

Archbishop, chaplains object to same-sex weddings

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WASHINGTON -- Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio of the Archdiocese for the Military Services and a group representing hundreds of other Christian military chaplains have objected to a Pentagon memo allowing military chaplains to participate in or officiate at same-sex marriages on or off military installations.

The memo was issued by Undersecretary of Defense Clifford L. Stanley Sept. 30. It followed the Sept. 20 repeal of the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy that banned gays from serving openly in the armed forces.

Stanley's memo said: "A military chaplain may participate in or officiate (at) any private ceremony, whether on or off a military installation, provided that the ceremony is not prohibited by applicable state and local law."

It also said that "a chaplain is not required to participate in or officiate (at) a private ceremony if doing so would be in variance with the tenets of his or her religion."

Archbishop Broglio has questioned how the military could allow chaplains in the U.S. armed forces to be involved in same-sex marriage ceremonies when the federal Defense of Marriage Act prohibits such unions.

"The Pentagon's new policy, as outlined in these two memos, appears to ignore the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which was signed into law 15 years ago and remains in effect," Archbishop Broglio said in a statement emailed to Catholic News Service Oct. 12.

"How can Undersecretary Stanley say, on the one hand, that chaplains may take part in any private ceremony as long as it is 'not prohibited by applicable state and local law,' and on the other, say nothing of the federal law?" he asked.

A statement from a group called Chaplain Alliance for Liberty, which represents evangelical and Orthodox chaplains, raised the same concerns.

The alliance's executive director, Ron Crews, told reporters that despite the Pentagon saying that chaplains are not required to participate in same-sex weddings, as stated in Stanley's memo, he is concerned that a chaplain who refuses to perform such a ceremony will not be seen as "a team player" by the military and would be reassigned.

The Chaplain Alliance for Liberty does not allow its members to perform same-sex wedding ceremonies "under any circumstances," he said.

Taylor Henry, spokesman for the military archdiocese, told Catholic News Service that it goes without saying that no Catholic chaplain will preside at same-sex weddings. "There is nothing that has changed in church teaching about that," he said.

In his statement, Archbishop Broglio said the Pentagon's new policy on chaplains and same-sex marriage "seems to undermine the will of the American people."

"In no fewer than 29 states, men and women of goodwill have affirmed marriage as the union of a man and a woman," he said. "Anywhere that the people have been allowed to decide, marriage has been reaffirmed as that union made clear by nature itself. Furthermore 41 states have statutory or constitutional 'Defense of Marriage Acts.'"

He said the new policy "seeks to circumvent the clear will of the majority, whose unquestionable sovereignty has the last word in the system of government enshrined in the federal Constitution."

He emphasized that the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act was passed through the "efforts of a substantial, bipartisan majority in Congress" and was signed into law by Democratic President Bill Clinton.

"As a nation we walk down a dangerous path when appointed officials are allowed to undermine the will of the people," Archbishop Broglio said.

"The women and men I am privileged to serve place their lives on the line every day to defend the country whose government is of the people, by the people, and for the people. Let us pray that the millions who have died to ensure those liberties did not die in vain," he said.

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