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**Catholic Bishops Silent on Gay Suicides,
2,000 Catholics and Four Catholic Organizations Issue
Anti-Bullying Statement: "We stand on the side of love."**

(Milwaukee, WI) The largest annual gathering of progressive Catholics met this weekend for the Call To Action conference and issued a statement in conjunction with Equally Blessed, the pro-LGBT Catholic Coalition, against bullying in light of the recent rash of suicides among gay youth:

We cannot wait for the Catholic bishops to issue a statement on behalf of our children. Instead, as Catholics we stand today and say "no" to the bullying that our youth experience. We say "no" to the culture of violence that promotes this bullying and we say "no" to the statements of Catholic bishops that fuel this culture of violence against our vulnerable young people. Instead, as people of faith, we say "yes" to standing with our youth and dedicating ourselves to building a culture of love in our churches and our world so that every child-no matter if they are gay or straight-will know they are beloved and that God is, indeed, a God of love.

-Statement of Equally Blessed Coalition and Call To Action
Conference Participants

"We cannot wait for the Catholic bishops to have a change of heart," said Jim FitzGerald, Call To Action Executive Director. "Our children need to know that our hearts are with them. That is why today we are announcing a call for Catholics to wear rainbow ribbons at masses during Advent, the liturgical season preceding Christmas, to show our gay youth that we stand on the side of love."

"A month has gone by since the media broke the news about a series of gay suicides, but the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has failed to issue a single statement regarding these tragic, preventable deaths," said Marianne Duddy-Burke, Executive Director of DignityUSA. "It is the bishops' discriminatory rhetoric which denigrates those not fitting the heterosexual stereotype that perpetuates a culture where youths are bullied for being who God created them and, sadly, sometimes pushes them to attempt suicide. Gay youth are three times more likely to commit suicide than their peers."

A week from today, the U.S. bishops are scheduled to meet in Baltimore to hear a presentation from its own "Ad Hoc Committee for the Defense of Marriage" which works to deny marriage equality and has prompted the bishops to spend millions of dollars to discriminate against LGBT people. The Ad Hoc Committee, despite its name, has become central to the Conference of Bishops and its committee members include top bishops from dioceses including Washington, DC and Los Angeles (see list below).

"Jesus said 'let the little children come to me' but each time a bishop issues a statement or supports a campaign against gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender people, he is pushing our children away--and potentially pushing them over the edge to suicide," said Mary Ellen Lopata, Co-Founder of Fortunate Families and mother of a gay son. "The church teaches that all children are gifts of a loving God. This is about saving children's lives and there are no exceptions."

"The church justice movement-working for justice in society *and* the church-is essential in these times because justice cannot stop at the church door," said Francis DeBernardo, Executive Director of New Ways Ministry. "What is said from the pulpits on Sundays affects what happens every other day of the week. We have the obligation as Christians to profess ourselves as people, not of hate, but of love and our youth need to hear it now more than ever."

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Dioceses Whose Bishops Sit on the USCCB's Ad Hoc Defense of Marriage Committee:

Archbishop Joseph Kurtz, Archdiocese of Louisville (chairman)

Archbishop Donald Wuerl, Archdiocese of Washington

Bishop Salvatore Cordileone, Diocese of Oakland

Bishop William Lori, Diocese of Bridgeport, CT

Bishop Gabino Zavala, Archdiocese of Los Angeles

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Equally Blessed is a coalition of faithful Catholics who support full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people both in the church and in civil society. Equally Blessed includes four organizations that have spent a combined 112 years working on behalf of LGBT people and their families: Call To Action, DignityUSA, Fortunate Families and New Ways Ministry.