

Leaders protest same-sex unions

WASHINGTON (CNS) — As gay-rights groups and church leaders from Boston to San Francisco continued to debate the gay marriage issue, Catholic bishops reiterated their opposition to same-sex marriages while stressing that their support for traditional marriage should not be seen as an attack on or discrimination against homosexuals.

In Boston, legislators spent two days at the Massachusetts Statehouse in impassioned debate over a proposed constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriages. The session ended in a stalemate Feb. 13, and the topic was to be taken up again March 11.

During a Feb. 8 outdoor rally in Boston, Archbishop Sean P. O'Malley told participants that those speaking out against same-sex marriages were not "hate-mongering" as some people have accused them of doing.

"We are here because we are concerned about marriage and about family," said the head of the Boston Archdiocese. "Good, strong marriage and family are good for our country, for society."

In San Francisco, the city's mayor, Gavin Newsom, asked city clerks to remove all gender references from local marriage forms Feb. 12, which brought a rush of gay couples seeking to be married that day to the City Hall.

San Francisco Archbishop William J. Levada said the mayor's action went against "long-established California law, which was reaffirmed overwhelmingly by California voters just four years ago."

The archbishop pointed out that many have called opposition to same-sex marriages "discrimination against gay and lesbian persons."

"Such an interpretation is false and offensive to people whose good will is clear," he said in a Feb. 12 statement.

"The Catholic Church has often spoken of the respect, compassion and sensitivity demanded in our interactions with and attitudes toward homosexual people. Withholding support for same-sex marriage should never be equated with hostility toward homosexual people," Archbishop Levada said.



Reuters/CNS

Carol McKinley of Pembroke, Mass., demonstrates outside the Massachusetts Statehouse in Boston Feb. 11. Inside, legislators considered a proposed amendment that would outlaw same-sex marriage.

In Chicago, activists protested in front of Cardinal Francis E. George's home Feb. 14 demanding equal marriage rights for homosexuals.

Members of the group told reporters that they chose the cardinal's residence over state and federal legislators' offices because Cardinal George had been among the main opponents of a gay rights bill that narrowly lost last year in Illinois.

In a Feb. 14 statement, the cardinal said demonstrators made false claims by characterizing the church's support for traditional marriage as an attack on gay people.

"That is inflammatory and untrue," he said. "Marriage is a natural institution. It is the invention of neither the church nor of the state, and neither has the authority to change its nature."

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Irondequoit parish to build a new center

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

During the next year, Irondequoit's St. Cecilia Parish plans to build a new parish center, create a youth/religious-education center and expand its parking lot, according to Father Kevin E. McKenna, pastor.

St. Cecilia already has received preliminary site-plan approval for the project from the Town of Irondequoit, said Peter Kelderhouse, chairman of the project's capital campaign. Groundbreaking is slated for April 1, pending final approval from the town.

"The mood is that there are no major obstacles that we have to pass," Kelderhouse said.

The 3,028-square-foot "Newcomb Friendship Center" will replace Newcomb Hall, located in the church basement, Father McKenna said. The hall was named for the parish's founding pastor, Father Bernard C. Newcomb.

The new parish center will be a ground-level addition to the parish's former school building, which is currently being rented to a child-care center as well as being used for

parish activities. The center, church and former school will all be connected, and the new youth/religious-education center will be located in the church basement, Father McKenna said.

The parish decided to build the new center on ground level due, in part, to St. Cecilia's aging membership, he said, noting that seniors are often unable to use the stairs leading to Newcomb Hall. The center can also be used as a reception hall for such events as funerals, he said.

Kelderhouse said it would not have been cost-effective to renovate the church basement into a new center. He added that the youth center planned for the basement is a sign of St. Cecilia's commitment to young people.

The parish conducted a \$1 million capital campaign to finance the project, Kelderhouse said. The campaign has exceeded the goal, raising more than \$1,006,739, according to Father McKenna.

In addition to the new parish center, the parish plans to expand its parking lot from 157 spaces to 171, Kelderhouse said.