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Blessing Services for *Irregular Couples*

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Abstract

In the Catholic Church in Germany, there has been a long-standing discussion about the blessing of couples who have not formalised their union through the sacrament of marriage. Between the publication of the *Responsum ad Dubium* in February 2021 and *Fiducia Supplicans* in December 2023, and as a result of the *Synodaler Weg* within the Church (2019–2023), the concerns of couples who feel excluded and discriminated against by the Church came into focus. One possible way to include these couples in the community of the Church could be the official introduction of a liturgical celebration that would allow the Church to acknowledge and bless them. This article aims to provide an overview of the German Roman Catholic efforts to promote blessing services.

Keywords

Benediction | Blessing services | Liturgy | Catholic Church | Same-sex couples | Marriage | Homosexuality

The German Discussion on Blessing Services for *Irregular Couples*

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1 Introduction

This essay examines certain liturgical examples from Germany concerning the blessing of same-sex couples from a liturgical-theological perspective. Naturally, the German reflections are embedded in a broader cultural process of transformation in dealing with homosexuality and therefore cannot be viewed in isolation. The German promotion of blessing services for so-called *irregular couples* serves as a concrete example of how a local church engages theologically with magisterial statements concerning the recognition of these couples. It is particularly noteworthy that the *Synodaler Weg* (*Synodal Way*) in Germany has significantly intensified the debate on this issue.

The publication of the declaration *Fiducia Supplicans* on December 18, 2023,¹ sparked diverse reactions worldwide. Both Catholic and secular media – particularly in Germany – quickly interpreted the declaration as a kind of Catholic revolution.² LGBTQ+ issues are gaining greater visibility

¹ Cf. On the Pastoral Meaning of Blessings (18 December 2023). [↗](#)

² Cf. Richard STROBL, Vatikan-Revolution. Papst Franziskus erlaubt Segnung homosexueller Paare – unter Bedingungen (18 December 2023); [↗](#) Joachim FRANK, Vatikan erlaubt Segnung Homosexueller. Revolution von oben (18 December 2023); [↗](#) [KIRCHE+LEBEN], Theologen bewerten Erklärungen zu Segnungen. Sautermeister und Seewald: Vatikan-Ja, "wegweisend" und "bahnbrechend" (19 December 2023). [↗](#)

both in the Catholic Church and in German society. German initiatives and movements such as *#OutinChurch* and *#liebegewinnt* (“Love Wins”) campaign for a non-discriminatory Church that does not exclude individuals based on their sexual orientation. However, *Fiducia Supplicans* dampened expectations that the Church’s magisterium had enacted a revolutionary change.³

The declaration has garnered positive, negative, and mixed reactions. Particularly among conservative circles in the United States and in German-speaking regions of Europe, polemical responses vehemently criticised the magisterium of the Pope and his prefect, Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernández. These voices questioned the teaching authority of the Church as such and even accused the magisterium of heresy.⁴ The declaration, which according to many observers seeks to link pastoral-theological concerns with the *Responsum ad Dubium*, has been critically received by these groups. Currently debated issues in society, such as sexual diversity or changing concepts of the family, inevitably lead to tensions within the Church, creating an image of a divided Church regarding doctrine and practice.

In the context of *Fiducia Supplicans*, the focus lies primarily on the so-called *irregular situations*.⁵ The declaration accepts the marriage between a man and a woman as the only legitimate form of relationship, while all other forms are classified as *irregular* and therefore not in accordance with the Catholic understanding of marriage. Within the Catholic theological and ecclesiastical discourse in Germany, there have been demands to re-evaluate the sexual morality of the Church, as well as to create liturgical celebrations for alternative forms of relationships.

³ Cf. [KATHOLISCH], Erklärung des Glaubensdikasteriums sei kein Grund zum Jubeln. Knop und Kranemann kritisieren vatikanisches Segensdokument (15 January 2024);  Annika SCHMITZ, *Fiducia Supplicans*. Die 10-Sekunden-Regel, in: *HerKorr* 78/2 (2024) 9–10; Ewald VOLGGER, *Ermutung zum Segen*, in: *Gd* 58/8 (2024) 81–84.

⁴ Cf. Peter VREE, *Fiducia Supplicans*. A Fine Mess, in: *NOR* 91/3 (2024) 32–35; Michael CHARLIER, Schlechte Prognose für “*Fiducia supplicans*”, in: *UVK* 54/1 (2024) 93–96.

⁵ The term “irregular situations” appears five times in *Fiducia supplicans* (s. fn. 1).

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the efforts for reform and the criticism expressed in the process of the German *Synodaler Weg* (*Synodal Way*) – such as the Church’s magisterial prohibition of blessing same-sex and remarried couples – prompted Rome to publish *Fiducia Supplicans*. That aside, it can hardly have escaped the Vatican’s notice in recent years that other Christian churches have already introduced blessing services for same-sex couples.⁶ It is worth noting that Pope Francis, the Vatican, and bishops from other regions of the world have expressed critical concern regarding the aims and resolutions of the *Synodaler Weg*.⁷ The declaration provides a guideline on how the Catholic Church should approach the blessing of couples who have not entered into the sacrament of marriage. Regarding Church policy and theological controversies, the interpretation of the declaration as a reaction to the question of blessing *same-sex couples* is pivotal, even though the focus on *irregular couples* in general serves as a form of deliberate obfuscation. Although *Fiducia Supplicans* does not explicitly use the term *irregular couples*, the declaration does refer to couples in *irregular situations*. This suggests that it is, in fact, addressing *irregular couples* – i. e., forms of relationships not recognised or legitimised by Church doctrine, which is precisely what the term *irregular* implies. The axiom *lex orandi – lex credendi* indicates that no liturgy can be considered legitimate if it is performed in a context that contradicts the Church’s teaching.

Instead of using terms such as *irregular situations* or – more pointedly – *irregular couples*, this essay will refer to *same-sex couples* or *relationships* (or *partnerships*) from a neutral linguistic perspective, as they are the primary focus. According to the teaching of the Church, same-sex couples represent a subgroup of so-called *irregular couples*.

⁶ Cf. ch. 4.1.

⁷ Cf. [KATHOLISCH], Vier Bischöfe: Weltsynode und Synodaler Weg gehen nicht Hand in Hand (4 November 2024); [\[VATICAN NEWS\]](#), Franziskus äußert Sorge über Synodalen Weg in Deutschland (14 June 2022); [\[CNA DEUTSCH\]](#), Kardinäle und Bischöfe aus aller Welt kritisieren deutschen “Synodalen Weg” in Brandbrief (12 April 2022); [\[FRANZISKUS\]](#), Schreiben von Papst Franziskus an das pilgernde Volk Gottes in Deutschland (29 June 2019). [\[link\]](#)

First, this essay aims to illustrate the German discourse on the blessing of same-sex and other couples in the period following the publication of the *Responsum ad Dubium* and prior to the declaration *Fiducia Supplicans*. Second, liturgical examples from the discussion will be presented to illustrate how in Germany blessing services⁸ for *irregular situations* are made theologically plausible through prayers like the opening prayer and the blessing in particular. A dogmatic or moral theological evaluation plays a subordinate role, as only the classification of this topic from a contemporary and liturgical perspective lies within the scope of this paper. It should also be noted that the presentation of theological positions in support of recognising same-sex relationships – and by extension, homosexuality – as well as the promotion of liturgical blessing services, is intended to provide insight into the arguments put forward by advocates and the specific actions that characterise their approach in practice. This essay cannot offer a comprehensive treatment of critical voices; however, it is not my intention to give the impression that opposing arguments are being deliberately ignored or dismissed. Nonetheless, the thesis to be put forward is that Germany's engagement in this discourse – which is by no means exhausted – will continue to occupy the Vatican even after the publication of *Fiducia Supplicans*, and may ultimately lead to a definitive decision.

2 The German Approach

By means of selected examples, the media impact of various initiatives within the Catholic Church in Germany will be described very briefly in order to demonstrate that the publication of *Fiducia Supplicans* was, in a sense, also provoked by the German reaction to the *Responsum ad Dubium*. This German reaction is primarily shaped by the debates and resolutions of the *Synodaler Weg*, as well as by academic discussions of top-

⁸ In German, there are various terms for *blessing service*, such as “Segnungsgottesdienste”, “Segensgottesdienste”, “Segensfeiern”, or “Feier des Segens”. Additionally, the intended recipients are often specified, such as “für alle sich liebende Paare” (“for all loving couples”), “für Paare, die sich lieben” (“for couples who love each other”), “für queere Paare” (“for queer couples”), or specifically “für gleichgeschlechtliche Paare” (“for same-sex couples”).

ics such as sexuality, marriage theology, and the liturgical composition of blessing services for queer couples.

