

In run-up to pope election, dissidents seek voice

By NICOLE WINFIELD, Associated Press

In this photo taken on Thursday, March 7, 2013 Martha Heizer, president of the International Movement "We are Church", meets reporters in Rome. The election of a new pope always brings with it hopes for change from across the Catholic ideological and theological spectrum. Advocacy groups from around the world have descended on Rome to try to publicize their causes while media attention on the Vatican is high. These lay groups will not determine the vote. Perhaps the most well-known lay reform movement, We Are Church was founded in 1996 following the outcry that erupted in Austria over the sex abuse scandal involving its then-archbishop of Vienna, Cardinal Hans Groer. Photo: Alessandra Tarantino

VATICAN CITY (AP) — The election of a new pope always brings with it hopes for change from across the Catholic ideological and theological spectrum. Advocacy groups from around the world have descended on Rome to try to publicize their causes while media attention on the Vatican is high. These lay groups won't determine the vote. But some movements are influencing the debate, particularly those that count hundreds of active Catholic priests as members — a threat the Vatican cannot easily ignore. On Friday, International Women's Day, cardinals who are working through the problems of the church before entering the conclave discussed the role of women in the church — a first for the deliberations. Here is a look at some of the more well-known "dissident" reform and advocacy groups, from those claiming to have ordained female priests to those seeking Vatican files on sexually abusive priests.

ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC PRIESTS: Founded in 2010 in Ireland by three priests, the ACP now says more than 1,000 of the estimated 3,500 active priests in Ireland are members. The group's founding constitution calls for a re-evaluation of the church's teaching on sexuality and for greater lay involvement in church decision-making, but it is better known for its support for an end to mandatory celibacy for priests and opening discussion on women's ordination. One of its founders, the Rev. Tony Flannery, has been sanctioned by the Vatican for his views: Until he recants, he can't be in active ministry. But Flannery, a member of the Redemptorist order, is undeterred. "The point we try to make is that in 20 years' time, there will be very few priests in Ireland. Who is going to provide the Eucharist to people?" The ACP promotes inviting back priests who have left the priesthood to marry, allowing mature married men to celebrate the Eucharist "and then having made those changes, you can begin to look seriously at the question of ordaining women," Flannery said in a telephone interview.

PFARRER INITIATIVE: Founded in 2006 in Austria by the Rev. Helmut Schueller, the former vicar of papal contender Cardinal Christoph Schoenborn, the "Priest Initiative" claims 350 priests and 79 deacons as members. Most of them are in Austria, but Schueller is looking to expand to Germany, Ireland, France, Australia and the U.S. The group's 2011 "Appeal to Disobedience" calls for the admission of women and married men into the priesthood to relieve the priest shortage — an appeal that has so shaken the church in Austria that Schoenborn briefed Vatican officials about it. "The Roman refusal to take up long needed reforms and the inaction of the bishops not only permits but demands that we follow our conscience and act

independently," the appeal reads. Those supporting the call pledge to ignore the ban on preaching by trained laity, including women, and vow to never deny communion to the faithful, including divorced and remarried Catholics. Church teaching forbids such divorcees from receiving the Eucharist. In November, the Vatican stripped Schueller of the right to call himself "monsignor."

WE ARE CHURCH: Perhaps the most well-known lay reform movement, We Are Church was founded in 1996 following the outcry that erupted in Austria over the sex abuse scandal involving its then-archbishop of Vienna, Cardinal Hans Groer. He was forced to resign in 1995 over claims he molested youths in a monastery in the 1970s, a removal that paved the way for Schoenborn to be named archbishop. In the aftermath of the scandal, about 2.5 million people signed a petition calling for a renewal of the church according to the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. The movement is represented in more than 20 countries and works as a network of independent units: Wir Sind Kirche in the German-speaking world, Nous Sommes Eglise in the Francophone world and so on. Its founding manifesto lists five demands, calling for inclusion of lay people in the selection of bishops, admission of women in all church ministries, a choice for priests to live celibately or not, "a positive attitude toward sexuality," and freedom of speech and thought — particularly for theologians. "I feel as a dissident, but I stay, and a dissident stays," theologian Marta Heizer of the International Movement We Are Church said this week in Rome. "They have to ban me or what else, but I do not leave my church. Because I love it."

