

Cardinal Müller: Can't receive Communion? You can still participate in Church's life

Cologne, Germany, [Mar 3, 2016](#) A focus on the reception of Holy Communion by the divorced-and-remarried misses the larger point of pastoral care: participation in the Church's whole life, Cardinal Gerhard Müller said in an interview on Tuesday.

“The Pope always says that it is not about Holy Communion alone, but about integration within the life of the Church,” Cardinal Müller, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, told German daily Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger in [an interview published March 1](#).

The final step of this process, he said, may be the reception of Holy Communion, “after a process of conversion and repentance, if the generally valid prerequisites for this are fulfilled.”

“A second marriage or a second spouse, as long as the rightful spouse is still alive, is not possible according to the Catholic interpretation of the words of Jesus.”

“The Pope and all of us however want to carefully avoid people ‘drifting away’ from the Church as community of salvation,” he reflected.

There are other forms of participation in the life of the Church that are “valuable and legitimate,” the cardinal noted.

“Community with God and the Church is not only constituted in the oral reception of Holy Communion.”

In addition to discussing pastoral care of the divorced-and-remarried, the interview touched on Islam, the persecution of Christians in the Middle East, the United States presidential election, clerical sex abuse, and the cardinal's relationship with Pope Francis.

Concluding with a discussion of divorce-and-remarriage and the reception of Holy Communion, Cardinal Müller acknowledged that “one may indeed struggle with the best way of handling a difficult situation.”

“But what certainly is not possible is putting the teaching of Jesus Christ up for negotiation,” he said.

“And that teaching is, after all: 'What God therefore has joined together, let no man separate'. There can be no compromise there, by which we as humans would turn the clear word of God into something vague. A sound pastoral approach is the opposite of relativizing the words of Christ.”

The cardinal defended the role of bishops in ensuring clear teaching. He compared this to motor vehicle inspections to ensure cars are roadworthy “so as to avoid accidents with serious consequences.”

“If the matter at stake is the salvation of humans and endangering eternal life, then bishops have an even bigger responsibility. And the word of God is in fact very clear. There is but one faith, even if there are legitimately different schools of theology.”

The Cologne newspaper asked the cardinal whether his explanation of the teaching on marriage and Holy Communion was a step back from the German bishops’ position at the 2015 Synod on the Family, characterizing it as finding participation in Communion being conceivable for the divorced-and-remarried after a discussion with a priest in the internal forum.

In response Cardinal Müller noted that this is possible only if the divorced-and-remarried take on the duty to live in complete continence. He said this citing St. John Paul II's reminder "regarding the perennially valid teaching of the Church on marriage in his apostolic exhortation [*Familiaris Consortio*](#)."

He added that reception of Holy Communion by the divorced-and-remarried must also take "into consideration the manifold situations upon which the process of reconciliation is predicated."

"The Church is not able to dissolve or suspend a valid and truly sacramental marriage."

One of the German leaders at the center of the remarriage controversy is Cardinal Walter Kasper, president emeritus of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger noted Cardinal Kasper's description of a "battle" in the Vatican over the future of the Church.

Cardinal Müller responded: "He retracted that problematic metaphor."

"A battle is aimed at destroying the enemy. But this is neither about the subjugation of others nor certainly about enmities. The subject was the teaching on marriage," he explained.

The interviewer cited Cardinal Reinhard Marx of Munich and Freising, who, he said, considers unrealistic the expectation of sexual abstinence in an irregular union.

Cardinal Müller commented: "That is also what the apostles thought, when Jesus explained to them the indissolubility of marriage (cf. Matthew 19:10). But what seems to us human beings to be impossible, is made possible by the grace of God."