Firstly, a general contextualisation of the issue of homosexuality and same-sex relationships is provided within the framework of social and cultural processes of transformation. Secondly, some of the initiatives will be presented in more detail. Additionally, the academic reception will be explored, and, lastly, the resolutions of the *Synodaler Weg* will be discussed.

2.1 Homosexuality in Church and Society

According to the Archbishop of Kinshasa, Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo Besungu, homosexuality is a European rather than an African issue.⁹ Following the publication of *Fiducia Supplicans*, the *Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar* (SECAM) spoke out against the blessing of same-sex couples.¹⁰

A look at the statistics on tolerance toward homosexuality among Catholics supports the Cardinal's assessment: In the majority of African countries, Catholics largely reject homosexuality.¹¹ It should be noted that "homosexuality is much more tolerated in industrialised countries than in developing countries. The formerly communist countries of Eastern Europe tend to occupy a middle position."¹² According to recent research, it is surprising to note that "the acceptance of homosexuality has increased in international comparison, especially in countries where the majority of the population belongs to the Roman Catholic Church"¹³. This means that the majority of Catholics no longer agree with the teachings of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which rejects the practice of homosexuali-

⁹ Cf. [KATHOLISCH], Kardinal: Homosexualität ist Europas Thema, nicht Afrikas (2 July 2025). [↗](#)

¹⁰ Cf. SECAM, "No Blessing for Homosexual Couples in all Churches in Africa" (11 January 2024). [↗](#)

¹¹ Cf. Arno TAUSCH – Stanislaw OBIREK (eds.), *Globaler Katholizismus, Toleranz und die offene Gesellschaft. Eine empirische Studie über die Wertesysteme der Katholiken*, Cham 2022, 147–149.

¹² Ibid., 146.

¹³ Ibid., 143.

ty.¹⁴ However, it should be added that in countries where homosexuality is predominantly rejected by society, Catholics also tend to take a critical stance. In a global comparison it becomes evident that the majority of Catholics fundamentally accept homosexuality.¹⁵

One possible explanation for this development is that “a country’s level of development and the extent of its democracy are key drivers of the growing global acceptance of homosexuality”¹⁶. In international comparisons, Germany ranks among the countries where homosexuality is most widely accepted by society – following Andorra, Sweden, the Netherlands, and France.¹⁷ In this context, it is understandable that the Catholic Church in Germany takes a significantly different approach to the issue of homosexuality and the blessing of same-sex couples, given that homosexuality is already largely accepted in the broader societal circumstances. Nevertheless, in the past, homosexuality was criminalised and seen as a “perversion”¹⁸.

Looking back at the societal development of acceptance of homosexuality in the second half of the 20th century, it must be noted that the Catholic Church did not play a pioneering role in actively promoting the acceptance of homosexual lifestyles. In 1971, the Protestant Churches in Germany (*Evangelische Kirche(n) in Deutschland – EKD*) still expressed a critical view of homosexuality.¹⁹ Over time, this position changed – not least as a result of broader societal shifts. Within the Protestant Churches

¹⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 143.

¹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 147–151.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 146.

¹⁸ Cf. Stephan GOERTZ, Zwischen “himmelschreiender Sünde” und “Geschenk der Liebe”, in: *id.*, “Wer bin ich, ihn zu verurteilen?” Homosexualität und katholische Kirche, Freiburg i. Br. 2015, 189–194, and well as Michael MAYER – Michael SCHWARTZ (eds.), *Verfolgung – Diskriminierung – Emanzipation. Homosexualität(en) in Deutschland und Europa 1945 bis 2000*, Berlin – Boston 2023.

¹⁹ Cf. Klaus FITSCHEN, Homosexualität und evangelische Kirche in den 1960er Jahren, in: Claudia LEPP et al. (eds.), *Religion und Lebensführung im Umbruch der langen 1960er Jahre (AKZG 65)*, Göttingen 2016, 335–346, here: 335.

themselves, initiatives emerged advocating for greater acceptance of same-sex relationships.²⁰ In 1996, the EKD published an *Orientierungshilfe* ("guide") on the topic of homosexuality, in which it acknowledged its own share of responsibility for the discrimination against homosexual individuals.²¹ The intensive theological reflection within the EKD ultimately led to a fundamental acceptance of homosexuality – although individual regional churches and congregations may have different regulations regarding the blessing of same-sex relationships.²² When the *Ehe für Alle* ("marriage equality" or "same-sex marriage") was introduced by German legislation in 2017, the Independent Evangelical-Lutheran Church (*Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche* – SELK) in Germany expressed its opposition to same-sex marriage on the basis of a theology of creation.²³ In the Old Catholic Diocese in Germany, blessing services for same-sex couples have been largely accepted and liturgically regulated since the 1990s, following intensive debates and the official liturgical documentation introduced in 2003. In 2014, the ritual for the *Feier der Partnerschaftssegnung* ("Celebration of the Partnership Blessing") was established. On

²⁰ Cf. Klaus FITSCHEN, *Homosexualität als Thema kirchlicher Öffentlichkeit. Diskursive Entwicklungen im deutschen Protestantismus in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, in: Michael MAYER – Michael SCHWARTZ (eds.), *Verfolgung – Diskriminierung – Emanzipation. Homosexualität(en) in Deutschland und Europa 1945 bis 2000*, Berlin – Boston 2023, 153–166.

²¹ Cf. FITSCHEN, *Homosexualität und evangelische Kirche*, 335.

²² For a comprehensive analysis cf. Klaus FITSCHEN, *Liebe zwischen Männern? Der deutsche Protestantismus und das Thema Homosexualität* (CuZ 3), Leipzig 2018. On the debate surrounding the blessing of same-sex relationships in the Protestant Churches cf. Julia KNOP, *Segnen, was Gott geschaffen hat. Dogmatisch-theologische Überlegungen zur Benediktion gleichgeschlechtlicher Partnerschaften*, in: LJ 71 (2021) 255–272, here: 259 f. To mention a few liturgical examples, cf. EVANGELISCHE KIRCHE VON WESTFALEN, *Segnungsgottesdienst für Paare in eingetragener Lebenspartnerschaft*, Bielefeld 2015; LUTHERISCHE KIRCHE IN BAYERN, "Nehmt einander an, wie Christus euch angenommen hat". *Handreichung zur Segnung gleichgeschlechtlicher Paare in der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Bayern*, Munich 1999.

²³ Cf. KNOP, *Segnen*, 260; [SELK], *Stellungnahme zur "Ehe für alle"* (29. Juni 2017). [↗](#)

November 13, 2021, the 62nd Ordinary Synod of the Old Catholic Diocese in Germany decided to grant same-sex relationships blessings full legal and liturgical equivalence.²⁴

Outside of Germany, various Protestant Churches have introduced the blessing of same-sex partnerships or the so-called *Ehe für Alle* as well. However, examples include countries such as Switzerland,²⁵ England

²⁴ Cf. KNOP, Segnen, 260; [ALT-KATHOLISCH], Alt-Katholische Synode beschließt Gleichstellung von Partnerschaftssegnung und Ehe (13. November 2021). [↗](#)

²⁵ The *Ehe für Alle* was officially introduced in Switzerland on 1 July 2022. A year earlier, a clear majority of over 64% of the Swiss population had voted in favour of opening marriage to same-sex couples in a national referendum. Cf. Jonas GLATTHARD, Schweiz sagt "Ja, ich will" zur Ehe für alle (26 September 2021); [↗](#) [SRF], Ehe für alle in der Schweiz (20 March 2023). [↗](#) However, a significant step towards equality had already taken place in 1995: in the Protestant Nydegg Church in Bern, the first blessing service for a same-sex couple was held. For more information cf. David PLÜSS – Isabelle NOTH, Fürbitten, segnen oder trauen? Analysen 25 Jahre nach der ersten Segnung eines schwulen Paares in der Schweiz, in: Michael U. BRAUNSCHWEIG et al. (eds.), Gleichgeschlechtliche Liebe und die Kirchen. Zum Umgang mit homosexuellen Partnerschaften, Zürich 2021, 121–142. The *Liturgie- und Gesangsbuchkonferenz der Evangelisch-reformierten Kirche der deutschsprachigen Schweiz (LGBK)* ("Liturgical and Hymnbook Conference of the Evangelical Reformed Churches in German-speaking Switzerland") published a document on its website entitled "Zehn Bausteine zur Segnung gleichgeschlechtlicher Paare" ("Ten Building Blocks for the Blessing of Same-Sex Couples"), compiled from a variety of sources. Cf. LGBK, Zehn Bausteine zur Segnung gleichgeschlechtlicher Paare (no date). [↗](#) Since the legalisation of same-sex marriage, the *Christkatholische Kirche* ("Christian Catholic Church") in Switzerland has also made it possible for same-sex couples to marry in church. Blessing ceremonies had already been practised there since 2007. Cf. [KATHOLISCH], Schweiz: Christkatholische Kirche führt "Ehe für alle" ein (12 June 2022). [↗](#) By comparison, the Roman Catholic Church in Switzerland lags behind in recognising same-sex couples. Although blessing services have been carried out discreetly since 2015, they remain unofficial. Following the publication of the *Responsum ad Dubium*, there was a noticeable increase in such blessings – as in Germany – as a form of protest against the Vatican's stance. Cf. David SARASIN, Katholische Segnung für queere Paare in Zürich

(United Kingdom),²⁶ and Italy.²⁷ Overall, the way in which homosexuality and the desire for recognition of diverse relationships in liturgical celebrations are addressed is not a uniquely German phenomenon but a global one – regardless of secular or religious contexts. It is clear that the theological debates surrounding same-sex relationships and the creation of liturgical forms are also of great importance for the Roman Catholic Church.²⁸ It must address this issue in order to find new answers in the face of critical questions and the rejection of the traditional view of marriage and homosexuality.

