

DIOCESAN NEWS

Theologian: Church should support gay rights

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — The church has more reasons to support civil rights for homosexuals than it has to oppose them, according to Father Richard A. Peddicord, OP, assistant professor of moral theology at Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis, Mo.

"(I)t is inconsistent with a commitment to social justice to oppose legislation which would serve to ensure justice for gays and lesbians," Father Peddicord said. "Opposing the morality of certain sexual practices ought not to entail collusion with campaigns to place social, economic and political obstacles in the path of an undervalued minority."

Father Peddicord made his case Sept. 18 during a plenary session of the fifth annual conference of the National Association of Catholic Diocesan Lesbian and Gay Ministries.

The "Imaging Justice" conference took place Sept. 17-Sept. 20 at the Sheraton Four Points Hotel and drew more than 260 people.

Hosted by the Catholic Gay & Lesbian Family Ministry, which works on behalf of the Diocese of Rochester, the conference featured several workshops on ministry to gay and lesbian Catholics.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark celebrated the conference's Mass at St. Mary's Church Saturday night, Sept. 19.

Father Peddicord titled his talk "Foundational Justice: Toward a Catholic Case for Supporting Gay & Lesbian Civil Rights Legislation."

Church teachings upholding universal human rights clearly compel the church to support statutes that forbid discrimination against homosexuals in such areas as housing and employment, the priest said. But he contrasted the stances of two church leaders on gay rights legislation to illustrate what he called the church's "studied ambiguity" on civil rights for homosexuals.

Cardinal John O'Connor, archbishop of the Archdiocese of New York City, has consistently opposed gay rights ordinances, he said, whereas retired San Francisco Auxiliary Archbishop John R. Quinn has consistently supported such legislation.

Cardinal O'Connor's stance is rooted in church moral teaching opposing homosexual acts, Father Peddicord said, whereas Archbishop Quinn has used the church's social teaching upholding human rights to justify his stances.

"Sexual morality versus the church's social teaching — such is frequently the im-



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Father Norman Weslin, OS, a transient priest ordained in the Diocese of Ponce, Puerto Rico, marches with anti-conference protesters outside St. Mary's Church prior to Mass Sept. 19.

passee at which one finds the Catholic hierarchy in the United States on the question of gay and lesbian rights," he said.

Father Peddicord added that through documents issued in the mid-1980s and early 1990s, the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith threw cold water on church support for gay rights.

Specifically, he noted, the congregation stated in 1992 that "there are times when one is morally obligated to discriminate against gays and lesbians," adding that the congregation specified teaching, coaching and military jobs as areas where gays should not be allowed.

Essentially, Father Peddicord said, the congregation believed that homosexuals are an "undeserving minority" because their status is based on a condition that raises moral qualms. He said that he did not agree with such reasoning, arguing

that "judging that certain sexual behaviors are immoral does not reveal how the practitioners of such behaviors ought to be treated."

"The social participation of gays and lesbians is not regulated by the virtue of chastity, but by the virtue of justice," Father Peddicord said.

Father Peddicord cited Vatican II's endorsement of religious liberty as a parallel to his case. If the church can support the right of non-Catholics to deny the church's doctrinal teachings, then the church can also support the civil rights of people who deny the validity of the church's moral teachings, he contended.

In a follow-up interview with the *Catholic Courier*, Father Peddicord further explained his thesis by comparing the church's opposition to legalized abortion with its various stances on gay rights.

In abortion, the priest said, the church clearly has an obligation to take its moral teaching to the public realm because the unborn are directly affected by the law. However, he said, no such "third party" is harmed when gays are protected from discrimination.

When asked if certain employers and landlords could argue that they, like the unborn, are a third party adversely affected by homosexual civil rights, Father Peddicord responded that heterosexuals generally do not lose their jobs or their homes for fornicating, which is also immoral.

Discriminating against homosexuals in the public realm for their private behavior can only be seen as selective discrimination, he said, adding that such discrimination was "radically offensive to Catholic social teaching."

Bishop praises growth in new ministries

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Catholic ministry to homosexuals has come a long way in a short period of time, according to Bishop Matthew H. Clark, chief celebrant at a Sept. 19 Mass for the fifth annual conference of the National Association of Catholic Diocesan Lesbian and Gay Ministries.

More than 260 people attended the NACDLGM conference, held at the Sheraton Four Points Hotel Sept. 17-20. According to NACDLGM information, 50 priests, six deacons, 19 women religious and three men religious were among the conference attendees, who came from at least 50 U.S. dioceses as well as from Canada and the United Kingdom.

Bishop Clark made his comments during his homily at the conference Mass in St. Mary's Church.

The church has benefited from the insights of social scientists, pastoral ministers, and gays and lesbians themselves in breaking new ground in recent years in ministry to homosexuals, the bishop commented in his homily.

"Not too many years ago, such an event as this was unheard of," the bishop said of the conference.

