

To: The Priests, Deacons and People of God
From: Archbishop Paul D. Etienne
RE: Those seeking a blessing
Date: 12/24/23

Recently, the Dicastery (a Vatican Department) for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a Declaration:

Fiducia Supplicans
On the Pastoral Meaning of Blessings

Here is a link to the full document in English

<http://tinyurl.com/5n6j8pav>

or

<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2023/12/18/0901/01963.html#en>

The declaration is brief and quite instructive and self-explanatory. The introduction makes clear the subject matter and intent:

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 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.

... 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.

So, it is clear that the Church will not be revising any liturgical books nor drafting some new form of liturgical blessing for these requests for blessings.

(over)

Every priest and deacon experiences the pastoral situation in which they are approached, most often after Mass, by individuals who seek a blessing. These moments are not scripted, nor advertised ahead of time, they are simply a spontaneous expression of faith of God's people who share a pastoral need and request a prayer and or blessing. It seems clear this is the context which today's declaration addresses. Thus, a helpful section of today's declaration follows:

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

I hope this is helpful. May our diaconal and priestly ministry continue to accompany God's faithful people and help them to know God's unconditional love and mercy in their lives.

In the spirit of Advent hope and peace, I remain,

In The Heart of Christ,

Archbishop Paul D. Etienne