(11 May 2021). [↗](#) Christian VON ARX, Auch Schwule und Lesben bitten um Segen, aber nicht bei der Kirche (23 February 2015). [↗](#)

²⁶ Since 2013, same-sex marriages have been legal in the United Kingdom. Cf. UK PARLIAMENT, The Law of Marriage (no date). [↗](#) In response, some Anglican Churches opened up church weddings to same-sex couples – while the Church of England continued to struggle with the issue theologically. Cf. Rémy BETHMONT, Blessing Same-Sex Unions in the Church of England. The Liturgical Challenge of Same-Sex Couples' Demand for Equal Marriage Rites, in: *Journal of Anglican Studies* 17 (2019) 148–167. It was not until 17 December 2023 that this began to change. Cf. [KATHOLISCH], Church of England. Segnungen homosexueller Paare ab Sonntag (13 December 2023). [↗](#)

²⁷ The *Chiesa Evangelica Valdese* (“Waldensian Evangelical/Protestant Church”) in Italy approved the *Benedizione di unioni di coppie dello stesso sesso* (“blessing of same-sex couples”) at its synod in 2015. Cf. CHIESA EVANGELICA VALDESE, Benedizione di unioni di coppie dello stesso sesso (August 2015). [↗](#) While the same-sex marriage does not yet exist in Italy, same-sex couples can enter into a registered civil partnership (“unione civile”). The practice of blessing same-sex couples was, in effect, not widespread in the Catholic Church in Italy and, where it did occur, took place discreetly – as Italian pastoral worker Father Pino Piva noted in an interview following the publication of the *Responsum ad Dubium*. Cf. [KATHOLISCH], Homosexuellen-Seelsorger: Mit dem Vatikan-Nein explodiert das Thema (28 March 2021). [↗](#)

²⁸ At this point, reference may be made by way of example to the Catholic Church in Belgium. Following the *Responsum ad Dubium*, the Flemish bishops published a guideline for the blessing of same-sex couples. Cf. DE VLAAMSE BISCHOPPEN, Homoseksuele personen pastoraal nabij zijn (20 September 2022). [↗](#)

The developments within the Catholic Church in Germany cannot, therefore, be viewed in isolation but are part of a theological dialogue in an ecumenical sense²⁹ – even if this is significantly more difficult for individual members of the Roman Church due to the universal Church’s magisterium. This does not mean that German Catholics who campaign for equal rights for LGBTQ+ people within the Church look enviously at their sister churches. Rather, they see it as an incentive to facilitate change within their own church in order to take a more developed anthropological-theological view of forms of relationships, such as same-sex partnerships.

2.2 *Initiatives by faithful Catholics*

The initiative *#liebegewinnt* emerged as a movement as a direct result of to the *Responsum ad Dubium* from the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2021.³⁰ On May 10, 2021, several same-sex couples had been blessed during a Catholic service in Munich – a historic event.³¹ In Germany, many Catholic priests and pastoral workers joined the initiative to offer blessing services for all couples, regardless of their sexual orientation, at various locations. This was the first action for 2021; a second one followed in 2022.

The official website publishes dates and locations for the blessing services to invite as many people as possible. No further service dates for 2023, 2024 and 2025 are currently listed.³² To support the planning and implementation of blessing services, *#liebegewinnt* provides materials in PDF format for free use.³³ Although there is a *#liebegewinnt* page on YouTube, it currently only contains a few videos and is rarely updated.³⁴ The initiative *#liebegewinnt* has been publicly recognised and welcomed for its service actions; various media formats have reported on it.³⁵ Be-

²⁹ An issue to which Julia Knop draws attention, cf. KNOP, Segnen, 259–264.

³⁰ Cf. [LIEBEGEWINNT], Statement (no date). [↗](#)

³¹ Cf. [DOMRADIO], Wie die Aktion “Liebe gewinnt” entstand (9 May 2022). [↗](#)

³² Cf. [LIEBEGEWINNT], Gottesdienste (no date). [↗](#)

³³ Cf. –, Material (no date). [↗](#)

³⁴ Cf. –, [Videos] (21 April 2021). [↗](#)

³⁵ Cf. Elsa BARTELT, #Liebegewinnt. Katholiken vs. Vatikan (10 May 2021); [↗](#)

yond *#liebegewinnt*, numerous examples of different blessing services can be found on YouTube, either uploaded afterward or even streamed live.

The *#OutinChurch* initiative is a coalition of queer individuals who are professionally or voluntarily active within the Catholic Church in Germany. In collaboration with the public broadcaster ARD, a television documentary was produced, which was aired on January 24, 2022, on the channel *Das Erste*.³⁶ In this documentary, over one hundred queer employees of the Catholic Church in Germany appeared in public and postulated a reform of the ecclesiastical labour law so that they would no longer have to fear disciplinary actions. An online petition was launched for this purpose.

As a result of this campaign, the initiators published the book *Out in Church – Für eine Kirche ohne Angst* (“Out in Church – For a Church Without Fear”) to portray everyday life of many queer people in the Catholic Church.³⁷ In November 2022, the German bishops consented to a reform of the ecclesiastical labour law. Through this reform, it was agreed that from now on “the essentials of private life, especially relationships and forms of intimacy, should not be subjected to value judgements and sanctions”³⁸.

In the official statement of *#OutinChurch*, published in several languages on the website, the amendments demanded from the Church have been clearly articulated. One of these demands is the establishment of

[SPIEGEL], Katholische Geistliche segnen homosexuelle Paare – und lösen Debatte aus (10 May 2021); [\[EVANGELISCH\]](#), Große Resonanz auf bundesweite Aktion *#liebegewinnt* (10 May 2021). [\[1\]](#)

³⁶ Cf. [QUEER], Massen-Coming-out in der katholischen Kirche (24 January 2022). [\[2\]](#) In Germany, the documentary accessible in parts via the ARD Mediathek.

³⁷ Cf. Michael BRINKSCHRÖDER et al. (eds.), *Out in Church. Für eine Kirche ohne Angst*, Freiburg i. Br. 2022. The book is also available via Open Access.

³⁸ DEUTSCHE BISCHOFSKONFERENZ, Grundordnung des kirchlichen Dienstes (22 November 2022), Article 7(2), p. 5. [\[3\]](#) Original: “Der Kernbereich privater Lebensgestaltung, insbesondere Beziehungsleben und Intimsphäre, bleibt rechtlichen Bewertungen entzogen.”

blessing services specifically for members of the LGBTQ+ community: “Further, the Church must express in its rites and celebrations the fact that LGBTQ+ persons, whether living alone or in relationship, are blessed by God and that their love bears manifold fruits. This includes at least the blessing of same-sex couples who ask for such a blessing.”³⁹

Through the collaboration across various parishes in the Rhine area, a working group under the name of *Regenbogenkirche* (“Rainbow Church”) was formed in the Archdiocese of Cologne in spring 2022. The *Regenbogenkirche* aims to include everybody, irrespective of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Respect and equality are the guiding principles of this movement.⁴⁰

The work of the *Regenbogenkirche* consists of various activities, such as the dissemination of information and education, as well as the organisation of blessing services for all loving couples. These services are professionally organised by full-time staff members.

