



# Archdiocese of Winnipeg

Office of the Archbishop

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## Pastoral Letter on *Fiducia Supplicans*

*Then he led them out as far as Bethany, raised his hands and blessed them. As he blessed them, he parted from them and was taken up to heaven. (Matthew 24:50-51)*

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On December 18, 2023, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith published a Declaration on the *"Pastoral Meaning of Blessings"*, entitled, **Fiducia Supplicans**. Over the last several months, I have received a number of inquiries about this Declaration from people seeking to understand this aspect of the Church's teaching. I am also aware of some of the inaccurate reporting about the Declaration in the media and how different groups have used it to advocate for change to the Church's teaching on marriage and sexuality. In response, I am writing this short pastoral letter to assist people in understanding the essence of this Declaration on the *Pastoral Meaning of Blessings*.

When we speak of blessings given by the Church's ministers, there are three general categories: The **Blessing of persons**: where God's love for the person or persons is invoked and assistance in daily life is prayed for; **Blessing of places**: where God's generosity is recognized and his gifts appreciated, and those who live and work or worship in that place, may be blessed; **Blessing of things**: where God's grace is invoked over a particular article so that people may use it for the greater glory of God. The Church's sacramentals, such as rosaries and religious articles are a distinctive category within this category, as they serve to assist us in our spiritual lives. Needless to say, the practice of blessings has a rich theology and a great number of different applications. For example, there are blessings which are celebrated more formally, either within the liturgy or outside of it, which are approved and ritualized by the Church. There are other blessings of a spontaneous nature which are given to people seeking God in their lives such as the person coming forward in the communion line who isn't receiving the sacrament, or the person outside the church on the sidewalk asking for God's help in their circumstances or indeed several people enjoined in a common activity, to name only a few examples. Priests and Deacons are very familiar with such situations.

It is in this latter sense that *Fiducia Supplicans* addresses itself, namely, the pastoral meaning of blessings spontaneously given to people seeking God's assistance. Pope Francis has stated: *"The Lord blesses everyone who is capable of being baptised, that is, every person."* This is in keeping with Scripture, for example, when St. Paul writes to the Thessalonians and reminds them: *"For this is the will of God, your sanctification..." (1Thess.4:3)*, he is sharing with them God's desire that they be holy people called to repentance and faith in the Gospel (Mark1:15). On Easter Sunday the Popes always give a short address to the City and to the World, called the *Urbi et Orbi*, delivered from the Loggia at St. Peter's Basilica and blesses the people of Rome and the whole world.

The Declaration, *Fiducia Supplicans*, deals with the question of **spontaneous blessings** prayed over people who approach one of the Church's ministers in a simple manner asking for God's blessing and assistance. The primary purpose of the Declaration is to provide pastoral guidance for ordained ministers regarding these occasions when people request a blessing even though they are in, what are termed, irregular situations, including same sex relationships. *Fiducia Supplicans* means "supplicating trust", that is to say, the trust that people have in the mercy that flows from the heart of Christ. In other words, having confidence in our prayers offered to the Lord. God's love for each of us is so profound that the Church is called to bestow the Lord's blessings on all who seek him, including people in irregular situations and same-sex relationships "without validating their status or changing in any way the Church's perennial teaching on marriage" (#3 FD).

*Fiducia Supplicans* draws a distinction between such spontaneous blessings and formal blessings which are ritualized both within and outside the liturgy which often have approved texts and practices. When we speak of having one's "marriage blessed", we are referring to an approved ritual of the Church. When a couple celebrate their marriage anniversary and exchange their vows once again before a priest or a deacon, this too, is an approved ritual. *Fiducia Supplicans* seeks to provide pastoral guidance to the Church's ministers in regard to, what can be called, *spontaneous blessings* as well as explain to the Faithful, how such non-ritualized blessings can be applied in a general sense, through brief encounters in everyday life.

