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Bishops gear up to oppose same-sex marriage

John L. Allen Jr. | Jun. 17, 2009 NCR Today

Facing a growing political ferment across America around same-sex marriage, including six states that have recognized homosexual marriage and others that have adopted domestic partnership acts, the U.S. bishops this afternoon pondered how to get out their message in defense of traditional heterosexual marriage.

tThe Ad-Hoc Committee in Defense of Marriage presented four key points the bishops hope to make:

?tMarriage is inherently related to the sexual difference between men and women.
?tMarriage is ordered to the good of children. (?A culture that welcomes the child is a culture that welcomes hope,? said Archbishop Joseph Kurtz of Louisville, chair of the ad-hoc committee.)
?tMarriage by its nature is restricted to one man and one woman, and saying so is not a matter of unjust discrimination. (?The church deplores all violence and unjust discrimination against homosexual persons, but to treat marriage differently is not unjust discrimination,? Kurtz said. ?It stems from the nature of marriage itself, and the state has a positive duty to uphold this fundamental institution.?)
?tLegalizing same-sex marriage has consequences for religious freedom, such as the prospect that people opposed in conscience might be compelled into cooperation with it. (Kurtz said there are already plenty of ?real-life examples? of that coercion.)

Kurtz presented these points to the fully body of bishops this afternoon. He said the committee is contracting with professional communications firms to try to package these points successfully, including the production of a series of videos and brochures.

Kurtz said the bishops hope to make their pitch to two key groups: Young adults aged 18-29, with a special focus on Latinos; and priests and catechists across the country. Those choices, Kurtz said, were shaped by consultations the ad-hoc committee has carried out, which, he said, revealed that ?priests often hesitant to preach about defense of marriage.?

In discussing these efforts, Kurtz offered a special thank-you to the Knights of Columbus, which has provided funding for the Ad-Hoc Committee in Defense of Marriage.

Archbishop Michael Sheehan of Santa Fe, New Mexico, pointed out that efforts in his state to resist same-sex legislation were buoyed by cooperation with Evangelicals and other Christian groups such as Baptists. Kurtz agreed, saying such ecumenical alliances tend to be especially effective on the state level.

Kurtz also brought the conference up to date on efforts to draft a pastoral letter on marriage from the U.S. bishops. He said that a final draft of the document should be presented to the full body of bishops at their November meeting.

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