

# Divorce, Remarriage, Communion: A Guide to What Is Happening and How You Can Help

It's no secret that marriage is in crisis. The problems are widespread, and they include things like:

- Divorce
- Spousal abandonment
- Trial marriages
- Living together outside of marriage
- Contraception
- Abortion
- Unwed motherhood
- Civil unions
- Homosexual “marriage”

The Church is concerned about all these threats to marriage, and to help deal with them, Pope Francis called for two crucial meetings of bishops.

This type of meeting, known as a “synod of bishops,” involves a selection of bishops from around the world who are called to consider important issues facing the Church. Pope Francis called for a synod to take place in October 2014 and another in October 2015.

In preparation for both, he urged the bishops to think creatively about ways to help families today, and many proposals have been made.

One proposal in particular has attracted a lot of attention, because it appears to contradict the Church's historic teaching and practice on marriage.

The concerns raised by the proposal are so serious that cardinals—including some close to Pope Francis—have been arguing with each other in the news media.

The matter is serious, and the faithful need to support the pastors of the Church as they wrestle with this issue.

This booklet will serve as a guide to the subject—and to how you can help.

## **What is the controversial proposal that the cardinals are discussing?**

Put basically, it is the idea that Catholics who have divorced and remarried without an annulment should, in some circumstances, be admitted to Holy Communion without being required to live chastely.

## **What is an annulment?**

An annulment is a declaration that a particular marriage, for one reason or another, was not valid (i.e., is null).

Such declarations are issued by Church authorities after the circumstances of a marriage have been investigated and sufficient grounds for nullity have been discovered.

If a marriage is found to be null, the parties are not actually married to each other and so are free to marry other people.

## **Why does the proposal to give Communion to those who have civilly remarried without an annulment appear to contradict Church teaching?**

The Church teaches that a valid, consummated marriage between two Christians cannot be dissolved by anything but death.

As a result, if a person who has been married obtains a civil divorce and then wishes to remarry, the Church must look at the first marriage to see if it was valid. If it was valid, the person is not able to marry someone else.

To attempt to do so will result in the person living in a state of ongoing adultery.

Like anyone who engages in unrepented grave sin, those who engage in unrepented adultery are not eligible to receive Communion.

The new proposal appears to contradict the Church's teaching by allowing those who are committing ongoing adultery without true repentance to receive Communion.

## **Has the Church dealt with this proposal before?**

Yes. Some theologians began discussing it after the Second Vatican Council, and it was discussed at the 1980 Synod of Bishops, which was also on the topic of the family.

Pope St. John Paul II rejected the thinking behind the proposal in the document he released following the 1980 synod. After calling upon pastors and the whole community of the faithful to reach out to divorced and civilly remarried Catholics to keep them from being alienated from the Church, he stated:

However, the Church reaffirms her practice, which is based upon Sacred Scripture, of not admitting to Eucharistic Communion divorced persons who have remarried. They are unable to be admitted thereto from the fact that their state and condition of life objectively contradicts that union of love between Christ and the Church which is signified and effected by the Eucharist. Besides this, there is another special pastoral reason: If these people were admitted to the Eucharist, the faithful would be led into error and confusion regarding the Church's teaching about the indissolubility of marriage (*Familiaris Consortio* 84).

## **Does the Church have pastoral concern for people in this situation?**

Absolutely! John Paul II stated:

I earnestly call upon pastors and the whole community of the faithful to help the divorced, and with solicitous care to make sure that they do not consider themselves as separated from the Church, for as baptized persons they can, and indeed must, share in her life. They should be encouraged to listen to the word of God, to attend the Sacrifice of the Mass, to persevere in prayer, to contribute to works of charity and to community efforts in favor of justice, to bring up their children in the Christian faith, to cultivate the spirit and practice of penance and thus implore, day by day, God's grace. Let the Church pray for them, encourage them and show herself a merciful mother, and thus sustain them in faith and hope (*ibid.*).

