Opinion
Letters to the Editor



by NCR Staff

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In December, NCR Vatican correspondent Christopher White reported that a new Vatican document officially declares it possible for Catholic priests to bless same-sex couples and divorced and remarried couples. NCR staff reporter Aleja Hertzler-McCain reported how theologians reacted to the news. In a guest opinion column, executive director of New Ways Ministry Francis DeBernardo said the Vatican document that allows blessings for same-sex couples is good news for both LGBTQ+ people and anyone who was marginalized or excluded by Catholic Church policies.

And NCR columnist Michael Sean Winters wrote, "No one knows if this step the pope has taken will prove to be the first of many steps or the last." Following are NCR reader responses with letters that have been edited for length and clarity.

For the LGBT community, this is a holiday gift of grace and love. But those who despise and reject us will continue to do so. I'm still haunted by words I heard decades ago from a priest, "This isn't a homo Church and it will never be one!" and, in the last year, "I just want all homosexuals obliterated."

RICH CRANK
Topeka, Kansas



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The Vatican tossed a few crumbs to gay Catholics in an act of Christian charity with the authorization of blessings of gay people. Many bishops felt the need to clarify the Vatican directive. We were told that there should be no ceremony replicating a marriage ceremony. We are told that this is not a blessing of a union but rather gay people would be blessed individually.

Catholics have really perfected hate. It's love that seems to be the greater challenge for many Christians. It was good when announced, but that good only lasted a few hours. It may be time to rethink where we spend our Sunday mornings. People who love their gay family members and friends are disgusted by this hate.

EDWARD MCCAREY MCDONNELL
Baltimore, Maryland

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The article written by DeBernardo validates Pope Francis allowing blessings of same sex couples — because as he reiterates what Francis says — God is a God of mercy and love for all of us.

But the church did not feel that way about divorced Catholics when my Italian immigrant father went through a divorce in the 1940s. He was not permitted to receive the Eucharist at Mass. Was God not the God of mercy and love then?

I recall as a child my father taking me to Mass every Sunday, but he remained in the pew during the distribution of Holy Communion. The church did not offer mercy and love to divorcees who were unable to afford the legal church fees to go through an annulment. This makes my heart grieve — for my dad and thousands of other divorced Catholics who wanted to receive Jesus in the Holy Eucharist but had to remain in their pews distinguished as sinners.

GLORIA FANTONE MAURER
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

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As a priest, I believe that rules and rubrics (though they have their place) must be set aside if goodness and acceptance are more needed. My experience has often brought me to people on the margins, people needing acceptance, mercy and God's unconditional love. There, I have met Christ.

Thirty years ago, a lesbian couple asked, "Would you ask God's blessing for us?" I was frightened by the request. But as I looked into their faces, I saw the beauty of two precious children of God. Love was so present as I raised my arms and bestowed God's blessing upon them.

I've long felt that it is by the guidance of the Holy Spirit that the church as we knew it is meant to fade away. I don't know what comes next. Still, the goodness with which all things right and just come into being is a goodness that remains.

My hope is lifted by the authenticity of Pope Francis who has set aside the rules so that God's blessing for same-sex couples (a blessing which has always been), may now be proclaimed, proudly and publicly. Here's to 2024 and the goodness that is yet to rise up.

GREGORY M. CORRIGAN
Kennett Square, Pennsylvania

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Pope Francis, our pope of mercy, authorized the declaration from the Vatican's doctrinal office allowing Catholic priests to bless same-sex couples, as well as divorced and remarried couples. But a significant number of bishops and other Catholic leaders in the U.S. greeted this pastoral decision with stinging criticism and cries of heresy. It brings to mind Matthew's Gospel: "At this, the high priest tore his clothes and declared, 'He has blasphemed! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy.'" On the other hand, when a major U.S. political leader in a "Christmas" message cursed and wished damnation on those who opposed him, there was a deafening silence. I think it's time to recalibrate our understanding of the Christian message.

ED MARTINEZ
Viroqua, Wisconsin

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I read Michael Sean Winters' Opinion piece until this point: "The delegates to the synod on synodality only left Rome a few weeks ago, unable to find any consensus on LGBTQ issues. So the pope's decision to strike out along a new path on his own authority, though perfectly within his authority, is nonetheless a reminder that synodality within the church of Rome will (co-)exist alongside hierarchy and papal primacy, not replace them."

False! He properly defines synodality, then goes off on a tangent. Synodality can't happen if a pope retains the full power to do as he pleases.

Francis has met with LGBTIQ+ people for years. Contact breeds familiarity and understanding. He also consults with clergy with longer and more intimate contact via ministry, like Fr. James Martin who attended the October Synod. Francis' review of the Synod documents in addition to impressions he got while in attendance and discussion with his synod advisors could have resulted in this blessing document. It's unlikely Francis made the decision alone.

The Holy Spirit has spoken, if only faintly, with Francis issuing an equally faint blessing.

The church under Pope Francis is adjusting its governance model from hierarchical to synodal. The church is in the early stages of a period of transition. The ultimate question remains: "What will happen to the synodal development of the church when Francis is no longer pope?"

MICHAEL J. MCDERMOTT
North Brookfield, Massachusetts

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Conservative, public reaction to Fiducia Supplicans was shallow and shameful. The talking heads of extreme, right-wing media ,who continue to have Pope Francis in their sights for his bold, humanitarian, global concerns, contribute strongly to the attempt to tarnish his pastoral brilliance while giving voice to his harshest clerical critics who seem convinced that Francis is an instrument of evil and endangers the church of which he happens to be supreme pontiff and divinely appointed as such.

The decision to allow for the blessing of gay couples may be difficult to swallow for some Catholics who have evolved no further than the Council of Trent. For others who regularly take the time to read inspired encyclicals, teachings and documents like Fiducia Supplicans, the latest edict involving the conditional blessing of gay couples and those in "irregular unions" is a refreshing counterpoint to the cruel, judgmental bias of some; an attitude that is surely a grief to our loving father, the Holy Spirit and Pope Francis.

NANCY MCGUNAGLE
Kalispell, Montana

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Pope Francis' vision of an open and welcoming church cannot succumb to the same prejudices which prevail in our wider culture since the church should serve as a respite from the worst effects of the negativity which many encounter. Although in the case of same-sex attraction, the growing consensus in our culture is one of acceptance. Churches need to reflect the positive attributes found in our ambient culture in order to retain relevancy and this issue is one which allows the church to be seen as reflective of the better angels among the vast majority of the faithful.

Granted there will be those among the clergy and the faithful whose attitudes toward the LGBTQ community are reflective of less enlightened times and the fear of change among these individuals is palpable. However, if society at large is to turn the corner to full acceptance of all our people without prejudice, then our church must also be reflective of the higher standards of acceptance and understanding that all people are like ourselves, children of God and our siblings in our common family.

CHARLES A. LEGUERN
Granger, Indiana