In March 2023, a Catholic priest and member of this initiative celebrated a *Segnungsgottesdienst für alle liebenden Paare* (“Blessing service for all loving couples”). After having been anonymously reported to Rome, Rainer Maria Woelki, Cardinal Archbishop of Cologne, disciplined the priest and gave the order not to celebrate such blessing services anymore.⁴¹

Nevertheless, the working group remained committed to their beliefs. After Cardinal Woelki had reaffirmed his opposition to blessing services for same-sex couples in August 2023,⁴² various activists, including

³⁹ [OUTINCHURCH], Manifest (24 January 2022). [↗](#) Original: “Weiter muss die Kirche in ihren Riten und Feiern zum Ausdruck bringen, dass LGBTIQ*+ Personen, ob alleine oder in Beziehung lebend, von Gott gesegnet sind und dass ihre Liebe vielfältige Früchte trägt. Hierzu zählt mindestens auch die Segnung gleichgeschlechtlicher Paare, die um einen solchen Segen bitten.”

⁴⁰ Cf. [REGENBOGENKIRCHE], Wer wir sind (no date). [↗](#)

⁴¹ Cf. Joachim HEINZ, Irritationen über Umgang mit Homosexuellen im Erzbistum Köln. Kardinal Woelki maßregelt Pfarrer nach Segensfeier für Liebende (30 July 2023). [↗](#) For impressions of the blessing service cf. Andrea LAUER – Maximilian BRÖHL, Liebe unterm Regenbogen. Segnungsgottesdienst am 26.03.2023 (28 March 2023). [↗](#)

⁴² Cf. Thomas JANSEN, Pfarrer kritisieren Woelkis Verbot von Segnungsfeiern

Regenbogenkirche, organised and celebrated a public blessing service in front of Cologne Cathedral in September 2023. This event was specifically arranged for same-sex couples, but open to everybody else seeking a blessing.

The impressions of this day were documented on the working group's website. The organisers explained that the warning to the priest had served as a trigger to celebrate this blessing service in Cologne.⁴³ The event was also taken up in public media.⁴⁴

2.3 *Academic Theology*

Not only in the process of the *Synodaler Weg*, German academic theology in its various disciplines had intensively addressed the question of establishing blessing services for same-sex couples, remarried divorcees, and heterosexual couples without sacramental connection.⁴⁵ Issues which have come up in academic discussion are, firstly, the theological significance of the blessing; secondly, possible forms for blessing services that could address the needs of the aforementioned couples. The blessing of same-sex couples is at the core of the discussion. Thirdly, the implemen-

für homosexuelle Paare (2 August 2023). [↗](#)

⁴³ Cf. [REGENBOGENKIRCHE], "Liebe ist Segen". Impressionen und Stimmen zum Segnungsgottesdienst 'All you need is love' für alle sich liebenden Paare in Köln (no date). [↗](#)

⁴⁴ For example, a report was uploaded to YouTube by the tv station RTL West. Cf. RTL-WEST, Katholische Segnung. Auch für Schwule und Lesben (21 September 2023). [↗](#) The celebration of the service was not undisturbed, since a small group of Catholics, who were obviously critical of the blessing service, demonstratively prayed the rosary in a loud voice, for example.

⁴⁵ Cf. Stephan Loos et al. (eds.), *Mit dem Segen der Kirche? Gleichgeschlechtliche Partnerschaft im Fokus der Pastoral*, Freiburg i. Br. 2019; Julia KNOP – Benedikt KRANEMANN (eds.), *Segensfeiern in der offenen Kirche. Neue Gottesdienstformen in theologischer Reflexion* (QD 305), Freiburg i. Br. 2020; Stefan DIEFENBACH et al. (eds.), *Paare.Riten.Kirche. Wenn eine katholische Trauung nicht möglich ist. Liturgische Beispiele gesammelt und kommentiert*, Paderborn 2020; Ewald VOLGGER – Florian WEGSCHEIDER (eds.), *Benediktion von gleichgeschlechtlichen Partnerschaften* (SKUL 8), Regensburg 2020.

tation of blessing services for same-sex couples in accordance with liturgical law.

It is obvious that the possibility of blessing same-sex couples requires a re-evaluation of homosexuality, which is seen as sinful and disordered according to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.⁴⁶ As a result, there are considerations for developing a *Beziehungstheologie* ("theology of relationship"), which excludes the sexual component of a partnership and instead focuses on the fundament of an earnest and respectful relationship. Birgit Mock writes that "sexuality is to be understood more broadly than the mere act of sexual union, as an event of eroticism and tenderness, as the realisation of being human and being created"⁴⁷.

This concept of a *Beziehungstheologie* would not be exclusively limited to same-sex couples. Thus, it has to be taken into account that the sacrament of marriage does not guarantee that a heterosexual couple is always blessed with children and that the aim of reproduction is always fulfilled in real life, too (*Zeugungstheologie*). The focus on marriage as an institution of procreation has already been revoked in the revised version of the Order of Celebrating Matrimony. The petition for offspring is no longer a mandatory element of the nuptial blessing.⁴⁸ While procreation represents a meaningful, blissful part in marriage, it is no longer a constitutive element, since childless marriages are now acknowledged as fully valid as well.⁴⁹ With the promotion of a theology of relationship, the question of procreation would become less important. Such a theology could be considered a first step towards establishing church blessing services for loving couples as liturgies which would be legitimate across all forms of relationships.

⁴⁶ Cf. CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, §2357–2359.

⁴⁷ Birgit Mock, Für eine Theologie der Beziehung, in: Stephan Loos et al. (eds.), Mit dem Segen der Kirche? Gleichgeschlechtliche Partnerschaft im Fokus der Pastoral, Freiburg i. Br. 2019, 117–125, here: 119.

⁴⁸ Cf. OrdoMatr²1991, 60 (17).

⁴⁹ Cf. Thomas SCHÜLLER, Gleichgeschlechtliche Partnerschaft und Kirchenrecht, in: Stephan Loos et al. (eds.), Mit dem Segen der Kirche? Gleichgeschlechtliche Partnerschaft im Fokus der Pastoral, Freiburg i. Br. 2019, 158–169, here: 159–162.

Ultimately, the entire discussion about the theological acceptance of homosexuality and the support of liturgical celebrations leads to a further developed theological anthropology – based on both biblical interpretations and human scientific results. The classical biblical passages (cf. Gen 19:1–29; Lev 18:22; Lev 20:13; Judg 19:22–25; Rom 1:26 f; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10) that supposedly condemn homosexuality are read today in light of historical-critical exegesis and cannot reflect today's idea of equal same-sex partnerships based on fidelity, responsibility and respect, as such relationship models were not known at the time the texts were written.⁵⁰

Precisely because the biblical texts do not recognise homosexuality in the way it is understood today, no conclusive evidence can be derived from them to support their use as arguments or even endorsements for affirming same-sex relationships. Nonetheless, a discussion on the evaluation of homosexuality and the associated same-sex partnerships is also being encouraged by critics.⁵¹ It should be mentioned, for the sake of completeness, that there are critics who fundamentally reject homosexuality and same-sex relationships and who, in their view, see this stance as consistent with Church teaching.

Liturgical scholar Harald Buchinger emphasises that the moral-theological assessment of same-sex couples does not fall within the area of liturgical studies or sacramental theology.⁵² From a liturgical point of view,

⁵⁰ For a helpful overview of recent developments in theological anthropology and the interpretation of biblical texts, cf. KNOP, Segnen, 264–269. Furthermore, cf. Udo RAUCHFLEISCH, Schwule – Lesben – Bisexuelle. Lebensweisen – Vorurteile – Einsichten, Göttingen 42011, 217–250; Thomas BAUER et al. (eds.), Religion und Homosexualität. Aktuelle Positionen (Hirschfeld-Lectures 3), Göttingen 2013.

⁵¹ Cf. PLANKGEZOGEN – DER PODCAST, Pater Karl über Homosexualität & Kirche: Ein ehrliches Gespräch über Segen & Sünde (8 May 2025) [🔗](#) Mario TRIFUNOVIC, Moraltheologie: Traditionelle Überlegungen zu Homosexualität überdenken (2. August 2024). [🔗](#)

⁵² Harald BUCHINGER, Nicht alles, was hinkt, ist ein Vergleich. Zur Segnung von Paaren, in: Stefan BÖNTERT et al. (eds.), Grenzgänge. Beiträge für eine Liturgiewissenschaft zwischen akademischem Diskurs, pluraler Kultur und kirchlichem Leben. Festschrift für Benedikt KRANEMANN, Münster 2025, 168–174.

