



Implementation text

Blessing ceremonies for couples who love each other

Decision of the Synodal Path adopted by the Synodal Assembly on March 10, 2023

Introduction

(1) The Church wants to proclaim the message of the God-given dignity of every person in word and deed. This message guides her in her dealings with people and their partnerships. Therefore, she offers recognition and accompaniment to couples who are united in love, who treat each other with full respect and dignity, and who are prepared to live their sexuality for the long term with care for themselves, for each other and in social responsibility.

(2) There are couples who ask for a blessing for their partnership. This request is based on the gratitude for experienced love and the hope for an accompanied future.

Motion

(3) The Synodal Assembly recommends that the German Bishops' Conference and the Central Committee of German Catholics discuss the subject of blessing celebrations together with members of Forum IV and persons concerned, taking into account the reflections of the Flemish bishops and the decisions of the Anglican Synod, and that appropriate liturgical celebrations be developed and introduced in a timely manner.

(4) The official introduction of such blessing ceremonies should also help to ensure that all couples who love each other feel welcome in the parishes.

(5) The German Bishops' Conference and the ZdK are working together with members of Forum IV and affected persons on a handout for blessing ceremonies, which can draw on preliminary work by various dioceses, the Working Group for Catholic Family Education (AKF) and others, as well as relevant practical experience.

(6) This handout includes suggested forms for blessing celebrations for various couple situations (remarried couples, same-sex couples, couples after civil marriage), as well as a pastoral-theological introduction and pastoral-practical advice.

(7) Such ceremonies may be presided over by ordained ministers or persons with an episcopal mandate to worship. Training for the organisation of blessing ceremonies is suggested.

(8) For all couples interested in such ceremonies, preparatory talks with pastors and, if necessary, seminars are planned. Here the joint life situation may be taken into consideration. This

also includes the question of whether there are obligations towards partners and children from a previous relationship.

(9) No obligation to lead such celebrations is imposed on anyone; conversely, no chaplain presiding over such a celebration need expect disciplinary consequences. If necessary, colleagues or diocesan contact persons can be referred to.

(10) Experience with this practice will be gathered after the introductory stage. The blessing celebrations will be evaluated from March 2026.

Reasoning

(11) For further considerations, the following proposals, which were adopted by a majority of Forum IV, should be included and weighted:

(12) People choose to express commitment in their relationship in different ways.

(13) It has become a common experience in pastoral practice that same-sex loving couples ask for a blessing for their partnership. So do civilly remarried couples who dare to make a new start in a new partnership. Couples who do not yet consider themselves ready for the sacrament of marriage also do so. Often, they want to meet the interests of a partnership in which only one partner is a believer or is close to the Catholic Church. Increasingly, unbaptised couples are asking for a blessing.

(14) A blessing for all these partnerships is officially not provided for. The explanatory note of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has confirmed this with regard to homosexual couples. However, the response to the questionnaires in the context of the World Synod of Bishops has shown that the view of homosexuality underlying this document is not considered sufficient in many places. In the meantime, even a bishops' conference (Flanders) has published a liturgy for the blessing of same-sex couples. So there is a need for further theological development. On a practical level, the request for blessing is already fulfilled in many places. The decision to bestow this blessing is therefore made by the pastors according to their conscience and their pastoral responsibility, but in many cases they are in conflict with magisterial guidelines. The Synodal Assembly has accordingly adopted this proposal, which aims to help clarify the situation and can be fed into the global synodal process.

(15) The refusal to bless the relationship of two people who want to live their partnership in love, commitment and responsibility to each other and to God proves to be merciless or even discriminatory in a society that has achieved human dignity and free self-determination as maxims of moral standardisation. Such a refusal also leaves questions open in terms of the theology of grace. This not only burdens the proclamation of God's philanthropy and the double commandment of loving one's neighbour and God, but also raises serious questions about the credibility of church action in our cultural sphere. Reference can be made to the *Relatio Finalis* of the Synodal Assembly of 2015 and the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia* (19 March 2016). Pope Francis can no longer say "that all those in any "irregular" situation are living in a state of mortal sin and are deprived of sanctifying grace." (AL 301)

(16) Blessing couples who love each other is not at the expense of valuing classical sacramental marriage.

