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'Father of Proposition 8' the latest in the Vatican's fast-track promotions

by Jamie Manson

Grace on the Margins

If last week's elevation of Bishop Salvatore Cordileone of Oakland, Calif., to archbishop of San Francisco proves anything, it's that attacking marriage equality puts a man on the fast-track to promotion in the Roman Catholic Church. A quick survey of the hierarchy's most recent, high-profile appointments reveals a common denominator.

The trend became apparent in March, when Bishop William Lori of Bridgeport, Conn., was given his papal orders to take over the reins in the historic Archdiocese of Baltimore. Lori, the longtime chaplain of the Knights of Columbus, no doubt earned his reward as chair of the USCCB's Ad Hoc Committee on Religious Liberty.

Although the religious freedom battle has been widely associated with contraception, the bishops have always included same-sex marriage as a clear threat to their First Amendment rights. Of the committee's six signs of attack on religious freedom, two relate to marriage equality: the Department of Justice's refusal to defend the Defense of Marriage Act and the "narrow religious exemption" in New York State's same-sex marriage bill. Lori, still seething from the successful passage of the marriage equality bill in Connecticut in 2008, was no doubt delighted to take up the cause.

Just weeks after Lori's promotion, Archbishop J. Peter Sartain of Seattle made national news for exhorting pastors in his diocese to use their parishes to collect signatures in support of a repeal of Washington state's newly passed marriage equality law. Only 10 days after this headline, Sartain practically became a household name when he was tapped to head the "reform" of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. Given the backlash the LCWR crackdown created, it might be a dubious honor, but it is

nevertheless a powerful and high-profile position.

Before their respective appointments, each of these men publicly declared himself a culture warrior ready to do battle with lesbian and gay couples who seek to formally honor their commitments and protect themselves legally.

There almost seems to be an element of retribution in these promotions. Lori's anti-LGBT zeal was unleashed on a state in which the Catholic governor, Martin O'Malley, was instrumental in passing Maryland's marriage equality. Sartain was charged with leading the hostile takeover of women religious who were in trouble for (among only a few other reasons) not pushing the church's agenda against same-sex marriage.

It is possible to interpret the elevations of Lori and Sartain as payback by the Vatican. But the Cordileone appointment is downright combative. For years, Cordileone has quietly made his mark as the USCCB's fiercest opponent of same-sex marriage. Last year, his labor earned him the role of chairman of the U.S. bishops' Subcommittee for the Promotion and Defense of Marriage. And now he has been tapped to be the chief shepherd of a city known for its prominent LGBT population and its historic role in the LGBT liberation movement.

Cordileone's tussles with gay and lesbian Catholics made headlines in *NCR* just weeks ago. In his June 25 article, Brian Roewe charted Cordileone's ongoing investigation into Catholic Association for Lesbian and Gay Ministry, a small organization of diocesan, parish and campus-based ministries dedicated to pastoral concern and support for lesbian and gay Catholics, their parents, families and friends. Since the group has its office in Berkeley, Calif., they operate under the watch of Cordileone, who has served as bishop of Oakland since 2009.

Among Cordileone's concerns was the group's use of the words "gay and lesbian," which he said are "not in the church's vocabulary." Yet a glance at the official websites of the Archdiocese of Chicago and the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, not to mention Cordileone's own diocese of Oakland, shows a clear use of the term "gay and lesbian ministry."

The inquiry culminated in the bishop's attempt to force each CALGM board member to sign an "Oath of Personal Integrity in Belief and Practice Regarding the Teachings of the Catholic Church." According to Roewe, the oath "included a series of 'I affirm and believe' statements regarding the definitions of marriage, purgatory and hell; the belief that Communion is available only under a state of grace; and church positions on chastity and cloning, among others."

The board of CALGM refused to sign the oath, and that's where the Cordileone story left off until Friday's announcement of his promotion across the Bay.

Cordileone's struggle with CALGM seems minor compared with his extraordinary efforts against marriage equality during the time he served as auxiliary bishop in his hometown of San Diego. In an August 2009 cover story for the *East Bay Express*, journalist Chris Thompson chronicled Cordileone's labors against marriage equality in California, which are so extensive that the paper dubbed the bishop the "Father of Proposition 8."

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"As an auxiliary bishop in San Diego, Cordileone played an indispensable role in conceiving, funding,

organizing, and ultimately winning the campaign to pass Proposition 8," Thompson writes.

If Thompson's journalistic investigation is accurate, it was Cordileone and a small group of Catholic leaders who decided to push for a state constitutional ban on same-sex marriage, which would later be known as Proposition 8. It was Cordileone who personally called Maggie Gallagher, president of the National Organization for Marriage, to aid in the effort to collect signatures. It was Cordileone who not only created partnerships with Evangelical churches -- he even helped to craft the Prop 8 campaign's rhetorical strategy and messaging.

Perhaps most disturbing, Cordileone did all of this by insisting his approach to gays and lesbians is pastoral. Charles LiMandri, the general counsel for the marriage organization's California chapter, credited the bishop's air of compassion with the success of Proposition 8.

"He tried to approach this in a loving way, and I think this made a real difference," he told Thompson. "He wasn't judgmental. Gay and lesbian people are children of God, and he has always welcomed them into the church."

But the company Cordileone kept through the Prop 8 movement has not been so sensitive to the LGBT community. On the night before the November 2008 election, Thompson writes that the bishop attended a fundamentalist revival at San Diego's Qualcomm Stadium, which included appearances by Focus on the Family leader James Dobson and Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council as well as numerous testimonies from "ex-gay" men and women.

After Prop 8 passed, Cordileone appeared on the Catholic radio show "A Body of Truth" and practically gloated about his victory and the way in which activists for LGBT rights were "caught sleeping": "They didn't realize until after we had collected a couple hundred thousand signatures that we were up to this," he told Fr. Thomas Loya, the radio host.

At the conclusion of the show, as Cordileone reflects one last time on same-sex marriage, even his rhetoric begins to sound fundamentalist.

"The ultimate attack of the Evil One is the attack on marriage," he tells Loya. "And again, the evangelicals, they understand that. They understand this is an attack of the Evil One at the core institution."

It's very likely Cordileone's role as the "Father of Proposition 8" landed him the position in Oakland, the role as chairman of the USCCB's subcommittee on the defense of marriage and, ultimately, his elevation to Archbishop of San Francisco, a city in which 75 percent of the population voted against Prop 8.

With this latest appointment, the Vatican solidifies its "pack mentality" approach to promotions. Nowadays, a man earns his stripes and proves his loyalty to the hierarchy by attacking a group the hierarchy perceives as a threat to survival, even if the threat is based on nothing more than fear and paranoia.

That paranoia, however, might also be giving way to delusion. I'm sure there are some within the Vatican and the laity who believe this appointment will demonstrate the Roman Catholic Church's commitment to robust, uncompromising, "we'll-show-them-who's-boss" leadership. But in reality, for the majority of Catholic laity in this country who support marriage equality, Cordileone's promotion is only further, glaring evidence of the hierarchy's deepening descent into meanness, spitefulness and pastoral insensitivity.

[Jamie L. Manson received her Master of Divinity degree from Yale Divinity School, where she studied Catholic theology and sexual ethics. Her columns for *NCR* earned her a first prize Catholic Press Association award for Best Column/Regular Commentary in 2010.]

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