Buchinger continues, the blessing of a relationship is not the defining feature of an ecclesiastical marriage between a man and a woman. He explains: "Not all Catholic marriages were blessed prior to the late 20th century, nor did the nuptial blessing [*Brautsegen*, MX] in the Roman tradition, before the most recent liturgical reform, constitute a blessing of the couple. It is only within the last fifty years, therefore, that any confusion between various forms of couple blessings and the act of marriage itself has become possible."⁵³

2.4 *The Synodal Way*

The tensions between the Roman Magisterium and the Catholic Church in Germany became palpable especially during the *Synodaler Weg* (2019–2023). The suggested reforms seemed hardly practicable without an adjustment of magisterial norms.

On March 10, 2023, the *Synodaler Weg* discussed a text entitled *Segensfeiern für Paare, die sich lieben* ("Blessing Services for Couples in Love"), with recommendations for further steps to be taken.⁵⁴ Thus, the document calls for the development of a guide (*Handlungstext*) for blessing services, on the basis of practical experiences. It includes both a pastoral-theological introduction and practical guidelines. The task of developing this guide was assigned to various stakeholders, including the *Deutsche Bischofskonferenz* ("German Bishops' Conference"), the *Zentralkomitee der deutschen Katholiken* ("Central Committee of German Catholics"), and members of the Synodal Forum. The range of blessing services should provide forms for the different kinds of couples who are to be included, with the service being led either by ordained ministers or appointed laypeople, but without obligation. Preparatory courses are recommended for interested couples.

The text *Segensfeiern für Paare, die sich lieben* also refers to the *Responsum ad Dubium* from the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith from February 2021. The *Responsum* rejects blessings for same-sex couples, while the German text argues that the *Responsum* is still insufficiently de-

⁵³ Ibid., 174.

⁵⁴ Cf. DER SYNODALE WEG, *Handlungstext. Segensfeiern für Paare, die sich lieben* (10 March 2023). [↗](#)

veloped within the framework of the global synod (2021–2024) and requires further theological editing. With this text, the Synodal Assembly aims to establish clarity in these issues.⁵⁵ The final report of the global synod from October 26, 2024, gives no hint whatsoever that this topic will be addressed.⁵⁶ This understatement corresponded with the fact that LGBTQ+ issues would not meet with a positive response from all members of the global synod.⁵⁷

In April 2023, the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für katholische Familienbildung* (“Committee for Catholic Family Education”) published an *Arbeitshilfe* (“Working Aid”) for testing blessing services for couples who are not bound together by sacramental marriage.⁵⁸ This aid can serve as a test of practicability and as a precursor to a future official guide (*Manuale*). The text justifies the promotion of blessing services for couples without the sacrament of marriage as an expression of appreciation for their partnership and as recognition of love as a divine intention. Rejecting them, the text argues, would violate the dignity of the affected individuals.⁵⁹

The text *Segensfeiern für Paare, die sich lieben* also refers to the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC), which allows for the creation of new liturgical forms at the level of local churches (cf. SC 22 §2).⁶⁰ Here, the opportunity for inculturation is empha-

⁵⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 6 (no. 14).

⁵⁶ Cf. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, For a Synodal Church. Communion, Participation, Mission. Final Document (26 October 2024). [↗](#)

⁵⁷ Cf. [KATHOLISCH], Warnung vor verstärkter Diskriminierung. Aktivist: Besser nicht über LGBTQ bei Welsynode sprechen (7 July 2024); [↗](#) [KATHOLISCH], Jesuit und Aktivist erwartet nichts Bemerkenswertes zu LGBTQ-Fragen. James Martin zur Welsynode: Wohl kaum Neues für queere Menschen (4 October 2024). [↗](#)

⁵⁸ Cf. ARBEITSGEMEINSCHAFT FÜR KATHOLISCHE FAMILIENBILDUNG, Arbeitshilfe. Die Feier des Segens für Paare (23 May 2023). [↗](#)

⁵⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 6–9.

⁶⁰ Cf. DER SYNODALE WEG, Segensfeiern für Paare, die sich lieben, 9–10 (no. 21–22). For further liturgical considerations cf. Thomas SCHÜLLER, Kirchenrechtliche Anmerkungen zur Segnung gleichgeschlechtlicher Paare – eine vorläufige Bestandsaufnahme, in: Julia KNOP – Benedikt KRANEMANN (eds.), Segensfeiern in der offenen Kirche. Neue Gottesdienstformen

sised in order to address the societal context in Germany, which also recognises relationships that deviate from the traditional concept of marriage between a man and a woman, such as same-sex partnerships, remarried couples, or heterosexual couples without marriage.

Overall, the document is supportive of the complex topic. Interestingly, a previous draft preceded the text, which contained stronger formulations and explicitly referred to a *demand* to officially enable blessing services for couples who do not have access to sacramental marriage. This draft called on the bishops to introduce blessing services as diocesan liturgy and explicitly spoke of a liturgical *manuale* rather than a guide, which would have formalised the implementation.⁶¹ The fifth synodal assembly of the *Synodaler Weg*, which is available on YouTube, shows that the *Handlungstext* was controversially discussed. It is clear that the compromise was particularly criticised by synodal representatives who had hoped for much more. Alongside factual and critical feedback, there were also emotional reactions.⁶²

In order not to jeopardise German-Roman relations entirely, the decision was made for the current official text, which takes a diplomatic approach. Nevertheless, expectations were tempered within the *Synodaler Weg* that an official liturgy would be developed and introduced in the short term.

Furthermore, reference should be made to the press release of 23 April 2025, which announced that the joint conference of the *Deutsche Bischofskonferenz* and the *Zentralkomitee der deutschen Katholiken* had adopted a *Handreichung* ("guide") dated 4 April 2025. This document is intended to allow for the practice of "blessing couples not married in the

in theologischer Reflexion (QD 305), Freiburg i. Br. 2020, 340–357, here: 344–349.

⁶¹ Cf. DER SYNODALE WEG, Synopse zur Vorlage des Synodalforums IV "Leben in gelingenden Beziehungen – Liebe leben in Sexualität und Partnerschaft" zur Zweiten Lesung auf der Fünften Synodalversammlung (9.–11.3.2023) für den Handlungstext "Segensfeiern für Paare, die sich lieben" (11 March 2023), p. 1 f. [↗](#)

⁶² Cf. DEUTSCHE BISCHOFSKONFERENZ, Fünfte Synodalversammlung des Synodalen Weges. Teil II (10 March 2023), from 4:57:45 to 6:41:00. [↗](#)

Church”.⁶³ It presents itself as an implementation of the resolutions of the *Synodaler Weg*, but falls short of expectations – for instance, regarding the development of a liturgical form. It lays the groundwork for a successful practice in the spirit of *Fiducia Supplicans*, but it does not carry any legal obligation. As will be demonstrated below, there are liturgical examples that provide for such blessings.

2.5 Interim Conclusion

Within the Catholic Church in Germany, the discussion about introducing blessing services for all loving couples, particularly same-sex couples, continues. The majority advocates for the recognition and promotion of such blessing services. Since this is an ongoing process, it is important to note that developments surrounding blessing services are not a completed phenomenon but are still in dynamic development.

However, the discussion about LGBTQ+ issues is by no means solely a German concern. On the global level, there are also figures advocating for the recognition and integration of LGBTQ+ individuals. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the global Church views the developments in the German Church with varying attitudes and expectations.

3 Blessing Services in Practice

In the Catholic Church in Germany, there is a diversity of different concepts for the design of blessing services for all loving couples. This diversity provides Liturgical Studies with a broad basis for representation, analysis, and evaluation.⁶⁴ As previously mentioned, the concept of blessing services for same-sex couples is not a topic specific to the Roman

⁶³ Cf. DEUTSCHE BISCHOFSKONFERENZ, Gemeinsame Konferenz verabschiedet Handreichung zu Segensfeiern (23 April 2025), [↗](#) as well as the guide DEUTSCHE BISCHOFSKONFERENZ, Segen gibt der Liebe Kraft. Segnungen für Paare, die sich lieben. Handreichung für Seelsorger*innen (4 April 2025). [↗](#)

⁶⁴ Liturgical scholar Benedikt Kranemann examined liturgical formulas with regard to blessing services in other Christian churches, cf. Benedikt KRANEMANN, Liturgiewissenschaft und ihre Aufgabe für ein neues kirchliches Ritual, in: Ewald VOLGGER – Florian WEGSCHEIDER (eds.), Benediktion

Catholic Church, but it must be understood within an ecumenical context, as other sister churches have also engaged with this issue. However, the examples from the sister churches will not be discussed in more detail below, as they would go beyond the scope of this essay. The remaining part will examine three Roman Catholic examples: the components of a blessing service from the initiative *#liebegewinnt*, liturgical approaches by *Ewald Volgger* regarding the benediction of same-sex couples, and the blessing service for couples designed by the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für katholische Familienbildung*.

