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Gay marriage passes in DC; Position of archdiocese unclear

Maureen Fiedler | Dec. 16, 2009 NCR Today

On Dec.15, by a vote of 11 to 2, the City Council of the District of Columbia passed a law that legalizes gay marriage in the nation?s capital.

The Catholic Archdiocese of Washington had opposed that legislation, and had threatened to withdraw from its social service contracts with the District government if it, or Catholic Charities, were forced to pay spousal benefits to same sex couples, or to be involved in facilitating adoptions for same sex couples.

The archdiocese and Catholic Charities receive millions of dollars from the District government for a myriad of social services for the poor, and many people of faith were critical of what seemed like a threat that would hurt the poor. Attempts at compromise arrangements did not bear fruit.

Now that the gay marriage bill passed, the archdiocese issued this statement about its intentions:

?The Archdiocese of Washington and Catholic Charities are deeply committed to serving those in need, regardless of race, creed, gender, ethnic origin or sexual orientation. This commitment is integral to our Catholic faith and will remain unchanged into the future.

Religious organizations have long been eligible to provide social services in our nation?s capital and have not been excluded simply because of their religious character. This is because the choice of provider has focused on the ability to deliver services effectively and efficiently. We are committed to serving the needs of the poor and look forward to working in partnership with the District of Columbia consistent with the mission of the Catholic Church.?

Although the statement sounds conciliatory, it is not clear what it means. Is the Archdiocese still looking for a compromise with DC, or if it is hoping that its effectiveness in providing services will somehow exempt it from paying spousal benefits? It?s an ongoing drama worth watching?

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