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Group plans ordination without Vatican's OK

by Niels Sorrells by Religion News Service

BERLIN -- The controversial Society of St. Pius X (SSPX) has announced plans to consecrate three priests on June 26 in Germany, a move one Catholic official has called a "provocation" that could upend a tentative peace with the Vatican.

The conservative SSPX, which rejects many of the Catholic Church's modernizing reforms, has long had a difficult relationship with the Vatican. A decision to consecrate four bishops against the orders of Pope John Paul II in 1988 led to the excommunication of all bishops involved, though the excommunication of four bishops was lifted in 2009.

The Vatican was deeply embarrassed after one of the rehabilitated SSPX bishops, Richard Williamson, turned out to be a vocal denier of the Holocaust. The Vatican claimed it did not know of his views when Pope Benedict XVI lifted his excommunication in a bid to reconcile the group with Rome.

The ordination ceremony for three deacons from Sweden, the Czech Republic and Italy was revealed in a circular released by the SSPX on Monday (May 31).

The KNA news agency quoted Regensburg Bishop Gerhard Ludwig Mueller, whose diocese includes the town of Zaitzkofen where the ordination is set to occur, as saying that the move was a "provocation" that could damage efforts to reintegrate the group into Catholic Church.

Until the group's status is clarified, any such ceremonies should "only be attempted with clear direction and permission from the pope," Mueller said.

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