

# Homosexual Catholics angered over document

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Groups of homosexual Catholics reacted with anger to a Vatican document meant to help U.S. bishops decide how to respond to gay rights legislation.

Dignity, an unofficial group of Catholic homosexuals, in a statement, called the document a "mean-spirited and unjust attempt" to propagate myths about homosexual persons, and said it may result in increased violence against homosexuals.

"The Vatican position is an affront to the conscience and sensibilities of all persons," it said.

A group of Catholics advocating gay rights in Rochester also condemned the document.

"The recent statement from the Vatican to the nation's bishops ... is not acceptable within the framework of the teachings of Jesus Christ," said a July 23 statement written by gay ministry members at Rochester's Corpus Christi Church, 864 Main St. E. "As members of the Catholic community, we affirm the rights of all people and take a stand against discrimination of any kind."

After announcements at Masses last weekend, 568 Corpus Christi parishioners signed a petition protesting the Vatican document.

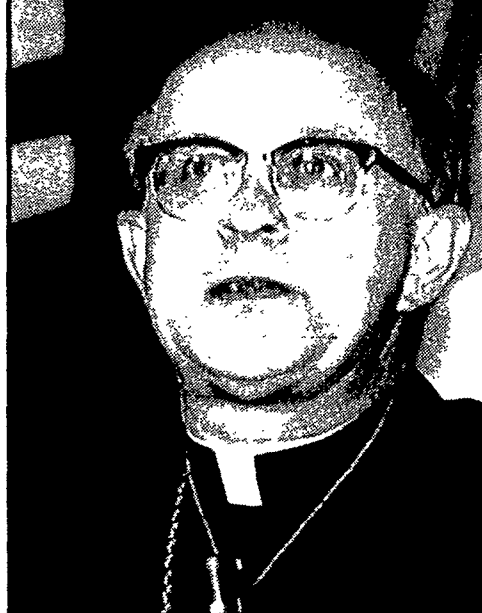
"This is discrimination and discrimination is discrimination no matter how you look at it," said Dick Conheady, a member of Corpus Christi's gay ministry group.

Further reaction to the document continued to come at the national level as well.

Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk of Cincinnati, president of the U.S. bishops' conference, in a July 22 statement, said the U.S. bishops "will continue to look for ways in which those people who have a homosexual orientation will not suffer unjust discrimination" in law or society. That pledge

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File photo

Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk

was echoed by Seattle Archbishop Thomas J. Murphy and a spokesman for the Archdiocese of San Francisco.

Archbishop Pilarczyk also said in his statement that the Vatican document "rightly warns against legislation designed more to legitimate homosexual behavior than to secure basic civil rights."

Titled "Some Considerations Concerning the Catholic Response to Legis-

lative Proposals on the Non-Discrimination of Homosexual Persons," the document said it was 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.

The four-page document by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith was leaked to the news media by New Ways Ministry, a U.S. group working with Catholic homosexuals that has no official church standing.

A second version of the statement, which differed slightly in wording, was issued by the Vatican July 23.

Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said the document was intended as a "background resource offering discreet assistance" to U.S. bishops. It was sent to them because the question of non-discriminatory legislation "is a particularly pressing one" in certain parts of the United States, he said.

"It should be noted that the observations were not intended to pass judgment on any response which may have been given already by local bishops or state conferences" to legislative gay-rights measures, said Navarro-Valls.

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

The Vatican document said legislation that includes "homosexual orientation" as a potential basis for illegal discrimination can easily lead to the "legislative protection and promotion of homosexuality."

It said "homosexual persons, as human persons, have the same rights as all persons, including the right of not being treated in a manner which offends their personal dignity."

But it said these rights — such as to work and housing — are not absolute. Instead, it said, they can be legitimately limited for "objectively disordered external behavior." As an example, it said, the state sometimes restricts the rights of the physically or mentally ill in order to protect the common good.

The document praises people who control their homosexual tendencies, saying that if a person's homosexual tendencies are kept secret "the problem of discrimination in terms of employment, housing, etc. does not

arise."

Archbishop Murphy of Seattle, in a statement issued July 20, described the Vatican document as "an internal memorandum from a Vatican office to the bishops."

Noting that it "does not carry the name of the pope or any Vatican official," Archbishop Murphy said the document "adds nothing new to church teaching on human sexuality. Nor does it call for any change in the ministry of the archdiocese to homosexual persons."

He said "the Archdiocese of Seattle continues its commitment to provide compassionate pastoral care to homosexual persons."

"It will also oppose any harassment, prejudice and discrimination against any member of the human family," he said.

Father Robert McElroy, spokesman for the Archdiocese of San Francisco, which last year unsuccessfully pushed for repeal of a citywide domestic-partners-rights ordinance, 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."

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

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

In his view 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 Chicago-based Catholic Advocates for Lesbian and Gay Rights, in a July 17 statement, 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., in its statement, called "groundless" the fear that the heterosexual family will no longer "be the dominant mode of socialization" if society backs civil rights for homosexuals.

Contains additional reporting by Staff Writer Lee Strong.

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