

教義部

《懇求者的信賴之心》牧靈聲明

Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith

Declaration *Fiducia Supplicans*

On the Pastoral Meaning of Blessings

教義部

新聞公報：

有關接受《懇求者的信賴之心》牧靈聲明的心態

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Press release concerning the reception of

Fiducia Supplicans

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教義部
《懇求者的信賴之心》
牧靈聲明
論不同祝福的牧靈意義

序言

本聲明仔細思考了本部過去幾年和最近所收到的各種問題。在本聲明的起草過程中，本部按照慣例，在諮詢了專家後開始撰寫，並在本部會的集會（*Congresso*）上討論了草案，而且在過程中也不乏與聖父——教宗方濟各的討論。本聲明最終經過聖父審核，並獲他簽署批准。

在研究本文件所有主題的過程中，聖父回應了一些樞機主教的「疑問」（*Dubia*），這為在本文件中的反思提供了重要的澄清，並且也是本部工作的決定性因素。鑑於「教廷首先是為伯多祿的繼承人服務的工具」（《你們去宣講福音》宗座憲章，第二部分，1），我們的工作必須促進信友，不僅去理解教會長久以來的教義，同時也接受聖父的訓導。

正如上面提到的聖父對兩位樞機主教的「疑問」（*Dubia*）的回應一樣，本聲明堅持教會關於婚姻的傳統教義，不承認任何可能使人混淆的禮儀儀式或類似於禮儀儀式的祝福。然而，這份文件的價值在於，為「祝福」的牧靈意義提供了明確而又革新的貢獻，使我們能夠拓寬並豐富對「祝福」經典的理解，它一直以來與禮儀觀點是緊密相關的。這次神學反思是以教宗方濟各的牧靈願景為基礎，與教會訓導和教會官方文件中有關祝福的說法相比，這意味著真正的發展。這就解釋了本文件會採用「聲明」這種類型的原因。

正是在這脈絡下，我們便可以理解，對於非常規情況中的男女和同性伴侶，教會並未認可他們的狀態（*status*）或以任何方式改變對婚姻長久以來的教義，但能給予他們祝福，這是可能的。

本聲明也旨在向忠信的天主子民致意，他們以深深信賴上主慈悲的許多方式來朝拜祂，並以這種心情不斷地向慈母教會尋求祝福。

部長

維克多·曼努埃爾·費爾南德斯樞機
（V́ctor Manuel Card. FERNÁNDEZ）

導言

1. 忠誠的天主子民懷著懇求者的信賴之心，透過基督的教會，領受自基督的心所溢流出的祝福之恩。正如教宗方濟各及時提醒我們：「耶穌基督就是天主的偉大祝福，祂是天主的偉大禮物，是天主的聖子。祂是全人類的福分，是拯救我們所有人的祝福。祂是永恆的聖言。正如聖保祿所說的，『在我們還是罪人的時候』，天主便藉著祂祝福了我們——聖言成了血肉，為我們被獻在十字架上。」¹

2. 在這偉大而又寬慰人心的真理的支持下，本部考慮了各種正式和非正式的問題，事關祝福同性伴侶的可能性，以及按教宗方濟各慈父般的牧靈態度，為當時教義部於2021年2月22日發布的《釋疑覆文》（*Responsum ad dubium*）² 提出新的澄清的可能性。

3. 上述《覆文》引起了許多不同的反應：有些人對這份文件的清晰性及其與教會一貫教導的一致性表示歡迎；另一些人則不同意對該問題的否定回答，或認為在附上的〈釋義備註〉（*Nota esplicativa*）裡的措詞及論述不夠明確。為了以兄弟之愛與後者相遇，現在似乎是適當的時機，讓我們再次討論這個議題，並提供一個統整教義角度和牧靈角度的願景，

因為「每一項教義的教導都必須以福傳心態為基礎，而這心態是要以親近、慈愛和見證來呼喚人們發自內心的跟隨。」³

一、婚姻聖事中的祝福

4. 教宗方濟各最近對兩位樞機主教提出的五個問題中的第二個問題所作的回應，⁴促使我們進一步研究該問題，特別是其對牧靈的影響。這是為了避免「一些不是婚姻的事物被承認為婚姻」。⁵ 婚姻的構成要素乃「一男和一女之間專一性的、固定的和不可拆散的結合，可以自然地生育」，⁶不允許被混淆及在與之相悖要素下的儀式和祈禱。這立場是建基於長久以來天主教的婚姻教義之上，只有在這種背景下，性關係才能找到其自然、充分和完全的人性意義。教會的教義在這一點上是堅決的。

5. 這也是福音所提供的對婚姻的理解。因此，就祝福而言，教會有權利和義務避免任何可能與此立場相矛盾或使人混淆的儀式。這也是當時信理部的《覆文》（*Responsum*）的涵義，當中指出教會並沒有權力祝福同性之間的結合。

6. 應該強調的是，在婚姻聖事的典禮中，「祝福」所指涉的並非一般的祝福，而是為公務司祭職人員所保留的祝福行動。在這種情況下，公務司祭職人員的祝福是與一男一女的

1. 教宗方濟各，《教理講授——論祈禱：祝福》（2020年12月2日），《羅馬觀察報》，2020年12月2日，第8頁。

2. 參閱：教義部，〈針對同性結合的祝福的《疑問》（*Dubium*）的《覆文》（*Responsum*）〉及〈釋義〉，《宗座公報》113（2021），431~434。

3. 教宗方濟各，《福音的喜樂》宗座勸諭（2013年11月24日），42號，《宗座公報》105（2013），1037~1038。

4. 參閱：教宗方濟各，《對樞機們所提出的疑問之覆文》（2023年7月11日）。

5. 同上，釋疑之二，丙（*ad dubium 2, c*）。

6. 同上，釋疑之二，甲（*ad dubium 2, a*）。

特定結合直接相關的，在這結合中，男女雙方在合意的情況下建立了排他的、不能拆散的盟約。據此，更明確地凸顯了將為其他形式的結合所行的祝福與婚姻聖事典禮中的祝福混為一談的風險。

二、不同祝福的涵義

7. 另一方面，上述聖父的回應邀請我們努力拓寬並充實祝福的涵義。

8. 祝福可以被視為最常見而又不斷演變的聖儀之一。事實上，祝福引導我們在人生所遇到的一切之中察覺到天主的臨在，並提醒我們，即使在使用受造之物時，人類也獲邀去尋找天主，愛慕祂並忠信地事奉祂。⁷因此，不同的祝福，囊括的是人、朝拜和敬禮的對象、聖像和畫像、生活場所、工作和苦難、大地的果實和人類勞苦的產物，以及所有指向造物主的受造事物。這些人、地、事物，透過他們的美麗，讚美並祝福造物主。

祝福禮在禮儀上的意義

9. 從狹義的禮儀角度來看，祝福禮要求凡接受祝福的，都要符合在教會教導中所表述的天主旨意。

10. 事實上，祝福禮是憑藉信德而舉行的，目的是對天主的

7. 參閱：《祝福禮典總論》，1985年，12號（*Rituale Romanum ex decreto Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II instauratum auctoritate Ioannis Pauli PP. II promulgatum, De Benedictionibus, Editio typica, Praenotanda, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, Civitate Vaticana 1985, n. 12*）。

讚美以及為祂子民的屬靈益處。正如《祝福禮典》的解釋所述：「為使這一點更清楚地顯示出來，依照古老的傳統，祝福的經文（禱詞）首先著重於讚頌天主的恩賜，懇求祂施予恩寵，以及抑制世間邪惡的勢力。」⁸因此，那些透過教會呼求天主祝福的人，應加強「他們的意向，讓自己接受那一切都是有可能的信德所引導」，並信賴那「催迫我們遵守天主誠命的愛德。」⁹這就是為什麼，一方面「隨時隨地都有機會藉著基督，在聖神內，讚美、呼求和感謝天主」；但在另一方面，也是要顧慮到「那些與福音的法律或精神有所抵觸的事物、地點或情況。」¹⁰以上的論述，即可理解何以祝福禮是教會正式頒布的儀式。

11. 基於這些考慮，教義部當時在上述《覆文》（*Responsum*）的〈釋義備註〉（*Nota esplicativa*）中重申，當透過特定禮儀的儀式來對某些人與人之間的關係呼求祝福時，接受祝福的事物必需能夠符合天主銘刻在創造中並藉主基督所圓滿啟示的計劃。鑑於教會始終認為只有婚姻內的性關係在道德上才是

8. 同上，11號：「*Quo autem clarius hoc pateat, antiqua ex traditione, formulae benedictionum eo spectant ut imprimis Deum pro eius donis glorificent eiusque impetrent beneficia atque maligni potestatem in mundo compe-scant.*」

9. 參閱：同上，15號：「*Quare illi qui benedictionem Dei per Ecclesiam expostulant, dispositiones suas ea fide confirment, cui omnia sunt possibilia; spe innitantur, quae non confundit; caritate praesertim vivificentur, quae mandata Dei servanda urget.*」

10. 參閱：同上，13號：「*Semper ergo et ubique occasio praebetur Deum per Christum in Spiritu Sancto laudandi, invocandi eique gratias reddendi, dummodo agatur de rebus, locis, vel adiunctis quae normae vel spiritui Evangelii non contradicant.*」

正當的，因此，任何禮儀性的祝福，若可能使那些被臆想為婚姻的結合或婚外性行為獲得某種形式的道德合法性，那麼教會便沒有權力授予這樣的禮儀性祝福。教宗在就兩位樞機的《疑問》(Dubia)的答覆中已經實實在在地反覆強調了這一點。

12. 但與此同時，我們也必須避免僅依這種角度而窄化了祝福的意義，因為這樣會導致我們為了一個簡單的祝福卻提出與領受聖事相同的道德要求。為避免這種風險，就必須要進一步拓寬這觀點。事實上，現在就存在這樣的風險，就是把太多道德的先決條件強加在一項如此受人喜愛而且十分普遍的牧靈行動之上。這些道德的先決條件，以需要被檢驗為藉口，很可能會使天主無限慈愛的力量——祝福行動的基礎——蒙上層層陰影。