## **Does the Church offer a way for these people to be reconciled with the Church and be readmitted to Communion?**

Yes. John Paul II also stated:

Reconciliation in the sacrament of Penance which would open the way to the Eucharist, can only be granted to those who, repenting of having broken the sign of the Covenant and of fidelity to Christ, are sincerely ready to undertake a way of life that is no longer in contradiction to the indissolubility of marriage. This means, in practice, that when, for serious reasons, such as for example the children's upbringing, a man and a woman cannot satisfy the obligation to separate, they take on themselves the duty to live in complete continence, that is, by abstinence from the acts proper to married couples (*ibid.*).

## **Has the subject come up again in the years since?**

Yes. In July, 1993, three German bishops—Archbishop Oskar Saier, Bishop Karl Lehmann, and Bishop Walter Kasper—published a pastoral letter advocating Communion for the divorced and civilly remarried.

## **What was the Church's response?**

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, then headed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI), issued a letter to the bishops of the world that reiterated the Church's teaching:

In fidelity to the words of Jesus Christ, the Church affirms that a new union cannot be recognized as valid if the preceding marriage was valid. If the divorced are remarried civilly, they find themselves in a situation that objectively contravenes God's law. Consequently, they cannot receive Holy Communion as long as this situation persists.

This norm is not at all a punishment or a discrimination against the divorced and remarried, but rather expresses an objective situation that of itself renders impossible the reception of Holy Communion (*Letter Concerning the Reception of Holy Communion by the Divorced and Remarried Members of the Faithful*, Sept. 14, 1994).

The letter, which John Paul II approved, pointed to the same solutions involving the parties repenting, going to confession, and either separating or living as brother and sister.

## **Who is making the proposal today?**

At the moment, the most prominent advocate of the position is Cardinal Walter Kasper of Germany.

During a meeting of cardinals in February 2014, Cardinal Kasper gave a speech in which he proposed that divorced and civilly remarried Catholics might be admitted to Communion in some circumstances.

The speech was initially confidential, but the text of it was later published. An English translation from Paulist Press appeared under the title *The Gospel of the Family*.

While other churchmen support Cardinal Kasper's proposal, for the sake of simplicity we will refer to it as the "Kasper proposal."

## **What did Cardinal Kasper say?**

In *The Gospel of the Family*, he framed his proposal as a question, asking:

[I]f a divorced and remarried person is truly sorry that he or she failed in the first marriage, if the commitments from the first marriage are clarified and a return is definitively out of the question, if he or she cannot undo the commitments that were assumed in the second civil marriage without new guilt, if he or she strives to the best of his or her abilities to live out the second civil marriage on the basis of faith and to raise their children in the faith, if he or she longs for the sacraments as a source of strength in his or her situation, do we then have to refuse or can we refuse him or her the sacrament of penance and communion, after a period of reorientation?

Although framed in the form of a question, the implied answer—in Cardinal Kasper's view—is that it is possible to give people absolution and holy Communion in such circumstances.

## What have others had to say?

Some Church leaders have spoken in favor of Cardinal Kasper's proposal. Others have spoken against it.

Among the latter is the current head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), Cardinal Gerhard Müller. The CDF is the department at the Vatican charged with maintaining doctrinal integrity; and, although the CDF has not issued a new document on this subject, Cardinal Müller has personally reiterated existing Church teaching on it.

He has done this, among other places, in an article he wrote titled "Testimony to the Power of Grace: On the Indissolubility of Marriage and the Debate Concerning the Civilly Remarried and the Sacraments." It was published in the Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* and can be found online at *Vatican.va*.

He also gave an extensive interview dealing with the subject that was published by Ignatius Press as *The Hope of the Family*.

One of the most vocal cardinals on the subject was the American Cardinal Raymond Burke, who has made many public statements in defense of the Church's existing teaching and practice on this subject. In an interview with Catholic News Service, he stated:

Cardinal Kasper's proposal is in fact an old proposal. It's a proposal that's also been put forward by others and to which the Church has responded [by] consistently upholding her teaching and practice with regard to the indissolubility of marriage.

I cannot see how it can go forward if we are going to honor the words of our Lord himself in the Gospel according to St. Matthew, [in] which he said the man who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery [Matt. 5:32, 19:9]. And the person who is living in an irregular union is living in an adulterous union and therefore cannot be admitted to the sacraments until that situation has been rectified ("Cardinal Burke: Stop Communion debate now," posted on YouTube.com).

