

Same-sex marriage vote said no sign of disregard for gay Catholics

LOS ANGELES – In a message to homosexual Catholics in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, Cardinal Roger M. Mahony and the six auxiliary bishops of the archdiocese said the recent vote in California defining marriage as the union of a man and a woman “does not diminish in any way (your) importance” nor “lessen your personal dignity and value as full members of the body of Christ.”

The message said Catholic support for Proposition 8, the state constitutional amendment approved by a 52 percent to 48 percent margin Nov. 4, “was in defense of the long-standing institution of marriage understood as the lifelong relationship of a man and a woman ordered to the good of the spouses and to the procreation and education of their children.”

The church’s support was not an effort to harm the homosexual community or to ban same-sex marriage, even though ballot information about Proposition 8 stated that was the initiative’s purpose, the cardinal and bishops said.

“If we had ever thought that the intent of this proposition was to harm you or anyone in the state of California, we would not have supported it,” they said. “We are personally grateful for the witness and service of so many dedicated and generous homosexual Catholics. We pledge our commitment to safeguard your dignity.”

The message was dated Dec. 3 and was signed by Los Angeles Auxiliary Bishops Thomas J. Curry, Gerald E. Wilkerson, Edward W. Clark, Gabino Zavala, Alexander Salazar and Oscar A. Solis, as well as Cardinal Mahony.

The churchmen noted that the understanding of marriage as a lifelong union of man and woman “is found in at least three major religious traditions which have described the origin, meaning and intent of marriage in their sacred writings.”

The Hebrew Scriptures make explicit reference to marriage in 51 verses in 19 books, while the Christian Scriptures and the Muslim Quran each have 14 passages dealing with marriage, they said.

“Our faith communities have never understood this term to be applied to other types of relationships between people,” the message added.

Support for Proposition 8 should not be seen as a disregard for civil rights “but as an effort to resist a redefinition of marriage,” Cardinal Mahony and the bishops said. “Supporting marriage as it has always been understood diminishes none of us.”

The message emphasized the church’s record of supporting past civil rights battles, its history of spiritual and pastoral outreach to the homosexual community and its support for the legal rights already guaranteed in the California Constitution to various “groupings of people residing under one roof” in the state.

“Our efforts in this country to espouse equal rights for all citizens have frequently created adverse reactions for our church: our somewhat belated efforts to prohibit slavery; our insistence on equal educational opportunities for all children; our strong support of immigrants’ rights; our struggles on behalf of unborn children and those at the end of life’s journey, and so many others,” it said.

The Los Angeles message was made public two days after San Francisco’s archbishop appealed to people on both sides of the same-sex-marriage issue to be tolerant of each other, to “disagree without being disagreeable” and not presume to know “the real motives” behind people’s viewpoint.

“We need to stop hurling names like ‘bigot’ and ‘pervert’ at each other. And we need to stop it now,” Archbishop George H. Niederauer said Dec. 1 in an open letter.

The Los Angeles message also expressed dismay that “some people who opposed Proposition 8 have employed hurtful and accusatory language, and even threatening actions, against those who voted for Proposition 8.”

“This is most unfortunate since such strategies obscure the basic matter at issue: the preservation of the ordered relationship between man and woman created by God,” said Cardinal Mahony and his auxiliaries, urging “thoughtful and civil dialogue” on marriage and other issues.

“We are committed to find ways to eliminate discrimination against homosexual persons, and to help guarantee the basic rights which belong to each of us,” they

said.