13. 正是在這方面，教宗方濟各敦促我們不要「失去牧靈上的愛德，相反地，這份愛德必須滲透到我們所有的決定和態度裡」，並避免「成為那些只會否定別人、拒絕別人，和排斥別人的判官。」¹¹ 那麼，就讓我們透過發展出對祝福禮更為寬廣的理解來回應他的建議。

聖經裡的祝福

14. 為了要蒐集不同觀點來反思祝福的諸多涵義，我們必須要讓自己從《聖經》的聲音中得到啟發。

11. 參閱：教宗方濟各，《對樞機們所提出的疑問之覆文》，釋疑之二，丁(ad dubium 2, d)。

15. 「願上主祝福你，保護你；願上主的慈顏光照你，仁慈待你。願上主轉面垂顧你，賜你平安」（民六24~26）。我們在《舊約》中——更準確地說是在《民長紀》中——找到這種「司祭的祝福」，具有「由上而下」的特點，因為它代表著呼求那從天主降臨到人類身上的祝福：它是最古老的來自天主的祝福文本之一。在《聖經》中我們還可以找到第二種類型的祝福，即從地上「上升」到天上的、那歸於天主的祝福。在這裡，祝福就相當於為了天主的慈悲和信實，為了祂所造就的奇蹟，以及按照祂的旨意所發生的一切，來讚美、頌揚、感謝祂：「我的靈魂，請祝福上主，我的五內，請祝福主的名。」（聖詠一〇三1）

16. 對於那祝福人的天主，我們也以祝福來回應。撒冷王默基瑟德祝福亞伯拉罕（參閱：創十四19）；黎貝加在成為依撒格的新娘之前受到家人的祝福（參閱：創廿四60），而依撒格又祝福了她的兒子雅各伯（參閱：創廿七27）。雅各伯祝福法老王（參閱：創四七10）、他的孫兒厄弗辣因和默納協（參閱：創四八20）以及他全部十二個兒子（參閱：創四九28）。梅瑟和亞郎祝福以色列子民（參閱：出卅九43；肋九22）。一家之主會在婚禮之際、在踏上旅程之前，以及在死亡來臨之時祝福他的孩子。由此可見，這些祝福看來是一份豐盛無比且不求條件的恩賜。

17. 《新約》中的祝福基本上保留了與《舊約》相同的意義。我們發現天主「由上而下」的恩賜、人「由下而上」的感恩，以及由人「延伸」到其他人的祝福。匝加利亞在恢復語言能力後，因為

上主的奇妙作為而祝福祂（參閱：路一64）。年長的西默盎懷裡抱著新生的小耶穌，感謝天主賜給他親眼看見救世主默西亞的恩寵，因此也祝福小耶穌的雙親——瑪利亞和若瑟（參閱：路二34）。耶穌在著名的讚美詩中祝福天父：「父啊！天地的主宰！我稱謝祢。」（瑪十一25）

18. 與《舊約》一樣，即使在耶穌身上，祝福也不僅是由下而上指向天父，同時也有由上而下地將祝福以恩寵、保護和仁慈的行動傾注在他人身上。耶穌親自實行並推廣了這種做法。例如，祂祝福孩子們：「耶穌遂抱起他們來，給他們覆手，祝福了他們」（谷十16）。耶穌在塵世生活的最後一幕是祂為十一人施行了最後的祝福，在上升到天父那裡之前：「祂就舉手降福了他們。正降福他們的時候，就離開他們，被提升天去了」（路廿四50~51）。耶穌在世上的最後形象，就是祂舉起雙手，為人祝福。

19. 天主在祂愛的奧蹟中，透過基督向教會傳達祝福的力量。祝福是天主賜給人的，並藉由人擴展到其他近人身上，祝福便轉化為包容、團結與和解。這是安慰、關懷和鼓勵的正面訊息。這祝福表達出天主慈悲的擁抱和教會的慈母之情，呼籲著信友對他們的弟兄姊妹懷有與天主對他們相同的情感。

神學—牧靈角度對祝福的理解

20. 凡請求祝福的人，都在表明他需要天主進入他的人生歷史來拯救他；凡向教會請求祝福的人，都在承認教會是救恩的聖事。在教會中尋求祝福，就是承認教會生活是源自天主肺腑的慈

悲，而且可幫助我們前進，生活得更好，以回應主的旨意。

21. 為了幫助我們理解著重在牧靈態度上去看待不同祝福的價值，教宗方濟各敦促我們以信德的態度和慈父的心懷來深思「當你請求祝福時，你是在表達向天主尋求幫助，向天主懇求你能夠活得更好，是在表達對能夠幫助我們活得更好的天父的信賴。」¹²在任何情況下，我們都必須重視、陪伴並懷著感恩接受這項請求。自發地前來請求祝福的人，藉此來表達他們對超性的幅度敞開心懷、他們內心對天主的信賴、他們並不只是依靠自己的力量、他們對天主的需要，以及他們渴望脫離這個被各種狹隘限度所封閉的世界。

22. 正如耶穌聖嬰聖女小德蘭教導我們的那樣，除了這種信賴之外，「世上並沒有其他途徑可以通往那給予一切的「愛」。憑藉這份信賴，恩寵的泉源就會傾注到我們的生活中〔……〕。最恰當的態度是把內心的信賴放在我們自身之外：寄託於無限慈悲的天主那無窮無盡的愛中〔……〕。世界的罪是深重的，但並非是無限的。相反地，救主慈悲的愛卻是無限的。」¹³

23. 當我們把這些信仰的表達方式放在禮儀的框架之外來考量時，我們便會發現自己處於一個更有自發性和自由度的領域，但是「民間熱心敬禮的自由選擇性，並不代表它們就可以不被關注或被漠視。正確且明智地評估民間熱心敬禮的豐

12. 同上，釋疑之二，戊（*ad dubium 2, e*）。

13. 教宗方濟各，《是信賴》（*C' est la confiance*）宗座勸諭，（2023年10月15日），2，20，29號。

富內涵及所具的潛力，才是必須依循的途徑。」¹⁴ 這樣，不同的祝福便成了值得重視的牧靈資源，而不是一個風險或者一個問題。

24. 從一般牧靈關懷的角度來考慮，不同的祝福必須被視同敬禮行為，「在聖體聖事和其他聖事慶典之外獲得其所屬的空間〔……〕。民間敬禮的措詞、節奏、運作和神學重點，與相應的禮儀行動不盡相同。」基於同樣的原因，「我們必須避免將『禮儀慶典』的模式引入民間敬禮中，而民間敬禮應該保留其風格、簡樸的特性及其措詞。」¹⁵

25. 此外，教會不應故步自封，必須避免將其牧靈行動建立在某些墨守成規的教義或紀律條文上，特別是當它們會「導致自戀式或專制式的菁英主義，原應勉力福傳，卻從事分析和歸類，原應朝向恩寵，卻把精力消耗在檢定與驗證上。」¹⁶ 因此，當有人來請求祝福時，不應把詳盡而又徹底的道德分析作為給予祝福的前提。我們不能苛求他們在領受祝福前便在道德上是完美無瑕的。

26. 由此看來，教宗的《覆文》可幫助我們更好地從一個牧靈的角度去探索教義部在2021年的公告，因為該文件確實邀請我們去辨別「由一位或多位人士所請求的，而又並不使人誤

以為是婚姻的不同祝福形式」的可能性；¹⁷ 同時，即使在客觀倫理上不可接受的各種情況下，「牧靈上的愛德也要求我們，不要把一些人簡單地視為『罪人』了事，因為他們的罪過或責任，可由某些影響主觀歸責性的因素被減輕。」¹⁸

27. 在本聲明的開始所引用的教理講授中，教宗方濟各提出了對這種祝福的描述，這種祝福是提供給每個人的，而且沒有任何要求。這段話值得我們以開放的心去閱讀，因為這段話可以幫助我們領會無條件施予祝福的牧靈意義：「那祝福人的其實是天主。在《聖經》的前幾頁中，祝福就一直不斷地在重複著。天主祝福，人也祝福，很快我們就發現，祝福有一種特殊的力量，它會伴隨那些領受祝福的人一生，並引導人心接受天主的改變〔……〕。因此，對天主來說，『我們』比我們所能犯下的所有罪過更重要，因為祂是父親、祂是母親、祂是純粹的愛，祂已經永遠地祝福了我們。而且，祂永遠不會停止祝福我們。在監獄或更生中心閱讀這些有關祝福的聖經經文，是很有力量的經驗。讓那些雖犯了嚴重過錯但仍蒙天主祝福的人，感受到天父希望他們繼續得到益處，並希望他們最終能夠敞開心扉，接受善良。即使他們已被視為無可救藥，連最親近的親友也拋棄他們，但對天主來說，他們仍然是祂的孩子。」¹⁹

14. 禮儀及聖事部，《民間熱心敬禮與禮儀指南》，12號，梵蒂岡出版社，梵蒂岡城，2002年。

15. 同上，13號。

16. 教宗方濟各，《福音的喜樂》宗座勸諭（2013年11月24日），94號，《宗座公報》105期（2013年），1060。

17. 教宗方濟各，《對樞機們所提出的疑問之覆文》，釋疑之二，戊（*ad dubium 2, e*）。

18. 同上，釋疑之二，己（*ad dubium 2, f*）。

19. 教宗方濟各，《教理講授——論祈禱：祝福》（2020年12月2日），《羅馬觀察報》，2020年12月2日，第8頁。

28. 在許多場合，人們會自發性地請求祝福，無論是在朝聖途中，還是在聖地裡，甚至在街上遇到司鐸時。舉例來說，我們可以參考禮儀書《祝福禮典》（*De Benedictionibus*），當中提供了一系列為人祝福的儀式：長者、病患、教理講授或祈禱聚會的參與者、朝聖者、遠行的人、團體和善會，志工團隊等。這些祝福是為所有人的，沒有人可以被排除在外。例如，在《祝福居家老人儀式》的前言中，就指出了該祝福禮的目的：「使老人一方面接受兄弟姊妹的敬意與感謝，同時也與他們一齊，為了天主所賜予的恩惠，以及因祂的協助所完成的善行，而感謝天主。」²⁰ 在這種情況下，受祝福的對象是長者，是為了他並與他一起，為了他所完成的善行以及他所領受了的益處而感謝天主。沒有人可以阻止任何人感謝天主，即使有些人的生活在不符造物主計劃的情況下，但他們中仍有善良的部分，每個人都可以為此而讚美天主。