He added that until a few years ago, almost no dioceses had ministries tailored to gays and lesbians, whereas now several do.

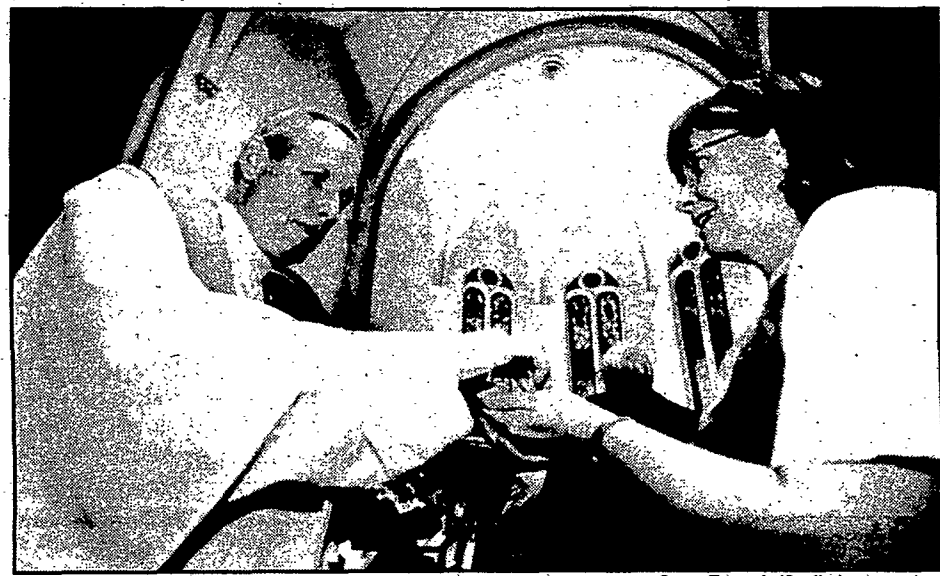
Indeed, NACDLGM information notes that at least 35 U.S. dioceses — including the Diocese of Rochester — have ministries associated with the national organization.

Speaking to a near-capacity congregation of 600 in the church, the bishop noted that the conference was just one of many signs that the church is openly acknowledging the existence of Catholic gays and lesbians.

"Can I tell you how happy I am that the utter silence of my youth — and of others' — about this issue has been broken," the bishop said.

Prior to and during the Mass, more than 50 anti-conference protesters picketed outside, holding signs with such slogans as "Is Sodomy No Longer A Sin?" and "Bishop Clark: Love The Homosexual With The Truth."

In his homily, the bishop referred to



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Bishop Matthew H. Clark offers Communion to Laurie Donohue, a parishioner of Corpus Christi Church, during Mass at St. Mary's Church, Rochester, Sept. 19. About 600 attended the Mass for the National Association of Catholic Diocesan Lesbian and Gay Ministries conference.

the protesters, saying "the presence of the protesters — the questions of good people who have a difficulty with this issue — gives us the perspective of how far we have to go."

Protesters included members of the Lambs of Christ, a pro-life protest group, and of Citizens for a Decent Community, which leafletted diocesan parishes in recent months with anti-conference literature. The picketers prayed the rosary as they walked in front of the church.

Mike Valerio, a member of the Lambs of Christ Western New York chapter, and a parishioner at Penfield's Holy Spirit Church, said he was protesting the Mass because of his belief in church teaching against homosexual acts.

"(I'm) defending the Catholic faith as it's meant to be, that is, love the sinner and hate the sin," he said.

However, across the street from the front of the church, about 15 protesters, primarily from Rochester's Corpus Christi Church, said they were in favor of the Mass and the conference. As they chanted and sang in support of Bishop Clark, mounted Rochester City Police patrolled the street in front of the church.

One conference supporter, Lillia Castillejo, a parishioner and volunteer at Corpus Christi, said she represented her

parish's solidarity with gay and lesbian Catholics.

"We are in unity with all who are oppressed and living on the edge ...," she said.

Inside the church, the bishop celebrated the Mass with St. Mary's pastor, Father William Donnelly, and NACDLGM's executive director, Father James Schexnayder, who directs gay and lesbian ministry for the Diocese of Oakland, Calif.

At the conclusion of the Mass, Father Schexnayder thanked Bishop Clark for welcoming NACDLGM to the Rochester Diocese and for supporting ministry to homosexual people. The bishop was then treated to a lengthy standing ovation from the congregation, which chanted "Matthew! Matthew!"

After Mass, Steve and Florence Balog, a married couple from the Diocese of Portland, Ore., told the *Catholic Courier* that they enjoyed the NACDLGM conference, at which they had presented a workshop.

They also praised Bishop Clark for his ministry to gay and lesbian Catholics.

"If the bishop is a reflection of the whole diocese, then I think there's a lot of hope for this diocese," Steve Balog said.

Michael R. Yackiw
Funeral Home

1270 Norton Street
544-5000



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