

World & Nation

Chicago archdiocese takes over Dignity Masses

Chicago (NC) — Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin announced May 15 that the Archdiocese of Chicago will on June 5 assume sponsorship of a weekly Mass for gay and lesbian Catholics. The Mass had been sponsored by the Chicago chapter of Dignity, a group that opposes Church teachings on homosexual activity.

"I am very concerned that gay and lesbian Catholics receive the pastoral care of their Church," Cardinal Bernardin said in a statement read during the group's May 15 Mass at Chicago's St. Sebastian Parish. The cardinal planned to announce his decision personally, but the weather delayed his return from an out-of-town trip.

The officers of Dignity-Chicago welcomed the move as an accomplishment of one of the group's goals: to gain for gay and lesbian Catholics an official Church ministry that recognizes their gifts and needs.

In an interview with National Catholic News Service, an officer of Dignity-Chicago who asked not to be named said Dignity knew the Archdiocese of Chicago would have to ask the group to discontinue sponsoring the Mass because a 1986 document on homosexuality prohibited the use of church facilities by groups opposed to Church teaching.

The solution offered by Cardinal Bernardin, following a year of meetings with priests ministering to the homosexual community and with other individuals, "is a dynamic model that other bishops can follow," the Dignity officer said.

In his statement, Cardinal Bernardin said that Dignity's July, 1987, resolution questioning Church teaching on homosexuality made it "inappropriate" for the group to continue sponsoring the Mass. The Dignity resolution, approved at a national meeting, disagreed with Church teaching against homosexual activity.

The Sunday evening liturgy had focused on the needs of gay and lesbian Catholics for more than 17 years, the cardinal noted. It had begun as an apostolate of the Legion of Mary.

Although the parish "monitored" the Mass under Dignity's sponsorship, the archdiocese "never formally recognized" the arrangement because it felt Dignity's position on Church teaching was ambiguous, Cardinal Bernardin said. This ambiguity ended with the 1987 resolution openly challenging the Church, the cardinal noted.

"It is my responsibility as pastor of the Church of Chicago to make sure that the Church's teaching on human sexuality is presented clearly and without ambiguity," Cardinal Bernardin said.

The statement said the cardinal and the priests "agreed on some basic principles upon which our ministry to the Catholic gay and lesbian community should be based." These principles are:

- The condemnation of "arbitrary discrimination and prejudice, violence and harassment against a person because of his or her sexual orientation."
- The support of Church teaching, which rejects homosexual acts but not homosexual people.
- A reaffirmation of the archdiocese's commitment to minister to homosexual people.
- A policy of not endorsing any organization that "assumes a position of advocacy against Church teaching."

Cardinal Bernardin appointed six priests from St. Sebastian's and neighboring parishes to carry out the ministry with the homosexual community and asked the liturgy committee members involved in the Dignity Mass to continue their participation.

