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

Cardinal Dolan lauds pope's 'new strategy' of evangelization

Francis X. Rocca Catholic News Service | Oct. 9, 2013
Vatican City

Pope Francis' recent warning against overemphasizing moral teachings against abortion, same-sex marriage and contraception means that U.S. bishops should emulate his positive approach to evangelization, not shift the priorities of their public policy agenda, said Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York.

"What he's saying is that if the perception of the church is of a scold who's always nagging and always negative and always fearful, we're not going to make many converts because nobody wants to join the church out of fear or (join a) a paranoid group," the cardinal told Catholic News Service on Tuesday.

"If we emphasize the positive, the gracious, the embracing, the warm, inviting side of the church, then we're going to attract people," he said. "And that of course is what Pope Francis is saying and doing on steroids."

Dolan, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, met with Pope Francis at the Vatican on Monday, along with Archbishop Joseph Kurtz of Louisville, Ky., conference vice president; Msgr. Ronny Jenkins, general secretary; and Msgr. J. Brian Bransfield, associate general secretary.

The cardinal said the group told the pope about some of the U.S. bishops' "pastoral priorities," including support for immigration reform and objections to the Affordable Care Act, "because it excludes the baby in the womb and the undocumented worker, and also because the implementation of it would place a severe burden on our religious convictions and our consciences" by mandating coverage of contraception in violation of Catholic moral teaching.

Pope Francis "was very attentive to that and he listened very closely," Dolan said.

According to Dolan, U.S. bishops have a "lot of issues we're hung up on, including immigration, the budget battle, proper health care, world peace, Syria, hunger and the HHS (contraception) mandates," he said. But the "only one that ever seems to get attention would be any kind of controversial promotion that we would do in defense of life, in defense of marriage and in defense of religious freedom, because they tend to be the more combative issues of the day."

In an interview published Sept. 19, Pope Francis said the church "cannot insist only on issues related to abortion, gay marriage and the use of contraceptive methods. ... We have to find a new balance; otherwise even the moral edifice of the church is likely to fall like a house of cards, losing the freshness and fragrance of the Gospel."

Dolan said that "when the Holy Father suggested this new strategy, I don't think he got a longer standing ovation from anybody than he did from the bishops in the United States. Because we've been saying for a long time, 'Listen to everything we say, don't just listen to us when we speak about your pet issue.' "

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