

11-10-07 - Critics Hope To Keep Cardinal George From Top Post

By Jay Levine, CBS 2 (IL)

CHICAGO (CBS) — There is a move afoot to stop Francis Cardinal George from becoming president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. As CBS 2 Chief Correspondent Jay Levine reports, next week's election, which should have been automatic, has become controversial.

George is well respected by his fellow bishops, viewed as both a moral and political leader. He is a favorite of the Vatican, their choice really made three years ago, when he was elected vice president. The vice president always succeeds the president.

The only question now is the impact of letters like one CBS 2 learned have been sent to each of his fellow bishops by the group Voice of the Faithful: "urging that you elect...someone other than Cardinal Francis George of Chicago."

"He has failed, he has absolutely failed," said Janet Hauter of Voice of the Faithful.

Critics mean specifically the case of Father Daniel McCormack, who recently pleaded guilty to abusing young boys, but had been allowed to remain in contact with children in a West Side parish even after he was first investigated by police.

Another letter-writing campaign in Chicago suggested he "step aside and decline to accept the post of president..."

A detailed response from the cardinal included the statement: "I will forever be aware that I should have acted more quickly."

The former head of the church's national board admits the McCormack case is troubling.

"But I do believe he is trying harder and putting more safeguards in place, so I think we have to give him a chance," said Judge Anne Burke, who serves on the Illinois Supreme Court.

"What impact will the letter have on the bishops? None at all," said Eugene Kennedy of Loyola University.

Voice of the Faithful, founded in Boston in the wake of the church sex abuse scandal there, is now a nationwide organization, though the group is under no illusion about its influence on the bishops.

"It's not gonna happen right away, but we're like water rolling over a rock," Hauter said. "After a while it wears a groove."

The cardinal has already left for Baltimore where the election will be held next Tuesday. For the past few weeks, he's turned down all requests for interviews. There is no indication he has any intention of taking himself out of the race.