



# NATIONAL CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT

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### STATEMENT OF THE GHANA CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE ON WHETHER CATHOLIC PRIESTS HAVE NOW BEEN AUTHORIZED TO BLESS SAME-SEX MARRIAGES

*“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 1:7)*

We, the members of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, have seen the need to issue this statement in the wake of the publication on 18 December 2023 of a document from the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith entitled *“Fiducia Supplicans”* (Supplicating Trust: “On the Pastoral Meaning of Blessings”). Following its publication, some TV and radio news items as well as posts on the social media have falsely stated that Pope Francis has formally given Roman Catholic priests the permission to bless same-sex marriages. This publication has caused a lot of consternation among many people, Catholics and non-Catholics alike. We would like to make the following points:

Firstly, the Declaration does not give Catholic priests the permission to bless same-sex marriages. This is clear from the following statements in the Declaration. In the introductory paragraph, the document says, “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 Declaration also defines marriage as the “exclusive, stable, and indissoluble union between a man and a woman, naturally open to the generation of children” (par. 4). It adds that it is only in the context of marriage “that sexual relations find their natural, proper, and fully human meaning”.

Secondly, the Declaration notes that there are several occasions when people spontaneously ask for a blessing (prayer), whether on pilgrimages, at shrines, or even on the street when they meet a priest. The Declaration makes a distinction between liturgical (sacramental) blessings and pastoral blessings which may be given to persons who desire God's loving graces in their lives. The Declaration says that these pastoral blessings “are meant for everyone; no one is to be excluded from them” (par. 28). It also notes that 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” (par. 38).

Thirdly, in view of the statement that no one should be excluded from these blessings, the Declaration deals with 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”. The Declaration notes 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 between a man and a woman 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 Declaration says that to avoid “any form of confusion or scandal”, when a couple in an irregular situation or same-sex couples ask for a blessing, it “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” (par. 39). Thus, according to the Declaration, in imparting blessings on people outside the context of marriage, the blessing must be a simple one and must avoid any elements that remotely resemble a marriage rite.

The blessing which the Declaration says could be given to everyone refers to prayers that people may request for. For those in the state of sin, the prayers are meant to lead them to conversion. Therefore, the prayers for persons in same-sex relationships are not intended to legitimize their way of life, but to lead them on the path of conversion (cf. paragraphs 38, 42-45).

In conclusion, we wish to reiterate that priests cannot bless same-sex unions or marriages.

*“May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23)*



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