SNAP: The Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests is the most prominent U.S.-based support group for victims of clerical sex abuse. It was founded in 1988 and says it has more than 12,000 members. The group, which counts victims as its founding members, has been unwavering in its criticism of the bishops who moved abusive priests from parish to parish rather than report them to police, and of the Vatican, which turned a blind eye to the problem. Its advocacy, coupled with documentation made public by court action and the online research site BishopAccountability.org, has shed light on crimes the church wanted hidden, and contributed to the pressure on the Vatican to change its ways. SNAP has been hosting daily media briefings in Rome this week, including one where it listed the "dirty dozen" cardinals who shouldn't be pope and one where it listed three "promising" candidates for the papacy based on their records. One of the three isn't even a cardinal: Dublin Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, who has been outspoken in calling for an end to church cover-up of abuse. "He seems to understand, at least in his words, that children are still at risk in Ireland and that things must change if children are to be safe," SNAP outreach director Barbara Dorris said this week in Rome.

ROMAN CATHOLIC WOMENPRIESTS/WOMEN'S ORDINATION CONFERENCE: Roman Catholic Womenpriests was founded in Germany in 2002 after seven women said they were ordained as priests on the Danube River in violation of church law. The Vatican excommunicated them a few weeks later. Since then, hundreds of women say they have been validly ordained as deacons, priests and a handful of bishops. Since then as well, the Vatican has made the illicit ordination of women one of the "gravest" canonical crimes, dealt with exclusively by Benedict XVI's old office, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The sanction is swift and severe: automatic excommunication for the woman receiving the attempted ordination and the priest who performs the ceremony. Church teaching holds that because Jesus chose men to be his apostles, only males can serve in the priesthood. Supporters of the female priest movement argue that Jesus called "women and men to be disciples and equals living the Gospel." The U.S.-based Women's Ordination Conference says

it's the oldest and largest organization working solely to ordain women. In October, the Vatican laicized Rev. Roy Bourgeois, who had supported women's ordination and had participated in a 2008 ordination ceremony. He had been a priest with the Maryknoll order for 39 years.

THE VATICAN'S RESPONSE:

Asked this week about SNAP's "dirty dozen" list, Vatican spokesman the Rev. Federico Lombardi said it wasn't for SNAP or anyone else to decide who is pope. "Cardinals can decide themselves without asking SNAP for advice." Lombardi was also asked about the role of women in the conclave process, in which 115 cardinals — obviously male — will select the spiritual leader for 1.2 billion Catholics. Lombardi noted that some women work in service jobs (cooking and cleaning) at the Vatican hotel where the cardinals will be staying, and one woman was featured in a Vatican video clip sewing the skirting for the tables that will be used in the Sistine Chapel for the vote. "This is also part of the conclave," Lombardi said. Perhaps aware of the poor impression left, Lombardi arrived at a press briefing the following day, International Women's Day, bearing flowers and wishing all women well. When asked, he said the cardinals too, discussed the role of women in the church during Friday's closed-door deliberations, but gave no details of what was said. Massimo Franco, commentator for leading daily Corriere della Sera, said advocacy groups for sex abuse victims and those calling for greater participation of women in the church have more room than ever before to influence the debate going into the conclave because the Catholic Church has such a "tarnished" image following the sex abuse scandals. "I think they have a voice, but the problem is whether this voice will be heard and listened to by the cardinals," he said in an interview.

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http://mdjonline.com/view/full_story/21926821/article-Dissidents-descend-on-Vatican-in-days-before-selection-of-new-pope?instance=lead_story_left_column

http://www.thepublicopinion.com/news/associated_press/national/europe/article_a7a9d0ab-a38f-5659-8ad1-98c8fea30519.html

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/huff-wires/20130308/eu-vatican-the-dissidents/?utm_hp_ref=media&ir=media

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