



Presentation

of Synodal Forum I

“Power and separation of powers in the Church
- Joint participation and involvement in the mission”

for the First Reading

at the Second Synodal Assembly (30 September - 2 October 2021)

for the action text

“Framework regulation for accountability” (draft file)

The Synodal Assembly is requested to resolve as follows:

Bishops and priests in the Catholic Church exercise the pastoral ministry. All the faithful are called to take responsibility for the life and mission of the Church. Regular accountability procedures are to be established in order to promote trust and transparency. In the pursuit of accountability, a commission appointed by the German Bishops' Conference and by the Central Committee of German Catholics is to draw up a framework regulation in 24 months after the adoption of this resolution which ensures minimum standards.

In their statement on the renewal of the pastoral ministry entitled “*Gemeinsam Kirche sein*” (Being a Church together), the German bishops (2011) proposed a new style of leadership which must go hand in hand with a change of mentality so that there is greater clarity in the distribution of tasks in the Church, responsibility can be assumed more effectively, and greater momentum is given to the witness of faith. In a declaration from 2016, the Committee of German Catholics underlined synodality as a fundamental principle of the Catholic Church, and declared: “The bishops' leadership ministry gains in effectiveness to the extent that the decision-making processes are publicly known and transparent.”

In view of the rampant crisis of confidence, the task of building on these general considerations and introducing binding procedures arises with the utmost urgency. The positive experiences can be input here which have been gathered over the history of the Catholic Church,

especially in the associations and orders, with their transparent procedures of joint planning and accountability on the part of their leaders.

The accountability of bishops to the Holy Father is firmly established in the Catholic Church. Equally self-evident is the accountability of parish priests vis-à-vis the bishop. It is however consistent to also include the faithful, for whom a bishop and a parish priest exercise their offices, in the community of responsibility. This is to be done by holding the ministers accountable in the Synodal Council of the diocese or parish. The starting point is a joint consultation and decision-making process on the pastoral goals for the next few years. The bishop and the parish priest later give a public account to the faithful of the work that they have done with regard to these goals. When crises have arisen that have to be overcome together, they seek assurance that they enjoy the trust of the faithful.

The aim pursued by the framework regulation is to lend greater depth to cooperation between the bishops and parish priests on the one hand, and all other baptised and confirmed on the other, to promote evangelisation, and to improve the quality of pastoral work.

Common goals: Forming focal points and defining themes

At the beginning of the term of office of a Synodal Council of a diocese or parish (usually four years), those with responsibility, and the council, jointly develop the pastoral planning and future perspective. Taking into account the different areas of responsibility, they determine the focal points of the work in the coming period and, if necessary, agree on organisational consequences. These goals, as well as the points in time at which they are to be realised, are decided by the bishop or parish priest, together with the Synodal Council. The decisions are published.

If it proves necessary or advisable to correct the planning or agreed goals during the term of office of a Synodal Council, those with responsibility, and the council, may discuss these changes together and decide how they are to be effected.

The period of office ends with a comparison of what has been achieved in the parish or diocese vis-à-vis the planning and agreed goals. A discussion is held on the extent to which it was possible to achieve the set goals, and seeks to determine the reasons why the goals were not achieved. On this basis, new goals are set at the beginning of the new term of office, and procedures are agreed upon for achieving the goals, as are deadlines for achieving them.

Being accountable and clarifying trust: reviewing goals and overcoming crises

Each bishop and each parish priest submits to the Synodal Council of his diocese or parish a progress report on the past four years, one year before the end of the term of office of this council. In particular, the parish priest reports on how and to what extent the concrete goals and deadlines that were adopted have been achieved within the diocese or parish. After this has been debated, he asks whether the members of the Synodal Council, firstly, concur with his report and, secondly, that they express their confidence in him.

If the question of confidence is not answered positively by at least half of the voting members of the Synodal Council, a special meeting of the council is held, presided over by an external chairperson. This meeting identifies the reasons for not reaching an agreement, and seeks to develop the instruments needed to re-establish the conditions for cooperation in a spirit of trust. The third parties who are (to be) entrusted with chairing the meeting are decided on pro forma by the Synodal Council at the beginning of its term of office. The bishop or parish priest submits at the next meeting of the Synodal Council how he intends to solve the problems that have arisen and to increase the willingness of the faithful of his diocese or parish to cooperate with him. After a debate, the faithful are again asked whether they agree with this presentation. If two-thirds or more of the voting members answer negatively, the matter is referred to an arbitration board established for the diocese or parishes. If the Synodal Council finds with a two-thirds majority that confidence is not restored even after a decision has been taken by the arbitration board, this is considered to constitute a request to the bishop to offer his resignation to the Pope, or to the parish priest to offer his resignation to the bishop, as the case may be.

The council is able to initiate unscheduled proceedings in the manner described above during the entire term of office of a Synodal Council of the diocese or parish if confidence in the leadership ministry is permanently impaired. Likewise, the bishop or the parish priest himself can also initiate the process in order to seek assurance of the confidence of the faithful.

Procedures are also to be provided for the regular accountability of individuals with responsibility at diocesan level. The Vicar General presents his account in the Synodal Council of the diocese at least once per term of office, and the finance officer does so annually in the finance council.