

In Landmark Ruling Pope Francis Approves Priestly Blessings for Same-sex Couples (Under Certain Circumstances)

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On December 18, Pope Francis approved a landmark ruling allowing Roman Catholic priests to administer blessings to same-sex couples as long as they are not part of regular Church rituals or liturgies nor given in contexts related to civil unions or weddings. The declaration from the Vatican's doctrinal office, approved by Pope Francis, said such blessings would not legitimize irregular situations but be a sign that God welcomes all and does not discriminate.

Francis' comments are the first uttered by a pope about such laws. But they are also consistent with his overall approach to LGBTQ people and belief that the Catholic Church should welcome everyone.

Earlier this year, in January 2023, Pope Francis criticized laws that criminalized homosexuality as "unjust," saying "being homosexual isn't a crime," and "God loves all his children just as they are" and called on Catholic bishops to welcome LGBTQ people into the Church.¹

The formal declaration entitled "Fiducia Supplicans" ("Supplicating Trust") was subtitled, "On the pastoral meaning of blessings" (*Fiducia Supplicans*), is a resistance to a rigid church, one that excludes people from blessings because they fail doctrinal or moral litmus tests, but also one that turns blessings — including to same-sex couples — into the supports of a new Canon legal structure.

The *Fiducia Supplicans* evolved from a letter Francis sent to two conservative cardinals in October. It reaffirms that marriage is an "exclusive, stable and indissoluble union between a man and a woman, naturally open to conceiving children." The declaration insists that Mass is not the proper setting for the less formal forms of blessing that could include the blessing of a gay couple, and it repeats that "it is not appropriate for a diocese, a bishops' conference" or other church structure to issue a formal blessing prayer or ritual for unwed couples.

Further, the blessing should not be given "in concurrence" with a civil marriage ceremony to avoid appearing as a sort of church blessing of the union. And it stresses that blessings in question must be non-liturgical in nature, must avoid using set rituals, and avoid the clothing and gestures that are traditional in a wedding.

But it says requests for such blessings for same-sex couples should not be denied outright. Priests are to decide on a case-by-case basis and "should not prevent or prohibit the Church's closeness to people in every situation in which they might seek God's help through a simple blessing."

"Ultimately, a blessing offers people a means to increase their trust in God," the document said. "The request for a blessing,

thus, expresses and nurtures openness to the transcendence, mercy, and closeness to God in a thousand concrete circumstances of life, which is no small thing in the world in which we live.”

Conclusion

There has been a small burst of liberal activity in the Catholic Church on several fronts in 2023 from the Vatican’s Office of the Doctrine of the Faith, not just on the LGBTQ issue.

On Oct. 31, Francis approved another document, making clear that transgender people can be baptized, serve as godparents, and be witnesses at church weddings, furthering his vision of a more inclusive church. And, for the first time, women and laypeople can vote on specific proposals alongside bishops, a radical change that is evidence of Francis’ belief that the Church is more about its flock than its shepherds.

Pope Francis has worked steadily to open the Church to the LGBTQ+ community. For some, his efforts are too much. For others, they are not enough.

1 “Being homosexual isn’t a crime,” Francis said during an exclusive interview on January 24, 2023, with Tuesday with The Associated Press.