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Pope Leo XIV answers questions from journalists during a news conference aboard the plane flying back to Rome after leaving Equatorial Guinea, April 23, 2026. (CNS/Lola Gomez)



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Pope Leo XIV offered more insight into where he stands on LGBT issues, telling reporters on his flight back to Rome from Equatorial Guinea that he plans to emphasize "issues of justice, equality and freedom" rather than "sexual matters."

A reporter asked Leo, who spent the last 11 days touring North and Central Africa, his thoughts about the decision of Cardinal Reinhard Marx of Munich-Freising to issue in his diocese a guide for blessings of people in relationships outside of sacramental marriage, which includes same-sex couples.

"First of all, I think it's very important that the unity or division of the church should not revolve around sexual matters," Leo said in English. "We tend to think that when the church is talking about morality that the only issue of morality is sexual. And in reality I believe there are greater and more important issues such as justice, equality, freedom of men and women, freedom of religion that would all take priority before that particular issue."

That said, Leo noted that the Vatican has already spoken to the German bishops to make clear its disagreement with the formalized blessing of same-sex couples "beyond what was specifically, if you will, allowed for by Pope Francis in saying that all people receive blessings."

Leo said Francis' exhortation that all are welcome in the church meant, "all are invited to follow Jesus and all are invited to look for conversion in their lives."

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A 2023 document approved by Leo's predecessor made explicit that "couples in irregular situations and same-sex couples" may receive an informal blessing from a priest, but without a formalized type of ceremony comparable to sacramental marriage.

"To go beyond that today," Leo said during the presser, "I think that the topic can cause more disunity than unity, and that we should look for ways to build our unity on Jesus Christ and what Jesus Christ teaches."

In a book-length interview made public last year, Leo said that LGBT issues had been "on the back of my mind," as he wanted to promote issues that were less polarizing.

"For now, because of what I've already tried to demonstrate and live out in terms of my understanding of being pope at this time in history, I'm trying not to continue to polarize or promote polarization in the church," he told Crux journalist Elise Ann Allen.

Last September, Jesuit Fr. James Martin, who founded the LGBT Catholic ministry Outreach, said that during a roughly 30-minute meeting with Leo, the pope expressed "openness and welcome" to LGBT Catholics.

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Leo's views on LGBT issues were little known before his election last year.

Days before the May 2025 conclave, The New York Times reported that in 2012, then-Bishop Robert Prevost said that he had expressed dismay that Western news media held "sympathy for beliefs and practices that are at odds with the gospel," specifically citing the "homosexual lifestyle" and "alternative families comprised of same-sex partners and their adopted children."

But in a 2023 interview with Catholic News Service, when Prevost was made a cardinal by Francis, he suggested that his views had softened.

"Given many things that have changed, I would say there's been a development in the sense of the need for the church to open and to be welcoming," he said. "I think Pope Francis made it very clear that he doesn't want people to be excluded simply on the basis of choices that they make, whether it be lifestyle, work, way to dress or whatever."

He added, "we are looking to be more welcoming and more open, and to say all people are welcome in the church."

This story appears in the **Leo XIV in North and Central Africa** feature series. View the full series.