

Welcoming divorced-remarried people and homosexuals into Lay Dominican fraternities

The lay Dominican fraternities of the Vice-Province of Belgium are happy to note that Br. Bruno Cadore, Master of the Order, in his letter of 25 January 2018 to the Dominican laity¹, has asked all fraternities to have a positive, welcoming attitude towards the divorced people in their midst that have contracted a civil marriage. As it happens, Pope Saint John Paul II² and Pope Francis³ both insist on these people being welcomed and better integrated into Christian communities.

The Synod of Bishops, quoted by Pope Francis, states that "the baptized who are divorced and civilly remarried need to be more integrated into Christian communities in a variety of possible ways, while avoiding any chance of scandal"⁴. In Belgium these people can therefore be fully integrated into the Dominican laity through journeying together within a fraternity and going from the different stages of reception, formation, preparation for profession, temporary profession and final profession.

Our fraternities welcome the fact that the Bishops' Conference of Belgium⁵, willing to implement *Amoris Laetitia*, insists on "accompaniment, discernment and integration" while opening the possibility for these people to receive the Eucharist under certain conditions, following in this respect what the Pope has shown he has in mind (Letter to the episcopal region of Buenos Aires and Guidelines from the Vicariate of Rome on this subject). In this respect, our practice is fully in accordance with the guidelines from our local Ordinary.

Besides, our fraternities also consciously implement the call of the Catechism of the Catholic Church about welcoming homosexuals: "They must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity". (no. 2358)

Lay Dominican fraternities in Belgium would like, wherever possible, for fraternities to be special places where this welcoming attitude and discernment be applied about so-called irregular situations, including in countries where Bishops' Conferences or their Family Commission have not taken a clear stand on *Amoris Laetitia*. Br. Bruno Cadore asks for fraternities to reflect on such discernment.

The structured practice of the four pillars of Dominican spirituality – prayer, search for truth, fraternal life and Dominican apostolate – is an effective grace in order for everyone in their own specific situation to discern God's will thanks to the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Statement originally published on 22.09.18 on the Belgian website: www.laicsdominicains.be

¹ In the Letter that Br. Bruno Cadore addressed to the Laity of the Order of Preachers on 25 January 2018 with a view to preparations for the forthcoming International Assembly of the Dominican Laity, he mentioned the issue of "so-called irregular conjugal situations". He explicitly used Pope Francis's wording in *Amoris Laetitia*, not that of the Synod of Bishops, which speaks of "irregular situations". This means in particular those people who are divorced and remarried, having contracted a civil marriage. On this subject he both insists on welcome and discernment, following in the footsteps of Pope Francis. He indicates: "The question should not be whether we should welcome or reject them, but rather to think about how their membership in a fraternity can be one of the ways in which the Church both accompanies them and will welcome the deployment of their own gifts received from the Holy Spirit". He goes on to say that "the idea is certainly not that the lay fraternities of the Order should be places where Church rules are not respected". Finally, he calls on "all the priors provincial and provincial officials of the Dominican laity to include this theme in the agenda of reflection in their province on the mission of the laity in the Order in order to define the concrete modalities of welcoming and accompanying brothers and sisters affected by these situations. I ask them to do so in dialogue with the local Ordinaries".

² *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 84.

³ *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 299.

⁴ Synod on Family, 2015, *Final report*, no. 84 and *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 299.

⁵ Pastoral letter from the Bishops of Belgium on *Amoris Laetitia* – the French version can be downloaded at: <http://www.cathobel.be/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2017-05-09-Amoris-laetitia-Lettre-pastorale.pdf>. There is currently no English version of this Letter.