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Utah diocese opposes Amendment 3

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The Catholic Diocese of Utah released a statement Wednesday opposing the state's proposed marriage amendment. Bishop George Niederauer drafted the statement several weeks ago to clear up the misconception that the church is in favor of Amendment 3.

"While it is true that the Catholic Church is opposed to same-sex marriage, we are reassured that Utah law already prohibits such marriages," Niederauer said.

Niederauer's statement reveals the schism Amendment 3 cuts through Utah's religious communities. More than 60 evangelical ministers issued a statement last week backing the constitutional change. Seventeen Episcopal bishops followed with their own statement expressing concern about the amendment. And The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints issued a statement this week endorsing amendments like Utah's.

Don't Amend Alliance Director Scott McCoy says the different statements reveal that "people of good faith" can disagree over the amendment.

"Christian conservatives can believe in and affirm the principle of traditional marriage and defend that principle without necessarily supporting Amendment 3," McCoy said. "They are acknowledging there is a right way and a wrong way to do this."

Yes on 3 Co-Chairman Monte Stewart calls the apparent disagreement between the Christian faiths "commonplace."

"In the tradition of diverse American religions, different churches and faith-based communications take different approaches to moral and social issues," Stewart said.

Amendment 3 is written in two parts: a simple definition of heterosexual marriage and a follow-up paragraph that blocks the state from granting civil unions or domestic partnerships or any other unions the "same or substantially equivalent legal effect" as a marriage.

Niederauer bases his doubts about the amendment on the concerns raised by three candidates for attorney general, including incumbent Republican Mark Shurtleff, about the amendment's second section.

About 200,000 Catholics live in Utah. Diocese Government Liaison Dee Rowland said the bishop's statement is not meant as a guide for voters, but simply a "clarifying statement."

"We respect the prudential judgment of every voter," Rowland said.

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