29. 由「從下上升」的角度來看，即使是處於犯罪情況下的人，當他意識到主的恩賜及祂無條件的愛時，特別是當他的祈禱得蒙俯聽時，這位信友的心也會高聲讚美天主並祝福祂。這種形式的祝福不會排除任何人。每個人——無論是獨自還是與他人一起——都可以表達對天主的讚美與感謝。

30. 但民間對祝福的理解也包括「從上降下」的意義。假若「一個教區、主教團或任何其他教會架構，因為各種問題，不便恆常地

正式開始這些程序或儀式」，²¹公務司祭職人員可明智地根據牧靈智慧，在避免嚴重的惡表或在信友間產生混淆的前提下，加入那些人的祈禱，儘管他們的結合絕不能與婚姻相提並論，但他們希望把自己託付給主以及祂的慈悲，呼求祂的幫助，並希望獲得引導，好能更加了解祂愛與真理的計劃。

三、祝福非常規情況中的男女及同性的伴侶

31. 在上文所勾勒的視野之中，祝福非常規的夫婦和同性伴侶便成了可能的，儘管這祝福不能使用教會當局所確立之任何儀式，以免與適用於婚姻聖事的祝福產生混淆。在這些情況下，祝福不僅具有「從下上升」的價值，同時也是那些意識到自己的困乏並需要天主幫助的人呼求天主降下的祝福；這些人並不是要宣稱自己的情況合理，而是懇求在他們生命和人際關係中真正美好的和真正作為人的一切，都能夠藉著聖神的臨在得以被接納、治癒和提升。這些形式的祝福表達出對天主的懇求，祈求天主賜予那些來自於祂聖神脈動的幫助——神學傳統上稱之為「現時的恩寵」——好使人際關係能夠成熟，並能夠忠信於福音喜訊地成長，擺脫當中的不完美和脆弱，並在其中越來越能夠映照出天主神聖的愛。

32. 事實上，天主的恩寵在那些不自稱為義人、卻像其他人一樣謙卑地承認自己是罪人的人的生命中起作用。天主的恩寵能夠按照祂神祕莫測的計畫來安排一切。因此，教會以孜孜不倦的智慧和

20. 《祝福禮典》，258號：「*Haec benedictio ad hoc tendit ut ipsi senes a fratribus testimonium accipiant reverentiae grataeque mentis, dum simul cum ipsis Domino gratias reddimus pro beneficiis ab eo acceptis et pro bonis operibus eo adiuvante peractis.*」

21. 教宗方濟各，《對樞機們所提出的疑問之覆文》，釋疑之二，庚（*ad dubium 2, g*）。

母愛，歡迎所有以謙卑的心來接近天主的人，並以使眾人明白天主的旨意，且在自己的生命中圓滿地實現天主旨意的屬靈的輔助來陪伴他們。²²

33. 這項祝福雖然沒有被納入禮儀儀式中，²³ 卻結合了那些謙卑地歸向天主的人呼求的祈禱，懇求天主的幫助。天主從來不會把任何來接近祂的人拒之門外！歸根究柢，祝福就是讓人增加對天主信賴的方式之一。祝福的請求，表達出並滋養了在千萬種人生處境中對超性的幅度、熱忱、親近天主的開放態度；在我們身處的世界之中，這絕對不是小事一樁。這可是聖神的種子，我們必須悉心照顧，切不可阻礙。

34. 即使在我們的罪過、我們的無功無德、我們的軟弱和困惑中，教會禮儀本身依然邀請我們採取這種信賴的態度，正如摘自《羅馬彌撒經書》的這段美麗禱文可茲佐證：「全能永生的天主，祢豐厚的慈愛，遠遠超過我們所堪當的，也出乎我們的期望。求祢廣施憐憫，寬恕我們良心上的罪疚，賞賜我們在祈禱中不敢冀求的恩寵」（常年期第廿七主日〈集禱經〉）。事實上，有多少次，透過牧者一個簡單的祝福，儘管他並沒有企圖透過這行動來宣稱要准許任何事物或使之合法化，人們仍然能夠經驗到天主父那份「遠遠超過我們所堪當的，也出乎我們的期望」的親近。

22. 參閱：教宗方濟各，世界主教會議後宗座勸諭《愛的喜樂》，250（2016年3月19日），《宗座公報》108（2016），412~413。

23. 參閱：禮儀及聖事部，《民間熱心敬禮與禮儀指南》，13號：「民間熱心敬禮與禮儀之間事實上的區別必須可見於其儀式之表達〔……〕民間熱心敬禮必須在感恩祭及其他聖事的慶典之外舉行。」

35. 因此，應培育公務司祭職人員在牧靈工作中的靈敏度，使他們能夠自發地施行《祝福禮典》中所沒有的祝福。

36. 從這個意義上說，理解教宗的關切是至關重要的，為使這些非儀式性的祝福可以一直作為一個簡單的舉動，提供一種有效的方式，以加強請求祝福的人對天主的信賴，同時也應避免這些非儀式性的祝福變成類似一件聖事的禮儀或可與禮儀類比的行動，造成屬靈上的嚴重匱乏，因為若使在民間熱心敬禮中具有重大價值的行動受到過度的管控，就會從而剝奪聖事施行者在陪伴人們生活中牧靈工作的自由和自發性。

37. 在這方面，我想到了早前已經部分引用過的教宗的談話：「在某種情況下，能當作牧靈智慧的一些決定，沒有必要成為規範。換言之，要一個教區、一個主教團，或者任何教會架構為所有議題恆常而正式地制訂並舉行各種各樣的程序或儀式，是不明智的〔……〕。《天主教法典》總不能，也無法涵蓋一切；各主教團也不能聲稱，可以透過他們各式各樣的文件和決議來這樣做，因為教會生活，除了合乎規範的各種方式之外，也有許多其他方式。」²⁴ 因此，教宗方濟各說，一切「針對個別情況所作的分辨結果，也不應被提升到統一規範的層次」，因為這「會導致令人難以接受的曲解詭辯」。²⁵

24. 教宗方濟各，《對樞機們所提出的疑問之覆文》，釋疑之二，庚（*ad dubium 2, g*）。

25. 教宗方濟各，世界主教會議後宗座勸諭《愛的喜樂》，304，（2016年3月19日），《宗座公報》108（2016），436。

38. 因此，不得提倡或預備為各種非常規情況中的伴侶舉行祝福的儀式，但也不得阻擋或禁止教會親近任何通過一個簡單的祝福來請求天主幫助的任何情況。在這自發性祝福之前的簡短禱告中，公務司祭職人員可以祈求平安、健康，以及耐心、對話和互助的精神，並祈求天主的光明和力量，好能夠完全承行祂的旨意。

39. 無論如何，正是為了避免任何形式的混淆或惡表，當一對處於非常規情況的伴侶要求祝福祈禱時，儘管該祝福祈禱不屬於禮儀典籍所列舉的儀式之內，但這祝福禮絕不可與民事結合的儀式同時進行，甚至不可與該儀式有任何關係；當然也不可使用婚禮儀式中典型的服飾、手勢或言詞。當同性伴侶請求祝福時，上述規定同樣適用。

40. 這種祝福可以在其他場合中舉行，例如參觀聖所、與司鐸會面、集體誦唸禱文或朝聖期間。事實上，儘管這些祝福禮並不是透過禮儀所確立的儀式，而是作為表達教會慈母心情的方式來施行，類似那些從民間熱心敬禮的最深處所發出的一樣，但這些祝福禮的目的並不在於要去合理化任何東西，而只是向天主敞開自己的生命，請求祂的幫助來更好地生活，並呼求聖神，好使能更忠實地活出福音的價值觀。

41. 本聲明中關於同性伴侶祝福的內容，足以指導公務司祭職人員在這方面進行謹慎而又心懷慈父之情的辨別。因此，除了上述指示之外，就規範此類祝福的細節或任何實際問題而

言，不應再等待有其他答案。²⁶

四、教會是天主無限的愛的聖事

42. 教會繼續獻上基督在世上時以大聲哀號和眼淚所作的祈禱及懇求，以大聲哀號和眼淚，向那能救祂脫離死亡的天主所作的祈禱和懇求（參閱：希五7），所以這些禱詞和懇求額外有效。這樣，「教會以愛德以榜樣，以苦行以祈禱，盡其慈母之責，領導人歸向基督。」²⁷

43. 教會因而是天主無限的愛的聖事。為此，即使人與天主之間的關係因罪惡而蒙上陰影，他仍可向天主伸手，請求祝福，正如伯多祿在暴風雨中向耶穌呼喊：「主，救我吧！」（瑪十四30）。在某些情況下，懇求並獲得祝福，是可能的好事情。教宗方濟各提醒我們，「在人性巨大的限度中邁出一小步，比在那生活上無可指責，安逸度日但不克服重大困難的人的生活，能更令天主喜悅。」²⁸ 這樣，「所閃耀出來的亮麗，就是天主藉著死而復活的耶穌基督所彰顯的救贖愛情。」²⁹

44. 任何祝福都可成為再次宣講福音初傳（*kerygma*）的機會，邀請人更接近基督的愛。教宗本篤十六世教導說：「就像瑪利亞一

26. 參閱：同上。

27. 教廷聖禮部，《日課禮儀總論》，沈鼎臣譯，《鐸聲》第102-111期（1971-1972），第17號：「*Itaque non tantum caritate, exemplo et paenitentiae operibus, sed etiam oratione ecclesialis communitas verum erga animas ad Christum adducendas maternum munus exercet.*」。取自：聖神修院神哲學院網頁：教會文獻〔<http://archive.hsscol.org.hk/Archive/database/document/C036.htm>〕

