

## ***Blessings give love strength***

### **Blessings for couples who love each other Handout for pastoral carers**

Resolution of the Gemeinsame Konferenz of 4 April 2025

‘The Church wishes to proclaim in word and deed the message of the dignity given by God to every person. This message guides it in its dealings with people and their partnerships. Therefore, it recognises and offers support to couples who are united in love, treat each other with full respect and dignity, and are willing to live their sexuality in a mindful manner towards themselves, each other and in social responsibility. There are couples who ask for a blessing for their partnership. This request is based on gratitude for the love they have experienced and the hope for a future accompanied by God.’<sup>1</sup> Based on this concern, the Synodal Assembly of the Synodal Path of the German Bishops’ Conference and the Central Committee of German Catholics (ZdK) has recommended that couples who do not wish to enter into a church sacramental marriage or who are not eligible for one should be allowed to have blessing ceremonies.

The issue of blessings for couples has been a topic of discussion within the Catholic Church in Germany for some time. Couples who are not married in the Church, divorced and remarried couples, and couples of all sexual orientations and gender identities are a natural part of our society. Quite a few of these couples would like a blessing for their relationship.<sup>2</sup> Such a request is an expression of gratitude for their love and an expression of their desire to shape this love from their faith. Until now, there has been no general guidance on how pastoral carers can respond to this request in an appropriate manner.

The decision of the Synodal Assembly therefore provided for the German Bishops’ Conference and the ZdK to jointly develop proposals for the framework conditions and organisation of blessings in the near future. The present guidelines fulfil this mandate.

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<sup>1</sup> Resolution of the Synodal Assembly of 10 March 2023: Text of the resolution *Blessing ceremonies for couples who love each other*, in: The Synodal Path, 20. Resolutions of the Synodal Path of the Catholic Church in Germany, published by the Secretariat of the Synodal Path (Bonn 2023) 283 (full text: 283–290, quoted: SW 20).

<sup>2</sup> “It has become widespread experience in pastoral practice that same-sex couples express a desire for a blessing for their partnership. The same is true of civilly remarried couples who are making a new start in a new partnership. Couples who do not yet feel ready for the sacrament of marriage also do so. In doing so, they often do justice to the needs of a partnership in which only one partner is a believer or close to the Catholic Church. There is also a growing experience that unbaptised couples are asking for a blessing.” (SW 20, No. 13)

In the meantime, the global Church's requirements for this matter have changed significantly: on 18 December 2023, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, with the approval of the Pope, published the declaration *Fiducia supplicans – On the pastoral meaning of blessings (FS)*. This declaration distances itself from the previous categorical rejection of blessings for couples for whom a sacramental marriage in the Church is not possible.<sup>3</sup> In order to give greater prominence to the pastoral approach of Pope Francis' pontificate in this matter as well, it is the declared intention of *Fiducia supplicans* to combine “doctrinal aspects with pastoral aspects in a coherent manner” (FS 3).

At the same time, the declaration encourages us to reflect more deeply on the meaning of blessings as a whole and to appreciate them more. Blessings ‘invite us to recognise God's presence in all events of life and remind us that, even in the use of created things, we are called to seek God, to love him and to serve him faithfully.’ (FS 8) With Pope Francis, *Fiducia supplicans* reminds us that, above all individual blessings, Jesus Christ himself

is ‘God's great blessing’. He is God's great gift, ‘a blessing for all humanity, he is a blessing that has saved us all’. (FS 1) Thus, the *request* for blessings is always accompanied by *thanksgiving and praise* for God's goodness and greatness, for his gifts and benefits, for the gift of life and love (cf. FS 10.15.29); ‘The request for a blessing expresses and nourishes openness to transcendence, piety, closeness to God in a thousand concrete circumstances of life, and this is no small thing in the world in which we live. This is a seed of the Holy Spirit that must be nourished and not hindered.’ (FS 33)

