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Seattle's cathedral parish opts out of signature drive

Dan Morris-Young | Apr. 13, 2012

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http://ncronline.org/sites/default/files/stories/images/oldimgs/20120214cnsbr08847%20[seattle%20same%20sex%20marriage].jpg

Washington state Gov. Christine Gregoire signed legislation Feb. 13 legalizing same-sex marriage in the state. (CNS photo/Robert Sorbo, Reuters)

If the referendum campaign to block Washington state's recently passed law authorizing same-sex marriage [1] makes the state's November ballot, it will not be with any official help of the Seattle archdiocese's cathedral parish, despite Seattle Archbishop Peter Sartain's outspoken support of Referendum 74 and his call for parishioners to bolster its campaign.

In a short, two-paragraph email sent to St. James Cathedral parishioners April 11, pastor Fr. Michael G. Ryan wrote, ?After discussing the matter with the members of the Cathedral's pastoral ministry team, I have decided that we will *not* participate in the collecting of signatures in our parish. Doing so would, I believe, prove hurtful and seriously divisive in our community.?

The email noted the archbishop ?has written a letter in which he has expressed his support for Referendum 74 and for the collecting of signatures in parishes,? but pointed out the archbishop had ?wisely left it up to each pastor to decide whether to allow the collection of signatures in his own parish.? Ryan provided an Internet link to the archbishop's letter.

Ryan told *NCR* on April 12 that had emailed parishioners because local media stories had been ?appearing which made it look like the parishes were mandated to do the signature drive.?

?Sadly,? he said, ?the archdiocese never put a word out? that parish participation in the signature drive was encouraged but optional.

In an email to *NCR*, he wrote, ?I decided to take a preemptive strike by sending out my email (April 11) thinking that many of my parishioners would either boycott Mass this coming Sunday or that they would arrive in a white heat. The tone of my email was low-key and anything but inflammatory. I have received 115 responses to it -- when none were required or even expected! -- and fully 110 of them have been strongly supportive of my decision. And I mean *strongly* supportive!?

Ryan said he had heard that at least a handful of other parishes would not sponsor petition-gathering efforts.

Asked if he felt his decision would place the archbishop in an awkward position as it could appear his own cathedral did not support Referendum 74, Ryan said, ?I don?t think I have put him in an awkward position at all. I merely exercised the option he gave to pastors. And had his communications people made it clear from the get-go that pastors had this discretion, I never would have felt the need to send that email.?

Greg Magnoni, archdiocesan communications director, said, ?The archbishop understands perfectly well that

situations differ in each parish and last thing he would want is for it to be any more divisive than it already is.?

?He wants pastors who are supportive to be able to go forward, and he also understands that for their own reason others will not want to gather signatures in their parishes.?

Magnoni said the archbishop wrote his 1,000-word letter largely in response ?to a lot of people asking pastors if they could gather signatures at their parishes.?

To qualify for the November ballot, Referendum 74 must receive approximately 120,000 valid signatures of registered Washington voters by June 6. Supporters are seeking 150,000 signatures.

According to the Washington State Catholic Conference website [2], the National Organization for Marriage is directing the signature campaign. The organization has come under fire recently for allegedly racist tactics.

A *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* story reported that National Organization for Marriage internal memos disclosed as part of litigation in Maine spoke of a strategy to ?drive a wedge between gays and blacks,? and ?to make opposition to gay marriage an identity marker? for young Latinos.

Source URL (retrieved on *03/10/2014 - 01:49*): http://ncronline.org/news/seattles-cathedral-parish-opts-out-signature-drive

Links:
[1] http://www.sos.wa.gov/elections/initiatives/referendum.aspx?y=2012
[2] http://thewscc.org/