



**Decisions of
the Synodal Path of
the Catholic Church in Germany**

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Preface

„The Catholic Church in Germany is embarking on a journey of change and renewal”, this is how the Statutes of the Synodal Path of the Catholic Church in Germany begin. With the present publication this path, which aims to overcome the systematic causes of abuse and its cover-up in the sphere of the Catholic Church, enters a new phase.

This publication contains all decisions of the Synodal Path made in one of the five Synodal Assemblies from 2020 to 2023. The decisions base on the deliberations and preparations in the four Synodal Forums. According to this, all texts presented for decision were discussed by the Synodal Assembly in two readings and adopted with a two-thirds majority vote. This volume now gives notice of all decisions of the Synodal Path in accordance with its Statutes. Our sincere thanks go to all those who, in different ways, were involved in preparing all 15 decisions.

While the first stage of work of the Synodal Path ended with the Fifth Synodal Assembly in March 2023, this fact does not apply in any way to the Synodal Path as a whole. The numerous jointly agreed reform projects that should lead to change characterise a church that is embarking on a journey of change. What is to stake now, is nothing less than the implementation of these very demanding but also necessary steps of reform that should lead - within the Synodal Path of the Universal Church - to a more Synodal Church in Germany.

Decisions concerning topics reserved for an all-church regulation are forwarded to Pope Francis as a vote of the Synodal Path in accordance with the Statutes. However, at least as important is everything that we in Germany can implement ourselves in parishes, dioceses, associations, religious orders, in the German Bishops’ Conference and the Central Committee of German Catholics. Now all those responsible are called upon to evaluate the decisions, adapt them to their given situation and fill them with life, each in synodal understanding with one another.

Let us start looking how we can put the Gospel at the centre and proclaim it new as credible witnesses.

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 President of the
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 President of the
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Preamble text

Listen, learn, taking new ways: The Synodal Path of the Catholic Church in Germany

Decision of the Synodal Path adopted by the Synodal Assembly on March 11, 2023

(1) As a Synodal Assembly, we are walking a path of repentance and renewal. We face the criticism and the justified accusation of those affected by sexualised violence, abuse of power and its cover-up in the Church. We want to hear and proclaim the Gospel, God's good news, anew - in words and deeds. Thus, the Synodal Path will serve the cause of evangelisation. It is indispensable to openly confess guilt and also to analyse the structural causes of this guilt.

(2) The Church in this country and in these times is looking for a path to connect in a new way with the existential questions of the people of today and thus learn to perceive the mission of evangelisation in a new manner. For those who want to proclaim the Gospel must first hear it anew themselves and allow themselves to be changed by it. At the same time, the Synodal Path of the Church in Germany should contribute to the Synodal Path of the Universal Church, to which Pope Francis has invited all the faithful at Pentecost 2021. In 2019, he encouraged the "pilgrim people of God in Germany" in his letter, „walking together and with the whole Church under the Spirit's light and guidance, to be invaded by the Spirit, to learn to listen and discern the ever new horizon that is always on offer." With this, Pope Francis also links the call to seek "a frank response to the present situation". This is why the Synodal Path takes up pressing questions that are of great importance not only in Germany, but also in other regions of the Universal Church.

(3) We entrust our Synodal journey to God and ask for the gift of discernment of spirits to help us walk the path into the future.

1. Where we are:

in the middle of the crisis, in the middle of the world, in the middle of the Church

(4) "The Lord then said: What have you done! Listen: your brother's blood cries out to me from the soil! (Gen 4:10). With this question God also addresses us. Sexualised violence is a serious personal guilt; it is also systemically and structurally part of the Catholic Church. Those responsible for leadership have not acknowledged the failure for decades and have covered up cases of sexualised violence. Many parish and association members have also supported and protected the system. Today, this is still happening. Among us in the Synodal Assembly there are people who have silenced even the quietest and most timid attempts at lament and protest, and still try to do so today. Others have not believed those affected, thereby causing them additional

suffering and preventing them from receiving justice. Instead of taking the perspective of those affected and perceiving their suffering, some still rather lament the damage to the reputation of the Church and the heavy burdens on the church community. With the scientific MHG study, which researched sexual violence against minors by clergy in the sphere of the German Bishops' Conference, many eyes and ears have opened - far too late and still associated with the inability of those responsible to admit own responsibility for the failure of the Church. The Synodal Path confronts this failure.

(5) However, we also see encouraging signs of hope in this grave crisis: the decisive commitment of those affected and of survivors to clarification, reappraisal and change testifies to a trust in the liberating God whom no power in the world can silence for good and who is also able to make His word effective anew in crisis situations of the Church through prophetic voices. Therefore, the voice of those affected is not only helpful advice in a helpless situation. In their voice we hear the admonishing voice of God on the way of our own evangelisation. Moreover, we become aware once again of many other problems which obscure the Good News in our Church and impair her mission in the secular environment: abuse in spiritual and pastoral relationships, the abuse of power through clericalism and incompetence, the disregard for women and for people who do not conform to the binary order of male and female, and last but not least, where the Church's teaching on sexuality promoted or promotes an understanding that does not do justice to what deeply constitutes the reality - especially the sexual identity - of many people. The four central themes and fields of action of the Synodal Path are dedicated to these urgent questions.

(6) As Synod members, we stand with our guilt and need, with our hope and our faith in the midst of a world that is itself shaken by serious crises. It is all the more important that the Church faces up to the questions of the time and that she does not give the impression of already having all the answers. Together with the people of today, she is in search of perspectives inspired by the faith in God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

(7) The personal as well as systemic dimensions of sexualised violence have drastically increased the loss of trust in the Church. And yet many people still expect something from this Church. They expect a community of believers who, in following Jesus, are committed to humanity; who turn especially to those who are distressed and in need; who, where necessary, lend them their voice and let them have their say; who build bridges between the many hostile camps and therein share their hope for a better future, who, strengthened by conversion and renewal, learn to proclaim anew the Word of God made man in Jesus Christ. Therefore, the Synodal Path must also lead to a culture of conversation that is characterised by mutual respect and love of one's neighbour, because violence and abuse already begin with the language used. This means a resolute rejection of any kind of hateful and contemptuous communication. We are grateful for the many moments of intense dialogue, committed testimony and constructive controversy. However, we must acknowledge that there have also been painful moments when people inside and outside the Synodal Assembly have been hurt by statements and gestures of individual members. This challenges us to work resolutely towards a synodal culture that is based on respect. The aim of the synodal process is to achieve the greatest possible unanimity. This has been achieved in many places. But there is a minority that was not only sceptical about

the Synodal Path from the outset, but also voted against the large majority on important decisions. It is therefore important to remain in dialogue and to fill the decisions with life, which are to make synodality permanent.

(8) The Church is a Church with guilt and failure. She will only do justice to her mission if she engages with people and their everyday world and is particularly sensitive to the needs of those traumatised by violence and those of the poor, disadvantaged and marginalised. Pope Francis writes: “I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.” (Evangelii Gaudium 49).

(9) We are a part of this Church because faith in God, hope in Jesus Christ and communion in Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist unite us with all believers in the Catholic Church, across all boundaries that separate people from one another. It is the task of the Church to be “a sacrament or a sign and instrument both of a very closely-knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (Lumen gentium 1). Therefore, she must take seriously Jesus' mandate to work for justice and peace (Matt. 5:6+9). Many things in society as well as in the Church are striving apart and have to be painstakingly brought together. Because the Church is not only holy, but also sinful, she must never carry out her tasks in an attitude of superiority, but always in humility.

(10) It is contrary to God's spirit to impose unity in an authoritarian way. The search for ways to prevent discrimination, suffering and violence in the Church in Germany - even against resistance from within and outside the Church - is not divisive but necessary. We rely on the encouragement of the Apostle Paul: “Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything; retain what is good. Refrain from every kind of evil”. (1 Thess. 5:19-22).

2. Where we come from:

with our experiences, with our disappointments, with our hopes

(11) In the Synodal Assembly we come together with different experiences, with disappointments and with great hopes. Many of us are young and know the arguments about the way of the Church in the last decades only from hearsay. They are committed to a non-discriminatory and humane Church. Others have been involved for a long time; they draw a mixed balance of what has succeeded and failed. Quite a few people have turned their backs on the Church because they have been disappointed or hurt by her or because they have no use for her any more. For them, the gap between their faith in the Gospel and the words and actions of the hierarchical Church has become too wide. However, it is important to include all perspectives, not to deny each other's faith and to always look for new ways to talk to each other.

(12) The Synodal Path would fall short of the claim of the Gospel if the expertise of those affected by sexual violence were not brought in and their voices were not listened to carefully in its midst. We are grateful that members of the Advisory Council of those affected by sexual violence at the German Bishops' Conference are involved and committed to the Synodal Path.

(13) Our self-understanding includes the experience of a democratic society in which human rights are valid. We expect that they are also respected and implemented in the Church. Our church experience is shaped by the Second Vatican Council, even if most of us have not experienced it ourselves. We want to be Church "today", with the energy of the Bible, with the staying power of tradition, but also in decisive contemporaneity here and now. Being united with the Pope and with the Church throughout the world opens up a richness of unity that consists in the vitality of a cohesion of very many people who bring their different gifts, their strengths and weaknesses into the community of faith. Unity is a dynamic quantity that cannot be lived at all without diversity. We share Pope Francis' concern that those in authority in the Church frequently act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators (*Evangelii gaudium* 47). God is close to everyone, inside and outside the Church. Spreading this message is the mission of the Church.

(14) The Catholic Church in Germany has followed a path of renewal that has led from the Second Vatican Council to the Würzburg Synod and the Dresden Pastoral Synod. Associations and initiatives have also initiated renewal processes. Different challenges have required different issues. Today, many problems remain unresolved and new ones have been added. Quite a few resolutions have still not been implemented. The proposals of that time cannot simply be repeated today because the situation has changed. The Synodal Path follows the tradition of the ways of renewal and synodal processes, which are also today taking place in many parts of the Catholic Church worldwide, in order to make the Church a place of faith and freedom for the people.

(15) Pope Francis stresses: "The present questions, as well as the answers we give, demand a long fermentation of life and the collaboration of a whole people for years." (Letter by Pope Francis to the Pilgrim People of God in Germany, here with reference to Yves Congar). The Catholic Church in Germany is on this path and continues to walk it. It is a path marked by great hope and joy, but also by deep disappointment because many had hoped for courageous steps of reform for decades which have not been realized yet. We therefore share the Pope's intention to go forth as a Church and to strengthen synodality (*Evangelii gaudium* 32) and we want to further develop the understanding of Synodality according to local conditions. We want to be able to proclaim the message of the Gospel in such a way that we do justice to the people in their respective life worlds. We share the conviction that the Catholic faith gives people the power to recognise the signs of the times, to interpret them in the light of the Gospel and to act accordingly.

(16) We are convinced that the crisis of the Church, which is evident in the crimes of sexualised violence and their cover-up, is not the end of the Church, despite the heavy guilt. Even in this deep crisis there is the chance of conversion and a new beginning. The Catholic Church has lost credibility in many areas, which she hopes to regain. This can only happen through a change which, in addition to a changed attitude, also takes institutional modifications into consideration. Much can be learned from the spirituality and experiences gathered in living congregations, religious orders and spiritual communities. Catholic organisations and associations provide important impulses and are a sign of hope within a space of the Church. The close relations with the Universal Church, which are not least deepened by the church relief agencies, are important as well.

3. Where we want to go:

to the lives of people, to the places of faith, to the points of rupture in society

(17) The goal of the Synodal Path is to prevent discrimination, suffering and violence, to eliminate the systemic causes of sexualised violence and in this way to listen anew to the Gospel of liberation. Only those who perceive God's voice in the cry of the poor for justice (Matt. 5:3-12) and in the silent groaning of the maltreated creature (Rom. 8:22) may dare to trust in God full of hope, despite all guilt, and stand up for their neighbours.

(18) "Man is the way for the Church" (Redemptor hominis 14). The Church must follow the path of the people and not judge and determine the ways of the people from a supposedly superior perspective. She is needed where fractures and wounds mark people's lives and must not hide her own fractures and wounds. She must be of service to the people.

(19) In order to do justice to what the MHG study analyses as systemic causes of sexual violence and how to deal with it, the German Bishops' Conference has asked the Central Committee of German Catholics (ZdK) to jointly pursue a synodal path. It has proposed three topics for this: power and the separation of powers, the way of life of priests and the Church's sexual teachings. At the suggestion of the ZdK, the topic "Women in Ministries and Offices in the Church" was added. The consultation of the local churches at the worldwide synodal process of the Catholic Church has shown that the four topics are also significant in many other parts of the Universal Church and that they demand new answers.

(20) There are, of course, many more issues that need to be deliberated and decided in a synodal way in the Catholic Church. Each topic requires decisions that can be taken in Germany, with a specific responsibility of the bishops for their dioceses. However, all topics also raise questions that cannot be decided in Germany alone, because they concern the Catholic Church as a whole. Due to the worldwide situation of sexual abuse by members of the clergy, worldwide systemic changes are also needed. We would like to contribute to this with the Synodal Path in Germany. Clear votes are needed in this regard so that the Universal Church can hear our voice, the voice of the Catholic Church in Germany, just as we listen to the voices from the Universal Church in the Synodal Assembly. The critical accompaniment of the public is also important. We want to be part of a learning Church on a spiritual path that brings together all the faithful.

(21) We share Pope Francis' commitment to being a synodal Church. In a synodal Church, all are aware of their mission and have a say in setting the course for the future: In the "Letter to the Pilgrim People of God" he wrote: Synodality must begin "from below", always anew; only then is there that "synodality from above" which is a special leadership responsibility of the bishops. They bear this responsibility together with the whole people of God. In a synodal Church, all the faithful are called to listen together to God's Word and to interpret the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel and to direct pastoral action accordingly. They are invited to perceive their mission and to have a say in setting the course for the future. In a synodal Church, ecclesial ministry is understood as a service to the priestly and prophetic people of God in the common struggle for the necessary unity and legitimate diversity. In a synodal Church, spiritual processes of reflection and discernment in the Holy Spirit lead to binding decisions.

(22) The Synodal Path of the Catholic Church in Germany is also a learning process of synodality. Synodality "is a constitutive element of the Church" (Pope Francis, Address at the ceremony

commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops). And at the same time, it is a “modus operandi”, a way of acting, that the Church must rediscover and practise in this time. On this path, not everything succeeds at once and immediately. An important task is therefore to stay on this path together. Simple forecasts for the Church will not help. We are talking about a future that is open to surprising turns and developments, full of trust in Jesus' promise that God's Spirit will guide His Church.



Orientation text

On the path of conversion and renewal Theological foundations of the Synodal Path of the Catholic Church in Germany

Decision of the Synodal Path adopted by the Synodal Assembly on February 3, 2022

(1) The story of the liberation of God's people from Egyptian slavery begins with seeing and listening: "I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry of complaint against their slave drivers" (Ex 3:7). God sees the need of the people and listens to remedy it - that is the Good News. Following this message today also begins with seeing the wounded and marginalised, with listening to those who have been silenced and condemned, to the members of God's people who have fallen silent and yet are rebelling. Pope Francis writes with regard to the poor: "They have much to teach us. (...) We are called (...) to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them".¹ They undoubtedly include the victims and survivors of sexualised and spiritual violence in the Church.

(2) Seeing need, listening to the Word of God and to one another is a fundamental implementation of all synodality. We need to seek, together, God's counsel for the Church and the world to be able to go the necessary steps. Dialogue is indispensable to a Church that is seeking the truth. As Pope Paul VI put it in his inaugural encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* "For it becomes obvious in a dialogue that there are various ways of coming to the light of faith and it is possible to make them all converge on the same goal. (...) It will be a slow process of thought, but it will result in the discovery of elements of truth in the opinion of others." (86). In dialogue, the participants are together in search of the truth, full of respect for each other and open to the insights of the participants. A dialogue thrives on different perceptions, assessments and points of view that are expressed. And it renounces them when, influenced by good arguments and new insights, they are no longer tenable. Dialogues usually lead to new, jointly-shared insights - even though they may reinforce what is tried-and-tested with fresh plausibility. But dialogues also teach us to live with what is foreign and incomprehensible and to endure a dissent that cannot be resolved (cf. Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes/GS 43*). Last but not least: Genuine dialogue does not stop at talking - it leads to decisions and to action that takes account of the new insights.

¹ Pope Francis, *Apostolisches Schreiben Evangelii gaudium über die Verkündigung des Evangeliums in der Welt von heute (Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium on the Proclamation of the Gospel in today's world)* (24 November 2013), 198: Sekretaria.t der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (Ed.): *Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls No. 194* (Bonn 2013), P. 142.

I. Finding our way along the Synodal Path

(3) The Synodal Path of the Catholic Church of Germany which began on the first Sunday of Advent 2019 is a dialogue carried out in an attitude of faith, leading to listening and seeing, to judging and acting. It starts during a major crisis in the Church. It takes up the impulses of the MHG study. It lives from the perceptions, assessments and points of view of all members of the Synodal Assembly as well as of all people who participate in this dialogue. It must especially listen to the voice of those who are affected by abuse of power and sexualised violence. It needs a readiness to open up to new insights and to permit itself to be defined by them. It also lives from regularly seeking dialogue with new people and groups, within and outside the Church. The bishops are important participants in the discourse. They exercise the ministry of unity within their diverse local churches but they also constitute an essential link to the universal Church and to the Bishop of Rome. They must pay attention to what the people of God believe. This makes it all the more important that everyone on the Synodal Path has a say and can take part in decisions, not only those who hold a senior office in the Church.

(4) The Synodal Path needs a reliable orientation. In God's strength the Church knows herself to be challenged not to suppress systemic abuses of spiritual power, but to fight against them, and not to squander the resources of faith but to use them in a sustainable manner. Without God's help, the Church is lost. She must face up to her history and open up to the future. She needs new impulses to rediscover the Gospel. She needs new forces and alliances to help her draw practical conclusions.

(5) Listening together to the Word of God makes it possible to find answers to the pressing questions of our time, to pressing questions of faith and to pressing questions of the Church. Sexualised violence, sexual and spiritual abuse and the cover-up of it have happened in our Church and have systemic causes. Through her structure, her actions and her practices, the Church has caused great suffering.

(6) The search for orientation requires theological clarity. The task of theology is to open up the sources of faith from which motivations emerge for the conversion and renewal of the Church. "But in order to keep the Gospel forever whole and alive within the Church, the Apostles left bishops as their successors, "handing over" to them "the authority to teach in their own place." (Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*/DV 7 - with reference to Irenaeus, *Adv. Hær.* III,3, 1). Essential is the voice of the whole people of God; in particular there is an "option for the poor", which derives from the Gospel itself.²

(7) The task of the orientation text consists in clarifying the theological foundation for successful work in the Forums, and it serves the entire Synodal Path of evangelisation. The Forums deal with "Power and separation of powers", "Priestly existence", "Women in ministries and offices in the Church", as well as with "Life in succeeding relationships - living love in sexuality and partnership". The orientation text makes clear the foundations as regards the understanding of revelation, the Church's mission and the quality of theological debate so that these can be built on later.

² Pope Francis, Address to participants in the international Congress on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the conference of the Latin American Episcopate in Puebla (3rd October 2019).

(8) The Synodal Path needs spiritual guidance as well as theological discussion. There is no Synodal Path without worship and prayer. There is also none without deliberation and decision-making. The arguments for and against must be exchanged fairly. In doing so, it corresponds not only to human rights, which must be upheld as a matter of course, but even more deeply to that "freedom in Christ" of which the Apostle Paul speaks so passionately (cf. Gal 5:1), that there must be no prohibitions on thought and speech, no fear of sanctions or discrimination. At the same time, however, this freedom also calls us to the common responsibility of the faith that has been handed down to us. Decisions must be well-founded. They must be followed by actions.

II. Rediscovering and reconnecting the places and times of theology

(9) Theology is fed by sources of knowledge of revelation which are instrumental for the life of the whole Church. These sources are places of theology (*loci theologici*). These also include times of theology which always make it possible to discover the "today" of the voice of God in different contexts (cf. Ps 95,7; Hebr 3,7). It can be recognised at these places and in these times what God wishes to say to people by human means, and what people who believe hear as the Word of God. It is important to precisely define these places and times, to differentiate and determine their status, and to precisely clarify their interrelationships. They are found in the celebration of faith, in the proclamation of the Gospel, and in serving one's neighbours in the midst of the world.

(10) The most important places of theology include Holy Scriptures and tradition, the signs of the time, and the sense of faith of the people of God, as well as the Magisterium and theology. No place can substitute the other places; they all need the mutual distinction and association. All these places need to be rediscovered and relinked in each time anew so that God's faithfulness to His promise has the power to renew the Church's faith from one generation to the next. Each of these places has a surplus of promise at each time which cannot be reduced by other places and other times, but which can be strengthened.

(11) The orientation text starts with "Scripture and tradition" in order to describe the basic, seminal testimonies of faith. It speaks of the "signs of the time", making it possible to recognise the "Kairos", the opportunity of the present, (cf. Luke 16:9), and of the "sense of faith of the people of God", which "cannot err in matters of belief" under the promise of the Spirit (Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium* 12). The orientation text places the "Magisterium" and "theology" in a mutual context in order to designate their different responsibilities and at the same time their joint mission, namely to serve the truth of faith which lies in God's salvific word.

(12) Discovering and linking the places and times of theology here and today is an expression of faith which unifies and liberates the entire Church in listening to the Word of God. This is the Biblical experience of God, rooted in the hope of Israel: "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path" (Ps 119:105).

Opening up scripture and tradition

(13) The witness of Holy Scripture as the “highest guiding principle” (DV 21) and of living tradition are fundamental and landmark for the Church. For this reason, the Synodal Path takes its measures from them.

(14) Scripture and tradition are much more than standards to be observed; they enable a belief in God’s love for all His creatures. The Bible tells the story of how people discovered God’s love, justice and grace in the history of Israel, in the mission of Jesus, and on the paths of the young Church. Tradition makes it clear that God’s journey with people is continued in each generation because the people of God can trust in him “at all times” (Ps 62:9): He says “Yes” to all his “promises” (cf. 2 Cor 1:20).

(15) For the Catholic Church it is essential not to understand scripture and tradition as opposites but to communicate them together and be open to all the different voices speaking as human witnesses of the Word of God. On the one hand, Scripture itself is a tradition because it has been formed in the living tradition of the Church, which is rooted in Judaism. On the other hand, tradition only transmits the Word of God when it forms itself “in accordance with the scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3-4). The meaning of Scripture reveals itself in tradition, and the meaning of tradition reveals itself in Scripture. It is therefore necessary to read and interpret the Holy Scripture in the light of tradition, and tradition in the light of the Holy Scripture. “This sacred tradition, therefore, and Sacred Scripture of both the Old and New Testaments are like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything“ (DV 7).

The Holy Scripture fundamentally testifies to the living God who creates, sustains and redeems people.

(16) The Bible testifies to the “beginning” that God makes by saying His word again and again (cf. Heb 2:3). Therefore, it takes on a special significance with and towards the tradition as a fundamental witness to the Word of God. Greek Church Father Gregory of Nyssa describes the Holy Scripture as “a sure truth criterion for each teaching” (Contra eunomium 1:315). Read in the spirit of God, the Holy Scripture is the “guide” that lends orientation to the life and mission of the entire Church, also today and tomorrow (DV 21).

(17) The Holy Scripture is a source of renewal in faith, of criticism of wrongdoing, of encouragement to attain freedom, of a hope for redemption, of an invitation to love and of seeking justice. The Bible is inspired by God and written to give a voice to the poor, to comfort all who mourn, to free the captives and to make space for God’s grace - always “today” (cf. Is 61:1-2; Lk 4:18-19). The Bible stands for faith in God, love for one’s neighbours, and hope of renewal which imparts a foretaste of redemption.

(18) The Bible is however also a book that many people find difficult to access. It is written in the language of a bygone age. It reflects a worldview that has perished. It contains a wealth of scriptures whose significance and context trigger questions and attract criticism. It is misused again and again to exercise dominion over others. This makes good explanations all the more

important. Whoever believes never remains stuck to the letter of the Bible, but seeks to breathe the “Spirit” that “gives life” (2 Cor 3:6).

(19) The Holy Scripture fundamentally reveals how faith comes into being and reveals itself. The Christian Bible reaches from Creation to the end of the world. It starts with God, who speaks (Gen 1), and ends with a blessing for all (Rev 22:21). The rainbow becomes the sign of a Covenant which God establishes with all of humankind (cf. Gen 9:13). The Bible calls to mind the lasting mission of Israel, the flight from Egypt (Ex 12-15), God’s revelation at Sinai (Ex 19-40). It lends a voice to wisdom and prophecy. According to Luke, Mary testifies that God is on the side of the poor: “He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly” (Lk 1:52). According to the Gospel of John, God’s eternal Word became flesh in Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 1:14). The New Testament testifies to the memory of Jesus who in His birth, life and death, as well as in His resurrection reveals God’s unending nearness to people. (cf. Mk 1:15), His court ruling over sin (Mt 25), His search for those „who were lost” (cf. Lk 19:10) and His imparting life “more abundantly” (Jn 10:10). The New Testament shows the awakening of the young Church which will gather people for faith among all the peoples: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal 3:28). The Bible brings together all those who believe in Jesus Christ with their Jewish brothers and sisters in faith. It provides the sure foundation for the knowledge of the Living God (cf. Hos 6:6) and promotes friendship with Jesus (cf. Jn 15:12-17). It communicates the promise of Jesus Christ to remain on the path in the midst of His Church “until the end of the age” (Mt 28:20).

(20) The faith of the Church entails a conviction that the books of the Bible teach the “truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation” (DV 11). In this declaration, the Second Vatican Council invokes the New Testament: “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17).

(21) The Bible reveals in a variety of ways the unity of faith without which there is no diversity, and the diversity of faith without which there is no unity (Rom 12:1-8). The Canon brings together a chorus of voices lending expression to the search for God in different languages, with different tones, and in far-reaching visions of the future, expressing joy in God and questions about God, but also doubt about God, struggling with God, and again and again astonishment about God. The multifaceted nature of the texts creates a vociferous choir singing the melody of the Gospel in all its highs and lows: with all the harmonies and dissonances which belong to people’s lives “through all eternity” (1 Chr 16:36), in the fundamental attitude of the God-given “hope of being restored to life by Him” (2 Macc 7:14).

(22) In the Bible, people, inspired by the Spirit of God, bear witness to God’s Word in human words. They heard it and wrote it down in their times and at their place in order to enable people in all times and in all places, who read, meditated and studied the Holy Scripture to hear God’s comforting, liberating word. Saint Augustine put it as follows: “God speaks through people in a human manner by speaking thus, by seeking us” (Augustine, *De civitate Dei* XVII 6:2). This suspense between God’s Word and human words ensures that the meaning of the Holy Scripture can never be exhausted, but has to be discovered anew and more deeply time and again.

(23) The Bible does not dictate world views, gender roles, values of the times in which they were valid. Rather, it also changes prevailing conventions in order to create space for God and open up spaces of freedom. But even in these processes of change, it is bound to a specific time. Therefore, the Bible has lost none of its topicality and relevance. However, its message must always be defended against attempts to use the Bible to set back, discriminate against and dominate people who, on the basis of their conscience, live and believe differently from the norms of the Church.

(24) Any reform of the Church worthy of its name is measured against the Holy Scripture. The Bible does not provide a pattern that one only needs to copy, but gives impulses and sets criteria when it comes to walking along new paths and mastering new challenges. The Holy Scripture is a compass enabling us to take new paths with God's help. It encourages us to engage in creativity and criticism, to discover the old and explore the new. As Pope John XXIII put it: "It is not the Gospel that changes, but we who begin to understand it better" (Apoftegma, 24 May 1963).

(25) The Bible must be interpreted in such a way that the salvific power of the Gospel can be proclaimed. This salvific power is faith (cf. Rom 1:16-17). The fact that interpretation is possible and necessary is based on the Bible itself: The Torah must be applied, wisdom lived, prophecy embraced. "Let the reader understand" (cf. Mk 13:14). The history of the Church is also a history of interpretation of Scripture which is to impart the literal, spiritual and historical with an up-to-date meaning. The goal of interpreting Scripture is to always hear God's voice and permit it to enter our hearts "today" (cf. Ps 95:7; Heb 3:7).

(26) Criteria are needed for interpreting the Bible. It is essential to pay attention to the original meanings of the texts, to the context of Scripture as a whole and to the connection with the tradition of the Church (cf. DV 12). Especially when it comes to the question of what orientation the Holy Scripture gives today, the interpretation must be open to new insights from the natural, human and social sciences. In addition, it must be remembered that new questions arise in every age to which there are no direct answers in the Bible. The task of the Church's interpretation of Scripture remains to make the Word of God audible in the many words of the Bible. Sacred Scripture opens itself to the witness of faith in the breadth of the Spirit who gives life (cf. 2 Cor 3:6).

(27) The interpretation of the Bible is a concern for all who read the Bible in order to discover God's story in the story of their own lives. It is a concern for the whole Church to find in the Bible the initial, fundamental witnesses of faith which must be proclaimed anew to every generation. It is a major task for the sermon, for catechesis, and for religious instruction, not only to inform people about the Bible, but to open it up for them for today as God's Word in human language. Interpretation is a matter for theology, the "soul" of which is the study of Holy Scripture (DV 24); as theology can provide a scholarly explanation of the Bible from the time of its genesis and it can recognise how it has been re-read and re-understood, again and again, as time has passed. The interpretation of the Bible is not lastly a matter for the Magisterium, which however must respect freedom of theological research and the sense of faith of the believers and put it to use. Its task after the Second Vatican Council is to explain the written Word of God that has been handed down "bindingly (authentically)", whereby it is "not above the Word of God", but "serves it" (DV 10). The Magisterium is the ecclesiastical authority to be heard and

obeyed in matters of faith and morals. Its task is to bear witness to the authoritative interpretation of Sacred Scripture (cf. DV 10) and to advocate that the "table of the Word" (DV 21) be richly laid for the faithful and that God's Word comes to the fore in the interpretation of the Holy Scripture, which is "near" to all those who believe (Deut 30:14 - Rom 10:8).

Tradition testifies to the creativity of the Spirit of God, which leads the Church of all times and places on the path of conversion and renewal.

(28) God's Spirit leads the Church on her path through time. This is how the tradition of the Church comes into being. It is not a rigid but a living entity. She hands down the Word of God which is fundamentally given to us in the Holy Scripture in such a way that the Word of God can be perceived in each time and in all places in the human witness to faith: in celebration, in teaching, and in the ministry of faith. Thus, tradition realises the unity of the Church, faith and baptism in the diversity of gifts and vocations (cf. 1 Cor 12:12-27; Eph 4:4-5). Tradition is founded in the apostolic proclamation of the Gospel. It requires constant transmission. According to Irenaeus of Lyons, the bishops, as successors of the apostles, have the task of reliably witnessing to the truth of the Gospel (cf. *Adversus haereses* 3:3). All who are in the ministry of preaching are called to recognise and witness to the liberating truth of the Gospel so that all members of the Church may grow in faith (cf. Eph 4:11-21).

(29) Traditionalism is wrong to only recognise the penultimate phase of church history as binding in most cases, thus curtailing the richness of tradition or forcing it into the corset of a system. But as a living entity, tradition develops in the changing times, in the diversity of cultures and in the community of believers who celebrate God's mystery, profess God's greatness and seek to know God's will. French author Madeleine Delbr el writes: "We are ready for every departure because our time has shaped us in this way, and because Christ must go with us at today's pace in order to remain in the midst of the people."³

(30) Reforms are an integral part of tradition: Worship changes; doctrine develops; Caritas unfolds. In its dynamism, tradition is the process to review the current form of the Church and of faith in order to always receive and shape her anew as God's gift. The tradition of the Church is open to the context of new discoveries, new insights, new experiences which challenge the traditional faith and demand new answers, which testify more deeply to the revealed truth of God, which serve the growth of the Church, the proclamation of the Gospel and the communion with all people to whom God's grace applies. The philosophy and wisdom of the peoples, science and the arts, the life of the people and the social work of the Church were and are inspiring factors for further development and for the ever-new unfolding of tradition. Prophetic voices are found not only within but also outside the Church. People's living conditions and attitudes change over time; these changes are shaped by tradition, and also help to shape tradition.

(31) In amongst the abundance of phenomena, in the contradictions of the times, and in the controversies regarding the right path, criteria are needed in order to recognise the tradition which is able to faithfully hand down and continually rediscover the Word of God. These criteria cannot be reduced to particular manifestations, rites or structures. Rather, it is God's Word

³ Madeleine Delbr el, *Frei f ur Gott* (Einsiedeln 1976), P. 71.

itself that constitutes the tradition. No human being may claim to possess this Word of God, but all the faithful are called upon to hear it and to bear witness to it (cf. Rom 10:17). It is crucial to promote love for God (cf. Dt 6:4-5), which is shown in love for the neighbour (cf. Mk 12:28-34). Wherever the "philanthropy" of God is shown in the lives of people (Tit 3:4), the tradition is alive.

(32) With regard to the Second Vatican Council, a distinction has to be made between tradition and the traditions which are very important and helpful in faith for people of a specific time and culture, but are not generally widespread, are not passed on from one generation to the next, but can certainly also be recognised as being narrow, as an exaggeration or fixation on a particular constellation. Tradition per se does not exist without traditions, but only within them; but a critique of tradition is required so that tradition per se can be recognised in traditions and from traditions. This forms part of the constant reorientation of the Church towards witnessing the Holy Scripture in light of the signs of the time.

(33) The subject of tradition is Christ Himself who brings together the people of God in His Spirit. Different members, charisms and gifts make up the people of God. The decisive factor is the community formed in faith, from generation to generation, and from place to place. Tradition is therefore inseparable from the sense of faith of the people of God (*sensus fidei fidelium*): The 'sense of faith' of God's people lends expression to Scripture and tradition: They are recognised and visualised. The sense of faith in turn extends the tradition of the Church in each present time by taking the witness for the Holy Scripture as a yardstick, and interpreting the signs of the time. The promise applies that God's Spirit holds and guides His people in and to the whole truth of the Gospel (cf. Jn 16:13).

(34) Distinguishing tradition in the multiplicity of human traditions is a task that is already set in the Bible in a different context (cf. Mk 7:8). The Holy Scriptures provide the criteria for evaluation because, read in God's Spirit, they reveal the Word of God in its original meaning, which must be determined anew in any given time. The signs of the times indicate the direction in which the tradition must be further developed. In their sense of faith, the people of God recognise by virtue of the Spirit where the paths of faith are running: what to preserve from the past and what to discard, what to develop further and what new things to integrate. Theology reflects what is, has been and may be considered tradition. The Magisterium has the task of continually opening up tradition as the source of a living faith, protecting it from misinterpretation and promoting the unity of the Church in critical phases through listening and discernment.

(35) The liberating power of the Gospel must be expressed in the interpretation of Scripture and tradition. For Scripture and tradition, by virtue of the Spirit of God, lead from the written word into the midst of life and from the past into the present and future. Scripture and tradition are decisive milestones for the path of conversion and renewal the Church is following. They open our eyes to all people who are searching for meaning and happiness, for comfort and strength, for solidarity and hope on the paths of their lives.

Exploring the signs of the time and the sense of faith of the faithful

The Church is instructed to interpret the signs of the times in her respective present as places of God's salvific and liberating presence.

(36) The Church is tasked with giving witness to the truth of God. She can only do so if, in addition to Scripture and tradition, she also carefully examines and interprets the signs of the time for traces of God's salvific and liberating presence. For the signs of the time open up an important gateway to discover God in the people's history and present. This will enable the Church to adequately answer the pressing questions about the meaning of human life and redemption from evil for the present and for the future.

(37) The Second Vatican Council makes us discover that we have the task "of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel" (GS 4). In this context it is important "to decipher authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the happenings, needs and desires in which this People has a part along with other men of our age. For faith throws a new light on everything [...], and thus directs the mind to solutions which are fully human." (GS 11). In this specific sense we understand the signs as a place of theology. They can be recognised through discernment in the midst of epochal changes in all areas of human life and in all parts of the world. The Second Vatican Council gives examples of the ambivalence of phenomena typical of the times: "Never has the human race enjoyed such an abundance of wealth, resources and economic power, and yet a huge proportion of the world's citizens are still tormented by hunger and poverty, while countless numbers suffer from total illiteracy. Never before has man had so keen an understanding of freedom, yet at the same time new forms of social and psychological slavery make their appearance." (GS 4). Among the hopeful signs of the times - "authentic signs of God's presence and purpose" (GS 11) - Pope John XXIII counts, for example, the "improvement in the economic and social condition of working men"; the growing together of peoples into a "human family" that will soon know no more foreign domination; and, not least, the growing participation of "women in public life" (Pacem in terris 21-25; cf. 45-46.67.75). According to Pope John XXIII in these and similar signs of the time people discover "what is meant by truth, justice, charity and freedom. ... And that is not all. Inspired by such principles, they attain to a better knowledge of the true God—a personal God transcending human nature. They recognize that their relationship with God forms the very foundation of their life—the interior life of the spirit, and the life which they live in the society of their fellows." (Pacem in terris 25).

(38) The signs of the time stand for moments in which something significant reveals itself and forces one to make a decision. They stand for a window, a momentum, a Kairos. This places all of the signs of the present time on a Biblical foundation (cf. Lk 12:56): Time fulfils itself with the coming of Jesus of Nazareth: The "kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk 1:15). The life and destiny of Jesus are the incarnate signs of God's salvific and liberating nearness in the past, present and future of humankind. Such signs of the time must therefore never remain without consequences. Jesus Christ already calls to conversion and discipleship in the face of the fulfilled time. Today's signs of the time must therefore make us reflect; interrupt our habitual thinking and actions and make us consider new beginnings, also in the life of the Church.

(39) All signs of the time must be distinguished in the abundance of historical and societal phenomena and determined in terms of their significance for faith and the Church. Only in this way may orientation be gained for personal and societal life and for the life of the Church. For the "improvement in the economic and social condition of working men" or the participation of "women in public life", what is hopeful may be obvious. The crisis of growth, or the simultaneity of freedom and new forms of slavery, on the other hand, undoubtedly make the ambiguity of many signs of the time just as obvious. At the same time, they can point to both the salvific and to the unholy. The signs of the time must therefore be identified. What is the salvific element in which God's presence may be perceived? And what is the unholy element which must be overcome in the light of the Gospel, that is in the light of the salvific and liberating nearness of God and the call of Jesus Christ to conversion?

(40) This distinction is not new. The Scriptures of the Bible also call for the "discernment of spirits" (cf. 1 Cor 12:10), and warn against "false prophets" (1 Jn 4:1) leading people astray. The signs of the times must be interpreted in the spirit, life and destiny of Jesus Christ. The Risen One Himself sends the assistance of His Spirit to His disciples (cf. John 16:7-8). His spirit helps to distinguish and recognise the sinful from the righteous, the unholy from the holy, and the "authentic signs of God's presence and purpose" (GS 11).

(41) Recognising the signs of the time in the power of God's Spirit, and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, requires an interplay between all further places and sources of faith. The Holy Scripture opens up a view of criteria which result from the distinction between true and false prophecy. Tradition proves that the discernment of spirits has always been a task for all faithful and for the church office - under changing conditions, and with varying success. The interaction and expertise of all is needed: of those who have a special closeness to the everyday world of the people, as well as of those who are entrusted with the Magisterium, in order to ensure consistency and connectivity with the profession of faith. And theology ensures the connection to the insights that must flow into the interpretation of all the signs of the times in the discourse of the sciences, in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and in attention to the different cultural realities.

(42) The insights of other sciences are indispensable. For only they open up the reality of many areas of life that are not (fully) covered by Holy Scripture or tradition. The sciences decipher their inherent laws ("autonomy of earthly affairs": GS 36). Therefore "if methodical investigation (...) is carried out in a genuinely scientific manner and in accord with moral norms" scientific knowledge "never truly conflicts with faith, for earthly matters and the concerns of faith derive from the same God." (GS 36). Therefore, dialogue with the sciences is essential for the interpretation of the signs of the times as well as for faith as a whole.

(43) The outcry of the victims of sexualised violence is truly a sign of the time. The outcry draws attention to a terrible evil - namely, decades of violence in which priests, religious and other employees abused their spiritual and administrative power over children and juveniles as well as over adults, and especially women. The outcry of the victims forces the Church into a salutary crisis of purification. It forces her as a whole to engage in conversion (cf. LG 9). Hearing this outcry and following it up through the renewal of the Church and its structures can itself become a sign of the times. It becomes a place to give witness to the Christian faith. The sign of the time making the outcry of the victims of sexualised violence effective is not inconsequential. It

brings into focus other questions of the life of the Church that in some cases have been open for a long time: the question of power and the desire for the separation of powers; the sustainability of priestly ways of life; the desire for equal access to the ministries and offices of the Church for all genders; the reception of current research findings in the sexual morality of the Church. They too could prove themselves to be signs of the times. They too call to be interpreted on the trail of God's presence and God's counsel. The following also applies to them: "Do not quench the Spirit! Do not despise prophetic utterances! Test everything; retain what is good." (1 Thess 5:19-21)

In the intuition of their faith, the members of the Christian people of God assure themselves of the truth of the Gospel.

