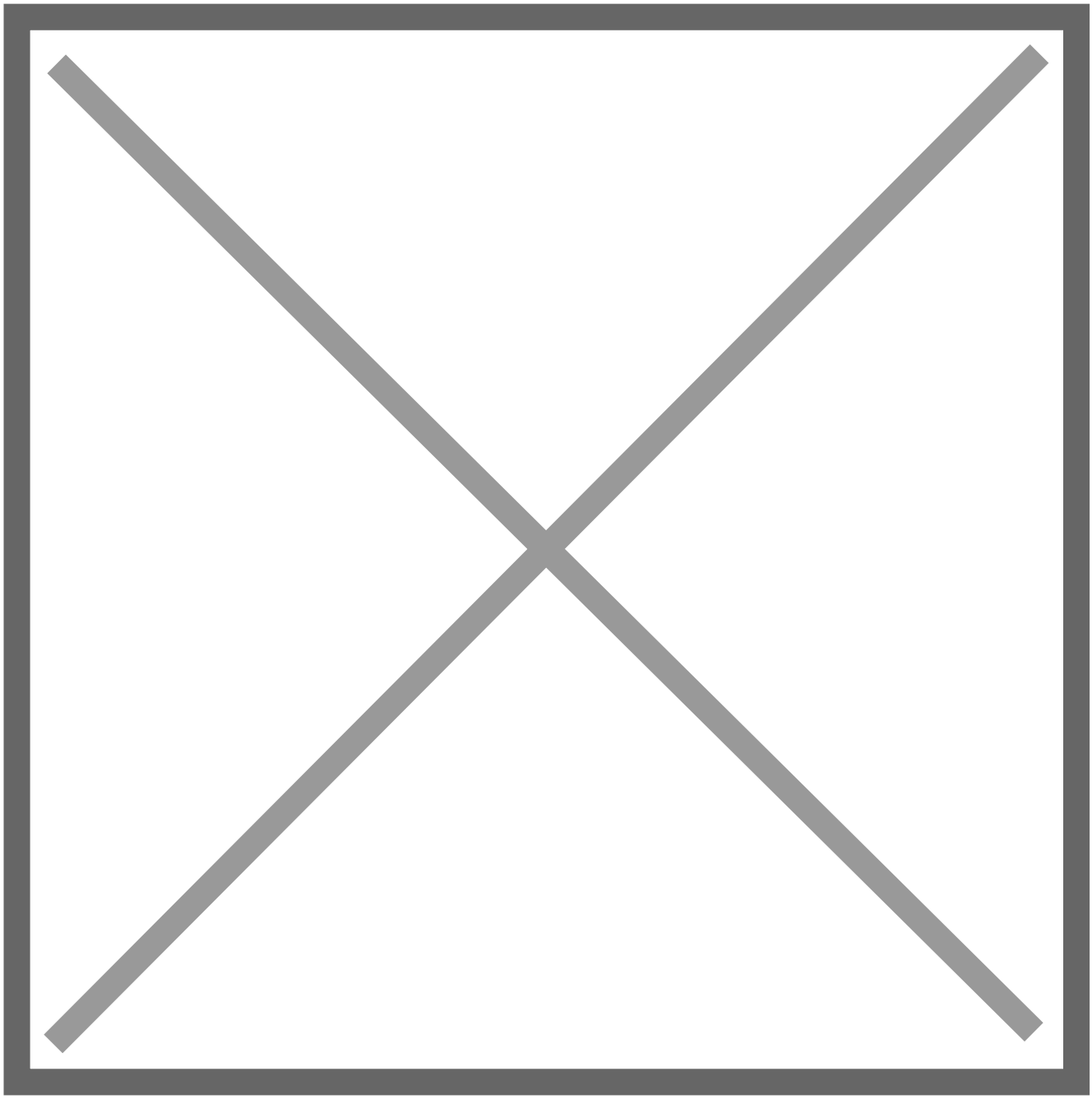
Vatican
Vatican News



Bishops enter Würzburg Cathedral for the opening Mass of the spring plenary assembly of the German Bishops' Conference Feb. 23, 2026. Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, told reporters May 6 the Holy See has not ruled out intervention into same-sex blessings by German bishops if the dispute cannot be resolved. (OSV News/Courtesy of the German bishops' conference)

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Dialogue between the Vatican and German bishops regarding the blessing of same-sex unions is ongoing, and it was too soon to talk about sanctions, said the Vatican secretary of state.

