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San Francisco archbishop under fire for plan to speak at March for Marriage

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NCR Today

San Francisco public officials and many religious leaders are angry -- very angry -- at the plans announced by Catholic Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone. He is listed as a speaker at the June 19 March for Marriage in Washington, D.C., sponsored by the National Organization for Marriage (NOM) and the Family Research Council, two groups that have taken some of the most hostile stances against same-sex marriage and LGBT people generally.

Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom, San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee, state and city officials, other religious, and LGBT community leaders have written a letter to the archbishop, asking him to cancel this highly charged speaking engagement. Religiously affiliated signers include:

- The Episcopal bishops of California and Wisconsin
- The Very Rev. Brian Baker, dean of Sacramento's Trinity Cathedral
- The Rev. Will McGarvey, executive director of the Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County and Community Presbyterian Church in Pittsburg, Calif.
- The Rev. Dennis W. Wiley, pastor of the Covenant Baptist United Church of Christ in D.C.
- The Rev. Karen Oliveto, pastor of Glide Memorial UMC in San Francisco
- Rabbi Michael Lerner, editor of *Tikkun* magazine.

In addition, an online petition has collected more than 20,000 signatures requesting the archbishop cancel his appearance.

But the objections are not focused on Cordileone's opposition to same-sex marriage. They are about the groups with which he would associate (and implicitly endorse) at this rally. The letter says in part, "We

respect freedom of religion and understand that you oppose civil marriage for same-sex couples. But the actions and rhetoric of NOM, and those of the event's speakers and co-sponsors, fundamentally contradict Christian belief in the fundamental human dignity of all people."

NOM has a long history of publishing inaccurate information on homosexuality, linking it with incest and pedophilia. The Southern Poverty Law Center has actually categorized the Family Research Council as a hate group because of its vitriolic rhetoric on this issue.

Cordileone's involvement in this rally, the letter's authors argue, is out of step with Pope Francis.

"While not all of us agree with official Catholic teaching on marriage and family," the letter states, "we appreciate the many statements from Catholic leaders defending the human dignity of all lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, especially the recent words of Pope Francis: 'If someone is gay, who searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge?' "

The letter ends, "Sadly, the actions of NOM and its invited speakers push us farther apart rather than bringing us together. We ask that you will reconsider your participation and join us in seeking to promote reconciliation rather than division and hatred."

Cordileone is scheduled to be one of the major speakers at the rally, along with former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee and former Pennsylvania senator Rick Santorum. Cordileone, head of the U.S. bishops' Subcommittee for the Promotion and Defense of Marriage, has a history of opposition to same-sex marriage and was an early supporter of Proposition 8 in California.

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