Australian Cardinal George Pell has also been vocal on the subject. In a foreword he contributed to *The Gospel of the Family* (Ignatius Press, 2014; note that this is not the same book as the one by Paulist Press with the same title), he wrote:

The indissolubility of marriage is one of the rich truths of divine revelation. It is no coincidence that monogamy and monotheism are found together in Judeo-Christianity. Lifelong marriage is not simply a burden but a jewel, a life-giving institution. When societies recognize this beauty and goodness, they regularly protect it with effective disciplinary measures. They realize that doctrine and pastoral practice cannot be contradictory, and that one cannot maintain the indissolubility of marriage by allowing the “remarried” to receive Holy Communion. Recognizing their inability to participate fully in the Eucharist is undoubtedly a sacrifice for believers, an imperfect but real form of sacrificial love (pp. 8-9).

He also stated:

One insurmountable barrier for those advocating a new doctrinal and pastoral discipline for the reception of Holy Communion is the almost complete unanimity of two thousand years of Catholic history on this point (p. 9).

**The Kasper proposal is often presented as allowing the civilly remarried to receive Communion only in limited circumstances. What are these circumstances?**

According to what Cardinal Kasper proposed in Paulist Press’s *The Gospel of The Family*, the conditions would be these:

1. Sorrow for failing in the first marriage
2. Returning to the previous spouse is definitively out of the question
3. Impossibility of getting out of the present marriage without incurring new guilt
4. Striving to live out the second, civil marriage on the basis of faith
5. Striving to raise the children of the second marriage in the Faith
6. Longing for the sacraments
7. A period of reorientation

## **Given the Church's historic teaching and practice, what should one make of giving Communion under these circumstances?**

The individual conditions have different degrees of relevance to the question. For example, the first condition—sorrow for failing in the first marriage—applies only when a spouse was at fault. One or both of them might have been, but sometimes marriages fail when a spouse is not at fault, in which case the spouse has nothing to be sorry for.

On the other hand, there are situations in which the second condition is fulfilled, and it is a practical impossibility of reconciling with the previous spouse.

Concerning the third condition, there are also situations in which leaving a civil union would do great harm, such as abandoning an invalid spouse who has no one else to provide care, or when children are involved. The Church has thus recognized that there are situations in which continuing in a civil marriage may be morally permissible *provided* that the parties live as brother and sister.

The key condition is the fourth one: living the civil marriage on the basis of faith. The Church has historically understood this as entailing the obligation to live as brother and sister. If this condition is satisfied, the parties are not living in ongoing adultery and can receive absolution and Communion.

The fifth condition is a natural consequence of the fourth: Parents are obliged to the best of their ability to raise their children in the Faith.

If the preceding conditions are fulfilled, along with the sixth—longing for the sacraments—then there is no reason why they can't receive them.

In fact, the seventh condition—a period of reorientation—would be unnecessary from the Church's historic point of view. If one has repented of one's sins and is committed to living chastely in the future, there is no need for a period of reorientation. One can simply go to confession and then Communion.

However, if the traditional understanding were being proposed, it would not be the occasion of controversy (ignoring the irrelevance of the seventh condition). It therefore appears that Cardinal Kasper and his associates are proposing something else.

## **What are they proposing?**

They are proposing to allow people to receive absolution and Communion even though they are *not* living as brother and sister.

In other words, after a period of reorientation and the fulfillment of the other conditions, people would be allowed to receive absolution in confession and Communion *and then* continue to have sex with each other even though they are not validly married to each other and are therefore committing ongoing adultery.

## **How can they make this proposal?**

They do not phrase the proposal this way. Instead, they put it in terms that sound better. They suggest that:

- They are upholding Christ's teaching regarding the indissolubility of marriage.
- There are positive elements to the second, civil marriages.
- These civil marriages may count as some kind of valid marriages after all.
- The parties are not engaging in adultery.
- This is an option that will provide mercy for those seeking healing.
- This is not a proposal to change the Church's doctrine.
- This will help guide people toward a full acceptance of the Church's teachings in their lives.

