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Pope Benedict XVI denounces cultural shift toward gay marriage in U.S.

Alessandro Speciale Religion News Service | Mar. 9, 2012

VATICAN CITY -- Pope Benedict XVI on Friday denounced the "powerful political and cultural currents" that are working to "alter the legal definition of marriage" in the United States.

The pope's condemnation of same-sex marriage came in an address to a delegation of bishops from Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota, headed by Archbishop John Nienstedt of St. Paul and Minneapolis.

Maryland legalized gay marriage March 1 and Minnesota will be one of five states to vote on the issue in the coming months. Minnesota's bishops are campaigning for a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage.

Benedict stressed that "sexual difference cannot be dismissed as irrelevant to the definition of marriage," and called on the church to continue its "reasoned defense of marriage."

The pope also echoed bishops' concerns over their battle with the Obama administration on the contraception mandate. "Threats to freedom of conscience, religion and worship" in the United States, he said, "need to be addressed urgently."

The pontiff also challenged the bishops to act more incisively against the "widespread practice of cohabitation," which is not only "gravely sinful" but also "damaging to the stability of society."

The church, he said, must do more to promote the "virtue of chastity" in a society that "tends to misunderstand and even ridicule" it.

In a veiled reference to the sexual abuse crisis, Benedict also said that the church must continue to dedicate itself to educating the young, despite being "chastened by the events of the past decade."

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