

Christian Family Movement leaders discuss marriage initiative

REDONDO BEACH, Calif. – Tom Halpin, a national board member of the Christian Family Movement, thinks church leaders sometimes are “misperceived as being out of touch” with issues faced by laypeople.

“Nothing could be further from the truth,” he said, after meeting with Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz, named in June to head the Archdiocese of Louisville, Ky., and who is chairman of the U.S. bishops’ Committee on Marriage and Family Life.

“The church is truly committed to affirming and helping couples in their marriages,” added Halpin, an Omaha, Neb., resident. He and his wife, Mary Kay, are CFM’s treasurer couple.

Archbishop Kurtz and Sheila Garcia, associate director of the U.S. bishops’ Secretariat for Family, Laity, Women and Youth, met with Halpin and other CFM board members during their summer board meeting at St. Lawrence Martyr Church in Redondo Beach.

The archbishop and Garcia discussed the bishops’ new marriage initiative, listened to the board’s reaction and asked for input on how the church could help them in their efforts to support couples and families.

Halpin spoke about the meeting in an interview with The Message, newspaper of the Diocese of Evansville, Ind., where CFM’s national office is based.

The meeting was the first consultation the bishops’ committee had with a lay organization since the June 27 announcement of a public service campaign on radio, TV and the Internet that is part of the bishops’ marriage initiative.

Next fall, the bishops are expected to vote on a pastoral letter dealing with Catholic teaching on marriage.

“Our call is to proclaim the truth in pastoral charity,” Archbishop Kurtz told the CFM board members.

He said the bishops’ marriage initiative is not intended to come up with a new program to support marriage in society, but rather to be “a catalyst to help you do what you are doing.”

CFM connects couples and families through small groups that support members in their efforts to lead active Christian lives.

The initiative's radio and television spots, unveiled in Denver in June, show people answering the question "What have you done for your marriage today?" The answers - all about doing small things for each other - are meant to show the need for spouses to take an active part in maintaining a good marriage.

"It is exciting to see the extent to which the bishops have gone to become as informal as possible in this initiative," said Peter Buchbauer, another CFM national board member. He and his wife, Jane, from Winchester, Va., are the past president couple of the organization.

The public service announcements, with their emphasis on couples doing something positive for one another, goes along with the active spirituality encouraged by CFM, according to Father Donald Conroy, the group's national chaplain and a priest of the Diocese of Greensburg, Pa.

"I am confident that much good will come to married couples across the United States as the new marriage initiative is put into action," he said.