

Lay group says bishops divisive on gay marriage

Leader dismayed at active opposition

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WINCHESTER -- The president of Voice of the Faithful, a lay organization that has studiously avoided wading into debates over social issues, last night criticized the active role bishops have played in opposing same-sex marriage.

"We look with dismay at bishops who openly criticize the homosexual community and criticize gay rights," James E. Post, the organization's president, told about 150 people at a Voice of the Faithful meeting at St. Eulalia Church in Winchester.

In an interview afterward, Post told reporters, "It is discouraging to see the archbishop using archdiocesan resources to run this campaign against gay marriage and to speak out in a way that is so divisive."

Post said Voice of the Faithful, which claims 35,000 members nationwide, has not taken a position on same-sex marriage, and said "it's not our issue."

But, Post said, it was important to speak out because "we can't do our work without acknowledging the deterioration in the environment in the Catholic Church."

Archbishop Sean P. O'Malley, a leader in the fight to preserve marriage as an exclusively heterosexual institution, has said that he does not wish to be divisive, but is articulating the church's view that marriage is between one man and one woman. Voice of the Faithful leaders have previously avoided speaking out on social issues, preferring to focus on the organization's three goals, supporting victims, supporting "priests of integrity," and helping to shape structural change in the church.

Post also said he regretted the "politicization of the Eucharist" as some Catholics have suggested that Senator John F. Kerry and other politicians should not receive Communion because they support abortion rights. O'Malley also has objected to the politicization, writing in *The Pilot*, the archdiocesan newspaper, that "it is of concern that some people seem determined to make our liturgical services a political battleground."

Post said his organization also is sending a letter to the Archdiocese for Military Services, seeking an explanation for the removal of the Rev. Thomas Doyle, a longtime advocate for victims of clergy sexual abuse, from his post as an Air Force chaplain. Post said the ouster "gives the appearance of being a form of retribution," a charge Archbishop Edwin O'Brien of the the military services has denied.

Voice of the Faithful, which has at times been at odds with various bishops, won a strong endorsement last night from Kathleen L. McChesney, the executive director of the Office of Child and Youth Protection of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops.