

Despite threat, pastor holds his ground over marriage amendment

Tom Roberts | Jan. 19, 2012 NCR Today

It's a long way to November and the vote in Minnesota over an amendment to the state constitution that would limit marriage to one man and one woman. The Catholic church has joined battle with gay rights forces in what could be a protracted battle to persuade the public.

The push back, however, is not confined to those outside the church. Catholics for Marriage Equality MN strongly oppose the measure and are mounting a strong campaign against its passage. And among clergy, one especially outspoken pastor, Fr. Michael Tegeder, has held his ground despite threats to his ministry from his archbishop.

As 2011 was coming to a close, Archbishop John C. Nienstedt of the Archdiocese of Minneapolis-St. Paul, was ramping up a campaign that had actually begun in earnest in September of last year when the archdiocese sent out 400,000 DVDs, paid for by an anonymous donor, explaining church teaching on the matter and urging that an amendment be put to a vote.

In October of this year, bishops urged priests throughout the state to form committees to help get the proposed amendment approved.

And earlier this month, Nienstedt sent out a prayer, to be used as part of the prayer of the faithful during Mass, asking that God "grant to us all the gift of courage to proclaim and defend our plan for marriage, which is the union of one man and one woman in a lifelong, exclusive relationship of loving trust, compassion and generosity, open to the conception of children."

A letter accompanying the prayer said the fight over the amendment "demands a three-fold approach."

"We must educate our fellow citizens on the meaning and good of marriage," Nienstedt wrote. "We must actively and resolutely promote widespread participation among our fellow believers in the support of a marriage amendment. And most importantly, we must pray and offer sacrifice for the success of all endeavors that seek to protect and promote marriage."

Most recently, the archbishop sent out a warning to any priests who might not be inclined to see the political picture in the same way:

"It is my expectation that all the priests and deacons in this Archdiocese will support this venture and cooperate with us in the important efforts that lie ahead. The gravity of this struggle, and the radical consequences of inaction propels me to place a solemn charge upon you all: on your ordination day, you made a promise to promote and defend all that the Church teaches. I call upon that promise in this effort to defend marriage. There ought not be open dissension on this issue. If any have personal reservations, I do not wish that they be shared publicly. If anyone believes in conscience that he cannot cooperate, I want him to contact me directly and I will plan to respond personally."

I've had several conversations with Tegeder recently, and he emphasizes that he's not against conventional marriage, nor does he want to do anything to harm the institution. He just thinks that the church is wasting

enormous financial and political capital, not to mention credibiity, in engaging in this campaign.

In a recent piece in the Minneapolis Star-Tribune, he was quoted as saying the marriage amendment campaign is "not the way to support marriage. If we want to support marriage, there are wonderful things we can do as Catholic churches and ministers. We should not be focused on beating up a small number of people who have this desire to have committed relationships."

For continuing updates on the situation, check out The Progressive Catholic Voice Web site at <http://theprogressivecatholicvoice.blogspot.com/>, and the New Ways Ministry blog, Bondings 2.0 at <http://newwaysministryblog.wordpress.com/2012/01/19/a-priest-of-integrity/>, and Catholics for Marriage Equality MN at <http://c4me.org/>.

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