

President signs repeal of military's 'don't ask, don't tell' policy

WASHINGTON - With the repeal of the policy that banned gays from serving openly in the armed forces, an auxiliary bishop of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services said Dec. 23 that "there are no changes" to the archdiocese's ministry "and our response" to "don't ask, don't tell."

Bishop F. Richard Spencer, who is currently in Iraq, told Catholic News Service in an e-mail: "I have not read what the 'new' law requires nor the timeline for implementation and the elements of implementation. I know of no restrictions nor hindrances or challenges to the ministry that we already are providing to all members and their families within the jurisdictional boundaries" of the military archdiocese.

He added that "any additional policy statements will be shared" through the office of Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, who heads the archdiocese.

President Barack Obama signed the Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act of 2010 into law Dec. 22. It passed the Senate Dec. 18 in a 65 to 31 vote. The House approved it in late May.

There was no immediate reaction to the repeal from the military archdiocese in Washington. Its offices were closed for the holidays and were not scheduled to reopen until Jan. 3.

As of Dec. 23, the archdiocese's website referred visitors to a June statement from Archbishop Broglio, who had urged Congress not to repeal the 17-year-old policy, saying it had "the potential of being enormous and overwhelming," and that "nothing should be changed until there is certainty that morale will not suffer."

The archbishop reiterated church teaching on homosexuality as defined by the Catechism of the Catholic Church. According to the catechism, "homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered" but homosexuals must be "accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard

should be avoided.”

“Sacrificing the moral beliefs of individuals” in response to “merely political considerations is neither just nor prudent especially for the armed forces at a time of war,” he said.

He also said that Catholic military chaplains had expressed concern about the policy’s possible repeal and requested guidance about what to do if it were lifted.

Archbishop Broglio also said that “unions between individuals of the same gender resembling marriage will not be accepted or blessed by Catholic chaplains.” He also noted that in the event of a repeal, “no restrictions or limitations on the teaching of Catholic morality can be accepted” and that “First Amendment rights regarding the free exercise of religion must be respected.”

Obama called repealing the policy a civil rights triumph and said the implementation should take place within a matter of months.

The Associated Press reported Dec. 23 that Defense Secretary Robert Gates sent a memo to the heads of the military branches telling them the new law was not officially in effect yet. It will not be fully implemented until the Pentagon can show Congress various conditions have been met, including education and training programs for the troops.