(44) The call of the Apostle Paul not to quench the Spirit of God was first addressed to the Church in Thessalonica. As part of the canonical Scripture, it is handed down for the Church into the present day. It is therefore a reminder to all the people of God. The people of God, in all its members, is gathered into a community in order to discover the abiding presence of God in the manifold signs, and to explore His counsel: in the Scriptures of the Bible, in the traditions of the Church, and not least in the signs of the time. And it is in God's counsel itself that the whole people of God discover and explore Him. Only all the members of the Church together consolidate the intuition necessary for this. Only in this way does the sense of faith of the faithful (*sensus fidei fidelium*) develop; only in this way does it become an open ear, a seeing eye or the sensitive touch of God. Mary, the Mother of the Lord, puts this sense of faith into words that come to life in the prayer of the Church: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my saviour" (Lk 1:46-47).

(45) The sense of faith of the faithful is rooted in the common priesthood of all who are baptised and confirmed. The common priesthood fundamentally allows active participation in the three-fold ministry of Christ, the ministry of leading, the ministry of sanctifying, and the ministry of teaching (cf. LG 12 and 36). For the dogmatic constitution of the Second Vatican Council on the nature of the Church, this common priesthood has very far-reaching consequences for the teaching of the Church. The common priesthood means that the people of God in its entirety "cannot err (...) They manifest this special property by means of the whole peoples' supernatural discernment in matters of faith when 'from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful' [St Augustine] they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals." (LG 12)

(46) The sense of faith of the faithful includes the connection between life and faith. It consists not only in what is transmitted by Church teaching. It is also far more than the intuitions of believers who are able to sense the truth of the Scriptures, tradition or the Church's teaching. The sense of faith of the faithful must also examine everything itself in the Spirit of God in order to find out what is good and right. The Spirit of God inwardly directs the faithful towards what determines everyone and everything: towards the spiritually-interwoven thread of personal conduct in life, the Church as God's community of discovery and exploration - in constant conversion, and on the path of discipleship of Jesus Christ. God thus communicates again and again in the sense of faith of the faithful. In this spiritual act, the faithful adopt the truth contained in Scripture, tradition or the signs of the time, out of an inner conviction. The role models are the

Saints, who themselves frequently struggled with their Church in their time, but in the midst of all adversities gave authentic witness to and inspired the faith of God's people, irrespective of their gender, of their origin, and of any office in the Church.

(47) The sacramental ministry of the ordained priesthood represents Christ as Head of the Church and ensures the unity of the Church - in all places and through all times. In this it serves the common priesthood of all who are baptised and confirmed. This ministry is indispensable. Unity of the Church does not mean uniformity. The unity of the Church consists in the unambiguousness of her mission and its many-voiced expressions. "The "visible and social union" of the Church (cf. LG 9) takes place as unity in the commonly shared faith, in the sacraments and in the communion of the Church under the successor of the Apostle Peter.

(48) This unity must be struggled for again and again. It is put to the test when there is long-lasting dissent within the people of God on central questions of faith. This becomes particularly evident when a church doctrine is not taken on board by a major section of the people of God despite many clarifications and explanations. Here too, the sense of faith of the faithful may emerge. Of course, ongoing dissent by no means automatically negates the truth of a theological insight or of a doctrine that is presented. But it does indicate that it must be examined, and if necessary further developed. It is the better arguments and more profound insights that count, and certainly not the number of loud voices or the forcefulness of power-conscious positions. Scripture and tradition never tell us about quick majority decisions, but they tell us a lot about the strenuous efforts of a common search for the truth. Decisions of faith in the Church should always be made according to the principle of unanimity. They aim at a consensus that is not an outward compromise but an inner coming together. The consequent involvement of the sense of faith of all the faithful in the other places and sources of faith prevents it being simply equated with a prevailing opinion in a present place. The sense of faith feeds on the sources of Scripture and tradition; it interprets the signs of the time, and is prepared to listen to the Magisterium. The Magisterium, in turn, presupposes and inspires the sense of faith of God's people. Theology encourages it through analysis and critical reflection.

(49) The sense of faith of the faithful expresses itself - guided by the Spirit of God - in particular in the "truth of conscience"⁴. Conscience confronts each person individually with God's direct call. He calls on him or her to unconditionally direct conduct in life towards the love of God, and of his or her neighbour. Love of God and of one's neighbour points to the conscientious insight of each one of the faithful into the common quest of all the faithful, indeed of all people of good will (cf. GS 16). No personal judgment of conscience could have permanence if it were to close itself to the pros and cons of common considerations with others. It must allow itself to be critically questioned in cases of doubt. It is quite possible that an idiosyncratically-accentuated decision of conscience could pass its acid test in this respect. It is no coincidence that the word conscience refers to knowing together, to *con-scientia*, to *syn-eidesis* (cf. 1 Cor 10:28). But in the end, it always appeals to the individual's own insight, to his or her own judgment, to his or her own decision. The deeply-personal, conscientious final decision about one's own way

⁴ Pope John Paul II, Enzyklika *Dominum et vivificantem* über den Heiligen Geist im Leben der Kirche und der Welt (Encyclical *Dominum et vivificantem* on the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World) (18 May 1986), 31: Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (Ed.): *Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls* No. 71 (Bonn 1986), P. 30.

of life is binding - even if it should turn out that it was made in error. To ignore conscience, to control it from outside, to eliminate it, or even to neglect it, would be to negate the personal centre of people and their dignity that was created by God. Conscience, for its part, finds orientation in the light of faith.

(50) The truth of conscience is the realisation of the human being's rational nature and his participation "in the light of the divine mind" (GS 15). At the same time, the rational capacity for knowledge and judgement in many questions of faith and life unites believers with all other people: "In fidelity to conscience, Christians are joined with the rest of men in the search for truth, and for the genuine solution to the numerous problems which arise in the life of individuals from social relationships." (GS 16). The conscience of the believers makes use of the findings of different sciences. But this also shows that the sense of faith does not establish an exclusive claim to ownership by individual believers. The sense of faith of the believers pushes for a consensus, for a commonly shared sense - even if such a consensus is not always reached and the community of believers then has to live with dissent over a period of time. The Church is not only a community of remembrance, but also a community of dialogue. She fundamentally involves all who are baptised and confirmed. The bishops in particular are responsible for ensuring that a dialogue may take place in alignment on the essentials, and does not end in a confusion of voices. As leaders of the local churches, they are advocates of unity, and bridge-builders within the world-spanning community of dialogue. They thus serve the "truth of conscience" - the formation of conscience in the community, as well as for each individual. These special advocates and bridge-builders can however never take their place.⁵

Taking the Magisterium and theology seriously

(51) In common with the other witnessing instances of faith, the Magisterium and theology are dynamic variables. They are represented by people who are called in various ways to testify to and teach God's Word. The Magisterium and theology belong together from the beginning. For the Word of God is also the foundation of the magisterial proclamation. Theology is not only represented here by the scholarly discipline of that name, but ultimately by all those who are baptised who testify to their faith in various contexts, speak of their experiences with God, and pray to Him. The Magisterium and theology, like the entirety of the faithful, are bound to the revelation of the Word of God, to Sacred Scripture, tradition and the sense of faith of the whole people of God in the context of the signs of the times. The sense of faith of all the baptised, like all other places of faith, is grounded in the Holy Spirit. *Lumen gentium* 12 emphasises that the entirety of believers shares in the prophetic ministry and the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and that they have an inerrant teaching authority under the guidance of the Magisterium.

(52) Tradition speaks with regard to the individual faithful of a *sentire cum ecclesiam*, of a feeling and breathing with the Church, to express that there is not only an outward, but also an inward relationship with the people of God. This connection can be perceived as a successful, joyful experience, or as a burdened, sorrowful one. Suffering under or in the Church is prevalent

⁵ cf. Pope Francis, *Nachsynodales Apostolisches Schreiben Amoris Laetitia über die Liebe in der Familie* (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia* on love in the family) (19 March 2016), 37: Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (Ed.): *Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls* No. 204 (Bonn 2016), P. 30.

today in many, but especially among those who have fallen victim of abuse. This makes it difficult to live the joy of the Gospel and to experience the salvific dimension of the sacramentality of the Church. The Magisterium and theology need to take feeling with the Church and the *sensus fidei* seriously, given that any talk of a consensus in the Church would remain abstract without these two dimensions. Church educator Catherine of Siena showed with her letters to the Pope that the *sentire cum ecclesiam* also does not rule out constructive criticism of the conduct of the Magisterium.

The most important task of the episcopal and Papal Magisterium is the authentic proclamation of God's Word.

(53) In this ministry of proclamation, the ministry of leadership is grounded in the people of God. The ordained ministry is oriented towards and is meant to serve the common priesthood of all the baptised. The bishops have been understood as vicars and ambassadors of Christ (LG 27) since the Second Vatican Council; the preaching of the Gospel occupies an eminent place among their principal duties (LG 25). They are in collegial communion with one another and with the people of God appointed to the ministry of sanctification, teaching and leadership.

(54) Universality and regionality make up the living diversity and unity of catholicity. The form of faith changes diachronically over the epochs, and synchronously distinguishes itself due to the different manifestations of the local church. A bishop, as representative of the faith of the apostles and at the same time of people within the respective local church, has to give voice to this faith in the universal community of bishops. The universal Magisterium of the Church is exercised not only by the Pope, but by the whole body of bishops, under his direction and in a collegial and conciliar manner. It is necessary to strengthen the synodal moment with the participation of all the faithful also in the development of church doctrine. Infallible decisions of the extraordinary Magisterium are subject to special conditions, and for good reasons form the absolute exception in the Catholic Church. The ordinary Magisterium of the Pope and the individual bishops may trust in the working of the Spirit of God. It is however not exempt from possible errors, unless everyone agrees in a consensus.

(55) These forms of the exercise of the Magisterium have been supplemented by the synodal tradition at universal Church and regional level since time immemorial, and Pope Francis has declared that he wishes to enhance this. An ancient principle of the Church goes as follows: "that which affects all as individuals must be approved by all" (CIC ca. 119, 3) There is therefore a need to consider how participation of all faithful in the realisation of their common priesthood in future councils and at universal synodal level can be guaranteed. Unity in the Catholic understanding is no static concept. It takes place in concrete terms between ourselves and the triune God, in the diversity of the people, local churches and cultures. Unity, as a gift of the Holy Spirit, is a characteristic of the Church and at the same time a task for all believers. We also notice this in the controversial debates within the Church, which show how lively and diverse the unity of the Church is. "It is not easy to grasp the truth that we have received from the Lord. And it is even more difficult to express it. So, we cannot claim that our way of understanding this truth authorizes us to exercise a strict supervision over others' lives. Here I would note that in the Church there legitimately coexist different ways of interpreting many aspects

of doctrine and Christian life; in their variety, they “help to express more clearly the immense riches of God’s word”.⁶

(56) The Magisterium is called to unlock the immense riches of God’s Word. In connection with the preservation of unity, the Magisterium is thus entrusted with the task of enabling and protecting the legitimate diversity of faith and doctrine that has always belonged to the life of the Church and to the working of the Spirit of God. The Magisterium had previously rather held back in theological disputes beyond conciliar decisions, and left the clarification of central questions to the theological debates that were shaped in the Middle Ages by the great traditions of the religious orders. The consequence of the First Vatican Council was that the Papal Magisterium, for apologetic reasons, increasingly claimed the task of and competence for theology for itself, and understood itself as a faith-defining defensive instance in the face of a modernity which it perceived as a threat to faith. In the anti-modernism controversy, this hindered the reception of knowledge from the humanities and the natural sciences and thus also prevented attempts by theology to open up new paths of faith in dialogue with contemporary thought and to make faith in God comprehensible to the people of their time.

(57) A new epoch started in the Church with the Second Vatican Council. The deliberations that took place at this Council led to a constructive dialogue within the Church and with the world, and to a new attitude towards other denominations and religions, as well as towards philosophy and atheism. The Papal Magisterium increasingly sought to establish a dialogue with theology and with the other sciences, the insights of which were now also positively received. This also led to a new flourishing of theology, the independence and specific Magisterium of which were acknowledged. The Second Vatican Council chose a clearly different language than the councils before: it no longer separates, excludes or pronounces condemnations; it sees the world in the love of God and grants the possibility of salvation to people outside the Church. These departures of the Council must be strengthened and advanced. Thus, with regard to its language, the Magisterium must also take into account today how its words affect people.

(58) The Popes and the Curia often reacted to reform-orientated synodal developments in the local churches with reserve or rejection, or did not even respond to pressing questions and urgent requests, such as the Würzburg Synod. This led to fresh disappointments and tensions. The Synodal Path notes that the Roman Magisterium also intervenes in our time in ongoing clarification processes and discussions, and insists on doctrinal positions that many faithful, including deacons, priests and bishops, far beyond Germany, no longer find comprehensible. The alienation between Church teaching and the increasingly complex lives of people, as identified by Pope Francis and the Family Synod, is also becoming a challenge to the practice of proclaiming the Gospel for the local churches in Germany. Particular significance attaches here to adherence to the meaning of the Scriptures, to the living tradition, to the signs of the time, to research into theology, and especially to the *sensus fidei*.

(59) The guidelines of church teaching are also to be critically reflected by theology. If the Magisterium points out that the Church does not have the authority to change a doctrine on

⁶ Pope Francis, *Apostolisches Schreiben Gaudete et exultate über den Ruf zur Heiligkeit in der Welt von heute* (Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et exultate* on the call to Holiness in today’s world) (19 March 2018), 43: Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (Ed.): *Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls* No. 213 (Bonn 2018), P. 26.

certain questions, then it must be examined what is at issue: In these cases, is it really a doctrinal position of the highest obligation? Or is it a doctrine that is to be located at the top of the hierarchy of truths? Is *ius divinum*, divine law, to be assumed? Can the justifications put forward be convincing? Every magisterial decision gains its authority only as an authentic form of proclamation of revealed truth. The insistence on authority alone is not enough. Because of the guilt of abuse and out of a pressing pastoral need, the Synodal Path is therefore looking for new perspectives. It should also be pointed out that even the authentic ordinary Magisterium can possibly err when it is in doubt whether it expresses the consensus of all in faith. This question is of particular importance because we are experiencing that worldwide, in concern for the future of the faith and the credibility of the Church, a not inconsiderable number of ecclesiastical doctrinal positions are being questioned. It is the task of theology to take up such questions and to support the Magisterium also through constructive criticism. It becomes evident anew how necessary dialogue is in order to find a consensus in our time. "Such a mission requires in the first place that we foster within the Church Herself mutual esteem, reverence and harmony, through the full recognition of lawful diversity. Thus, all those who compose the one People of God, both pastors and the general faithful, can engage in dialogue with ever abounding fruitfulness. For the bonds which unite the faithful are mightier than anything dividing them. (GS 92).

Theology is included in cooperation and dialogue between all places of faith.

(60) Historicity and temporality also of the Church's doctrinal statements are to be taken into account. The Synodal Path therefore attempts to present theological arguments in a differentiated way. This is also to aid the Magisterium in examining previous statements in the light of scientific findings and reflections, whose inherent lawfulness is to be appreciated and examined and to realise necessary changes in teaching positions. This is at the same time a contribution to the discernment of spirits. Theology reflects faith in God in a plural way, and is tasked with permitting faith and rationality to come into their own as equals. In the same way as the Holy Scripture and tradition, theology as a science - in its exegetical, historical, systematic and practical manifestation - belongs to the witnessing instances and places of identification of the faith of the Church, along with the sense of faith of all the faithful and the Magisterium. It relies here on engaging in a dialogue with the other sciences, with which it seeks together to find the truth and its significance for people. There are different hermeneutical approaches in theology, and these themselves are open to the many schools of thought in an increasingly complex world, in order to be able to enter into a fruitful dialogue with them. Theology itself takes place in this rich plurality.

(61) "Sacred theology rests on the written word of God, together with sacred tradition, as its primary and perpetual foundation. By scrutinizing in the light of faith all truth stored up in the mystery of Christ, theology is most powerfully strengthened and constantly rejuvenated by that word." (DV 24). So just as the Church as a whole must reinterpret the text of the Holy Scripture again and again, because this text is not unambiguous, so too the soul of theology, that is the study of the Holy Scripture (DV 24), must lend a voice to the one truth founded in the mystery of God, equally in its diversity and multiplicity of meaning.

(62) In the dogmas of the Church, truths revealed by God are expressed in a historical and binding manner; they aim to illuminate and strengthen our faith. Nevertheless, they are also texts with multiple meanings, and in the course of history they have to be questioned again in terms of their meaning. Council texts are often compromise texts, given that they aim to achieve consensual unanimity. This is also taught by the Second Vatican Council, the reception of which is still underway in different and conflicting paths. Theology is aware of the tension of unity and diversity of such texts, of their binding nature, but also of their historicity and contextuality, which gives us food for thought. Pope Francis reminds us in this context that God has surprises in store for us again and again: There are no easy solutions when we ask in a differentiated manner for the meaning of God's Word for people in our time. "When somebody has an answer for every question, it is a sign that they are not on the right road. They may well be false prophets, who use religion for their own purposes, to promote their own psychological or intellectual theories. God infinitely transcends us; he is full of surprises. We are not the ones to determine when and how we will encounter him; the exact times and places of that encounter are not up to us. Someone who wants everything to be clear and sure presumes to control God's transcendence."⁷

(63) In common with the other sciences, theology must accept that each answer and every time gives rise to new questions, and that the search for the truth does not end, even if the truth has been found, until God brings time to an end. "At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully" (1 Cor 13:12). God's mystery is a lasting challenge for theology and for the Church as a whole. It leads to a properly understood self-critical attitude of humility in which one's own interpretations and convictions are placed into perspective again and again, i.e. they are referred back to the mystery of God's boundless love. Even if He is infinitely close to all people, He at the same time transcends all human thinking capacities. Theology is thus also tasked with countering fundamentalist temptations where positions of individuals or groups are to be made absolute and not subject to debate in such a way as to make it incapable of dialogue. A self-correction emerges in the scientific community of theology via the critical scholarly discourse. A critical counterpart is also needed in dialogue with the Magisterium, that is for both partners in the dialogue.

III. Deliberating and deciding in the power of the Spirit

(64) Theological criteria have been identified in this text which guide the work of the Forums of the Synodal Path and the drafting of their resolutions. They aim to open up spaces for new paths, and show that there may be changes in the Church, indeed that there must be changes in times of crisis. How else could one speak of a serious conversion?

(65) The concept of transformation is of central significance not only in the celebration of baptism and the Eucharist. It is the guiding concept for Christian life: All are called by God to repent, to be constantly changed and transformed by His love. How does this happen? Is there really conversion and change or do the same familiar patterns, structures and attitudes remain?

⁷ Pope Francis, Apostolischen Schreiben *Gaudete et exsultate* über den Ruf zur Heiligkeit in der Welt von heute (Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate* on the call to Holiness in today's world) (19 March 2018), 41: loc.cit., P. 25.

Does the Synodal Path bring about change? If, in the face of guilt and sin, there is no repentance and new turning to the Lord, the Church becomes rigid; its members who are stuck in guilt betray the living God and the people who are seeking God today.

(66) The Church is a royal priesthood, a holy nation under God, so that they may announce the great acts of God in the name of Jesus Christ (cf. Ex 19:3; 1 Peter 2:9). She is “in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely-knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (LG 1). Because of her holy origin, from which she can constantly draw strength, the Church can be called holy in spite of all her shortcomings. She lives by the promise so that she cannot be destroyed by the forces of evil (cf. Mt 16:18-19).

(67) The profession of the holiness of the Church, which can only be founded in God alone, is connected with the admission of her sinfulness. The knowledge of the Church’s sinfulness must not be used in today’s crisis as an argument to simply carry on as before because sin and guilt have always been part of her. On the contrary: If the Church takes her own theology of repentance seriously, radical self-criticism, honest repentance, open confession of guilt and a genuine change of direction in her attitude, her actions and, where necessary, also in the change of structures are indispensable. Only in this way can a path of reconciliation which the Church hopes for and which only God in His mercy can open up for her be taken.

(68) Pope Francis paints a new picture of the Church today, which he sees as a “field hospital”⁸. The Church is to help heal the people’s wounds, and not to open up new ones. She should speak a language that people understand, which does not wound and discriminate, but allows people to recognise God’s kindness. Trusting in God’s mercy, the Church is called upon to confess her sins, to resolutely combat the structural causes of abuse within the Church and to courageously pursue new paths of the common mission. To respond to this call is the mandate of all members of the Church. This means that all those baptised shall assume their responsibility and use their right to give advice to each other and to take good decisions together.

(69) The model of a self-renewing synodal Church, which Pope Francis resolutely promotes, is also the model of the Synodal Assembly, which seeks to involve itself in the worldwide Synodal Path. This universal process deliberately embraces the participation of the common priesthood of all who are baptised. The question of the appropriate participation of the whole of God’s people in the deliberations and decisions in the Church arises worldwide, and demands new answers. Above all, the victims and survivors of abuse must be heard. Their experiences, their indignation, and their complaints, must find an echo in the teaching and in the practice of the Church. The experiences of people and the proclamation of God’s Word are already inseparable for the Holy Scriptures. No one may tear them apart.

(70) Due to the systemic increase of abuse within the Catholic Church the four themes of the synodal forums are indications of the first steps to be taken on the Church’s path of conversion and renewal. They are prerequisites for evangelisation that accompanies people’s lives, which is the mission of the Church, and draw consequences from the fact that the Church has to permit herself to be evangelised in order to bear credible witness to God’s Gospel. The theological clarifications needed to promote participation and the separation of powers, to shape priestly

⁸ Pope Francis, Nachsynodales Apostolisches Schreiben *Amoris laetitia* über die Liebe in der Familie (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia* on love in the family) (19 March 2016), 291: loc.cit., P. 205.

life today, to strengthen women in ministries and offices in the Church, and to mediate between the sexual teaching of the Church and the lives of people today, are dealt with in the texts of the Forums, and lead to concrete options for action.

(71) The synodal experience “allows us to walk together not just in spite of our differences, but seeking the truth and taking on the richness of the polar tensions at stake.”⁹ Pope Francis speaks of a diverse Church in which the image of unity is not a pyramid or a circle, but a solid polyhedron, i.e. a three-dimensional polygon. This is an exciting image that combines diversity and unity.

(72) Gathered and united by the Holy Spirit, the Synodal Assembly lives and experiences the rich diversity of the Church, united in the common faith. All members of the Synodal Assembly are called to pray to God, celebrate the liturgy together, and live the diaconal mission of the Church in service to all people. This unity does not rule out different positions also being taken up on certain questions of the Church’s life and doctrine in the future, and in mutual respect. Everyone involved in the Synodal Path will thus struggle for the path of the Church in the future, and will continue to seek a synodal understanding: The Synodal Path has not come to an end, but is to continue!

⁹ Pope Francis, *Wage zu träumen (Let us dream)* (München 2020), P. 108.



Foundational text

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

Decision of the Synodal Path adopted by the Synodal Assembly on February 3, 2022

Introduction

(1) The Catholic Church is in a serious crisis. She can, however, only fulfil her mission if she recognises the character, causes and dimensions of this crisis, faces up to the crisis, and makes a serious effort to find solutions. This concerns above all the systemic causes of abuse of power and sexualised as well as spiritual violence.

(2) Even if the crisis of the Church needs to be defined within a broader context of societal and cultural change processes, it is not limited to such general factors. Firstly, there are tensions within and between the doctrine and practice of the Church. Secondly, there is a divide between the claims of the gospel and the way power is actually conceived and exercised in the Church. This divide must be closed under the demands of the Gospel. The standards of a plural, open society in a democratic constitutional state do not oppose this, but give room for a credible proclamation of the Gospel.

(3) The conversion and renewal of the Church in particular concern her system of power.¹ According to Lumen gentium (LG) 8, the Church is not only a spiritual entity, but she is also a society constituted in this world, because only this way she can serve the world. A look at history shows that there were many ways of shaping the structures of the Catholic Church. In the light of the Holy Scripture and of the Second Vatican Council they should be put to the test again and again - through a discernment of spirits. The abuse scandal confronts the Catholic Church with the question of which spirit she is guided by.

(4) Only the entire people of God can give an answer to this question. The sense of faith of all who are baptised calls for greater shared responsibility, cooperative action and enforceable participation rights. Shared responsibility not least creates transparency in the use of church power. The research project “Sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests, deacons and male members of orders in the domain of the German Bishops’ Conference” (MHG Study) carried out in 2018 has shown forcefully and in disturbing diversity that sexualised violence committed by clergy against children and juveniles, the hushing up of offences, and the protection of perpetrators, are caused not only by individual psychological factors, but also by systemic ones. In particular, the focus is on the current power structure within the Church. It favours certain

¹ The term refers to the structures of power in the Church and their principles.

criminal and abusive acts and makes it difficult or prevents to counter them internally as well as to cooperate with the public authorities. It is therefore all the more important that those with responsibility in the Church undertake a critical self-reflection with regard to these structural and ideational factors that enable or promote the abuse of power. Standards and criteria for a sustainable spiritual and structural renewal have to be developed which then need to be translated into concrete measures.

(5) As the Synodal Assembly of the Catholic Church in Germany, we therefore recognise in conscientious and self-critical reflection, and in an effective reform within the Church's power structures an essential prerequisite to realise the mission of the Church in the world of today. If the Church wishes to be able to claim spiritual and moral authority, her understanding and use of power must be critically examined, and if necessary reformed: Does the Church's power really serve the proclamation of the Gospel, and does it serve people? Where does it become autonomous? Where does it promote and where does it hinder the experience of God's unlimited creative life power?

(6) A change in the ecclesiastical order of power is called for on the basis of the Church's own history of the synodal principle, on the basis of democratic decision-making processes in orders and ecclesiastical associations, and for reasons of successful inculturation into a democratically shaped free society under the rule of law. This is not about uncritically adopting practices from society, for the Church also always has a prophetic-critical mission towards her social partners.² The democratic society, however, can no longer understand and comprehend the Church's system of power in many instances. Yes, the Church is publicly suspected of using her own legal system to discriminate against people, to undermine democratic standards, and to immunise herself against critical enquiries about her doctrines and organisational structures. The Synodal Path builds on theologically-based reforms and concrete changes in order to address legitimate accusations, rebuild trust in the Church, and make space for faith in the God of life.

(7) The kernel to the problem is the manner in which power - that is power to act, power to interpret and power to judge - is understood, justified, transferred and exercised in the Church. A theology of the Church has developed, a spirituality of obedience and a practice of the office which unilaterally bind this power to ordination and declares it to be sacrosanct. The Church is thus shielded from criticism, disconnected from supervision, and cut off from division. Conversely, vocation and charisms, dignity and rights, competences and responsibility of the faithful in the Catholic Church are not taken into account according to the significance that they have to the people of God. The access to the Church's ministries and offices is restrictively regulated without the task of evangelisation coming sufficiently to the fore as a decisive criterion. The respective ministries, offices, roles and responsibilities too are not sufficiently closely linked to the charisms, competences and qualifications of the faithful. This is not only about a wrong understanding of power, but above all about the lost opportunities for the development of our Church. A restrictive leadership culture wastes potentials and competences of believers and ministers. Not only access to power, but also the selection and guidance of those to whom this power is entrusted, require an honest examination and reform. The Church-related exercise of power also requires a settled personality and spiritual maturity.

² Cf. Pope Francis, Letter to the pilgrim people of God in Germany (29 June 2019), No. 7. 2.

(8) These factors justify, cause and promote the abuse of power, which obscures the mission of the Church. Precisely because this obscuration reaches into the institutional core of the Church, it also affects the image of God that is proclaimed and lived, and thus the innermost point of all evangelisation. The Church's aspirations and reality must become closely aligned.

(9) Since the problem of power concerns structural issues of separation of powers, power control and participation beyond the question of the individual behaviour of public officials, these issues are particularly in focus here. Questions closely connected to this include those of gender equality, and the question of the mission and shape of the ordained ministry. Regarding the question of options for a successful life in different forms of life, in addition to questions of content, there is also a debate about the criteria and competences according to which church authorities can be assigned sovereignty of interpretation and judgement.

Part I:

Reforming our own power structures as a fundamental activity of a Church on the move

1. Where do we stand? And what lies ahead?

Dimensions and challenges of the crisis

(10) The Catholic Church needs a spiritual and institutional conversion that is sustainable. The crisis of the Catholic Church affects different levels, and has multiple causes. The crisis is massively exacerbated by sexualised violence and spiritual abuse of charges.

- There is a serious institutional crisis in the Church. Individual misconduct is part of a culture of exaltation of the spiritual office and in structures and attitudes secured by church law which "protect" ministers from critical questioning, as well as from sustainable supervision and limitation. Committing sexual and spiritual abuse a perpetrator becomes guilty as does at the same time the institution that does not prevent such action and that protects the perpetrator.
- There is also a severe crisis of credibility in the Church. The crisis is evident not only in the systemic causes of abuse, but also in a lack of openness to reform. Some who resign their Church membership retain their faith, but the failure of the Church costs others their faith. Alienation from congregations and from Church institutions, as well as from the Church's rituals and offers of meaning, are as studies show an important factor motivating people to dissociate themselves from the Church, even in circles of highly committed church members. Often, the Church's power structures are experienced as authoritarian. For many, her legal system does not meet the human rights-based standards of democratic societies. The Church doctrine on ethical issues, especially in the field of gender justice and sexuality, is perceived as hostile to life.

(11) The institutional crisis and the credibility crisis of the Church make it considerably more difficult to communicate the Gospel. In parallel, profound religious-cultural changes are taking place worldwide, the consequences of which are not yet foreseeable. Spiritual and religious needs continue to claim space, but church ties are loosening. Fundamental Christian beliefs, namely the belief in the triune God, are evaporating. The confessional, symbolic and social form of the Christian faith is increasingly losing plausibility. Thus, appropriate measures are necessary that might help to overcome the institutional crisis and the credibility crisis of the Church.

(12) We wish to understand, change and exercise power and responsibility in the Church in such a way that “God’s kindness and love for mankind” (Titus 3:4) can be rediscovered.

(13) The proclamation of the Gospel and the celebration of faith must correspond to the gospel of Jesus Christ, motivated by the service to the poor. Interpersonal relationships and organisational structures have to be guided by this gospel. Where this is not the case, sustainable corrections have to be made.

2. We have understood!

The mission of the Church as a debt to culture and society

(14) More than half a million people terminated their membership of one of the two major Christian Churches in 2019 alone. 272,771 people left the Catholic Church. The number of people leaving the Church has doubled since 1990. This trend is continuing. Many church members are considering leaving. Not only in Germany, but worldwide, there are more and more new and disturbing reports about abuse of power in sexual, spiritual and financial terms. Whilst the analysis and correction of factors that enable or fail to effectively prevent violence against minor charges is gradually gaining (legal) contours, and has triggered intensive theological reflections, other problems such as spiritual abuse of or violence against (religious) women, and adult charges have so far hardly been recorded and dealt with. This also applies to sexualised violence, sexualised and spiritual abuse perpetrated by full-time and voluntary church workers, as well as the violence that has occurred in the many institutions, communities, groups, associations and federations of the Church. Nationally and internationally, depths of actions on the part of the Church have been revealed. The strength and willingness of many, especially many women, to continue to commit themselves in the Church, to shape the Church on the ground, and to stand up for this Church, are exhausted.

(15) We have understood

- that an enlightened and plural society must insist that such phenomena of structure-related abuse of power must be consistently exposed, charged and punished and that everything must be done to prevent their continuation. This requires active, transparent cooperation between the Church and state authorities. The Church can only be grateful for the critical public opinion;
- that abuse of power may be legitimised and concealed neither in canon law nor theologically or spiritually. It distorts the idea of spiritual authority, and counteracts the theology of the office, which does not empower to engage in arbitrariness, but orders to exercise the ministry. It blatantly contradicts both Christian and social values and standards of law and justice;
- that power is transferred as a ministry and requires spiritual depth. It can only achieve blessed effects when it is shared, limited and supervised in the spirit of the Gospel, and when it is granted, and if necessary withdrawn, within the framework of comprehensible quality standards. Where instruments to supervise power are lacking, the power to shape and interpret is transformed into arbitrariness - also and especially in the Church;
- that the Church in a free, democratic society has to face public supervision;
- that the legal culture of the Church must be aligned with fundamental and human rights;

- that also spiritually based leadership must be effectively bound to law and legal protection;
- that transparency, accountability and effective checks on power prevent abuse of power, and the reliable administrative justice is needed in the event of culpable failure;
- that leadership must always be co-decided by those over whom decisions are taken;
- that sharing and supervising power do not signify opposition to the authority of offices. In fact, the attribution of authority increases when it commits itself to abide by unambiguous quality standards that have been established by others;
- that power in the Church must not become independent, but should open up ways of life in the sign of the gospel of God's love - and that it shall be measured by this.

(16) We have understood that the Church has been guilty. We have understood that the Church has enabled and covered up massive sexual violence, sexual abuse and spiritual abuse and protected the perpetrators. We have understood that the causes of these cases are systemic and linked to the structure and teaching of the Church. We have understood that we need to resolve the systemic prerequisites for abuse in the Church. We have understood that many parts of society consider a Church which is primarily concerned with herself to be unattractive and useless. Questions of structure and legitimacy are undoubtedly challenges we have to face. However, this is not already the fulfilment of the set task, but only its prerequisite. People want a Church that offers them a space in which to experience and encounter God, and that fulfils a critically-prophetic mission towards society. To realise this is the task of all faithful.

(17) We have understood that we will be judged on whether and how we honour this debt.

3. We are on a path of learning.

The breakthrough of the Second Vatican Council in terms of revelation theology and its ecclesiological formalisation

(18) The Second Vatican Council has shown new ways of understanding Revelation that serve the renewal of the Church. It is guided by Holy Scripture and tradition; but it also relies on the sense of faith of God's people and on the signs of the times (Pope John XXIII), especially on the dialogue, ready to learn, with the scientific findings and socio-cultural developments of the present day, which in their own way offer a key to understanding the Word of God. The Holy Scripture and Church tradition, as well as the "signs of the time", give clear instructions for the possible *aggiornamento*- the updating - of the Church. None of the testimonial instances is to be made absolute or to be asserted uncritically.

(19) The reference to Holy Scripture needs scientific exegesis. The reference to church tradition needs critical historical research and analysis that reveals the detours and deviations of the history of the Church and of dogma, reminds us of what has been forgotten and makes clear the respective time-boundedness of theological concepts and church structures. The interpretation of the signs of the times also needs an awareness of the possible dangers of an era and its current social order. A discernment of spirits is required. The signs of the time are to be interpreted in the light of the Gospel (cf. *Gaudium et spes/GS 4*). Orientation to the Holy Scriptures, interpretation of tradition and commitment to the *aggiornamento* of the Church are intertwined.

3.1 God's revelation in the Church's tradition

(20) It was theologically decisive for the Second Vatican Council to describe revelation and faith in terms of a dialogue between the Word of God and the human response. "In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father. ... Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends" (Dei verbum/DV 2). No tradition is thus started off by a text or a doctrine. Therefore, a network of witnessing instances of faith (*loci theologici*) is laid out in the event of revelation. At these "places" the event of salvation is perceived and passed on. Thus, the network of these places is of decisive importance in the Church's teaching.

(21) The "orientation text" presented by the Synodal Committee describes the individual witnessing instances of faith and their interrelations. The Second Vatican Council highlighted the faithful and their sense of faith (cf. LG 12), and the signs of the time (GS 4) as places of theology: These include the significance of externally-gained insights for a deeper understanding of the Gospel, as well as a contemporary shaping of the Church's structures (cf. GS 44). The dialogical interpretation of God's Word by "lay" believers, theological experts, and representatives or instances of the Church's Magisterium are also part of this. Determining this structure in a differentiated way has consequences for the understanding of power and the separation of powers in the mission of the Church, which will be explained in the following.

(22) The revelation-theological and the ecclesiological renewal of the Council thus intertwine. This is not a mere pragmatic reform of structures, but a demanding synodal renewal of the Church's self-understanding. This also constitutes a major motivation for today's processes of conversion of the Church.

- God's revelation has been handed down once and for all - but its reception and interpretation take place in a human way, i.e. within the framework of historically- and culturally-determined understanding processes. This was already the case in the Bible.
- These understanding processes do not take place in a monological or directive witnessing instance but within a network of different instances. None can be replaced or superseded by another. Weight is given to each witnessing instance; each is historical, i.e. dynamic and time-bound in equal measure.
- Insights, experiences and developments of the time are resonating spaces of the Gospel, in which proclamation can, on the one hand, trigger a new echo and, on the other hand, absorb new impulses.

(23) In a synodal church, this interaction of witnessing instances must be expressed.

3.2 The Church on the path through time

(24) The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) portrays a pilgrim Church which has not yet reached her destination. She is not rigid in her structures, but alive in her mission; not self-sufficient, but capable of learning. The Church is out to seek and find God and His traces, also in the "strange", unexpected places (cf. GS 4, 11, 44). She is moving on with all people of good will on the Path in a joint quest for truth (cf. *Dignitatis humanae/DH 3*), in solidarity with their joys

and griefs, their thinking and deciding (cf. GS 1; Ad gentes/AG 22); with respect for their dignity and conscience (cf. GS 16).

(25) This self-understanding reflects the willingness, as a Church, to learn from the surrounding culture and society: from its language and experiences, its perceptions and ways of thinking, its social processes and organisational structures. “With the help of the Holy Spirit, it is the task of the entire People of God, especially pastors and theologians, to hear, distinguish and interpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them in the light of the divine word, so that revealed truth can always be more deeply penetrated, better understood and set forth to greater advantage.” At the same time, the Church “can and ought to be enriched by the development of human social life, not that there is any lack in the constitution given her by Christ, but that she can understand it more penetratingly, express it better, and adjust it more successfully to our times” (GS 44).

(26) We see ourselves as a learning Church. To this end, we want to use the whole network of witnessing instances to reveal the meaning of the Gospel in our time. We want to learn our common Church’s mission anew - together with the people for whom we are on the path as a Church.

4. We want to learn to embody theological diversity in the unity of the Church.

Plurality as legitimate diversity of different core beliefs - also within the Church

(27) Church and theology were and are plural which is neither a weakness of the Church, nor a failure of leadership on the part of those with responsibility. Cultivating diversity without breaking apart as a community can be understood as the very hallmark of what it is to be Catholic. This is shown by Church history and this becomes more and more urgent as regards the global character of the Church. Openness to different ways of thinking and living is indispensable with regard to the cultural linguistic ability of the church, because the gospel addresses all people.

(28) Unity and diversity in faith must be balanced anew. We believe that God keeps his people in the truth revealed in Christ. It is the fundamental task of the teaching authority in the Church to authentically testify to this truth and thus to preserve the Church in unity. This does not release us from the need to constantly search for this truth of salvation history in the diversity of times, cultural forms and concrete social challenges. We can only speak honestly of the one truth entrusted to us if we are aware of the complexity of such approaches and open the discursive space for this without restriction. Dealing with complexity in an ambiguity-sensitive manner is due to the historical character of the truth of salvation and at the same time proves to be a fundamental signature of intellectual contemporaneity, especially today. as a fundamental signature of intellectual contemporaneity. For this reason, it is a prerequisite for today’s theology. It does not only pursue the one core perspective, not the one truth of the religious, moral and political worldview, and not the one form of thought that can lay claim to ultimate authority. Legitimate views and ways of life can co-exist in the Church too, even on core beliefs. In fact, they can even simultaneously assert a theologically-justified claim to truth, accuracy, comprehensibility and honesty, and still contradict one another in terms of their statement or in their language. Not infrequently in history, the Magisterium has deliberately not resolved such tensions, but has only recorded the mutual dependence, as for example in the central

question of grace and freedom. The fact that plurality is also legitimate and an opportunity in the interpretation of doctrinal statements also relates to the debates along the Synodal Path.

(29) Given a legitimate diversity of interpretations of how and for what purpose the Church is to serve, the task is to develop a Church culture of conversation and of learning from one another. This also applies to coordination in the different universal Church contexts, and on the different levels of the universal Church.

(30) A church culture of conflict presupposes:

- to avoid denying one another Catholicity and Catholic legitimacy. It is important to learn from the others' positions, to listen to one another and to the working of the Spirit in this dialogue. In doing so, people challenge each other to critically examine their own position.
- a commitment to conducting debates in a solution-oriented manner and making well-founded decisions. However, decisions may need to be addressed even if solutions have not yet been conclusively found.

