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Dignity/Dallas leaders respond to local bishops' pastoral letter

DALLAS, TEXAS (Oct. 19, 2008) – Leaders of Dignity/Dallas, a support group for gay Catholics and their families, stated their objection to a joint statement issued by the bishops of Dallas and Fort Worth effectively saying it is “morally impermissible” to vote for a candidate who supports the “intrinsic evils” of abortion and same-sex marriage.

“It’s certainly their constitutional right to participate in public policy debate and in the political process generally, but it’s not very prudent to be so directive,” says Jon Garinn, co-pastor of Dignity/Dallas. “By making a case to openly oppose a political candidate, these bishops have violated the guidelines they have set out repeatedly in their own documents on political responsibility.”

Bishops Kevin Farrell of Dallas and Kevin Vann of Fort Worth issued a pastoral letter on Oct. 8, 2008 urging Catholics to base their vote on a candidate’s position regarding the “intrinsic evils” of abortion and same-sex unions rather than on a spectrum of social issues such as immigration reform, health-care, the economy and its solvency, care and concern for the poor and the war on terror.

“Catholics have long been encouraged to examine the positions of the candidates on the full range of issues as well as their integrity, philosophy and performance,” Garinn says. “By encouraging us to base our vote on these issues, the bishops have failed to distinguish between moral principles and their application in the political order. It is possible to agree on important moral principle and yet disagree, in good conscience, on the way that principle is applied in the political order.”

For nearly 20 years, the U.S. bishops have opposed “the formation of a religious voting bloc,” as well as instructing Catholics “on how they should vote by endorsing candidates.”

“Yet that’s what the bishops of Dallas and Fort Worth are doing,” Garinn says. “One presidential candidate supports abortion rights, the other does not. Both candidates oppose same-sex marriage. So it’s clear that they are implicitly endorsing a candidate for president, contrary to their own teaching.”

Moreover, Garinn adds, the bishops had no reason to elaborate their position on same-sex unions other than to go on record in support of discrimination.

“Because both candidates for president oppose same-sex marriage, and because same-sex marriage is unconstitutional in the state of Texas, the bishops are being divisive and insulting to our families,” Garinn says. “It shows that they have very little understanding of the truth of how we live our lives.”

Dignity/Dallas is part of DignityUSA, a national organization that works for respect and justice for all gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons in the Catholic Church through education, advocacy and support.

About Dignity/Dallas

For more than 35 years, Dignity/Dallas has provided a spiritual home for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Catholics, and their families and friends in North Texas. For more information, visit www.dignitydallas.org.

About Dignity/USA

DignityUSA is the nation’s foremost organization of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Catholics, their families, friends and supporters. Founded in 1969, it is an independent nonprofit organization with members and chapters across the country. DignityUSA works for the full inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people in the life of the Church and society. For more information, visit www.dignitydallas.org.