Speaking to journalists in Rome May 6, Cardinal Pietro Parolin was asked if the Vatican intends to impose sanctions on the German bishops after the continued promotion of a handbook for blessing same-sex couples.

"We are in dialogue on this point; it's premature to say. It's a decision that belongs to the pope, but we've already begun a dialogue, and I believe we can find a solution," the cardinal said, according to the Italian news agency ANSA.

"Every decision must be in accordance with canon law, the Second Vatican Council, etc. It's premature to talk about sanctions now. We hope we never have to resort to sanctions. When negotiations resume, we'll try to find a solution," he added.

Parolin's comments were given several days after the Vatican released a 2024 letter signed by Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, addressed to the president of the German bishops' conference's liturgical commission, Bishop Stephen Ackermann of Trier.

Published May 4, the letter, which was dated Nov. 18, 2024, was written in response to a proposed guide for formal blessings for couples who are not sacramentally married, including same-sex couples.

The guide, or *Vademecum*, was presented as a supplement to the "Blessings for Couples who love each other," which was approved by German bishops and lay representatives in 2023 as part of the so-called "Synodal Way."

In his letter, Fernández reaffirmed that the Church "does not have the power to confer its liturgical blessing when this, in some way, could offer a form of moral legitimization to a union that presumes to be a marriage or to an extra-marital sexual practice."

Fernández expressed concern that the guide also mentioned "a union and an 'official regulation'" and included a "genuine 'acclamation,' a gesture that is normally part of the marriage ritual."

"In this sense, the Vademecum effectively legitimizes the status of such couples, in a manner contrary to what is affirmed in *Fiducia supplicans*," he said, referring to the 2023 document released by the Vatican.

Although *Fiducia supplicans* allows Catholic priests to bless a same-sex couple or a couple in an irregular union, it cannot be a formal liturgical blessing, nor give the impression that the Church is blessing the union as if it were a marriage.

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Despite Fernández's letter, the German bishops published the supplement, titled "Blessing gives strength to love," in April 2025.

In an interview with OSV News published Aug. 13, Mattias Kopp, spokesman for the German bishops, said the Vatican had been consulted about the guide before its publication, adding that he saw no danger of a serious division over the issue of blessings.

The guide, titled "Segen gibt der Liebe Kraft" ("Blessing gives strength to love"), recently resurfaced in the news after it was reported that Cardinal Reinhard Marx of Munich had urged priests and pastoral ministers to implement its use in a letter

obtained by the German Catholic weekly, Die Tagespost.

According to the report, Marx said he wanted the handout to be "the basis for pastoral care."

While noting that "the blessing is not the celebration of a sacramental marriage," Marx said it doesn't mean that "the blessing of a non-sacramental union, which in many cases is already a civil marriage, relegates the couple to the margins of the community and the Church."

The handout was drafted by a joint conference of German bishops and lay Catholics, with approval by the bishops' conference permanent council.

While Marx is among several German bishops who approved of the guidelines, a 2025 survey conducted by the Bonn-based online news agency Katholisch.de showed that fewer than half of Germany’s 27 Catholic dioceses had fully approved and adopted the handout.

Marx met with Pope Leo XIV May 7 in his capacity as coordinator of the Vatican's Council for the Economy. Neither the Vatican nor the Archdiocese of Munich has issued a statement regarding the meeting.

However, on his return flight to Rome after his 11-day visit to Africa, Leo was asked by a German journalist about Marx's letter regarding blessing same-sex couples.

While emphasizing that "the unity or division of the Church should not revolve around sexual matters," the pope told the journalists the Vatican had made it clear to the German bishops "that we do not agree with the formalized blessing of couples, in this case, homosexual couples … or couples in irregular situations, beyond what was specifically, if you will, allowed for by Pope Francis in saying all people receive blessings."

Likening the blessings approved by his predecessor, Pope Francis, to those given "at the end of Mass" for all people, Leo said that "all are invited to look for conversion in their lives."

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