(31) Conflicts must be interpreted and solved in community, in which the faithful listen to one another and to the working of the Holy Spirit, with different attitudes. In such joint learning processes, which serve the purpose of unity and the strength of the faith of the Church, fundamental questions can thus be posed which aim to further develop the doctrine, and in line with the latter, the Church's legal order.

(32) As a Synodal Assembly, we know that our debating and deciding can always only be of a provisional nature. But this insight must not prevent us from acting responsibly. We know of our fundamental common origin and of our different interpretations. We struggle with each other to find the best possible solution. We respect our differences, even when it comes to core convictions; we strive to perceive the legitimate concerns in other positions. We expect everyone to do their part to promote the ability of the Synodal Assembly to act and that majority recommendations and decisions to also be supported by those who themselves have voted differently. We count on everyone to examine the implementation of the decisions in a thorough and publicly-transparent manner.

5. We follow the aspiration to be signs and instruments of unity and salvation.

5.1 The sacramentality of the Church ...

(33) The Second Vatican Council declared in programmatic terms: "Christ is the Light of nations" - and developed the essence of the Church from this starting point: "[...] the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely-knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race" (LG 1). From this faith follows the need for a sustained conversion of the whole Church, spiritually and institutionally.

(34) As the Synodal Assembly, we accept the sacramentality of the Church as a challenge: We want the Church to become credible again as a place where people find a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and experience God's healing power in the sacraments, in proclamation, in the ministry to the poor and distressed (cf. GS 1) and in fellowship. In order to be authentically and effectively regarded as the sign and instrument of this connectedness with God and with one another, we are working to reform the Church's system of power.

(35) A “sign” must be the bearer of a message. It must make itself heard and resound in the heart of the people. And what is to serve as a tool (“instrumentum”) must be handy and efficient. In short: A sacrament must have a signal effect! Transferred to the Church this means: Meaning and credibility must be expressed in the structure (cf. LG 8). The system and exercise of the Church’s power must prove itself worthy of the trust that the faithful are to place in her. Through a misguided internal power structure, the Church obscures her mission. Instead of preventing abuse, she has enabled it, instead of investigating it, she has all too often covered it up. This was also made possible because the Catholic Church has not consistently taken up the demands of the Gospel, nor the achievements of liberal standards such as transparency, participation and control. When the church is not experienced as a sign of salvation but as a space of disaster, its sacramental identity is called into question.

(36) The reform of the Church’s power structures is therefore not some kind of manoeuvre involving cultural refinements that adapt the Church to the zeitgeist. It is required for the sake of the sacramentality of the Church. In this sense, Pope Francis has set the worldwide synodal process in motion so that in the various local church contexts areas of qualification in church structures and attitudes can be developed which make the idea and essence of the Church to be a sign and instrument of unity with God and with one another credible and real.

(37) Whilst the Church is not an end in herself, this also applies to the sacramental office. This office is responsible not for human rule becoming effective in salvific terms, but the life-giving power of God. It is a sacramental sign which points to Christ and receives its authority from Him. This does not absolve the minister from supervision and criticism. In fact, quite the reverse: For the sacramental office serves the life of the people in the sign of the Gospel and is to be measured by this. It is not only a function, but is based on an empowerment. Those who exercise the office represent Christ, the Head of the Church. For this reason, the church office always calls to mind the difference between Christ and the minister. Those ordained are called and authorised for the “formation of a genuine Christian community” (Presbyterium ordinis/PO 6) which, imbued with the spirit of Jesus Christ, lives by His word and proclaims His death and resurrection in the Eucharist. The Church must lead to life and allow herself to be transformed by the Spirit of God where she does not do so.

(38) As the Synodal Assembly we wish to help ensure that the Church can be experienced as a space in which to experience community with God and with one another. In view of the Church’s abuse of power the theology and organisation of the Church’s structures and offices must be refined in such a way that the Church can better fulfil her mission today.

5.2 ... as an inspiration and a task to be performed

(39) The Second Vatican Council related the sacramentality of the Church not only to her institutional side, but also to the community of the faithful. In the same way as the Church is called on to be the sign and instrument (LG 1) of unity, the faithful are called on to be a “witness and a living instrument of the mission of the Church itself” (LG 33, cf. Apostolicam actuositatem/AA 2). They have been consecrated to a “holy priesthood” by virtue of their baptism and confirmation (LG 10) and sent out to build up and shape the Church and the world in the spirit of the Gospel. All faithful, laity and clergy, without prejudice to any further differentiation in the

manner of their participation, have their part to play in all the essential processes of the Church: proclamation, pastoral work and the liturgy. (cf. Sacrosanctum concilium/SC 14 and frequent other mentions, LG 10; 30-38).

(40) In this newfound view of the Church and the sacramental ministry the Second Vatican Council takes up fundamental Biblical insights. Baptism forms the basis for partaking of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13), and calls us to play an active role in the life of the Church (1 Cor 12:12-27). Baptism is the full expression of being a child of God, vested with all the rights arising from this status (Gal 3:26-4:7). There is one baptism - for all who believe in Jesus Christ (cf. Eph 4:4-6). In the power of the Spirit, baptism overcomes the discriminatory differences that prevail between Jews and Greeks, slaves and free persons, male and female (cf. Gal 3:28). It must also exert its anti-discriminatory effect within the Church today. Paul says that the unity of the body of Christ goes hand in hand with the diversity of the members that form this body, and are indispensable in their respective distinctiveness (cf. 1 Cor 12:14-27; cf. Rom 12:6-8 and Col 1:18; Eph 1:22; 4:15). Paul refers these members to the charisms which are given to all the faithful (cf. 1 Cor 12:1-11,28-31; Rom 12:3-5). They contribute to the inner and outer growth of the Church (cf. 1 Cor 14). The Apostolate too is a charism according to this understanding, as are prophecy, teaching, helping and leading: All these gifts establish responsibility; they demand recognition and enable cooperation. Based on the work of the apostles and prophets, the ministry of church leadership with its own indispensable task develops into the common priesthood of all believers in a tense relationship with and to one another (cf. Eph 2:20-21; Eph 4:11; 1 Tim 3:1-7, 8-13; Tit 1:5-9 etc.). It is in these processes of institutionalisation that the approach described by Paul comes to the fore that it is the Spirit of God who gives the many gifts, some of which become permanent leadership ministries without being distinguishable by virtue of greater or lesser grace.

(41) The ecclesiological task to be accomplished today is to define - both in the understanding of the sacramental ministry and in understanding as well as exercising the leadership tasks - the interaction within the common priesthood of all and the particular priesthood of the ministry in such a manner that the *communio* structure of the Church is clearly expressed and takes on a social and juridical form which makes one-sided relationships of domination impossible and creates a commitment to those possibilities of participation by all.

(42) We take up this approach on the Synodal Path in the theology of baptism and in the gifts of the Spirit including ordination. God's spirit makes the faithful living witnesses of the common mission of the Church, whom the sacramental ministry serves, and lending it concrete shape for the legitimisation of tasks, responsibilities and competences in a variety of Church ministries.

Part II:

Necessary steps on the way to reform church power structures

(43) The Catholic Church must constantly re-examine the structures in which she lives her power. She must change these structures where service to the people requires it and develop them further to ensure the proper governance of the Church in the spirit of the Gospel. She must listen to the voice of those who have been and are affected by the abuse of power in the

Church. In them, according to the testimony of Holy Scripture (cf. Mt 5:1-12; Mt 25:31-46), the voice of Christ becomes audible. Their cry is a special locus theologicus of our time.

(44) The necessary changes strengthen the unity and diversity of the Catholic Church, which is sent to proclaim the Gospel. They intensify the interaction between all members of the Church who have different ministries and tasks. The specific ministry carried out by bishops, priests and deacons is renewed spiritually and structurally. The relationship between the sacramental structure and the organised acts of the Church is intensified because the richness of vocations and gifts is put to better use. The tasks of pastoral leadership increase in meaning by taking on forms in the sense of an *ecclesia semper reformanda*, which serve the inculturation of the Gospel into the respective time and society.

6. We need clear terms and precise distinctions.

(45) In common usage the term “power” refers first and foremost to opportunities to influence human interactions and to shape their structures. People who have power have opportunities to realise their convictions and to enforce their will even in the face of opposition. This is precisely why power must be tied to legitimacy: to procedures, above all to communicative understanding. In this respect, power is not only a question of structure. In following Jesus, power is to be exercised as service: not as oppression of the weak, but in the sense of strengthening the powerless in solidarity (cf. Mk 10:41-45, Mt 20:24-28; Lk 22:24-27). This biblical orientation does not call into question that power is always necessary for leadership and organisation. But power relations are provided with a qualitative reservation: Authoritarian rule must be effectively prevented; precisely in the Church, power must become effective in service to the powerless. This is how she gains authority and legitimacy.

(46) The power that is legitimately exercised in the Church can be traced back to the authority (*potestas*) with which Jesus Christ has endowed the Church so that she can perform the ministry of preaching the Gospel in word and deed. Because the place of the Church is the world, power to shape - as power to act, power to interpret and power to judge - must also be organised in it, not least in the leadership of the Church. The Synodal Path focuses on making a precise distinction between christologically-founded authority, and forms of exercising power that are necessary from an organisational point of view. This differentiation does not mean opposition, but makes it possible to clarify competences, hone profiles and create new connections between the members of the people of God.

6.1 Terms clearly defined in canon law

(47) When it comes to dogmatics, canon law speaks of three offices or tasks (*munera*) of the Church: leading, teaching and sanctifying. The Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium* refers them back to the three offices of Jesus Christ, pastor, prophet and priest (LG 10): All the faithful, laity and clergy participate in all three offices, in different ways: by virtue of sacramental authorisation through baptism and confirmation or by virtue of sacramentally conferred official authority. Canon law lays down this principle (can. 204 § 1 CIC), thus underlining the active participation in the mission of the Church of all who are baptised. Official authority is given to

express that the Church cannot be Church on her own, i.e. proclaim the Word of God and celebrate the sacraments on her own strength, but that Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, renders the Church the instrument of God's universal salvific will.

(48) According to the Church's theory of powers, which is incorporated in the Code of Canon Law (CIC) of 1983, the Church's power is concretised in two differentiated powers, the "power of ordination" and the "power of governance" or "power of jurisdiction", detailed in canon law.

- The "power of ordination" (*potestas ordinis*) is conferred when priests and bishops are ordained. It is based on divine law. The power of ordination enables acts to be carried out which are reserved to the ordained, especially in the liturgy and in the celebration of the sacraments. This entails above all the possibility to preside over the Eucharist; the power of absolution (*potestas absolvendi*), which is central to the sacrament of confession, is based on the priestly power of ordination.
- The power of governance (*potestas regiminis*), which is regarded together with the power of jurisdiction (*potestas iurisdictionis*), is based on divine law and relates to the Church's offices of divine or Church law in order to empower the minister to lead the Church, and so to promote the life of the Church in faith. The power of governance includes legislative (*potestas legislativa*), judicial (*potestas iudicativa*) and executive power (*potestas executiva vel administrativa*).

(49) The service rendered by bishops and pastors as their co-workers in the Church is characterised by the connection between the ordaining power and the governing power (can. 129 CIC).³ However, it does not exclude a separation of powers in the area of governance appropriate to the Church, in which executive, legislative and judicial powers can be distinguished in order to enable more transparency and control as well as more participation and cooperation. [...]The aim is better participation and involvement of all the baptised and confirmed in the life and mission of the Church. This insight takes up important impulses from Scripture and Tradition; it corresponds to the signs of the times and allows the sense of faith of God's people to take effect anew.

6.2 Precise distinctions

(50) The Church's legal system is open to structural reform that gives space to the sense of faith of God's people. Spiritual power is rooted in listening to God's Word. Spiritual leadership is tied back to the witness of faith in the entire people of God. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure the responsible participation of all the faithful.

Differentiations in canon law

(51) Canon law caters for essential differentiations which show that the assumption of important tasks in worship (liturgy), in the proclamation (*martyria*) and in Caritas (*diaconia*) may not be

³ This connection has been underlined again with regard to the priest by the Instruction of the Congregation for the Clergy "The pastoral conversion of the parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church" (29 June 2020): Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (Ed.): *Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls* No. 226 (Bonn 2020).

understood as a privilege of ordained ministers of the Church. Rather, all faithful are called by their baptism and encouraged by their confirmation to take their share in the fulfilment of all three basic tasks (*tria munera*). This is shown by many examples from practice and the law.

(52) The distinctions made in the Church's law and already realised in Church practice must be taken up and enhanced.⁴ One approach is to coin a broader definition of "ministries" (*ministeria*) determining the official acts of the Church.⁵ Pope Francis' *motu proprio* "Spiritus Domini" opens up far-reaching possibilities in this regard, which should be fully exploited. It gives space for the responsible performance of tasks by all those who are baptised.

(53) This participation can be assured via diocesan law to a certain extent. In many dioceses, structures of shared responsibility and decision-making by the faithful and priests in the parishes and at diocesan level have already emerged and proved their worth. They need to be strengthened. There is, however, also a need to readjust the Church's constitutional structure in order to strengthen the rights of the faithful in the governance of the Church. Experience here shows that contributing to bodies of the Church becomes more attractive as the elected members of the Church discover that they can participate in decision-making and in shaping the Church.

Perpetuating a living tradition

(54) The scandal of sexualised violence perpetrated by clerics, and the glaring errors committed in dealing with these crimes on the part of individuals with responsibility, have aggravated a profound crisis in the Church. This also affects its institutional form. It has become obvious that the aforementioned traditional narrowing within the Church's power structures have to be overcome in order to discover the genuine breadth of the Church's ministry anew. In relation to the Church's constitution, there is also a need for a living tradition in the present. The task to be performed in our time is to develop structures in which power is exercised in the Church that prevent sexual and spiritual abuse as well as poor decision-making on the part of ministers, enable transparent decisions to be taken, sharing responsibility with the faithful, and promote the ministry of the Gospel in all these.

(55) We advocate using the current canon law to establish precise definitions and distinctions in order to remove obstacles which complicate or prevent participative structures of pastoral work in the Church.

⁴ On 8 February 1977 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith stated during the process of the reform of the Code that only offices that were intrinsically hierarchic (*uffici intrinsecamente gerarchici*) were the preserve of the ordained: *Pontificium Consilium de legum textibus interpretandis, Congregatio plenaria diebus 20-29 octobris 1981 habita*, (Vatican 1991), 37.

⁵ Pope Paul VI took an important initiative with his *motu proprio Ministeria quaedam*, in: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis LXIV* (1972) 529-534. This text names, together with the abolition of the consecration of the lower orders, the liturgical services of the lector and the acolyte. These may also be conferred on lay people. The approach of the *motu proprio* still refers to pre-clerical ministries, and it only speaks of men. As a consequence of the approach, ministries are described which can be assumed by all faithful on the basis of the grace that they have received on baptism, and with the power of confirmation. This development is opened by the statement: "There is nothing to prevent the Bishops' Conferences from requesting from the Apostolic See, in addition to the ministries common to all in the Latin Church, others which they consider necessary or very useful to introduce in their countries for particular reasons."

(56) We are committed to applying the existing canon law in such a way that power is transferred in the dioceses to those who are baptised and confirmed, and that effective supervisory procedures are established.

(57) We are also committed to amending the existing canon law in such a way that a system of separation of powers, participation in decision-making, and independent scrutiny of power, is established which is appropriate for the Church and which is based on the independent dignity of each baptised person.

(58) We are convinced that, for the sake of the vocation of all God's people, the monistic structure of powers must be overcome according to which the legislative, executive and judicial powers are bundled exclusively in the office of the bishop, and where all leadership authority at the level of the parish lies with the parish priest, who whilst he can delegate this partially to others, can also reassume it at any time in the event of a conflict occurring.

7. Defining standards and criteria together.

(59) Standards and criteria for the organisation of formative power in the sense of strengthening the rights of all believers follow from the theological principles of Catholic ecclesiology as well as from experiences made with the free democratic basic order of our society.

(60) Social psychology recognises that the uncontrolled, non-transparent exercise of power triggers fear, and political science recognises that the exercise of power without supervision and transparency leads to power being abused. This is also the case in the Catholic Church. She must however be a welcoming Church because she proclaims Good News. She is charged and commanded to convey nearness, trust, encounter and attentiveness, without becoming overbearing or indiscreet.

7.1 Common standards

(61) Taking a look at the New Testament reveals a wealth of situations, challenges and decisions which have been taken by virtue of the Holy Spirit on the basis of broad participation by the congregations, with special responsibility assumed by the Apostles. The history of the Church reveals numerous constellations in which not only bishops but also religious and qualified lay people have taken responsibility with regard to questions of faith, morals and discipline, ranging right up to resolutions of the Council. Beginning with the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the Second Vatican Council clearly corrected the previous opposition of active ministers and passive laity in pursuing the goal of also enabling and promoting the active, conscious participation of the faithful without ordained ministry in the Church, in the liturgy, in proclamation, and in pastoral leadership. It was ultimately a matter at the time, and to the present day, of the common responsibility of all who are baptised and confirmed for the mission of the Church. With regard to the Church's leadership structures, it is important to formulate participation rights that also facilitate, promote and guarantee this shared responsibility in cases of conflict.

Creating spaces, securing participation rights and preventing abuse

(62) The Church must create space for the faithful so that they may develop their personal gifts and their mission for evangelisation. Therefore, in the sense of "checks and balances", the asymmetry of power, which is also unavoidable in church leadership offices, must be combined with transparency and accountability obligations as well as with consultation and co-decision rights. In order to secure the participation rights of the faithful and to prevent the abuse of the power of ordination and leadership, standards arising from the mission of the Church in the world must be observed.

Inculturation into democracy

(63) Taking a look at the democratic societies of the present, we see that there are guaranteed rights and organised processes of participation in politics, industry and administration, in education and in associations and societies, which are characterised by regular elections and the separation of powers, by accountability, supervision and limits on the number of terms of office, by participation and transparency. If the Catholic Church is to remain faithful to her mission she must become inculturated into societies characterised by democratic processes.

(64) Democratic society is founded on the idea of freedom and the equal dignity of all people: Decisions that affect everyone are made together. This perception of humankind is founded in the Biblical narratives, which present humankind as made in God's image (cf. Gen 1:26-28), and called to responsibility and freedom. This image of the human being gives rise to the obligation of state institutions to guarantee or realise human rights and to enable the members of society to jointly shape the rules and conditions of their coexistence themselves. This is the idea on which liberal democracy is based.

(65) Democracy is not rendered obsolete by virtue of the fact that institutions and their practices are deficient, e.g. because powerful interest groups seize control of politics and steer it in a direction that destroys the natural environment and harms social cohesion.⁶ It is precisely in the moment of danger that the high value of democracy becomes clear. Where today's populist movements deny pluralism, set themselves up as spokespersons of a 'true people' against 'the elites', and "classify entire peoples, groups, societies and governments as "populist" or not"⁷, it is necessary to defend democracy and its institutions, but not to compromise the guiding principle of democracy.

Democracy as a place of learning for the Church

(66) The Church recognises democracy and human rights as a form of coexistence that corresponds to people's freedom and equal dignity. In line with the Second Vatican Council (cf. LG 32), canon law speaks of the true equality of the faithful on the basis of baptism (can. 208 CIC).

⁶ Cf. Encyclical letter *Laudato si'* by Pope Francis On Care of Our Common Home (24 May 2015), et al. 53 f., 156, 189; Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (Ed.): *Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls Nr. 202* (5. Auflage, Bonn 2022), P. 41-42, 112, 132-133.

⁷ Encyclical letter *Fratelli tutti* of the Holy Father Pope Francis on fraternity and social friendship (3 October 2020), No. 156; Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (Ed.): *Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls No. 227* (Bonn 2020), P. 98.

Despite the need to distinguish between the Church and the State, this normative foundation must also be recognised and made effective in the Church's system of power: in the shape of equal participation and shared responsibility for her mission. The goal of a separation of powers appropriate for the Church is first of all to effectively bind ministers' actions to a law with which they must comply, and to have this legal obligation reviewed by courts which are not subject to instructions. Over and above this, the demand for supervision of power aims to adequately involve those who are affected by the actions of the ministers in all important decisions, and to provide them with effective instruments of supervision. In these processes, it is mostly elected representatives of those affected who are to participate in the decisions and supervise power effectively.

(67) Democracy is not only a form of state governance, but also a way of life: People come together as free and equal, learn from one another, listen to the experiences and arguments of others, and struggle together to find good solutions. Such learning processes are possible when a willingness to engage in dialogue, mutual respect, and openness to new, different arguments shape the interactions. People who encounter one another as equals in this manner and live in a vital democratic state also expect this in their Church.

Synodality as a principle of the Church

(68) The Church has a long tradition of joint deliberation and decision-making structures in the shape of synods.⁸ This synodal momentum must be enhanced in view of the vocation and rights of all believers⁹ and be translated into concrete procedural steps.¹⁰ Church law currently provides that only bishops have decision-making rights at synods. This restriction must be overcome without denying the bishops pastoral leadership ministry. The synodality of the Church is more than the collegiality of the bishops. The synodal momentum in the Church includes a new togetherness of all who are baptised and confirmed, in which the differences between the various vocations, including those between ministries and offices, are not levelled out, but attention is given to ensuring that all concerned are heard and that the voice of the poor, the weak and the marginalised is heard in particular. The special spiritual quality of synodality lives from listening together to each other and to what the Spirit tells the congregations (cf. Rev 2:7). Synods that meet in the spirit of Jesus Christ cannot merely deliberate, but will also decide. The synodal momentum belongs as much to the parish level as it does to the diocese and to the bishops' conference, all the way to the level of the universal Church.

⁸ Cf. Internationale Theologische Kommission, *Die Synodalität in Leben und Sendung der Kirche* (2 March 2018): Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (Ed.): *Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls* No. 215 (Bonn 2018).

⁹ Cf. Central Committee of German Catholics, *Synodalität - Strukturprinzip kirchlichen Handelns* (Bonn 2016).

¹⁰ "The words "communion" and "mission" can risk remaining somewhat abstract, unless we cultivate an ecclesial praxis that expresses the concreteness of synodality at every step of our journey and activity, encouraging real involvement on the part of each and all." Address of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Opening of the Synod (2021).

7.2 Joint criteria

(69) The criteria mentioned below presuppose the current law of the Church, which emphasises pastoral leadership carried out by bishops and parish priests. They show the means by which the participation of all faithful in deliberative and decision-making processes in the Catholic Church can be assured on a sustainable basis. Much in this respect can be drawn from tried and tested traditions of the religious communities and Catholic associations.

(70) It is important for the Catholic Church that decision-making processes are linked with the interests and ideas of the faithful, which in turn are rooted in their sense of faith.

(71) This linkage requires qualified and legally guaranteed participation in all of the Church's consultative and decision-making processes:

- through co-consultation and co-decision;
- at the level of Church bodies;
- through building and securing effective supervision;
- by transparency in decision-making processes;
- by limiting the time for holding church leadership positions.

(72) It is important for the Catholic Church that decisions are bound to the law in such a way that general rules of fairness, transparency and supervision, recognised as legitimate, are comprehensively guaranteed so that arbitrariness is effectively ruled out. The participation of the faithful must depend on the goodwill of the bishop or pastor in question. This is made possible by:

- an effective improvement in the possibility for the faithful to assert their rights before an ecclesiastical administrative jurisdiction or the Apostolic See;
- strengthening the rights of parishes and communities vis-à-vis those of the diocesan decision-making and administrative powers;
- a strengthening of the formative rights of the diocesan bishops or the bishops' conferences vis-à-vis the Apostolic See with regard to pastoral care in the dioceses.

(73) For the Catholic Church, it is important that procedures are further developed or introduced that strengthen the acceptance of ministers, facilitate binding dialogues between them and the faithful and enable conflicts to be dealt with in an orderly manner:

- by the direct or indirect participation of the faithful in the appointment of leading offices;
- by requiring those who hold leadership positions to regularly account for the administration of their office;
- by agreeing on procedures to ensure that in the event of misconduct on the part of the office bearer and in the event of undesirable developments for which he or she is responsible, a good solution is sought together, but that in the exceptional case of a blatant failure in office, an orderly resignation takes place.

(74) Legal security and protection must be guaranteed for all members of the Church. To this end, the discussion on a *Lex ecclesiae fundamentalis*, and its norms which are fundamental for the legal system of the entire Church, must be rekindled and brought to a positive conclusion.

(75) Decisions in the Catholic Church must be factually appropriate. This requires the following principles to be taken into account:

- *Professionalism*: Qualification is a prerequisite for the assumption of responsibility and of decision-making powers.
- *Diversity*: Bodies are to be composed on the basis of the equal dignity of all who are baptised (can. 208 CIC), that is they are to be as representative as possible, including gender-appropriate, cross-cultural and diverse.
- *Effectiveness*: Tasks are to be assigned and procedures are to be structured in such a way that the necessary resources are available for power to be exercised effectively.
- *Transparency*: The objects of planning procedures and decision-making processes are to be disclosed.
- *Communication*: The aim is to reach a consensus with all parties involved.
- *Verifiability*: Processes and decisions must be documented and evaluated at regular intervals.
- *Solidarity*: Decisions must enhance the Communion of the Church, and in particular help those who are weak to assert their rights.
- *Subsidiarity*: Decisions are made by the lowest authority that is able to do so in terms of personnel, institutions and expertise.
- *Sustainability*: Decisions are also taken in the interest of future generations.

(76) We advocate ensuring that the possibilities which exist in the law of the Church are put to better use so that all who are baptised and confirmed play an active role in the proclamation of the Gospel, in the pastoral work in the parishes and - through elected representatives - in all important decisions of the Church.

(77) We are committed to the synodality of the Church being sustainably developed so that the rights of deliberation and decision-making of the entire people of God are guaranteed.

(78) We are committed to ensuring that the Church's decisions link in to the sense of faith of God's people - in innovative procedures promoting dialogue between those who exercise leadership tasks and the other members of the Church.

(79) We are also committed to reforming canon law in such a way that the general principles of fairness, transparency and supervision are implemented on the basis of a fundamental rights charter of the Church.

(80) We are convinced that the structural changes in the Catholic Church's system of power promote freedom of faith in the community of the Church, and at the same time make the ministry exercised by bishops and priests clearer and more attractive, because on the one hand it is relieved of overburdening and excessive demands, and on the other hand it is embedded more deeply in the community life of the Church by enhancing synods, bodies and elections.

8. We address requirements for access and promote competences.

(81) Reforms are not only called for to manage flaws and seek stopgap solutions.

(82) Common goals are to prevent suffering and violence, to promote evangelisation, to strengthen the unity of the Church and to make better use of the competences of the faithful.

8.1 Leadership tasks

(83) It is certainly possible and necessary given the provisions of canon law as it currently stands for faithful who are qualified and called to assume leadership tasks in the Church which are usually, but by no means necessarily, assumed by clerics. Particular significance attaches in this context to the establishment of full equality and participation of women.

8.2 Celibacy

(84) Celibacy has profoundly influenced the spirituality of the priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church. But the fact that those who are proven in faith and life can also be ordained as priests needs to be reconsidered in view of the pastoral challenges and the manifold charisms within the Church. This should lead to a vote being taken in Germany which is addressed to the Apostolic See and gathers together experiences of the universal Church so that different pastoral situations can be responded to in the field in different ways.

8.3 Enabling women to access the ordo

(85) Due to the exclusivity of access, the question of admitting women to ordained ministries, is also a question of power and of the separation of powers. It is important to reinforce the living unity of the Church, and at the same time to allow regional differences to apply.

(86) We advocate ensuring that the possibilities that church law already offers are consistently applied to promote equality.

(87) We are also committed to ensuring that ministries and offices in the Church are made accessible to all who are baptised and confirmed, and assigned according to their charisms and vocations, their aptitude, qualification and performance. We encourage a synodal understanding at universal church level.

(88) We are convinced that the re-clarification of the access requirements creates a basis ensuring that the gifts of the Spirit which are given to the Church are more effective, and the witness of the Gospel becomes stronger.

9. We describe areas for action and decision-making procedures.

(89) The stimuli for reform which the Synodal Path triggers through its resolutions relate to all areas, levels and decisions of the Church's activities.

9.1 The Church's fundamental activities: Liturgy, Martyria and Diaconia

(90) Liturgy (worship), Martyria (witness to faith) and Diaconia (charity) realise the Church as *Communio*. Real *Communio* requires the participation of all baptised people with guaranteed rights in these fields of action.

Liturgy

(91) The celebration of the liturgy is strengthened when the entire gathered community is involved. The liturgy becomes all the more alive when it is celebrated authentically and in a variety of ways, not only in the Eucharist but also in services led by faithful who are not ordained.

Martyria

(92) The martyria requires competent intermediation between the witness of faith from Scripture and tradition on the one hand, and the signs of the time and sense of faith of God's people on the other. Only a church that is focused on proclaiming the Good News of God's unconditional care in word and deed to the people in the world in which they are living fulfils her mission.

Diaconia

(93) Diaconia is a fundamental aspect of the Church's activities. Diaconia commits to the option for the poor, for those who are weak and the people deprived of their rights. A Christian profile requires support for those who need help and especially for those who are otherwise forgotten; demands justice for those who are wronged and solidarity especially with those who have experienced abuse of power - in society as well as in the Church.

9.2 The levels of organisation of the Church: local, regional, national, universal

(94) The resolutions of the Synodal Path aim to develop procedures at all levels that enhance synodality, collegiality and subsidiarity, participation and cooperation. This also includes the levels not specifically reflected here, namely the pastoral realm, the deaneries and the regions.

The parish level¹¹

(95) The dioceses have opted for different models of how parishes are formed, structured and led. What has to be safeguarded and developed is the active participation on the part of those concerned in the structural decisions that are taken. With regard to the subsidiarity principle, there is a need to markedly reinforce the possibilities for action at the foundation of the Church. These include parishes and local communities, but also the varied institutions of categorial pastoral work and other places belonging to the Church.

The diocesan level

(96) A key role is played by the dioceses, in both legal, financial and organisational terms. The bishop is entitled and obliged to improve the conditions for a life of faith that is characterised

¹¹ The pastoral landscape is currently very much in flux. Different reform processes are being organised in various dioceses, with different terminology. The focus here is on the "parish" because it is a defined term in the Code of Canon Law. The term "parish" is however sometimes defined in different ways in diocesan structural reforms.

by participation and sharing, by strengthening and protecting rights and promoting competences. In the interest of the unity of the Church and of legal security for all the faithful, bishops are required to undertake to abide by framework regulations. They respect the independence of the Church's courts. There is a need for synodal structures at diocesan level which organise a counterpart to the bishop and define the manner in which they work together. These structures are to be networked with the existing bodies and councils and revised and further developed in the sense of the synodal principle in such a way that transparency and supervision, co-consultation and co-decision are guaranteed.

The level of the Bishops' Conference

(97) In the spirit of the principle of subsidiarity, there is a need to reinforce the organisations and institutions at supra-diocesan level. The cooperation on which the Synodal Path has embarked must be strengthened and made permanent. Binding decisions that affect all Catholic dioceses in Germany are to be discussed and decided together by the Bishops' Conference (DBK) in cooperation with the Central Committee of German Catholics (ZdK) that represents the faithful in a democratically-legitimised way. The existing joint institutions of the German Bishops' Conference and the Central Committee of German Catholics are to be reviewed and developed further along the lines of the synodal principle.

The universal church level

(98) Pope Francis has not only initiated a worldwide synodal process, but speaks of a Synodal Church. The Synodal Path in Germany strengthens this concern, because there is a need for an open dialogue, including with the Apostolic See, on reforms that do not take the same shape in every time and place, but reflect in their dynamism the richness of the gifts and tasks that the Holy Spirit gives to the Church. The Synodal Path also advocates at the universal church level for changes in all systemic conditions that are responsible for the abuse of power in the Church.

9.3 Finance, human resources development and planning: matters of church governance

Finance

(99) Canon law provides for participative structures in financial matters, and these need to be elaborated: in terms of expanding the supervisory powers of independent bodies whose members are elected by the faithful (directly or indirectly), and in terms of systematically incorporating criteria of ethically-sustainable asset management.

Human resources development

(100) The Catholic Church must carefully select, prepare and guide those individuals who proclaim God's Word, make God's love tangible, and celebrate hope on her behalf.

(101) Especially in the church context, the expectations placed on persons with responsibility are high, since they must embody the message of faith, hope and love with their actions, words

and attitudes. This is contrasted by the experience that superiors do not live up to their leadership responsibility, or abuse their power in an authoritarian way. There is a need for prevention of abuse of power, protection of victims and reparation.

(102) In *matters of personnel*

- the task is to organise the cooperation of bishops, priests, deacons, full-time, part-time and voluntary pastoral workers in a transparent, reliable and crisis-proof manner by means of framework regulations,
- the task is to determine more precisely how the legitimacy and quality of leadership personnel can be enhanced through elections, taking into account the applicable conditions of church law and state-church law both for bishops and pastors, as well as for all other persons holding leadership positions,
- the task is to make job posting and application procedures transparent and comprehensible.

Planning: decision-making processes

(103) When it comes to planning, there is a need not only to clarify the leadership responsibility of bishops and pastors in cooperation with bodies and staff, but also for those affected to be involved in an organised, legally-clarified way.

(104) We advocate ensuring that the opportunities for participation and the rights of all who are baptised and confirmed are reinforced in the liturgy, in the proclamation of faith and in diaconia through organisational and structural changes on the basis of the applicable church law.

(105) We are committed to ensuring that the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity are binding standards of action at all levels of the Church's activities.

(106) We are also committed to ensuring that the criteria of participation and legality, transparency and supervision, professionalism and the preservation of legitimate expectations apply in all areas of the Church's activities, from the financial regulations through personnel development to the planning processes.

(107) We are furthermore committed to ensuring that the profound changes to the power structure of the Catholic Church which are necessary for the sake of evangelisation take place, and will agree on ways to initiate these changes, also with regard to amendments to canon law.

(108) We are convinced: that the individual is the starting point and objective of all decisions. He or she takes responsibility to the degree to which he or she is involved in decisions. For this reason, the Church's decision-making structures are also to become participatory. For we are "called for freedom" (Gal 5:13).



Foundational text

Priestly existence today

Decision of the Synodal Path adopted by the Synodal Assembly on March 9, 2023

1. Guidance/Introduction

(1) The theology and everyday reality of the priestly ministry have been in a state of crisis for years, and this has implications for the whole life of the Church. Some of the questions being asked relating to the priestly existence have been under discussion for as many as 50 years, and have not been answered satisfactorily. Others have been newly added due to changing pastoral conditions and the shock over abuse by priests. The priestly ministry in all of its dimensions is being questioned in this context.

(2) There is no doubting the fact that there are many priests who exercise their ministry in a good and appropriate way and bear witness through an authentic celibate way of life. The changing pastoral conditions, however, and not least the many cases of sexualised violence perpetrated by clerics call for significant changes in view of the number of unreported cases¹ that can be assumed to exist. The increasing number of failings that have been uncovered in connection with cases of sexualised violence, and the dynamics of concealment that have been revealed in this process along with the loss of image of the Catholic Church is one of the main reasons for the alienation of many believers up to the departure from the Church, even of those who have been active church members so far.

(3) The call for substantial systemic change has become evident. However, there is a certain bewilderment with regard to the question of a viable vision for the future of the priestly ministry, which after all is a constituent element of the sacramental constitution of our Church and which has to be further developed theologically. From today's perspective, the theological reasoning often comes up against the limits of logic, whilst many questions reach a broad-based consensus:

(4) A priesthood that is theoretically reserved for heterosexual men alone seems questionable and not compatible with actual practice. The gender-dependent admission to the priesthood causes incomprehension, is discriminatory and must be abolished. The justification for celibacy as an obligatory priestly way of life is largely no longer accepted and convincing. The equal acceptance of homosexuality, also among priests, is explicitly demanded.

¹ The study presented on 13 June 2022 referring to the diocese of Münster assumes that there are up to ten times more minors affected, and thus clearly goes far beyond the assumptions of the MHG Study. <https://www.uni-muenster.de/news/view.php?cmdid=12635>, most recently retrieved 16 June 2022.

(5) On the other hand, there is an increased tendency towards conservative status quo-ism, and even a rejection of change. Many priests are themselves ultimately asking the question as to the why and wherefore of their vocation and the specific tasks involved in the priestly ministry.

(6) A prolonged process of discernment, under the guidance of the universal Church, is evidently needed. The question of why the ordained priestly ministry is needed can only be answered in part at present and requires a differentiated answer which integrates new developments, experiences and insights.

(7) This question has been raised urgently for some time - not only in Germany, but worldwide. It can no longer be avoided. The basic text "Priestly Existence Today" sets out to find appropriate and sustainable answers in the face of the crisis, but without being able to give definitive answers.

(8) The following reflections do not only explore the status quo of the priestly ministry, but they embed it in the baptismal and confirmation vocation in the sense of the theology of the people of God, as formulated by the Second Vatican Council. The Biblical testimony is unequivocal in the thematic context. In the strict and proper sense, there is only one (high) priest, namely Jesus Christ. And the talk is of the royal priesthood and holy nation on which redemption has been conferred (cf. 1 Peter 2:9).

(9) It is therefore clear to what the official priesthood, as a priesthood of ministry, is orientated and assigned: to the Lord and to the people, on which the common priesthood has been conferred.

(10) Firstly, the priesthood testifies in a polar relationship to the abiding presence of Jesus. He is present in His Church, especially also in the sacraments, but in His sovereignty He is unavailable. The priesthood of ministry stands for the divine call to the congregation, and so stands opposite it in a certain way but together they bear witness as the people of God to the salvific presence of the Risen Lord in the world.

(11) On the other hand, it is the task of the priesthood of ministry to ensure that all members of the priestly people can develop their dignity, their gifts and charisms and thus, in following Jesus Christ, can contribute to the life of the congregation, i.e. its service of love, its proclamation and its liturgical action. The priesthood of ministry has a multifaceted and important mediating task here.

2. Church developments

(12) Since the Second Vatican Council, the social and, in this context, also the ecclesial situation worldwide and in Germany has changed considerably, for which reference is often made to the political and cultural developments after 1968, after the events at the turn of 1989/90 ("fall of the Berlin Wall") as well as to 9/11 (2001). Many of these changes have had far-reaching effects on the life of religions in general as well as on the life of the Church and the faithful. First of all, some ecclesiastical developments are discussed, whose effects on the question of the priest's understanding of his role and ministry are to be discussed.

(13) The number of members of both the Catholic and the Protestant Church in Germany is declining sharply.² Whereas in the year of reunification there were still 28.3 million Catholic members, thirty years later in 2021 only 21.6 million are recorded, while Germany's population has risen from 79.75 million to 83.1 million in the same period; this means that from 35.5% of Germans before, only 26% are Catholic in the year 2021.³ A major reason for the decline in the number of Catholics is the total of over 3 million people who have left the Church in the past 30 years.

(14) Add to this the demographic development (ageing of the population) and - though not only for this reason - declining baptism numbers: from almost 300,000 Catholic baptisms (1990) to 141,992 baptisms (2021). Is the Catholic Church on her way to becoming an irrelevant minority? For a similar development is shown by the decline from 114,000 Catholic marriages to 20,140 in the same period. Catholic burials show the same trend, albeit less drastic.⁴ All this is likely to have been exacerbated by the pandemic of recent years.

(15) Another indicator of the crisis in the Catholic Church is the average number of worshippers, which has fallen from 6.19 million in 1990, representing 21.9% of the membership, to 923,000 (4.3%).⁵ This development is also massively reflected in the number of priests (religious and secular). In 1990, there were still almost 20,000 priests in Germany, but their number has fallen to 12,280 in 2021, which corresponds to a decline of about 40%. In addition, the number of priests from abroad working in Germany has risen steadily. In 2021 there were 2,279 priests, the majority from India and Poland. This represents an enrichment, but it also makes it necessary to reconcile different mentalities and ecclesiastical socialisations with each other. Even more obvious is the decline in the number of ordinations to the priesthood, which in 1990 was still 295 and in 2021 reached a low of 48 which corresponds to a decline of as much as 83%.⁶

(16) It is also worth mentioning the number of priests who have left the ministry for various reasons.⁷ One of the main causes is that the priest in question does not feel able to live the promise of celibacy.⁸ In this context, the accusation is repeatedly made that priests do not keep their promise of celibacy and that this leads to a loss of credibility in the exercise of the priesthood. Repeatedly, the problem of loneliness of priests is pointed out, which increases in old age.⁹

² The data are mainly taken from: "Katholische Kirche in Deutschland Zahlen und Fakten" (Arbeitshilfen, Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference, most recently Arbeitshilfe 325, 2021).

³ The increase in the number of Catholics with a migration background is interesting in this context.

⁴ Whereas 288,945 of the 297,179 Catholics who died in 1990 were also buried as Catholics, the number of Catholic burials fell to 236,546 in 2020, whilst the number of Catholics who died rose slightly.

⁵ The peak in the post-war period was reached in 1960 with 11.9 million churchgoers.

