

THE BISHOP OF SPEYER

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Speyer, November 2nd, 2023

To all Priests, Deacons,  
Pastoral and community Advisors and Assistants  
in the Diocese of Speyer

Dear fellow brothers, dear pastoral care employees!

At the last meeting of the Synodal Way in March of this year, it was decided with a majority of 93% to enable “blessing celebrations for people who love each other”. In the meantime, a working group set up by the Bishops' Conference and ZDK was set up to prepare a meeting in this regard handout set up. After the discussions and reflections on the entire synodal path as part of the autumn bishops' conference, I would like to address you on this important pastoral question.

**For some time now, we have been striving in our diocese to provide pastoral care, touched and moved by God's humanity, for couples who, for various reasons, cannot or do not want to receive the sacrament of marriage.** Based on my own long-standing pastoral experience, I am also moved by the great need and the deep longing of many, not infrequently, deeply religious people for God's blessing and the church's benevolent encouragement for their life together with all the searching, failure, new departures and happy finds - that is, with what makes human life so deeply fragile and precious at the same time. I am reminded of Jesus' instruction from the middle of the Sermon on the Mount: “Judge not, lest you be judged.” (Mt 7:1) has increasingly become an essential key for a pastoral ministry based on the Gospel of Jesus, as I also find it in the much-quoted words of Pope Francis, “Who am I to judge him?”

Both with regard to believers whose marriages have broken down and who have remarried, and especially with regard to same-sex oriented people, it is urgently time - especially against the background of a long history of deep hurt - for a different perspective to find a pastoral attitude inspired by the Gospel, as many of you have been practicing for a long time.

**That's why I campaigned for a reassessment of homosexuality in Church teaching in the Synodal Way and also voted for the possibility of blessing ceremonies for same-sex couples. I stand for that.** I hope

that on the path of the World Synod this pressing question of our time can also experience positive development.

On this path together with and in the universal church, we can and must ask ourselves how we people who, out of honest faith, seek God's blessing in their lives we ask for a community of life, to meet them in a sincere way and, through the blessing, to promise them the healing closeness of God that accompanies their life's journey and can thus also give them a sign from the church that they belong in the middle of our community.

**The blessing in the name of the Church witnesses to these believers that they are not left alone by God in their situation and wants to encourage them to find their way with God in the community of the Church. It is clear that it is not about celebrating a sacrament, but rather about a blessing.** The Church's primary task is to bear witness to the boundless and unconditional love, affection and mercy of God. Acts of blessing address people's deep longing for salvation, recognition and security. Here it is important to develop a pastoral approach that is sensitive to the injuries often suffered by people in the church space. The loyalty and commitment that is sometimes lived very sacrificially in such relationships and therefore testifies to our Christian faith certainly has its own value in the eyes of God and therefore also participates in God's history of blessing and salvation with his people. Therefore, I ask you as pastors

**Pastors in our diocese are asked to approach such believers with great pastoral sensitivity and, if they ask, to work with them to find ways that are suitable for them so that they can experience God's blessing for their shared journey through life. Nobody is forced to have such blessings, but my request also means that no one who carries out such blessings has to fear sanctions.** On the contrary, it is important to me that we give these believers a clear sign of God's closeness in the community of the church. **It may be that the domestic setting (possibly also with the blessing of the shared apartment) is more suitable for receiving a blessing. A blessing ceremony can also take place in the church or at another suitable location. The celebration must differ in words and symbols from a church wedding and, as an act of blessing, should expressly reinforce the love, commitment and mutual responsibility that exist in the couple relationship.** Empathy and discretion are required here. A handout from the German Bishops' Conference with a suitable blessing form is currently being developed. Until it is completed, the working aid from the Working Group for Catholic Family Education and Pastoral Care (AKF e.V.) can serve as orientation and guidelines. The 52 pages comprehensive publication is available for download from the AKF (Association for Catholic Family Education) under the link [www.akf-bonn.de](http://www.akf-bonn.de).

If you cannot reconcile a blessing with your conscience and understanding of your faith, then I respect that decision. In this case, however, refer couples who ask for a blessing to the Episcopal Ordinariate. In the future, they will be able to contact a placement office in Main Department I – Pastoral Care and will be referred to pastors in their region based on a list. In this regard, I am grateful to pastors who are willing to lead such blessing celebrations in the diocese beyond their own pastoral care area. So that the list mentioned can be created for further distribution, I ask you to contact the Episcopal Ordinariate at the email address [segenspenden@bistum-speyer.de](mailto:segenspenden@bistum-speyer.de) by mid-November. I cordially invite you all to the training course “Valuing Difference” on Wednesday, November 15th.

Comprehensive publication is available from the AKF (Working Group for Kath November 2023, from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. in the Caritas St. Hedwig Old People's Center, Leipziger Straße 8, Kaiserslautern.

Experiences can be exchanged and questions can be clarified there (registration at: pfarrei-lebensraeume@bistum-speyer.de). Many couples' prayers for blessings reveal a deep longing to be able to shape their lives together under the protection and guidance of God. This shows a longing for God that goes beyond boundaries that have been drawn up to date. This should be taken seriously and refers to the biblical promise of God's presence wherever there is goodness and love.

With the possibility of blessing celebrations, we want to do justice to both God's mercy and the situation of people. Let us walk this path together and remain in dialogue.

With my deep gratitude for your pastoral service and united in prayer,

Yours

+ Dr. Karl-Heinz Wieseemann Bishop of Speyer

Copy: - To all employees of the diocese - To all members of the diocesan assembly