## **How do they suggest that they are upholding Christ's teaching on the indissolubility of marriage?**

They do so by openly affirming the impossibility of contracting a second, sacramental marriage while the first partner is still alive. Thus, in *The Gospel of the Family*, Cardinal Kasper wrote:

[M]any deserted partners, for the sake of the children, are dependent upon a new partnership and a civil marriage, which they cannot again quit without new guilt. . . . What can the Church do in such situations? It cannot propose a solution apart from or contrary to Jesus' words. The indissolubility of a sacramental marriage and the impossibility of contracting a second sacramental marriage during the lifetime of the other partner is a binding part of the Church's faith tradition, which one

cannot repeal or water down by appealing to a superficially understood and cheapened sense of mercy.

This affirmation of the impossibility of contracting a second, sacramental marriage during the lifetime of the first partner is good; but, as we will see, it is not by itself sufficient to uphold Christ's or the Church's teaching.

### **What kind of positive elements are they proposing for second, civil marriages?**

These include things like the affection that the parties have for each other; the happiness they experience; the commitment they have made to support each other in difficult times; the fact that they bring new children into the world; and the affection and care that they provide their children, including educating them in the Faith.

### **Can civil marriages have positive qualities like these?**

Yes, but so can the relationships of people who are living in open adultery, without the legal fiction provided by a civil marriage.

The fact that a relationship has positive qualities does not mean that it is morally licit. In fact, *every* sinful relationship—and every sinful *act*—has positive qualities, or people would not engage in them.

Sin is a distortion of something good, and it is the distorted but positive qualities it has that make it attractive. These same qualities can help people rationalize their sins and continue to engage in them.

The fact that there are positive qualities to a relationship between two people does not mean that the relationship is moral or that the parties are not engaging in grave sin.

This applies not only to the sin of adultery but to every form of sinful relationship.

## **How is it suggested that these civil marriages may be valid marriages after all?**

At times, a confusion of terms can make it seem that, even though they are not *sacramental* marriages, civil marriages can be *valid*, even though they are contracted after a divorce and without an annulment.

For example, in an interview with Catholic News Service, Cardinal Kasper stated:

If there's a second union, well, it's not a sacramental one. That's clear; it's not on the same level as the first one. It's a civil marriage, and the civil marriage is not sacramental, but [there] can be seen some essential elements of marriage and of a family [in it]: there is love, there is commitment, there is exclusivity, there is forever, and there is prayer life, there are children, they're well-educated in Christian life. Many things are there, and, especially, there is a public dimension. There is a new situation of marriage ("Cardinal Kasper on sex and second unions," posted on YouTube.com).

## **Is it possible for a person who has a sacramental first marriage to contract a new marriage that is valid but non-sacramental while the first spouse is alive?**

No. To help cut through the confusion, let's define the relevant terms:

- A *sacramental marriage* is the only kind of marriage that can exist between two baptized people. Thus the *Code of Canon Law* states that "a valid matrimonial contract cannot exist between the baptized without it being by that fact a sacrament" (can. 1055 §2).
- A *natural marriage* is valid but not sacramental. For a natural marriage to exist, one or both parties must be unbaptized.
- A *valid marriage* is genuine, authentic, or real. It can be sacramental or natural, depending on whether both parties are baptized.
- An *invalid marriage* is not genuine, authentic, or real. As a result, it is neither sacramental nor natural, because it has no objective reality.
- A *civil marriage* is contracted before the civil (state) authorities. It can be valid or invalid, depending on the circumstances.

The scenario we are considering is one in which a Catholic has contracted a valid marriage with someone, gotten divorced, and then contracted a civil marriage with someone else.

What is the status of this marriage?

The Catholic's first marriage is valid. It may be either sacramental or natural, depending on whether the other spouse was baptized, but it is valid either way. As a result, it is a real, genuine marriage, and the Catholic is not free to marry someone else if the first spouse is alive. If the Catholic attempts to do so, the new marriage will be invalid, and the parties will be living in an objectively adulterous situation.

One cannot say that the new marriage may not be sacramental but that it is still a marriage. It is not.

If you are validly married to one person, you cannot marry someone else while the first partner is alive. Even if the state allows you to contract a civil marriage, this new marriage will not be valid. It will be a legal fiction.

