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Vatican urges a slowdown in the rush to reform

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Pope Francis has earned headlines worldwide with his reform-minded comments on any number of topics, from the church being "obsessed" with divisive issues like abortion and homosexuality to the role of women in church leadership.

But Tuesday, the Vatican warned churches not to get ahead of the pope and take the reform process into their own hands.

The diocese of Freiburg in Germany recently broke ranks and said divorced and remarried Catholics could receive Communion if they were "trying to live according to their faith."

The Vatican's chief spokesman, Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi, warned that the diocese's view was not one the church endorsed, and that the topic would be considered a year from now in an extraordinary session of the Synod of Bishops, which will meet Oct. 5-19, 2014, at the Vatican.

It will be only the third extraordinary synod -- a meeting held in addition to the usual Vatican gatherings -- since Pope Paul VI reinstated the practice nearly 50 years ago.

"When people or local offices propose particular pastoral solutions, it runs the risk of generating confusion," Lombardi said.

The diocese of Freiburg said its guidelines were not meant to contradict the Vatican's stance on any issue but rather to "offer hope" to divorced Catholics who otherwise lived their lives according to church teachings.

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