3.1 Blessing Services by *#liebegewinnt*

The freely available materials for the celebration of a blessing service for all loving couples are provided to support the creation of a creative and individualised service. A document entitled *Bausteine für Segnungsgottesdienste* ("Modules for Blessing Services") offers components that can serve as inspiration for compiling a service. The elements discussed include the opening prayer/prayer of blessing, the blessing of a couple or benediction, and intercessions.⁶⁵

The opening prayer or prayer of blessing in particular sets the thematic focus of the service: the blessing of all loving couples:

Gott der Liebe,
 du hast in jede und jeden von uns deine Liebe hineingelegt,
 du schenkst uns die Erfahrung, dass unsere Liebe wächst,
 wenn wir sie teilen und weitergeben.
 Wir bitten dich für alle Liebenden und für alle Paare,
 die ihren Weg miteinander gehen.
 Für ihre Lebensgemeinschaft bitten sie um deinen Segen.
 Schenke ihnen, was sie von deiner Güte erhoffen,
 und schenke uns allen die Fülle deines Segens.
 Darum bitten wir durch Jesus Christus,
 unseren Bruder und Herrn,

von gleichgeschlechtlichen Partnerschaften (SKUL 8), Regensburg 2020, 129–160, here: 135–152.

⁶⁵ [LIEBEGEWINNT], *Bausteine für Segnungsgottesdienste* (no date).  The various elements provided by the initiative in the document come from other sources.

der in der Gemeinschaft des Heiligen Geistes
mit dir lebt und in uns Liebe weckt in Ewigkeit.
Amen.⁶⁶

The opening prayer is intentionally general and addresses all couples in a gender-neutral manner. God is referred to as the *God of Love* (“Gott der Liebe”), who emphasises the diversity of human love and is understood as the source of love, having endowed humanity with this gift.

The prayer praises God, whose love should grow and be shared between people, and asks for His blessing on all who love each other. Theologically, this request is unproblematic, as it emphasises God’s love and relationship with humanity in the reality of life. Acting in alignment with this love is understood as being in harmony with God’s will.

From an ecclesial perspective, however, the phrase *für alle Paare* (“for all couples”) raises questions, as it includes not only married couples but also other types of partnerships. While blessings for married couples are undisputed, the opening of the prayer invites an inclusive interpretation, which also embraces partnerships beyond the Church’s definition of marriage.

The blessing forms the climax of the service. As an example, a form of *benediction* is mentioned, which refers to the liberation of Israel from Egypt:

Menschenfreundlicher Gott
Du kommst uns Menschen in unserer Suche nach Glück entgegen. Du hast
ein offenes Ohr gehabt
für die Klage deines Volkes in der Unterdrückung Ägyptens.
Du bist Mensch geworden wie wir
in unserem Freund und Bruder Jesus Christus.
Er lebte ganz für das Wohl der Menschen.

⁶⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 1. Translation: “God of love, you have placed your love in each and every one of us. You grant us the experience that our love grows when we share it and pass it on. We pray for all who love and for all couples who walk their path together. They ask for your blessing on their life together. Grant them what they hope for from your goodness, and grant all of us the fullness of your blessing. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our brother and Lord, who lives with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit and awakens love in us, now and forever. Amen.”

Er gab der Liebe ein Gesicht,
 so leuchtend und hell, dass wir es immer vor Augen haben.
 Darum bitten wir dich jetzt:
 Lass dieses Licht leuchten
 in der liebenden Gemeinschaft aller Paare (bzw. von N.N. und N.N.)
 Gib ihnen Orientierung, wie du sie deinem Volk gegeben hast
 auf seinem Weg ins gelobte Land.
 Sei in ihrer Mitte, wie du in der Mitte deines Volkes bist
 von allem Anfang an.
 Und wenn ihr Weg in Dunkelheit gerät,
 dann erhellte ihn, wie du den Weg deines Volkes in der Gestalt einer Feuer-
 säule erhellt hast.
 Segne mit deiner göttlichen Gegenwart
 das Leben und die Beziehung der hier anwesenden Paare (bzw. von N.N.
 und N.N.),
 lass ihre Liebe reifen in einer Atmosphäre des gegenseitigen Verstehens.
 Schenke ihnen Offenheit im Gespräch und Gelassenheit im Zuhören.
 Gib ihnen den Mut zur Vergebung,
 wie du Vergebung gewährst allen, die dich darum bitten.
 Und erfülle sie mit der Kraft, füreinander da zu sein
 auch dann, wenn es schwierig ist.
 Liebender Gott,
 du bist immer für uns da
 in deinem Sohn Jesus Christus, unserem Bruder und Herrn,
 der mit dir und dem Heiligen Geist
 lebt und Leben schafft in Ewigkeit.
 Amen.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Ibid., 2–3. Translation: “God, friend of humankind, you come to meet us in our search for happiness. You listened with compassion to the cries of your people in the oppression of Egypt. You became human like us in our friend and brother, Jesus Christ. He lived entirely for the good of the people. He gave love a face, so radiant and bright that we always keep it before our eyes. And so, we pray to you now: Let this light shine in the loving union of all couples (or: of N.N. and N.N.). Guide them, as you once guided your people on their journey to the Promised Land. Be in their midst, as you have been in the midst of your people from the very beginning. And if their path leads into darkness, then shine your light upon it, as you once lit the way for your people in the form of a pillar of fire. Bless, with your divine presence, the lives and relationships of the couples gathered here (or: of N.N. and

The benediction invokes God as the companion of human life, with His role as a companion emphasised in two ways: In relation to the Old Testament, the liberation of Israel from oppression in Egypt is addressed, a central event that bears witness to God's saving action for His people. In relation to the New Testament, the incarnation of Christ, who is described as a *Bruder und Herr* ("friend and brother"), is referred to. In Him, God's love becomes visible and tangible.

The subsequent petition is a trustful appeal to God, asking that His love revealed in Christ may also be reflected in couples. This love is meant to provide guidance and lead them in their loving relationships. A parallel is once again drawn to the history of Israel: Just as God led His people through the desert to the Promised Land, the prayer asks that He also accompany the couples and lead them into a fulfilling and successful relationship.

There may be an implicit critique of the church's doctrinal approach to certain couples – those deemed *irregular* due to their life circumstances. The blessing service could offer comfort and direction to these couples, assuring them of God's support to overcome injustices and find a path to the happiness of a successful relationship. It becomes clear that in this context there is a situation of vulnerability. The key question is how the experience of injustice is interpreted.

In the specific petitions, depending on the context, prayers are either made generally for all couples or the names of individual couples are explicitly mentioned. The goal of the specific petitions is to foster a respectful coexistence through God's blessing, characterised by mutual forgiveness and understanding.

It is particularly noteworthy that the intercessions include prayers for the recognition of life realities that are not accepted by all people. The

N.N.). Let their love grow and mature in an atmosphere of mutual understanding. Grant them openness in their conversations and calmness in their listening. Give them the courage to forgive, just as you offer forgiveness to all who turn to you. And fill them with strength to be there for one another, even when times are difficult. Loving God, you are always there for us in your Son, Jesus Christ, our brother and Lord, who lives and gives life with you and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen."

couples experience exclusion and discrimination “weil sie von einer vermeintlichen Norm abweichen” (“because they deviate from a supposed norm”). At the same time, the intercessions express the trust that God blesses these forms of relationships as well.⁶⁸ The goal is for the *Geistkraft*⁶⁹ in society to promote acceptance, thus fostering diversity.

As possible ideas for the scripture readings, the following passages are suggested, among others: Gen 9:1,8–17; Gen 12:1–3; Num 6:22–27; Eccles 4:9–12; 1 Cor 12:31–13:8A; Eph 4:1–6; 1 John 3:18–24; 4:7–12; Matt 22:34–40; John 15:9–12. Especially the Johannine texts are suitable to emphasise that love for one another is of central importance – a theme that the blessing service aims to highlight.

3.2 *The Celebration of the Benediction of Same-Sex Partnerships*

In 2020, before the *Responsum ad Dubium*, liturgical scholar Ewald Volgger published a draft *Feier der Benediktion von gleichgeschlechtlichen Partnerschaften* (“Celebration of the Benediction of Same-Sex Partnerships”) with the aim to encourage both the ecclesial and theological research to analyse this draft.⁷⁰ In doing so, he consciously distances himself from existing approaches and explains why, according to his liturgical-theological assessment, a change to the *lex credendi* would be necessary in order to enable the celebration of same-sex partnerships in accordance with the *lex orandi*.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁹ With regard to gender equality, the *Heiliger Geist* (masculine form) – *Holy Spirit* is also referred to as the *Heilige Geistkraft* (feminine form) – literally, *Holy Spirit Power*, in German-speaking regions, which is based on the *rûah JHWH* in the Old Testament.

