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Boston Cardinal O'Malley bans touring Austrian priest from parish

Kate Simmons | Jun. 24, 2013 NCR Today
Schüller Tipping Point Tour

The first American speaking tour of a reform-minded Austrian priest has hit its first snag.

Boston Cardinal Sean O'Malley says Fr. Helmut Schüller [1]can't speak on archdiocesan property, forcing a rescheduling of the Boston leg of his 15-city tour, which begins July 15.

Last week, Boston Auxiliary Bishop Walter Edyvean called St. Susanna Parish -- Schüller's scheduled speaking stop for July 17 -- to inform them that O'Malley had ruled that "Father Schüller could not speak at any Catholic parish because he espouses beliefs that are contrary to the teachings of the Catholic church," according to parish Deacon Larry Bloom.

Schüller's talk will be moved to the First Church of Dedham, a Unitarian Universalist church down the street, Bloom wrote in an email to *NCR* Monday.

Schüller is founder of the Austrian Priests' Initiative [2], a group of Austrian priests pushing for institutional reforms in the Catholic church. The group issued an "Appeal to Disobedience [3]" in 2011, calling for (among other things) admission of women and married people to the Catholic priesthood.

St. Susanna tends to attract parishioners with a lot of questions, so "we often have speakers who represent various, sometimes controversial, points of view," wrote Bloom, who serves as director of adult faith formation for the parish.

"This, however, is the first time in my eleven years at the parish that we have actually been told we could not allow someone to speak at the parish," Bloom wrote. "We did not expect that the talk on parish property would be prohibited, but we were not shocked and proceeded calmly to complete a resolution."

In a statement released Monday, organizers of Schüller's speaking tour, titled "The Catholic Tipping Point," called O'Malley's decision "distressing."

"Cardinal O'Malley's action is particularly distressing since it is taken by one of the eight cardinals appointed to help reform Church governance," they said in the statement. "This attempt to suppress these long overdue discussions is a disservice to Christ's body."

The tour, sponsored by 12 progressive Catholic organizations, will begin in New York City and travel across the country to California and Seattle, ending Aug. 7 back in Long Island, N.Y. Find out more about the tour [4].

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