News



A large rainbow flag hangs in front of the Church of St. Theodore in Cologne, Germany, March 29, 2021. According to a survey released on Aug. 6, 2025, fewer than half of Germany's 27 Catholic dioceses have fully adopted guidelines for same-sex blessing issued in April, with some objecting that the guidelines far exceeded current church rules. (OSV News/Harald Oppitz, KNA)



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COLOGNE, Germany — August 14, 2025
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A German Catholic spokesman has defended his church's approach to blessing same-sex couples, despite evidence of deep disagreement among the country's bishops.

"Members of the German bishops' conference and Central Committee of German Catholics have adopted a guide for pastoral workers on blessing couples not married in church — they've recommended diocesan bishops proceed in accordance with its spirit," explained Matthias Kopp, spokesman for the German bishops.

"This document states that the church recognizes and offers support to couples united in love. The practice should therefore be strengthened of accompanying divorced and remarried couples with a blessing, together with couples of all gender identities and sexual orientations, and couples unwilling or unable to receive the marriage sacrament," he said.

The lay Catholic was reacting to an Aug. 6 survey by the church's Bonn-based Katholisch.de online news agency, which showed fewer than half of Germany's 27 Catholic dioceses had fully approved and adopted the new "Blessings for couples who love each other" handout for pastors.

In an OSV News interview, Kopp said the Vatican had been consulted about the guide ahead of its April 23 publication, adding that he saw no danger of a serious division over the blessings issue.

However, a senior observer told OSV News that Germany's bishops were irrevocably divided over same-sex blessings, with many believing the new four-page handout violated rules set out by the Vatican.

"With every priest and parish now doing whatever they feel is right, I can't foresee any consensus," said Gottfried Bohl, news editor of Germany's Catholic news agency, KNA. "Perhaps it's a good thing disagreements exist, enabling the bishops to present contrasting liberal and conservative faces at the same time. But many Germans have little interest in what the church teaches anyway, and don't accept being told what to do by clergy, especially on questions of sexuality."

The handout — drafted by a Gemeinsame Konferenz, or joint conference of bishops and lay Catholics with approval by the bishops' conference permanent council — offers "practical guidelines" for blessing people in irregular unions.

It cites Fiducia Supplicans, a December 2023 declaration from the Vatican's Dicastery for Doctrine of the Faith, which conditionally allowed priests for the first time to bless same-sex couples "outside of a liturgical framework," although "without officially validating their status" or "changing in any way the church's perennial teaching on marriage."

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Subtitled "On the Pastoral Meaning of Blessings," the Vatican document stated that the church could extend God's grace via blessings of couples in "irregular situations," especially same-sex partnerships or heterosexual non-marital cohabitation. It also affirmed the immorality of extramarital sexual relations, but acknowledged that couples in irregular situations could spiritually benefit from the graces that blessings could mediate.

The handout for German pastors that was published in April notes that, while there should be "no confusion with the liturgical celebration of the marriage sacrament," same-sex blessings can now be given with "greater spontaneity and freedom," and can include "music and song" as well as scriptural and biblical readings.

"Couples not married in church, divorced and remarried, of all sexual orientations and gender identities, are a natural part of our society. Quite a few of these couples would like a blessing for their relationship," the handout says.

"The Church wishes to proclaim the God-given dignity of every person in word and deed… She therefore recognizes and offers support to couples who are united in

love, who treat each other with full respect and dignity, and who are willing to live out their sexuality in care for themselves and each other with long-term social responsibility," the handout states.

In his OSV News interview, Kopp said Germany's Catholic dioceses were not required to follow the handout, adding that the bishops' conference had no data on the "general attitude" of Catholics to same-sex blessings.

However, in its survey, Katholisch.de said the April guidance had been "received very differently" across the German church.

Some dioceses were taking steps to implement it, the agency reported, including Dresden-Meissen, Hildesheim, Limburg and Osnabruck, as well as Rottenburg-Stuttgart, which published a 15-page brochure with prayers for "couples of all sexual orientations and gender identities" who seek blessings "regardless of lifestyle or marital status."

However, other dioceses had rejected the handout, Katholisch.de reported, including Augsburg, Cologne, Eichstätt, Passau and Regensburg, while several, including Magdeburg, Paderborn and Munich-Freising, had not yet "reached a final position" on blessings.

In a July 22 statement, the Cologne Archdiocese said the new handout guidelines infringed Vatican instructions that blessings should be "spontaneous and in passing" without "liturgical form."

Meanwhile, the Augsburg Diocese told Katholisch.de that the handout explicitly referred to "blessing ceremonies" with readings and songs, thus failing to comply with Vatican instructions "to guard against a parallel with marriage services."

Catholics make up around 23.7% of Germany's 84.7 million inhabitants, although church membership and attendance have dropped sharply since 2019, with only 6.6% of Catholics currently attending Mass, according to July church data.

Same-sex blessings were backed by the lay-led Central Committee of German Catholics in a November 2019 plenary vote, and were also strongly supported by the German church's reformist Synodal Way forum at its fifth session in March 2023.

However, the issue has proved divisive internationally, with some Catholic bishops' conferences and dioceses, especially in the Global South, refusing blessings and

criticizing the 2023 Vatican declaration.

In his interview with OSV News, Bohl said he believed most bishops were concerned about responding positively to liberal, pro-reform pressure among German Catholics, many of whom awaited a Vatican response to the latest church moves on same-sex blessings.

"Many people have lost confidence in the church because of the sexual abuse crisis, and its leaders must be careful not to lose further credibility with today's highly secularized society," the KNA news editor told OSV News.

"The new pope knows the situation here well, having taken part in many recent discussions with German bishops. But for now, we still don't know how he intends to handle calls for reform by bishops' conferences like ours," he said.