

Hispanic Christians Rally Against Gay Marriage in New York

✖ **May 13, 2009** – Hispanic pastors in New York are mobilizing to oppose a gay marriage bill that passed in the state Assembly Tuesday night.

Led by Democratic New York state Sen. Rubén Díaz (pictured), a Pentecostal pastor in the Bronx, tens of thousands of Christians are expected to gather outside Gov. David Patterson's Manhattan offices on Sunday afternoon to protest his moves to bring same-sex marriage to the state.

Díaz, who is ordained through the Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.), said Patterson disrespected the Catholic, Jewish and evangelical communities by introducing the gay marriage bill April 16, just days after Easter and Passover week.

"I'm telling the governor he's being disrespectful," said Díaz, pastor of Christian Community Neighborhood Church in the Bronx. "On Sunday, it is a good possibility that someone in the rally will ask him to resign."

A similar gay marriage bill passed in the state Assembly in 2007 but failed in the Senate. Díaz said that the Assembly's 89-52 vote Tuesday night was no major victory because the Senate lacks the 32 votes needed to pass the measure, even though there are 32 Democratic senators.

"I have the commitment from six Democrats that they will not vote for it," Díaz said. "So they're going to have to go to the Republicans if they want to pass it in the Senate. But this is a Democratic agenda, and I doubt that the Republicans would jump on board to make the Democrats look good."

Even if the gay marriage bill is reintroduced every year, Díaz promises to block it. "I'm a preacher. I'm not only a state senator," he said. "I would not vote for that."

Rally organizers include Radio Vision Cristiana International, the New York Hispanic Clergy Organization, the CONLICO network of bishops and the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference (NHCLC).

"Radio Vision has been motivated to respond to Gov. David Paterson and every other elected official, to let them know that we are not sleeping and that we will not stay idle with our hands crossed while they pressure and promote marriage between persons of the same sex," said the Rev. Milton Donato, president of Radio Vision Cristiana.

NHCLC leaders are sending letters to state representatives and Gov. Patterson to express their opposition to the measure. "This is not a political issue. It's a God issue, and we can't stay in our pews praying," said the Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, president of the NHCLC.

Although the NHCLC has been known for its activism around immigration reform, Rodriguez said he believes the group misplaced its priorities by emphasizing immigration over the sanctity of life and traditional marriage.

"Immigration is one of God's values, " Rodriguez said. "But when we have to prioritize, if we are faithful to life and marriage, God's going to be faithful to making sure we get comprehensive immigration reform."

Rodriguez said Hispanic Pentecostals in the past have been reluctant to engage in political issues. But the Rev. Michael Carrion, Bronx director of the NHCLC, said Christians various ethnic groups are responding in large numbers to their calls to rally on Sunday.

"This is when you know God is doing something: When the Assemblies of God is speaking to American Baptist churches are speaking to the Roman Catholic Church is speaking to [African Methodist Episcopal] is speaking to independent is speaking to Pentecostal is speaking to Lutheran, and that's what's happening," said Carrion, pastor of The Promised Land Church, a Pentecostal congregation in the South Bronx.

"This is not a Spanish church issue, this is a church issue," he added. "It's not just the Latin community that will be affected by this. Every generation will be affected by this if there's not a prophetic witness of the church."

Although critics accuse the ministers of being "anti-gay," the pastors see marriage not as a civil-rights issue but as a religious one. "We're not talking about people's civil rights, we're talking about religious freedom," said the Rev. Daniel Delgado, New York director for the NHCLC. "Do not redefine the sacred text. Marriage was not instituted by government; it was instituted by God."

Carrion said redefining marriage would have "alarming ramifications" for generations to come. "We believe that we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves," he said. "We believe that we are to embrace, support and uphold the rights of those who believe in same-sex marriage."

"This is not a personality war, but there's a line that's been crossed. That line will interrupt the very fabric of society. And that's the concern. That's why we're rallying."

The Rev. Duane Motley, founder of New Yorkers for Constitutional Freedoms, believes the momentum toward legalizing same-sex marriage is about to shift.

He said there are moves under way in Maine and Iowa to reverse legislative decisions to legalize gay marriage. And though an influential gay lobbying group is working to pass the New York

bill, Motley said they won't be able to convince enough senators to change their votes.

"If we can win in New York-and it's going to be a continuing battle here-and some of these other states can be overturned, then we may end up with three or four New England states that allow it, but they're going to be the exception and not the rule," said Motley, noting that 45 states have either passed constitutional amendments or state Defense of Marriage Acts prohibiting gay marriage. "The bulk of the country will not allow it."

But Motley, who is supporting Sunday's rally, said Christians must be "engaged in the battle" for the tide to turn.

"It's just like 2 Chronicles 7:14, if [God's] people will do something, God will come along and perform the miracle and heal our land, which needs to be done," he said. "But if God's people don't, then He's just going to let things go. It's up to God's people. God's not going to force Himself on us."