NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Boston's O'Malley: Pope prefers to talk love, not abortion

Joshua J. McElwee | Aug. 7, 2013 NCR Today

Pope Francis has not mentioned traditional hot-button Catholic issues like abortion because he prefers to emphasize that Catholics "love people" and are not "mean or old-fashioned," Boston Cardinal Sean O'Malley has said.

O'Malley, the only North American Francis asked to serve on a group of eight cardinals advising him on reforming the church, made the comments during a keynote address Tuesday in San Antonio at the annual convention of the Knights of Columbus.

"Some people think that the Holy Father should talk more about abortion," O'Malley told approximately 2,000 attendees, according to a copy of the remarks posted online.

"I think he speaks of love and mercy to give people the context for the Church's teaching on abortion," he continued. "We oppose abortion, not because we are mean or old fashioned, but because we love people. And that is what we must show the world."

O'Malley's focus on explaining the pope's lack of abortion talk may be seen by some as a reaction by the cardinal to recent reports that some American Catholics have been underwhelmed by the new pope's emphases, which have also not highlighted other more controversial Catholic teachings on issues like gay marriage or divorce and remarriage.

Philadelphia Archbishop Charles Chaput alluded to such displeasure in an *NCR [1]* interview last month [1], when he said the right wing of the church "generally have not been really happy about [Francis'] election."

The Knights, a U.S. fraternal organization open to Catholic males, are known both for wide-ranging charitable work and for holding a strict line around traditional Catholic teachings. Studies commissioned last fall found they donated substantially [2] to campaigns across the country to oppose legalization of same-sex marriage.

O'Malley told their gathering Tuesday that Catholics "must be better people."

"We must love all people, even those who advocate abortion," O'Malley said. "It is only if we love them that we will be able to help them discover the sacredness of the life of an unborn child. Only love and mercy will open hearts that have been hardened by the individualism of our age."

O'Malley continues [3]:

"Our efforts to heal the wounds of society will depend on our capacity to love and to be faithful to our mission. The Holy Father is showing us very clearly that our struggle is not just a political battle or a legal problem, but that we must evangelize and humanize the culture, then the world will be safe for the unborn, the elderly and the unproductive.

"The Gospel of Life is a Gospel of [m]ercy. If we are going to get a hearing in today's world, it will be because

people recognize that authenticity of our lives and our dedication to building a civilization of love. We are called to live our lives as a service to others and commit our lives to give witness to the presence of God's love and mercy in our midst."

O'Malley is due to be in Rome for the first meeting of the group of eight cardinals from Oct. 1 -3. In announcing their mandate in April [4], the Vatican said the group is to advise the pope "on the government of the universal church."

The Knights are continuing their meeting through Thursday.

In his talk Tuesday, O'Malley also spoke of his 20 years working at a Spanish-speaking Catholic Center in the archdiocese of Washington, D.C.

His experience there, the cardinal said, "brought home to me how difficult it is to be an immigrant, to be a stranger in a strange land and experience countless humiliations and deprivations as one struggled to make enough money to feed one's children."

Saying he initially wanted to be a missionary, O'Malley said that missionaries today are needed in "the Western World where secularism and de-Christianization are gaining ground."

"This is the challenge of the New Evangelization," he continued. "It is much harder to preach the Gospel in a culture that seems to be vaccinated against the Faith, in our own country where so many Catholics have stormed off, dozed off or simply drifted away from the Church."

"Pope Francis is calling on all of us to be missionaries in our own communities," he said. "In this new millennium, business as usual is not enough. We must be a team of missionaries, moving from a maintenance mode to a missionary one."

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