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Chicago Cardinal George: no red carpet for Schüller

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NCR Today

Schüller Tipping Point Tour

Cardinal Francis George was much distressed last week when he was told that the Association of Chicago Priests had invited its members to attend a meeting with Fr. Helmut Schüller at a Catholic church before his talk, sponsored by Call to Action and other reform groups, July 24 in Chicago. Schüller, head of the Austrian Priests' Initiative, is traveling around the country urging Catholics to speak freely about their concerns for the church. George reportedly upbraided the chair of the ACP, threatened to take punitive action against the organization and indicated his disappointment that it would extend itself to a man such as Schüller.

In fact, the ACP had not endorsed Schüller. The chair, Fr. Dennis Ziomek (acting on his own initiative), had merely notified those on his email list of the Austrian priest's willingness to talk. Meanwhile, the pastor of the parish where the conversation was to take place had already canceled the event at his church immediately upon learning that the auxiliary bishop of his vicariate was urgently trying to contact him. Fr. Dennis O'Neill, the pastor, then arranged for the meeting to take place instead at a nearby Presbyterian church.

So the event did take place, but because details were publicized so late, only seven priests attended: five from the Chicago archdiocese, two from Milwaukee. This left a question lingering in the air: Why was George so upset? Was he opposed to any interaction between Schüller and his priests, or was his concern about a meeting of priests with this super-active reformer on Catholic church property? The latter seems to be the case. When *NCR* requested clarification, the Chicago archdiocese issued a one-sentence response: "The cardinal did not forbid priests to meet with Fr. Schüller."

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