⁶ The Church's 2021 statistics list 62 new ordinations for 2021: 48 secular priests and 14 priests in religious orders (German Conference of the Superiors of Religious Orders - not including from other provinces. See: https://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse_downloads/presse_2022/2022-101a-Kirchenstatistik-2021_Flyer.pdf).

⁷ According to the initiative called "Priester im Dialog" ("Priests in Dialogue"), the number of priests who have left the ministry since Vatican II because of compulsory celibacy is a good 1,500.

⁸ The "Priests in Dialogue" initiative was launched in 2005 by dioceses that regularly invite their priests who have left the ministry, with the aim of overcoming disenfranchisement, preventing alienation, and exchanging ideas on how to improve relations with one another. The Pi Dialogue was held in Würzburg from 2005-2018. The Archdiocese of Munich adopted the Pi Dialogue in 2016, and was joined by the diocese of Augsburg in 2021.

⁹ Cf. <https://www.kirche-und-leben.de/artikel/ueberfordert-der-zoelibat-unsere-priester>; staff in the Recollectio House in Münsterschwarzach indicate a close link between loneliness and burn-out among priests.

(17) The figures for the other pastoral staff, on the other hand, are different.¹⁰ Above all, the number of permanent deacons has increased by over a third. The number of lay people in pastoral ministry rose from around 5,200 in 1990 to 7,516 in 2021. However, in recent years this trend has also been reversed from growth to stagnation or decline.

(18) In youth work, which reaches a large number of children and young people in the areas of social commitment, altar servers and church music, especially in choirs,¹¹ it is to be feared that the consequences of the pandemic will make themselves felt, which could have an effect on the number of vocations in all church professions. For example, the number of students in all theological subjects in Germany is in extreme decline.

(19) Pastoral developments in the dioceses also have an impact on the question of priestly identity. The figures and trends have had a far-reaching, comprehensive impact on pastoral work and forms of organisation in pastoral work in the German dioceses in recent years, and have led to processes of change being initiated in pastoral care and congregational structure. Church buildings have been abandoned, sold or assigned to another purpose in numerous dioceses. A number of dioceses have plans to assess the church buildings in order to determine which ones should be retained in future. In addition, the number of legally constituted parishes is being drastically reduced in some cases. This has an impact on the self-image of many priests and the cooperation among all pastoral staff.

(20) In addition to this development, there have been extensive changes in the pastoral care field in almost all German dioceses which have led and are continuing to lead to parishes being merged to form pastoral care units or parish associations. A variety of leadership models are being proposed in this context, from a priest exercising leadership in the pastoral sphere with in some cases more than 20,000 congregation members¹², so that one might speak of an “episcopalisation” of the priestly ministry, through leadership models consisting of several pastors according to the solidarity-based governance model “in solidum” to multi-professional teams. These new models of pastoral work, and also of leadership in large new units, pose major challenges to the leaders as well as to the teamwork skills of both the priests and all pastoral employees. New forms of voluntary leadership by lay people are being developed, thus creating a need for new job profiles to be developed. Many priests feel unable to cope with these changes, or do not recognise the motivations of their vocation in them. Conflicts also arise in connection with the priest’s ambition for power and his role in the Church. The question arises in this respect of the identity of the priest in this new phase of the development of the Church, irrespective of his ministry actually carried out. In this context, pastoral care must be given priority over administrative tasks.

(21) All reflections on the priestly existence and on collaboration between priests and pastoral workers must take account of these fundamental changes, and develop visions, prospects and most of all options for actions for pastoral care and for shaping the Church in the future. A reform aimed at providing for parishes to also be led by lay people was assessed as not possible

¹⁰ Permanent deacons, parish expert workers and pastoral assistants.

¹¹ There were about 360,000 altar servers in 2021, 660,000 members between the ages of 7 and 28 in the member associations of the Federation of German Catholic Youth, and about 66,000 young people are involved in some 3,630 choirs in the Catholic Church.

¹² Some newly-planned parishes are to include as many as up to 100,000 congregation members.

in July 2020 by an Instruction of the Vatican.¹³ The traditional parish model of a parish led by a priest as a pastor will nevertheless have to be increasingly supplemented or replaced by new forms of leadership. The focus must always be on the fundamental service to God's people. In this respect, too, there is an urgent need for reform.

3. Change structures that promote abuse

3.1. What the MHG study says: offender profiles

(22) The so-called MGH study published in 2018¹⁴ on the “Sexual abuse of minors committed by Catholic priests, deacons and male religious in the sphere of the German Bishops’ Conference,” revealed that it is not only transformation processes in society and the Church that make it necessary to fundamentally re-orientate the priesthood. The high number of priests who became offenders, and the systemic facilitation of acts of sexualised and other abuses of power that have been exposed, intensify the need for a re-examination. The data of the study shows a perpetrator quotient of 5.1% of priests working in diocesan ministry (roughly one in 20 priests), although the proportion is likely to be considerably higher in view of the high number of unreported cases, which must be assumed.¹⁵ These are therefore by no means isolated cases, as is sometimes argued! Far too much harrowing suffering and life-long traumatisation of the victims of sexualised violence could have been prevented if consistent action had been taken in time. But even now, the forces of inertia within the church are immense, although the phenomenon of an irritated system has been evident since 2010. Yet it is clear: systemic changes are inevitable and require all hierarchical levels to take responsibility. In this context, it makes sense to first look at the typology of accused persons, also in order to counteract a general suspicion. Analogous to typologies of sexual abusers outside the church context, the study identifies three basic patterns of accused persons.

(23) “Accused persons who had committed sexual abuse on several persons affected under the age of 13, who committed such offences over a period of more than six months, and with regard to whom the first accusation was documented not long after their ordination, can be assigned to a “fixed type” in which there are indications of a possible paedophilic preference disorder

¹³ The text of the Instruction can be found at: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/07/20/200720a.html>.

¹⁴ The Study, commissioned by the German Bishops’ Conference, is named after the research locations Mannheim, Heidelberg and Gießen.

¹⁵ “The number of clerics accused - 38,156 sets of personnel records and reference files from the 27 dioceses dating from 1946 to 2014 were reviewed as part of the research project (SP6). Information regarding allegations of the sexual abuse of minors was found to exist with regard to 1,670 clerics of the Catholic Church. This represented 4.4 percent of all clerics from 1946 to 2014 whose personnel records and other documents were reviewed in the dioceses. This figure constitutes a conservative estimate, and findings from research into the unknown area suggest that the actual value is higher. The share among diocesan priests was 5.1 percent (1,429 accused persons). It was 2.1 percent (159 accused persons) among priests within religious orders who are governed by “Gestellungsverträge” (a contract conferring a form of stipend), and 1.0 percent (24 accused persons) among full-time deacons. Where the personnel records of clerics who were accused in the course of the application procedure for “benefits in recognition of the suffering imposed on the victims of sexual abuse” were reviewed, only 50 percent of the personnel records or other church documents relating to clerics with regard to whom the allegations had been classified by the Catholic Church in the applications as being plausible were found to contain a corresponding reference to the accusation or offence. This means that half of all cases would not have been discovered as part of a review of personnel records pure and simple, had the persons affected not actively applied for “benefits in recognition of the suffering imposed on the victims of sexual abuse”. This provides an indication of the extent of the unknown area that can be assumed to exist” [https://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse_downloads/dossiers_2018/MHG Studie-Endbericht-Zusammenfassung.pdf](https://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse_downloads/dossiers_2018/MHG_Studie-Endbericht-Zusammenfassung.pdf).

in the sense of a primary or secondary paedophilic tendency. The life of a priest in the Catholic Church, with its extensive opportunities for contact with children and juveniles, is highly likely to attract this type of individual.

(24) A “**narcissistic-sociopathic type**” of accused person can be described as a second characteristic. Such a person exercises his power not only in the sexual abuse of children and juveniles, but also in an inappropriate manner in other settings. Sexual abuse manifests itself here as one among several forms of narcissistic abuse of power in such cases. (...) The power available to an ordained priest by virtue of his office offers many different opportunities to this type (...).

(25) A third group of accused persons can be described as a “**regressive-immature type**”, which refers to accused persons whose personal and sexual development is deficient. These include both heterosexual and homosexual accused persons. (...) The obligation to remain celibate could offer members of this type a misconceived possibility of not having to adequately confront the formation of their own sexual identity. (...).”¹⁶

(26) Conclusions about the changes needed in the selection, training and guidance of seminarians, as well as lifelong guidance for priests, can already be drawn after reading these offender descriptions. In doing so, the research consortium urges that one should not only aim “at the symptoms of an undesirable development, and thus prevent a debate taking place on the fundamental problem posed by clerical power (...)”¹⁷. The Synodal Assembly also confronts this analysis of structures which favour abuse with the text on priestly existence today.

3.2. Recommendations of the MHG Study with regard to the priestly existence today

(27) What is required is a mature personality that is also self-confident in the context of sexuality. In this context, a purely project-related examination of one's own sexuality is not sufficient.¹⁸ A selection of candidates with appropriate use of established psychological methods as well as their accompaniment “with regard to the challenges of a celibate life, not necessarily chosen voluntarily, but obligatory as a prerequisite for priestly ordination is to be ensured.”¹⁹ In-service psychological counselling for priests is to be made a permanent feature here, not only in the form of a pastoral-spiritual approach²⁰.

¹⁶ MHG Study: Research project, Sexual abuse of minors committed by Catholic priests, deacons and male religious in the sphere of the German Bishops' Conference, p. 12, source (in German): www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse_downloads/dossiers_2018/MHG-Studie-gesamt.pdf, most recently retrieved 8 January 2022. Emphasis by the authors “What is more, the inability of individuals of this type to enter into a mature partnership does not need to be socially justified if they become priests. The first accusation often does not occur in this group until after a prolonged period of latency that occurs subsequent to being ordained as a priest. One reason for this might be that the barrier to sexual abuse offences is not broken down until overburdening, isolation and a lack of support from the Church with regard to such problems have increased over time.” (ibid.)

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁸ “Celibacy is not an eo ipso risk factor for sexual abuse. A commitment to a life of celibacy however requires an intensive examination of one's own emotionality, eroticism and sexuality. A predominantly theological and pastoral approach towards these developmental requirements is not sufficient.” (Ibid., p. 17)

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 13.

²⁰ Cf. ibid.

(28) The Synodal Assembly therefore sees both the need to discuss the appropriate rationale and necessary changes regarding mandatory celibacy, as well as to reflect on improved professionalism and personal development, which includes the further development and evaluation of training and continuing education, and to adopt appropriate recommendations for action.²¹

(29) The present priestly formation must be put to the test under these aspects. In view of the decreasing number of candidates, comprehensive training in separate, closed institutes seems increasingly questionable, but joint training of all pastoral professional groups seems more sensible and necessary - also with regard to professional standards and the avoidance of misogynistic tendencies as well as the prospect of interprofessional cooperation in the future pastoral (large) spaces.²² In this context, the admission of women for ordination is also often seen as beneficial.²³ The training for the priesthood to date should be put to the test with regard to these aspects.

(30) Many of the needs for change that have been highlighted stem from a lack of standards for professionalisation and professionalism. Developing appropriate standards, enabling a feedback culture, and if necessary establishing sanction measures, are the tasks that are introduced in the implementation text entitled "Professionalisation and personality development". Such a feedback culture is intended not only to enable unilateral feedback, but by using reflection and regulation to make sure that proximity and distance of priests to members of the congregation, families, and especially children and young people in basic and further training, accompanied by trained experts and other assistance from the Vicariates General/ordinariates, are appropriately shaped, and assume binding legal force.

(31) Large numbers of offences committed by the third group of offenders did not begin until after an average period of service of approx. 8-14 years. The assumption that this has to do with overburdening and loneliness after a certain period of service has implications for the standards that need to be developed with regard to professionalisation. Considerations with regard to way of life are addressed in the implementation text on celibacy to some extent. This also needs to be considered when revising the "ratio nationalis" (the nationwide framework statutes for training for the priesthood), which has already been drawn up by a working group of the German Bishops' Conference. The implementation of these statutes should be based on broad expertise. The issue of homosexuality among priests and candidates for ordination must not be ignored.²⁴ Special needs are also seen with regard to the Sacrament of Penance. While the Sacrament of Penance offers the opportunity to experience the heart of faith as a place of God's love and readiness to forgive, a double sensitisation is advisable nevertheless: Firstly, the possibility of abuse, including of a spiritual and intellectual nature, to which the Sacrament of Penance is particularly susceptible, needs to be addressed in formation and professional accompaniment. Furthermore, increased sensitisation is required with regard to possible insinuations and naming

²¹ Cf. Implementation text "The celibacy of priests - strengthening and opening".

²² Cf. Implementation text entitled "Celibacy of priests - encouragement and opening".

²³ The Synodal Forum "Women in Ministries and Offices in the Church" has developed some points on this question. From the forum "Priestly existence today" there is the implementation text "Plural ministry structure as an opportunity - overcoming clericalism", which also touches on this question from another perspective.

²⁴ In this regard, reference is made to the implementations texts "A re-evaluation of homosexuality in the Magisterium" and "Breaking with taboos and normalisation - Votes on the situation of non-heterosexual priests."

of those affected in confession. The same applies to confidential conversations in any spiritual accompaniment.

(32) On the other hand, confession has been used by perpetrators of sexual abuse as a way of disclosing acts in a way that avoids further prosecution.²⁵ There is a need for increased awareness and training for confessors on how to proceed in such cases; if necessary, new regulations under church law (prohibition of absolution, etc.) must be adopted.

(33) All this shows that beyond the "clarification, processing and prevention of individual acts of sexual abuse", a fundamental examination of the ordained ministry of the priest and his understanding of his role vis-à-vis non-ordained persons is necessary²⁶. It is therefore a matter of sometimes profound and sometimes painful changes in the priestly self-understanding and in the image of the priest of many believers, as they are addressed in the following text (especially in chapter 5).

3.3. Overcoming clericalism! Topics and cross-references to other Forum topics

(34) Not only the MHG Study, but also other diocesan studies, and the inclusion of the victims in the process of analysis, are pushing for a renewed examination of the Church's understanding of ministry. The misconception of priestly ordination, which can be summarised under the keyword clericalism, is to be considered in this context above all other things. Pope Francis confronts this with a reinforced approach to Synodality²⁷. The under-secretary of the Synod of Bishops, Nathalie Becquart, clarifies this idea by stating that "the vision of a synodal Church is a means to overcome clericalism and get rid of it (...)"²⁸. There seems to be a consensus in the universal Church that clericalism runs counter to the fundamental understanding of the priestly ministry, and that changes are necessary. The "internally-blind regime of monopolised male celibate sacral power",²⁹ as Gregor Hoff puts it, needs to be overcome.

(35) This has implications among other things for the theology of the "repraesentatio Christi" (see Chapter 5).

²⁵ "Accused clerics not infrequently see confession as an opportunity to reveal their own abuse crimes. The protected sphere of the confessional box was even used by accused clerics to prepare or conceal offences in some cases. The Sacrament of Confession is therefore particularly significant in this context. From a scientific point of view, the responsibility of the confessor for adequate clarification, confrontation and prevention of individual acts of sexual abuse should be emphasised." <https://www.dbk.de/themen/sexualisierte-gewalt-und-praevention/forschung-und-aufarbeitung/studien/mhg-studie>, Research project, Overall final report. p. 17. Most recently retrieved 25 April 2022.

²⁶ Cf. *ibid.* "A change in clerical power structures requires a fundamental discussion of the ordained ministry of the priest and his understanding of his role vis-à-vis non-ordained persons. This must not remain lip service by those responsible for the Church. The sanctioning of individual accused persons, public regret, financial payments to those affected and the establishment of prevention concepts and a culture of respectful interaction are necessary, but by no means sufficient measures. If the reactions of the Catholic Church are limited to such measures, such fundamentally positive approaches are even likely to maintain clerical power structures, as they only target symptoms of an aberrant development and thus prevent the fundamental problem of clerical power from being addressed." (p.18).

²⁷ As he emphasised back in 2015: "What the Lord is asking of us is already in some sense present in the very word "synod". Journeying together – laity, pastors, the Bishop of Rome – is an easy concept to put into words, but not so easy to put into practice." https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html, most recently retrieved 25 April 22.

²⁸ Lebendige Seelsorge: Klerikalismus. Vol 1/2022, Echter-Verlag Würzburg, p. 34.

²⁹ *Ibid.* P. 39.

(36) As far as the issue of improperly-exercised power is concerned, cross-references need to be made to Synodal Forum I. Synodal Forum III discusses the potential to rectify the power imbalance and the male-oriented structures by opening up ordination admission and increased involvement in leadership functions not only for men. The “repraesentatio Christi” with regard to gender affiliation is also discussed here. The topic of sexuality is not only addressed in Synodal Forum IV, but also has a direct impact on the reflections of the Synodal Forum “Priestly existence today”. Confronting one’s own sexuality, and the topics related to eroticism and emotionality, is increasingly being set as a topic in training and in occupational standards. This seems to become particularly necessary irrespective of the request to lift the general obligation of celibacy.

(37) As the ongoing discussions on the basis of the abovementioned studies reveal, protecting the offenders has too often been prioritised over protecting victims of sexualised violence. This does not only refer to the priestly ministry, but also to the understanding of ministry and the exercise of the episcopal ministry. This must be considered elsewhere and the necessary consequences have to be drawn. It is important to develop an awareness of the problem where insufficient measures of sanctioning and prevention tend to help preserve clerical power structures if they merely target the symptoms of an undesirable development.³⁰ The implementation text entitled “Prevention of sexualized violence and dealing with perpetrators in the Catholic Church” also takes a look at concrete measures to this end.

(38) The very nature of the professional groups of parish and pastoral assistants who have received theological training and are active in pastoral care, as well as other professions which are in the process of developing and which exist in the German-speaking world, also invites reflection in pastoral practice and in theology on the understanding of pastoral care and of the ministry. The implementation text entitled “Opportunities through a plural ministry structure - Overcoming clericalism” suggests such a reflection.

4. The purpose and the goal of the sacramental ordained ministry

(39) The various demands on the Church and the forthcoming processes of change also confront the Synodal Assembly with the fundamental question of whether and for what purpose the priestly ministry is needed. This question also seems urgent, since many congregations have to organise their lives without an ordained priest due to the shortage of priests. In this context, it must be guaranteed that there are no clerical misinterpretations, as if there were the privilege of a higher Christianity of the ordained.

(40) The sacramental necessity of the priesthood is being questioned. In many parishes the specific ministry of the priest is no longer plausible. For in view of the existing shortage of priests, many parishes are finding quite pragmatic ways of organising church life without a priest. Many of the arguments for the tasks reserved for the ordained priest are no longer convincing. The traditional priestly ideal has not only been deeply damaged by the abuse crisis. Due to a theological and ecclesiastical adaptation that has long been refused or delayed, and

³⁰ Cf. MHG Study: Research project, Sexual abuse of minors committed by Catholic priests, deacons and male religious in the sphere of the German Bishops’ Conference, pp. 15-19, source: www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse_downloads/dossiers_2018/MHG-Studie-gesamt.pdf.

not least because of many status relics that are by no means part of the ministry, it seems in many respects to have fallen out of time. All this needs to be perceived objectively. A conscious re-accentuation on the basis of the biblical and theological sources and the ecclesial tradition is therefore necessary in order to find credible and sustainable answers to these problems in the present. In this process, the question of the necessity of the priestly ministry can also unfold salutary-critical or de-clericalising dynamics in these search movements, which deserve appreciation and acceptance. This fundamental question must be addressed in a credible way, among other things with regard to changed admission conditions and the opening of ordination to all genders.

(41) According to Catholic tradition, the ordained minister constitutively keeps present in the church the essential counterpart of the divine promise and claim in the congregation.

(42) The Catholic tradition is currently faced with the task of revising the theology of ministry in such a way that the counterpart of Jesus' saving action (*triplex munus christi* = teaching, guiding, sanctifying) is credibly implemented in the actions of ordained priests.

(43) The priesthood has the special responsibility and mission to realise the sacramentality of the Church in and with the people of God. The sacramentality of the Church is manifested by being a sign and instrument of God's salvific nearness to all people and of the unity of all people (LG 1).

(44) The priesthood has special responsibility for the sacraments. To this end, priests step back as persons and in their actions give space to the work and presence of Jesus Christ and his message of God's love for every human being.

(45) They invite and preside at the communion of the Eucharist on behalf of Jesus Christ. They open spaces of reconciliation and unity, especially symbolic in the sacrament of reconciliation. Through their devotion they allow people to experience God's healing devotion to all people, especially to the poor and suffering, as in the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. Their ministry aims to ensure that all the baptised and confirmed live out their common priesthood, in the celebration of the sacraments and in their whole lives.

(46) Such a ministry is indispensable for the sacramentality of the Church.

(47) In order for the priesthood to be a sign and instrument of God's salvific nearness and the unity of people, it must be freed from everything that stands in the way of this: from separation from people's lives, from an idealisation of the minister, from privileges of status and exaltation. For if the official role and the person are not thought to be congruent, the priestly ministry becomes liveable and does not fail because of the excessive demands of (self-)imposed perfection.

(48) The priesthood can be understood as a sign when its members and their actions credibly point to the work of Jesus Christ. This succeeds when they do not focus on themselves but on God's action in the church community. And it succeeds when it is noticeable that they strive to live as followers of Jesus Christ and His message.

(49) It can be an effective tool when the healing and unifying closeness and love of God can be experienced in the actions of the ministers. This succeeds when they bring people together,

proclaim the Gospel and are close to people in their joys and hopes, sorrows and fears, especially to the poor and disadvantaged.

(50) “Whilst the Church, understood in the sacramental sense, is not an end in herself this also applies to the sacramental office. This office is responsible not for human rule becoming effective in salvific terms, but the life-giving power of God. (Foundational text “Power and separation of powers in the Church - Joint participation and involvement in the mission”) Power exercised by priests for and on behalf of God’s people must be exercised in the spirit of Jesus: Empowering the weak and acting in a participative, communicative and transparent way without putting oneself first. This is a consequence of Jesus’ mission: “But it shall not be so among you”, as in the case of those in power who abuse their power (cf. Mk 10:43-44).

(51) “The church ministry is a sacramental sign which points to Christ and receives its authority from Him. This does not absolve the minister from supervision and criticism. In fact, quite the reverse: The sacramental office does not establish privileges, but is a call to render service. Precisely because it not only organises a function, but is based on an empowerment and makes it possible to represent Christ, the Head of the Church, the sacrament of the ordo always calls to mind the difference between Christ and the minister”. (Foundational text “Power and separation of powers in the Church - Joint participation and involvement in the mission”)

(52) The biblical statements on the priesthood are somewhat cult-critical in their orientation, and thus always priest-critical. The First Testament is reserved vis-à-vis the hereditary priesthood, since this priesthood is always in danger of turning its “ministry” into an instrument of domination. The Second Testament radicalises this critical view of the priesthood. For Christians, there is no priest but Jesus: “There is also one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, himself human” (1 Tim 2:5, cf. also Hebr). There is hence only one priest in the Church, the Lord Himself. Any priesthood can only be accepted if it points directly and existentially to the mission of Jesus and makes His presence felt.

(53) The Church needs priests because she lives from the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, the celebration of which is presided over by a priest. The priest is ordained (“consecrated”) so that he as a person stands for Jesus Christ himself presiding over the celebration of the sacraments. His ministry aims to ensure that all the baptised and confirmed live out their common priesthood, in the celebration of the Eucharist and in all their lives. The ordained priest, within the framework of his specific tasks as a minister, stands for the legitimate making present of the action of the risen Christ.

(54) The actions of the priest can only be understood if they personally stand up for the holiness and radical otherness of the divine claim. The why and the wherefore of the ordained priestly ministry will only be understandable today if the minister’s serving pro-existence effectively liberates people, and the liberated individual may perceive in it a sense of God’s holiness. The Church requires priests in order for this message to be proclaimed.

5. Theological reflections on the priestly ministry

(55) All the considerations so far show that there is a need today for a renewed pastoral implementation of the sacramental priesthood, and this begins with an honest assessment³¹ and locates its theological foundations in it. As Pope Francis stresses in his Letter to the pilgrim people of God, we are “living in times of change” which raise “new and old issues, in view of which a discussion is justified and necessary”.³²

5.1. The priestly ministry in the people of God

(56) In his Letter to the pilgrim people of God, Pope Francis desires a “pastoral conversion”,³³ which is measured by the primacy of evangelisation, as the Church is to be a “sign and instrument both of a very closely-knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (LG 1), and to share “joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties” with all (GS 1). In synodal terms, this can only be realised as the path of the whole people of God.³⁴ It is from this vocation of God’s people alone that reflection on the ministry of the priest is possible. For the priest comes out of the people of God, and his ministry is always to be understood in terms of this setting.

(57) 1 Peter and other New Testament Scriptures already speak of the common dignity and the unity of all in the one people of God. The Biblical theology of baptism includes the awareness of all who are baptised being anointed by the Spirit (1 John 2:20) and forming a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5). Hebrews in particular develops an awareness that there is only one priest, namely Christ himself, through whom all who are baptised gain access to the Father. He brings salvation, and there can be no other mediator. His giving His life makes all sacrifices complete, so that nothing must be added to His sacrifices, except that the faithful follow His gift and so give the praise due to the Father. Therein lies the priestly dignity of all who are baptised. By being anointed with chrism in baptism, the newly-baptised are assured of being members of God’s people and of sharing in the priestly, royal and prophetic ministry of Christ. The common baptism is the bond that brings everyone together and unites them in the one people of God. This pneumatological origin of the people of God is confirmed and always recalled by the priest.³⁵ Even before the New Testament speaks about different services and offices, baptism and anointing with the Spirit form the sacramental foundation of churchhood. Each and every baptised person represents Christ and the Church.

(58) The different representations of the Church already convey in the New Testament the perspective of serving. There are images that express in strong words the nearness between Christ

³¹ Cf. Baumann, Klaus et al. (eds.), *Zwischen Spirit und Stress. Die Seelsorgenden in den deutschen Diözesen*, Würzburg 2017.

³² Pope Francis, Letter to the pilgrim people of God in Germany. VAS 220 (29 June 2020).

³³ Pope Francis, Letter to the pilgrim people of God in Germany, No.6.

³⁴ Cf. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, in: VAS 194 (24 November 2013), No. 111: “Evangelization is the task of the Church. The Church, as the agent of evangelization, is more than an organic and hierarchical institution; she is first and foremost a people advancing on its pilgrim way towards God. She is certainly a mystery rooted in the Trinity, yet she exists concretely in history as a people of pilgrims and evangelizers, transcending any institutional expression, however necessary.”

³⁵ PO 11.

and His Church, for example in the reflection on the Church as the body of Christ (e.g. Eph 4:12), whilst others consider the juxtaposition of Christ and the Church, such as when Christ is seen as the Bridegroom of the Church (cf. Eph 5:21-33) - an image for His covenant of loyalty, which, by the way, must not be misinterpreted in a gender-specific way. This is insofar significant, as the Church must not equate herself with Christ. The ordained minister performs a service to the community as a member of the people of God. He is to perform his service in a community-building, motivating way for others, not in competition with the other baptised individuals. His service largely consists of promoting and affirming the revealed being of the Church and the ecclesial action of all the baptised.

(59) The Biblical archetype of service is the washing of the feet, which Jesus concludes with the instruction: "If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet." (John 13:1-17). Historically, a one-sided view has emerged. The ordained became clerics: from around the 3rd century onwards, they were understood to have their own ecclesiastical sociological status (*ordo*), which was distinguished from the status of the "laity". This difference in status, with which different rights and duties are associated, still shapes church law and liturgy today. However, this is not biblical. Clericalism is rooted in the emphasis on this difference of status.

(60) Sacramental ordination has nothing to do with sacralising the person. By no means does the ordained priest become an image of Christ in all aspects of life. Nor is it an enhancement of the common priesthood of all the baptised (*sacerdotium commune*), but rather an authorisation of the ordained to act in *persona Christi capitis* for the benefit of the faithful in certain, narrowly defined sacramental acts (*Presbyterium Ordinis* no. 2). It is no coincidence that the Decree on Priests of Vatican Council II consistently does not use the term priest ("*sacerdos*") for the minister, but "presbyter" (elder, authorized). They are distinguished from the bearers of the common priesthood, the faithful, by their office and role, not by a priesthood, however enhanced.

(61) The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church "*Lumen gentium*" of the Second Vatican Council attempts to eliminate potential, i.e. historically-conditioned, flaws. The concept of the Church as a hierarchically-ordered "*societas perfecta*", that is as a society of unequals, can still be found in the draft versions.³⁶ *Lumen gentium* itself then prefers the ecclesiology of the people of God such that the unity of the people of God precedes the hierarchical order of the Church. The equality of the dignity of the baptised goes first, and conditions the diversity that we find. The priesthood of the ministry is preceded by the common priesthood of all the faithful, which expresses itself in prophesy, leadership and witness. Thus, the Council has laid the foundation for embedding the ministry of the priest in the many ministries and spiritual gifts in the Church.

(62) The texts of the Council remain authoritative for today's reflection on the people of God and the priestly ministry. The German bishops considered and developed concrete consequences in their statement on the renewal of the pastoral ministry "*Gemeinsam Kirche sein*" of 1 August 2015.³⁷ Esteem for the gifts of the Spirit and the recognition that all are called through baptism

³⁶ Cf. Wenzel, Knut, *Kleine Geschichte des II. Vatikanischen Konzils*, Freiburg, Basel, Vienna, 2005, 61-66.

³⁷ Cf. Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference (publisher), *Gemeinsam Kirche sein*. Statement by the German bishops on the renewal of the pastoral ministry, in: *Die deutschen Bischöfe* 100, Bonn 2015.

to live a holy life and to contribute their own gifts to the Church is significant here.³⁸ The charisms of all who are baptised are emphasised as the richness of the Church. The text recalls the priestly dignity of those who are baptised, which cannot be enhanced. Ordained priests are to be instruments, but are not to form an estate of their own.³⁹

(63) These texts also constitute an important foundation for the further work of the Synodal Path. The reception of the Second Vatican Council is not complete with regard to the question of the essence of the priesthood. What is more, priests' self-perception and the perception of others do not always coincide. This may lead to (personal) crises of identity for priests and to confusion among the remaining faithful. It is then tempting to seek clarity through demarcation. Priests do not gain authority in the sense of *auctoritas* over the people of God by these means; at most they can rely on *potestas*. This touches on the issue of power.⁴⁰

5.2. The common representation of Christ by the baptised and the representation of Christ by the priest

(64) Each and every baptised person represents Christ, the only “high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.” (Hebr 5:10), who has made His Church into a kingdom of “priests for his God and Father” (Revelation 1:6). “The whole community of believers is, as such, priestly”.⁴¹ The representation of Christ by the priest in the administration of the sacraments reserved for him is distinct from this, especially the celebration of the Eucharist. It is clear in Magisterial texts that the “*repraesentatio Christi*” by the priest is not limited solely to the sacramental celebration of or presiding over the Eucharist, but concerns the entire priestly existence.⁴² This opens up the question of the relationship between the representation of Christ by the priest outside the Eucharist, and similarly the representation of Christ by all faithful.

(65) The priestly existence is not different from that of all faithful outside his sacramental acts. The fact that the “*sacramental representatio*” of the priest shapes his whole life does not mean that he is different in everyday life. The opposite is the case: His sacramental ministry, which is characterised as receding behind Christ, will also shape his behaviour in everyday life.

³⁸ Cf. Pope Francis, Letter to the pilgrim people of God in Germany, No. 9: “The anointing of the Holy which was poured out on the whole body of the Church “distributes special graces among the faithful of every state and condition of life, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes. (1 Cor 12:11). Through these he makes them suitable and ready to undertake various works and ministries for the renewal and full construction of the Church, according to the word: “The manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit” (1 Cor 12:7).

³⁹ Medard Kehl, Stephan Ch. Kessler, *Priesterlich werden. Anspruch für Laien und Kleriker*, Würzburg 2010, 19.

⁴⁰ The group of topics “office and leadership” is dealt with by the Synodal Forum “Power and separation of powers in the Church - Joint participation and involvement in the mission”.

⁴¹ CCC 1546.

⁴² Cf. Pope John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*, in: VAS 105 (25 March 1992), No. 14: “In the Church and on behalf of the Church, priests are a sacramental representation of Jesus Christ - the head and shepherd - authoritatively proclaiming his word, repeating his acts of forgiveness and his offer of salvation - particularly in baptism, penance and the Eucharist, showing his loving concern to the point of a total gift of self for the flock, which they gather into unity and lead to the Father through Christ and in the Spirit. In a word, priests exist and act in order to proclaim the Gospel to the world and to build up the Church in the name and person of Christ the head and shepherd.” *Pastores dabo vobis* No. 16 notes: “Inasmuch as he represents Christ the head, shepherd and spouse of the Church, the priest is placed not only in the Church but also in the forefront of the Church.”

(66) Whereas the priest, by virtue of the sacrament of Orders, acts “in the person of Christ the Head” (LG 10) when administering the sacraments, and the faithful hence receive an assurance that the grace of the sacrament applies regardless of the holiness of the person administering it, this ministry to the people of God has no higher dignity or holiness. “The configuration of the priest to Christ the head - namely, as the principal source of grace - does not imply an exaltation which would set him above others. In the Church, functions do not favour the superiority of some vis-à-vis the others.”⁴³

(67) Not only against the background of the scandal of sexual abuse in the Church, and of the findings of the MHG Study, it is important that the priest, outside the celebration of the sacraments, does not take on the role of Christ Himself and confuse himself with the voice of God, and is not mistaken for this voice by the faithful. Such sacral glorification can lead to spiritual abuse of power.

5.3. The sacramental nature of ordained ministry

(68) The sacramental ministry is part and parcel of the “essence” of what is Catholic. The sacramental understanding of the priest corrects a purely functional view of the ministry. The priest’s sacramental ministry is in essence a service rendered for unity “which is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life” in the celebration of the Eucharist (LG 11). This ministry of unity, as assessed in “Gemeinsam Kirche sein”, which is indispensable for the Church, is the unique feature of the priestly ministry. The sacramentality of the priesthood, and the holiness of the Church, by no means imply flawlessness. Pope Francis emphasises unequivocally: “The Church has repeatedly taught that we are justified not by our own works or efforts, but by the grace of the Lord, who always takes the initiative”.⁴⁴

(69) The ordained priest has the task of expressing the standard of the Gospel, and of making clear in his sacramental actions “that God is faithful, that Christ Himself is present in the Church: real, concrete, personal and unadulterated”.⁴⁵ Ordination does not release him from the necessity to strive for credibility. “Gemeinsam Kirche sein” explains the wording of the

⁴³ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, No. 104. A note on the orientation of ontological statements towards the priesthood. A person who is ordained to the priesthood is the holder of a “character indelebilis”; he has been given an “indelible stamp”, and differs in “essentia” (ablative) “in essence” from the non-ordained faithful. These statements are not easy to understand. Firstly, because they presuppose an Aristotelian teaching of reality, which is not readily compatible with today’s understanding of reality. But it would be possible to cope with this given a few hermeneutic aids. It becomes more difficult if one interprets the ontological statements, which has often happened, in the sense of an essential superiority of the priest, thus encouraging a form of clerical glorification. It is therefore important to recall the meaning and the purpose of the ontological statements: If the Lord brings about grace and salvation in the Church through the sacraments, then the effective potential of the sacramental-priestly ministry must be existent independently of the moral disposition of the minister. This could however only be expressed in ontological categories. Perhaps an image helps to understand this: There is a road, a path to salvation, and it is secured with guard rails. The ontological reflections are, as it were, guard rails for reflection: If the believing person is so disposed, the administration of the sacrament by the priest can only be one thing, namely the mediation of salvation, regardless of the circumstances. However, if one confuses the reflections that are supposed to protect the lasting effectiveness of the priestly action with reflections that have the priestly state at their centre, then one confuses the road and the guard rail. But engineers who know how to make guard rails are neither road workers nor vehicles, nor the drivers who use the roads. The Church has unfortunately trained far too many engineers who only know how to build guard rails and crash barriers, and has sadly neglected road construction, vehicle construction, as well as driving instruction.

⁴⁴ Pope Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Gaudete et exultate* on the call to holiness in today’s world. VAS 213 (19 March 2018), No. 52.

⁴⁵ *Gemeinsam Kirche sein*, 37.

constitution resulting from the Council Lumen gentium 10, “Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated”. It is said not to be a matter of a larger quantity of holiness or dignity; in fact, the essential difference consists in the sacramental ministry to the community and the congregation. Such ministry of unity may also be realised by priests through their ministry of leadership. Here it is entirely at the service of the episcopate, which is the primary addressee of the ministry of unity.

(70) Leadership is a broad and open term.⁴⁶ It serves in essence to enable participation by many in the diverse tasks of the Church. Leadership seeks the spiritual gifts, and it enables their realisation among other things in the ministry for the unity of the Church. Leadership by priests understands “being church together” not in the sense of an isolated “rule”, but as a relational event. The priest himself is already in a sacramental relationship with the bishop, and shares in his leadership ministry. For without the bishop, there is no priest. Priests act “in collaboration with their bishops.⁴⁷ The fellowship of the presbytery should also clarify the ministry of unity as a relational event. Baptised Christians participate in leadership with their gifts and professions. In addition, leadership is more than mere decision-making competence. With regard to the Vatican Instruction entitled “The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church” of the Congregation for the Clergy of 20 July 2020 it has to be pointed out: An expanded concept of leadership is called for in order to not only carry out the debates on competences and tasks under church law. Priestly leadership does not merely consist of being a pastor, but it is rather to be understood from the three offices of Christ. Proclaiming the Gospel is the primary task of the leadership ministry⁴⁸.

(71) It is a much-lamented dilemma of the pastoral profession that administration and organisation overshadow the necessary pastoral care and spiritual leadership. This also entails the danger of functionalising the priestly vocation. The functions of other pastoral vocations, and their derivation from the episcopal ministry, should also be considered in this context.

5.4. The evangelical counsels

(72) The evangelical counsels which Jesus proposes in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7), namely of poverty, chastity and obedience, can be adopted by all believers as an expression of a life of following Christ. (cf. LG 39). All three are mandatory under church law for faithful who have opted for them through profession in institutes of consecrated life or societies of apostolic life (cf. can. 573 §1 CIC). They are a possible answer to the question of what it means to leave everything and follow Christ (Mt 10:28). Especially when it comes to possessions, celibacy and power, they also serve to flesh out discipleship for the so-called secular priest, who is called “to live these counsels in accordance with those ways and, more specifically, those goals and

⁴⁶ Cf. *Gemeinsam Kirche sein*, 41 et sqq.

⁴⁷ PO 77.

⁴⁸ For priests are brothers among brothers (74) with all those who have been reborn at the baptismal font. They are all members of one and the same Body of Christ, the building up of which is required of everyone. (75) Priests, therefore, must take the lead in seeking the things of Jesus Christ, not the things that are their own. (76) They must work together with the lay faithful, and conduct themselves in their midst after the example of their Master, who among men “came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life as redemption for many” (Mt 20:28). (PO 74-77a).

that basic meaning which derive from and express his own priestly identity”.⁴⁹ This applies not only to celibacy (chastity), but also to the way he deals with property (poverty) and power (obedience).

(73) The ministry of a priest is not only to be characterised by solidarity with the poor and deprived, but it is necessary to allow oneself to be evangelised by them.⁵⁰ As an indication of this, he is to live out his interactions in accordance with the evangelical counsel of poverty, which also needs to be re-examined with regard to remuneration and a critical handling of other financial possibilities (cf. can. 282 §1 and 2 CIC).

(74) The evangelical counsel of the obedience of the priest towards the bishop and the Church in relation to the ministry to the people of God concerns the area of power, and is spelled out anew in practical terms in the implementation texts, which themselves deal with professionalisation.

(75) Chastity, or celibacy, is intended to signify the representation of Christ and the prophetic dimension of the priestly ministry. Despite and due to manifold encounters and commitments, many priests lack both the experience of being embedded in the everyday life of the people of God, as well as that of experiencing acceptance of and support for their way of life by the concrete community of the faithful. The lack of having a home may lead to loneliness through one’s own fault and the fault of others. This background is also significant with regard to offender type 3 (cf. Chapter 3).

(76) The celibate way of life presupposes a way of life that is rich in relationships, both within the Church as well as with regard to wider worldly relational structures. This however poses a risk of the celibate way of life leading to marginalisation if the symbolism is no longer supported by large sections of the people of God. In addition, sacramentality itself is at risk if celibacy is neither spiritually understood nor lived out in concrete, credible terms, and is tacitly and collectively undermined in a double life that is tolerated by the church leadership. We therefore propose a review of the link between the conferral of ordination and the commitment to celibacy.⁵¹

5.5. Working as a priest in a synodal Church

(77) Around 10,000 secular priests, and roughly 2,000 priests in religious orders, ordained in Germany, as well as about 1,400 priests ordained in a foreign diocese, are active in the Church in Germany in a wide variety of areas.⁵² A majority, but not all, are active in pastoral care in parishes. Other areas of activity include pastoral care of foreigners, pastoral care in universities and schools, adult education, or academies, Caritas, the associations and spiritual communities, youth pastoral care, hospital pastoral care and pastoral care for persons with disabilities, the Church’s administration or the exercise of priestly activity in a secondary office (e.g. “worker

⁴⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, No. 27.

