

# Gays respond angrily to document

By Laurie Hansen  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — U.S. groups working with Catholic homosexuals reacted angrily to a document the Vatican sent to U.S. bishops, urging them to oppose laws intended to protect homosexuals if such laws also promote acceptance of homosexual conduct.

A statement by New Ways Ministry, a group working with gay Catholics, blasted the document, saying its reasoning was based on "myths and stereotypes" and lacked "a sound foundation in theology." New Ways, which has no official standing in the church, leaked the Vatican document to the media.

But a spokesman for the Archdiocese of San Francisco, which last year unsuccessfully pushed for repeal of a citywide domestic-partners-right ordinance, told Catholic News Service July 20 that the document had positive elements.

Father Robert McElroy, San Francisco archdiocesan spokesman, praised the document's stance that "protecting the dignity of the human person does not extend to endorsing affirmative action for gays and lesbians or setting up public benefits for homosexual couples."

San Francisco's domestic-partners-rights ordinance permits registration of homosexual or unmarried couples. San Francisco Archbishop John R. Quinn has maintained that the ordinance endangers family stability.

U.S. bishops around the nation have had varied responses to homosexual-rights legislation proposed in recent years.

Last year, the Connecticut Legislature approved a gay-rights bill after the state's Catholic bishops dropped their longstanding opposition to the measure.

The bill mandated equal treatment of heterosexuals, homosexuals and bisexuals in matters of employment, housing, credit availability and job training, but — after pressure from the

state's bishops — exempted religious institutions and permitted sexual orientation to be considered when placing children in adoptive families.

The document, written by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, says that "it is not unjust discrimination to take sexual orientation into account" in areas of adoption or foster care, when employing teachers or coaches, or in military recruitment.

Archbishop Rember G. Weakland of Milwaukee told CNS July 20 that he was unaware of any other group against which the church condones discrimination.

Archbishop Weakland said he believes the document will not be helpful in the United States, a pluralistic nation where "Catholics are going to have to learn to live" with imperfect legislation not wholly in accord with church teaching.

The Vatican document argues that laws protecting homosexual rights may have a "negative impact on the family and society" and the common good.

Sexual orientation is not comparable to "race, ethnic background, etc. in respect to non-discrimination," the document states. "Unlike these, homosexual orientation is an objective disorder."

The document praises people who control their homosexual tendencies, noting that if a person keeps his or her homosexual tendencies secret "the problem of discrimination in terms of employment, housing, etc. does not arise."

Father McElroy said the Archdiocese of San Francisco agrees with the Vatican document's position. Statutes that set apart gays and lesbians "as a special category" like ethnic minorities, he said, have the effect of "undermining the family," he said.

"Giving the same benefits to persons living together but not married" as the government gives to married couples undermines marriage, said the priest.

On the other hand, Father McElroy

said, the Vatican document "departs from previous and more authoritative" church documents with its statements relating to homosexuals and employment and housing discrimination. "It's unclear whether it seeks to override" previous documents, said the priest.

The archdiocese maintains that "unjust discrimination against gays and lesbians is wrong and to be condemned," he said.

In a July 17 statement, the Chicago-based Catholic Advocates for Lesbian and Gay Rights said the document's writers "completely ignored contemporary medical, psychological and sociological understandings of gay and lesbian persons."

The group said the document "seriously erodes the credibility of the Vatican to speak on justice issues."

"The church's call to speak the truth and speak it boldly is meaningless when it promotes ignorance, bigotry and fear," the statement said.

New Ways Ministry, based in Mount Rainier, Md. said in its statement that the document will have little impact on the views of U.S. Catholics.

"U.S. Catholics are simply unconvinced that any serious harm will result to a society from the recognition of civil rights for homosexual citizens," it said.

It termed "groundless" the fear that the heterosexual family will no longer "be the dominant mode of socialization" if society supports civil rights for homosexuals.

"Empirical evidence indicates that cities, towns and municipalities which have enacted civil rights for homosexual people remain predominantly heterosexual," it said.

In Italy, gay leaders said the document had effectively closed off dialogue with the Catholic Church.

"From now on we will hold the Catholic Church as those with primary moral responsibility for violence and discrimination against gays and lesbians," said Franco Grillini, president of Arci-gay, a gay rights group.

He said his organization was invit-



AP/Wide World Photos

**HANGING EFFIGY** — An effigy of Ross Perot is blindfolded before it is hanged from the roof of artist Michael Racine's studio in Oxnard, Calif., on July 16. Racine said Perot let his supporters down when he quit his bid for the presidency.

ing gay Catholics to "choose another Christian religion that is more tolerant."

The Vatican document deplored violence against homosexuals, saying "such treatment deserves condemnation from the church's pastors wherever it occurs."

But when homosexual activity is condoned, "neither the church nor society at large should be surprised when other distorted notion and practices gain ground, and irrational and violent reactions increase," the statement added.

## Court rejects bid to overturn RU-486 ban

By Nancy Frazier O'Brien  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court turned down an emergency appeal of the Food and Drug Administration's limits on import of the French-made abortion pill, RU-486.

Justice Clarence Thomas, who had referred the question to the full court, voted with the majority in the case involving Leona Benton, a California social worker whose pills were confiscated July 1 on her arrival from England.

Only Justices John Paul Stevens and Harry A. Blackmun voted to lift the FDA ban on the importation of RU-486 for personal use.

"We are pleased that the Supreme Court recognized that the FDA exercised sound scientific judgment in barring importation of the dangerous and illegal abortion drug RU-486 for personal use," said Richard D. Glasow, education director for the National Right to Life Committee.

"Under this ruling, drug use in this country will continue to be governed by the FDA's reasoned medical judgment and not by the ideological agenda of abortion advocates," he added.

The Supreme Court's brief unsigned opinion July 17 indicated that Benton's lawyers had not convinced the court that they would have ultimately been successful in arguing that the FDA ban violated federal drug laws or the government's own regulations.

"We conclude that petitioners have failed to demonstrate a substantial likelihood of success on the merits of these claims," the three-paragraph opinion said.

Stevens, however, said in his minority opinion that the FDA had an obligation to prove it was protecting Benton from any "significant health risk associated with the use of this medicine when prescribed by a competent

physician."

"There is no evidence in this record that this applicant faces any such risk," Stevens added.

RU-486, made by the French drug company Roussel-Uclaf, is the popular name for the drug mifepristone, which induces abortion in the earliest stages of pregnancy when used with a synthetic prostaglandin.

FDA spokesman Don McLaren said the agency was happy with the Supreme Court decision "because it says this is a medical issue to be decided by the doctors and scientists at the agency."

Under French guidelines, it can only be used in the first 42 days of pregnancy. For Benton, that period ended July 18. She was expected to undergo a surgical abortion.

The California Pro-Life Council appealed to the woman in a July 16 open letter to reconsider her decision to have an abortion.

"Please, Leona, return home and allow the caring hands of the pro-life movement to assist you and your baby through your pregnancy and delivery," the letter said. "You and your baby can survive this difficult time, and when your baby is born, if you are still not ready for parenting, numerous loving families would happily take your child into their homes and lives."

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