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Report: Knights of Columbus a top funder of anti-gay-marriage drives

David Gibson Religion News Service | Oct. 19, 2012

The Knights of Columbus, a wealthy and influential Catholic charitable organization, is a leading funder in the push to make same-sex marriage illegal in four states that have ballot measures on the issue this fall, a coalition of gay rights groups announced Thursday.

The Knights have contributed millions of dollars directly to several of the campaigns to stop the legalization of gay marriage and have channeled money through other Catholic groups. They also have provided extensive financial support to the National Organization for Marriage, according to the Human Rights Campaign, one of four advocacy groups that compiled the research.

"In the aggregate, the (Catholic) church and NOM are the single largest funders of discrimination, responsible for funding nearly 60 percent of all anti-equality efforts in Minnesota, Maryland, Maine and Washington," HRC said in a statement.

The two groups have spent a combined $2.5 million, the report says, with much of it coming from the Knights, a group that has become increasingly involved in conservative culture war issues under the leadership of Carl Anderson, a longtime Republican activist.

"Carl Anderson is using the good name that the Knights have developed over generations as cover while pursuing policies and making alliances that many Catholics find deeply troubling when they learn about them," said Marianne Duddy-Burke, executive director of DignityUSA, an organization of gay Catholics that was part of the coalition behind the report.

The report, which culled information largely from the Knights' Internal Revenue Service filings, found that the Knights donated $6.25 million to fight same-sex marriage initiatives between 2005-2012. Close to $2 million of those funds went directly to NOM.

The Knights of Columbus responded that while they have helped fund the fight against same-sex marriage initiatives as a reflection of their principles, that funding represents a small fraction of their spending.

"The Knights of Columbus supports Catholic Social Teaching and the bishops of the Catholic Church, and some resources have long been dedicated to promoting that teaching on moral issues," read a statement released by the group Thursday.

"This report mentions $6.2 million donated by the Knights over the past seven years, during which time we also donated more than $1 billion to charitable causes, with more than $225 million of that coming from our Supreme Office."

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