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Fr. Helmut Schüller makes debut in NYC

by Jamie Manson

NCR Today

Schüller Tipping Point Tour

This summer's most anticipated event -- for reform-minded Catholics, at least -- kicked off Tuesday night in Manhattan's Greenwich Village.

Austrian priest Helmut Schüller offered the first of 15 presentations he will offer around the country in a program called "The Catholic Tipping Point: Conversations."

The event drew a notable crowd of 230 people who braved sweltering heat and humidity to gather at Judson Memorial Church to hear Schüller discuss the "Call to Disobedience" set forth in 2011 by the Austrian Priests' Initiative.

The movement, Schüller said, "was initiated out of deep sorrow for the future of parish communities."

"As a 60-year-old parish priest, I fear that, when my time is over, I will leave my community to an uncertain future," he said.

He and a group of Austrian priests decided to go public with their questions and concerns about the shrinking priesthood, the merging of parishes and the inordinate pressures placed on the dwindling number of parish priests.

"Because, as priests, we are members of the hierarchy, the hierarchy became nervous," he told the crowd.

As priests, Schüller said, "we have power, which means we are responsible to use that power." Church reform movements must not be left to the laity alone, he said. "We must be companions to these movements."

The tour is sponsored by 10 progressive Catholic organizations, including Future Church, Call to Action, DignityUSA, and Voice of the Faithful.

I will have a full wrap-up of Tuesday night's event, including Schüller's thoughts on the new pope, his ideas about the state of the church outside of the United States and Europe, and his take on the Roman Catholic Womenpriests movement, in my column later this afternoon.

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