28. 教宗方濟各，《福音的喜樂》宗座勸諭，44，（2013年11月24日），《宗座公報》105（2013），1038~1039。

29. 同上，36，《宗座公報》105（2013），1035。

樣，教會是天主對世界的祝福的中保：她迎接耶穌時領受這祝福，並將之傳遞給人，藉此的將耶穌帶給人。祂就是世界無法給予的、而且是世人常需要的慈悲與平安，就像需要食糧一樣，甚至更為需要。」³⁰

45. 有鑑於上述的闡釋，並遵循教宗方濟各的權威教導，本部最後切願重申：「能夠感受到自己蒙受祝福以及能夠去祝福，此仍基督徒溫良的根源〔……〕。這個世界需要祝福，而我們能夠給予祝福，也可以接受祝福。天父愛我們，而我們唯有的喜樂，就是祝福祂、感謝祂、以及向祂學習去祝福。」³¹ 因此，教會中的每一位弟兄姊妹都能夠感受到自己總是在朝聖的路上，總是在乞求，總是被天主所愛，而且無論如何，總是蒙受天主的祝福。

部長

維克多·曼努埃爾·費爾南德斯樞機

(Victor Manuel Card. FERNÁNDEZ)

教義分部祕書

阿曼多·馬泰奧蒙席

(Mons. Armando MATTEO)

教宗方濟各 於 2023年12月18日 批准頒令

(天主教會臺灣地區主教團 譯)

30. 教宗本篤十六世，〈第四十五屆世界和平日：至聖瑪利亞天主之母節彌撒講道〉，伯多祿大殿（2012年1月1日），《教導VIII》（*Insegnamenti VIII*），1（2012），3。

31. 教宗方濟各，〈教理講授——論祈禱：祝福〉（2020年12月2日），《羅馬觀察報》，2020年12月2日，第8頁。

教義部

新聞公報：

有關接受《懇求者的信賴之心》牧靈聲明的心態

2024年1月4日

一、教義方面

某些主教團對《懇求者的信賴之心》所作出的回應是可以理解的，其意義在於強調需要更長的時間作牧靈上的反思。這些主教團所表達的內容不能被詮釋為在教義上反對這份牧靈聲明，因為該文件對婚姻和性方面的主張是清楚的、合乎傳統教義的。

「聲明」中有數句強而有力的話語，讓人沒有任何懷疑的餘地：

聲明「始終堅持教會關於婚姻的傳統教義，不承認任何可能使人混淆的禮儀儀式或類似於禮儀儀式的祝福」。雖然這是**為非常規伴侶的牧靈行動**，但我們「並未認可他們的狀態（*status*）或以任何方式改變對婚姻長久以來的教義。」（「聲明」，序言）

「婚姻的構成要素乃『一男和一女之間專一性的、固定的和不可拆散的結合，可以自然地生育』，不允許被在與之相悖要素下的儀式和祈禱混淆。這立場是建基於長久以來天主教的婚姻教義之上，只有在這種背景下，性關係才能找到其自然、充分和完全的人性意義。教會的教義在這一點上是堅決的。」（「聲明」，4號）

「這也是當時教義部的《覆文》(*Responsum*)的涵義，當中指出教會並沒有權力祝福同性之間的結合。」(「聲明」，5號)

「鑑於教會始終認為只有婚姻內的性關係在道德上才是正當的，因此，任何禮儀性的祝福，若可能使那些被臆想為婚姻的結合或婚外性行為獲得某種形式的道德合法性，那麼教會便沒有權力授予這樣的禮儀性祝福。」(「聲明」，11號)

顯然，這在教義上是沒有任何有違教會傳統或褻瀆天主的嫌疑，因此讓人無從否認《懇求者的信賴之心》這份牧靈聲明，或將其視之為異端者。

二、具體接受方面

然而，有些主教特別表達了一個具體的關注：非常規情況中的伴侶也可能得到的祝福是怎樣的。聲明建議可以對非常規情況中的伴侶(而非其結合)進行(非禮儀性或儀式化的)簡短的牧靈祝福，同時強調這些祝福是沒有禮儀形式的，因此這些祝福既不認可也不證明這些人所處的情況為正當的。

教義部的文件，如《懇求者的信賴之心》，需要多久的時間才能實行，這取決於各教區的當地情況以及每位教區主教與他的教區一同作出的辨別。有些地方可以立即實行，沒有任何困難；但在有些地方則需要避免引入任何新的做法，反而是需要花時間來閱讀此文件，並細心解讀。

例如，一些主教規定，每位司鐸都必須自行作辨別判斷，但他只

能私下施行這些祝福。只要在表達上述規定時，懷有對由教宗本人簽署並批准的文件給予應有的尊重，並試圖以某種方式來適應當中所包含的想法，那麼便都沒有問題。

每位地方教會的主教，因著他本身的職務，在實際環境(*in loco*)中總是擁有辨別判斷的權力，更具體地說，意即在地方上他知道的比別人更多，因為那是他的羊群。對當地教會背景和當地文化的謹慎和關注，足以讓他找到不同的實行方法，但不能完全地或絕對地否定我們為司鐸們所提出這做法的可行性。

三、某些國家的特殊情況

要理解一些主教團的實際情況，就必須考慮到他們的處境。在一些國家，存在著嚴重的文化甚至法律問題，在短期間無法實行，而是需要時間和一些牧靈策略。

如果該國家有法律，一個只是宣稱自己是同性戀的人便會被判處監禁，在某些情況下會被判處酷刑甚至死刑，那麼，不必多說，舉行祝福便是不明智的。顯然，主教們不會想讓同性戀者遭受暴力。同樣重要的是，這些主教團必須持守與獲教宗批准的這份「聲明」相同的教義，因為這就是從古至今的教義。在這情況下，他們只是提出了再深入研究和辨別判斷的需要，以便在這種處境下小心謹慎地進行牧靈工作。

事實上，有為數不少的國家，在不同程度地譴責、禁止同性戀，並將其定為刑事罪行。在這些情況下，除了施行祝福的

問題之外，尚有一項巨大而且涉及廣泛層面的牧靈任務，包括：培育和捍衛人性尊嚴、教導教會社會訓導，以及思考各種不可倉促推行的牧靈策略。

四、文件真正的新意

《懇求者的信賴之心》真正的新意，是需要我們努力接受的，而且不應把自己排除在外，其實重點並不是祝福非常規情況中的伴侶的可能性，而是邀請我們把兩種不同形式的祝福區分開來：「禮儀性的或儀式化的」祝福和「自發性的或牧靈的」祝福。這份聲明的序言明確解釋了「這份文件的價值在於，為祝福的牧靈意義提供了明確而又革新的貢獻，使我們能夠拓寬並豐富對祝福的傳統理解。[……] 這次神學反思是以教宗方濟各的牧靈願景為基礎，與教會訓導和教會官方文本中有關祝福的說法相比，這意味著真正的發展。」

這份文件的背景，正是教宗在許多文件中對「一般牧靈關懷」的正面評價。在這背景下，教宗邀請我們珍視天主子民簡單的信仰，他們即使身陷在罪惡之中，也嘗試從封閉的自己中走出來，敞開心扉請求天主的幫助。

為此，該文件的主旨，其實並不是對非常規情況中伴侶的祝福。它採用的是高規格的「聲明」，這代表箇中的意義遠大於一份《覆文》(*responsum*)或一封信函。這文件的中心思想，其實是拓寬對祝福的理解，並提議可以施行牧靈祝福，即毋需與禮儀性的或有既定儀式的祝福要求相同條件，這

便邀請我們去加強我們的牧靈工作。所以，除了相關爭議之外，這份文件也要求我們以牧人的心，並且在不受任何意識形態影響之下，心平氣和地仔細思量。

儘管有些主教認為暫時不要施行這些祝福才是明智的，但我們所有人都要日益堅定地相信，非儀式性的祝福並非聖化那些接受這祝福的個人或伴侶。這些祝福並不使他們的所有行為合理化，也不是贊同他們所度的生活。當教宗要求我們對牧靈祝福有更廣泛理解的時候，就是建議我們去想到一種毋需那麼多條件的祝福方式，來實行在牧靈工作中親近人的簡單行動。這是促使在各種不同境遇中的人向天主敞開心扉的一種方法。

五、這些「牧靈祝福」如何具體進行？

為了與禮儀性的或儀式性的祝福清楚地區分開來，「牧靈祝福」首先必須非常簡短（參閱：28號）。這些祝福大概持續幾秒鐘，並沒有儀式，也沒有《祝福禮典》的規範。如果兩個人一起請求這祝福，他們只需向主祈求平安、健康，以及為這二人的其他益處。同時，這祝福要求他們能夠完全忠於基督的福音，並且讓聖神能夠把這兩個人從不符合祂旨意的一切和所有需要淨化的一切之中解放出來而得自由。

這種簡短的非儀式性祝福形式，並不要求使一切道德上不可接受的事情合理化。這形式顯然不是締結婚姻，也不是對任何事情的「批准」或贊同，而純粹是一位牧者對尋求天主幫

助的兩個人的回應。因此，在這種情況下，牧者不會強加條件，也不會想探知這些人的私生活。

既然有些人提出了疑問：「這些祝福應是什麼樣子的？」那麼，就讓我們看一個具體的例子：讓我們想像一下，在一次朝聖旅途中，一對曾離婚的新結伴伴侶對司鐸說：「請給我們一個祝福！我們找不到工作，他病得很重，我們居無定所，生活非常困難：願天主幫助我們！」

在這種情況下，司鐸可以誦念一段簡單的祈禱文，譬如：「主啊！請看顧祢的這些孩子，賜給他們健康、工作、平安、以及互助互愛。求祢把他們從一切與祢的福音相抵觸的事物中解放出來，並使他們按照祢的旨意生活。阿們。」最後，在他們兩人的額上劃上十字聖號。