⁵⁰ Cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, No. 198.

⁵¹ For more detailed explanations see: implementation text “The celibacy of priests - strengthening and opening”.

⁵² Cf. in this regard: Secretariat of the German Bishops’ Conference (publisher), *Kontinuierliche jährliche Erhebung statistischer Eckdaten über Priester, Diakone und andere hauptamtliche Mitarbeiter/innen in der Pastoral*. May 2021, 3.

priests”). Bishops are ordained deacons or priests, too.⁵³ The ministry of the priest cannot therefore be reduced to that of the parish priest, but is regarded in terms of its sacramental dimension.

(78) The jointly-trodden path (syn-hodos) is largely determined by the method (“met-hodos” - the path towards something). Pope Francis referred to this method in his address at the opening of the synod on young people as “an ecclesial exercise in discernment”, consisting in a three-step process of spiritual discernment - perceiving, interpreting and choosing.⁵⁴ If the Church and the synod are synonymous,⁵⁵ then priests serve to call the people of God in their respective areas by accompanying them in spiritual processes, in joint consultation, decision-making and leadership.

(79) This requires a twofold perception and connection which establishes a joyful identity of the priest, as Pope Francis sets forth in his “Letter to priests”: “For our hearts to be encouraged, we should not neglect the dialectic that determines our identity. First, our relationship with Jesus. [...] The other essential aspect of this dialectic is our relationship to our people”.⁵⁶ In the second step of the synodal method that what has been perceived has to be distinguished.⁵⁷ Synodality is not an end in itself after all, but “the innermost goal of the Synod as an instrument of the implementation of Vatican II can only be mission”⁵⁸.

(80) The synodal approach means a change and inculturation of attitudes and structures, as explained in the corresponding implementation texts.

5.6. The priest’s following of Christ in this time and in this society

(81) Pope Francis calls in “Querida Amazonia” for an “Inculturation of forms of ministry”.⁵⁹ This applies not only to the Amazonas.⁶⁰ Inculturation is a twofold movement which includes both

⁵³ Cf. in this regard: Secretariat of the German Bishops’ Conference (publisher), *Kontinuierliche jährliche Erhebung statistischer Eckdaten über Priester, Diakone und andere hauptamtliche Mitarbeiter/innen in der Pastoral*. May 2021, 9-19. The age structure will be added to.

⁵⁴ Cf. Pope Francis, Address at the opening of the synod on young people (3 October 2018): http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/de/speeches/2018/october/documents/papa101francesco_20181003_apertura-sinodo.html.

⁵⁵ Pope Francis, Address to the Ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops (17 October 2015), in: *Die Berufung und Sendung der Familie in Kirche und Welt von heute. Texte zur Bischofssynode 2015 und Dokumente der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (Arbeitshilfen 276)*, published by the Secretariat of the German Bishops’ Conference, Bonn 2015, p. 28.

⁵⁶ Pope Francis, Letter to priests on the 160th anniversary of the death of the Holy Curé of Ars (4 August 2019).

⁵⁷ Cf. Pope Francis, Address to the Ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, p. 27. Cf. for the interaction between hierarchical and charismatic gifts: *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter “Iuvenescit Ecclesia” to the Bishops of the Catholic Church Regarding the Relationship Between Hierarchical and Charismatic Gifts in the Life and the Mission of the Church*, in: VAS 205 (15 May 2016).

⁵⁸ Cf. Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, Address at the ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops (17 October 2015), in: *Die Berufung und Sendung der Familie in Kirche und Welt von heute. Texte zur Bischofssynode 2015 und Dokumente der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (Arbeitshilfen 276)*, published by the Secretariat of the German Bishops’ Conference, Bonn 2015, p. 92.

⁵⁹ Cf. Pope Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia*, in: VAS 222 (2 February 2020), Nos. 85-90, here No. 85: “Inculturation should also be increasingly reflected in an incarnate form of ecclesial organization and ministry. If we are to inculturate spirituality, holiness and the Gospel itself, how can we not consider an inculturation of the ways we structure and carry out ecclesial ministries?”.

⁶⁰ Cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, No. 115: “Grace supposes culture, and God’s gift becomes flesh in the culture of those who receive it.”

the transformation of culture through the Gospel, as well as receiving the Holy Spirit from culture.⁶¹ This leads to two questions, on the one hand with regard to the way of life of the priest in our society, but on the other hand concerning the concrete life of the individual priest: (1) What does inculturation mean for a specific way of life of the priest in our secular and global society in which individual freedom and equality are highly valued? (2) This poses the following question for the priest, as it does for all faithful: How can faith be lived in an inculturated authentic and dialogic manner, i.e. in dialogue and thus full of tension, between a religiously-motivated counter-culture and a bourgeois way of life, and against the horizon of globalisation and the changes that it brings? All processes of change in the present reveal only one thing in the final analysis: The priesthood is embedded in history, and is therefore always to be understood as an incarnatory process. New forms of organisation, as they are to be shaped in the future and to some extent already now after the end of the popular church structures, call for a variety of configurations of priestly ministries.

6. Final remarks

(82) We are faced with the challenge of developing the theology of ordination in such a way that its essence, founded in Scripture and tradition, is preserved, while at the same time overcoming its elements that are no longer in keeping with the times, that promote clericalism and encourage abuse.

(83) In order to enable a genuine inculturation of the Catholic theory and tradition of priestly ministry into today's society, other topics also need to be considered which, however, to a large extent have universal church dimensions.

(84) For this reason, the developed implementation texts are to a large extent proposals to the universal church processing, primarily in a synod or even in a council. This also applies to a gender-just approach and systemic corrections in view of the crimes of abuse. At the same time, the tasks that can already be implemented are urgent: the change in the training regulations that takes all pastoral professional groups into consideration, the needs of professionalisation and personality development, joint leadership and decision-making.

(85) With the implementation text "The celibacy of priests - strengthening and opening"⁶² and further considerations to "Plural ministry structures as an opportunity - Overcoming clericalism", the Synodal Assembly formulates petitions to the universal Church. The same applies to the demand for the admission of women and queer people, which is largely uncontroversial in Germany, as it is the subject of the implementation texts from the Synodal Forum "Women in Ministries and Offices in the Church" as well as the reflections on participation from the Synodal Forum "Power and Separation of Powers in the Church - Joint Participation and Involvement in

⁶¹ Cf. Pope Francis, *Querida Amazonia*, No. 68: "On the one hand, a fruitful process takes place when the Gospel takes root in a given place, for "whenever a community receives the message of salvation, the Holy Spirit enriches its culture with the transforming power of the Gospel". On the other hand, the Church herself undergoes a process of reception that enriches her with the fruits of what the Spirit has already mysteriously sown in that culture. In this way, "the Holy Spirit adorns the Church, showing her new aspects of revelation and giving her a new face". In the end, this means allowing and encouraging the inexhaustible riches of the Gospel to be preached "in categories proper to each culture, creating a new synthesis with that particular culture".

⁶² Cf. implementation text "The celibacy of priests - strengthening and opening".

the Mission"⁶³. At the same time, the bishops in Germany are looking for ways to implement the recommendations of the MHG study.

(86) With the presented fundamental approach to the priestly form of life, to the re-accentuation of the theology of priestly ministry, as well as the view of the pastoral practice of the local churches in Germany, a basis for further work is presented here, which requires further discussion.

⁶³ Cf. for example <https://www.kirche-und-leben.de/artikel/umfrage-zwei-drittel-gegen-pflichtzoelibat-und-fuer-priesterinnen>.



Foundational text

Women in ministries and offices in the Church

Decision of the Synodal Path adopted by the Synodal Assembly on September 9, 2022

1. Introduction

(1) Demanding gender justice as the basis for all future courses of action in the Roman Catholic Church is the guiding principle of the following observations. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). These encouraging words of Paul guide the reflections that follow below. Divisions according to origin, status and gender are abolished in the community that confesses Jesus as Christ. A consequence of the common priesthood of each individual believer in Christ, founded in baptism, is the participation of all in the mission of the Church to proclaim the Gospel in the world. Because all are “one in Christ Jesus” the non-admission of women to ecclesiastical ordained ministry urgently requires a renewed theological and anthropological review in the light of the current signs of the times. Living out gender equality in the sense of God’s instructions as handed down in the Bible in the changing cultural and social contexts shall form the basis for the future course of action in the Roman Catholic Church.

(2) This means in concrete terms that all who are baptised and confirmed, experience acknowledgement and appreciation of their charisms and of their spiritual vocation, which must not depend on their gender identity; they become active, according to their aptitude, their abilities and skills, in ministries and offices which serve the proclamation of the Gospel in our time.

(3) The institutional, official form of the Church is to be shaped at all times in such a way that She opens up a broad space for the message of God into which all people would like to enter. Every course of action which strengthens faithful trust, which substantiates the hope of Easter, which enables love to be experienced, and which serves to build up the Christian community, is to receive recognition. To be excluded as a woman* from the official representation of Christ is scandalous. For many Christians, it obscures the message of the Gospel, the proclamation of which was entrusted to the female Easter witnesses. Put to constructive use, this has an energising impact and motivates people to act. It is in the sense of the proclamation of the Easter Gospel, to which Jesus Christ also called women from the beginning, to call for a new orientation: It is not participation by women in all the Church’s ministries and offices that requires justification, but indeed the exclusion of women from the sacramental ministry. The fundamental question is: What is the will of God with regard to the participation of women in the ministry of proclamation of the Gospel? Who can claim to be able to give an answer to this question for time immemorial, and on the basis of what criteria?

(4) The doctrine of 'Ordinatio Sacerdotalis'¹ is not accepted and understood by the people of God in large parts. Therefore, the question must be addressed to the highest authority in the Church (Pope and Council) whether the teaching of 'Ordinatio Sacerdotalis' should be reviewed: In the service of evangelisation, it is a matter of enabling the appropriate participation of women in preaching, in the sacramental representation of Christ and in the building up of the Church. Whether or not the doctrine of 'Ordinatio Sacerdotalis' binds the Church infallibly must then be examined and clarified bindingly at this level (cf. also 5.3).

(5) The question of the ministries and offices of women in the Church of Jesus Christ, especially participation by women in the sacramental ministry, makes it seem necessary to learn to read the "signs of the times", in addition to looking at Scripture and at tradition, and at the potential given in these sources for opening up the ministries to women. This absolutely must include reflecting on the different theological positions from the perspective of gender equality, entering into a close exchange with the social sciences, cultural studies and human sciences, and constructively taking up their reflections on gender theory. It should also be borne in mind in this context that there are people in the Roman Catholic Church who do not feel that their gender identity is adequately accommodated in the distinction between men and women. They are not specifically addressed in this text, but as people who are also affected, they are included in most of the statements on gender justice presented here. It should be noted in our thematic context that reservations against women's participation in the sacramental ministry in the representation of Christ are derived from the Scripture and from tradition. A critical examination of these arguments goes hand in hand with openness to the possibility of all people participating in the ordained ministry.

(6) There are many ways to approach the goal of gender equality that has been formulated. An argumentative effort has been selected here: The memory of experiences of sexualised violence and spiritual abuse committed by men against women inspires to decisive action, in which a readiness to repent is central (Part 2). There is a need to ground the argumentation in Biblical theology (Part 3). Anthropological, historical, systematic theological and practical theological arguments justify the position that has been taken up (Parts 4 and 5). The outlook for the Church's present proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is to be considered in view of the arguments set out above (Part 6).

(7) There is a wealth of literature worldwide on all the aspects that are addressed here. Our contribution has been written with the perspective that it will be heard by the universal Church and that it will be implemented accordingly. It is highly desirable that in all places of the earth people will embark together on a journey of dialogue regarding the concerns and insights presented here. Every theological argument is placed in a context. The perception of spiritual abuse and of sexualised violence against women and girls has caused resistance to injustice to grow strong in the Church in Germany and has demanded theological thinking and appropriate activities with a great degree of urgency.

¹ Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (May 22, 1994).

2. The challenges of our time

2.1 Frightening: clerical and sexual abuse as well as sexual and sexualised violence against women and girls

(8) Girls and women had remained largely invisible as victims of sexual abuse in the Church until very recently. It is only of late that the German-speaking world has started to look at those victims who suffered spiritual and sexual abuse in the Church as adults. Many of them find it difficult to tell their stories. In addition to the often traumatic and shameful experiences, they are frequently not believed, or are even blamed, or thought to share the blame, for what they have suffered. The women affected are often confronted with institutional “non-competence”, for instance by victims’ commissioners who point out that they are allegedly not responsible for adults. This makes them victims of an abuse of power once more. Retraumatization may occur as a result of such actions.

2.1.1 The potential dangers lying in the doctrine and the system of the Roman Catholic Church

(9) Abuse takes place in specific power and gender constellations. It is a question of the credibility of the Church and of justice to take note of the group of women victims, and to take them seriously. The Church is exposed to the same dangers as other communities: Weaknesses among particularly vulnerable persons are exploited; existing inequalities are consolidated, and power is abused. Special systemic factors need to be taken into account in the Church. Spiritual abuse is an integral part of the planning and preparation of sexualised violence in many cases. Particular potential for danger lies in a double asymmetry that is specifically Roman Catholic in nature: When priests commit abuse, they are endowed with spiritual authority as clerics; as men, they are in a privileged position because of their gender. The MHG Study has identified a certain dominant habitus of priests as clerics who are likely to commit abuse: It can be observed in cases of sexual and spiritual abuse that church ministers sacralise their own person, and legitimise their deeds by claiming to act in the name of Jesus Christ. Victims furthermore report that they were placed in a docile, servile or even submissive role with reference to Mary in which they felt that they had to tacitly accept the abuse although in the “Magnificat” a self-determined, courageous, strong woman, namely Mary, prophesies that the dynamics of power relations will be overthrown. As long as women continue to be identified with the image of Eve as a seductress, they seem responsible for the actions of men, who are supposedly defenceless against seduction. In many cases, it is perpetrator-victim reversal strategies that lead girls and women in the context of abuse to feel ashamed of their experiences of abuse because they feel guilty, and it is suggested that they are complicit in what has happened - an event that they neither sought out nor provoked, nor actively shaped.

(10) Women have been and still are perpetrators, connivers and concealers in many contexts of abuse in the church sphere, in addition to male decision-makers. This has to be taken into account when it comes to reappraising and preventing abuse. There are also modes of conduct on the part of Christians, both women and men, that reinforce the dominance of men in the clergy, and enhance the danger of spiritual and sexual abuse, for example by adopting a submissive attitude towards ministers.

2.1.2 The potential dangers lying in pastoral care and the celebration of the sacraments

(11) Acts of pastoral care and the celebration of the sacraments, as forms of human communication, are always sensual, for example when it comes to the laying on of hands, anointing, distribution of Eucharistic gifts, and gestures of blessing. These acts are beneficial, but they also constitute a potential danger. Spiritual and sexual abuse frequently happens in the context of sacramental celebrations, or in other pastoral care situations, because they involve a complex relationship of power and dependence, and this is rooted in the professional role of the pastoral worker. Such constellations pose the risk of favouring physical, emotional, spiritual or psychological assault and manipulation. The fact that girls and women predominantly encounter male pastoral workers in most pastoral situations is a challenging issue against the background of these experiences. Especially the official ministry reserved for men in the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation was abused despite significant threat of punishment; for this reason the confessional became a place of horror for large numbers of girls and women. Stories from affected women reveal the extent to which their faith was damaged by the abuse that they suffered. Every further liturgical celebration can then have a re-traumatising effect. The victims are thus denied an important source of resilience. All that remains are the communal sacramental celebrations of reconciliation and anointing of the sick, which, however, women cannot lead, but can only help to organise.

2.1.3 The danger to women in church employment

(12) Women are underrepresented in positions of responsibility in many church contexts, especially in pastoral care. This also applies to women in leading positions within voluntary work. In this structure, many of them have to deal with sexism that is experienced on a daily basis which not infrequently emanates from male superiors. The relationship between proximity and distance is not easy to regulate appropriately. Abuse of power perpetrated by clerics humiliates women who work in full-time and honorary positions. Such discrimination reinforces women's desire to exercise leadership in pastoral and sacramental contexts themselves. Such aspirations on the part of women are often defamed as an illegitimate assumption of power, without at the same time admitting that the existing constellations particularly imply such relationships of power.

(13) When describing the motivation of women to take on and shape ministries and offices in the church, it is obvious from the position of the office holders to see in them above all people who want to be on an equal footing with them. Such a view, influenced by issues of power, changes when the realisation is achieved that many women do not aspire to an office previously denied to them, but out of pure joy in proclaiming the Gospel, respect their own charisms and feel called by God to render service in the community of faith.

2.2 Insight: Gender equality in the debate within society

(14) The demand for justice concerns all types of social relations and relationships, and therefore also gender relations and social gender relationships. Gender equality is achieved when every person in the respective social context, irrespective of their gender affiliation or identity,

has equal rights and opportunities to partake of assets, and has access to positions, and is thus able to lead a self-determined life.

(15) European traditions in philosophy, theology and politics have led in the Christian era to identifying what is “human” with the male, and have thus brought about an androcentric gender order. The hierarchisation to which this has led has resulted today in all “non-male” people having to repeatedly demand universal equality in terms of human rights. Agreements such as the European Convention on Human Rights (and in particular Article 14, Prohibition of discrimination) are therefore needed, as are strategies that lead to a reduction in man-made gender-related inequalities, and thus to gender equality.

(16) The Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*) that is in force in Germany establishes in Article 3 the fundamental equality of all human beings, irrespective of all existing differences in regard to gender, parentage, language, disability, homeland, faith, religious or political opinions. Thus, the state is to promote “the actual implementation of equal rights for women and men and take steps to eliminate disadvantages that now exist” (Art 3 para. 2 of the Basic Law). In order to accommodate this, further detailed legal provisions are constantly being made in order to overcome enduring disregard for gender equality. The existing situation still leaves much to be desired; there is a constant need for new changes and adaptations.

(17) There are different ideas in the debate within society as to what gender equality could and should look like. Social developments such as globalisation, migration, European integration, pluralisation of lifestyles, demographic change or social movements, include diverse perspectives concerning this topic. It must be borne in mind, for instance, that not all women can be subsumed under one “we”; one might name as examples migrant women, women of colour, Jewish women, lesbians, or women with disabilities. Their experience around the world, and in Germany, is that they are also regarded as “the others”, over and above the question of their gender identity and are consequently excluded. There is an urgent need for a differentiated analysis of the manner in which injustice is created, experienced and justified (not only) via gender.

(18) Gender should therefore be seen in a multidimensional perspective. Social or socio-cultural gender, as it presents itself or is taken for granted in a specific cultural context, is the result of a social process. Thus, the manifold differences within the genders are taken seriously. At the same time, the question of the binary understanding of sexuality is to be posed with renewed sensitivity against this background on the basis of experience and of research findings.

(19) When speaking about a person’s gender, judgments are made about different androcentrically-defined characteristics, abilities, interests and needs of women and men, which are often regarded as biologically determined. They become the basis of argumentation for a definition of the relationships between the genders, as well as for justifying their supposedly just place in society. In order to achieve gender equality, the respective understanding of the gender relationship must therefore be discussed above all. There are positions here which emphasise the difference between the genders more strongly. Others stress the equality of the genders over their differences. In addition, there are approaches that elaborate a conceivable coexistence of difference and equality.

(20) The position of the difference was formed in bourgeois society as a model of gender complementarity. It assumes that the female complements the male, or it even tends to subordinate the female to the male. As a response to the assumption of this hierarchical-patriarchal order of the genders, feminism brings about a positive re-evaluation of female values and ways of life, and thus of traditional gender roles and characters. However, such a view, positive in itself, according to which women are assigned their own sphere in society, or such a role is claimed by them, also has its dangers: It can have a suppressing effect, and may neglect the criticism of the lasting validity of prevailing power dynamics.

(21) By contrast, the equality position especially put forward in sociological concepts is thus opposed to traditional gender characters and gender roles, androcentrism and the various forms of sexism. The goal of the equality approach is for women to participate in the male-dominated spheres where power, wealth and prestige are distributed. However, it tends to reduce justice to formal equality, and to consider in abstract terms the differences between the genders that exist in the cultural and social spheres.

(22) Equality and difference are correlated in the methods that seek to overcome the dilemmas arising from these positions. The demand for equality has its starting point in the fact that what is being compared is different. This approach is based on the idea of the subject as an autonomous, self-identical individual: There is neither the woman nor the man. The diversity of life contexts and of lifestyles, as well as of individual experience, have meaning and intrinsic value when it comes to determining gender equality. This approach presents a difficult task: The principles of difference and equality must be combined: Neither can difference be intrinsically justified, nor can equality be conceived without heterogeneity. Following on from this concept, it is important to perceive each person as a distinct personality, and to hold his or her charms in respect.

(23) The question of gender equality is constantly being raised anew, also at worldwide level, in view of the processes of social transformation and of the changes that are currently taking place in the world of business, work and life. The answer to this question is closely connected to the questioning of the conditions prevailing in each case, and exerts an impact on the possibilities and opportunities of a gender-independent perception of all functions, offices and occupations in society as well as in the Church. Role attributions as part of a polarity that is orientated towards the supposedly natural nature of the sexes are often very critically questioned in today's society; there is frequently a lack of an echo of this in a church context. The structures and power relations in the Roman Catholic Church today are essentially determined by cultural patterns shaped over thousands of years. While the images of women and men are changing rapidly in our culture, the Church is officially sticking to the old roles and tasks for women and men for the time being. As in society, women are underrepresented in church leadership despite current efforts. Jobs held by women are lower in the hierarchy, have less social prestige and are paid less. Women's access to sacramental ministry is closed. Critical questions are increasingly being asked of the Church, both from society and from within the Church. As a result, the Church is now supportively accompanying the struggle for gender relations and gender justice, which has been going on for more than a century but is still far too hesitant to make it a matter of Her own heart and is even less likely to accept it as a mandate for Her own work.

2.3 Diagnosis: a need for comprehensive reform

(24) Both an admission of guilt and a change in awareness and behaviour are urgently required in view of the horror of spiritual and sexualised violence against women, and of the continuing marginalisation of and discrimination against women in the Roman Catholic Church.

(25) The Second Vatican Council says of the Church that She is “at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, always follows the way of penance and renewal.”² In every age, the Church is called to renew Herself on the model of Her apostolic origin, and to live the proclamation of the Easter message as Her mission.

(26) The “social structure of the Church”³ in which God’s Spirit is at work, as recalled by the Second Vatican Council, is also determined in the public perception above all by the form of ministries and offices that people perform in the Church. From a theological perspective too, the Church takes on Her visible form primarily in liturgical celebrations, in catechesis and in diakonia. The responsible staff working there are measured against a high standard: to always and repeatedly represent Jesus Christ approximately as the one reason for the actions of the Church.

(27) How do people recognise the presence of Jesus Christ in His Holy Spirit? Paul’s exhortations are clear in the statement: There must be no personal boasting (cf. 1 Cor 1:29-31). Gifts and spiritual attitudes characterise people in following Jesus: willingness to reconcile, kindness, humility, perseverance, attention to one another, time for one another, and so many good things besides. The marks of love that Paul mentions in 1 Cor 13 are the starting point for a common discernment process with regard to women’s access to ministry and thus the constant reform programme of all Churches.

(28) Many people today (still) measure the Church by the behaviour of those holding leadership positions. It is irrelevant for most people today whether it is a man or a woman who steps up to represent the Christian Church. What is important above all is that individuals in leading church ministries endeavour again and again to live as Jesus Christ did.

3. The Biblical background

(29) The Scriptures of the Bible contain different perceptions of humankind. The Jewish and Christian exegesis of recent decades has recognised the great degree to which the Bible speaks of the many different ministries that women exercised. In addition, the exegesis has elaborated the impact exercised by social structures in Antiquity on the Scriptures and on their transmission, but also on the development of the offices and ministries themselves.

3.1 The fact of all humans having been made in the image of God in Creation

(30) The first Creation story emphasises the equality of the genders: Human beings were created first and foremost as a human image of God (living statue of God), in God’s likeness. Only afterwards is it stated that there is a male and a female variant (Gen 1:26-27). The text is directed

² Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, 8.

³ Ibid.

against the multifarious world of gods and goddesses in Antiquity. The one deity is not human-shaped (anthropomorphic), but humans are very much god-shaped (theomorphic), regardless of their gender.

(31) Especially in Ancient Egypt, the King - and sometimes also the Queen - was considered a human image of a deity. Gen 1:26-27 transfers this royal privilege to all human beings. The fact of having been made in the image of God demands of all humans that they carry out God's will and organise their community collectively (cf. Gen 1:28), regardless of their social origin or gender. God Himself considers this egalitarian order to be "very good" (Gen 1:31).

3.2 (Sexual) violence against women in the Bible

(32) The Scriptures do not describe only the original good condition of the world. They also show numerous ruptures in the relationship with God and between the genders. In many cases, they tacitly presuppose the subordination of women, even in sexual relationships. On the other hand, they repeatedly draw attention to the problems of this gender (dis)order.

(33) The law of succession deals exclusively with the question of which sons are to inherit (cf. Deut 21:15-17). Women are not mentioned as witnesses in court (cf. Num 35:30), and marriage is usually seen as an arrangement between men in which women change hands as chattel (cf. e.g. Gen 29:1-30; Tob 7:9-17). Women face multiple structural disadvantages, and are therefore particularly vulnerable to abuses of power. Holy Scripture also recognises the particular abuse of power through sexual violence, but sharply condemns it. It reveals that such violence can be cloaked by the term "love", for example in the case of Dinah (cf. Gen 34:3) or Tamar (cf. 2 Sam 13:1).

(34) Several prophetic texts describe a woman being stripped and publicly humiliated as a punishment. Such scenes are considered metaphors for the destruction of the kingdom of Judah (Jer 13:15-27), the northern kingdom of Israel (Hos 2-3), and/or the cities of Jerusalem and Samaria (Ez 23 and 16, as well as Lamentations 1:8-9). This ranges through to rape, which is considered in this image to constitute punishment for premarital sex (Ez 23:3), adultery (Jer 13:27; Ez 23:4-8, 11-27), and pride (Isa 47:7-8). Non-adherence to sexual norms stands metaphorically for cult practices which, according to the prophets, are to be punished. The punishment - in the image rape, in reality the conquest and destruction of a city or country - thus appears to be logical and just.

(35) The scenes portrayed in the Bible reveal a disastrous fundamental attitude that attributes blame for abuse to the victims of that very abuse. Such an attitude prevents many victims from addressing or reporting the violence that they have experienced down to the present day.

(36) Conversely, Holy Scripture shows in several places how women remain able to act, even in situations of extreme powerlessness. After Tamar is raped by her half-brother Amnon, she resists the demand to cover up and makes her hurt and grief public through ritual mourning (2 Sam 13:1-22). Susannah can only narrowly avert being coerced into sexual intercourse. She is slandered as an adulterer by the perpetrators in a reversal of guilt during the subsequent court proceedings, and is not allowed to present her version of events. She turns to God as her only

ally. He sends her help in the shape of Daniel, who testifies to her innocence, convicts the perpetrators and thus gives her justice (cf. Dan 13).

(37) The Song of Songs paints a positive counterimage of a different kind, portraying an innocent, non-violent, consensual relationship on an equal footing.

3.3 Patriarchy, kyriarchy and its reversal in the Holy Scriptures

(38) The violence-ridden social order in which the Scriptures were written is often referred to as a “patriarchy” (domination by fathers). The term “kyriarchy” (rule by a Lord) is however increasingly gaining ground in the exegesis and in other disciplines. What is meant by this is that a community is headed by a single man (*kyrios*) to whom all, women and men alike, must submit. This applies in general terms to the “house”, the residential and economic community of an extended family. But it is also true for the political community, presided over by a king, or for the temple staff, which is headed by the high priest. Certain women can indeed exert an influence in such orders - in some cases also over men who are their social inferiors, but always in subordination and assignment to the one man at the top (cf. e.g. Bathsheba in 1 Kings 1:11-31). Obviously, gender is a factor of structural inequality in many biblical texts, as the paragraph itself states. Intersectional exegetical approaches presuppose this, but go further by noting that gender is only one of many factors that determine one's place and agency in society - others include social rank, health, income, and so on. This is why, for example, Bathsheba can plot to bring her son Solomon to the throne, which in turn gives her influence that other women and men do not have. It is precisely one of the effects of patriarchy or kyriarchy that women have to take a detour through men and use more subtle means of power in order to achieve their goals. This is often at the expense of structurally worse-off men and women (another example is the story of Potiphar, his wife and Joseph in Gen 39).

(39) Whilst the Holy Scriptures take this kyriarchal order for granted in many places, they also contain ideas that break through this order. In the Old Testament, it is the foremothers and numerous women who lead the people of God as prophets and judges (cf. e.g. Deborah in Judges 4-5). The daughters of Zelophehad claim and receive their father's heritage (cf. Num 27:1-11).

(40) Also worthy of mention are the non-Israelite women who are specifically mentioned in Jesus' family tree (Mt 1:1-17), although otherwise only the male, kyriarchal lineage counts. Jesus' behaviour also shows that He undermines and abolishes the principles of the kyriarchy. He repeatedly refers to the heavenly Father and Lord, under whom all people become equal brothers and sisters. He snubs his physical and social family, and instead starts a new, equal family of God which is to live by heavenly standards (cf. Mt 12:49-50).

(41) There is no mention of priestesses in the Old Testament. Whilst priestesses are documented elsewhere in Antiquity, this is not the case in Jerusalem. Potential reasons that are given include ritual purity regulations, which at times excluded women from ritual acts due to inability to worship during menstruation (Lev 15:9-30). Taboos on marriage and childbearing may also play a role. All this however remains speculative, given that there is no Biblical substantiation of the non-existence of priestesses.

(42) The typical Greek term for priest (*hiereus*) is never used in the New Testament for specific ministries or offices in the early Christian communities (*ecclesia*). Hebrews declares that believers in Christ have (only) *one* High Priest, namely Jesus Christ (Heb 3:1; 4:14; 5:10). In the Book of Revelation, the term “priest” is considered a dignitary title for all who are baptised (Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). The teaching of the common priesthood of all faithful ties in with this. People who have found faith in Jesus Christ are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9).

3.4 “The Twelve” and “the Apostles” are not the same

(43) Terms such as “apostles”, “the Twelve”, “presbyters”, “deacons” and “episcopos” are more common and more powerful in the New Testament writings than the term “priest”. We must first distinguish between what can be attributed to the historical Jesus, and what happened after Easter. Both are only accessible to us through the texts of the Gospels, which were written later. In between the two comes Paul, who wrote to the communities outside Palestine even before the Gospels were written. His letters thus reflect the oldest use of the word “apostle” in early Christianity. This usage is distinct from that of Luke, who, after Paul’s death, writes a double work in the shape of his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles which specifically seeks to emphasise the concern for historical continuity between Jesus before Easter, and the Church that emerges after Easter. The understanding of what an apostle is, whether male or female, therefore changes within this period.

(44) First of all, the historical Jesus: Mark, the oldest Evangelist, reports that Jesus chose twelve men and “appointed [them] that they might be with him and he might send them forth to preach and to have authority to drive out demons” (Mark 3:14). These Twelve point to the twelve tribes of Israel, and thus to Jesus’ claim to gather together the new Israel (cf. Lk 22:28-30; Mt 19:28). Since the kyriarchal principle of the applicable social order held that the founders of the twelve tribes of Israel were male, the symbolically-appointed representatives of the new Israel could only be male, otherwise the sign would not have been understood. In the post-Easter period of the early Church, Paul now speaks several times in his letters of a group of Apostles (Rom 16:7; 1 Cor 9:5; 15:9; cf. Gal 1:17 and 19). Research however shows that this group was not identical to the circle of the Twelve appointed by Jesus before Easter. The “Apostles”, according to Paul, were in fact people who could claim to have encountered the Risen Lord, and who considered themselves as sent out by him; that is why Paul refers to himself as an apostle (cf. 1 Cor 9:1; Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1). The early Christian creed in 1 Cor 15:3-7 clearly distinguishes between the Twelve and “all the apostles”. The latter also included women, some of whose names are mentioned in the Gospels. According to the Gospels, women are witnesses to the death of Jesus, His burial and resurrection (Mark 15:40-41; Mt 28:1 and 9 to 10). In the Gospel according to John, it is Mary Magdalene who first encounters the Risen Lord and who is the first to receive the proclamation mission (John 20:1-18, Mt 28:9-10 and Mark 16:11); this is why the position of “*apostola apostolorum*”, a position which is elevated in comparison to the circle of the Twelve, is conveyed on her by the Latin Church Fathers. Pope Francis once again recalled this to the Church’s memory when he elevated her feast day to the liturgical rank of a feast, like that of the other apostles. Apostles are therefore public witnesses of the Risen Lord.

(45) The early Christian creed, to which Paul refers in 1 Corinthians, only mentions male Easter witnesses by name, in contrast to the Gospel narratives (1 Cor 15:5-8). Why are the women not named here, even though they existed? It was customary in the socio-cultural context that only the testimony of men was considered as legally-admissible evidence in court in the event of a legal dispute. By naming only male witnesses, the formula legitimises the credibility of the creed. This however serves to exclude women from the ranks of those witnesses to the Easter story who are therefore eligible to use the title of apostle from the outset. Paul himself, on the other hand, claims this title of apostle for himself on the basis of his encounter with the Risen Lord on the road to Damascus (cf. Acts 9), and later also refers to others as “apostles”, including at least one woman (Junia: cf. Rom 16:7).

(46) The Evangelists Matthew and Luke equate the Apostles with the Twelve (Matthew 10:2; Luke 6:13). For Luke’s Acts of the Apostles, a unified group emerges in this way in the shape of “the Apostles” which stands for continuity between Jesus and the infant Church. When Matthew is elected to join the post-Easter circle of the Twelve, someone is nominated “who accompanied us the whole time the Lord Jesus came and went among us” Acts 1:21). The author of Luke’s double work therefore does not consider Paul to be an Apostle in this sense. The term “Twelve Apostles” is thus associated with Luke’s theological view of history: In Luke’s model of the Church, they remind us of “the teaching of the apostles” (Acts 2:42) as the decisive factor of continuity between the earthly Jesus and the post-Easter Church.

(47) Luke’s image of the Church is therefore not hierarchical pure and simple: The pericope of the upper room in which the eleven devoted themselves with one accord to prayer “together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers” (Acts 1:14) is a memorable image of a fraternal original Church onto which the Spirit poured itself out without discrimination on the Day of Pentecost. Today’s ecclesiology can link into this Biblical image of Mary and of the Church.

(48) What suggests itself from the New Testament’s findings on the “Twelve” and the “Apostles”, which are not to be equated with them, for a contemporary discussion of ministries and offices in the Church? The argument that Jesus appointed “the Twelve”, and that they were exclusively men, follows the later perspective of Matthew, and especially Luke, who equates these twelve men with the Apostles who founded the Church. If, on the other hand, one starts from the concept of disciples, Jesus appointed and sent out men and women in His lifetime. The oldest tangible concept of an “Apostle” was ultimately orientated towards the encounter with and the sending out by the Risen Lord. And this group includes many people, men and women, from Mary Magdalene to Paul, Andronicos and Junia, including the twelve (or eleven) Apostles, together with Peter. The question therefore arises in general terms as to how far the selection of the Twelve is normative for the subsequent shaping of the Church’s ministry structure, given that such a circle of the Twelve is soon no longer mentioned as an authority. It should also be borne in mind that there are now several thousand bishops as “successors of the Apostles”. Why the question of gender alone should dictate the path ahead here can hardly be justified in terms of biblical exegesis.

3.5 Women in the New Testament congregations

(49) The early period of the Christian congregations in the cities of Asia Minor and in Rome is tangible in the Pauline Epistles, which were written a generation before the Gospels. The numerous women who are mentioned by name with their functions and tasks in the churches produce an impressive picture: Women were active, in the same way as and together with the men, in matters of church leadership as well as of church organisation. They were involved in the in-depth proclamation of the Gospel and in missionary work. This is not only true for the congregations founded by Paul, as the list of greetings in the Letter to the Romans shows. (cf. Rom 16).

(50) Since Paul also combines women's names with the masculine functional designations in male-centred language (*apostolos*, 16:7 for Junia, *diaconos* in Rom 16:1 for Phoebe), it cannot be ruled out that women are also referred to as part of the triad of "apostles, prophets and teachers" mentioned in 1 Cor 12:28, the 500 brothers mentioned in 1 Cor 15:6 to whom the Risen Lord appeared, as well as the bishops and deacons mentioned in Phil 1:1. It also suggests itself that, in the theologically important statement about being a child of God in Gal 4:4-7, the masculine form refers to both gender forms, so that women also receive the Spirit in the same way as men, and thus become "sons" and heirs in the same way as they do, and not underprivileged "daughters".

(51) Paul does not provide any information concerning how and by whom the Lord's Supper was led, nor does he use a specific term for such a task, either for men or for women. It is only after the New Testament that we see evidence of a presiding role at the Lord's Supper, which is then however reserved for a man.

(52) That having been said, key roles and leadership roles are recognisable which were probably held in most cases in concrete practice by the respective heads of the household, and in which some women's names have been passed down to us: Mary, the mother of John who is called Mark (Acts 12:12) in Jerusalem, Lydia (Acts 16:14-40) in Philippi, Prisca with her husband Aquila in Ephesus (1 Cor 16:19; 2 Tim 4:19) and Rome (Rom 16:3), also in Rome: Mary, Junia, Tryphaena and Tryphosa, Persis, Julia, as well as the mother of Rufus and the sister of Nereus (cf. Rom 16:6-15), Nympha (cf. Col 4:15) in Laodicea, Apphia (cf. Phil 1-2) in Colossae, Phoebe (cf. Rom 16,1) in Cenchreae, as well as Chloë (cf. 1 Cor 1:11).

(53) The later image of the Church was not however primarily shaped by Paul's lists of greetings and charisms. The Gospel of St Luke limits the apostolate to the Twelve and singles out Peter in particular. In research, it is nevertheless considered "the Gospel of women" because it mentions many women by name and is the only one that mentions that also women followed Jesus on his preaching journeys in Galilee (Lk 8:1-3). Whereas the New Testament often refers to women in need of help, it is made clear here that women actively supported Jesus with their means. Recent exegesis, however, points out that this also changes the role of women between the time of Jesus and the time of Luke: Women like Mary of Magdala, who had a mission of proclamation with Jesus, become supporters and servants of the male proclaimers with Luke. Reasons: The evaluation of the Gospel of Luke, and especially the evaluation of the image of women therein, is currently being debated in exegesis, which is reflected in the draft text and the proposed amendment. The modified motion for amendment attempts to take this still unfinished debate into account.

(54) Behind this is the changed situation of those second-generation Christians who came from rural Palestine to the region of the cities in Syria, Asia Minor and Greece, and also gained a foothold in the urban Roman setting. The adaptation to the surrounding culture and the social structures applying there took its toll, especially on the women.

(55) The change in the role played by women becomes clear in the post-Pauline Pastoral Epistles (before 150 AD): Women are excluded from the public congregation and relegated into the realm of the home. The house churches, conceived along the lines of the Roman association, are led by the “elders” (*presbyteroi*). The “kyriarchy” takes its toll by motivating the exclusion of women. It however does not (yet) fully assert itself, since the Church is not led by a single man, but by a circle of men.

(56) Some scholars consider Paul’s prohibition of teaching for women in 1 Cor 14:34-36 not to be an original part of the Letter, but a later adaptation of the prohibition of teaching in 1 Timothy (1 Tim 2:11-15). In both cases, the prohibition of teaching is however justified not in theological but in purely sociological terms with a view to social customs. A Genesis exegesis that is questionable from today’s point of view is used in 1 Tim 2:12-14 in order to justify the subordination of women to men. Female deacons are only to be deployed in a social, charitable and gender-specific context (1 Tim 3:11).

(57) The dispute about widows in 1 Tim 5:3-16 shows particularly clearly from today’s perspective how great the fear was that an alternative understanding of the role of women might damage the reputation of the Christian congregations (1 Tim 5:14). Women who defied and resisted male dominance in society seem to have been more readily accepted in Pauline times. 1 Cor 7 indicates that even young women could live out their religiously-motivated ideal of celibacy and place their Christianity at the service of the proclamation with greater freedom. This opportunity was not given to women again until in the context of the ascetic monastic movement of late Antiquity. The establishment of celibacy as an accepted religious way of life for women can be seen as a significant emancipatory achievement of the early Church.

