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GERMANY: Catholic blessings of same-sex couples despite Vatican

Euronews (10.05.2021) – <https://bit.ly/3tDuz0n> – Germany's powerful Catholic progressives are openly defying a recent Holy See pronouncement that priests cannot bless same-sex unions.

They are offering such blessings at services in about 100 different churches all over the country this week.

The blessings at open worship services are the latest pushback

from German Catholics against a document released in March by the Vatican's orthodoxy office.

The 'Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith' said Catholic clergy cannot bless same-sex unions because God "cannot bless sin."

The document pleased conservatives and disheartened advocates for LGBTQ Catholics around the world. But the response has been particularly acute in Germany, where the German church has been at the forefront of opening discussion on hot-button issues such as the church's teaching on homosexuality as part of a formal process of debate and reform.

The dozens of church services celebrating blessings of gay unions are the latest escalation in tensions between conservatives and progressives that have already sparked alarm, primarily from the right, that part of the German church might be heading into schism.

Germany is no stranger to schism: 500 years ago, Martin Luther launched the Reformation here.

Pope Francis, who has championed a more decentralised church structure, has already reminded the German hierarchy that it must remain in communion with Rome during its reform process, known as a "synodal path."

In Berlin, the Rev. Jan Korditschke, a Jesuit who works for

the diocese preparing adults for baptism and helps out at the St. Canisius congregation, will lead blessings for queer couples at a worship service May 16.

“I am convinced that homosexual orientation is not bad, nor is homosexual love a sin,” Korditschke told The Associated Press in an interview. “I want to celebrate the love of homosexuals with these blessings because the love of homosexuals is something good.”

The 44-year-old said it is important that homosexuals can show themselves within the Catholic Church and gain more visibility long-term. He said he was not afraid of possible repercussions by high-ranking church officials or the Vatican.

“I stand behind what I am doing, though it is painful for me that I cannot do it in tune with the church leadership,” Korditschke said, adding that “the homophobia of my church makes me angry and I am ashamed of it.”

The head of the German Bishops Conference last month criticised the grassroots initiative for gay blessings which is called “Liebe Gewinnt” or “Love Wins.”

Limburg Bishop Georg Baetzing said the blessings “are not suitable as an instrument of church political manifestations or political actions.”

‘Love wins’

However, Germany's powerful lay organisation, the Central Committee of German Catholics, or ZdK, which has been advocating for gay blessings since 2015, positioned itself once more in favour of them. It called the contentious document from Rome "not very helpful" and explicitly expressed its support for "Love Wins."

"These are celebrations of worship in which people express to God what moves them," Birgit Mock, the ZdK's spokeswoman for family affairs, told the AP.

"The fact that they ask for God's blessing and thank him for all the good in their lives – also for relationships lived with mutual respect and full of love – that is deeply based on the Gospel," Mock said, adding that she herself was planning to attend a church service with gay blessings in the western city of Hamm on Monday in which she would pray for "the success of the synodal path in which we, as a church, recognise sexuality as a positive strength."

The ZdK has been taking part in the "synodal path" meetings for more than a year with the German Bishops Conference. They are due to conclude in the autumn. The meetings include talks about allowing priests to get married, the ordination of women and a different understanding of sexuality, among other reforms. The process was launched as part of the response to revelations of clergy sexual abuse.

"We're struggling in Germany with a lot of seriousness and intensive theological discourses for the right path," Mock

added. "Things cannot continue the way they did – this is what the crimes and cover-ups of sexual abuse showed us."

"We need systemic changes, also regarding a reassessment of the ecclesiastical morality of sexuality," Mock said.

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