這只需要大約10或15秒。拒絕這類乞求祝福的人，合理嗎？難道這不是個好時機，去支持他們或多或少的信德嗎？難道這不是個好時機，藉著天主的祝福，來扶助他們的軟弱嗎？難道這不是個好時機，去打開那通往超性的通道，引領他們更忠於福音嗎？

為了避免任何誤解，《懇求者的信賴之心》中補充說，當一對處於非常規情況中的伴侶請求祝福時，「儘管該祝福祈禱不屬於禮儀典籍所列舉的儀式之內，但這祝福禮絕不可與民事結合的儀式同時進行，甚至不可與該儀式有任何關係；當然也不可使用婚禮儀式中典型的服飾、手勢或言詞。當同性伴侶請求祝福時，上

述規定同樣適用」(39號)。因此，很明顯，這祝福不可在聖堂等神聖建築的重要地方或祭台前舉行，因為這也會造成混淆。

因此，每位教區主教均獲《懇求者的信賴之心》的授權，在考慮到上述所提出的小心辨別和關注之後，可以在教區中開始實行這類簡單的祝福，但他絕對沒有權力提出或啟動任何可能類似禮儀性的祝福。

六、教理講授

在某些地方，為幫助每個人了解這類祝福並非認可請求者所度的生活，也許有進行教理講授的需要。這些祝福更不是一種赦免，因為這些行動絕非一件聖事甚或儀式。這類祝福只是簡單地在牧靈關懷中表達親近，因此是不會提出與聖事或正式儀式同樣的要求。我們都必須習慣接受：假若一位司鐸給予這種簡單的祝福，他並不是異教人，他沒有認可任何東西，他也沒有否認天主教的教義。

我們可以幫助天主子民瞭解到，這類祝福只是簡單的牧靈渠道，幫助人們表達他們的信德，即使他們是大罪人。所以，把這類祝福施予兩個自發性地一起請求祝福的人，並不同於聖化他們，也不是祝賀他們，更不是贊同這種結合。事實上，在祝福單獨一人的時候，情況也相同，因為請求祝福而非罪赦的人，可能是個大罪人，但我們不會因此就在他為生存而掙扎時拒絕給予他這慈父般的行動。

只要透過良好的教理講授來澄清這一點，我們就可以不再害怕這些祝福可能把一些東西表達得不夠清楚。我們可以成為更自由的、更可親的、結出更豐碩果實的牧靈工作者，使我們在牧靈工作中充滿慈父的情懷和可親的姿態，而不用擔心被誤解。

讓我們祈求新生的主慷慨大方而且不求回報地把祝福傾注在每個人身上，好使我們能度一個聖潔又快樂的2024年。

部長

維克多·曼努埃爾·費爾南德斯樞機
(*Víctor Manuel Card. FERNÁNDEZ*)

教義部門祕書

阿曼多·馬特奧蒙席
(*Mons. Armando MATTEO*)

(天主教會臺灣地區主教團 譯)

DICASTERY FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH

Declaration

Fiducia Supplicans

On the Pastoral Meaning of Blessings

Presentation

This Declaration considers several questions that have come to this Dicastery in recent years. In preparing the document, the Dicastery, as is its practice, consulted experts, undertook a careful drafting process, and discussed the text in the *Congresso* of the Doctrinal Section of the Dicastery. During that time, the document was discussed with the Holy Father. Finally, the text of the Declaration was submitted to the Holy Father for his review, and he approved it with his signature.

While the subject matter of this document was being studied, the Holy Father's response to the *Dubia* of some Cardinals was made known. That response provided important clarifications for this reflection and represents a decisive element for the work of the Dicastery. Since "the Roman Curia is primarily an instrument at the service of the successor of Peter" (Ap. Const. *Praedicate Evangelium*, II, 1), our work must foster, along with an understanding of the Church's perennial doctrine, the reception of the Holy Father's teaching.

As with the Holy Father's above-mentioned response to the *Dubia* of two Cardinals, this Declaration remains firm on the traditional doctrine of the Church about marriage, not allowing any type of liturgical rite or blessing similar to a liturgical rite that can create confusion. The value of this document, however, is that it offers a specific and innovative contribution *to the pastoral meaning of blessings*, permitting a broadening and enrichment of the classical understanding of blessings, which is closely linked to a liturgical perspective. Such theological reflection, based on the pastoral vision of Pope Francis, implies a real development from what has been said about blessings in the Magisterium and the official texts of the Church. This explains why this text has taken on the typology of a "Declaration."

It is precisely in this context that one can understand the possibility of blessing couples in irregular situations and same-sex couples without officially validating their status or changing in any way the Church's perennial teaching on marriage.

This Declaration is also intended as a tribute to the faithful People of God, who worship the Lord with so many gestures of deep trust in his mercy and who, with this confidence, constantly come to seek a blessing from Mother Church.

Víctor Manuel Card. Fernández

Prefect

Introduction

1. The supplicating trust of the faithful People of God receives the gift of blessing that flows from the Heart of Christ through his Church. Pope Francis offers this timely reminder: "The great blessing of God is Jesus Christ. He is the great gift of God, his own Son. He is a blessing for all humanity, a blessing that has saved us all. He is the Eternal Word, with whom the Father blessed us 'while we were still sinners' (Rom. 5:8), as St. Paul says. He is the Word made flesh, offered for us on the cross."¹

2. Encouraged by such a great and consoling truth, this Dicastery has considered several questions of both a formal and an informal nature about the possibility of blessing same-sex couples and—in light of Pope Francis' fatherly and pastoral approach—of offering new clarifications on the *Responsum ad dubium*² that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published on 22 February 2021.

3. The above-mentioned *Responsum* elicited numerous and varied reactions: some welcomed the clarity of the document and its consistency with the Church's perennial teaching; others did not share the negative response it gave to the question or did not consider the formulation of its answer and the reasons provided in the attached *Explanatory Note* to be sufficiently

1. Francis, *Catechesis on Prayer: The Blessing* (2 December 2020).

2. Cf. Congregatio pro Doctrina Fidei, «*Responsum*» ad «*dubium*» de benedictione unionem personarum eiusdem sexus et Nota esplicativa (15 March 2021) : *AAS* 113 (2021), 431-434.

clear. To meet the latter reaction with fraternal charity, it seems opportune to take up the theme again and offer a vision that draws together the doctrinal aspects with the pastoral ones in a coherent manner because “all religious teaching ultimately has to be reflected in the teacher’s way of life, which awakens the assent of the heart by its nearness, love, and witness.”³

I. The Blessing in the Sacrament of Marriage

4. Pope Francis’ recent response to the second of the five questions posed by two Cardinals⁴ offers an opportunity to explore this issue further, especially in its pastoral implications. It is a matter of avoiding that “something that is not marriage is being recognized as marriage.”⁵ Therefore, rites and prayers that could create confusion between what constitutes marriage—which is the “exclusive, stable, and indissoluble union between a man and a woman, naturally open to the generation of children”⁶—and what contradicts it are inadmissible. This conviction is grounded in the perennial Catholic doctrine of marriage; it is only in this context that sexual relations find their natural, proper, and fully human meaning. The Church’s doctrine on this point remains firm.

5. This is also the understanding of marriage that is offered by

3. Francis, Ap. Exhort. *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), no. 42: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1037-1038.

4. Cf. Francis, *Respuestas a los Dubia propuestos por dos Cardenales* (11 July 2023).

5. *Ibid.*, ad dubium 2, c.

6. *Ibid.*, ad dubium 2, a.

the Gospel. For this reason, when it comes to blessings, the Church has the right and the duty to avoid any rite that might contradict this conviction or lead to confusion. Such is also the meaning of the *Responsum* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which states that the Church does not have the power to impart blessings on unions of persons of the same sex.

6. It should be emphasized that in the Rite of the Sacrament of Marriage, this concerns not just any blessing but a gesture reserved to the ordained minister. In this case, the blessing given by the ordained minister is tied directly to the specific union of a man and a woman, who establish an exclusive and indissoluble covenant by their consent. This fact allows us to highlight the risk of confusing a blessing given to any other union with the Rite that is proper to the Sacrament of Marriage.

II. The Meaning of the Various Blessings

7. The Holy Father’s above-mentioned response invites us to broaden and enrich the meaning of blessings.

8. Blessings are among the most widespread and evolving sacramentals. Indeed, they lead us to grasp God’s presence in all the events of life and remind us that, even in the use of created things, human beings are invited to seek God, to love him, and to serve him faithfully.⁷ For this reason, blessings have as their

7. Cfr. *Rituale Romanum* ex decreto Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II instauratum auctoritate Ioannis Pauli PP. II promulgatum, *De Benedictionibus, Praenotanda*, Editio typica, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del

recipients: people; objects of worship and devotion; sacred images; places of life, of work, and suffering; the fruits of the earth and human toil; and all created realities that refer back to the Creator, praising and blessing him by their beauty.

The Liturgical Meaning of the Rites of Blessing

9. From a strictly liturgical point of view, a blessing requires that what is blessed be conformed to God's will, as expressed in the teachings of the Church.

10. Indeed, blessings are celebrated by virtue of faith and are ordered to the praise of God and the spiritual benefit of his people. As the *Book of Blessings* explains, "so that this intent might become more apparent, by an ancient tradition, the formulas of blessing are primarily aimed at giving glory to God for his gifts, asking for his favors, and restraining the power of evil in the world."⁸ Therefore, those who invoke God's blessing through the Church are invited to "strengthen their dispositions through faith, for which all things are possible" and to trust in "the love that urges the observance of God's commandments."⁹ This is why, while "there is always and everywhere an opportunity to praise God through Christ, in the

Holy Spirit," there is also a care to do so with "things, places, or circumstances that do not contradict the law or the spirit of the Gospel."¹⁰ This is a liturgical understanding of blessings insofar as they are rites officially proposed by the Church.

