

# **Bishops establish new ad hoc committee to promote, protect marriage**

WASHINGTON - A new ad hoc committee of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops will work to raise awareness of the “unique beauty of the vocation of marriage” and the many threats it faces today, according to its chairman.

Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville, Ky., said Cardinal Francis E. George of Chicago, USCCB president, asked him to chair the committee, whose work is being funded by the Knights of Columbus.

In addition to its educational component, the committee’s work will involve public policy advocacy efforts against moves to redefine marriage through legislatures or the courts.

In a telephone interview from Chicago Oct. 14, Archbishop Kurtz said precise details about the committee’s strategies, whether its membership will be expanded and how long its work will continue remain to be determined by its members, who have only held one conference call thus far.

“Cardinal George felt it was important to begin with a small group that can move quickly,” said the archbishop, who also chairs the USCCB Subcommittee on Marriage and Family Life.

Other ad hoc committee members are Bishop William E. Lori of Bridgeport, Conn., chairman of the bishops’ Committee on Doctrine, and Auxiliary Bishop Gabino Zavala of Los Angeles, chairman of the USCCB task force on strengthening marriage. Carl A. Anderson, supreme knight of the Knights of Columbus, will serve as a consultant.

Initial plans include the redistribution of the 2003 USCCB statement “Between Man and Woman: Questions and Answers About Marriage and Same-Sex Unions” to dioceses, parishes and schools around the country and the development of a brief

video on marriage that will be available on the Internet and through social networking sites.

In a letter to his fellow bishops announcing the initiative, Archbishop Kurtz said the conference wants to “make known the uniqueness and beauty of the institution of marriage,” while at the same time addressing “inadequacies in the ongoing public debate on the nature of marriage through education and public advocacy.”

“The direct attempt to restructure the institution of marriage places the family, society and the institution of marriage itself in a precipitous position,” he said in the letter. “It may also bring serious consequences to the church as she seeks to carry out her sacred mission in our society.”

Within the first month of the ad hoc committee’s establishment, Connecticut was expected to begin issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples to comply with an Oct. 10 decision of the state Supreme Court. In addition, voters in California, Arizona and Florida are to vote Nov. 4 on proposed constitutional amendments that would define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.

“There has been an erosion of institutional and cultural support for the time-honored understanding of the institution of marriage,” Archbishop Kurtz said in the interview with Catholic News Service. One of the committee’s goals is to find “the best ways to be effective advocates” for traditional marriage, he added.

The archbishop said much of the committee’s work will parallel the National Pastoral Initiative for Marriage, a multiyear effort launched by the bishops in 2005 to communicate “the meaning and value of married life for the church and for society.”