

WORLD & NATION

Half-million men march in D.C. to promote faith

By Mark Pattison
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — There was no tent big enough to contain the nation's largest-ever tent revival. Hundreds of thousands of men — including thousands of Catholics — sought repentance and reconciliation at the Oct. 4 Promise Keepers rally in Washington, confessing their sins on the Mall and exulting in their salvation through Jesus Christ.

The rally, titled "Stand in the Gap: A Sacred Assembly of Men," addressed the issues of sexual immorality, racism and sectarianism through stirring preaching and pulse-pounding music.

Neither Promise Keepers nor Washington-area police agencies gave crowd estimates. But Catholic University of America sociologist John McCarthy and University of Illinois sociologist Clark McPhail pegged the crowd's size at 480,000 using charts, aerial photographs and 20 years of experience in estimating crowds.

The rally's only Catholic speaker, Michael Timmis, a layman from the Detroit suburbs, said "we have divided ourselves" with sectarianism and racism. "We must rid ourselves of the disunity that is in our spirits. To be in a place of disunity is to be in sin before God.

"Each of us have been guilty of the sin of division," Timmis added, asking the men to bow their heads and examine their own consciences.

The Rev. A.R. Bernard Sr., senior pastor of the New York Christian Life Center in Brooklyn, N.Y., recalled the life of the

Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in focusing on racism.

"Many white churchmen" who were thought to be allies "traded caution for courage" and "stood by speaking hypocritical irrelevancies" when Rev. King was jailed in Birmingham, Ala., he said. "They focused on heaven while discounting any relevance to what goes on on earth."

Talk of sexual sin, cited by past Promise Keepers rally participants as the sin they have to struggle against the most by far, took up a large part of the Mall gathering.

The early Israelites' "most persistent struggle was for sexual morality," said the Rev. Joseph Garlington, senior pastor of Covenant Church of Pittsburgh.

The struggle continues today with pornography widely available on the Internet, making the World Wide Web "a web of moral destruction," he added, warning America will "reap the whirlwind of destroyed marriages, damaged children and quite possibly incurable sexually transmitted diseases. We must stop now."

Before the rally, some groups had criticized Promise Keepers for suggesting a patriarchal model of family life.

The Rev. Tony Evans, senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas, tried to dispel that notion in his address, saying that men and women were "equal partners" in marriage.

A man leaves work for his "second job" at home, he added: "It's not a time for reading the newspaper, it's not a time for getting out the channel flipper."

The model, Rev. Evans said, is "not dominance" but "submission, mutual honor



CNS/Nancy Wiehach

Men attending the Promise Keepers "Stand in the Gap" rally join hands in prayer Oct. 4 in Washington, D.C. A number of Catholics participated in the event, which drew hundreds of thousands of Christian men.

and respect."

Bill McCartney, the Promise Keepers' founder, told the rally that Christianity has been divided, "and a house divided cannot stand." Promise Keepers, he added, is "unity with diversity. This is diversity with-

out dissension. Our God is not a God of sameness. He is a God of oneness."

He directed men to give their time, treasure and talents to their local churches. "You can't sit on these gifts, you can't squander them."

Statement draws reactions

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — A bishops' committee statement to Catholic parents with homosexual sons or daughters has drawn both praise and criticism.

The 20-page statement, "Always Our Children," was released Oct. 1 by the Committee on Marriage and Family of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Its central message is that parents with homosexual sons or daughters should love their children and never reject them, even if the son or daughter engages in activities that the parent cannot accept or condone.

It suggests ways — including counseling and pastoral assistance from church agencies and use of church-based support groups — for parents to work through the flood of emotions and tensions that often accompany discovery of a child's homosexual orientation and establish trust, communication and love.

But it also reaffirms the church's traditional teaching that homosexual activity is morally wrong, and says that parents may need to challenge some aspects of their child's behavior they find objectionable. It also says that agencies working with the families should "operate in a manner consistent with Catholic teaching."

"This is a compassionate, strong and helpful document," said Father James Schexnayder, director of outreach to the gay and lesbian communities in the Diocese of Oakland, Calif., and executive director of the National Association of Diocesan Lesbian and Gay Ministries.

"We strongly support the U.S. bishops' willingness to reach out in an open, inclusive way to mothers and fathers of gay and lesbian children," said Nancy McDonald, president of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG).

Charles Cox, executive director of Dignity/USA, an unofficial Catholic support and advocacy organization of gay, lesbian

and bisexual Catholics, commended the statement as a "positive step" but criticized it for insisting on sexual abstinence as the only moral course of action outside heterosexual marriage.

"Dignity believes that expressions of love, including sexual intimacy between two individuals of the same sex, can be morally acceptable," he said.

The bishops' statement draws a distinction between homosexual activity, which it says is objectively immoral, and homosexual orientation, which it said usually is not willed but experienced as a given, and therefore not a question of morality.

Father John Harvey, director of Courage, a group for Catholic homosexuals seeking to live chastely, said Oct. 3 that the statement "needs substantive revision."

He objected to the use of the terms "gay" and "lesbian" in the statement because they "give the public the impression that the homosexual condition is fixed and permanent" and that "one's homosexual orientation is his most important characteristic."

Father Harvey, an Oblate of St. Francis de Sales, also suggested that the statement "stress that the homosexual inclination cannot be considered as equal to heterosexuality," and that the bishops explain the church's position on gay rights legislation.

"Many clergy, parents and young people are confused by the current propaganda in favor of same-sex marriage," he said.

Bishop Fabian W. Bruskewitz of Lincoln, Neb., said the statement "seems to say what the Catholic Church has always taught, namely that we must hate sin and still love the sinner.... Our condemnation of sin does not permit us, either figuratively or otherwise, to shoot our wounded."

The bishops' committee urged parents to suggest counseling, spiritual direction and other supports to their homosexually oriented sons or daughters, and it cited "therapy directed toward changing a homosexual orientation" as a possibility.

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