

Catholic bishops issue guidelines on gays: Condemn bigotry, accept baptism of gay couples' children

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The U.S. Catholic bishops have approved new statements on controversial sexual subjects amid a culture that several bishops noted is not always receptive to traditional church teachings.

In taking up homosexuality, contraception and natural family planning November 14 during their national conference in Washington, D.C., the 300 bishops wanted to “help people in the church respond to the call of holiness,” said Bishop Arthur Serratelli of Paterson, New Jersey.

“To be a Catholic is a challenge, and to be a Catholic requires a certain choice—and these are choices consistent with the gospel of Jesus as handed down through the church,” Serratelli said.

The newly approved documents include guidelines for ministry to gays and lesbians as well as a brochure aimed at young married couples that underscores the church’s stance against contraception.

“We have a responsibility to help our people understand these teachings that—because the culture is hostile—are not always easily accessible to them,” said Archbishop Joseph Naumann of Kansas City.

After a vigorous debate, the bishops approved the guidelines for ministry to gay and lesbian Catholics 194 to 37.

The guidelines condemn antigay bigotry while asserting the church’s traditional teaching that homosexual acts violate the will of God and natural law. And while the bishops do not approve of sexually active same-sex couples, the guidelines say children of those couples can be baptized in the church if they are being raised as Catholics.

“Ministry to persons with homosexual inclinations is not easy in our society, but it is a responsibility we accept because of the good we have to offer,” said Serratelli, who chairs the committee that drew up the guidelines.

Though the guidelines had been in the works since 2002, a number of bishops said more consultation on last-minute changes was needed.

The lay and ordained members of the bishops’ National Advisory Council, who meet semiannually to review documents and offer recommendations, were closely divided on the guidelines. While 21 members agreed or strongly agreed with the guidelines, 22 disagreed or strongly disagreed with them, according to a survey presented November 13 by Bishop David Zubik of Green Bay, Wisconsin.

Catholic Organizations for Renewal, a coalition of 23 North American Catholic groups, condemned the guidelines as “deeply flawed.”

In a letter to the bishops, the coalition said “the proposed guidelines are not at all pastoral but rather harmful because they repeat the same spiritually violent language used over the past 20 years.” The coalition especially objected to the word *disordered* to describe the homosexual orientation—a term that at least two bishops said is “difficult to apply pastorally.”

Francisco DeBernardo, head of New Ways Ministry, an independent advocacy group for Catholic gays, said the guidelines “do not reflect good science, good theology or human reality.”

The bishops also approved, by a 201-to-24 margin, a document titled “Happy Are We Who Are Called to His Supper.” It asks Catholics who “knowingly and obstinately repudiate” church teaching on moral issues to refrain from receiving communion. However, they turned down a measure that would have called on Catholic politicians specifically to refrain from the sacrament if they disagree with church teaching. – *Religion News Service*