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## Latino Catholic leaders exhorted to 'lead society to conversion'

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(CNS/Florida Catholic/Ana Rodriguez-Soto)

**MIAMI** - Hispanic business leaders from across the country were repeatedly called to "be different from the world around us" during the seventh annual meeting of CALL -- the Catholic Association of Latino Leaders -- held Aug. 24-26 in Miami.

The high-powered group, with 148 members and 10 chapters nationwide, was joined by an equally high-powered roster of bishops and speakers, including Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, papal nuncio to the U.S.; Cardinal Sean P. O'Malley of Boston; Archbishop Jose H. Gomez of Los Angeles; Archbishop Charles J. Chaput of Philadelphia; Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski of Miami; and Carl Anderson, supreme knight of the Knights of Columbus.

Gomez, who serves as the group's episcopal moderator and was among the founders of CALL when he was auxiliary bishop of Denver, set the tone for the meeting with his opening remarks, when he said "America is becoming a society where religious conviction is a cause for suspicion."

He cited the "real threat" posed by the Department of Health and Human Services' mandate that all employers, regardless of religious beliefs, pay for birth control and sterilization coverage for their employees; and the threat posed to the institution of marriage and the family by "powerful people" who want to redefine the "natural realities" of marriage, motherhood and fatherhood as "arbitrary social constructs."

"We have a duty as Catholics and as Americans to lead our society to conversion," Gomez said, referring to the new evangelization called for by both Blessed John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. "This is a time for Catholic voices and Catholic action."

He urged CALL members to reflect on "Who are we? What do we believe in? What do we stand for? Being a Catholic is more than a private devotion or a philosophy of life," he noted. It means living in community with Jesus, carrying out his commandments and "building up this earthly city."

"Each of us has a part to play in the church's mission," Gomez said. "It is a job for every single Catholic."

A few hours later, while celebrating Mass at the National Shrine of Our Lady of Charity on Biscayne Bay, Chaput reiterated that to be church means to be "a clear sign," or a sacrament, to the world. "We need to be identified as a church that is different from the world around us," he said.

CALL's conference this year encompassed topics such as the new evangelization, the challenges facing today's families, teaching the faith and civic responsibility in Catholic schools and publicly witnessing to the faith.

"We're really the only Catholic Hispanic business and professional organization in the country," said Robert Aguirre, CALL's national president.

He said the group's internal goal is "to grow in faith through prayer, service and leadership," and its external goal is "to support our local bishops in efforts of evangelization."

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"As business people, we're used to fighting political battles. We're used to speaking out in the public square. That's part of our ministry," Aguirre said.

He noted that the HHS mandate "is certainly way up there" in terms of importance this year, as are attempts to redefine marriage as something other than a permanent union between one man and one woman.

"One of the missions of CALL is to basically work with the church for the common good," especially among Hispanic communities in the U.S., said Manny Garcia-Tunon, president of the Miami chapter of CALL. He cited immigration as another issue that concerns CALL members.

"It doesn't have much to do with political party at all," Garcia-Tunon said. "The church is looking to form conscience. It's never about voting for a specific political party."

"It's about control of the culture," said another conference speaker, Robert Destro, professor of law and founding director of the Interdisciplinary Program in Law and Religion at the Columbus School of Law at The Catholic University of America.

He blamed "secular fundamentalism" for the current battles over the limits of religious freedom and the definition of marriage.

"Those who control the media and the government define not only the culture but morality itself," Destro said. And their current definition of religious freedom is that of a place where people go to worship, to "preach to the choir" and to serve only those who believe the same way they do.

"We are in for a long battle over our culture," Destro said. "If you want there to be a next generation of Latino leaders you have to start now. People like you need to get involved."

In welcoming CALL to Miami, Wenski called it "the city of the future" and "the answer to anyone who has a problem with immigration in this country," because its vitality is living proof that "the immigrants themselves come bearing gifts."

In his homily at the closing Mass, the archbishop also noted that though Catholics, estimated at 70 million, are the largest religious group in the U.S., most of them do not attend Mass every Sunday. In fact, people who identify themselves as "former Catholics" are "the next largest religious demographic in America."

He noted that the religious landscape of the U.S. is filled with people who define themselves as "spiritual" but not "religious," along with a "new phenomenon": people "who claim to be 'believers' but who do not belong to any church" and "belongers who do not believe."

"Thus the urgency of the new evangelization," Wenski said, citing the words of Blessed John Paul II: "We are called to reach out to them with new methods and a new enthusiasm."

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