11. Basing itself on these considerations, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's *Explanatory Note* to its 2021 *Responsum* recalls that when a blessing is invoked on certain human relationships by a special liturgical rite, it is necessary that what is blessed corresponds with God's designs written in creation and fully revealed by Christ the Lord. For this reason, since the Church has always considered only those sexual relations that are lived out within marriage to be morally licit, the Church does not have the power to confer its liturgical blessing when that would somehow offer a form of moral legitimacy to a union that presumes to be a marriage or to an extra-marital sexual practice. The Holy Father reiterated the substance of this Declaration in his *Respuestas* to the *Dubia* of two Cardinals.

12. One must also avoid the risk of reducing the meaning of blessings to this point of view alone, for it would lead us to expect the same moral conditions for a simple blessing that are called for in the reception of the sacraments. Such a risk requires that we broaden this perspective further. Indeed, there is the danger that a pastoral gesture that is so beloved and widespread

Vaticano 2013, no. 12.

8. *Ibid.*, no. 11: "Quo autem clarius hoc pateat, antiqua ex traditione, formulae benedictionum eo spectant ut imprimis Deum pro eius donis glorificent eiusque impetrent beneficia atque maligni potestatem in mundo compescant."

9. *Ibid.*, no. 15: "Quare illi qui benedictionem Dei per Ecclesiam expostulant, dispositiones suas ea fide confirmant, cui omnia sunt possibilia; spe innitantur, quae non confundit; caritate praesertim vivificentur, quae mandata Dei servanda urget."

10. *Ibid.*, no. 13: "Semper ergo et ubique occasio praebetur Deum per Christum in Spiritu Sancto laudandi, invocandi eique gratias reddendi, dummodo agatur de rebus, locis, vel adiunctis quae normae vel spiritui Evangelii non contradicant."

will be subjected to too many moral prerequisites, which, under the claim of control, could overshadow the unconditional power of God's love that forms the basis for the gesture of blessing.

13. Precisely in this regard, Pope Francis urged us not to “lose pastoral charity, which should permeate all our decisions and attitudes” and to avoid being “judges who only deny, reject, and exclude.”¹¹ Let us then respond to the Holy Father's proposal by developing a broader understanding of blessings.

Blessings in Sacred Scripture

14. To reflect on blessings by gathering different points of view, we first need to be enlightened by the voice of Scripture.

15. “May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace” (Num. 6:24-26). This “priestly blessing” we find in the Old Testament, specifically in the Book of Numbers, has a “descending” character since it represents the invocation of a blessing that descends from God upon man: it is one of the oldest texts of divine blessing. Then, there is a second type of blessing we find in the biblical pages: that which “ascends” from earth to heaven, toward God. Blessing in this sense amounts to praising, celebrating, and thanking God for his mercy and his faithfulness, for the wonders he has created, and for all that has

come about by his will: “Bless the Lord, my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!” (Ps. 103:1).

16. To God who blesses, we also respond by blessing. Melchizedek, King of Salem, blesses Abram (cf. Gen. 14:19); Rebekah is blessed by family members just before she becomes the bride of Isaac (cf. Gen. 24:60), who, in turn, blesses his son, Jacob (cf. Gen. 27:27). Jacob blesses Pharaoh (cf. Gen. 47:10), his own grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh (cf. Gen. 48:20), and his twelve sons (cf. Gen. 49:28). Moses and Aaron bless the community (cf. Ex. 39:43; Lev. 9:22). The heads of households bless their children at weddings, before embarking on a journey, and in the imminence of death. These blessings, accordingly, appear to be a superabundant and unconditional gift.

17. The blessing found in the New Testament retains essentially the same meaning it had in the Old Testament. We find the divine gift that “descends,” the human thanksgiving that “ascends,” and the blessing imparted by man that “extends” toward others. Zechariah, having regained the use of speech, blesses the Lord for his wondrous works (cf. Lk. 1:64). Simeon, while holding the newborn Jesus in his arms, blesses God for granting him the grace to contemplate the saving Messiah, and then blesses the child's parents, Mary and Joseph (cf. Lk. 2:34). Jesus blesses the Father in the famous hymn of praise and exultation he addressed to him: “I praise you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth” (Mt. 11:25).

11. Francis, *Respuestas a los Dubia propuestos por dos Cardenales*, ad dubium 2, d.

18. In continuity with the Old Testament, in Jesus as well the blessing is not only ascending, referring to the Father, but is also descending, being poured out on others as a gesture of grace, protection, and goodness. Jesus himself implemented and promoted this practice. For example, he blessed children: “And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them” (Mk. 10:16). And Jesus’ earthly journey will end precisely with a final blessing reserved for the Eleven, shortly before he ascends to the Father: “And lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven” (Lk. 24:50-51). The last image of Jesus on earth is that of his hands being raised in the act of blessing.

19. In his mystery of love, through Christ, God communicates to his Church the power to bless. Granted by God to human beings and bestowed by them on their neighbors, the blessing is transformed into inclusion, solidarity, and peacemaking. It is a positive message of comfort, care, and encouragement. The blessing expresses God’s merciful embrace and the Church’s motherhood, which invites the faithful to have the same feelings as God toward their brothers and sisters.

A Theological-Pastoral Understanding of Blessings

20. One who asks for a blessing show himself to be in need of God’s saving presence in his life and one who asks for a blessing from the Church recognizes the latter as a sacrament of

the salvation that God offers. To seek a blessing in the Church is to acknowledge that the life of the Church springs from the womb of God’s mercy and helps us to move forward, to live better, and to respond to the Lord’s will.

21. In order to help us understand the value of a more pastoral approach to blessings, Pope Francis urges us to contemplate, with an attitude of faith and fatherly mercy, the fact that “when one asks for a blessing, one is expressing a petition for God’s assistance, a plea to live better, and confidence in a Father who can help us live better.”¹² This request should, in every way, be valued, accompanied, and received with gratitude. People who come spontaneously to ask for a blessing show by this request their sincere openness to transcendence, the confidence of their hearts that they do not trust in their own strength alone, their need for God, and their desire to break out of the narrow confines of this world, enclosed in its limitations.

22. As St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus teaches us, this confidence “is the sole path that leads us to the Love that grants everything. With confidence, the wellspring of grace overflows into our lives [...]. It is most fitting, then, that we should place heartfelt trust not in ourselves but in the infinite mercy of a God who loves us unconditionally [...]. The sin of the world is great but not infinite, whereas the merciful love of the Redeemer is

12. *Ibid.*, ad dubium 2, e.

indeed infinite.”¹³

23. When considered outside of a liturgical framework, these expressions of faith are found in a realm of greater spontaneity and freedom. Nevertheless, “the optional nature of pious exercises should in no way be taken to imply an underestimation or even disrespect for such practices. The way forward in this area requires a correct and wise appreciation of the many riches of popular piety, [and] of the potentiality of these same riches.”¹⁴ In this way, blessings become a pastoral resource to be valued rather than a risk or a problem.

24. From the point of view of pastoral care, blessings should be evaluated as acts of devotion that “are external to the celebration of the Holy Eucharist and of the other sacraments.” Indeed, the “language, rhythm, course, and theological emphasis” of popular piety differ “from those of the corresponding liturgical action.” For this reason, “pious practices must conserve their proper style, simplicity, and language, [and] attempts to impose forms of ‘liturgical celebration’ on them are always to be avoided.”¹⁵

25. The Church, moreover, must shy away from resting its pastoral praxis on the fixed nature of certain doctrinal

or disciplinary schemes, especially when they lead to “a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism, whereby instead of evangelizing, one analyzes and classifies others, and instead of opening the door to grace, one exhausts his or her energies in inspecting and verifying.”¹⁶ Thus, when people ask for a blessing, an exhaustive moral analysis should not be placed as a precondition for conferring it. For, those seeking a blessing should not be required to have prior moral perfection.

26. In this perspective, the Holy Father’s *Respuestas* aid in expanding the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s 2021 pronouncement from a pastoral point of view. For, the *Respuestas* invite discernment concerning the possibility of “forms of blessing, requested by one or more persons, that do not convey an erroneous conception of marriage”¹⁷ and, in situations that are morally unacceptable from an objective point of view, account for the fact that “pastoral charity requires us not to treat simply as ‘sinners’ those whose guilt or responsibility may be attenuated by various factors affecting subjective imputability.”¹⁸

27. In the catechesis cited at the beginning of this Declaration, Pope Francis proposed a description of this kind of blessing that is offered to all without requiring anything. It is worth

13. Francis, Ap. Exhort. *C’est la Confiance* (15 October 2023), nos. 2, 20, 29.

14. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy. Principles and Guidelines (9 April 2002), no. 12.

15. *Ibid.*, no. 13.

16 Francis, Exhort. Ap. *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), no. 94: AAS 105 (2013), 1060.

17 Francis, *Respuestas a los Dubia propuestos por dos Cardenales*, ad dubium 2, e.

18 *Ibid.*, ad dubium 2, f.

reading these words with an open heart, for they help us grasp the pastoral meaning of blessings offered without preconditions: “It is God who blesses. In the first pages of the Bible, there is a continual repetition of blessings. God blesses, but humans also give blessings, and soon it turns out that the blessing possesses a special power, which accompanies those who receive it throughout their lives, and disposes man’s heart to be changed by God. [...] So we are more important to God than all the sins we can commit because he is father, he is mother, he is pure love, he has blessed us forever. And he will never stop blessing us. It is a powerful experience to read these biblical texts of blessing in a prison or in a rehabilitation group. To make those people feel that they are still blessed, notwithstanding their serious mistakes, that their heavenly Father continues to will their good and to hope that they will ultimately open themselves to the good. Even if their closest relatives have abandoned them, because they now judge them to be irredeemable, God always sees them as his children.”¹⁹

28. There are several occasions when people spontaneously ask for a blessing, whether on pilgrimages, at shrines, or even on the street when they meet a priest. By way of example, we can refer to the *Book of Blessings*, which provides several rites for blessing people, including the elderly, the sick, participants in a catechetical or prayer meeting, pilgrims, those embarking on

a journey, volunteer groups and associations, and more. Such blessings are meant for everyone; no one is to be excluded from them. In the introduction to the *Order for the Blessing of Elderly People*, for example, it is stated that the purpose of this blessing is “so that the elderly themselves may receive from their brethren a testimony of respect and gratitude, while together with them, we give thanks to the Lord for the favors they received from him and for the good they did with his help.”

