

Cardinal, bishop decry New York condom giveaway

NEW YORK – With their decision to distribute 18 million free condoms to the public, New York City officials are failing “to protect the moral tone of our community,” two Catholic leaders charged.

Cardinal Edward M. Egan of New York and Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio of Brooklyn, N.Y., said that city officials “encourage inappropriate sexual activity by blanketing our neighborhoods with condoms.”

“Although in their statements they give nod to the truth that only abstinence before marriage and fidelity within marriage are fail-safe, by their actions they ignore that truth and degrade societal standards,” the two said in a joint statement Feb. 15.

On Valentine’s Day, Feb. 14, more than 150,000 condoms were handed out in the city’s five boroughs. The new condoms were branded with the logo “NYC CONDOM,” with the letters imitating the signs for the New York subway system.

The Free Condom Initiative of the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene distributes about 1.5 million condoms a month, mostly bulk orders received through the Internet from nightspots and retail outlets.

The church leaders noted that according to news reports the condoms also were given to minors.

“The taxpayers’ money that is being spent to distribute condoms and promote the attitude that ‘anything goes’ would be far better spent in fostering what is true and what is decent,” said Cardinal Egan and Bishop DiMarzio.

They called the city’s policy “tragic and misguided.”

Unveiling the new condom packaging Feb. 14, Dr. Thomas R. Frieden, New York City health commissioner, said condoms “can prevent HIV, other sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancies.”

“Abstinence is fail-safe, and reducing the number of sexual partners reduces risks of infections,” Dr. Frieden added. “But for sexually active people, using a condom is key to staying healthy.”