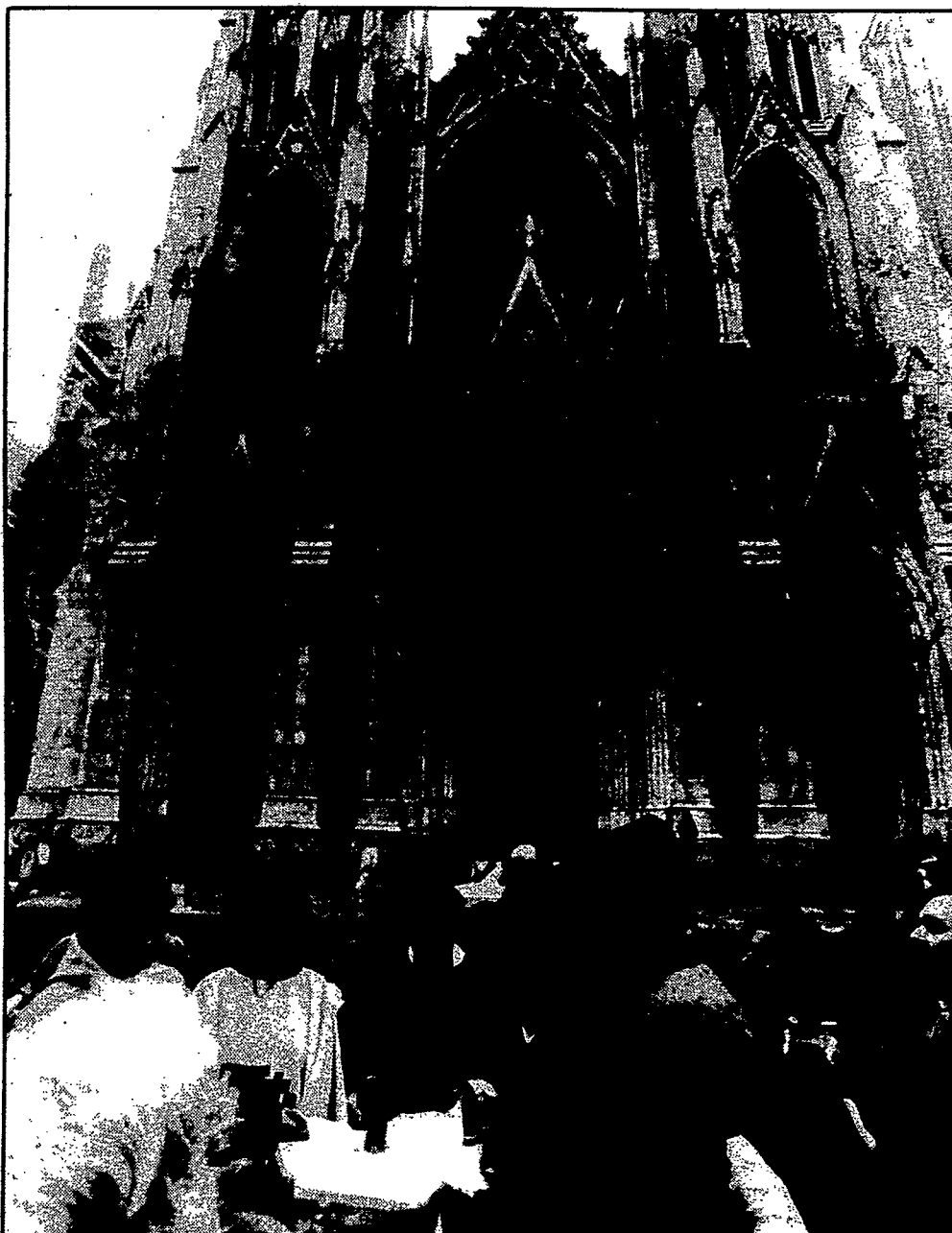
"It will be the responsibility of the pastors to ensure that everything connected with the Mass, and any events which might take place before or after the liturgy, be in accord with Church teaching and discipline," the cardinal said.

The Dignity-Chicago officer said the group's board approved of the cardinal's action by a 6-3 vote. The majority felt it "was not a move against Dignity as an organization," he said.

It is possible that the group can now be a better advocate for homosexual rights, the Dignity officer said, because "we can do our job as an organization without losing the Mass."

Cardinal Bernardin's action also was applauded by the Chicago-based Catholic Advocates for Lesbian and Gay Rights in a May 16 statement.

Rick Garcia, director of the organization, said official archdiocesan ministry to the homosexual community was "long overdue" and that sponsorship of the Mass is an "important and significant first step in the right direction" toward providing a range of services to gay and lesbian Catholics and their families.



Chris Sheridan/NC News

Masses sponsored by the unofficial homosexual Catholic organization Dignity have caused problems in several dioceses. Since the Archdiocese of New York ordered in March of 1987 that a local parish ban the group's Saturday evening Masses there, members of the organization have staged monthly protests outside New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral. Here, Father William O'Brien, a retired priest, celebrates Mass for the homosexual rights activists in front of the cathedral.

Board elects new president for St. Joseph's Hospital

The board of directors of St. Joseph's Hospital in Elmira elected Sister Marie Castagnaro, SSJ, president of the hospital at their annual meeting May 4. Sister Castagnaro succeeds Sister Martha Gersbach, SSJ, who has served as the hospital's chief executive officer since 1973.

Sister Castagnaro joined St. Joseph's as planning assistant in 1985, and was elected to the board of directors that same year. She held the position of vice president for clinical services from October, 1986, until her election as

executive vice president and chief operating officer in October, 1987. She was also the coordinator and organizer of the Behavioral Science Unit, which opened in 1986.

Sister Gersbach has been associated with St. Joseph's Hospital since being assigned to the nursing unit in 1962. She began serving as the hospital's associate administrator in 1967, and became the hospital's chief executive officer in 1973.

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