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"SF's Archbishop Cordileone: His Defense of Marriage"

Joe Garofoli, [SFGate.com](#)

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While much of liberal San Francisco awaits the Supreme Court's decision on Proposition 8, which banned same-sex marriage in California, I also wanted to hear from someone with a contrary viewpoint: Catholic Archbishop Cordileone, who has become the American Church's point person on defending what he calls traditional marriage.

When Cordileone was named archbishop of the diocese of San Francisco, some analysts thought it was the political-religious equivalent of a message pitch in baseball: A sign that the Vatican wanted it to be known that they take the issue of same-sex marriage so seriously that it would install its most outspoken person on the issue as its leader in America's gay mecca.

We asked Archbishop Cordileone about that when we chatted the other day in San Francisco for our story that appears in Sunday's Chronicle.

"I can't imagine it wasn't a factor, but I'm sure it was one of many factors that were considered," he said, explaining Vatican officials didn't explicitly mention that as the reason for their placement.

Mirroring the larger view of the Church, Cordileone may have a conservative position on marriage, but backs immigration reform, including a pathway to citizenship for immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally.

And lately, he has begun to do outreach on the crime issue. Last month, he and other clergy attended a prayer vigil for homicide victim Cameron Myers near the intersection of Innes Avenue and Arelious Walker Drive in Hunters Point. It was part of the diocese's Restorative Justice Ministry.

When I asked to interview him, Cordileone requested that he first respond to questions in writing in advance, then we could have an in-person interview followup interview.

Here are some of his written answers to our questions:

1. You have been at the forefront of the same-sex marriage debate in California and nationally. You helped raise money for Prop 8, got evangelical congregations involved and campaigned heavily for it. Should the Supreme Court legalize same-sex marriage in California in June, what would your next move be?

I am a pastor and a teacher of the faith. It is responsibility to educate, motivate and inspire people to live by the truths of the Gospel, including using the blessed power we have as free citizens in a democracy to work for justice and compassion in the public square, and so contribute to the common good. When a great public issue like the meaning of marriage arises, of course, it's my duty as a pastor to speak up. That job description won't change regardless of any Supreme Court decision. But since the law is also a teacher, when it teaches an untruth (e.g., people of a certain race are inferior to others and can be treated as such, human life in the womb is not worthy of equal respect, or that two people of the same sex can make a marriage with each other) my job gets harder, but it doesn't change: we need to work every day in our homes, in our parishes and in our communities to rebuild a marriage culture. Too many children are being hurt by our culture's strange and increasing inability to appreciate how important it is to bring together mothers and fathers for children in one loving home. The basic question is: does our society need an institution that connects children to their mothers and fathers, or doesn't it? The only institution that does this is marriage. Redefining marriage will mean that our society will have given its definitive answer: "no"; it will mean changing the basic understanding of marriage from a child-centered institution to one that sees it as a temporary, revocable commitment which prioritizes the romantic happiness of adults over building a loving, lasting family. This would result in the law teaching that children do not need an institution that connects them to the mother and father who brought them into the world and their mother and father to each other. Priority number one for me will continue to be looking for new ways to inspire Catholics to live their faith and help rebuild a more loving and successful marriage culture.

2. Why do you think that the Catholic Church should be spending money, time and resources on the same sex marriage battle, when it could be directing those resources toward helping the victims of the rapidly increasing poverty rate? How high of a priority should it be for the Church?

Marriage and poverty are deeply intertwined concerns: an extremely high percentage of people in poverty are from broken families, and when the family breaks up it increases the risk of sliding into poverty, with single parents (usually mothers) making heroic sacrifices for their children as they struggle to fulfill the role of both mother and father. And beyond material poverty there is that poverty of the spirit in which kids hunger for their missing parent, who often seems absent and disengaged from their lives. We all have a deep instinct for connectedness to where we came from, and we deeply desire it when we do not have it.

Promoting stable marriages is actually one of the best things we can do to help eradicate poverty; in fact, it is a necessary, even if by itself alone not a sufficient, part of the solution – that is, we cannot hope to fix the problem without it. The solution to poverty certainly requires a multi-faceted strategy; we need efforts such as job training

and placement for those in poverty, quality education for at risk youth, and so on. My Church is also involved in many of these kinds of efforts. But neither are these efforts alone sufficient. To focus exclusively on this, without educating our young people for marriage – teaching them to desire marriage and to develop the virtue necessary to sustain the demanding but rewarding commitment of marriage – would be like putting a bandage on a mortal wound. Rebuilding a marriage culture in which both men and women understand they need to come together in marriage to raise their children is not a distraction from poverty, it's one necessary part of helping to alleviate poverty.

3. After Rhode Island approved same-sex marriage, you said it was “a great injustice.” But an ABC News poll in March found that 54 percent of Catholics now support same-sex marriage, mirroring other national surveys. Young people are firmly in support of same-sex marriage. Twelve states now allow it. The largest Catholic country, Brazil, has legalized it, as has France. With the Catholic Church attendance shrinking in the U.S., doesn't the Church's overt leadership on this issue risk alienating young people? What would you say to a young person — Catholic or otherwise — who is put off by the Church's stance on this position?

Well, we have a lot of work to do, don't we? Of course many people these days self-identify as Catholic on surveys like these without actually doing basic Catholic things like attending Mass on Sunday. Many people call themselves Catholic because that is the religion they grew up with and, indeed, they are Catholic, but many are also quite distant from the Church and know little of what their Church really teaches and why. The Catholic Church has been dealing with marriage far more than any other institution in the world: For 2,000 years we have reflected on the importance of marriage for the common good, we have reflected on it theologically and reflected on its mystical significance, we have legislated on it (in fact, much of our civil legislation on marriage came from the Church's canon law, e.g., the principle that it is the consent of the couple that establishes their marriage and not anything else, such as a contract between their fathers) and we have been engaged on the pastoral level. We certainly have a valuable voice to contribute to this discussion, and, quite frankly, our insights are quite profound, even though it is quite difficult to break through the dominant culture to get this message out to people, especially young people. What I would say to a young person is: “open your mind! I have a treasure to share with you! If you receive it with an open mind and heart your life will be changed, and for the better!” My experience, and that of others I know who work in this field, has been that when young people are exposed to this deeper significance of marriage, and get in touch with their true, deeper desires, they enthusiastically embrace the Church's teaching. In fact, the most common remark one hears is, “Why didn't anyone tell me this before? It would have saved me untold heartache.” And this points to the real problem, which is the fault of us pastors: we have failed to teach this adequately to our young people. That's why they are distracted by the false messages of the popular culture.

4. Have you met with any gays or parents of gay children since you came to San Francisco so as to better understand their perspective?

Yes, I've met privately with gay people when we've tried to get to know each other and each other's points of view better. I cherish that kind of one-on-one dialogue because it puts a human face on our disagreements, and that makes it harder for hatred to grow. I haven't yet done this in my first eight months here in this archdiocese.