



## Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. Jn 3:16

On the 18th of December 2023, the Dicastery of Doctrine and Faith released, with the approval of Pope Francis, a document entitled "Fiducia Supplicans", offering an extended interpretation of Blessing that may include the blessing of people in irregular situations.

This has given rise to speculations as to whether the Church is now beginning the route to allow same-sex marriages.

### 1. Marriage Remains exclusive between a man and a woman.

The document makes it clear that it is not putting forward a change of doctrine about marriage to include people of the same sex. It reaffirms marriage as an "exclusive, stable, and indissoluble union between a man and a woman, naturally open to the generation of children" (4)

It also affirms that "only those sexual relations that are lived out within marriage are morally licit (11). It rules out any blessing, "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" (11). Thus, not even a situation of cohabitation between heterosexuals is considered marriage.

### 2. Love of all

What the document is affirming is that nobody is outside God's grace, and couples living in same-sex unions may not be denied a blessing when they spontaneously request it. Such a blessing is seen as an opportunity to avail oneself of God's mercy with a potential for conversion and openness to God's will and direction.

The blessing is done with the hope of conversion and does not equate to approving a way of life contrary to God's law. For this reason, the document clarifies that the blessing must not be done in such a way as to give the impression that it legitimises same-sex unions or other irregular unions by using ritual and liturgical blessings. Simple and spontaneous forms of blessing may instead be used.

### 3. Pastoral Guidance

The document offers suggestions for when and how the blessings might be given (40). The Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference will guide further on how such a blessing may be requested and granted to avoid the confusion the document warns against. In the meantime, the suggestions offered by the declaration may be taken as a guide with prudence.

It remains the position of the Church that all people, regardless of their sexual orientation, must be treated with the dignity that they deserve as God's children, made to feel welcome in the Church and not be discriminated against or harmed. In the same breath, we reaffirm the call to all to embrace the virtue of chastity according to one's state of life and that morally acceptable sexual activity is between a married man and woman in an indissoluble union with openness to the generation of children.

As the bishops of Kenya stated in their response to the declaration, "Evangelisation is a journey, and each makes this journey at his or her pace, aided by the grace of God and the intercession and ministry of the Church". Our hope in God, "who came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Mt.9:13), is that even "through a pastor's simple blessing, which does not claim to sanction or legitimise anything, people can experience the nearness of the Father, beyond all "merits" and "desires" (34).

May the coming celebration of God coming to dwell with us inspire and lead to loving and peaceful relationships among us and nations.

Bishop Sithembale Sipuka  
SACBC President  
21 December 2023

