

Massive Denomination Starts Offering Health Coverage to Same-Sex Partners

Striving to comply with federal nondiscrimination rules, Michigan's Catholic Church is extending health coverage to same-sex partners of employees without specifically saying so.

The Michigan Catholic Conference, which provides healthcare benefits for the Church's employees in the state, has extended coverage to include adults living in a church employee's household and who share living expenses, a spokesman said on Monday.

The coverage will include same-sex partners, though that term is not specifically mentioned in the new policy.

The decision to widen health coverage was to comply with federal government rules about nondiscrimination against same-sex partners, while at the same time avoiding language on same-sex partnerships, which go against Church teachings that marriage can only be between a man and a woman, said David Maluchnik, spokesman for the Conference.

The change in the plan was communicated to the Conference's 8,400 employees in a letter last week.

The new eligibility description does not make any reference to same-sex partners, but would have the effect of bringing them under coverage, Maluchnik said. An adult who lives in the same residence with the employee, who shares living expenses and is financially interdependent with the employee can qualify.

That could include relatives, adult children or others.

"We believe, with this modification of our health benefit

plan, that it is legally sound and consistent with Catholic teaching,” Maluchnik said.

“The plan pertains to residency, not relationships, so for an employee of the church who wants to add a legally domiciled adult, they must meet residency requirements that have nothing to do with relationship,” he said.

He said other Catholic institutions around the United States that are responsible for healthcare coverage, such as archdioceses, are also looking at the issue. {eo}

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