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News Item

# With Pope Francis' encouragement, Vatican allows blessings for same-sex couples | RNS

By Claire Giangravé

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*Photo by Cottonbro Studio via Pexels.*

"VATICAN CITY (RNS) — With Pope Francis' encouragement, the Vatican's doctrinal office issued a document on Monday (Dec. 18) allowing Catholic priests to bless same-sex couples.

The document grants priests "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."

But the document cautions that any rites or prayers that may be confused with marriage, which the Catholic Church considers to be a sacrament exclusively for the union of a man and a woman, "are inadmissible" for same-sex couples. It adds that "the Church's doctrine on this point remains firm."

The document, signed by the recently appointed prefect of the Vatican's doctrinal office, Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, and approved by Pope Francis, broadens the understanding of blessings in the Catholic faith by detaching them from the liturgy and sacraments.

"When considered outside of a liturgical framework, these expressions of faith are found in

a realm of greater spontaneity and freedom,” the doctrinal statement read. “In this way, blessings become a pastoral resource to be valued rather than a risk or a problem.”

Those seeking a blessing do not have to undergo “an exhaustive moral analysis,” nor should they “be required to have prior moral perfection,” the document states.”

A hot-button issue for years, the question of blessings for same-sex couples has been pressed by clergy in Germany and other parts of Europe, who have demanded that the church allow the practice. Does Pope Francis’ declaration signify progress for the Catholic Church? Or is it an attempt to maintain the legitimacy of the church in the eyes of a changing world with the bare minimal concessions? In her other article on the subject, Giangravè is wary about reading too much into the declaration.

***“[T]he document, like many of Francis’ pronouncements on topics where doctrine clashes with culture war issues, hedges its seemingly progressive leap forward with assurances that nothing has really changed.”***

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