

Diocese exploring how to develop a ministry to homosexuals

TUCSON, Ariz. – The Diocese of Tucson will develop a ministry to homosexuals, Bishop Gerald F. Kicanas said in a column in his diocesan newspaper, “The New Vision.”

In the May edition of the paper, Bishop Kicanas said he thinks the church should be doing more to minister to people with a same-sex orientation than the approach he and his priests’ council settled upon several years ago.

The consensus of those discussions was that ministry to homosexuals was best accomplished at the parish level, through spiritual direction and the sacrament of reconciliation.

“I thought then that was a sound approach to ministry,” he wrote. “I still think that but I also now believe we should be doing more.”

At recent meetings with pastoral leaders and parishioners, he said he heard “that in whatever ministry we ultimately may develop we must challenge any attitudes, language or actions in the church and in society that demean people of same-sex orientation.”

He said he also heard “that we need to be clear about the church’s moral teaching on homosexuality” and that “it is important that we articulate a positive vision of how a person of same-sex orientation can live in communion with the church and remain faithful in living as a Catholic.”

Bishop Kicanas told the Arizona Daily Star newspaper that part of the impetus for the discussion on ministry to homosexuals was criticism he heard after he and Arizona’s other two bishops – Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted of Phoenix and Bishop Donald E. Pelotte of Gallup, N.M., whose diocese includes northeastern Arizona – supported a state ban on same-sex marriage and on extending benefits to government employees’ domestic partners.

In his column, Bishop Kicanas wrote that among the issues raised in the discussions were the struggles of parents whose children disclose a same-sex orientation, how to relate to those sons and daughters, and how they might be treated by the church.

“We also explored ways that Catholics of same-sex orientation who want to live in communion with the church can find the personal and spiritual support they need,” he wrote.

Among suggestions from the group were that there be a parish “where Catholics of same-sex orientation could worship in an accepting environment that would help them in living faithfully as Catholics” and that priests, religious and lay parish employees be taught how to respond pastorally to people with same-sex orientation.

“While no final recommendations on a ministry plan resulted from our discussion, it is clear to me that our ministry plan must uphold Catholic teaching while it helps us to welcome people of same-sex orientation, to support them in living ‘authentic human integrity and holiness of life’ and to encourage ‘their full and active participation,’” he said, quoting from a 1976 U.S. bishops’ document “To Live in Christ Jesus: A Pastoral Reflection on the Moral Life.”

He said the diocese’s plan must challenge any degradation and violence toward homosexuals.

“I am very sensitive to the concerns I have heard from people of same-sex orientation that they feel they have no place in our parishes or in the household of faith,” he wrote. “We need to consider how we as a diocese or how I as a bishop may be generating such misunderstanding.”

Bishop Kicanas noted that a 2006 document by the U.S. bishops, “Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care,” called for developing such ministries in dioceses.