

Pope: Teachings are nonnegotiable: Benedict holds the line

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Pope Benedict XVI has reaffirmed church teachings on divorce and priestly celibacy, and told Catholic politicians they must follow church doctrine on abortion, euthanasia and same-sex marriage.

The pope based his letter to Catholic bishops, released March 13, on discussions held during the 2005 Synod of Bishops that studied the Eucharist in Catholic belief and practice.

In a section of the letter that dealt with “Eucharistic consistency,” Benedict said, “Catholic politicians and legislators” are bound to “introduce and support laws inspired by values grounded in human nature,” including “respect for human life, its defense from conception to natural death, [and] the family built upon marriage between a man and a woman.” “These values,” Benedict wrote, “are not negotiable.”

The Vatican has repeatedly rebuked Catholic politicians who dissent from the church’s teaching on controversial social issues, most recently in Italy, where lawmakers are debating a proposal to grant legal recognition to same-sex couples.

The pope’s letter stopped short of directing bishops to withhold communion from lawmakers who dissent from those teachings, as some U.S. bishops threatened to do during Senator John Kerry’s 2004 presidential bid because of his support of abortion rights. At the time, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger—now Pope Benedict— said that bishops could deny communion but were not required to do so.

The 151-page letter touched on a wide range of topics, among them the “need for greater restraint” in making the sign of peace during mass. Benedict also encouraged the celebration of Mass in Latin—the Second Vatican Council of the 1960s made local-language mass the norm—at international gatherings, “in order to express more clearly the unity and universality of the church.” *-Religion News Service*