



DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH
THE BISHOP'S OFFICE



Pastoral Letter

**To All Priests, Deacons, Seminarians, Religious Men and Women, and Faithful Laity
of the Diocese of Fort Worth**

December 21, 2023

Optional Memorial of Saint Peter Canisius

Dear Friends in Christ,

On December 18, 2023, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a Declaration with the title *Fiducia Supplicans*, on “The Pastoral Meaning of Blessings.” One controversial part of the document has to do with the possibility of blessing people who are in “irregular” or “same sex” unions.

Catholics, and people generally, confused by the mainstream media as well as by sexual ideologues outside and within the Church and Catholic media, are asking whether this declaration has changed the Church’s teaching about marriage and sexual morality. In plain words, “Is it possible now to bless sin?” I urge you to read the entirety of the document to avoid the distortions fomented by the media.

Even though the document permits what was already permitted, because of the timing and context of its release, the meaning of the text has been exploited by revisionists of the authentic teaching of the Gospel handed down through the Apostles and their successors to the Church to promote what is morally impermissible: the sanctioning of objectively grave sin, disordered sexual acts, and the perversion of marriage and family life. It would be unconscionable for me as your bishop not to exercise my teaching office and offer the clarity of the Gospel to address this confusion over a matter so essential for the salvation of souls.

1. *Fiducia Supplicans* Does Not Change the Church’s Teaching on Marriage

No authority, civil or ecclesial, can alter the divine revelation (through natural law and positive revelation) the teaching of Jesus Christ Himself that informs the Church’s understanding of marriage and her witness to perennial truths about one of the essential pillars of civilization. In his responses to *dubia* posed by two Cardinals, dated July 11, 2023, the Holy Father identified the need to avoid recognizing anything as marriage that is not marriage. “Therefore,” the new declaration says, “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.”

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2. The Purpose of the New Declaration

What, then, has changed if anything? The document says 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.” The document expands the theology of blessing to make a distinction between blessings invoked liturgically within a rite and ceremony and blessings that are offered spontaneously and outside of a liturgy and ceremony.

The document states, that “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.*” Again, “for this reason, one should *neither provide for nor promote a ritual for the blessings of couples in an irregular situation.*” (Emphases added.)

So, what does the blessing of an “irregular” or “same sex” couple actually look like? The declaration itself says, “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.*” God’s will can never include objectively grave sin inherently contradictory of the Gospel and His design of the created order.

3. The Blessing Does Not Offer Legitimization

This leads to an important matter of concern. The declaration says, “[T]here 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.”

To repeat a text from the introduction, it is in this context, the document says 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.*” (Emphasis added.)

The spontaneous blessing given to such people “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.” (Presumably, then, a couple who openly ask for a blessing *as a sign of legitimization* of their irregular status could not be blessed.) *If a priest or deacon is morally certain that such a couple is seeking public legitimation for their irregular status, the priest or deacon must refuse to offer such a blessing.* This includes not only same-sex couples, but also cohabitating couples outside of marriage, couples openly and publicly known to be divorced and re-married civilly.

It is important to remember that a blessing is a prayer that something be used for God's service, such as an object, a home, a talent, or marriage vows. A sin cannot be used in God's service and therefore cannot be blessed. In the end, however, blessings are often requested by each of us when we are troubled and seek God's help in pursuing authentic life in the Gospel. In that context, with good faith and with proper intentions all around, the blessings of God should be generously given faithfully and not be withheld from His people, all of us sinners and in need of the grace of conversion.

4. Conclusion and Request for Prayers

In summation, *Fiducia Supplicans* exhorts each of us to rely on God's mercy and not to impose our own ideologies fraught with passion as demands upon God to endorse and to discharge. The document teaches that the Church's teaching on marriage, designed in God's order of creation and taught by Christ Himself, has not changed and cannot change. The document further teaches that persons in irregular unions or "same sex" couples can receive a blessing as individuals, if the blessing is *spontaneously* requested and administered, if it is done apart from any kind of ceremony or liturgy, if it is clearly sought and understood as not endorsing or blessing objectively grave sin, if it does not allude to any union between the individuals that would suggest marriage, if it offers petition for growth in Christian virtue and if it does not use the liturgical prayers and rites of the Church (e.g. the *Book of Blessings*, the *Rite of Marriage*).

Let us pray for Pope Francis who exhorts all of us to rely ever more deeply on God's truth and mercy. Please pray for me as your bishop entrusted unworthily with this apostolic ministry. Please pray for your priests and deacons called to serve. Pray for all people in irregular situations, that they may come to understand the truth, and live the truth with integrity and peace. During the upcoming Christmas season, when the dignity of human flesh is restored from the corruption of sin through the Incarnation and birth of Jesus Christ, true God and true man, when the sanctity and necessity of marriage and family life is revealed in the loving and pure example of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, and when the summons of the Savior is made as clear to us as it was to the Magi, we must all pray and ask for prayers for ourselves, for those who deliberately mislead, and for those who are misled through ideological manipulation of this document despite its claims to the contrary.

May the Divine Infant Jesus bless each of us with unity and harmony through the gift of the Peace that only He can offer. I remain,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Michael F. Olson

Most Reverend Michael F. Olson, STD, MA
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