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Okla. bishop to replace cardinal at Latin Mass

by Chaz Muth by Catholic News Service



Cardinal Dario Castrillon Hoyos (CNS photo)

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 said April 22 that Bishop Edward J. Slattery of Tulsa, Okla., would be the main celebrant.

The Maryland-based Paulus Institute for the Propagation of Sacred Liturgy made the announcement a day after it said it would replace Colombian Cardinal Dario Castrillon Hoyos as celebrant of the April 24 Mass.

Members of the Chicago-based Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, known as SNAP, had criticized the institute's choice of the cardinal because of his handling of a clergy sex abuse case.

Cardinal Castrillon 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.

While it did not give a specific reason for its decision to choose a different celebrant, the Paulus Institute said April 22 "this action will help maintain the solemnity, reverence and beauty of the Mass," honoring Pope Benedict XVI's fifth anniversary as pope.

"A beautiful, dignified traditional Latin Mass will be celebrated," it said.

In its statement issued a day earlier, the institute said it 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."

"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," it said.

Cardinal Castrillon's letter to French Bishop Pierre Pican of Bayeux-Lisieux 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 the bishop who refused to report a sexually abusive priest to police.

Spanish newspapers reported Cardinal Castrillon, now retired, told an audience at a Catholic university in 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.

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In an April 20 telephone press conference, Mark Serrano and other SNAP members criticized the choice of Cardinal Castrillon. The group had called on the Vatican, Pope Benedict and Washington Archbishop Donald W. Wuerl to intervene and stop the cardinal from celebrating the Mass.

"Surely there are other high-ranking Vatican officials who are capable of saying a Latin Mass other than this man," Serrano said. "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."

After hearing the institute had replaced him, SNAP officials said they were relieved but expressed disappointment that neither the Vatican nor the Archdiocese of Washington had intervened in the matter.

The Paulus Institute has been planning the special Mass for three years to honor Pope Benedict, who in 2007 issued a letter allowing wider use of the Tridentine Mass, the liturgy that predates the Second Vatican Council.

The institute booked Cardinal Castrillon more than a year ago, Paul N. King, president of the Paulus Institute, told The Washington Post. He did not respond to Catholic News Service efforts to contact him through e-mail or by telephone.

There was no response from Vatican officials about the SNAP letter, but Washington archdiocesan spokeswoman Susan Gibbs told CNS April 21 that she didn't expect Archbishop Wuerl to intercede, because "cardinals have universal faculties and the archdiocese is not a sponsor of this event."

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