²⁰ In this case, the subject of the blessing is the elderly person, for whom and with whom thanks is being given to God for the good he has done and for the benefits received. No one can be prevented from this act of giving thanks, and each person—even if he or she lives in situations that are not ordered to the Creator’s plan—possesses positive elements for which we can praise the Lord.

29. From the perspective of the ascending dimension, when one becomes aware of the Lord’s gifts and his unconditional love, even in sinful situations—particularly when a prayer finds a hearing—the believer’s heart lifts its praise to God and blesses him. No one is precluded from this type of blessing. Everyone, individually or together with others, can lift their praise and gratitude to God.

20. *De Benedictionibus*, no. 258: “Haec benedictio ad hoc tendit ut ipsi senes a fratribus testimonium accipiant reverentiae grataeque mentis, dum simul cum ipsis Domino gratias reddimus pro beneficiis ab eo acceptis et pro bonis operibus eo adiuvante peractis.”

19. Francis, *Catechesis on Prayer: The Blessing* (2 December 2020).

30. The popular understanding of blessings, however, also values the importance of descending blessings. While “it is not appropriate for a Diocese, a Bishops’ Conference, or any other ecclesial structure to constantly and officially establish procedures or rituals for all kinds of matters,”²¹ pastoral prudence and wisdom—avoiding all serious forms of scandal and confusion among the faithful—may suggest that the ordained minister join in the prayer of those persons who, although in a union that cannot be compared in any way to a marriage, desire to entrust themselves to the Lord and his mercy, to invoke his help, and to be guided to a greater understanding of his plan of love and of truth.

III. Blessings of Couples in Irregular Situations and of Couples of the Same Sex

31. Within the horizon outlined here appears the possibility of blessings for couples in irregular situations and for couples of the same sex, the form of which should not be fixed ritually by ecclesial authorities to avoid producing confusion with the blessing proper to the Sacrament of Marriage. In such cases, a blessing may be imparted that not only has an ascending value but also involves the invocation of a blessing that descends from God upon those who—recognizing themselves to be destitute and in need of his help—do not claim a legitimation of their own status, but who beg that all that is true, good, and

humanly valid in their lives and their relationships be enriched, healed, and elevated by the presence of the Holy Spirit. These forms of blessing express a supplication that God may grant those aids that come from the impulses of his Spirit—what classical theology calls “actual grace”—so that human relationships may mature and grow in fidelity to the Gospel, that they may be freed from their imperfections and frailties, and that they may express themselves in the ever-increasing dimension of the divine love.

32. Indeed, the grace of God works in the lives of those who do not claim to be righteous but who acknowledge themselves humbly as sinners, like everyone else. This grace can orient everything according to the mysterious and unpredictable designs of God. Therefore, with its untiring wisdom and motherly care, the Church welcomes all who approach God with humble hearts, accompanying them with those spiritual aids that enable everyone to understand and realize God’s will fully in their existence.²²

33. This is a blessing that, although not included in any liturgical rite,²³ unites intercessory prayer with the invocation

22. Cf. Francis, Post-Synodal Ap. Exhort. *Amoris Laetitia* (19 March 2016), no. 250: AAS 108 (2016), 412-413.

23. Cf. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* (9 April 2002), no. 13 : “ The objective difference between pious exercises and devotional practices should

21. Francis, *Respuestas a los Dubia propuestos por dos Cardenales*, ad dubium 2, g.

of God's help by those who humbly turn to him. God never turns away anyone who approaches him! Ultimately, a blessing offers people a means to increase their trust in God. 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. It is a seed of the Holy Spirit that must be nurtured, not hindered.

34. The Church's liturgy itself invites us to adopt this trusting attitude, even in the midst of our sins, lack of merits, weaknesses, and confusions, as witnessed by this beautiful Collect from the Roman Missal: "Almighty ever-living God, who in the abundance of your kindness surpass the merits and the desires of those who entreat you, pour out your mercy upon us to pardon what conscience dreads and to give what prayer does not dare to ask" (Collect for the Twenty-Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time). How often, through a pastor's simple blessing, which does not claim to sanction or legitimize anything, can people experience the nearness of the Father, beyond all "merits" and "desires"?

35. Therefore, the pastoral sensibility of ordained ministers should also be formed to perform blessings spontaneously that are not found in the *Book of Blessings*.

always be clear in expressions of worship. [...] Acts of devotion and piety are external to the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, and of the other sacraments."

36. In this sense, it is essential to grasp the Holy Father's concern that these non-ritualized blessings never cease being simple gestures that provide an effective means of increasing trust in God on the part of the people who ask for them, careful that they should not become a liturgical or semi-liturgical act, similar to a sacrament. Indeed, such a ritualization would constitute a serious impoverishment because it would subject a gesture of great value in popular piety to excessive control, depriving ministers of freedom and spontaneity in their pastoral accompaniment of people's lives.

37. In this regard, there come to mind the following words of the Holy Father, already quoted in part: "Decisions that may be part of pastoral prudence in certain circumstances should not necessarily become a norm. That is to say, it is not appropriate for a Diocese, a Bishops' Conference, or any other ecclesial structure to constantly and officially establish procedures or rituals for all kinds of matters [...]. Canon Law should not and cannot cover everything, nor should the Episcopal Conferences claim to do so with their various documents and protocols, since the life of the Church flows through many channels besides the normative ones."²⁴ Thus Pope Francis recalled that "what is part of a practical discernment in particular circumstances cannot be elevated to the level of a rule" because this "would lead to an intolerable casuistry."²⁵

24. Francis, *Respuestas a los Dubia propuestos por dos Cardenales*, ad dubium 2, g.

25. Francis, Post-Synodal Ap. Exhort. *Amoris Laetitia* (19 March 2016), no. 304

38. For this reason, one should neither provide for nor promote a ritual for the blessings of couples in an irregular situation. At the same time, one 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. In a brief prayer preceding this spontaneous blessing, the ordained minister could ask that the individuals have peace, health, a spirit of patience, dialogue, and mutual assistance—but also God's light and strength to be able to fulfill his will completely.

39. In any case, precisely to avoid any form of confusion or scandal, when the prayer of blessing is requested by a couple in an irregular situation, even though it is expressed outside the rites prescribed by the liturgical books, this blessing should never be imparted in concurrence with the ceremonies of a civil union, and not even in connection with them. Nor can it be performed with any clothing, gestures, or words that are proper to a wedding. The same applies when the blessing is requested by a same-sex couple.

40. Such a blessing may instead find its place in other contexts, such as a visit to a shrine, a meeting with a priest, a prayer recited in a group, or during a pilgrimage. Indeed, through these blessings that are given not through the ritual forms proper to the liturgy but as an expression of the Church's maternal heart—similar to those that emanate from the core of popular

piety—there is no intention to legitimize anything, but rather to open one's life to God, to ask for his help to live better, and also to invoke the Holy Spirit so that the values of the Gospel may be lived with greater faithfulness.

41. What has been said in this Declaration regarding the blessings of same-sex couples is sufficient to guide the prudent and fatherly discernment of ordained ministers in this regard. Thus, beyond the guidance provided above, no further responses should be expected about possible ways to regulate details or practicalities regarding blessings of this type.²⁶

IV. The Church is the Sacrament of God's Infinite Love

42. The Church continues to lift up those prayers and supplications that Christ himself—with loud cries and tears—offered in his earthly life (cf. Heb. 5:7), and which enjoy a special efficacy for this reason. In this way, “not only by charity, example, and works of penance, but also by prayer does the ecclesial community exercise a true maternal function in bringing souls to Christ.”^[27]

26. Cf. *ibid.*

27. *Officium Divinum ex decreto Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II instauratum auctoritate Pauli PP. VI promulgatum*, Liturgia Horarum iuxta Ritus Romanum, Institutio Generalis de Liturgia Horarum, Editio typica altera, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1985, no. 17: “Itaque non tantum caritate, exemplo et paenitentiae operibus, sed etiam oratione ecclesialis communitas verum erga animas ad Christum adducendas maternum munus exercet.”

: AAS 108 (2016), 436.

43. The Church is thus the sacrament of God's infinite love. Therefore, even when a person's relationship with God is clouded by sin, he can always ask for a blessing, stretching out his hand to God, as Peter did in the storm when he cried out to Jesus, "Lord, save me!" (Mt. 14:30). Indeed, desiring and receiving a blessing can be the possible good in some situations. Pope Francis reminds us that "a small step, in the midst of great human limitations, can be more pleasing to God than a life which appears outwardly in order but moves through the day without confronting great difficulties."²⁸ In this way, "*what shines forth is the beauty of the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ, who died and rose from the dead.*"²⁹

44. Any blessing will be an opportunity for a renewed proclamation of the *kerygma*, an invitation to draw ever closer to the love of Christ. As Pope Benedict XVI taught, "Like Mary, the Church is the mediator of God's blessing for the world: she receives it in receiving Jesus and she transmits it in bearing Jesus. He is the mercy and the peace that the world, of itself, cannot give, and which it needs always, at least as much as bread."³⁰

28. Francis, Ap. Exhort. *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), no. 44: AAS 105 (2013), 1038-1039.

29. *Ibid.*, no. 36: AAS 105 (2013), 1035.

30. Benedict XVI, *Homily on the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. 45th World Day of Peace*, Vatican Basilica (1 January 2012): Insegnamenti VIII, 1 (2012), 3.

45. Taking the above points into account and following the authoritative teaching of Pope Francis, this Dicastery finally wishes to recall that "the root of Christian meekness" is "the ability to feel blessed and the ability to bless [...]. This world needs blessings, and we can give blessings and receive blessings. The Father loves us, and the only thing that remains for us is the joy of blessing him, and the joy of thanking him, and of learning from him [...] to bless."³¹ In this way, every brother and every sister will be able to feel that, in the Church, they are always pilgrims, always beggars, always loved, and, despite everything, always blessed.

