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Swiss religion magazine circulates women cardinals petition

Joshua J. McElwee | Oct. 21, 2013 NCR Today

A well-known Swiss religion magazine is circulating a petition for Pope Francis to begin appointing women as cardinals and has attracted signatures of a number of European theologians and women religious.

The petition [1], found in the Sept. 12 edition of the journal *aufbruch*, says that "more than half of the Church's members are women but this majority is being treated as if it were a minority."

While women work in all fields of the church, the petition states, "they are not taken into account when important decisions are made, so that there exists much inequality and injustice in the Catholic Church."

"Given Jesus's message of justice, we would like to suggest to invite an appropriate number of women to become cardinals," states the petition, which has drawn more than 860 signatures.

"Neither the Bible nor tradition nor the official teaching of the Church contain any argument that might prevent the Pope to put this suggestion as soon as possible into practice."

Among the petition's more notable signatories: Benedictine Sr. Irene Gassman, the prioress of a Benedictine monastery in Zurich; Maaike de Haardt, a theologian at Tilburg University in the Netherlands; and Benedictine Sr. Teresa Forcades, a Spanish medical doctor known for her social activism and criticism of the structure of the church's hierarchy.

Publication of the petition comes as many are wondering if the pope, who has said the church must develop a wider theology of women, is actively considering appointing female cardinals as one of his reforms of the church's structure.

Cardinals, sometimes known as the "princes of the church" and for their wearing of red vestments, are personally named by the pope. They are usually senior Catholic prelates who serve either as archbishops in the world's largest dioceses' or in the Vatican's central bureaucracy.

After a pope's death or renunciation of the papal office, cardinals are also responsible for governing the church until they meet together in a secret conclave to elect the next pontiff.

For the petition writers, appointing women as cardinals is a step to show "that the Catholic Church is not as hostile to women as is sometimes claimed."

"If the responsible leaders of the Church cannot overcome the patriarchal attitudes enshrined in the theory and practice of the Church, and do not give women the opportunity to have a say in all important matters, the Church will increasingly lose more and more competent and highly committed women as members," they state.

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