(58) Even if the ministry structures in the early congregations were not consolidated, and the development was not unilinear, the process of “institutionalisation” can be identified from an early stage. The more institutionalisation progressed, the more women took a back seat. With Paul, men and women alike who have charisms and functions are part of the congregation (1 Cor 12:28). Women are conceivable here. The Pastoral Epistles (before 150 AD), on the other hand, equate the charism of God with the grace of ordination. Both are conferred by the imposition of hands according to the Old Testament model (1 Tim 4:14). Women were excluded from such a ministry in the second Century at the latest. This also applies to the tripartite office of *episcopus*, *presbyteros* and *diaconos*, as well as to the monepiscopate (where the congregation is led by a single bishop). These forms of leadership emerged in the post-New Testament period, and are later justified in theological terms by the Fathers of the Church.

3.6 Biblical models of the ministry: from interpreting history to shaping the present

(59) Today’s church offices and ministries did not come into being all at once, nor did their development proceed in a straight line. Studies in social history, and more recently in gender studies, additionally show that the possibilities open to a woman to determine her own life were

largely dependent on her social and economic situation. This was already true in the early days of the Christian Church. Not every woman could leave everything behind and follow Jesus. Slave women could not hold a leadership position even in the Roman city churches. What the businesswoman and deaconess Phoebe could do in Cenchreae was probably not possible for the freed slave Junia in Rome, despite the fact that she was an apostle. This means that what we know about specific women and the possibilities open to them, as well as about the boundaries that were imposed on their participation in early Christian communities, is always also dependent on the concrete social ideas, and first and foremost on the prevailing role models for men and women to which the Christian minorities conformed. This is shown by the following example: When Paul or the later editor harshly condemns women to silence in the church assembly (1 Cor 14:33-36), he does so on the grounds of it not being customary for women to speak publicly in the assemblies of the churches. He however presupposes that they play an active role in church services (1 Cor 11:2-16). 1 Corinthians would therefore justify women preaching in worship, but exclude them altogether from playing a role as parish councillors, or from assuming leading offices in the Church.

(60) The fact that social structures in Antiquity largely determined gender roles must make us very cautious today when it comes to understanding Biblical statements about women as fundamentally valid determinations. The Church never considered Herself obliged to unquestioningly uphold the norms of the Ancient pagan environment; on the contrary, in the spirit of the Gospel, She has challenged them forcefully in Her history and struggled against them, at times with great missionary effort. The proclamation of the Gospel is hindered today by the perception that the genders are not treated equally in the Church, and the Christian message is thus judged to be untrustworthy.

(61) It might make more sense to rediscover the Pauline doctrine of charisms and apply it to today's bearers of spiritual gifts in the Church. For Paul, the Church (*ecclesia*) is - in Christological terms - the people of God gathered in Christ, and - in pneumatological terms - the body of Christ joined together by the Spirit and enlivened with His gifts (1 Cor 12). The vision of a Christian community of people in which ethnicity, social status or gender (neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free person, no male and female) is no longer significant, but the new existence as a human being baptised into Christ (Gal 3:28), that is a return to the originally good Creation, has not been brought to fruition up to the present day. Paul is already quoting here traditional material that was left to him, at first independently of the question of offices. But he states the principle in line with which the Church can direct Her authority to reshape offices in the present situation, or to create new offices out of Her faith in the mission of the Risen Lord.

3.7 Mary, friend of God, sister in the faith and archetype (*typus*) of the Church

(62) A woman in the Bible whose impact on the Church is theologically and spiritually inexhaustible is Mary, the mother of Jesus. We know little more about her in historical terms other than her name and that her hometown was Nazareth. Perceptions of women and of the Church down through the centuries have been inspired by Mary. As a friend of God, sister in the faith, seat

of wisdom and archetype (*typus*) of the Church⁴, she especially stands today for a fraternal Church, an amical community of the genders in a liberating space of grace. The singer of the Magnificat praises humility and a willingness to serve. She calls herself the “handmaid” or “slave” of God, thus conveying a prophetic title of honour on herself (cf. Moses as a “servant” or “slave” of God in Deut 34:5). She places herself in the long tradition of Biblical women (Miriam, Deborah, Judith, Esther and many more) who find strength in trusting God, who defy gender stereotypes, and sing of God’s acts putting an end to unjust power relationships as the angel Gabriel addressed her (Mary) and not the man as before, when he announced to Zechariah the birth of John the Baptist through his wife Elizabeth (Lk 1:5-38).

(63) The Biblical foundation presented here, while taking into account the patriarchal context of origin and interpretation, reveals considerable potential for equality between man and woman, as well as the common mission of the faithful for the proclamation of the Gospel, regardless of their gender.

(64) The Good News of Jesus centred on the announcement of the coming rule of God (Mk 1:15). The announcement that the kingdom of God is at hand was targeted at everyone. The Gospels report that Jesus had a multitude of encounters with women. It is evident in all the stories that Jesus has a brotherly, affirming attitude towards women. He speaks to them, he heals them, He teaches them as His disciples; He protects them from social injustice and religious discrimination.

(65) In all the Easter stories that the Gospels tell of the empty tomb, it is women who are the first witnesses to the resurrection. They, unlike most of the disciples, persevered at the cross and dare to go to the tomb, they receive the revelation of the victory over death and they are entrusted with proclaiming the Easter message.

(66) Charismatic equality in the Pauline congregations includes women. Women naturally have a share in the spiritual gifts, all of which are to be contributed towards building up the congregation. The missionary work of early Christianity did not therefore dispense with the services of women. In fact, they devoted their time, energy and indeed their whole lives to spreading the Gospel. They were active in the early Christian communities in preaching, in pastoral care, in education, and in leadership.

4. Reflections in the history of tradition

(67) Women have played a leading, creative role in Christian communities through all the eras in the history of Christianity. Countless women, often unnamed because tradition has been authorised by men, have shaped and spiritually enriched the Church, even though they were excluded from leadership functions and from ordained ministry from the 2nd Century onwards. The Church in the historical process is inconceivable without women praying, women acting as pastors, charity workers, teachers of theology, missionaries and financial supporters. In this process, women have created and fought again and again for free spaces in the thoroughly patriarchal societies in which, in addition to the serving and receptive role to assigned them, they have also exercised leadership functions in the Church in isolated cases. Great importance

⁴ Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 53; 63.

was and is attached to the women's orders in particular. Abbesses have exercised their office with spiritual authority in the communities that they led since early Christian times. Their actions are also significant at the level of ecclesiastical jurisprudence; they are qualified in terms of church law. Women's orders still exert a major influence on the spiritual constitution of society today. The presentation of the history of Christianity from the point of view of women is therefore not a narration of a series of exceptional, prominent female figures, but consists of recalling the history of the continuous contribution that women have made to the life of the Church. This needs to be acknowledged and appreciated.

4.1 Developments in the Patristic and Scholastic periods

(68) The configuration of the offices is based on cultural patterns of Roman society in which women could not give testimony or sign contracts, in which the husband or a relative was a woman's "guardian". The newly-forming sacramental offices of leadership - in the triad of bishop, presbyterate and diaconate - were therefore reserved for men. The presbyters were a body of experienced men who advised the bishop and who then, as the bishoprics grew ever larger, were able to preside over the Eucharist in the worshipping communities. Deaconesses were responsible for the ministry to the poor, widows and orphans. The dogmatic-theological significance of the offices held by women in the early Church and into the Middle Ages is a matter of controversy today. The office of deaconess is confirmed in the Western Church and into the early Middle Ages. The lines of argumentation regarding the exclusion of women from sacramental office then become tied up in scholastic theology with the question of whether women in office can represent Jesus Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist, and were also combined with a conviction that became deeply embedded in Western culture, namely that the female gender was inferior.

(69) Women were active in various ministries and offices in the Church in the first millennium. Widows and virgins who were in community ministry received an ordination which lent special expression to their following of Christ. Deaconesses were ordained in a similar way to deacons. The Syriac church order of the "*Didascalia apostolorum*", presented in the year 220, speaks of a ministry of deacons for women which is responsible for caring for women in the congregation, for services to the sick, for baptismal catechesis, and for the baptismal anointing of women. The title of "deaconess" is used for the first time in the 4th Century at the Council of Nicea (325), and the Council of Chalcedon (451) testifies in the 5th Century that women were being ordained as deacons. It sets 40 as the minimum age for deaconesses; there are provisions for deaconesses to marry, and there is talk of ordination with the laying on of hands and prayer. There is evidence of the ordination of women in the Western tradition up to the 12th Century. Indications of the ordination of women can in fact be found even longer in the Eastern Church and in the Orthodox tradition. The great cathedral churches of Antiquity had not only many deacons working there, but also a number of deaconesses. The best-known deaconesses of Antiquity include Olympias in Constantinople, Kelerina, Romana and Pelagia in Antioch, and Radegundis, the wife of the Frankish King Clothar, who left the court, was ordained as a "*diac-ona*", and lived in Poitiers.

(70) An explicit reflection on the exclusion of women from sacramental office began in scholastic theology and the study of canon law in the mid-13th Century. Aristotelian anthropology was adopted, and women were subordinated to men by their very nature and declared unsuitable for the *ordo*. Sacramental ordination, it is pointed out here, is ruled out by divine law, the central argument being the “natural likeness” between the sacramental symbol (involving the recipient) and that is signified by the sacrament. This means that the male Christ can only be represented by a male priest. According to Bonaventure in his *Commentary on the Sentences*, the likeness due to creation is a prerequisite for the coming into being of the sacrament, even though the fullness of the sacrament is certainly always achieved by being instituted by Christ. Man and woman stand for “God and the soul”, “Christ and the Church”, the “higher and lower part of reason” (Bonaventure, 4 Sent. d. 25, a. 2, q. 1 c. (IV, 650a-b). Here, the man always stands for the higher, stronger, divine part, and the woman for the lower, weaker, creaturely part; it is in precisely this sense that she is a “*mas occasionatus*”, a “misbegotten male”, as Thomas Aquinas writes (STh I, q. 92, a. 1). According to the argumentation, this is precisely what it means that woman is unable to exercise the priestly representation of Christ because she is said to lack qualifications on the level of “natural likeness”: namely, the male gender, and thus not to be able to take the place of the bridegroom in the conjugal union, which is understood as analogous to the relationship between Christ and the Church.

(71) A history of guilt that has rarely been considered in the past concerns the question of the debasement of women in the context of the justification of compulsory celibacy for clerics in the framework of the reform of the Church that took place in the 11th Century. Women priests were regarded as prostitutes and concubines, as a source of sin and a cause of undoing for pastors. The Second Lateran Council (1139 AD) condemned the intercourse of higher-order clerics with women as fornication and impurity, and this led to them losing their office. Clerics were therefore ordered to separate from their wives and children. The continence of the priest was justified, among other things, by the notion that one could not touch the body of Christ during the Eucharist and, around the same time, touch a “whore’s body”, namely that of a woman. The demand for the cultic purity of the clergy - in connection with misogynistic statements in the biblical texts and the patristic tradition - led to women being disqualified as objects of sinful desire.

(72) As early as in the late scholastic period, John Duns Scotus and Durandus changed the argumentation with regard to the exclusion of women from ordained ministry. An argument was introduced that referred to a corresponding order of Christ: The restriction of ordination to men is derived from the conferral of consecration authority at the Lord’s Supper, and of the authority to absolve in connection with the bestowal of the Spirit by the Risen Lord (John 20:19-23). This is the line of reasoning that is taken up in the ecclesial tradition, through to “*Ordinatio sacerdotalis*” (1994). This ecclesiastical argumentation is undermined in the mystical traditions, for instance in texts by Gertrude of Helfta or Mechthild of Magdeburg, by Julian of Norwich, by Teresa of Avila, Thérèse de Lisieux or Edith Stein, and also in the practice of the Church - in the catechesis, and in educational and missionary work, but also in liturgical practices in convents and various forms of aesthetic expression such as book illumination - there is a variety of other testimonies that can be discovered to women’s struggle to participate more fully in the Church according to their vocation. But these testimonies have remained invisible for centuries.

4.2 Women's diaconate in the Orthodox Church

(73) Deaconesses have been ordained in various Orthodox Churches in recent years. For example, Patriarch Theodoros II in the Democratic Republic of Congo ordained a woman as a “missionary deaconess” during a service held in Kolwezi in February 2017, and the Patriarch of Jerusalem also ordained a woman as a deaconess. These ordinations follow on from the ordination of deaconesses in the early Church and in Orthodox tradition, and this practice went on into the late Byzantine era. The institution of the women's diaconate was however never abolished by a synodal resolution.

(74) A debate on the restoration of women's diaconate has been going on in the Orthodox Churches since the 1980s: After the inter-Orthodox symposium that was held in Boston (1985), the Ecumenical Patriarchate convened a Pan-Orthodox Conference in Rhodes in 1988 on the topic of the place of the woman in the Orthodox Church and the question of the ordination of women. It was emphasised here that the women's diaconate should be revived. Although it had never been altogether abandoned, it was in danger of being forgotten. The studies of the Orthodox theologian Evangelos Theodorou and many others make it clear that the texts of the early Church do not distinguish between men and women with regard to the quality of ordination, and that there is also no gender-specific distinction between a higher or a lower level of ordination, or between a sacrament and a sacramental object. The ordination forms contain the epiclesis, and in the prayer of ordination the reference to divine grace, which explicitly indicates sacramental ordination. The diaconate, and this includes the women's diaconate, belongs in the old Church, and in the Orthodox theological interpretation of these ordination forms, to the “higher ordo”, like the bishop and presbyter.

(75) Deaconesses in the Orthodox Churches worked in the fields of liturgy, pastoral care, catechesis, education, mission and care especially for sick, grieving, needy women, for Christian and non-Christian women. They were also responsible for the virgins and widows within the Church, and it fell to them to ensure order and decency during the church service itself. Above all, as the “Apostolic Constitutions” make clear, they also assisted in the administration of baptism; they administered the Eucharist to sick women who were unable to travel to the house of God, and they assisted in the service of the burial of women. The ecumenical dialogue with the Orthodox Church will be helpful with regard to the establishment of the women's diaconate, even though the Orthodox Church rejects the ordination of women to the priestly ministry.

4.3 Positioning in the Reformation tradition

(76) In its plurality, the Reformation opened up new possibilities for women to take part in church life, especially in its early phase. The emphasis placed on the priesthood of all the faithful in the Reformation movements enabled women to recognise their opportunity to express themselves publicly in theological terms, to transcend their traditional roles, and to live out their vocations in new ministries within the Church.

(77) Nevertheless, the Reformation did not lead in a straight line to the ordination of women, or even consistently pave the way for it. The admission of women to pastoral and ordained ministry is, in the Churches of the Reformation, rather a development of modern times, especially of the 19th and 20th Centuries. Before this time, women in Protestant Churches were

given new and in some cases leading functions, especially in Protestant religious movements (including pietism, puritanism, revivalism and Free Church denominations), which attached importance to the personal faith of the individual and to the charismatic equality of the faithful, and which primarily included and emphasised the ministry of proclamation.

(78) The equal service of women in pastoral ministry in the Protestant regional churches was able to assert itself via several stages of underprivileged service relationships in periods of time that varied regionally in the second half of the 20th Century, but it was not until the mid-1970s that the equality of women in pastoral ministry was anchored and regulated by church law. The path frequently led via an “office *sui generis*”, or a women’s ministry (including parish assistant or vicar), whereby the difference *vis-à-vis* the male minister was distinctly underlined due to the gender-specific attributions. Similar processes also led to the ordained ministry of women being recognised in some Free Churches from the 1970s onwards. The decision of the General Synod of the Church of England in 1992 to admit women as priests received particular attention in ecumenical circles. The unrestricted ordination of women to the apostolic ministry in the Church took place in the Old Catholic Church in 1994 via the introduction of the diaconate.

(79) An often gradual process can be observed in all Churches which ultimately decided to ordain women and commission them in all ecclesiastical offices and ministries, whereby various ecclesiastical “women’s offices” were created in order to be able to appoint women to tasks within the Church. These encompassed the entire spectrum of the spiritual office, but without granting women complete equality. The recognition of women in ecclesiastical offices prevailed especially in those Churches where the proclamation mandate of women was taken seriously and fulfilled, or where a gift-orientated equality of rights was distinguished. A pneumatological accentuation of the theology of ministry played a decisive role in this process. This is certainly an ecumenical point of contact, including if gender equality is being struggled for to the present day in the Churches of the Reformation in a similar way as in different regions of the Roman Catholic Church. The worldwide Anglican Communion has been put to the test in view of the introduction of the ordination of women.

4.4 Developments in modern times

(80) Insights were gained during the Reformation in the 16th Century on the basis of the Biblical testimonies which found their way into the texts of the Council of Trent and were reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council. These developments are of profound significance when it comes to preparing to answer the question of whether women are also called to sacramental ministry, a question which needs to be discussed with theological expertise.

(81) The common priesthood founded in baptism and confirmation forms the theological foundation for any further consideration of the specificity of the sacramental ministry⁵. The “ministerial priesthood” and the “common priesthood” “differ from one another in essence and not only in degree”⁶. The most recent Council wished to express with this statement that there is a categorial and not merely an incremental difference in the definition of the ministry of those who are baptised, and that of the sacramentally ordained: In receiving the sacrament of priestly

⁵ Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, 10.

⁶ *Ibid.*

ordination and therein representing Jesus Christ, ordained persons have a different ministry, they minister to the ministries that as such are entrusted to all who are baptised. They discover and strengthen the charisms; they coordinate individual areas of the ministry; they exhort to work together with one accord in the one good work. Service to the ministries requires in a special way the ability to communicate, the ability to differentiate, and insight into the foundations of Christian existence. Both women and men have such talents. The proclamation of the Gospel of God's grace is the primary task to be performed in all acts of the Church. Unlike in earlier times when jurisdictional tasks were paramount, the Second Vatican Council has determined it to be the primary task of bishops to ensure that the Gospel is proclaimed in all places.⁷ In view of this challenge, the question arises as to why bishops do not seize all the opportunities presented to them to also entrust women who have acquired professional expertise and are ready to proclaim the Gospel on behalf of the Church, with the ministry of proclaiming the Gospel on an equal footing with men. The increased employment of women in pastoral ministry, made possible by the establishment of the professions of pastoral and parish workers over the last 100 years in the German-speaking world, also makes ambivalences obvious. With the same training and competence, the lack of equal rights to ordained ministry is a constant point of conflict. At the same time, there is a wealth of practical theological experience which must be taken into account.

(82) The Second Vatican Council paid great attention to the question of the order of ministries and offices. Concern for the diaconal acts of the Church was an important matter here. The establishment of the "permanent diaconate" in the period after the Second Vatican Council can be seen as the fulfilment of a promise made by the Council to pay greater attention to this dimension of ecclesial action. This is also being called for in the local churches of the South - such as the Latin American Churches - as was the case recently at the Amazon Synod (2019) and the Ecclesial Assembly (2021). Even before the Council's decision, men prepared themselves for their activities. Women are also doing this today, in the hope of a reception of the theological findings on the subject.

5. Systematic-theological aspects

(83) Controversial views are also put forward in the worldwide expert discussions on the question of the possibility of (also) women participating in the sacramental ministry, and these have to do with fundamental questions of theology which are taken up below: What are the ways of discerning the revealed will of God? What is the difference between a sacramental ministry and other forms of sending out and commissioning people who are called by God? What image of the Church constitutes the guiding principle in all the considerations, and how are the Church's doctrinal decisions, which claim a high degree of binding force, to be considered in the discussion?

⁷ Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, 25; Decree concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church *Christus Dominus*, 12; Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church *Ad gentes*, 30.

5.1 Theology-of-the-revelation contexts

(84) The question of the possibility of women also taking part in the three forms of the one sacramental office was already controversially discussed during the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), but increasingly in the systematic-theological reflection that followed. This also has to do with developments in ecumenism. For example, as described above, women were ordained as pastors in the Protestant Churches from the 1950s onwards. Theological discussions on the ordination of women began in the Anglican Churches in the 1960s. The General Synod of the Church of England decided in 1992 to admit women as priests. There were parallel developments in the Old Catholic Church. An effective motivating factor in these developments was certainly the new perception of the role of women in society. The theological debate always centred on the concern for the contemporary proclamation of the Gospel.

(85) Two magisterial letters were presented in this temporal context on the binding force of which agreement has still not been reached in the theological disputes. On 22 May 1994, Pope John Paul II published *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* on the ordination of priests reserved for men only, referring to the document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Inter Insigniores* on the admission of women to priestly ordination of 15 October 1976.⁸ John Paul II wrote in 1994: “Wherefore, in order that all doubt may be removed regarding a matter of great importance, a matter which pertains to the Church’s divine constitution itself, in virtue of my ministry of confirming the brethren (cf. Lk 22:32) I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church’s faithful.”⁹ John Paul II refers here to the authority of the Church, and to the canonical provision that a “baptised male alone receives sacred ordination validly” (Can. 1024/CIC 1983): The Church “has always acknowledged as a perennial norm her Lord’s way of acting in choosing the twelve men whom he made the foundation of his Church (cf. Rv 21:14)”¹⁰, and these [men] “did not in fact receive only a function which could thereafter be exercised by any member of the Church; rather they were specifically and intimately associated in the mission of the Incarnate Word himself”¹¹. Pope Francis refers in his statements on this question to the binding decision of *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, and emphasises with regard to the question of the ordination of women that “the door is closed”.

(86) The declaration *Inter Insigniores* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is thereby included, thus affirming a figure of discussion in the magisterial argumentation which draws on traditional gender anthropology. In this perspective, the representation of Christ in the sacramental ministry is only possible through men: Christ has entrusted acting “*in persona Christi*”, in other words the administration of the sacrament of the Eucharist, exclusively to the apostles - to men. Pope Francis puts it as follows in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia*: “Jesus Christ appears as the Spouse of the community that celebrates the Eucharist through the figure of a man who presides as a sign of the one Priest”¹² (*Querida Amazonia* 101).

⁸ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on the Question of Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood *Inter Signiores* (October 15, 1976).

⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Pope Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation to the People of God and to All Persons of Good Will *Querida Amazonia* (February 2, 2020), 101.

The representation of Christ in the sacramental ministry is understood in this sense as a counterpart to the Church, which is “feminine”. On the one hand, it is forgotten here that “*in persona Christi*” refers to the role, and not to the human person as is understood in the Modern sense. On the other hand, images are called to mind here that have been considered since the time of the Fathers: The Church is the Bride, according to the image from Ephesians, who is joined to the Bridegroom, Christ, in a loving relationship (cf. Eph 5:21-32).

(87) One problem is that insufficient attention is paid to the metaphoric nature of these texts, and that unilinear gender-specific attributions are carried out - Christ is male, the Church is female -, as well as that mystical traditions which have repeatedly broken with these unilinear attributions are not considered here.

(88) The metaphor of bride and bridegroom that is used when arguing for the exclusion of women from ordained ministry is furthermore problematic for another reason: The original Biblical context is the vivid inclusion of the question of faith in the one God who promised Himself in love to the people of Israel. The imagery is connected to the foundation of the monotheistic confession. God acts towards Israel like a jealous bridegroom to whom the bride is unfaithful, but God nevertheless remains merciful (cf. Hos 2). What might this mean in a theological context regarding the ministry? The Church as a bride - both men and women - is sinful, and does not deserve the love of the Bridegroom God on the basis of Her own works. The aforementioned magisterial documents, and the affirmation of their binding force also by Pope Francis, make it clear that, from a magisterial perspective, the structure of the ministries - including their representations with gender connotations - is grounded in revelation itself, in the will of God. The question of God's will with regard to the Church in its institutional form is to be answered against the background of the revelation-theological foundations of Vatican II and thus in the interaction of the various instances of witnessing to the faith (see orientation text).

(89) The current theological debates concerning women's access to the sacramental ministry take up this Christological-soteriological and eschatological perspective of the Biblical texts, and tie in with the new theology of revelationist foundations of the Second Vatican Council. “In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will”¹³, “out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends”¹⁴, and “man commits his whole self freely to God”¹⁵, borne by the grace of God and the interior help of the Holy Spirit. The question as to the representation of Jesus Christ is embedded in this fundamental theology of revelationist communicative structure, as presented in the Council texts. God's revelation therefore takes place not primarily through “instruction”, through an externally-binding instruction to hold statements to be true, but through the exchange of a divine promise and a human response in a personal event of faith and trust.

(90) In this sense, the ministry is at the service of evangelisation, to make salvation symbolic in secular reality, and yet “real”; to make it possible to experience it in physical and spiritual reality. Jesus Christ is “represented” in this sacramental manner in the ministry, so that spaces for the experience of salvation are opened up to the whole people of God, and the people of

¹³ Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei verbum* (November 18, 1965), 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

God themselves can live up to the aspiration of proclaiming the Gospel and growing in communion with God and with one another. This “representation” grows out of the continuous communication of God with man, and of the communication of the whole people of God with God. This means: out of the dynamics of what faith - especially also in the sense of the shared faith of the community of the Church - means: to “turn back” to God anew each time, and thus also to place structures of ministry in a continuous process of renewal towards God.

(91) The Second Vatican Council understands the process of revelation as a self-revelation of God: “In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will (see Eph. 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (see Eph. 2:18; 2 Peter 1:4).”¹⁶ God’s revelation serves the salvation of humanity. God’s revelation is a gift and a promise of a redeemed life. God promises His presence in faithfulness. Jesus Christ is the lasting image of the invisible God in time and history. God’s essence is neither female nor male. God redeemed Creation through His incarnation: God enters into the lowliness of earthly time and becomes man. Jesus Christ remains “obedient to death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8). The idea of God’s kenosis - “debasement” through God’s self-abasement - was given very high attention in early church Christology and soteriology. God takes on the life of a human being in order to permit the human being to partake of divine life. Those who consider the undisputed biological gender of Jesus as a man to be significant in this theological context run the risk of questioning the redemption of woman by God, since only those whom God has accepted according to human nature are redeemed.

(92) A distinction needs to be made, with regard to the question of how God’s revelation takes place through the life and workings of Jesus Christ, between the actions of the earthly Jesus, which (also) took place under the auspices of His human will and consciousness, and the post-Easter and post-Pentecostal interpretation of the entire life that He led. It is considered common knowledge in theological research today that Jesus knew that He was being sent out to His people Israel during his lifetime. The founding of the post-Easter Church in Her institutional structure is an event in the Holy Spirit, in connection with Jesus’ symbolic acts, which remained significant in the memory. One of these symbolic acts is the call to fellowship with Jesus, which both women and men experienced. Special authority was assigned in the post-Easter period to those persons who had encountered the Risen Christ - an event that established the apostolic ministry as a witness to the living Christ. Mary Magdalene also participates in this form of apostolate (cf. John 20:11-18). Mary, the mother of Jesus, is found in the events of Pentecost (cf. Acts 1:14; 2:1-4); this stands for a Church that is fraternal from the beginning. As a great believer and a prophetic as well as a courageous woman (cf. the Magnificat Lk 1:46-55), Mary becomes the “*typus*” of the Church, an example for all the faithful - regardless of gender.

(93) None of the passages in the Bible can be considered by itself as an indication of God’s will for the institutional form that the Church is to take. Ministries and offices related to the respective time have developed in a complex historical process, and these should always guarantee one thing: to serve the proclamation and the celebration of the Easter faith and to make visible the risen Lord Jesus Christ present in His Church. Different concepts of ministries and

¹⁶ Second Vatican Council, *Dei verbum*, 2.

offices were already handed down within the Biblical canon: Responsibility is assumed in the Pauline congregations by those who contribute a charism for the building up of the congregation; offices are arranged later on in the interest of preserving the apostolic tradition. All forms of ministries and offices are lastingly valid. The question arises anew in every age as to which form of ecclesial ministry and service best serves the proclamation of the Easter Gospel.

5.2 Sacramental-theological contexts

(94) The central mission of the Church is evangelisation, and the ministry is to be understood in terms of the apostolic mission. According to the guiding perspective of *Lumen Gentium* in the chapter on the episcopate, the ministry is to present and represent Jesus Christ in such a way that the people of God can live up to the aspiration of proclaiming the Gospel, and growing the communion with God and with one another¹⁷. This overcomes a sacerdotal-cultic understanding of ministry which led to a new interpretation of the priesthood in late Antiquity and scholasticism, where the latter established its most important task, consisting in the offering of the holy sacrifice of the Mass.

(95) The Second Vatican Council - also drawing on traditions of the early Church - assumes a multiplicity of “*ministeria*”, that is ministries, so that the Church can fulfil Her task of evangelisation. Jesus Christ has instituted “a variety of ministries”¹⁸, and all of them are grounded in the ministry of salvation to which the Church is committed in following Jesus Christ. Institution by Christ legitimises the authority of the “*ministeria*”, and it is on this that the authority and sacramental quality given with the office are founded. The office is always an office here in service “for others”; sacramentality is to be understood in this sense in soteriological-pastoral terms. To exercise a sacramental ministry is a “*ministerium*” which on the one hand is to be seen “in” the Church, and on the other hand, through being called by Jesus Christ, in “relativity” to the People of God. The “*ministerium*” is a service that cannot be primarily determined by the “offering of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ” in the celebration of the Eucharist. It is, rather, about opening up the space from the fresh conversion to Jesus Christ and in the relationship with the congregation and with the praying congregation, so that the mystery of redemption, which God has revealed in Jesus Christ, can take place anew. The representation of Jesus Christ, which accrues to the priest, is a relational act in the celebration of the Eucharist. Acting “*in persona Christi*” is related to the community of the faithful so that they can grow more and more into the mystery of God for which Jesus Christ stands, and which has been absorbed in His whole life, His death and His resurrection. Thus, the representation of Jesus Christ is to be understood in a broader sense, corresponding to the many “*ministeria*” and to their orientation towards the serving Christ (cf. Mt 20:26; 25; John 13:1-15) of which the Council speaks. It is precisely the representation of Christ in the diaconal ministry that will contribute to a renewal of ecclesiology and theology of ministry in the service of a diaconal Church. Jesus Christ is represented by those who take care of the poorest of the poor (cf. Mt 25:31-46), who go to the fringes, who permit themselves to be consumed by the need of their fellow beings. People can

¹⁷ Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, 18.

¹⁸ Ibid.

be trusted to perceive in the Holy Spirit that Jesus Christ meets them when a person - regardless of gender - listens to them, comforts them, lifts them up, heals them, and guides them in life.

(96) The Second Vatican Council laid the foundations for the renewal of the theology of ministry and sacraments. These constitute the foundation for invalidating magisterial argumentation figures with regard to the ordination of women, which have moved to the centre in recent years and which link questions of sacramental and ministerial theology with gender anthropology which is also increasingly contentious. The decisive factor here is in particular the Spirit-worked presence of the risen Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist.

(97) The question accordingly arises as to the theological meaning of the bride-bridegroom metaphor laid down in the Old Testament. In essence, this metaphor serves the concern of monotheism and of the special relationship between YHWH and Israel: that Israel has only one God, just as the bride and bridegroom are exclusive to one another. Accordingly, the Christian-adapted bride-bridegroom metaphor was never unambiguously attributed to the respective genders, but has also been attributed in exactly the opposite direction: For example, in speaking of the "*anima ecclesiastica*" (Origenes, Bernard of Clairvaux); from here, the symbolism has a tradition in mysticism. It however appears questionable - and even dangerous - to assign the typological speech of the bridegroom and the bride in the sense of roles to consecrated ministers and lay people in the sacramental acts: For the accounts of no small number of victims of sexual violence and spiritual abuse in the sphere of the Church (especially girls and women) also document that this gender typology in particular has become a gateway for abuse.

(98) Even beyond this bride-bridegroom metaphor, an interpretation of the representation of Christ that refers to the natural gender of a minister is difficult to bear for people who have experienced sexualised violence at the hands of priests. The question arises as to whether it should really be the fact that the minister is a man, his physical body, that qualifies him to adequately represent Jesus Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist. Any spiritual glorification of the difference between the genders for the purpose of role assignments within the Church must be critically questioned in a highly fundamental sense, especially in the context of the theology of ministry. One should therefore recall here the "presence of strong and generous women who, undoubtedly called and prompted by the Holy Spirit, baptized, catechized, prayed and acted as missionaries"¹⁹. According to the unanimous testimony of the Church's traditional teaching, the conferring of baptism is one of the apostolic tasks and powers in the same way as consecration in the Eucharist. If the possibility of the representation of Christ in the conferring of baptism is not bound to the male gender, then why should this be so when it comes to presiding over the Eucharist?

5.3 Ecclesiological contexts: on the binding nature of the Church's doctrinal decisions

(99) All theological knowledge of people is subject to fallibility. God's Spirit alone preserves the Church in truth. It is therefore important above all to initiate a common search movement in a spiritual process in a communicative exchange. There is controversy in theological research concerning the extent to which the magisterial statements are binding (as well as about these

¹⁹ Pope Francis, *Querida Amazonia*, 99.

themselves) in terms of the question of the ordination of women to sacramental ministries and offices in the Church. The arguments need to be re-examined, and evaluated according to criteria that are comprehensible from an argumentative point of view. The fundamental issue of the development of dogma must be taken into account in this process. In addition, scholarly theology raises the question of what form of language act applies to specific magisterial texts. An intensive effort needs to be undertaken in order to distinguish the criteria to be applied when determining the extent to which the Church's doctrinal statements are binding.

(100) The Roman Catholic doctrinal tradition comprises four forms of statement to which the attribute of infallibility (freedom from error) is to be assigned: an explicit doctrinal opinion of the Bishop of Rome, with an explicit reference to his authority (“*ex cathedra*” decision), the doctrinal decisions of an ecumenical council of all bishops, the concurring doctrinal opinion of the Body of Bishops worldwide²⁰, and the doctrinal opinion of the entire body of the faithful²¹. The question arises with regard to the qualification of the present doctrinal texts in terms of their binding nature as to whether the announcement of *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (1994), which has gone unchallenged by the bishops, fulfils the criteria of the third form. At the same time, the question arises as to what is signified if individual bishops today ultimately regard the question as open-ended, and call for more in-depth argumentation in accordance with theological research. John Paul II also refers in his remarks to the considerations that it is “*definitive tenendam*” (“to be preserved as definitive”), which, although said to not be clearly evident from the revelation in Scripture, is said to be necessary for the preservation of the Biblical revelation. This view is controversial in theological literature. Is it really the case that the core of the Christian message, namely the proclamation of the Easter faith, can only be preserved if women are excluded from this office? Or is it not rather the case that women perform precisely this ministry in the Easter stories, and testify to Jesus Christ as a living presence?

(101) A worldwide joint theological effort is needed in order to eliminate, as far as possible, the discrepancy that seems obvious to many theologians, men and women alike, between the assertion of the conviction that the formulated doctrines are final and binding, and the weakness of theological argumentation perceived by many theologians and already addressed in specialist contributions for decades. No church teaching will be able to prove sustainable and relevant to action in the long run, that is questioned or rejected altogether by an ever-increasing number of believers endowed with the sense of faith, and which also cannot be convincingly justified theologically-scientifically and in terms of biblical theology.

5.4 Hermeneutical insights in worldwide Christian ecumenism

(102) The ecumenical context of the issue must also be considered when searching for credibility. In national, European and worldwide dialogues, the Roman Catholic Church always affirms Her willingness to continue searching for the visible unity of the Church. This cannot be justified if there is not also a professional exchange in theological discussions about the arguments that led to a different position being adopted concerning the question of women (also) partaking of the apostolate, in official responsibility through ordination.

²⁰ Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, 25.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

(103) According to *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council, willingness to repent is constitutive for ecumenical cooperation, and connected with this the insight into the Churches' continuous need for reform and their inner dependence on the complementary gifts and values of the other Churches²². The requirements of the Decree on Ecumenism are accordingly realised in the spiritually-based reciprocity of the different Christian traditions. It is therefore important to include the ecumenical perspective in all questions related to the Church's teaching and practice, and to be ready for a process of learning and reform.

(104) What does the ecumenical movement mean for the participation of women in all ecclesial offices in the Roman Catholic Church, when numerous ecumenical partners who are to be taken seriously in terms of their history, values and tradition have decided in recent decades to ordain women? Ecumenical dialogue, which is seen as essential to the nature of the Church cannot disregard this fact and these developments.

(105) Demands for a just, fraternal community of women and men in the Churches have been formulated and repeatedly addressed, especially in the ecumenical context. Women are to be empowered to challenge oppressive structures in society and in the Churches. The recognition of the essential contribution made by women in Churches with the aim of equal co-responsibility and co-creation should be emphasised here.

(106) The introduction of women's ordination in many Churches has triggered ecumenical processes. This was also carried out with the inclusion of new insights from feminist theology and exegesis.

5.5 Gender equality in the universal Church context

(107) What is seen in the Roman Catholic Church as the God-given order of the genders was and is - more so than in society as a whole - to a large extent culturally and historically determined by the respective prevailing surrounding culture, and especially its political power dynamics.

(108) This can also be determined from the perspective of the "universal Church", which is to be seen as a "local church" in the community of many "local churches". As such, She is historically and currently characterised by a great lack of simultaneity in the different global contexts. Accelerating globalisation means that intercultural dynamics, the postcolonial debate, the question of justice, and the poverty gap, pose great challenges to the local churches. Accordingly, a wide variety of answers can be found to the question of gender equality in church contexts. It is to be noted, for example, that - on the one hand - women worldwide have made and continue to make an essential contribution to the transmission of the Gospel, but on the other hand have also been made invisible in history and in the present, and that they have experienced violence and continue to do so. Especially in view of this observation the local churches in Germany therefore bear the responsibility for keeping the question of women in church offices part of the discussion, also from the point of view of gender equality.

²² Second Vatican Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio* (November 21, 1964), 7.

(109) The Church's teaching traditionally describes the relationship between the genders from the position of complementarity, and uses this to also justify excluding women from the sacramental ministry. Church teaching even today defines the "essence of woman" with self-referential reference to tradition. Biblical texts are favoured that justify the "natural" destiny and subordination of women, without seeing the imbalance this creates, which leads to injustice and unfairness. This also excludes all that is necessary for Christians to be able to respond freely to their vocation: Freedom from relationships and social structures, freedom from human power and pressure, freedom of conscience, self-determination, the chance to (critically) discern one's own vocation. The Second Vatican Council, by contrast, states that "the basic equality of all must receive increasingly greater recognition", and that "every type of discrimination" is to be eradicated²³. There is thus a reason and a necessity to bring difference and equality to bear in the discourse on gender relations, including in the theological discourse, and to value and recognise all the charisms and vocations given by God, regardless of an individual's gender.

5.6 The experience of the vocation of women to the ministry

(110) No small number of women feel called by God to participate in sacramental ministries and offices. Much noted women in the history of the Church have reflected on the possible vocation also of women to the priestly ministry - among them Theresa of Avila, Thérèse of Lisieux and Edith Stein. For generations, many women have known that they were called by God to be deaconesses or priestesses. This inner knowledge is countered by the outer experience that these women feel that their vocation is not taken sufficiently seriously by the Church and Her ministers, and that they are sometimes even disregarded. They perceive the restriction of the life and vocations available to them, as ordered by the Church's teaching, as an injustice, as discriminatory, and as constituting marginalisation.

(111) No one is to judge the experience of an existential encounter with God. Vocation is a dialogical occurrence that is characterised by listening and being listened to - both in the relationship between God and humankind, and also within the Church, which perceives those who experience the calling. Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation entitled *Christifideles Laici* (1988) emphasises the importance of the different charisms as gifts of the Holy Spirit. Charisms should be received with gratitude in the Church, but it was also necessary to distinguish between them: "Judgment as to their (charisms) genuineness and proper use belongs to those who preside over the Church, and to whose special competence it belongs, not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to what is good."²⁴ Vocations for church ministries are not a private matter, but must always be reviewed by the Church in an appropriate manner. The methods and criteria for reviewing vocations must be transparent and constantly adapted to new circumstances, knowledge and experience. Fundamental questions arise from the perspective of gender equality which apply in equal measure to the vocation of all people: According to which criteria is a vocational experience of men and women to be examined? Is it taken

²³ Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes* (December 7, 1965), 29.

²⁴ Pope John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World *Christifideles Laici* (December 30, 1988), 24.

seriously that women perceive themselves as addressed and called by God? Is their inclination, their inner readiness for a form of discipleship that suits them listened to and valued?

(112) In future, it should no longer be gender that decides on the allocation of ministries, but the vocation, abilities and skills that serve the proclamation of the Gospel in our time. Only in this way will the full potential of vocations and charisms for the people of God, that is the Church, be exhausted.

