

Cardinal accused of mishandling abuse case replaced as Mass celebrant

WASHINGTON - The group organizing the first pontifical solemn high Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington in 45 years announced it was replacing as the main celebrant a cardinal criticized for his handling of a clergy sex abuse case.

Colombian Cardinal Dario Castrillon Hoyos, who was scheduled to celebrate the April 24 Mass, made international headlines when a letter he wrote years earlier surfaced, in which he praised a French bishop for refusing to report an accused pedophile priest to police, even though French law required him to do so.

The Maryland-based Paulus Institute for the Propagation of Sacred Liturgy did not list a specific reason for choosing a different celebrant for the Mass honoring Pope Benedict XVI's fifth anniversary as pope.

However, the announcement came a day after a Chicago-based group of survivors of clergy sexual abuse had called on the Vatican, Pope Benedict XVI and Washington Archbishop Donald W. Wuerl to stop Cardinal Castrillon, the retired head of the Vatican's Congregation for Clergy, from celebrating the Mass.

"This action will help maintain the solemnity, reverence and beauty of the Mass," the Paulus Institute said in a statement issued April 21. "We are in the process of seeking another bishop to celebrate a Pontifical Solemn Mass on Saturday and are confident that one will agree. However, in any event, a beautiful, dignified traditional Latin Mass will be celebrated."

It added that the institute supports directives by the pope and the U.S. bishops "that all bishops should report crimes of sexual abuse to the police in accordance with the requirements of civil law," the press release said. "However, the Paulus Institute is not competent, nor does it have the facts, to form an opinion about the recent media

reports concerning Cardinal Castrillon.”

Cardinal Castrillon’s letter resurfaced recently in the coverage of new disclosures of sexual abuse by priests. He wrote it in 2001, when he was head of the Vatican’s Congregation for Clergy.

He said the late Pope John Paul II had approved his congratulatory letter to a French bishop who refused to report a sexually abusive priest to police.

Spanish newspapers reported Cardinal Castrillon told an audience at a Catholic university in Murcia, Spain, April 16 that he consulted with Pope John Paul and showed him the letter. He said the pope had authorized him to send the letter to bishops worldwide.

The priest in question was later sentenced to 18 years in prison after being found guilty of multiple counts of sexual assault. The bishop was given a three-month suspended sentence for not reporting the abuse.

In an April 20 telephone press conference, Mark Serrano, a member of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, known as SNAP, joined others from his organization calling for the replacement of the cardinal as the Mass celebrant.

“Surely there are other high-ranking Vatican officials who are capable of saying a Latin Mass other than this man,” Serrano said during a telephone press conference. “This is the wrong man, sending the wrong message at the wrong time.”

SNAP’s national director, David Clohessy, compared allowing the cardinal to celebrate the Mass at the national Shrine to condoning clergy sexual abuse.

“It rewards wrongdoing,” Clohessy said. “It encourages future wrongdoing. It rubs salt in the wounds of victims.”

The Paulus Institute has been planning such a Mass for three years to honor Pope Benedict, who allowed for the Traditional Latin Mass to be more widely celebrated early on in his papacy.

The group booked Cardinal Castrillon more than a year ago, because it’s a

complicated Mass and there are few high-ranking clergy who can execute it and were available, Paul N. King, president of the Paulus Institute, told The Washington Post.

King did not respond to Catholic News Service efforts to contact him through e-mail or by telephone. Another institute representative sent CNS a link to the announcement that it was replacing Cardinal Castrillon.

SNAP officials said they were relieved the cardinal wouldn't be the celebrant but expressed disappointment that neither the Vatican nor the Archdiocese of Washington intervened in this matter. There was no response from Vatican officials about the SNAP letter, but Washington archdiocesan spokeswoman Susan Gibbs told CNS April 21 she didn't expect Archbishop Wuerl to intercede, because "cardinals have universal faculties and the archdiocese is not a sponsor of this event."

Clohessy said he didn't believe Archbishop Wuerl was powerless in this situation. "It's the duty of the archbishop to protect the well-being of Catholics in his archdiocese, whether they are on his payroll or not."

But Gibbs said, "I would trust the archdiocese to know church protocol more than SNAP."