### **How is it suggested that the parties in a second, civil marriage are not engaging in adultery?**

In the same Catholic News Service interview, Cardinal Kasper spoke of couples who have contracted a second, civil marriage, stating:

They love each other, and to say every sexual act is sinful, that's different. . . . If you tell people who live in this way, and they do it in a responsible way, tell them that [they are in] adultery, permanent adultery, I think they would feel insulted and offended. We must be very careful also in our language. To say you are living in a permanent adultery? It seems to me too strong.

### **What did Jesus Christ say about couples living in this situation?**

Jesus said:

Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery (Mark 10:11-12).

### **What does St. Paul say about couples living in this situation?**

St. Paul said:

[A] married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress (Rom. 7:2-3).

### **What does the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* say about couples living in this situation?**

It says:

Divorce is a grave offense against the natural law. It claims to break the contract, to which the spouses freely consented, to live with each other till death. Divorce does injury to the covenant of salvation, of which sacramental marriage is the sign. Contracting a new union, even if it is recognized by civil law, adds to the gravity of the rupture: The remarried spouse is then in a situation of public and permanent adultery (CCC 2384).

## **How is this presented as an option that will provide mercy for those seeking healing?**

In an interview with *Commonweal* magazine, Cardinal Kasper stated:

I do not deny that the bond of marriage remains. But the Fathers of the Church had a wonderful image: If there is a shipwreck, you don't get a new ship to save you, but you get a plank so that you can survive. That's the mercy of God—to give us a plank so we can survive. That's my approach to the problem ("Merciful God, Merciful Church," online at [commonwealmagazine.org](http://commonwealmagazine.org)).

## **Does the Church already have a merciful solution for people in this situation?**

Yes. It is inaccurate to say the Church is unmerciful toward such people. In addition to the various forms of pastoral care that they can and should receive, the Church makes available to them the very same solution of mercy that was instituted by Jesus Christ: the sacrament of confession.

It is this sacrament that the Church Fathers referred to as the plank after the shipwreck of sin. The *Catechism* states:

Christ instituted the sacrament of penance for all sinful members of his Church: above all for those who, since baptism, have fallen into grave sin, and have thus lost their baptismal grace and wounded ecclesial communion. It is to them that the sacrament of penance offers a new possibility to convert and to recover the grace of justification. The Fathers of the Church present this sacrament as "the second plank [of salvation] after the shipwreck which is the loss of grace" (CCC 1446).

The appropriate way for the Church to show mercy to individuals who have contracted a second, civil marriage is to continue to provide pastoral outreach to them and encourage them to experience God's mercy through the sacrament of penance.

## **Why can't they do this if they continue to have sexual relations with their present, civil spouse?**

Because, as Christ taught, sexual relations in this situation are adulterous.

The *Catechism* states:

Today there are numerous Catholics in many countries who have recourse to civil divorce and contract new civil unions. In fidelity to the words of Jesus Christ—“Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery” (Mark 10:11-12)—the Church maintains that a new union cannot be recognized as valid, if the first marriage was. If the divorced are remarried civilly, they find themselves in a situation that objectively contravenes God’s law. Consequently, they cannot receive Eucharistic communion as long as this situation persists. For the same reason, they cannot exercise certain ecclesial responsibilities. Reconciliation through the sacrament of Penance can be granted only to those who have repented for having violated the sign of the covenant and of fidelity to Christ, and who are committed to living in complete continence (CCC 1650).

Additionally, to make a valid confession, one must have repented of one’s sins.

The *Catechism* states:

The movement of return to God, called conversion and repentance, entails sorrow for and abhorrence of sins committed, and the firm purpose of sinning no more in the future. Conversion touches the past and the future and is nourished by hope in God's mercy.

The sacrament of penance is a whole consisting in three actions of the penitent and the priest’s absolution. The penitent’s acts are repentance, confession or disclosure of sins to the priest, and the intention to make reparation and do works of reparation (CCC 1490-1491).

If you are planning to have sex with someone to whom you are not validly married, you have not repented of this sin and thus cannot be validly absolved in confession.

