NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Milwaukee priest proposes replacing Mahony speech with conference on sex abuse

Tom Roberts | Feb. 5, 2013
LA abuse cases

A priest from the Milwaukee archdiocese has proposed replacing a talk from retired Cardinal Roger Mahony at a spring meeting of priests with a wide-ranging conference on the priest sex abuse crisis.

Fr. Jim Connell, an advocate for victims of clergy sex abuse, sent an open email to Milwaukee Archbishop Jerome Listecki asking for the cardinal's spot to be given to a range of experts as well as those directly affected by the scandal. Mahony, who was recently publicly rebuked [1] for failing to protect children, is scheduled to give a speech titled "In Christ, There Is No East or West: Embracing Our Diversity and the Social Message of Jesus" during the May 6-8 Spring Assembly of Priests.

Los Angeles Archbishop Jose Gomez relieved Mahony, who retired two years ago as the city's archbishop, of all of his public and administrative duties upon the Jan. 31 release of approximately 12,000 pages of documents that detail sex abuse by dozens of priests and the attempts by Mahony and others to hide the crimes and protect the priests from detection.

Gomez said he found the files "brutal and painful reading"; their contents, "terribly sad and evil."

He acknowledged Mahony's "sorrow for his failure to fully protect young people" and said he had informed Mahony that, effective immediately, "he will no longer have any administrative or public duties." Gomez has since clarified that the ban does not extend beyond the archdiocese.

In his open email, Connell, pastor of Holy Name and St. Clements parishes in Sheboygan, Wis., said an archdiocesan newsletter reminding priests of the May gathering came out before the news in Los Angeles broke. Connell asked Listecki to take two actions in light of the developments: make a public announcement "that Cardinal Mahony will not be present at the spring assembly of priests" and announce that "the time previously allotted to Cardinal Mahony at the spring assembly will be used for a conference on Catholic clergy sexual abuse."

"Given the appalling reality" of the scandal, Connell wrote, a conference would be beneficial by "expanding the knowledge of the truth" about the scandal; inspiring "the doing of justice" for victims, the church community and the society at large; and "generating optimism for the future" of the church.

Connell said the conference should be open to all, including laypeople and members of the media.

A spokesperson for the archdiocese said Listecki was traveling and that a response was not immediately available.

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