

Catholics Urge Cardinal Tied to Sex Abuse to Skip Papal Vote

A U.S. Catholic group has launched an online petition to keep a cardinal linked to a sex abuse scandal from attending the Vatican conclave that will select a new pope.

Catholics United, a nonprofit, non-partisan organization, says that former Los Angeles Archbishop Roger Mahony should refrain from attending the papal conclave and recuse himself from voting. The petition launched last week had more than 5,000 signatures as of Tuesday representing a tiny fraction of the roughly one in four Americans who are Catholics.

“Please do not bring further scandal to our Church that has already been rocked by the sex abuse crisis by attending the Papal Conclave. You have been disciplined and you have lost your ability to have a voice within our Church,” said the petition from the Washington-based group.

Los Angeles Archbishop Jose Gomez stripped Mahony, 76, of his duties last month over his handling of priest sex abuse cases.

Church files unsealed under court order this month showed that Mahony and an aide, Thomas Curry, worked to send priests accused of abuse out of California to shield them from law enforcement scrutiny in the 1980s.

Gomez said last week that Mahony and Curry remained bishops in good standing in the Los Angeles archdiocese. Mahony has apologized for “mistakes” he made as archbishop.

Mahony is attending the Vatican conclave to select a successor to Pope Benedict XVI, who said last week he was stepping down at the end of February. Victims rights groups have criticized

Mahony's presence at the conclave.

Church rules call for the conclave to start between 15 and 20 days after the papacy becomes vacant. The Vatican has said the meeting could start earlier than originally expected, giving the Roman Catholic Church a new leader by mid-March.

The Archdiocese of Los Angeles, the largest in the United States with 4 million Catholics, reached a \$660 million settlement in 2007 with more than 500 victims of sexual molestation. It was the biggest U.S. settlement of its kind.

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