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

Knights of Columbus redefine charity by giving to bishops

Nicole Sotelo | Jan. 23, 2014 Young Voices

I have always been impressed by the Knights of Columbus' dedication to charity. But over a period of four years, the Knights have donated more than $1.4 million of their "charitable contributions" not to the poor, but to sponsor Catholic bishops to attend medical ethics workshops that increasingly carry a political agenda.

The Knights' sponsorship of these political workshops is listed in their annual reports as charity alongside their Coats for Kids and Food for Families programs. Charity and bishops are both seven-letter words, but I have never confused the two. Unfortunately, it seems the Knights of Columbus have.

Since the 1980s, the Knights of Columbus have sponsored biennial "workshops for bishops" under the auspices of the National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia to train the Catholic hierarchy in medical ethics. Workshop topics have ranged from euthanasia to hospital ethics committees. In recent years, however, the curriculum for these workshops has increasingly focused on anti-gay politics.

For example, last year's workshop [1] featured the conservative psychologist and activist Thomas Finn, who presented on "Same-Sex Parenting Studies." He is known for disputing mainstream research, telling lawmakers [2], and now bishops, that children who grow up with same-gender parents are "vulnerable to risks such as increased presence of sexually transmitted disease, violence, substance abuse, mental health problems, etcetera."

At the 2011 workshop [3], bishops heard from Brian Brown [4], president of National Organization for Marriage, an anti-LGBT political organization that works against marriage equality. He spoke to the bishops not about medical ethics, but about "Same Sex 'Marriage' " (the quotes around "marriage" are his).

The same year, bishops heard a presentation on "Same-Sex Attraction and Gender Identity" by Richard Fitzgibbons, who runs a conservative counseling center. Fitzgibbons has written [5] extensively on his belief that people who identify as gay or transgender can be cured through counseling, something that the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association have both rejected.

These anti-gay trainings for bishops continue beyond the workshops. The National Catholic Bioethics Center not only coordinates the workshops but distributes supplementary materials, including public policy reports [6], a quarterly journal and online resources. All of these contain information that is harmful toward those who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender, including the Knights' own members who identify as such.

For example, the NCBC advocacy office issues monthly public policy reports that update dioceses on anti-gay legislation. Another example comes from an article in the NCBC quarterly journal that suggests those who are transgender have a "disorder [that] begins in early childhood with an insecure mother-child relationship and tends to affect boys who are emotionally vulnerable" (NCBC Bioethics Quarterly, Spring 2009, 103 [7]).

While mainstream scientists would disagree with the journal, bishops who believe the NCBC information may go on to make harmful diocesan policies and advocate in legislatures against those who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Harmful actions by the bishops have included advocating against fair housing, resisting

equal employment opportunities, and preventing standard health care treatment.

The fact that these "workshops for bishops" and supplementary resources are actually thinly veiled conservative political coachings shouldn't come as a surprise. The Knights of Columbus vice president for public policy sits on the board of the NCBC, which runs the workshops and resource distribution. Additionally, a large majority of the NCBC's board of directors reads like a who's who directory of bishops known for their political work against LGBT equality.

The NCBC board includes:

- Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia, who presided over the rejection of a lesbian couple's children from a Catholic school and actively worked against marriage equality [8] while he was an archbishop in Colorado;
- Cardinal Francis George of Chicago, who has repeatedly spoken out against the LGBT community [9] and battled against marriage equality in Illinois [10];
- Archbishop Joseph Kurtz of Louisville, Ky., current president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and former chairman of the USCCB Subcommittee for the Promotion and Defense of Marriage that focused on anti-gay education and advocacy [11];
- Archbishop John Nienstedt of St.Paul/Minneapolis, who sent anti-gay DVDs [12] to Catholics in his diocese in advance of a key election and was a vocal opponent against marriage equality [13].

While the "workshops for bishops" originally focused on the U.S. hierarchy, now the gathering includes bishops from countries such as Canada, Mexico and the Philippines, places where the Knights have membership. Today, the gathering is considered one of the largest regular gatherings of bishops outside of their episcopal conferences.

I am grateful the Knights are interested in educating bishops about medical ethics, but these classes appear less about education and more about politics. Plus, the fact that the Knights' leadership is using its charitable contributions for politically oriented workshops instead of charity, as their supporters are led to believe, seems anything but ethical.

The Knights of Columbus leadership themselves could benefit from an ethics workshop, one that focuses on the difference between politics and charity.

[Nicole Sotelo is the author of *Women Healing from Abuse: Meditations for Finding Peace*, published by Paulist Press, and coordinates WomenHealing.com [14]. She is a graduate of Harvard Divinity School.]

Editor's note: We can send you an email alert every time a Young Voices column is posted to NCRonline.org. Go to this page and follow directions: Email alert sign-up [15].

Source URL (retrieved on *2016-05-24 12:50*): http://www.ncronline.org/blogs/young-voices/knights-columbus-redefine-charity-giving-bishops

Links:
[1] http://store.ncbcenter.org/2013-Workshop-for-Bishops-DVDs-P62.aspx
[2] http://www.cga.ct.gov/2002/juddata/chr/2002JUD01209-R001300-CHR.htm
[3] http://store.ncbcenter.org/2011-Workshop-for-Bishops-DVDs-P59.aspx
[4] https://nationformarriage.org/index.php/about/leadership
[5] http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/the-psychology-behind-homosexual-tendencies-part-1
[6] http://ncbcenter.org/page.aspx?pid=1245

[7] http://ncbcenter.org/document.doc?id=581
[8] http://www.archden.org/index.cfm/ID/5791
[9] http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2011-12-23/news/ct-met-cardinal-gay-kkk-comments-20111223_1_gay-pride-parade-gay-rights-civil-unions
[10] http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2013-01-01/news/chi-cardinal-george-issues-letter-urging-catholics-to-oppose-gay-marriage-20130101_1_illinois-clergy-gay-marriage-marriage-fairness-act
[11] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lh_81zsW6U8
[12] http://www.mprnews.org/story/2010/09/22/archbishop-nienstedt-same-sex-marriage-dvd-qa
[13] http://www.minnpost.com/politics-policy/2012/08/archbishop-nienstedts-latest-marriage-amendment-letter-adds-catholic-turmoil
[14] http://www.WomenHealing.com
[15] http://ncronline.org/email-alert-signup