Víctor Manuel Card. Fernández
Prefect

Mons. Armando MATTEO
Secretary for the Doctrinal Section

Ex Audientia Die 18 December 2023
Francis

31. Francis, *Catechesis on Prayer: The Blessing* (2 December 2020).

DICASTERY FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH

Press release concerning the reception of

Fiducia Supplicans

4 January 2024

We are writing this Press Release to help clarify the reception of *Fiducia Supplicans*, while recommending at the same time a full and calm reading of the *Declaration* so as to better understand its meaning and purpose.

1. Doctrine

The understandable statements of some Episcopal Conferences regarding the document *Fiducia Supplicans* have the value of highlighting the need for a more extended period of pastoral reflection. What is expressed by these Episcopal Conferences cannot be interpreted as doctrinal opposition, because the document is clear and definitive about marriage and sexuality. There are several indisputable phrases in the *Declaration* that leave this in no doubt:

«This Declaration remains firm on the traditional doctrine of the Church about marriage, not allowing any type of liturgical rite or blessing similar to a liturgical rite that can create confusion». One acts in these situations of couples in irregular situations «without officially validating their status or changing in any way the Church's perennial teaching on marriage» (*Presentation*).

«Therefore, rites and prayers that could create confusion

between what constitutes marriage – which is the “exclusive, stable, and indissoluble union between a man and a woman, naturally open to the generation of children”—and what contradicts it are inadmissible. This conviction is grounded in the perennial Catholic doctrine of marriage; it is only in this context that sexual relations find their natural, proper, and fully human meaning. The Church's doctrine on this point remains firm» (4).

«Such is also the meaning of the *Responsum* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which states that the Church does not have the power to impart blessings on unions of persons of the same sex» (5).

«For this reason, since the Church has always considered only those sexual relations that are lived out within marriage to be morally licit, the Church does not have the power to confer its liturgical blessing when that would somehow offer a form of moral legitimacy to a union that presumes to be a marriage or to an extra-marital sexual practice» (11).

Evidently, there is no room to distance ourselves doctrinally from this *Declaration* or to consider it heretical, contrary to the Tradition of the Church or blasphemous.

2. Practical reception

Some Bishops, however, express themselves in particular regarding a practical aspect: the possible blessings of couples in irregular situations. The *Declaration* contains a proposal for short and simple pastoral blessings (neither liturgical nor

ritualised) of couples in irregular situations (but not of their unions), underlining that these are blessings without a liturgical format which neither approve nor justify the situation in which these people find themselves.

Documents of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith such as *Fiducia Supplicans*, in their practical aspects, may require more or less time for their application depending on local contexts and the discernment of each diocesan Bishop with his Diocese. In some places no difficulties arise for their immediate application, while in others it will be necessary not to introduce them, while taking the time necessary for reading and interpretation.

Some Bishops, for example, have established that each priest must carry out the work of discernment and that he may, however, perform these blessings only in private. None of this is problematic if it is expressed with due respect for a text signed and approved by the Supreme Pontiff himself, while attempting in some way to accommodate the reflection contained in it.

Each local Bishop, by virtue of his own ministry, always has the power of discernment *in loco*, that is, in that concrete place that he knows better than others precisely because it is his own flock. Prudence and attention to the ecclesial context and to the local culture could allow for different methods of application, but not a total or definitive denial of this path that is proposed to priests.

3. The delicate situation of some countries

The cases of some Episcopal Conferences must be understood in their contexts. In several countries there are strong cultural and even legal issues that require time and pastoral strategies that go beyond the short term.

If there are laws that condemn the mere act of declaring oneself as a homosexual with prison and in some cases with torture and even death, it goes without saying that a blessing would be imprudent. It is clear that the Bishops do not wish to expose homosexual persons to violence. It remains vital that these Episcopal Conferences do not support a doctrine different from that of the Declaration signed by the Pope, given that it is perennial doctrine, but rather that they recommend the need for study and discernment so as to act with pastoral prudence in such a context.

In truth, there are not a few countries that, to varying degrees, condemn, prohibit and criminalize homosexuality. In these cases, apart from the question of blessings, there exists a great and wide-ranging pastoral responsibility that includes training, the defense of human dignity, the teaching of the Social Doctrine of the Church and various strategies that do not admit of a rushed response.

4. The real novelty of the document

The real novelty of this *Declaration*, the one that requires a generous effort of reception and from which no one should declare themselves excluded, is not the possibility of blessing

couples in irregular situations. It is the invitation to distinguish between two different forms of blessings: “liturgical or ritualized” and “spontaneous or pastoral”. The Presentation clearly explains that «the value of this document [...] is that it offers a specific and innovative contribution to the *pastoral meaning of blessings*, permitting a broadening and enrichment of the classical understanding of blessings, which is closely linked to a liturgical perspective». This «theological reflection, based on the pastoral vision of Pope Francis, implies a real development from what has been said about blessings in the Magisterium and the official texts of the Church».

In the background is found the positive evaluation of “popular pastoral care” which appears in many of the Holy Father’s texts. In this context, the Holy Father invites us to value the simple faith of the People of God who, even in the midst of their sins, emerge from their everyday lives and open their hearts to ask for God’s help.

For this reason, rather than the blessing of couples in irregular unions, the text of the Dicastery has adopted the other profile of a “Declaration”, which is much more than a responsum or a letter. The central theme, which invites us especially to a deeper pastoral practice which enriches our pastoral praxis, is to have a broader understanding of blessings and of the proposal that these pastoral blessings, which do not require the same conditions as blessings in a liturgical or ritual context, flourish. Consequently, leaving polemics aside, the text requires an effort to reflect serenely, with the heart of shepherds, free from all

ideology.

Although some Bishops consider it prudent not to impart these blessings for the moment, we all need to grow equally in the conviction that: non-ritualized blessings are not a consecration of the person nor of the couple who receives them, they are not a justification of all their actions, and they are not an endorsement of the life that they lead. When the Pope asked us to grow in a broader understanding of pastoral blessings, he proposed that we think of a way of blessing that does not require the placing of so many conditions to carry out this simple gesture of pastoral closeness, which is a means of promoting openness to God in the midst of the most diverse circumstances.

5. How do these “pastoral blessings” present themselves in concrete terms?

To be clearly distinguished from liturgical or ritualized blessings, “pastoral blessings” must above all be very short (see n. 38). These are blessings lasting a few seconds, without an approved ritual and without a book of blessings. If two people approach together to seek the blessing, one simply asks the Lord for peace, health and other good things for these two people who request it. At the same time, one asks that they may live the Gospel of Christ in full fidelity and so that the Holy Spirit can free these two people from everything that does not correspond to his divine will and from everything that requires purification. This non-ritualized form of blessing, with the simplicity and brevity of its form, does not intend to justify anything that is not

morally acceptable. Obviously it is not a marriage, but equally it is not an “approval” or ratification of anything either. It is solely the response of a pastor towards two persons who ask for God’s help. Therefore, in this case, the pastor does not impose conditions and does not enquire about the intimate lives of these people.

Since some have raised the question of what these blessings might look like, let us look at a concrete example: let us imagine that among a large number making a pilgrimage a couple of divorced people, now in a new union, say to the priest: “Please give us a blessing, we cannot find work, he is very ill, we do not have a home and life is becoming very difficult: may God help us!”.

In this case, the priest can recite a simple prayer like this: “Lord, look at these children of yours, grant them health, work, peace and mutual help. Free them from everything that contradicts your Gospel and allow them to live according to your will. Amen”. Then it concludes with the sign of the cross on each of the two persons.

We are talking about something that lasts about 10 or 15 seconds. Does it make sense to deny these kinds of blessings to these two people who ask for them? Is it not more appropriate to support their faith, whether it be small or great, to assist them in their weaknesses with a divine blessing, and to channel that openness to transcendence which could lead them to be more faithful to the Gospel?

In order to avoid any doubt, the *Declaration* adds that, when the blessing is requested by a couple in an irregular situation, «even though it is expressed outside the rites prescribed by the liturgical books, this blessing should never be imparted in concurrence with the ceremonies of a civil union, and not even in connection with them. Nor can it be performed with any clothing, gestures, or words that are proper to a wedding. The same applies when the blessing is requested by a same-sex couple» (n. 39). It remains clear, therefore, that the blessing must not take place in a prominent place within a sacred building, or in front of an altar, as this also would create confusion.

For this reason, every Bishop in his Diocese is authorized by the Declaration *Fiducia Supplicans* to make this type of simple blessing available, bearing in mind the need for prudence and care, but in no way is he authorized to propose or make blessings available that may resemble a liturgical rite.

6. Catechesis

In some places, perhaps, some catechesis will be necessary that can help everyone to understand that these types of blessings are not an endorsement of the life led by those who request them. Even less are they an absolution, as these gestures are far from being a sacrament or a rite. They are simple expressions of pastoral closeness that do not impose the same requirements as a sacrament or a formal rite. We will all have to become accustomed to accepting the fact that, if a priest gives this type of simple blessings, he is not a heretic, he is not ratifying

anything nor is he denying Catholic doctrine.

We can help God’s People to discover that these kinds of blessings are just simple pastoral channels that help people give expression to their faith, even if they are great sinners. For this reason, in giving a blessing to two people who come together to ask for it spontaneously, we are not consecrating them nor are we congratulating them nor indeed are we approving that type of union. In reality the same happens when individuals are blessed, as the individual who asks for a blessing – not absolution – could be a great sinner, but this does not mean we deny him this paternal gesture in the midst of his struggle to survive.

If this is clarified as a result of good catechesis, we can free ourselves from the fear that these blessings of ours may express something inadequate. We can be freer and perhaps closer and more fruitful ministers, with a ministry that is full of gestures of fatherhood and hospitality, without fear of being misunderstood.

We ask the newly-born Lord to shower a generous and gracious blessing upon everyone so that we can live a holy and happy 2024.

Victor Manuel Card. Fernández
Prefect

Mons. Armando MATTEO
Secretary for the Doctrinal Section

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