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Catholics urge civility in politics

by Josef Kuhn by Religion News Service

WASHINGTON -- Responding to fresh controversy over Mitt Romney's Mormon faith, a group of Catholic elder statesmen on Wednesday called for more civility in politics, saying Catholics have been subjected to similar scrutiny.

Speaking as "Catholic citizens of different political persuasions," the signers urged "not only (that) civility be maintained in the public discourse but that all inclinations to raise the issue of personal religious affiliation be avoided."

The statement comes in the wake of a Dallas megachurch pastor and Rick Perry supporter who called Mormonism a "cult" and said Christians should give preference to Christian candidates.

"Catholics in the U.S. have experienced a long history of discrimination in the political life ... and so as a result, understandably, we Catholics are particularly sensitive to the issue," said Stephen Schneck, a political scientist at the Catholic University of America and an outspoken supporter of President Obama. The 37 signatories of the statement included several former U.S. ambassadors to the Vatican, retired lawmakers and university presidents.

"Conversations done in a civil tone, with respect to the other point of view, are more apt to lead to honest discussion of the issues," said Thomas Melady, who served as the U.S. ambassador to the Vatican from 1989 to 1993, and a principle organizer of the statement.

"It's up to us to cool down the temperature and get the facts out."

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