



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

December 21, 2023

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

On Monday, December 18, 2023, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a document, entitled *Fiducia supplicans*, on the pastoral meaning of giving blessing. The part that attracted the greatest interest was the third section of the document. It deals with the blessing of couples in irregular situations and couples of the same sex.

If you listen to the media and read the various statements from individual bishops and a number of Bishops' Conferences, you see that there are different interpretations of *Fiducia supplicans*. Some are calling it a 'revolution' in pastoral practice.

Given that these varied interpretations are creating scandal and confusion for many, I wish to take a brief moment to share what I believe this document is saying to clergy and laity in the Diocese of St. Catharines.

In the preamble to the document, Cardinal Fernandez, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, makes a statement that is open to ambiguity. He states: "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".

The confusion lies the phrase "the possibility of blessing couples in irregular and same-sex couples". Is he actually saying that you can bless these couples living in an irregular situation?

I ask this because, as you continue to read the document, the Cardinal states, "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" (FS 38).

Cardinal Fernandez is making a distinction between a ritual blessing and a pastoral blessing that provides closeness to individuals seeking God's help. He also acknowledges the difference between blessing a person and blessing a couple. For pastoral reasons, a couple living in an irregular marriage or are in a same sex relationship, can be blessed as individuals who are seeking God's help and mercy in their lives. This request should be spontaneous and motivated by a spirit of repentance and a desire for conversion. It should never be requested in order to seek approval of their lifestyle.

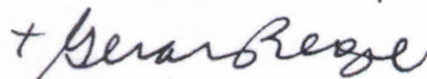
The reason why the couple cannot be blessed can be found in an earlier response from the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. We read, "it is not licit to impart a blessing on relationships, or partnerships, even stable, that involve sexual activity outside of marriage, as in the case of unions between persons of the same sex" (Responsum of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, March 15, 2021).

Another reason can be found in *Fiducia supplicans* itself. Cardinal Fernandez states, "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." (FS 4)

*Fiducia supplicans* is not demanding that every priest and deacon bless same-sex couples or those living in an irregular situation. It is saying that we continue to be open to those persons who humbly approach us seeking mercy and conversion in order to embrace true friendship and chastity. I believe that this is simply being faithful to the eternal teaching of the Church that has always blessed the sinner and never blessed sin.

With assurances of my prayers and best wishes, I remain,

Yours sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Gerard Bergie", with a small cross symbol to the left of the first letter.

Most Reverend Gerard Bergie, D.D.  
Bishop of St. Catharines