⁷⁰ Cf. Ewald VOLGGER, *Die Feier der Benediktion von gleichgeschlechtlichen Partnerschaften. Ein Entwurf*, in: ID. – Florian WEGSCHEIDER (eds.), *Benediktion von gleichgeschlechtlichen Partnerschaften* (SKUL 8), Regensburg 2020, 191–204, here: 191–193.

⁷¹ Cf. Ewald VOLGGER, *Sinngestalt und Sinngehalt einer möglichen Benediktion gleichgeschlechtlicher Partnerschaften. Ein liturgietheologischer Beitrag zur Pastoral*, in: Ewald VOLGGER – Florian WEGSCHEIDER (eds.), *Bene-*

His draft includes a pastoral introduction that outlines the meaning and structure of this celebration. Admission to the blessing requires baptism. Liturgically, Volgger argues that the grace of baptism makes it possible to bless same-sex couples. His focus is on a partnership within the ecclesiastical context.⁷²

The structure of the celebration is modelled after the celebration of matrimony.⁷³ It includes an inquiry of the partners to confirm that the partnership is entered into freely, as well as the exchange of rings after the blessing. Analogous to the solemn nuptial blessing in *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, Volgger envisions a *Feierliches Segensgebet* ("solemn blessing") for same-sex couples. A suitable collect from the missal is suggested; other elements, such as readings, a responsorial psalm, a gospel acclamation, and intercessions, are not addressed by Volgger, as these need to be specified when creating a liturgical form.⁷⁴ At this point, reference will be made only to the proposed *Benediktion*:

Gott und Herr, Schöpfer des Lebens und Quelle der Liebe,
zu Dir erheben wir unseren Lobpreis.
Du hast den Menschen nach deinem Bild geschaffen
und ihn befähigt, ein Bild deiner Liebe und Treue zu sein.
Durch dein Wort und die Propheten hast du dein Volk gelehrt,
das Herz nach deinem Willen zu gestalten
und dich und den Nächsten zu lieben wie sich selbst.
In deiner väterlichen Sorge und mütterlichen Liebe
begleitest du den Weg der Menschen
und förderst das Gute in ihren Herzen.
Du hast deinen Sohn in die Welt gesandt
und den Menschen ein Beispiel deiner Liebe gegeben.
Wo Menschen sich vom Weg der Güte und Liebe abwenden,
führst du sie auf deinen Weg zurück.
Wo Hass und Eigennutz um sich greifen,
heilst du das menschliche Herz in der Kraft deines Geistes.
Du hast die Menschen zur Gemeinschaft berufen

diktion von gleichgeschlechtlichen Partnerschaften (SKUL 8), Regensburg 2020, 161–190, here: 163.

⁷² Cf. *ibid.*, 170–173; cf. VOLGGER, *Die Feier der Benediktion*, 191–197.

⁷³ Cf. VOLGGER, *Die Feier der Benediktion*, 198.

⁷⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 203.

und rufst Männer und Frauen,
einander in Liebe zugetan,
ihren Lebensweg in Partnerschaft zu gehen.
Du nährst die Sehnsucht der Liebenden
einander Halt und Stütze zu sein.
Wo Menschen füreinander Sorge tragen,
zueinanderstehen und verzeihen,
des Anderen Last tragen,
wird deine Treue zu uns sichtbar.
Schau nun gnädig auf N. und N.
mit denen wir dankbar vor dir stehen
denn du hast sie zusammengeführt,
ein Zeichen deiner Liebe zu sein.
Sende auf sie die Gnade des Heiligen Geistes
und sei du selbst ihr Schutz vor allem Bösen.
Lass sie wachsen und reifen in gegenseitiger Treue
und in Zuversicht ihren Lebensweg gemeinsam gehen.
Möge ihre Liebe immer reicher werden
an Einsicht und Verständnis.
Hilf ihnen, ein Beispiel christlichen Lebens zu führen
und Verantwortung in der Welt zu übernehmen.
Schenke ihnen Offenheit für andere Menschen
und die Kraft, fremde Not zu lindern.
Am Ende ihres Weges führe sie in die Gemeinschaft deiner Heiligen,
zu dem Fest ohne Ende, das du denen bereitest,
die dich lieben.
Darum bitten wir durch Jesus Christus, deinen Sohn,
unseren Herrn und Gott, der in der Einheit des Heiligen Geistes
mit dir lebst und wirkt in alle Ewigkeit.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Ibid., 200–202. Translation: “God and Lord, Creator of life and source of love, to you we raise our praise. You created human beings in your image and enabled them to be a reflection of your love and faithfulness. Through your Word and the prophets, you taught your people to form their hearts according to your will and to love you and their neighbour as themselves. In your fatherly care and motherly love, you accompany the journey of humanity and nurture the good within their hearts. You sent your Son into the world and gave us an example of your love. Where people turn away from the path of goodness and love, you lead them back to your way. Where hatred and selfishness spread, you heal the human heart through the power of your Spirit. You have called human beings into community and you call

The *Benediktion* praises God as the Creator and source of all love, with the special relationship between God and humans being highlighted. The creation of humanity in God's image calls humans to love and faithfulness. Human beings are not only creatures but also bearers and transmitters of divine love. The partnership between humans reflects God's faithfulness and love. In the history of salvation, God's nature and action are described through characteristics such as Creator, source of love, educator, companion, saviour, and healer. In this understanding, every human partnership can be seen as protected by God's love.

Through the trinitarian structure of the text, God's infinite love becomes visible: The Father brings humans into existence out of love and calls them, as His image, to share this love. Christ provides guidance through the lived divine love, while the Holy Spirit strengthens and accompanies humans. Thus, the blessing leads, theologically, through creation and the Trinity, to the mission of passing on love, which is manifested in every partnership.

In Volgger's draft, this idea is concretely applied to same-sex relationships. The focus lies deliberately not on sexuality. However, the question arises as to how the passage "Du hast die Menschen zur Gemeinschaft berufen und rufst Männer und Frauen, einander in Liebe zugetan, ihren Lebensweg in Partnerschaft zu gehen" ("You have called human be-

men and women, joined together in love, to walk the path of life in partnership. You nourish the longing of those who love to be a support and strength for one another. Where people care for each other, stand by one another and forgive, where they bear one another's burdens, your faithfulness to us becomes visible. Now look graciously upon N. and N., with whom we stand before you in gratitude, for you have brought them together to be a sign of your love. Send upon them the grace of the Holy Spirit, and be yourself their protection from all evil. Let them grow and mature in mutual faithfulness, and walk their path in life together with confidence. May their love grow ever deeper in insight and understanding. Help them to live as an example of Christian life and to take on responsibility in the world. Grant them openness toward others and the strength to ease the suffering of those in need. At the end of their journey, lead them into the communion of your saints, to the unending feast you have prepared for those who love you. We ask this through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord and God, who lives and works with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever."

ings into community, and you call men and women, joined together in love, to walk the path of life in partnership”) is to be understood in the context of same-sex relationships. Volgger refers to the creational theology of human sexuality as described in Genesis 1. Humans – both men and women – carry the desire for a committed partnership within themselves.⁷⁶ Ultimately, the goal of every partnership is found in its eschatological dimension: participation in the never-ending feast.

3.3 *The Celebration of the Blessing for Couples*

The *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Katholische Familienbildung* has published an extensive guide designed to support the planning of blessing services at an interdiocesan level. In comparison to the elements of a blessing service by *#liebegewinnt*, this guide is significantly more detailed and can almost be considered as a liturgical manual. Entitled *Die Feier des Segens für Paare* (“The Celebration of Blessing for Couples”), it is aimed, as highlighted in the pastoral-theological introduction, towards all forms of partnership. This includes remarried divorced people, same-sex and queer couples, as well as couples who have not yet decided to marry. The blessing is understood as a strengthening of the partnership, not as an initiated *Verpartnerung* (“partnering”).⁷⁷

The guide distinguishes between a solemn and a simple form of the blessing service. Both forms follow the structure of the liturgy of the word (Holy Mass).⁷⁸ After the scriptural reading or homily, the blessing of the couple takes place. The main difference between the two versions lies in the degree of solemnity: while the formal version includes a dialogical prayer of blessing (*Feierliches Segensgebet*) between the presider and the assembly, the simpler form omits this, making it less festive.⁷⁹ Theoreti-

⁷⁶ This comment is based on a personal encounter with Ewald Volgger during a liturgical conference in Bochum in September 2024.

⁷⁷ Cf. ARBEITSGEMEINSCHAFT FÜR KATHOLISCHE FAMILIENBILDUNG, *Die Feier des Segens für Paare*, 5–11.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 12–13.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 16.

cally, a Eucharistic celebration could follow the blessing service, but it is not required.⁸⁰ No pre-written intercessions are provided.

