

Maryland's Catholic governor signs bill for gay marriage

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A coalition of Catholic groups that advocate gay rights in churches and society congratulated Maryland's governor after he signed a bill on March 1 making Maryland the eighth state to approve of same-gender marriage.

"We are deeply gratified that Governor Martin O'Malley has joined fellow Catholic governors Andrew Cuomo of New York and Christine Gregoire of Washington in signing marriage equality legislation into law," said Equally Blessed, a coalition of four groups, including DignityUSA and New Ways Ministry.

"We pray that some day such an understanding will take root among the bishops of the church," the statement said.

"These governors represent the sentiments of Catholics in this country far better than the church's hierarchy, which has spent millions of dollars in an increasingly futile campaign to prolong the era in which secular governments actively discriminate against same-gender couples and their families."

Both houses of Maryland's General Assembly narrowly approved gay marriage in February. The governor's signature was expected. Martin O'Malley had distributed copies of a booklet written by Francis DeBernardo of New Ways Ministry, and First Lady Katie O'Malley was a strong advocate for same-gender marriage, according to news reports.

However, Pope Benedict XVI on March 9 denounced the "powerful political and cultural currents" in the U.S. that are working to "alter the legal definition of marriage" in an address to a delegation of bishops from Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota.

Minnesota will be one of five states to vote on the issue in the coming months. Minnesota's bishops are campaigning for a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage.

Benedict stressed that "sexual difference cannot be dismissed as irrelevant to the definition of marriage" and called on the church to continue its "reasoned defense of marriage."