5.7 Representation of Christ and renewal of the theology of ministry on the paths of the poor Jesus

(113) The controversial conversation about the question of women in ministries and offices in the Church is not a structural question pure and simple; it is not a matter of “functionalising” the ministry, according to the concern expressed by Pope Francis²⁵. The question of women in sacramental ministry is about more: a renewed understanding of what the Church is, and a more profound approach to sacramentality, including from an ecumenical perspective. It is about a realisation of a process of conversion: to re-align oneself with what happened on the cross and in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The institutional configuration of the Church must be orientated first and foremost to this process of conversion. A fundamental renewal of the theology of ministry - in the service of the diaconal Church - will be decisive for the future. It will be a matter of understanding the mystery of faith from the profound nature of the mystery of renewal, which took place in Jesus Christ in His many encounters on the roads of Galilee and on the way to Jerusalem, and which means salvation, becoming whole and living life to the full for all. The representation of Christ “takes place” through the experience of salvation and in depth through experiencing the Eucharist, to which however all ways of following Jesus Christ are related, and where the poor Jesus²⁶ is sacramentally made present in analogy to the way of the kenosis of the divine Word: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). The representation of Christ grows in conformity to the communicative understanding of revelation as a soteriologically-orientated sacramental occurrence. The traditional substance-ontological representation of Jesus Christ, and a sacerdotal-cultic understanding of ministry, are broken open, and the fact of Jesus Christ being a man does not play a role in this soteriological perspective. This enables the Church to become a fraternal partnership-based Church that calls on men and women alike to follow Jesus Christ. The reflections with regard to women in the (sacramental) ministry are thus fundamentally placed at the service of a reform of the Church ministry - precisely in the sense of a critique of “clericalism”, which Pope Francis repeatedly emphasises as a threat to the credibility of the Church.

²⁵ Pope Francis, *Querida Amazonia*, 100-101.

²⁶ Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, 8.

6. Looking back at the argumentation and perspectives

6.1 Looking back at the argumentation

(114) In the universal Church context of the Roman Catholic Church, the effort of theological argumentation is a necessary prerequisite for a dialogue with the current authorities which can bring about a change in the framework for action by the Church. There is also a need to engage in dialogues about reasoned positioning in the ecumenical dialogue with Churches which, often after a long struggle, have now reached different understandings of our issues than that of the Roman Catholic Church. At the same time, there are other sources of knowledge than theological scholarship. Experiences are an impetus for change and renewal. The “signs of the times” are a place of knowledge. Watchful awareness of basic convictions in the social public sphere is more than advisable. These hermeneutical considerations which are set out in the orientation text are taken into account in the argumentation presented here. At the same time, it is important to look at concrete aspects of the topic.

(115) The general lines of the arguments presented here can be summarised as follows:

(116) Gender equality in the Church is an essential touchstone of the credible, effective proclamation of the Gospel to all people. It is not only the Second Vatican Council, and subsequently the Würzburg Synod, which emphasise in the Biblical tradition that the Church as a whole is called to continue the mission of Jesus Christ. Everyone is to bring this about in their own way, and for their own part²⁷. It is therefore stated that “everyone is called to advocate the message of Jesus Christ in word and deed”²⁸. All who are baptised are united by a common task and responsibility “to «give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope» (1 Peter 3:15) to ourselves and to the people with whom we live”²⁹.

(117) Outstanding women with prophetic courage have stood up for human rights in every period of history. Today too, countless women who are mothers, religious, theologians, spiritual guides, and in other ways of life around the world, are living the Gospel in word and deed. A distinction between the diaconate and the other forms of sacramental ministry is historically demonstrable. Taking a look at the universal Church shows that, in the vast majority of cases, it is women who take up a pastoral commitment and are willing to take on leadership responsibilities.

(118) There is no uninterrupted line of tradition for excluding women from the ministry of proclamation of the Gospel. Besides supposedly unambiguous statements in the mainstream of theological tradition arguing against women, there have always also been contrary developments. They brought new perspectives and answers to the demands of the respective time and culture. Women were involved in this to a significant degree.

(119) The new approach to the ministries in the Biblical texts, and the approach to the fundamental equality of all faithful, means placing the question of granting women access to the sacramental ministry in the context of the fundamental renewal of the theology of ministry. The question of the representation of Christ is to be distinguished from that of the natural likeness to a man. Jesus Christ is present when people act in His Spirit.

²⁷ Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, 31.

²⁸ Gemeinsame Synode der Bistümer in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, *Die Beteiligung der Laien an der Verkündigung* (the participation of the laity in proclamation), 2.1.1.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, *Unsere Hoffnung* (our hope), Introduction.

(120) The contours of a gender-equitable Church can be seen in places where everyone sees themselves as a community of equals following Jesus: In this community there is no discrimination, and no power imbalance is caused by questions of status. Everyone is seeking the truth as equals. Women visionaries and prophets are also heard. The words of Jesus “But it shall not be so among you” (Mark 10:43) are an incentive to invest time, strength and endurance in this hope.

6.2 The outlook

(121) There will always be “as many concrete answers” to the question of the relevance of the Christian faith “as there are figures of living Christianity among us”³⁰. It is always about communicating the “provocative power of our hope [...] also for all those who have difficulty with this Church, for the distressed and disappointed, for the wounded and embittered”³¹.

(122) The renewal of the Church “is not exhausted in individual synodal reform measures”³². The fundamental question arises as to whether the integration of women into the existing church offices and ministries is sufficient in itself to meet the demands of the Christian Gospel. Is our “church life not itself far too obscured and constrained by fear and faint-heartedness, too caught up in examining itself, all too driven by concern for self-preservation and self-reproduction [...]?”³³.

(123) The contribution made by women thinkers outside the mainstream is an essential part of the Christian tradition, and must be made visible in order to be able to take account of the increasing complexity of the world in which we live. The discourse changes when women’s traditions and their perception of reality as a God-human-world relationship are a natural part of the manner in which the Roman Catholic Church too is perceived. Controversies must be fought out. There is a need to put an end to practices that hurt people.

(123) A Gospel-orientated, people-orientated Church will also have the courage to try new things, trusting in the presence of God’s Spirit. The transformation processes in which the Church’s pastoral care, and the public significance of the Church worldwide, currently cause us to keep a look-out for creative ideas as to how the Gospel can reach and transform all people: God promises people that He will be eternally merciful, despite all their guilt, and regardless of any achievements of their own.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., Part II, 4.

³³ Ibid., Part I.8.



Implementation text

Involvement of the faithful in the appointment of the diocesan bishop

Decision of the Synodal Path adopted by the Synodal Assembly on February 3, 2022

Introduction

(1) It is the task of the diocesan bishop to carry out his ministry for the people of God in the relationship between local church diversity and universal church unity. His core tasks include involving the local church in the overall Church. The local church and the overall Church must therefore collaborate in appointing bishops. According to the directions of the Second Vatican Council, the people of God as a whole should appear as the acting subject. It is therefore urgent and necessary to involve the people of God of the diocesan local church in the appointment of bishops more closely than before.

(2) The Codex Iuris Canonici (CIC) speaks in can. 377 § 1 of two equal possibilities of appointing bishops: “The Supreme Pontiff freely appoints bishops or confirms those legitimately elected.” However, the second option is not discussed below, but only the Papal right of appointment, for which the bishops and Bishops’ Conferences draw up lists of candidates. These are however not binding on the Pope. In the Federal Republic of Germany, the appointment of bishops is one of the so-called “mixed matters” of Church and state, so that not only the internal church law of the CIC must be observed here, but also the corresponding four regulations in the concordats in the area of the German Bishops’ Conference.

(3) The Concordats have unrestricted legal priority over ecclesiastical law (can. 3 CIC). According to the Concordats in the area of the German Bishops’ Conference, the cathedral chapter and the bishops draw up lists of candidates for the Apostolic See, from which the Pope freely selects a bishop according to the Bavarian Concordat, and according to the Prussian and Baden Concordats draws up a list of three, from which in turn the respective cathedral chapter elects a bishop in a free and secret ballot. It should be noted here that, at the time of the conclusion of the Concordats, only the cathedral chapter existed as an advisory body to the bishop. Other advisory bodies have now been established, and these will be involved in appointing bishops in future, in the spirit of the Concordats.

Resolution

(4) A model regulation for the voluntary self-commitment of the respective cathedral chapters in the appointment of bishops shall be drawn up and issued. Therein, the cathedral chapters

are recommended to commit themselves to observe the following procedure in the case of a pending appointment of a bishop: The Synodal Council of the diocese¹ elects a body that has as many members as the cathedral chapter, and supports the chapter in exercising its rights in the process of appointing a bishop. The minimum criteria are:

- The members of the body who are to be added are selected in a way that is as gender- and generation-appropriate as possible.
- The same rules of confidentiality apply to the members of the co-determining body as to the members of the cathedral chapter. This applies in particular to pontifical secrecy.
- Together with the chapter, this body determines the list of suitable candidates, which the cathedral chapter sends to the Apostolic See.
- In those dioceses where the Prussian or Baden Concordats apply, the cathedral chapter furthermore undertakes to consult the participation body elected by the Synodal Council of the diocese before making its selection from the list of three from the Apostolic See. The body is entitled to make a voting recommendation to the cathedral chapter by a majority decision.

The model regulation also contains provisions for cases of conflict.

Reasons

(5) According to Church law, the respective diocesan people of God so far only have had an indirect, very limited participation, insofar as the Nuncio can also “seek individually and in secret the opinion of others from both the secular and non-secular clergy and from laity outstanding in wisdom” (can. 377 § 3 CIC). According to Concordat law, no rights of participation are provided for the faithful. Ecclesiologically, however, it would make sense to involve the entire people of God in the diocese - thus also priests outside the cathedral chapter, deacons, and above all the non-ordained faithful among the people of God - in the bishop’s appointment. Under the Church’s current law and Concordats, the following forms of participation are open to the diocesan people of God: a right of co-decision in the preparation of the list of candidates, and a right to be heard prior to the selection being made from the list of candidates. These two rights can be realised through a voluntary undertaking on the part of the respective cathedral chapter.

¹ Cf. on this the implementation text “Joint consultation and decision-making”.



Implementation text

A re-evaluation of homosexuality in the Magisterium

Decision of the Synodal Path adopted by the Synodal Assembly on September 9, 2022

Introduction

(1) The foundational text “Living in successful relationships - basic lines of a renewed sexual ethics” takes up findings from theology and the human sciences of sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church in Germany and results of the study “Sexual Abuse of minors by Catholics priests deacons and male religious in Area of the German Bishops' Conference” (in short: MHG study), which suggest a change in the positions held in the Magisterium with regard to homosexual people, as set out, among other places, in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC).

In order to evolve the Church’s teaching through a re-evaluation of homosexuality, the Synodal Assembly turns to the Pope and calls on him to reach an understanding on a universal church level on this and to implement the corresponding changes.

Motion

(2) The Synodal Assembly recommends that the Pope conduct a clarification and re-evaluation of homosexuality in the Magisterium. The following aspects must be taken into account in this process:

(3) Every human being is created by God with his or her sexuality, and has inalienable dignity by virtue of thus being created. The sexual orientation of every human person is inseparable from him or her. It is not selected, and it is not changeable.

(4) Having been made in God’s image, all people deserve esteem and respect, regardless of their sexual orientation. All faithful are obliged to actively address any discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

(5) Since a homosexual orientation is part of being a human as created by God, this orientation is not to be judged differently in ethical terms than a heterosexual orientation.

(6) Every person is called to integrate his or her sexuality into his or her way of life. Responsible genital sexuality in relationships with another person is guided by respect for dignity and self-determination, love and fidelity, responsibility for one another, and the specific dimensions of fertility. It takes place in relationships that are intended to be exclusive and permanent. Same-sex sexuality - also practiced in sexual acts - is thus not a sin that separates a person from God,

and it is not to be judged as bad in itself. Rather, it is to be measured by the realisation of the aforementioned values.

(7) It therefore follows that:

1. Paragraphs 2357-2359 as well as 2396 (homosexuality and chastity), amongst others, of the Catechism of the Catholic Church should be revised as part of this re-evaluation of homosexuality. Similarly, the relevant passages in the Compendium of the Catechism (2005; No. 492) should be amended. "Homosexual acts" must be deleted from the Compendium's list of "principal sins against chastity".
2. It follows from this re-evaluation that the Church should confess that She causes people suffering and violates their dignity in many places through Her teaching and practice in relation to homosexuality. Furthermore, She should clearly distance Herself from the persecution and criminalisation of homosexual people as well as from any efforts to introduce or legitimise such persecution and criminalisation by law.
3. Homosexuality is not a disease. Therefore, so-called "conversion therapies" are to be rejected and a ban is to be advocated on a social level. They are not medically indicated. Pastoral guidance must respect self-determination and support the integration of sexuality into the individual. No one may be made to believe that their homosexual orientation and its realisation in life are sinful per se.
4. It follows from this re-evaluation of homosexuality that no person should be prevented from taking up church offices or from receiving the Sacraments -especially the Sacrament of Ordination - and that no person who is in the service of the Church should suffer disadvantages in their career because of having a homosexual orientation.

Reasoning

(8) The re-evaluation of lived homosexuality proposed here embarks on a path that seeks to build bridges between the Church's existing teaching and tradition towards a further development. We see connecting points in the values made strong by the Gospel and by tradition, which are also realised in a same-sex partnership: love, fidelity, mutual responsibility, exclusivity and permanence, as well as - in the broader sense - fertility (foundational text B.5). Pope Francis recently put forward a broader view of fertility in *Amoris Laetitia*, according to which fertility manifests itself not only in biological and generative terms, but for instance also as a contribution to society (AL 178 and 181). In addition, insights from studying the Bible and from the human sciences help us to broaden and sharpen our view of homosexuality. For example, the recent document entitled *Che cosa è l'uomo? (What is Man?)*, published by the Pontifical Biblical Commission, reaches new, nuanced assessments of same-sex sexual acts as they occur in the Bible ("*Che cosa è l'uomo? Un itinerario di antropologia biblica*", 2019, Nos. 185-195). The state-of-the-art in the human sciences is that homosexuality and bisexuality are not diseases or disorders, and nor are they something that can be chosen. Rather, they are natural minority variants of people's preferences in terms of sexual structures. In common with heterosexuality, these sexual orientations manifest themselves during puberty, and are stable, i.e. not changeable. These findings make a re-evaluation of homosexuality necessary. It is a variant of the

norm, and not an “incomplete variant” (foundational text A 2.3). It is part of God’s good Creation as a normal case. The same must therefore apply in ethical terms to homosexual people as to heterosexual people.

(9) Homosexual people frequently experience debasement and marginalisation in our Church. Although the current version of the Catechism of the Catholic Church calls for these people to be treated with respect and not to be unfairly demeaned, there are many places in which these commands are not followed, as the sexuality of people of the same sex who love one another, also realised in sexual acts, is still considered a grave sin. This can have serious consequences for homosexual faithful, up to the point of causing danger to life and limb, if Catholic dignitaries, for example, do not adopt an unambiguous position of opposition to the persecution of homosexual people by the State, but sometimes even support it. If loving homosexual relationships are not acknowledged, there is a danger that same-sex desire cannot be integrated into one’s own personality and as in many other cases of non-integrated sexuality this may lead to inappropriate behaviour. Problems in establishing identity are also often the result. Experiencing rejection in the social and pastoral spheres, as well as in Catholic communities, can have negative effects on the mental health of young people in particular.

(10) The so-called “conversion therapies”, and similar “offers” that are aggressively promoted by some Catholic groups, are unscientific, and have been proven to have the potential to cause considerable psychological damage, which is why they are expressly banned in some countries. Last but not least, many Catholics working for the Church (laity as well as ordained persons) see their professional livelihoods placed at risk if their sexual orientation and/or same-sex partnership becomes known to their employer (foundational text B.5.5).

(11) The amendments to the Catechism put forward here are based on the realisation that the Church’s actions in matters of homosexuality have not sufficiently taken into account the dignity of homosexual people as creatures of God. Homosexual people are children of God, and by virtue of their being made in God’s image have a right to be unconditionally accepted in and by our Church, and to play an active role in the life of faith and in the life of the Church.

(12) The hostile attitude adopted by our Church has frequently made it difficult, if not impossible, for homosexual people to be disciples of Jesus in the past.

(13) The taboos and apprehension regarding sexuality in general, and homosexuality in particular, that have arisen from the Church’s sexual teaching up to now are systemic causes of the abuse crimes that have been committed in the Church, since they have impeded the development of mature sexuality in many cases, or prevented it altogether. Among other things, this development is hindered by the fact that homosexuality has been considered an obstacle to ordination so far. We also see an urgent need for action against this background so that people who are unsettled by the Church’s current teaching can integrate their sexuality positively and responsibly into their personality in future.



Implementation text

Fundamental Order of Ecclesial Ministry

Decision of the Synodal Path adopted by the Synodal Assembly on September 9, 2022

Introduction

(1) Through their work, all those active in an institution of the Catholic Church, irrespective of their employment status, contribute together to enabling the institution to fulfil its part in the mission of the Church (community of service).

(2) The credibility of the Church depends not only on individuals, but also to a considerable extent on the practice of the institutions, organisations and administrations, as well as of the parishes and ecclesial communities: What service do they render to people, and how do they deal with people? By contrast, the Fundamental Order of Ecclesial Ministry in the Framework of Ecclesial Employment Relationships narrowly focuses the question of the credibility of the Church on employees' loyalty obligations; issues of private life are overemphasised in doing so, and there is a fixation on sexuality. Identification with the goals of the Church and of the respective concrete institution, as well as professional skills, are mentioned in the Fundamental Order (Art. 3.3), but they take a back seat to the orientation towards the faith and moral teaching which is expressed in the Fundamental Principles (Art. 1).

(3) Loyalty to the Catholic Church is, above all, measured in terms of personal lifestyle (intimacy and family sphere), especially sexual orientation or gender identity. For this reason, many employees, some highly committed and qualified and showing a great deal of identification, have experienced and continue to experience unjust and discriminatory treatment on the part of the Church against this background under the current Fundamental Order. Similar problems arise when it comes to granting the *Missio canonica* and the *Nihil obstat*. Likewise, the loyalty of teachers of religious education and scholars to the Catholic Church is measured in terms of their personal way of life. There is no question that ecclesial employers are entitled to formulate and review loyalty obligations for their employees with regard to their conduct at work and within a very narrow corridor also in the off-duty area. That having been said, with the Fundamental Order that is in place, the Church as an employer tends to stand in the way of witnessing to God's love for all people. Some initiatives are already in place to appropriately update the Church's employment law requirements for Her employees. In particular, a working group of the German Bishops' Conference and the Association of German Dioceses has been working on a revision for quite some time.

Motion

(4) The Synodal Assembly calls on the German Bishops' Conference to carry out the announced amendment to the Fundamental Order of Ecclesial Ministry in the Framework of Ecclesial Employment Relationships as soon as possible, and in doing so to implement the following key points:

(5) Article 4 of the Fundamental Order should in future no longer permit to regard decisions in favour of a form of partnership opened up by state law as being in breach of loyalty obligations, and accordingly prevent a person from being recruited into the service of the Church or bring about the termination of an existing employment relationship. A person's family status must not be relevant to employment or continued employment in the service of the Church.

(6) The preservation and development of the Church's profile is primarily the task of the institution (parish, ecclesial community, institution, organisation or administration) itself, and where appropriate of its organisation, and relates above all to its mission. The employees must identify with this mission and convincingly align their professional actions with it. They are rightly expected to contribute their skills in a committed way. The following however applies to employees' choice of way of life:

(7) Art. 5.2.2.c and d of the Fundamental Order are to be deleted without any replacement.

(8) A non-discrimination clause should be inserted into the Fundamental Order prohibiting ecclesial employers from failing to recruit a person on the basis of his or her gender identity or choice of a legal form of partnership, or from dismissing an ecclesial employee on such grounds.

(9) In addition, the regulations concerning the *Missio canonica* should be amended in the same way. Furthermore, the German Bishops' Conference is to work to ensure that the requirements in terms of the way of life are interpreted accordingly in the procedure for granting the *Nihil obstat*. As a universal Church matter, they are to be altered along universal Church lines.

Reasoning

On the Fundamental Order:

(10) The Fundamental Order of Ecclesial Ministry has so far focused primarily on the private conduct of employees as well as on their conduct at work with regard to the preservation and realisation of the specific ecclesial profile. The weaknesses and inadequacies of this person-orientated approach have been long known, and have been discussed within the Church at various levels for a considerable time. A change towards an institution-orientated approach is emerging which particularly emphasises the responsibility of leaders, supervisory bodies and organisations for the profile of the institution in question. The aforementioned motion fits into this process of reform and transformation.

(11) The existing version of the Fundamental Order from 2015 states as a loyalty obligation for individuals in the pastoral and catechetical ministry, as well as for employees who are working on the basis of an episcopal commission, the recognition of the "principles of Catholic doctrinal and moral teaching" (Art. 4.1).

(12) In the subsequent list of possible breaches of loyalty obligations (Art. 5), the Fundamental Order urges ecclesial employers to dismiss Catholic employees for decisions made within their private lives, such as a civil marriage that is not recognised under Canon Law, or a civil marriage with a same-sex partner. At the same time, the Regulation prevents or impedes the recruitment of people on the basis of such decisions, and discourages many motivated, qualified, talented people from applying for positions in the Church. The two cases described above are listed as grounds for dismissal (Art. 5.2.2.c and d). The background to this is the ethical evaluation of such a decision in the traditional Catholic moral order as a “grave sin” (CCC, 2357).

(13) The Fundamental Order does provide for the possibility to refrain from dismissal “in exceptional cases” for “serious reasons” (Art. 5.3). It nevertheless states that in the case of publicly entering into a partnership after a divorce, or one with a same-sex partner, there is an “irrefutable presumption” that there has been a serious breach of loyalty which accordingly is “objectively capable of causing considerable annoyance in the service community” and which is “impairing the credibility of the Church” (Art. 5.2.c). The Fundamental Order therefore gives employers a certain amount of discretion. On the one hand, this means that individual employees who enter into a partnership that contradicts traditional Catholic sexual teaching will not be dismissed. On the other hand, it gives ecclesial employers a highly effective instrument of power over employees.

(14) The argument of “considerable annoyance”, if it ever applied, has been reversed. The annoyance for the community of service and for the professional sphere arises not from the conclusion of a civil marriage after another marriage has broken up, or from concluding a civil marriage with a same-sex partner, but from dismissal.

On the reality in Church and society:

(15) More and more people outside and inside the Church consider the manner in which the Catholic Church deals with remarried divorcees and with homosexuals to be discriminatory. This is made particularly visible in the specific manner in which the Church as an employer deals with employees who have opted for institutionalised forms of partnership that contradict the Church’s traditional sexual teaching. In the face of numerous painful and humiliating experiences of current or former employees, the Church must admit to Herself with regard to Her employment law that changes are necessary so that She no longer is giving a witness to unmercifulness and intolerance and that She is no longer obscuring Her “mission” in this respect (Art. 1).

(16) Judgments handed down by national and European courts on church employment law in Germany make it apparent that society is less and less willing to grant the Church the right to violate socially-established standards of non-discrimination as well as protection of privacy and of family life in the context of employment relationships by invoking Her right of self-determination. The Church can pre-empt future court judgments by amending the Fundamental Order of Ecclesial Ministry.

(17) Furthermore, an amendment of the Fundamental Order would do justice to the reality that decisions are already being made today in many church institutions that are in breach of the existing norms due to a lack of alternatives or out of an ethical conviction. Moreover, the current

Fundamental Order causes psychologically stressful situations for the employees concerned. Firstly, because they feel that their way of life is not officially accepted, and secondly because they might be put under permanent pressure.

(18) The moral teaching, which is listed as an authoritative criterion, is furthermore the subject of massive criticism within the Church with regard to Her statements on lifestyles. The majority of this Synodal Assembly also evaluates remarriage, intersexuality and transsexuality, homosexuality, and thus same-sex partnerships - in their respective differences - differently than did previous official texts of the Church (foundational text B.2.2-5, B.5.1-5, B.8.5-7).

(19) According to all these insights, the adaptation of the Fundamental Order, as well as of the practices followed in granting the *Missio canonica* and the *Nihil obstat*, is a necessary consequence that will brook no further delay.



Implementation text

Sustainable strengthening of Synodality: A Synodal Council for the Catholic Church in Germany

Decision of the Synodal Path adopted by the Synodal Assembly on September 10, 2022

Introduction

(1) “With the “foundational text” on “Power and Separation of Powers” qualifying “Joint Participation and Involvement in the Mission”, we note the following:

(2) Synodality is a fundamental activity of the Church. Synodality is also a spiritual process that helps us to hear God’s Word today and to promote evangelisation through discernment of spirits, prayer and the exchange of arguments. Synodality is a means enabling the members of God’s people to discover, contribute and interconnect their specific spiritual gifts. Synodality is furthermore a form of transparent, solution-oriented working. To deliberate and decide together on the Synodal Path has strengthened the community of faith in recent years. These good experiences gained on the Synodal Path form a foundation on which to further strengthen the synodality of the Catholic Church in Germany. Co-operation between bishops and faithful at supra-diocesan level is to become a permanent practice.

Motion

(3) The Synodal Assembly herewith resolves to establish a Synodal Council by March 2026 at the latest. The Synodal Council sees itself as a further development of the Joint Conference and is intended to replace it. The Council shall be established on the basis of can. 127 and can. 129 CIC. A Synodal Committee shall be appointed by the Synodal Assembly in order to prepare the Synodal Council. The decision of the Synodal Assembly to establish the Synodal Council shall be implemented by the Presidium of the Synodal Assembly in accordance with the decisions of the Synodal Committee by March 2026 at the latest. The Synodal Committee shall consist of the 27 diocesan bishops, 27 members elected by the Central Committee of German Catholics (ZdK) and 20 members elected by the Synodal Assembly. The Committee is composed in a generationally and gender equitable manner. This Committee shall be jointly supported by the German Bishops’ Conference and the Central Committee of German Catholics. It shall be chaired by the President of the German Bishops’ Conference and the President of the Central Committee of German Catholics. The Synodal Committee shall constitute itself after the Synodal Assembly in March 2023 and adopt statutes. It shall conclude its activities by March 2026 at the latest and report to the Synodal Assembly.

(4) The Synodal Committee shall have the following tasks:

- It shall prepare the establishment of a Synodal Council of the Catholic Church in Germany by 2026 at the latest which shall meet the requirements set out below. The development of the Synodal Council includes determining the relationship to other bodies of the German Bishops' Conference as well as to the Central Committee of German Catholics.
- It shall prepare and evolve the evaluation of the resolutions of the Synodal Assembly.
- It shall continue to develop the initiatives that have been discussed on the Synodal Path in the Synodal Forums and in the Synodal Assembly. It decides promptly on the texts that were discussed and decided in the Synodal Forums and could no longer be submitted to the Synodal Assembly.
- It seeks an understanding of the notion of synodality as a basic activity of the Church, which is deeply rooted in the Church and was re-emphasised by the Second Vatican Council and the worldwide synodal process in the pontificate of Pope Francis. As basic prerequisites for synodality, the Synodal Committee develops synodal structures, a synodal culture of togetherness as well as an inner attitude of being able to accept criticism and the common search for a sustainable consensus.
- It shall arrange for the necessary financial and personnel resources.

(5) Key features of the Synodal Council:

As an advisory and decision-making body, the Synodal Council shall advise on major developments in the Church and in society and based on this shall take fundamental decisions of supra-diocesan significance on pastoral planning, future perspectives of the Church and financial and budgetary matters of the Church that are not decided at diocesan level.

- The Synodal Council shall be composed in accordance with the proportions of the Synodal Assembly in transparent procedures and elections in a gender- and generation-appropriate manner, ensuring a size that is appropriate for work.
- The resolutions of the Synodal Council shall have the same legal effect as the resolutions of the Synodal Assembly (Art. 11 para. 5 of the Statutes of the Synodal Path).
- The Synodal Council shall meet in public session. The chair of the Synodal Council shall be held jointly by the President of the German Bishops' Conference and the President of the Central Committee of German Catholics.
- The Synodal Council shall elect two spiritual companions. It may invite observers to attend its meetings.
- The Synodal Council shall adopt statutes and rules of procedure.



Implementation text

The celibacy of priests - strengthening and opening

Decision of the Synodal Path adopted by the Synodal Assembly on March 9, 2023

a) Statements on celibacy among diocesan priests

Introduction

(1) The matter of priestly celibacy concerns many among the faithful. The text therefore makes transparent the "discernment of spirits", in the sense of a spiritual method of self-examination.

Our reflections are headed by a seven-fold "affirmation":

(2) Affirmation of the sacramentality of the Church.

(3) Affirmation of a sacramental priesthood, which is just as constitutive for our Catholic Church as is the common priesthood of all who are baptised, in the service of which the sacramental priesthood stands.

(4) Affirmation of the fact that people may experience priests who can promise them salvation, which God wants to give, and make it tangible in the ups and downs of human existence.

(5) Affirmation of the priestly ministry allowing the abiding presence and working of Jesus Christ to be experienced in many ways throughout the world.

(6) Affirmation that this ministry is to shape people's entire lives and existence in such a way that it can be experienced as an authentic witness of life.

(7) Affirmation of a priestly way of life which is shaped by the evangelical counsels - poverty, obedience and chastity, or celibacy.¹ We are primarily talking about celibacy here.

(8) Affirmation of the fact that the celibacy of a diocesan priest can be an appropriate witness, a real symbol of the orientation of life towards the Lord and for the people. This is embedded within a long tradition, in spiritual experience, and in the community-creating strength of opting for a celibate life which unites large numbers of priests.

¹ See Chapter 5.4 The evangelical counsels in the foundational text of Synodal Forum II.

(9) *There is a perceptible restlessness among God's people that has been going on for many decades. It is becoming stronger rather than weaker. This unease relates not so much to celibacy itself. As every way of life, celibacy has its strengths and weaknesses, moments of joy and moments of renunciation, life-enhancing aspects, and dangers.*

(10) The many difficulties of living in celibacy outside of communities are only to be touched on here. They include loneliness, the danger of addiction, unresolved issues related to old age, etc. We also perceive malformations of a life of celibacy. The mainstays of celibacy have fallen away, so that it has become a precarious way of life for some. For example, the living together of several people, often related to the priest, in the large presbytery no longer exists. The cohabitation of several priests in the presbytery of large parishes or of associations (*vita communis*) has also become rare. What is more, the virtual disappearance of the long-valued service of parish housekeepers living in the presbytery together with the priests has consequences that need to be considered. The viability of celibacy, involving integration into a parish family, was part of its justification in training for the priesthood for decades. This has disappeared in the large parishes, as has the often-mentioned diversity in encounters with the different generations of a parish. All these points require lifelong work on relational skills. Whilst this is primarily the responsibility of the priest, it also needs to be made possible through training, professional development, superiors and church regulations. It would go beyond the limits of this implementation text to take a differentiated look at all these issues.

(11) *Our unease about celibacy is therefore not about celibacy per se. It concerns the question of whether this celibacy must be affirmed by all who wish to become priests, or whether there is not a need for different choices to be available. Inner unease, as well as inner peace, are signs in the tradition of the discernment of spirits that need to be taken seriously. Such a discernment needs to be carried out because God can work through it and in it. Could it be that God is seeking to point us in a particular direction through this very unease? It is the following aspects to which we refer in concrete terms:*

(12) Celibacy is not the only appropriate witness for the discipleship of Jesus. Sacramental marriage, for instance, also points to God's love and unbreakable faithfulness towards His people, as it is already set out in Ephesians (Eph 5:31-32). It has not been possible since the Second Vatican Council at the latest to responsibly claim that a celibate way of life is of higher value.² Given their broad diversity, the vocations need and support one another. When marriage and celibacy are lived by priests, it enriches the witness of priestly life as a whole.

(13) For all the value of celibacy, there were also traditional lines of justification for celibacy that were motivated by hostility towards the body and sexuality. The idea of cultic purity, for example, is not a helpful category, and has contributed to a clericalistic glorification. There is

² Cf. inter alia: "Fortified by so many and such powerful means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord, each in his own way, to that perfect holiness whereby the Father Himself is perfect." (LG 11); "If therefore in the Church everyone does not proceed by the same path, nevertheless all are called to sanctity and have received an equal privilege of faith through the justice of God (cf. 2 Peter 1:1). And if by the will of Christ some are made teachers, pastors and dispensers of mysteries on behalf of others, yet all share a true equality with regard to the dignity and to the activity common to all the faithful for the building up of the Body of Christ." (LG 32); "Thus in their diversity all bear witness to the wonderful unity in the Body of Christ. This very diversity of graces, ministries and works gathers the children of God into one, because "all these things are the work of one and the same Spirit" (1 Cor 12:11)." (LG 32).

also no longer any basis for the economic considerations that were important in the High Middle Ages (right of inheritance in view of benefices, etc.).

(14) In addition, we see men who discover in an intensive process - before or after their ordination to the priesthood - that they are called to marriage, and at the same time feel an inner vocation to enter the priesthood.³ Their gifts, which could complement those of celibate priests, are lost to our Church because their two vocations, namely to the priesthood and to marriage, are generally regarded in the Latin Church as being incompatible. We are therefore not doing sufficient justice to the charisms and vocations existing here, or to the pastoral needs of the faithful. Many would choose the priestly profession if it were not linked to this way of life.

(15) Just as the celibacy of priests has a long tradition in our Church, albeit it is not uninterrupted, this applies to the possibility and the reality of married priests. Founded in the Biblical witness (1 Tim 3 and frequently), married ministers are a blessed reality, not only in the Orthodox Churches, but also in the Eastern Catholic Churches. The admission of married men to priestly ordination is an exception in the Latin Church, but it is not unthinkable, especially since experience with them and with their acceptance on the part of the faithful is rather positive in many cases. The same applies to the priests from Eastern Catholic Churches who have long been living in some of our congregations. Taking the step towards an exemption from celibacy would therefore not be a departure into completely new territory.

(16) The obligation to observe celibacy poses a very real danger that it will only be accepted as a consequence of the choice of vocation. The claim that it is thus understood as a witness can hardly be fulfilled in these cases. Many priests who have already been ordained increasingly suffer from the general suspicion that they did not choose celibacy freely. Religious report that the reactions to their celibacy are much more positive, precisely because this choice is completely voluntary.

(17) To put it very simply, there is the danger that priests choose a profession which is then associated with a way of life they put up with. Religious, on the other hand, primarily choose a way of life which may then be associated with a profession. In addition, religious usually live in communities, and this communal life may mitigate some of the dangers of celibacy.

(18) Many in the Synodal Assembly are convinced that the abolition of the obligation of celibacy as a condition of admission to priestly ordination will make the unmarried state for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven more visible as a "special gift of God" (Can 277), and will enhance its symbolic character for the dawning Kingdom of God. How extensive such an opening of the priestly ministry for married men could be arranged, or what steps should be taken on this path, will have to be weighed up wisely.

(19) The abuse crisis has taught us that obligatory celibacy may attract a disproportionately large number of men who are unsure of their sexuality, of their sexual identity and orientation, and wish to avoid confronting it. The regressive immature type, as a third group of people accused of sexual assault, exhibits these characteristics.⁴ The MHG Study concludes from this

³ We are aware that there is also a question of homosexual priests. We refer to the following implementation text of Synodal Forum II: Breaking with taboos and normalisation - implementation text on the situation of homosexual priests.

⁴ Cf. in: "Sexual abuse of minors committed by Catholic priests, deacons and male religious in the sphere of the German Bishops' Conference" (MHG Study), 282.

that it is the obligation to observe celibacy - not celibacy per se - that might promote sexual abuse through these and other constellations.⁵

(20) At the same time, we also consider pastoral reality as it reveals itself to us to be a sign that there is a need for change. We see people who long to make use of priestly ministries, and of sacramental ones in particular. The sacramentality of the Church also gives rise to the need for priestly ministries, including and especially sacramental ones, while the number of those who can exercise this ministry is rapidly decreasing - in our country and also in other parts of the universal Church. This makes one wonder. The Church defines herself as the community that is gathered around the Eucharist as its centre. What if a community no longer has sufficient access to the Eucharist? Is it legitimate and meaningful to argue from a position of shortage? We believe that the shortage of priests is not the only reason, and that it is not the only decisive reason, for the desire to abolish obligatory celibacy. We however regard the pastoral distress brought about by the shortage of priests as a sign of the times that should be taken seriously. We believe that access to the celebration of the Eucharist, as well as to the sacraments of the anointing of the sick and forgiveness, is to be valued more highly than the obligation to maintain celibacy. The reduction in the number of priests due to celibacy is also affecting many who are already in the ministry (and are celibate), as they are increasingly overburdened and less and less able to live out their spirituality.

(21) The latter two facts, the experience of thousands of sexual abuses by celibate priests, and the pastoral distress, point in the same direction, and reinforce the weight of the argument, so that we come to the following conclusions in our discernment of spirits:

(22) The Church naturally has an obligation to ensure that the rules and regulations which she establishes serve the life of the people and evangelisation. Just as there is a theological hierarchy of truths, there are also precedences and subordinate orders that must always be newly weighted in the organisation of the salvific ministry in the Church. If obligatory celibacy hinders priests' witness and pastoral ministry, and the mission and credibility of the Church, this rule should be changed.

(23) We understand all these factors as signs of the times that make it necessary to adopt the following votes:

Vote 1

(24) The Synodal Assembly therefore asks the Holy Father to reconsider the connection of the conferral of ordination with the commitment to celibacy in the synodal process of the World Synod (2021-2024).

(25) Even if the concrete practice of the Eastern Catholic Churches in this area, for example with regard to the importance of monasticism, cannot be simply transferred to the reality of

⁵ Cf. inter alia in: "Sexual abuse of minors committed by Catholic priests, deacons and male religious in the sphere of the German Bishops' Conference" (MHG Study), 11; 12-13. This problem indicator is explicitly mentioned there, without offering suggestions for a solution. See on this also Chapter 3 Change structures that promote abuse and underlying topics of the foundational text. Other problem areas, such as inadequate personality development, etc., are dealt with in the implementation text entitled "Professionalisation" of the Synodal Forum "Priestly existence today". This must be taken seriously, even where abuse also occurs in non-celibate contexts. This is one potential danger, but by no means the only one.

the Latin Church, taking a look at the Eastern Church's tradition nonetheless shows that diversity in the shaping of the priestly way of life was and is always a real possibility for the Church.

Vote 2

(26) The Synodal Assembly now asks the Holy Father to take the following concrete step, pending the possible implementation of vote 1:

(27) Dispensations in individual cases, such as those granted to married Protestant pastors who have converted to the Catholic Church, are to be granted even more generously. The right to give such a dispensation is currently reserved to the Apostolic See (can. 1047 §2 No. 3). This reservation can be lifted for individual local churches if the respective local bishop so requests. This would require an appropriate intra-diocesan process and consultation with the Bishops' Conference. If the Apostolic See consents to this, the authority for a dispensation then lies with the local bishop, who is in a better position to assess the situation on the ground.

Vote 3

(28) The Synodal Assembly now asks the Holy Father to take the following concrete step, pending the possible implementation of vote 1: to allow the ordination of viri probati. Already the Würzburg Synode dealt with the ordination of viri probati. The Amazon Synod proposes to define as a first step criteria "to ordain as priests suitable and respected men of the community [...] who have had a fruitful permanent diaconate".⁶ Even though the diaconate is a vocation in its own right, this proposal shows the urgency to look for and implement new ways.

Vote 4

(29) The Synodal Assembly now asks the Holy Father to take the following concrete step, pending the possible implementation of vote 1:

(30) One might for instance consider particular-church arrangements, on the basis of which experience could first be gained in one region of the world as to how such an opening would affect priests who have already been ordained, priests who are to be ordained in the future, and last but not least the faithful and the witness of the Church.

(31) The Synodal Assembly calls upon the German Bishops' Conference to apply to the Apostolic See for the implementation of the concrete steps mentioned.

Vote 5

(32) The Synodal Assembly asks the Holy Father, after any general exemption from the vow of celibacy to examine whether also priests who have already been ordained might be given the possibility of being released from the vow of celibacy without having to renounce exercising the ministry.

⁶ Final Document of the Amazon Synod, 111.

b) Votes on priests leaving the ministry due to a partnership

Introduction

(33) Every employee or civil servant has to accept negative consequences associated with the premature termination of his/her employment as long as they are legally permissible. Not all of these can and must be absorbed by the previous employer. This also applies as a matter of principle to leaving the priestly ministry. That said, from a point of view of justice and legal certainty, this departure, which is more than a professional caesura pure and simple, entails disproportionate disadvantages.

(34) The reasons for leaving are quite varied. A significant majority however have to renounce the priestly ministry because of a partnership.

Vote 6

(35) The Synodal Assembly has requested the German Bishops' Conference and the Central Committee of German Catholics to commission a social science study on the situation of suspended and dispensed priests, and to present it to the public no later than 2024. The aim is a quantitative and qualitative survey of ecclesiastical, professional and family situations, as well as of individual personal faith biographies. It is also important to ascertain the willingness to continue in a pastoral profession, or even to become active in the priestly ministry.

