

9/2/07 - Chicago Lay group: Don't pick Cardinal George for post
By Susan Hogan/Albach, Daily Southtown

A Catholic lay group is appealing to American bishops not to elect Cardinal Francis George as their next president because of his record on clergy sexual abuse.

In a letter to bishops, Voice of the Faithful cited George's handling of predator priest Daniel McCormack, who was sent to prison in July for molesting boys.

The cardinal didn't follow a review board's recommendation to remove McCormack from ministry after abuse was reported in 2005, church officials said.

After another complaint, McCormack was arrested in January 2006. He pleaded guilty this summer to five counts of aggravated criminal assault for molesting boys.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops will elect a new president in November. That position usually goes to the vice president -- who, currently, is George.

"We respectfully request that you ask Cardinal George to step aside so that a bishop with a track record of protecting children may be elected," the lay group's letter said.

The cardinal's spokeswoman said the letter and accompanying addendum contain errors in their characterization of George's record but declined to go into detail.

After McCormack's arrest, the Archdiocese of Chicago took several steps to enhance its child abuse prevention and protection program, church officials said.

Voice of the Faithful formed five years ago in Boston in the wake of a sexual-abuse crisis that led to the resignation of Cardinal Bernard Law. The group, which seeks church reform, has chapters across the country, including in Chicago.

Leaders said the decision to call on bishops not to elect George came after a "long process of prayerful discernment."

"The election of the next president of the USCCB will clearly indicate to the people of God and the public how serious the Catholic Church is about righting the wrongs that have plagued us over the last five years," the letter said.
