Vatican

Vatican News



Pope Leo XIV leave the Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta , Friday, May 8, 2026, in Naples during a one-day pastoral visit to Pompeii and Naples. (AP/Salvatore Laporta)

Nicole Winfield

View Author Profile

Associated Press

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Vatican City — May 11, 2026

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

The Vatican is sending new signals about how it intends to minister to LGBTQ+ Catholics in the Pope Leo XIV era, with signs of openness and limitations after Pope Francis ushered in a notable welcome during his 12-year pontificate.

Catholic LGBTQ+ advocates cheered this week when a Vatican working group released a report featuring the testimony of two gay, married Catholics who spoke openly about their sexuality, faith and how the Catholic Church's negative teaching on homosexuality had hurt them.

Additionally, Leo made clear during a recent airborne news conference that he believed the church's teachings on social justice, equality and freedom were far more important than its teaching on sexual morality, suggesting he doesn't intend to prioritize the issue.

At that same news conference, though, Leo indicated he will go no further than Francis on the contentious matter of same-sex blessings. The Vatican has recently renewed its opposition to any local efforts to deviate from the Holy See stance.

For the Rev. James Martin, an American Jesuit who has spearheaded the church's outreach to the LGBTQ+ community in the U.S., the developments signal strong continuity with Francis.

"If the Catholic Church has begun to listen to LGBTQ Catholics as part of its methodology, the church has already moved forward in a significant way," he wrote recently.

But the signals have prompted criticism from conservatives, who have stressed official Catholic teaching — unchanged during even Francis' pontificate — that says homosexual activity is "intrinsically disordered."

A synod document featuring searing testimony

The Vatican working group report summarized the work of experts studying controversial topics that emerged after Francis' yearslong reform effort. The report has no binding value and is merely a synthesis of deliberations. It's not clear what, if anything, Leo will do with it.

The testimony of the gay men, contained in annexes published on the Vatican's synod website, featured moving accounts of how one, from Portugal, came to terms with his homosexuality and married his husband. The man also recounted how he sometimes struggled with his faith because of insensitive remarks from a Catholic spiritual director and forced "conversion therapy," the scientifically discredited practice of using therapy to "convert" LGBTQ+ people to heterosexuality or traditional gender expectations.

The other testimony, from an American, criticized the therapy he went through and counseling he received from a Catholic pastoral group, Courage, that seeks to help people with same-sex attraction live chastely.

"My sexuality isn't a perversion, disorder, or cross; it's a gift from God," the person wrote.

Courage, in a statement Friday, decried the negative depiction of its work, saying it has never been involved in "reparative therapy."

"Courage has suffered calumny and detraction before, but usually from secular outlets," the group said. "It is a great sadness and an additional wound to our members to have this false and unjust depiction in a Vatican document."

Martin said the publication marked the first time that an official Vatican report "has included such detailed stories from LGBTQ Catholics. As such, it marks a significant step forward in the church's relationship with the LGBTQ community."

Bishop Joseph Strickland, whom Francis removed as bishop of Tyler, Texas, said the report was "deeply alarming" and contradicted church teaching about sexuality, sin, marriage and morality. In a post on his personal website entitled "An Emergency in the Church," Strickland said the church's teaching on homosexuality didn't come from prejudice but from God.

"To suggest that the sin does not consist in the same-sex relationship itself is not merely confusing language. It is a direct assault upon Catholic moral doctrine and upon the words of Scripture itself," he wrote.

Advertisement

The German church guidelines

The issue of LGBTQ+ outreach is coming to a head in Germany, where Catholic bishops have issued guidelines for priests on performing same-sex blessings that seemingly go beyond what Francis' Vatican decreed in 2023.

That year, the Vatican's doctrine office issued a declaration, known by its Latin title "Fiducia Supplicans," that allowed priests to offer spontaneous, nonliturgical blessings to same-sex couples, provided such blessings aren't confused with the rites and rituals of a wedding. Church teaching holds that marriage is a lifelong union between a man and woman.

The declaration prompted an unprecedented, continentwide dissent from African bishops and other conservatives, prompting the Vatican to clarify that such blessings must be brief, "10 or 15 seconds," and aren't a blessing of the union per se but the people in it.

In April 2025, German bishops and an influential lay organization published guidelines on implementing the declaration.

While stressing the spontaneous, nonliturgical nature of the blessing, the guidelines say they are for the relationship as opposed to individuals, and provide criteria for a proper celebration. The guidelines say, for example, there should be appropriate liturgical readings, "care in the preparation" of the event, and that people invited should offer "acclamation, prayer and song."

Leo revealed last month, while traveling home from Africa, that the Vatican had told the Germans that it doesn't agree with their proposals. This week, the 2024 letter in which the Holy See articulated its position was put online.

The letter, signed by doctrine chief Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernández, said the guidelines' reference to acclamation resembled that of marriage and "in this sense effectively legitimizes the status of these couples, contrary to what is stated" in the Vatican's 2023 declaration.

Fernández's letter complained that the German guidelines' mention of the location, aesthetic and music in a blessing suggested a liturgical ceremony that "contradicts" what the Vatican had allowed.

The letter didn't veto the German guidelines outright but offered Fernández's "observations."

LGBTQ+ advocates welcome Leo's measured approach

Leo met Thursday with German Cardinal Reinhard Marx, who — despite Fernández's letter — recently recommended that priests in his archdiocese use the German guidelines as a basis for their pastoral care.

Cardinal Pietro Parolin said Wednesday that talk of sanctions against German priests who use the guidelines was "premature" and said dialogue with German bishops was ongoing.

The hope is "never to have to resort to sanctions, that problems can be resolved peacefully, as should be the case in the church," Parolin said.

Martin said the Vatican had been clear that the Vatican's 2023 declaration limited blessing of same-sex couples only under certain circumstances.

"But the synod has also made it clear that it is inviting the church to listen, in a new way, to the experiences of LGBTQ Catholics. So, to me, there is no contradiction," he told The Associated Press. "Both 'Fiducia' and the synod report are steps forward in the church's ministry to LGBTQ people."

Francis DeBernardo, executive director of New Ways Ministry, which advocates for LGBTQ+ Catholics, praised Leo's comments on church teaching about sexual morality.

Returning from Africa, Leo was asked about Marx's adoption of the German guidelines and how he intended to preserve the unity of the church over the divisive issue of same-sex blessings.

"It is very important to understand that the unity or division of the Church should not revolve around sexual matters," Leo said. "I believe there are much greater, more important issues, such as justice, equality, freedom of men and women, freedom of religion, that would all take priority before that particular issue."

DeBernardo said it was "good to hear from the pope that he is making a decisive turn away from the church's obsession with sexual matters."

He also welcomed Leo's "measured" comments about the German same-sex guidelines.

"He did not condemn or even criticize German church leaders. He simply said there is disagreement, and that this is not a cause for disunity," DeBernardo said. "Both the new moral emphasis on social issues instead of sexuality, and the fostering of a more collegial church are good news for LGBTQ+ Catholics."