In contrast to the *#liebengewinnt* initiative, the opening prayer is relatively simple, as it can be directly taken from the missal, which offers great flexibility. If the prayers from the missal are to be omitted, the guide suggests, for example, the following opening prayer:

Liebender Gott,
Du führst Menschen in Liebe zusammen,
dass sie ihr Leben miteinander teilen.
Sieh auf N. und N., die deinen Segen erbitten,
und erneuere dein ganzes Volk in deiner Liebe.⁸¹

In this prayer, God is actively referred to as a loving God who brings people together in love, and it emphasises that they should share their love with one another. The focus is on a successful relationship in love that the two individuals are meant to share, which is why they ask for God's blessing. The assembly is also invited to partake in God's love.

For the design of the blessing service, the guide draws on the *Benediktion* created by Ewald Volgger, which has been discussed earlier. Similar to the opening prayer, the appendix of the guide provides a selection of various prayers of blessing that can be chosen depending on the context. An example given here is *Selection D*, which stands out for its brevity compared to the other suggestions:

Lasst uns beten, Geschwister im Glauben,
zu Gott, unserem Vater,
und ihn um seinen Segen bitten für dieses Paar.
Er möge mit seiner Hilfe immer bei ihnen sein.
Heiliger Vater, Schöpfer der Welt,
du hast den Menschen
nach deinem Bilde geschaffen
und seine Gemeinschaft gesegnet.
Wir bitten dich für N.N. und N.N.,

⁸⁰ Ibid., 10.

⁸¹ Ibid., 20 f. Translation: "Loving God, you bring people together in love so that they may share their lives. Look upon N. and N., who ask for your blessing, and renew your whole people in your love."

die sich einander verbunden haben.
 Dein reicher Segen, Herr,
 komme herab auf N.N. und N.N.,
 und die Kraft des Heiligen Geistes
 stärke ihre Liebe zueinander.
 Gib ihnen die Gnade, dass sie in frohen Tagen dich loben,
 bei dir Trost finden in der Trauer,
 deine Hilfe spüren in der Not
 und bei all ihrem Tun deine Nähe erfahren.
 Steh ihnen bei,
 damit sie dir in der Gemeinschaft der Kirche danken
 und in der Welt Zeugnis für dich geben.
 Gib ihnen ein erfülltes Leben
 mit ihren Verwandten und Freunden
 und führe sie nach dieser Zeit zum ewigen Mahl bei dir.
 Darum bitten wir durch Jesus Christus, deinen Sohn,
 unsern Herrn und Gott,
 der in der Einheit des Heiligen Geistes
 mit dir lebt und wirkt jetzt und in Ewigkeit.⁸²

The presider invites the assembly to pray together for God's blessing upon the couple, asking for divine assistance. The reference to Genesis 1 recalls the creation of humans in God's image, without specifically addressing the sexuality of humans as male and female. Interestingly, God's blessing is understood in a somewhat gender-neutral way, focusing on the

⁸² Ibid., 44. Translation: "Let us pray, brothers and sisters in faith, to God our Father, and ask him to bless this couple. May he always be with them, supporting them by his help. Holy Father, Creator of the world, you made humankind in your image and blessed their community. We pray for N.N. and N.N., who have joined themselves to one another. May your abundant blessing, Lord, come down upon N.N. and N.N., and may the power of the Holy Spirit strengthen their love for each other. Grant them the grace to praise you in times of joy, to find comfort in sorrow, to feel your help in times of need, and to know your presence in all they do. Be at their side, that they may give thanks to you in the fellowship of the Church and bear witness to you in the world. Grant them a life filled with joy among their family and friends, and lead them, when their time is fulfilled, to the eternal feast with you. Through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord and God, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever."

interpersonal community. The prayer for God's blessing is made concrete by mentioning the couple's names. The love between the two partners is to be deepened through the gift of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, the prayer for God's assistance is extended to all situations of life. The couple is to feel strengthened by God's help, to commit themselves to the Christian faith, and to share their life together with those closest to them. The fulfilment of the couple's love is intended to culminate in their participation in the eternal feast. This heavenly banquet is understood as an expression of the fullness and perfection of God's love. The blessing thus serves as a concise summary of Volgger's proposal.

Regarding the suggestions for New Testament readings, there are similarities with the *#liebegewinnt* initiative (cf. 1 Cor 12:31–13:8A; Eph 4:1–6; 1 John 3:18–24; 4:7–12; Matt 22:34–40; John 15:9–12). Additionally, other texts from the New Testament are included, such as Rom 12:1–2, 9–18; Col 3:12–17; Heb 13:1–4A, 5–6B; Mark 10:6–9. In terms of the Old Testament, there are no direct parallels, but other passages are referred to, such as Gen 1:26–28, 31A; Gen 2:18–24; Ruth 1:14B–17; Prov 3:3–6.⁸³ Due to the variety of scripture readings, the celebration can be adapted to different types of couples and their backgrounds. For example, the Old Testament reading from Ruth 1:14B–17 is often used in practice for lesbian couples.

3.4 *Interim Conclusion*

The *#liebegewinnt* initiative proposes liturgical elements that can be used in a blessing service. There is significant room for flexibility in the design, as the content is kept open-ended. While this makes critical objections more difficult, it also means that no specific guidance is provided for practical implementation. The texts do not exclusively address married couples, as various forms of relationships are meant to be included.

The draft for the *Benediktion* for same-sex couples represents a concretisation aimed at establishing a legitimate form of worship that is recognised by the Church. This proposal arose from theological considerations and is intended to be developed further. The *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* has adopted Volgger's proposal as base text but does not intend it to be

⁸³ Cf. *ibid.*, 27–41.

used exclusively for same-sex couples. The working group's proposal sees itself as a response to the reality of people's lives and seeks a middle way that can find common ground among all parties within the Church. Unlike in Volgger's proposal, however, the idea of a legal partnership was not included. What stands out across the three liturgical formularies is that neither procreation nor the binary concept of gender is treated as foundational to partnership. Instead, the values of *Beziehungstheologie* take centre stage. All the more striking, then, is the shift in emphasis: not on the creation of humanity as male and female, but on the fact that each person is created in the image of God and is, by nature, oriented towards relationship. This makes it all the more evident that the newly developed liturgical texts embody an inclusive theological anthropology.

4 Conclusion

With the publication of *Fiducia Supplicans*, the Church's teaching authority has confirmed that the blessing of relationships in a liturgical context is not permissible. This upholds the *Responsum ad Dubium* from 2021. From this perspective, the German initiative to plan and implement blessing services is rendered obsolete. However, the declaration does consider the possibility of allowing blessings in a pastoral context – as a form of spontaneous blessing, where *irregular couples* could also be blessed.

For proponents of blessing services, this is problematic because it is difficult to convey to the affected couples, and the practical implementation remains unclear. From a liturgical perspective, it becomes apparent in Germany that the demand for a blessing in a liturgical context has not primarily arisen from Church authority but rather as a grassroots movement – driven by the initiatives of the faithful Catholics.

The discussion surrounding blessing services is closely linked to the recognition of homosexuality as a normative variation of human sexuality. In the context of a renewed theological anthropology, same-sex (as well as heterosexual) relationships embody key values emphasised in a *Beziehungstheologie* – such as love, respect, and responsibility – which are essential for flourishing partnerships. Consequently, such a theological emphasis would also influence the liturgy, so as to reflect the *lex credendi* appropriately.

The future will show how the Roman magisterium will respond to developments regarding the blessing of couples in so-called *irregular situations*. While *Fiducia Supplicans* claims to have addressed the questions, they remain practically unanswered. It is certain that further doctrinal discussions will take place, as theological work continues in Germany. It would not be an exaggeration to say that a *liturgische Bewegung* (liturgical movement) is emerging, aimed at seeking ecclesial recognition for various life realities concerning relationships and making these visible in worship services. Such ecclesial recognition requires a development of Catholic sexual teaching that shifts the focus from a procreative theology (*Zeugungstheologie*) to a relational one (*Beziehungstheologie*).

Abbreviations

AKZG	Arbeiten zur kirchlichen Zeitgeschichte
CuZ	Christentum und Zeitgeschichte
Gd	Zeitschrift "Gottesdienst"
HerKorr	Herder Korrespondenz
LJ	Liturgisches Jahrbuch
NOR	New Oxford Review
QD	Quaestiones disputatae
SKUL	Schriften der Katholischen Privatuniversität Linz
UVK	Una Voce Korrespondenz
SC	Sacrosanctum Concilium

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