## **How is it suggested that doctrine is not being changed?**

Denials that doctrine is being changed typically focus on the Church's teaching on the indissolubility of marriage. Thus, in an article published in *America* magazine, Cardinal Kasper stated:

No theologian, not even the pope, can change the doctrine of the indissolubility of a sacramental marriage. On the contrary, we all have reason to help and support people to be faithful to marriage for their own good and for the good of their children. So doctrine cannot be changed and will not be changed ("The Message of Mercy," online at [americamagazine.org](http://americamagazine.org)).

## **Would the proposal actually require a change in Church teaching?**

Yes. If the teaching on the indissolubility of marriage were not changed, a change would be required in the Church's teaching in at least one of the following three areas:

- 1) The gravely sinful nature of sexual relations with someone that you are not married to
- 2) The need to repent of one's sins, including "the firm purpose of sinning no more in the future," to be validly absolved in confession
- 3) The need to be in a state of grace to receive Communion

## **Where does the Church teach these things?**

In many places, but each is found in the *Catechism*. The first is taught when the *Catechism* states:

Adultery, divorce, polygamy, and free union are grave offenses against the dignity of marriage (CCC 2400; cf. 2380-2381).

The second is taught, as we have seen, when the *Catechism* states that, in the sacrament of penance:

Among the penitent's acts contrition occupies first place. Contrition is sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again (CCC 1451; cf. 1490-1491, cited above).

The third is taught when the *Catechism* states:

To respond to this invitation [to Communion] we must prepare ourselves for so great and so holy a moment. St. Paul urges us to examine our conscience: "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself" (1 Cor. 11:27-29). Anyone conscious of a grave sin must receive the sacrament of reconciliation before coming to communion (CCC 1385).

### **Why would the Kasper proposal require the changing of one or more of these Church teachings?**

If having sexual relations in a second, civil marriage is adulterous, then such relations are gravely sinful. If they are gravely sinful, they need to be repented of in order to be absolved in confession so that one can return to a state of grace. If they are not repented of, then one committing them is not in a state of grace and so cannot receive Communion.

The Kasper proposal thus requires the belief that sexual relations in a second, civil marriage are not gravely sinful, that one does not have to repent of grave sin to be absolved, that one does not need to be in a state of grace to receive Communion, or some combination of these.

### **So this isn't merely a matter of Church discipline or pastoral practice but one of doctrine?**

Yes. Even if the indissolubility of marriage is upheld, a change in Church doctrine would be required on one or more points.

## **Advocates of the proposal sometimes argue that it is possible for doctrine to develop. Could it develop on these points?**

Doctrinal development involves sharpening the Church's understanding of particular points.

It is difficult to see how the Church's understanding of the indissolubility of marriage, the nature and gravity of adultery, the need for repentance in confession, or the need for the state of grace for Communion could develop in a way that would allow the Kasper proposal.

The issues involved are not new or unexplored. They have been with the Church since the very beginning and have been settled parts of the magisterium's teaching.

## **Would the proposal help guide people in these situations toward a full acceptance of the Church's teaching in their lives?**

Human nature suggests the opposite: Giving people absolution and Communion without repentance would remove key incentives for repentance and would confirm people in a sinful course of behavior.

They would be put in a position where the Church would be telling them that their present course of behavior is good enough and does not need to be corrected for them to lead a full, sacramental life.

It would also have a harmful effect on those who *have* made painful decisions in order to break with sin—either by ending invalid marriages or by living as brother and sister. It would tell them that their great sacrifices were pointless.

The inevitable result of creating sacramental incentives for people to remain in illicit marital and sexual relationships would be more such relationships.

The proposal would thus be a source of scandal in the proper sense of leading people into sin (CCC 2284-2287).

## **Are there other problems with this proposal?**

Yes. One of them is that it is unclear why people who are committing adultery should be given special privileges.

Many of the same considerations that the Kasper proposal applies to their cases could be applied to numerous other situations, including:

- People who are living in open adultery, without the legal fiction of a civil marriage
- People who are living together completely apart from marriage
- People in homosexual unions
- People who are committing other forms of sexual sin

In each of these cases, one could appeal to the same kind of “positive elements” in their relationships, ignore the objectively and gravely sinful character of the acts that these relationships involve, and make an appeal to mercy.

