News



Cardinal Robert McElroy of San Diego speaks about his experience as a delegate to the Synod on Synodality in October 2023 at the Vatican during a talk Feb. 16, 2024, at the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress in Anaheim. (OSV News/Courtesy of Archdiocese of LA Digital Team)

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The Vatican's decision to allow varying implementations of its recent document on blessings for people in irregular and same-sex unions is part of a "great move toward decentralization" in the Catholic Church amid the ongoing Synod on Synodality, said Cardinal Robert McElroy of San Diego.

But he blamed animus toward LGBTQ people “among far too many” for opposition to the document and for its critics focusing mostly, he said, on it allowing blessings for those in same-sex unions.

"We have witnessed the reality that bishops of various parts of the world have made rapidly divergent decisions about the acceptability of such blessings in their countries, based substantially on cultural and pastoral factors, as well as neocolonialism," said McElroy in a Feb. 16 talk at the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress.

McElroy, who was served as delegate in last October's monthlong synod gathering, was referring to "*Fiducia Supplicans*" ("Supplicating Trust") on "the pastoral meaning of blessings." The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith's December 2023 document outlines the possibility of informal, non-liturgical blessings for Catholics in irregular or same-sex relationships.

Such decentralization, McElroy said, must not "obscure" the "rigorous obligation" of the church everywhere to protect "LGBT persons" and accompany those who are divorced and remarried without an annulment.

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While McElroy did not mention the continent by name, the most notable global reaction to "*Fiducia Supplicans*" was a public statement from bishops' conferences across Africa, approved by Pope Francis, declaring that it would not be "appropriate"

to carry out the blessings outlined in "*Fiducia*" in Africa due to cultural differences.

In his remarks at the LA Congress, the 70-year-old cardinal acknowledged that "it is wholly legitimate for a priest to personally decline to perform the blessings outlined in '*Fiducia*,' because he believes that to do so will undermine the strength of that union."

But McElroy also blamed opposition to such blessings on "an enduring animus among far too many towards LGBT persons."

It is "distressing," the prelate said, that opposition to "*Fiducia*" has focused "overwhelmingly on blessing those in same-sex relationships" compared to people in heterosexual relationships that also might be considered sinful.

As a papally appointed synod delegate, McElroy will participate in the second part of the synodal assembly in Rome, set for later this year in October. At last year's session, he said, most participants agreed it was time for a "paradigm shift" in giving women more decision-making roles and responsibilities in the church, resulting in a proposal labeled as "urgent" in the meeting's synthesis document. Some of the other "important, overarching questions" raised by the synod, in McElroy's view, were decentralization, the issue of change and continuity with respect to church teaching and clericalism.

In another LA Congress talk on synodality in the church later that afternoon, Sr. Teresa Maya, a Sister of Charity of the Word Incarnate, said she was surprised to hear similar proposals about women in the church — including the possibility of ordained ministry — from the different reports that emerged during the synod.

"I never thought I would read (these statements) in my lifetime," said Maya, a theologian and former president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. "Something is shifting."

She credited the fact that some women were included in roundtable discussions with bishops and laypeople, and allowed to vote at last year's gathering in Rome.

"I thought the fact that women were sitting at those tables made a difference," she said to applause.