The text of the Synodal Path expresses this in a very similar way when it points out that couples’ request for a blessing makes it clear ‘that people want to shape their relationship within the horizon of God and orient themselves towards the Good News. Strengthened by the blessing, these couples make their Christian faith and their relationship with God fruitful in their partnership, in their families, circles of friends and communities, and sow the seeds for further blessings in and for our Church.’ (SW 20, No. 21)

In our culture and society, where human dignity, equality and self-determination are highly valued and therefore there is a high level of acceptance for different types of relationships based on love and responsibility, the idea expressed for the first time in a magisterial document in *Fiducia supplicans* can only be reinforced: Everything that is ‘true, good and humanly valid’ in such a shared life and in these relationships ‘is enriched, healed and elevated by the presence of the Holy Spirit.’ (FS 31) For whenever people ask for a blessing, they are expressing a request for God's help to live the values of the Gospel with greater fidelity (cf. FS 40).

‘This request should be valued in every way, accompanied and accepted with gratitude.’ (FS 21) At the same time, blessings, as expressions of faith, enrich the life of the Church

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<sup>3</sup> See the *Responsum ad dubium* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of 22 February 2021 (AAS 113 [2021], 431–434).

and deepen the understanding of the relationship between God and human beings. Thus, blessings “become a pastoral resource to be used.” (FS 23)

On this basis, the following **guidelines for practice** arise:

- In accordance with the decision of the Synodal Path, both ordained ministers and persons with a pastoral mandate from the bishop may impart blessings. (SW 20, no. 7)
- With regard to the situational design and formulation of the blessing, *Fiducia supplicans* relies on the experience, pastoral wisdom and pastoral sensitivity of the person imparting the blessing. (FS 35 and 41) All persons who ask for a blessing are to be treated with respect.
- *Fiducia supplicans* expressly points out that no further conditions apply to the request for and the granting of blessings other than a shared trust in God's assistance. (cf. FS 12 and 25)
- Pastoral workers who nevertheless come to the conclusion that they cannot reconcile a blessing with their conscience or who are unsure about this should refer the couple requesting the blessing to persons who can offer support (e.g. representatives for queer pastoral care, marriage and family pastoral care in the diocese).
- Appropriate further training should be offered for pastoral workers.
- As decided, experiences with blessings for couples who love each other will be evaluated. (cf. SW 20 No. 10)
- The blessings of couples who love each other can and should be characterised by greater spontaneity and freedom with regard to the life situation of those asking for the blessing. For this reason, no approved liturgical celebrations or prayers are intended for the blessings.
- The blessings should be designed in such a way that there is no confusion with the liturgical celebration of the sacrament of marriage.
- The blessing symbolically realises an event between God and human beings. It should be clear that people are asking for God's blessing for their relationship, which is reliably granted to them.
- Blessing is also an act of the Church, which places itself at the service of the encounter between God and human beings. The Church takes seriously the couple's desire to place their future life together under God's blessing. It sees in the request for blessing the hope for a relationship with God that can sustain human life. In order to encourage the couple in this hope, as many as possible of those present should participate in the blessing, in cooperation with the celebrant, through acclamation, prayer and singing.
- The blessing requires joint consideration that takes into account the wishes and concerns of the couple regarding the respective setting and appropriate form and incorporates them in a theologically meaningful way. The greater

spontaneity and freedom of these blessings should be combined with careful preparation.

- The manner in which the blessing is conducted, the location, the overall aesthetics, including music and singing, should reflect the appreciation of the people asking for the blessing, their togetherness and their faith.

Words from the Holy Scriptures make clear the connection between God's saving action and the blessing. Biblical texts appropriate to the situation should therefore be recited and, if necessary, interpreted during the blessing.

The blessing prayer addresses the God of the Bible and commemorates in praise and thanksgiving his history with humankind and the whole of creation. This should be followed by the blessing for the couple. The blessing prayer concludes with praise to God.

God blesses those upon whom he 'lets his face shine'. This is the conviction of Holy Scripture (cf. *Num* 6:24 ff.). To be blessed by God means to walk the path of life under God's loving gaze.

We do not have to and should not walk this path alone. We may walk it with the people God places at our side, surrounded and supported by the great community of believers of all times.

[The document in the original german version is here.](#)