(17) Where people are in love with each other, God is present. Christian spouses testify to this in a special way. Through the covenant that God makes with them in the sacrament, they know that they are supported by his unbreakable love. Underlying this is an inclusive understanding of the sacrament of marriage, which does not serve as the highest and best standard for evaluating or even devaluing other forms of loving, but as a clarification and condensation of a possible communion and closeness of God. In this way, the discussion of blessing ceremonies holds the chance to profile sacramental marriage more strongly as a conscious decision of the spouses to make visible and proclaim God's love for His Church in their marriage.

(18) For some, a blessing ceremony is associated with the concern that the Church might be approving of a sinful situation. This concern must be further reduced, also against the background of the line opened by Pope Francis with *Amoris laetitia*. The celebration must be different from a marriage ceremony. Liturgical possibilities for avoiding an analogy to marriage must be explicitly formulated. The blessing wants to strengthen what already exists in the couple relationship in terms of love, commitment and mutual responsibility. God's support is requested and promised for the future.

(19) Extensions in the area of acts of blessing are supported by the explanations in the booklet published by the Liturgy Commission of the German Bishops' Conference on liturgy-related celebrations "Christus in der Welt verkünden" and derived from the benedictional. In the benedictional, introduction No. 36 opens up the possibility of adaptation and benediction 99 provides a template that can be adapted to a wide variety of situations.

(20) The offers of blessing ceremonies are based on the conviction that there is moral value in the common life of couples who live together in commitment and responsibility for each other. Where faith is involved, what is good is worthy of blessing. The Church is enriched by the love of these couples. Such mutual love calls for a blessing. God is present where people love each other.

(21) The offer of a blessing ceremony is based on a primal human need: "People are in need of blessings. They long for salvation, protection, happiness and fulfilment in their lives. That is why people speak blessings to each other. Above all, they hope for and ask blessings from God". (Benedictional No. 1) This request for and hope of blessing is already of great relevance and it shows a longing for God that must be taken seriously. A blessing expresses that people want to shape their relationship in the horizon of God and orient themselves on the Gospel. Strengthened by the blessing, these couples make their Christian faith and their relationship with God fruitful in their partnership, in their families, among friends and in their congregations, and sow the seeds for further blessings in and for our Church. In order to fulfil the mission of the Church to proclaim God's promise in the contemporary world, new liturgical forms must be found at all times. The Liturgical Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* explicitly encourages the development of liturgical forms, even on a regional basis (cf. SC 22 § 2 and 63).

(22) The blessing ceremonies presented are regarded by many as an example of such inculturation. The assessment of the diversity of lasting relationships and the mutual responsibility perceived in them has changed in Germany. Partnerships that are binding and loving are met with a high level of social acceptance - irrespective of a previous union or the gender of the two partners. This esteem must also find a convincing expression in the liturgy of the Church. This

is how the Church lives up to her claim “They borrow from the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and disciplines, all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator, or enhance the grace of their Saviour, or dispose Christian life the way it should be.” (AG 22). At the same time, this shows the deep conviction of the Church: “The experience of past ages, the progress of the sciences, and the treasures hidden in the various forms of human culture, by all of which the nature of man himself is more clearly revealed and new roads to truth are opened, these profit the Church, too.” (GS 44)

(23) Often same-sex couples and remarried divorcees have experienced exclusion and depreciation in our Church. The possibility of publicly placing their partnership under God’s blessing does not make up for these experiences. However, it offers the Church the opportunity to show appreciation for the love and values that exist in these relationships and thus make reconciliation possible.

(24) The blessing is a sign for many couples and their children to be accepted in this Church and the congregations are encouraged to welcome them.