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The pro-love, anti-prejudice generation

Nicole Sotelo | Dec. 2, 2010

The most valuable demographic to the marketing mavens of Madison Avenue is the 18-35 group of Gen. X-ers and Millennials. Now, the leadership of the church is targeting these generations with a marketing blitz to win them to the cause of discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people.

Perhaps it is no accident that the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops just elected Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York, resident of Madison Avenue and known for his media saavy, as their president. Even more, it doesn?t seem coincidental that his newly-elected vice-president is none other than Archbishop Joseph Kurtz of Louisville, Ky., who chairs the Ad Hoc Committee for the Defense of Marriage.

Note the use of the word ?marriage? here is not about helping couples succeed in relationship but is, rather, the bishops? code word for ?anti-gay.?

During the national meeting of bishops this month in Baltimore, Kurtz informed his confreres and the news media that his once-temporary committee would now become a permanent subcommittee. Additionally, he announced that the Knights of Columbus, financial partners with the bishops in their anti-gay campaigns, are going to foot the bill for a new full-time, anti-gay federal policy adviser.

However, the bishops recognize that lobbying congress for anti-gay legislation only goes so far. They need votes to back them up ? young Catholic votes.

During the presentation, the bishops admitted they were on the losing side of the battle when it comes to younger generations and LGBT issues. Not only do Catholics comprise the largest religious denominational voting block in the United States, but young adult Catholics are the most favorably disposed toward LGBT justice. Without young adult votes, the bishops? anti-gay campaigns will not succeed.

Needing data, the Knights of Columbus -- who finance the bishops? anti-gay campaigns -- [Editor's Note: Link corrected.] surveyed young adults in a Marist poll earlier this year [1] and discovered that only 54 percent of the general public believes that same-gender marriage is morally wrong, a number that continues to drop. Perhaps even more disconcerting for the Knights, however, were the results of young Millenials surveyed: Only 47 percent believe that same-gender marriage is wrong, less than the critical tipping point of 50 percent in political campaigns. The bishops are losing the majority.

A Pew Forum study, also realeased this year, revealed that 55 percent of U.S. Catholics age 30 and over feel that homosexuality should be accepted by society. Of Catholics ages 18-29, 72 percent believe that homosexuality should be accepted by society -- more than any other religious denomination of young adults that was surveyed.

But it is not over. The bishops are vowing to win back young Catholics. In their presentation earlier this month, they spoke of the need to target this key demographic.

To do so on a national level, the bishops are preparing to issue the second of two anti-gay videos sponsored by the Knights of Columbus targeted to young adults considering marriage.

On a local level, individual bishops are utilizing extreme measures to denigrate and block any pro-LGBT messages. Bishop Thomas Olmsted of the Phoenix diocese recently mandated three extra months for diocesan marriage preparation in response to the ?challenges? posed by same-gender marriage -- so that couples could be better catechized regarding opposite-gender marriage.

Equally astonishing has been a string of actions by educational institutions, from Marquette University to Benedictine University, where LGBT educators have been deemed too dangerous to teach young minds, often with support from local bishops

There will likely be additional anti-gay tactics by bishops centered around young adult populations in the coming year, precisely because the younger generations stand on the side of their lovers and neighbors -- friends and family who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

If this generation holds to its values, it could be the generation that votes discrimination out of civil laws so that all people are treated fairly when it comes to pensions, taxes, education and healthcare. It could be the generation that upholds Christ?s teachings of love and is not confused by teachings of prejudice.

We could be that generation, but only if we ensure the bishops discrimination does not prevail. It is up to us.

[Nicole Sotelo is the author of *Women Healing from Abuse: Meditations for Finding Peace*, published by Paulist Press, and coordinates **www.WomenHealing.com** [2]. A graduate of Harvard Divinity School, she currently works at Call To Action.

Call to Action recently joined with New Ways Ministry, DignityUSA and Fortunate Families to form "Equally Blessed," a coalition of Catholics that supports the full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people both in the church and in civil society.]

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