

Will Vatican OK Outreach to Gay Couples at Next Meeting?

A working paper for a major Vatican meeting on the family this autumn indicated on Tuesday that organizers do not want the issue of how the Church should reach out to homosexual couples to be a key topic.

Gay rights activists had hoped the working document, the final one before the October meeting, might resurrect at least some of the conciliatory language on the pastoral care of gay couples that surfaced during a preparatory meeting last year.

The keenly awaited gathering of world bishops, or synod, will be held at the Vatican October 4-25. Its preparations have been peppered with debate about possible reforms, particularly on issues concerning gays and divorced Catholics.

The document also indicated that there would be no change anytime soon to the rule that bans Catholics who have divorced and remarried outside the Church from receiving communion unless they abstain from sexual relations.

In an interim report half-way through a two-week preparatory meeting last October, bishops spoke more positively of homosexuals than ever before in Church history. But that wording was watered down or eliminated at the end of that meeting after a backlash by conservatives.

The 80-page "Instrumentum Laboris," a road map for issues to be debated by the assembly, repeated the Church's opposition to gay marriage and to adoption of children by gays but made no specific reference to the pastoral care of gay couples.

It also re-stated the Church's stand that "everyone, regardless of their sexual tendencies, should be respected in their dignity and welcomed with sensitivity and tact."

The working paper called for Catholic dioceses around the world to develop programs to “accompany” individual homosexuals and heterosexual parents with homosexual children to help them understand Church teachings.

The Church teaches that homosexual tendencies are not sinful but homosexual acts are.

The original wording of the section on homosexuals at the mid-point of last year’s preparatory meeting spoke of “accepting and valuing their (homosexuals’) sexual orientations” and giving gays “a welcoming home.”

That wording also said the Church should acknowledge that couples in same-sex relations offered “mutual aid” and “precious support” for each other in times of difficulty.

At a news conference presenting the working paper, Archbishop Bruno Forte, the synod’s secretary, said bishops will not be prohibited from raising any topic at the gathering.

It will produce a document for Pope Francis, who has the final say on all issues. He then will write an “Apostolic Exhortation” which the faithful are obliged to adhere to.

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