*Fiducia Supplicans* was preceded by a shorter document from the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith dealing with the Church's response to certain questions about blessings, in March of 2021, entitled in brief, *Responsum ad dubium*. There are two points from both documents that I wish to briefly emphasize. The first point is the emphasis given to the Church's perennial teaching on marriage itself: "... which is the exclusive, stable, and indissoluble union between a man and a woman, naturally open to the generation of children" (RD). This teaching comes to us through the Gospel and as a result the Church rightly avoids any rite or ritual that contradicts this teaching or leads to confusion (#5 FD). Having said this, Scripture reveals a constant call, through innumerable events and circumstances, for all people to turn back to God regardless of life choices. We can turn to the encounter of Jesus with the woman at the well in Samaria (John 4:1-42) as an outstanding example of the way God approaches us even though we are sinners.

The second point is that since the pastoral work of the Church is to respond to hearts reaching out towards God in everyday life, one must remember that in the case of couples in irregular situations and same sex relationships, it is the individual himself or herself who is blessed and not their unions, in whatever form these unions take. A couple coming forward, asking for a blessing can receive a blessing if their motivation is sincere but with the understanding that it is the individual and not the unions as such, that are blessed. In other words, we can assist God's people to discover that such blessings are simple pastoral channels that help people give expression to their faith, in spite of their sins. In giving a blessing to two people in such a situation, who sincerely ask for it spontaneously, we are not consecrating them nor are we congratulating them nor indeed are we approving of their unions. We are reminded by the Declaration that, "One who asks for a blessing shows himself to be in need of God's saving presence in his life and one who asks for a blessing from the Church recognizes the latter as a sacrament of the salvation God offers" (#20 FS). In fact, for people to ask for a blessing from a Church's minister shows a sincere

openness to transcendence, that they do not trust in their own strength alone. For this reason, the Declaration reminds us that *“an exhaustive moral analysis should not be placed as a precondition for conferring it. For, those seeking a blessing should not be required to have prior moral perfection”* (#25 FS).

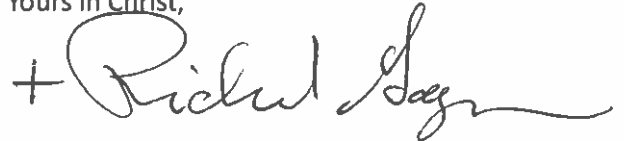
Pope Francis has often taught that we are to accompany people towards conversion and sanctification, in other words, we are to take them by the hand, so to speak, and help them along the way to God, not to condemn them from the beginning. This is also very important work for the ministers of the Church within the Sacrament of Confession.

Within this general perspective of *Fiducia Supplicans*, persons in irregular situations and in same sex relationships are not excluded from the Church’s supplication for all God’s children: *“Indeed, the grace of God works in the lives of those who do not claim to be righteous but who acknowledge themselves humbly as sinners, like everyone else. This grace can orient everything according to the mysterious and unpredictable designs of God”* (#31-32 FS). The document, however, is very careful to point out that such spontaneous blessings of persons, not be formal or liturgical in any way so as to avoid confusion with blessings associated with the Sacrament of Marriage. Nor can such spontaneous blessings be performed with any vestments, gestures, or words that are proper to a wedding (#39 FS). With this pastoral approach, one can see that the Church’s closeness to people in every situation in which they seek God’s help is not prohibited. In fact, any blessing will be an opportunity for a renewed proclamation of the Kerygma of the Gospel, an invitation to draw closer than ever to the love and mercy of Christ (#44 FS).

*Fiducia Supplicans* articulates the different kinds of blessings which the Church gives for the spiritual benefit of the people of God. It is important that all ministers of the Church properly understand such distinctions in the practice of their ministries and to ensure that such spontaneous blessings are given according to the meaning and purpose outlined in *Fiducia Supplicans*. I would recommend that *Fiducia Supplicans* be read by all the faithful so as to gain a direct familiarity with its teaching.

May the blessings of the Ascension and Pentecost be yours.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Richard Gagnon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R" and a long, sweeping tail.

✦Richard Gagnon  
Archbishop of Winnipeg

Solemnity of the Ascension, May 12, 2024