NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://www.ncronline.org)

The church continues to oppose same-sex marriage

Pat Perriello | Oct. 15, 2012 NCR Today

I saw a church bulletin Oct. 7 that contained a document from the Maryland Catholic Conference opposing same-sex marriage legislation. (The document can be found at the end of this blog post.) The headline was "Marriage cannot be Redefined: Vote Against Question 6." The intention seems pretty clear. The bishop and pastor are not only telling Catholics how to vote, but how they *must* vote. There can be no choice in the matter.

Reading over the document, however, it is amazing how weak the argument is. The document insists that marriage is all about procreation. Yet Vatican II taught that there are two ends of marriage, one of which is conjugal love. Why can bishops ignore the teaching of the most recent church council while the rest of us are bound by whatever they say?

Later, the document gets even more confusing when it says it is OK for couples to marry who don't have children, and that it would be improper for the state to deny the right to marry to those who are incapable of having children. Yet they have used precisely the argument of being able to have children as the reason there can be no same-sex couples.

Moreover, they insist marriage is designed to protect children who need both a mother and a father. This traditional couple is the best arrangement, they say, for children to thrive. Then, however, they go on to say that single parents also do a good job of raising children. They acknowledge there are many family constellations that are not ideal but exist in today's world and need to be supported. They, of course, do not cite any studies that show just how well children are thriving in many single-parent families and even with gay couples.

The document also focuses on the fact that same-sex couples already have many benefits of marriage, and therefore, there is no need to legalize same-sex marriage. I am trying to figure out whether they believe these couples should have these benefits or not. What has the church done to promote civil rights for same-sex couples? What about the rights married couples have that gay and lesbian couples in Maryland still do not have? Will the church now advocate for these citizens to be granted additional rights in order to forestall the need for a law legalizing same-sex marriage? Does the church really have any interest at all in seeing that our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters are not discriminated against in housing, employment, hospital visitation rights, legal matters, etc.? There has certainly been little evidence of interest or support regarding these issues.

Finally, the contentious issue of religious liberty is once again raised. The document is concerned that the law denies the church religious freedom. Yet when the law explicitly provides the church the freedom to be totally exempt from the implementation of the law, they say, "Oh well, we already had that freedom." Do you think they would have been silent if the law had left this provision out? In fact, they were among those who lobbied for the inclusion of this provision during the debate. There seems to be a lack of candor in their treatment of this issue.

The document goes on to say that the real issue is not freedom for the church but freedom for individuals. It then finally makes clear what this argument is really all about. It says that actually, there is no way any law could provide the freedom they feel is necessary. In other words, whatever the state offers them will never be

enough. We saw the same reality in the recent argument over contraception in health insurance plans.

I can only assume that they feel individuals opposed to the legislation lose their right to religious freedom if they have to live in a society where same-sex couples might shop at the same stores they frequent, or even worse, live down the street from them. I don't hear any complaints in the document about the lack of freedom for gay and lesbian individuals to marry. It seems only those who agree with the position of the hierarchy are entitled to freedom. This is a distortion of what freedom and democracy mean.

The bottom line for their argument is really that the arguments themselves don't matter. They don't even need to be that strong or well-stated. Why? Because if the archdiocese says to vote no, Catholics must vote no. Frankly, that's just not good enough.

Maryland Catholic Conference's stand on same-sex marriage [1]

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