Indeed, it is hard to see why the principles should be restricted to situations involving sexual sin. Why shouldn’t the principles of the Kasper proposal be extended so that *any* sinner who finds it difficult to break with his sin be allowed to make a similar appeal to mercy, receive the sacraments, and go on committing whatever his personal sin happens to be?

It is hard to see why the principles proposed in this case should not be applied universally.

If they were, it would mean a revolutionary change in the Church’s entire moral and sacramental teaching and practice, and some have suggested that the proposal is a “stalking horse” for such a radical change.

## **Who has suggested that the proposal is a stalking horse for broader changes?**

One is Australia’s Cardinal Pell. In an interview with Catholic News Service, he stated:

“Communion for the divorced and remarried is for some—very few, certainly not the majority of synod fathers—it’s only the tip of the iceberg, it’s a stalking horse. They want wider changes, recognition of civil unions, recognition of homosexual

unions,” Cardinal Pell said. “The Church cannot go in that direction. It would be a capitulation from the beauties and strengths of the Catholic tradition, where people sacrificed themselves for hundreds, for thousands, of years” (“Cardinal Pell: Synod says no to ‘secular agenda,’” online at catholicnews.com).

## **What is the present state of the issue?**

The first of the two synods that Pope Francis called for on the subject of the family took place in October 2014.

Presently, the bishops are preparing for the second synod in October 2015.

Although not all of the world’s bishops will be attending the synod, they have been asked to provide input by April 15, 2015.

After the issue is discussed further at the October 2015 synod of bishops, the final determination of this question will be made by the pope. The synod has a role in advising him, but all decisions are made by the pope himself.

## **How can we help the bishops as they deliberate on this issue?**

Three ways suggest themselves:

- 1) Becoming informed on the issue
- 2) Praying about the issue, and pray for the bishops specifically
- 3) Giving your bishop your sense of the issue

## **How can we get further information?**

There are a variety of resources available on the subject. Among the books that have been published are these:

- Robert Dodaro, *Remaining in the Truth of Christ: Marriage and Communion in the Catholic Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014)

- Carlos Granados and Gerhard Müller, *The Hope of the Family: A Dialogue with Gerhard Cardinal Müller* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014)
- Walter Kasper, *The Gospel of the Family* (New York: Paulist Press, 2014)
- Juan José Pérez-Soba and Stephan Kampowski, *The Gospel of the Family: Going beyond Cardinal Kasper's Proposal in the Debate on Marriage, Civil Re-Marriage, and Communion in the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014)

## **How can we help by prayer?**

The Kasper proposal is a serious issue affecting the life of the Church. Like all such issues, it needs to be brought before God in prayer, through Mass intentions, rosaries, novenas, and other devotions, as well as through spontaneous prayers.

Since St. Joseph is the patron of families, prayer to him would be particularly appropriate.

Since all decisions on this matter ultimately rest with the pope, the successor of St. Peter, prayers to St. Peter would also be particularly appropriate.

## **How can we provide our sense of this issue?**

The “sense of the faithful” (Latin, *sensus fidelium*) is an important resource for the bishops in discerning doctrinal and pastoral matters. The *Code of Canon Law* states:

The Christian faithful are free to make known to the pastors of the Church their needs, especially spiritual ones, and their desires.

According to the knowledge, competence, and prestige which they possess, they have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church and to make their opinion known to the rest of the Christian faithful, without prejudice to the integrity of faith and morals, with reverence toward their pastors, and attentive to common advantage and the dignity of persons (can. 212 §§2-3).

You can share your sense of this issue with your bishop by writing him. Contact information for your bishop will be found on your diocese's website. Catholic

Answers also has a page where you can look up your bishop's address and website at [catholic.com/bishops](http://catholic.com/bishops).

It is important that, when you share your sense of the issue, you do so with the "reverence toward their pastors" for which the *Code of Canon Law* calls. Your bishop is your spiritual father, and he deserves the respect that a father does.

Be polite, assure him of your prayers and good will, and share your sense of this issue in a calm and respectful way.

*Source: <http://www.catholic.com/documents/divorce-remarriage-communion-a-guide-to-what-is-happening-and-how-you-can-help>*