Vote 7

(36) The Synodal Assembly calls upon the German Bishops' Conference,

a) to maintain an intensive exchange with suspended and dispensed priests and to counteract alienation.

b) to make it possible for dispensed priests to apply for all ecclesiastical vocations open to lay people. Integration into a pastoral ministry should be possible as in the renewed dispensation.⁷

(37) The Synodal Assembly has commissioned the German Bishops' Conference and the Central Committee of German Catholics to set up a working group, with the involvement of suspended and dispensed priests. It should be given the task

a) to collect best practice examples for a humanly convincing handling of suspended and dispensed priests on the part of the dioceses (regular invitations to joint exchange, in which also questions of involvement and committees, schemes, may be settled) and to pass these on to the dioceses for implementation and

b) to develop binding and legally secure regulations - oriented towards civil society standards - analogous to the leaving of other pastoral employees for the taking over of dispensed priests in pastoral ministry.

⁷ The question of an ecclesiastical perspective of a priest separated from ministry by dispensation is already given to the respective bishop by the new version of dispensation rescripts; this also includes positive appreciation and encouragement that the dispensed person contributes with his talents and gifts.



Implementation text

Proclamation of the Gospel by authorised baptised and confirmed persons in word and sacrament

Decision of the Synodal Path adopted by the Synodal Assembly on March 10, 2023

Introduction

(1) The proclamation of the Gospel is the purpose of all the Church's activities and the Christian confession is Good News for every day. At the same time, the Gospel is heard with open ears in existentially significant life situations. Here, the Church's ministry of proclamation is very especially called for: by providing pastoral guidance, by sharing joy and successful life, by imparting blessings and an uplifting word and in sacramental services with all the charisms that God gives to people. All providers of pastoral care need to receive assurance that their actions in the respective existential situations are welcomed and considered effective.

(2) The testimony of God's salvific acts becomes weaker if the fulness of the existing charisms and skills cannot be respected and lived. In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "Querida Amazonia" of 2020, Pope Francis opens up perspectives: "The laity can proclaim God's word, teach, organize communities, celebrate certain sacraments" (QA 89).¹ Likewise, in "Querida Amazonia" he refers to can. 517 § 2 CIC 1983 and calls for the "stable presence of mature and lay leaders endowed with authority" (QA 94). In several German dioceses lay people are increasingly being entrusted with leading tasks in parish pastoral care according to can. 517 § 2 CIC 1983. It is sensible that also these persons should be more present in the proclamation of Word and Sacrament. The working document for the Continental Synod also emphasises that the issue of the full and equal participation of women is mentioned in almost all local church reports. This concerns inclusion in decision-making processes, but also in liturgical ministries, such as the preaching ministry by women (nos. 64, 91).

(3) Well-trained persons such as parish expert workers and pastoral assistants or commissioned volunteers participate in the proclamation ministry of the Church in various forms of worship. In this way, they promote the presence of diverse perspectives in the proclamation. According to can. 766 CIC 1983, it is possible for lay people to preach publicly in churches and chapels in accordance with the regulations of the Bishops' Conference, for example in celebrations of the Word of God. There is also the practice of an introduction at the beginning of the Eucharistic

¹ Through the Apostolic Letter issued *Motu proprio Spiritus Domini* by modifying Canon 230 § 1 CIC 1983 regarding access to the ministries of Lector and Acolyte of 10 January 2021, Pope Francis also decreed an opening up that is relevant to the universal Church: important church ministries are to be accessible not only to men, but as a matter of principle to all who are baptised.

celebration (statio) and the testimony of faith by lay people or the dialogue sermon. The homily, the sermon in the Eucharistic celebration, is to be distinguished from this. It has so far been reserved for ordained ministers entrusted with an episcopal mission for this purpose (can. 767 § 1 CIC 1983). In many (arch)dioceses in Germany there is a long-standing practice of giving permission to persons who have qualified themselves through studies in theology and have been sent by the bishop into the ministry of proclaiming the Gospel to also deliver a homily in the celebration of the Eucharist.

(4) In many areas of catechesis and the celebration of the sacraments, open questions arise today: Which actions are reserved for the diaconal, priestly and episcopal ministry? What transformations in the answer to this question are known from the history of tradition? What ideas for shaping new ecclesial ministries are theologically appropriate? What is the significance of the human person in the sustained efficacy of a sacramental action? The relationship between personal participation in a church celebration and its sacramentally based effect is to be considered experientially at all times. In many dioceses, for example, with regard to the service of burial by lay people, the perception has been strengthened of the importance of providing longer periods of conversation before and after the funeral service. In other life situations, too, people often open up more easily to a conversation about existential issues if trust has been gained beforehand at the level of a personal relationship. Also in view of the fact that the number of priests working in parishes or in categorical pastoral care is decreasing, it is necessary to consider in which pastoral-liturgical activities lay people can participate on a permanent basis. With regard to the individual sacraments, the possible participation of lay people in the shaping of the liturgies must be considered in a differentiated way. The entire richness of the history of tradition should be taken into account. New forms of proclaiming the Gospel may also be considered.

Resolutions

(5) 1. The German (Arch)bishops are seeking to boost the share of women and to increase diversity in the ministry of proclamation. In order to ensure the importance and improve the quality of the homily and to make better use of the richness of the manifold charisms, the German bishops should draw up a particular norm and obtain permission for this from the Holy See, according to which the homily can also be taken over in Eucharistic celebrations on Sundays and feast days by theologically and spiritually qualified faithful commissioned by the bishop, in accordance with the pastoral requirements recognised by the local Ordinary. A new Sermon Regulation would set out more precise criteria for granting the authority to preach (*facultas*) and apply them to ordained and non-ordained preachers alike.

(6) Thus, the following should be aimed for:

The homily is an integral part of the celebration of the Mass and has a sacramental dimension. However, this does not exclude the possibility of other full-time and appropriately trained persons, in addition to priests and deacons, taking on the ministry of proclamation in the celebration of the Mass. The bishops commission pastoral workers to preach in the Eucharistic celebration accompanied by their ecclesial mission (*missio canonica*), so that they may carry out their preaching ministry officially and in the name of the Church.

(7) It should be examined which qualifications are necessary for a sermon assignment and which other groups of people could be considered for this (e.g. religious education teachers, trained people for leading liturgies of the word, spiritual leaders of associations). Appropriate training and further education opportunities should be created.

(8) 2. In the German (arch)dioceses, the pastoral situations with regard to the introduction of the extraordinary administration of baptism according to can. 230 § 3 CIC 1983, the assistance in marriage by lay persons according to can. 1112 CIC 1983 and the entrustment of lay persons to assist in the governance of parishes in accordance with the legal requirements of can. 517 § 2 and can. 516 CIC 1983 are examined. The Pastoral Commission of the German Bishops' Conference coordinates a consultation process in which, among others, members of the responsible department of the ZdK, the Conference of Superiors of Religious Orders and the women's, men's and youth associations are to be involved. It examines how the interaction of sacramental priestly ministry and the ministries and offices of non-ordained persons can be deepened. In view of the current pastoral contexts, it also analyses how existing ministries and ministries can be further developed and what new ministries and ministries are to be designed with which the Church can and must respond to new challenges. The consultation process should lead to concrete decisions in a timely manner, which also includes the development of qualification criteria for the respective tasks and orientations for a framework regulation for qualification and commissioning. Topics and concerns of this consultation process will be brought into the universal church synodal process by the delegates from Germany.

Reasoning

(9) Re 1. In accordance with Lumen Gentium 31, all faithful are by baptism made part of the service of sanctifying, proclaiming and ruling. By virtue of their baptism and their individual mission based therein, lay persons are obliged and possess the right to work so that the divine message of salvation is made known (Can. 225 CIC 1983). This mission of proclamation relates to their witness of life and word, as well as to the fact that “they can also be called upon to cooperate with the bishop and presbyters in the exercise of the ministry of the word” (Can. 759 CIC 1983). The Second Vatican Council signals openness by not prohibiting lay preaching. In accordance with canon law as it stands, lay persons can be permitted to preach publicly in a church or oratory in various forms of worship, according to the prescripts of the conference of bishops (Can. 766 CIC 1983). The Church's book of law aims not to neglect the service of preaching on Sundays and Holy Days; for “it cannot be omitted except for a grave cause” (Can. 767 § 2 CIC 1983). As the moderator of the entire ministry of the Word of God, the diocesan bishop (cf. Can. 756 § 2 CIC 1983) has the task of ensuring the quality of the sermon. He carries this out for example through the possibility of restricting or withdrawing authority to preach.² In view of the absolute need for quality in preaching and the professionalism of pastoral activity, the interpretation of Scripture according to the Gospel is to be undertaken by competent individuals who have been trained for this purpose. These include bishops, priests and deacons who

² Cf. the revised version of the can. 1336 § 4 n. 2 CIC 1983.

have received appropriate training, as well as those among the non-ordained faithful who have completed theological studies and homiletic-pastoral training.³

(10) Making use of the richness of existing competences and charisms also with regard to the homily would benefit the quality of the preaching of the Word as well as enable more diverse perspectives and possibilities of identification for the worshipping congregations. The mutual interconnectedness of the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Eucharistic meal is borne above all by the communion of the worshipping community (cf. Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 26 and 35).

(11) There is an increasing awareness that it is very important for women to partake in the role of giving the sermon with regard to a well-designed liturgy against the background of the experience of sexual abuse. People who have experienced sexualised violence at the hands of clergy repeatedly express a need to attend liturgical celebrations that are not dominated by clergy.

(12) Re 2. Many candidates for baptism and families of persons baptised today have not experienced any socialisation within the Church. Pastoral workers are often close to the diverse realities of these people's lives and thus find access to them, for example, through activities in day care centres or through preparation for the sacraments. The connection between pastoral care in the sacraments and the celebration of the sacraments is highly significant. The anticipated development of personnel and structures in the dioceses shows that there no longer are, or at least soon will not be, a sufficient number of ordinary conferrers of baptism in the ministry. It is therefore all the more important to heighten the baptismal awareness of all in the local parishes, and the introduction of extraordinary authority to baptise can contribute to this if a congregational awareness process is associated with it. As the German Bishops emphasised in 2015 in their statement entitled "Gemeinsam Kirche sein" (Being a Church together): "Current obstacles can be resolved if, through baptism, we hear the call to holiness that is common to all of us." (Gemeinsam Kirche sein, p. 27).

(13) In accordance with Can. 861 § 2 CIC 1983 (included in the Instruction of the Congregation for the Clergy "The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church", 2020), the local Ordinary may, at his prudent discretion, entrust the conferring of baptism to other persons in addition to the ordinary conferrers of baptism (bishop, priest, deacon) if there is not a sufficient number of ordinary conferrers of baptism available (cf. also Can. 230 § 3 CIC 1983).

(14) Re 3. Forms of preparation for marriage and guidance of married couples with their families pose a major pastoral challenge. If possible, the conclusion of marriage should be integrated into an event involving an encounter with members of the Christian community who can themselves contribute their own experiences of married life to the discussions. It should be the concern of the entire congregation to give an authentic witness to the values of a marriage lived out in Christ. In accordance with Can. 1112 CIC 1983, the diocesan bishop can delegate lay

³ Cf. H. Hallermann, Die Beteiligung der Laien am Predigtendienst, in: C. Bauer/W. Rees (eds.), *Laienpredigt - Neue pastorale Chancen*, Freiburg i. Br. 2021, 266-298, here: 297: "Without doubt, it seems important and justified theologically as well as in terms of canon law to come to an opening in this regard [regarding the homily] at least for the group of lay people who, as full-time pastoral workers, already have an episcopal *missio canonica* for all other pastoral and ecclesiastical fields of action and can therefore - especially in the area of the preaching ministry - act officially and in the name of the Church."

persons to assist at marriages with the previous favourable vote of the conference of bishops and after he has obtained the permission of the Holy See.

(15) Re 4. The Church is “a sign and instrument both of a very closely-knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (LG 1). Her ministries and offices are also to be thought of in terms of this mission. Their diversity has developed historically, not least because of pastoral challenges, concerns and necessities. In the necessary revival and development of ministries and offices, it is also significant to consider which symbolic acts and rituals are meaningful for people today. In the interaction of the sacramental priestly ministry and the ministries and offices of non-ordained persons, emphasis should be placed on a deepening that profiles and strengthens the individual ministries.

(16) Re 5. Leadership in parishes and congregations is at the service of proclamation in word and sacrament, combined with responsibility for development and organization, personnel and resources in cooperation with full-time and voluntary workers. Experiences in several German dioceses show that the commissioning of lay people with leadership tasks in parish pastoral care and the distribution of leadership tasks to a team of priests and lay people is conducive to quality and relief with regard to the complex leadership tasks and that beneficial work is done.

(17) In connection with the Bible’s reference to therapeutically-effective charisms (cf. 1 Cor 12:4-11; Rom 12:6-8), it is appropriate to trust in the working of God’s Spirit through gifted women and men who are able to comfort and admonish, to discern spirits, to impart knowledge, and to heal diseases at the same time. According to Paul, the criterion for the legitimacy of the activity is whether the ministries benefit other people. All those baptised are called to testify to their trust in God’s nearness and to their hope in God’s mercy in every situation of life. Gifts of God’s Spirit are conferred on individuals in a special way so that they have a salvific effect and encourage them to live.



Implementation text

Blessing ceremonies for couples who love each other

Decision of the Synodal Path adopted by the Synodal Assembly on March 10, 2023

Introduction

(1) The Church wants to proclaim the message of the God-given dignity of every person in word and deed. This message guides her in her dealings with people and their partnerships. Therefore, she offers recognition and accompaniment to couples who are united in love, who treat each other with full respect and dignity, and who are prepared to live their sexuality for the long term with care for themselves, for each other and in social responsibility.

(2) There are couples who ask for a blessing for their partnership. This request is based on the gratitude for experienced love and the hope for an accompanied future.

Motion

(3) The Synodal Assembly recommends that the German Bishops' Conference and the Central Committee of German Catholics discuss the subject of blessing celebrations together with members of Forum IV and persons concerned, taking into account the reflections of the Flemish bishops and the decisions of the Anglican Synod, and that appropriate liturgical celebrations be developed and introduced in a timely manner.

(4) The official introduction of such blessing ceremonies should also help to ensure that all couples who love each other feel welcome in the parishes.

(5) The German Bishops' Conference and the ZdK are working together with members of Forum IV and affected persons on a handout for blessing ceremonies, which can draw on preliminary work by various dioceses, the Working Group for Catholic Family Education (AKF) and others, as well as relevant practical experience.

(6) This handout includes suggested forms for blessing celebrations for various couple situations (remarried couples, same-sex couples, couples after civil marriage), as well as a pastoral-theological introduction and pastoral-practical advice.

(7) Such ceremonies may be presided over by ordained ministers or persons with an episcopal mandate to worship. Training for the organisation of blessing ceremonies is suggested.

(8) For all couples interested in such ceremonies, preparatory talks with pastors and, if necessary, seminars are planned. Here the joint life situation may be taken into consideration. This

also includes the question of whether there are obligations towards partners and children from a previous relationship.

(9) No obligation to lead such celebrations is imposed on anyone; conversely, no chaplain presiding over such a celebration need expect disciplinary consequences. If necessary, colleagues or diocesan contact persons can be referred to.

(10) Experience with this practice will be gathered after the introductory stage. The blessing celebrations will be evaluated from March 2026.

Reasoning

(11) For further considerations, the following proposals, which were adopted by a majority of Forum IV, should be included and weighted:

(12) People choose to express commitment in their relationship in different ways.

(13) It has become a common experience in pastoral practice that same-sex loving couples ask for a blessing for their partnership. So do civilly remarried couples who dare to make a new start in a new partnership. Couples who do not yet consider themselves ready for the sacrament of marriage also do so. Often, they want to meet the interests of a partnership in which only one partner is a believer or is close to the Catholic Church. Increasingly, unbaptised couples are asking for a blessing.

(14) A blessing for all these partnerships is officially not provided for. The explanatory note of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has confirmed this with regard to homosexual couples. However, the response to the questionnaires in the context of the World Synod of Bishops has shown that the view of homosexuality underlying this document is not considered sufficient in many places. In the meantime, even a bishops' conference (Flanders) has published a liturgy for the blessing of same-sex couples. So there is a need for further theological development. On a practical level, the request for blessing is already fulfilled in many places. The decision to bestow this blessing is therefore made by the pastors according to their conscience and their pastoral responsibility, but in many cases they are in conflict with magisterial guidelines. The Synodal Assembly has accordingly adopted this proposal, which aims to help clarify the situation and can be fed into the global synodal process.

(15) The refusal to bless the relationship of two people who want to live their partnership in love, commitment and responsibility to each other and to God proves to be merciless or even discriminatory in a society that has achieved human dignity and free self-determination as maxims of moral standardisation. Such a refusal also leaves questions open in terms of the theology of grace. This not only burdens the proclamation of God's philanthropy and the double commandment of loving one's neighbour and God, but also raises serious questions about the credibility of church action in our cultural sphere. Reference can be made to the *Relatio Finalis* of the Synodal Assembly of 2015 and the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia* (19 March 2016). Pope Francis can no longer say "that all those in any "irregular" situation are living in a state of mortal sin and are deprived of sanctifying grace." (AL 301)

(16) Blessing couples who love each other is not at the expense of valuing classical sacramental marriage.

(17) Where people are in love with each other, God is present. Christian spouses testify to this in a special way. Through the covenant that God makes with them in the sacrament, they know that they are supported by his unbreakable love. Underlying this is an inclusive understanding of the sacrament of marriage, which does not serve as the highest and best standard for evaluating or even devaluing other forms of loving, but as a clarification and condensation of a possible communion and closeness of God. In this way, the discussion of blessing ceremonies holds the chance to profile sacramental marriage more strongly as a conscious decision of the spouses to make visible and proclaim God's love for His Church in their marriage.

(18) For some, a blessing ceremony is associated with the concern that the Church might be approving of a sinful situation. This concern must be further reduced, also against the background of the line opened by Pope Francis with *Amoris laetitia*. The celebration must be different from a marriage ceremony. Liturgical possibilities for avoiding an analogy to marriage must be explicitly formulated. The blessing wants to strengthen what already exists in the couple relationship in terms of love, commitment and mutual responsibility. God's support is requested and promised for the future.

(19) Extensions in the area of acts of blessing are supported by the explanations in the booklet published by the Liturgy Commission of the German Bishops' Conference on liturgy-related celebrations "Christus in der Welt verkünden" and derived from the benedictional. In the benedictional, introduction No. 36 opens up the possibility of adaptation and benediction 99 provides a template that can be adapted to a wide variety of situations.

(20) The offers of blessing ceremonies are based on the conviction that there is moral value in the common life of couples who live together in commitment and responsibility for each other. Where faith is involved, what is good is worthy of blessing. The Church is enriched by the love of these couples. Such mutual love calls for a blessing. God is present where people love each other.

(21) The offer of a blessing ceremony is based on a primal human need: "People are in need of blessings. They long for salvation, protection, happiness and fulfilment in their lives. That is why people speak blessings to each other. Above all, they hope for and ask blessings from God". (Benedictional No. 1) This request for and hope of blessing is already of great relevance and it shows a longing for God that must be taken seriously. A blessing expresses that people want to shape their relationship in the horizon of God and orient themselves on the Gospel. Strengthened by the blessing, these couples make their Christian faith and their relationship with God fruitful in their partnership, in their families, among friends and in their congregations, and sow the seeds for further blessings in and for our Church. In order to fulfil the mission of the Church to proclaim God's promise in the contemporary world, new liturgical forms must be found at all times. The Liturgical Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* explicitly encourages the development of liturgical forms, even on a regional basis (cf. SC 22 § 2 and 63).

(22) The blessing ceremonies presented are regarded by many as an example of such inculturation. The assessment of the diversity of lasting relationships and the mutual responsibility perceived in them has changed in Germany. Partnerships that are binding and loving are met with a high level of social acceptance - irrespective of a previous union or the gender of the two partners. This esteem must also find a convincing expression in the liturgy of the Church. This

is how the Church lives up to her claim “They borrow from the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and disciplines, all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator, or enhance the grace of their Saviour, or dispose Christian life the way it should be.” (AG 22). At the same time, this shows the deep conviction of the Church: “The experience of past ages, the progress of the sciences, and the treasures hidden in the various forms of human culture, by all of which the nature of man himself is more clearly revealed and new roads to truth are opened, these profit the Church, too.” (GS 44)

(23) Often same-sex couples and remarried divorcees have experienced exclusion and depreciation in our Church. The possibility of publicly placing their partnership under God’s blessing does not make up for these experiences. However, it offers the Church the opportunity to show appreciation for the love and values that exist in these relationships and thus make reconciliation possible.

(24) The blessing is a sign for many couples and their children to be accepted in this Church and the congregations are encouraged to welcome them.



Implementation text

Prevention of sexualised violence, intervention and dealing with perpetrators and suspects in the Catholic Church

Decision of the Synodal Path adopted by the Synodal Assembly on March 10, 2023

Introduction

(1) Successful prevention of sexualised violence and competent intervention when cases occur requires not only a focus on those affected but also a targeted look at the perpetrators. This implementation text has focused in particular on clergy with the aim of preventing perpetration and describing a standardised and preventive approach to clergy who have become perpetrators.

(2) From the experiences gained with cases of sexualised violence¹ in institutional contexts² and in particular on the basis of the findings of the MHG study³ various insights have developed that form the foundation for the sustainable protection of (potentially) affected persons. These include, on the one hand, systemic framework conditions and, on the other hand, clear procedures in concrete cases of sexualised violence.

(3) In addition to prevention concepts, clear rules for dealing with perpetrators are also part of coping with the abuse scandal and preventing sexualised violence.

(4) Since the many cases of sexualised violence in the Catholic Church have become public, the German Bishops' Conference has developed standards for the prevention of sexualised violence⁴ as well as a clear set of rules for dealing with cases of abuse⁵ and for investigating them.⁶ These

¹ The general term sexualised violence encompasses different forms of violence (verbal, psychological, physical) and behaviour that violates boundaries.

² 254 Retkowski, Treibel und Tuider, *Handbuch Sexualisierte Gewalt und pädagogische Kontexte*, Beltz Juventa, Weinheim Basel 2018. Helmut Willems, Dieter Ferring (Eds.): *Macht und Missbrauch in Institutionen. Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven auf institutionelle Kontexte und Strategien der Prävention*, Springer VS (Wiesbaden) 2014.

³ The abbreviation "MHG" stands for "Mannheim, Heidelberg, Gießen". These are the locations of the researchers involved in the interdisciplinary research project. The results were published under the title "Research project: Sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests, deacons and male religious in the area of the German Bishops' Conference".

⁴ "Framework Regulation - Prevention of sexualised violence against minors and vulnerable adults within the domain of the German Bishops' Conference" (Würzburg, 2019) and Handout "Framework Regulation - Prevention of sexualised violence against minors and vulnerable adults within the domain of the German Bishops' Conference" (2021).

⁵ "Regulation for dealing with sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults by clergy and other church staff" of the German Bishops' Conference (Würzburg, 2019).

⁶ "Joint declaration on binding criteria and standards for an independent examination of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in Germany" (2020).

standards and regulations are updated regularly. They are to be supported by this implementation text and specified in individual places.

(5) Even though topics such as sexual development, respect for boundaries, personality development, education and training, etc. have already been addressed, we consider it important, especially in this implementation text, that dealing with sexualised violence and respect for boundaries (from education and training until retirement) is given attention again and again.

(6) This implementation text addresses the prevention of sexualised violence and dealing with convicted perpetrators⁷ and accused persons in the Catholic Church. We are aware of the need for a respectful and appreciative encounter with those affected. We see it as a self-evident requirement for bishops and leading church employees to practice the ability to speak about the topic of sexualised violence and to attend training courses on how to conduct appropriate conversations. These settings include clarity of roles, committee competence, transparent record keeping, adherence to standards of good administration among other things⁸. Such training would also be desirable in the congregations for the congregation leaders and members in order to be able to speak and deal with cases of sexualised violence.

Statements on primary prevention⁹

(7) 1. The Synodal Assembly calls on the DBK and the ZdK to work towards and review that prevention regulations are adopted in Catholic institutions and associations on the basis of the Framework Regulations¹⁰ and that protection concepts are implemented in a binding manner and their applications monitored. This includes all those working in the Church, full-time employees and volunteers, consecrated and lay people. Prevention regulations, their consistent implementation and the comprehensive development of institutional protection concepts are basic prerequisites for protection against sexualised violence. The dioceses, religious orders and ZdK member organisations shall provide an overview to the Assembly in 2026¹¹, which shows the proportion of church or association institutions with a prevention concept and church or association employees who have completed prevention training.

⁷ This implementation text does not use the term perpetrator in the legal sense of a proven criminal offence, but in the following sense: a person who is charged/accused of performing an act that is at least assaultive. It is known that there are also female perpetrators in the Catholic context. But in this text, the focus is on male clerics, hence the reference to perpetrators.

⁸ From the reports of those affected, it has often become clear that they were not treated with the necessary sensitivity and sympathy, but rather with a defensive attitude. Those responsible seemed and still seem to be partially at a loss when it comes to dealing with this issue and the people involved.

⁹ The terms primary, secondary and tertiary prevention as well as intervention do not describe a ranking or a degree of importance, but are separate fields of work within a problem management. Primary prevention aims to create framework conditions in order to prevent acts in principle. Secondary prevention takes place when the first manifestations of problematic behaviour are already present and a (further) consolidation/aggravation is to be prevented. Tertiary Prevention/intervention intervenes when the offences have been committed and are known. Intervention creates structures to prevent further acts and to set consequences in various areas (legal, therapeutic, etc.).

¹⁰ This refers to the "Framework Regulations - Prevention of Sexualised Violence against Minors and Vulnerable Adults within the Domain of the German Bishops' Conference", which has been in force in all (arch)dioceses since 1 January 2020. Of course, it is always to be understood as a reference point in its current version.

¹¹ According to Article 13 Implementation and Evaluation of the Statutes of the Synodal Path, the Synodal Assembly "shall meet three years after its last meeting ... to evaluate the implementation of the results of the Synodal Path"

Reasoning:

(8) Based on the expert opinions of the dioceses available so far there seems to be a gap between aspiration and reality in parts.

(9) 2. The Synodal Assembly asks the persons responsible for the formation regulations to include the following standards for prevention work in their framework regulations, insofar as these are not already laid down there: prevention work is an integral part of priestly formation and the formation of all pastoral vocations. This is reflected by the following standards: The prevention of sexualised violence is to be discussed between the training supervisor and the interested person during the admission procedure. The basis for this is a code of conduct which contains binding rules of behaviour for a professional and appropriate relationship of closeness and distance for seminarians and formation leaders. This code of conduct must be signed by all participants. For seminarians, this applies at the beginning of priestly training; for other pastoral vocations, this point in time is to be determined in a comparable manner. Raising awareness of and practising behaviour that respects boundaries, but also becoming aware of ways to complain and appeal, is part of the training with regard to all areas of life. In order to prevent candidates from behaving correctly only towards the training and diocesan leadership, but not towards peers or subordinates, there should be a low-threshold reporting possibility. An appropriately sensitive training programme must take into account the fact that trainees may also be victims of sexualised violence. If necessary, it supports the victims in the process of healing and coming to terms with the situation. If transgressive behaviour (e.g. insensitivity in daily contact with hugs, sexist language, condescending behaviour, etc.) already occurs during the training and there is no change in behaviour despite practised criticism and the issuing of possible conditions, acceptance into the church ministry is excluded. Acceptance into church service, also in other dioceses, is generally excluded in cases of abusive behaviour or sexual assault.

Reasoning:

(10) These measures serve to protect children and young people as well as adults in the church space and in all respective institutions. They can deter potential offenders from continuing to aspire to enter the ministry of the Church.

(11) 3. The Synodal Assembly asks the DBK, in cooperation with the Commission for Spiritual Vocations and Church Services (K IV), to anchor the feedback culture of all those working in church ministry in a framework regulation.¹² For example, there should be regular supervision in (pastoral) teams. A code of conduct as described in 2. is introduced in each diocese as binding for all pastoral workers and signed by each pastoral worker as a voluntary commitment. It formulates pastoral standards which serve as a basis for feedback discussions, regular discussions in pastoral teams and in staff management.

¹² For further work in this area, please refer to the basic principles in the implementation text "Personality development and professionalisation", which contains the necessary measures for personality development, personality formation, professionalisation of personnel deployment, quality management, for cooperation between full-time and part-time pastoral personnel (priests and non-ordained persons) and for the professionalisation of priestly formation

Reasoning:

(12) It is essential to address and punish misconduct appropriately and to provide support for change up to special conditions and target agreements. If staff and priests do not respect boundaries, openness to a culture of criticism and error is indispensable. In this context, it is imperative that this also takes place as a matter of course and without fear, beyond hierarchical and professional boundaries. It must be possible for people who have experienced boundary violating and abusive behaviour to make complaints easily without disadvantages to the person making the report. A team culture and regular team meetings, also across professional groups, are helpful in all the bodies at the respective levels as well as in the parishes and pastoral units.¹³

Decisions on secondary prevention and intervention:

(13) 4. Special men's, violence and conflict counselling centres or contact points¹⁴ should be regularly presented to the circle of staff and also specifically to seminarians and clergy and thus be known as a possible option for help and support.

Reasoning:

(14) For priests and other staff members who notice that they have problems with transgressive or abusive behaviour or develop fantasies of sexual assault, a low-threshold offer of psychological help must be available and accessible to them. From a research perspective, it is known that a certain percentage of the population has a sexual preference for children or adolescents. For these people, therapy in the counselling centres can be very helpful in dealing responsibly with their predisposition and preventing perpetration.

(15) 5. The Synodal Assembly asks the German bishops to address the issue of sexualised violence during their visitations. This must be anchored accordingly in the visitation regulations where this is not yet the case. The visitors should proactively address the topics of sexualised violence, of a protection concept and border-respecting behaviour in the various talks. This is especially true in communities that are or have been affected by sexualised violence, as this usually results in traumatisation¹⁵ or at least in a feeling of irritation and uncertainty within the institution or among the members of the congregation in particular.

Reasoning:

(16) This encourages those affected or those with knowledge of certain cases of abuse to report violations of boundaries and sexual violence. It is the right and duty of the bishop to demand the creation and implementation of protection concepts, to advocate for those affected by

¹³ For a more detailed discussion of this topic, see: Implementation text professionalisation.

¹⁴ Examples are the networks "Don't become a perpetrator", "Real men talk" or "Treatment initiative for victim protection".

¹⁵ Cf. ,inter alia, Ursula Enders, Zartbitter Köln, 2004: „Eine Institution, die zum Tatort sexueller Ausbeutung von Mädchen und Jungen wurde, ist dann als traumatisiert zu bezeichnen, wenn neben der objektiv und/oder subjektiv erlebten Bedrohung des Lebens und der Sicherheit der Kinder auch die Einrichtung von ihren Mitgliedern als in ihrer Existenz bedroht wahrgenommen wird. Meist erleiden betroffene Einrichtungen einen institutionellen Schock, der eine Einengung der institutionellen Wahrnehmung zur Folge hat. [Diese Institutionen] sind bei der Konfrontation mit sexueller Ausbeutung in den eigenen Reihen oftmals in ihren institutionellen Handlungsmöglichkeiten erheblich eingeschränkt sie sind wie gelähmt oder entwickeln Überreaktionen und handeln nicht nach den Prinzipien fachlichen Handels. In der Regel erleben sie einen institutionellen Kontrollverlust.“

sexualised violence and to be present in affected parishes, as he is entrusted with pastoral care for all the faithful of his diocese (Can. 383 CIC).

(17) 6. The Synodal Assembly calls on the German Bishops' Conference to develop a church disciplinary regulation for priests. Bishops are to have the option of imposing a condition of cooperation with regard to possible external counselling or therapy on priests who have not been proven to have engaged in criminally relevant behaviour but who do engage in behaviour that crosses boundaries or that is abusive. In this case, the term "condition" is not to be understood in the legal sense, but analogous to service agreements in the case of problematic behaviour.¹⁶

Reasoning:

(18) Bishops often do not see themselves in a position to take disciplinary action if no justiciable behaviour can be identified. This creates a vacuum which leads to insecurity and reticence/passivity.

Decisions on dealing with identified perpetrators¹⁷:

(19) Preliminary remark: With regard to perpetrators, everything must be done to prevent them from re-offending. Work with perpetrators is considered part of victim protection.

(20) 7. If a cleric is proven to be a perpetrator, the forensic-psychiatric expert opinion provided for by Intervention Order No. 52 must be obtained before possible therapy. A subsequent therapy should be carried out by special offender counselling centres or therapists specialised in the field. The contents and goals of therapy with perpetrators of sexualised violence must above all be victim protection (assessing and averting danger for those among the perpetrator's environment who are directly or indirectly affected) as well as accepting responsibility for the acts and consequences of their actions. In addition, recognition of their own patterns and motivations used by the perpetrators when committing sexualised violence is imperative in order to find perspectives for possible further employment and the respective suitability of the person. Failure or refusal to comply with the requirement must result in expulsion from the service. The same applies to other offenders, taking into account the possibilities and limits of labour law provisions. A completed therapeutic measure does not mean institutional rehabilitation of the offender.

Reasoning:

(21) The danger of repeat offences must not be underestimated. Statistically, the risk of re-offending is extremely high in the field of sexualised violence. It is therefore all the more important that sustainable security measures are taken with offenders.

(22) 8. Each offender is assigned a person by the Ordinary who checks the conditions and requirements and follows the further career and life of the perpetrators in accordance with the

¹⁶ Reference is made here to the applicable intervention "Order for dealing with sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults by clerics and other employees in church service" (Würzburg, 2019)

¹⁷ The introductory part of this text explains, why only perpetrators are mentioned here. See, among others, footnote 7.

"Regulations for Dealing with Sexual Abuse of Minors and Adults in Need of Protection or Assistance by Clerics and Other Employees in Church Service"¹⁸. In the case of transfers across diocesan boundaries, there is a mutual obligation to inform each other. It must be clarified which legal possibility exists in this regard in the case where a laicisation process has been completed or the employment relationship has been terminated.

Reasoning:

(23) Too often, due to transfer, change of residence and/or temporary "leave of absence" keeping track of and control over previous offenders has not been possible.

Further decisions:

(24) 9. The Synodal Assembly calls on the DBK and the ZdK to advocate for the continuation and further development of the "Independent Commission for Coming to Terms with Sexual Child Abuse" on a legal basis at the Office of the Independent Commissioner for Child Sexual Abuse Issues (UBSKM). This is to be understood exclusively as a supplement to the already ongoing internal investigation and in no way replaces it.

(25) 10. The Synodal Assembly asks the German Bishops' Conference to set up a specialist committee within two years at the latest to clarify the outstanding questions. This committee shall submit proposals on the following questions, among others: Clarification of disciplinary rules, the conduct of interviews and obligatory further training, staffing of the person in charge of controlling the offenders and the qualifications required for this position. In addition, this expert body is to be established as a permanent instrument and is to give account on a regular basis. The organisation of these processes will then be presented to the Synodal Assembly, which will "meet again three years after its last meeting ... to evaluate the implementation of the results of the Synodal Path" (Statutes of the Synodal Path, Article 13 Implementation and Evaluation).

¹⁸ Ordnung für den Umgang mit sexuellem Missbrauch Minderjähriger und schutz- oder hilfebedürftiger Erwachsener durch Kleriker und sonstige Beschäftigte im kirchlichen Dienst der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (Würzburg, 2022), Nr. 50-55.



Implementation text

Dealing with gender diversity

Decision of the Synodal Path adopted by the Synodal Assembly on March 10, 2023

Introduction

(1) The current state of the human sciences provides a revealing picture: Every person possesses a gender identity and a sexual orientation. These are part of a complex developmental process and they cannot be arbitrarily shaped or even chosen. Instead, they result from a combination of biological processes and psychosocial factors, which include not least the individual acceptance and shaping by the person him- or herself. Already for the gender variants male and female, these developments lead to a variety of physical, psychological and social characteristics, ways of expression and self-perceptions. This diversity is already biologically inherent: The biological gender identity of a human being is initially based on the chromosomal code of XX or XY. However, it can by no means be reduced to this. Instead, the biological gender identity develops in complicated interactions between genetic and epigenetic factors and is above all decisively shaped by the "hormonal sex". Sex hormones such as testosterone or oestradiol determine all sexes, although they occur at different levels of concentration in bodies perceived as male or female. "In contrast to genetic sex, hormonal sex is not typologically binary (i.e. strictly male or female), but is expressed on a sliding scale in which the individual status can also lie between the two poles."¹

(2) Human science findings point to the existence of further variants: People are considered intersex (also "intersexual") if their biological sexual characteristics (e.g. mosaic formation of the chromosomal structure, external or internal sexual organs) do not allow a strict binary assignment to either male or female. Transgender people are people whose biopsychosocial development leads to a gender perception that does not (or at least not predominantly) correspond to the gender assigned at birth, usually on the basis of the external sexual organs. Intersex and transgender people also show a great variety of individual characteristics.

(3) The recognition of intersex and transgender people has progressed significantly in recent years in Germany and other parts of the world, both legally and socially. For example, since 2017, there has been the option of a separate gender entry for intersex people ("divers") in Germany in addition to the option of leaving the entry open² With regard to transgender people,

¹ German Ethics Council: Intersexuality. Opinion. 23 February 2012, P. 32, https://www.ethikrat.org/fileadmin/Publikationen/Stellungnahmen/deutsch/DER_StnIntersex_Deu_Online.pdf.

² The preceding ruling of the Federal Constitutional Court (1 BvR 2019/16), according to which people who are permanently neither male nor female have their fundamental rights violated as long as no other positive gender

the new regulation of the civil status law currently under discussion provides for prudent support, which wants to avoid rash determinations and instead support informed-reflective decision-making. Nevertheless, comprehensive and equal recognition is still pending in many places. Parallel to progress, social, political, religious and ecclesiastical resistance is also emerging, which continues to unsettle trans and intersex people in an already uncertain legal situation, in which they already experience much suffering through exclusion, medical and legal boundary crossing and even open violence.

(4) The Roman Catholic Church is also reacting to the ongoing social debates on how to deal with gender diversity. It has recently become known that the Vatican's International Theological Commission is currently working on a fundamental statement on the topic of gender.³

(5) Already in the paper "As Male and Female He created Them. Towards a Path of Dialogue on the question of gender theory in Education" of the Congregation for Catholic Education of 2019, trans- and intersexuality are mentioned for the first time. However, this is characterised by an understanding of these terms that corresponds neither to the self-understanding of the people concerned nor to the state of the human sciences. Speaking of inter- and transgender people, it is assumed, is part of an ideology whose goal is, among other things, the dissolution or obscuring of the supposedly clear and exclusive distinction between man and woman that is considered God-given and embedded in human nature.⁴ In the perspective of the universal church, this is referred to as "gender ideology" when social and human science theories question and dissolve the - according to the "classical" anthropological position - gender dualism anchored in human nature.

(6) On the one hand, such insinuations are difficult to bear for trans and intersex people, especially for those who see the Church as their spiritual home and a place of refuge. They cause or deepen suffering, and for some even make a lasting contribution to impairing the prerequisite for a loving relationship with God and self. On the other hand, such statements, which are accepted by ministers and believers worldwide, have an influence on the reality of the lives of trans and intersex people that should not be underestimated. They legitimise and promote exclusion, violence and persecution, from which the Church is supposed to protect. Instead, church doctrine and law continue to assign highly precarious and vulnerable positions to trans and intersex persons. This increasingly exposes them to abusive perpetrator strategies in church spaces, often targeting particularly vulnerable people. Their precarious position in family, social and church contexts also leads to minority stress, which has been shown to increase the risk of physical and mental illnesses such as depression. Suicidality is significantly higher among trans and intersex people.

entry is provided, was assessed at the time by Matthias Kopp as spokesperson of the German Bishops' Conference in a statement to the Catholic News Agency as "comprehensible".

³ Domradio.de: "Examining some anthropological questions'. Pope calls for creative fidelity to tradition on gender issue", 25 November 2022, <https://www.domradio.de/artikel/papst-fordert-kreative-treue-zutradition-bei-gender-thema>.

⁴ Congregation for Catholic Education: "As Male and Female He created Them. Towards a path of dialogue on the question of gender theory in education", 02 February 2019, No. 25, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20190202_maschio-e-femmina_ge.pdf.

(7) A remarkable contrast to the document of the Congregation for Education is the recently published paper of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference "Created and Loved. A guide for Catholic schools on identity and gender"⁵. In it, the bishops explain the interrelationship of biological and social gender from the perspective of the Christian image of humanity. The Australian bishops document a struggle with human-scientific findings and social developments, which is particularly noteworthy with regard to the consequences for the design of church learning spaces.

Motion

(8) 1. The German Bishops' Conference, in cooperation with the ZDK, members of Forum IV, other experts as well as trans and intersex people, is forming a working group that will continue to work on this issue. The following aspects can already be recommended for implementation.

(9) 1.1 For intersex children it shall be possible to leave the gender entry blank in the register of baptisms or to enter "diverse" as is now envisaged in German law. If at a later point in time there will be the desire to change the gender entry, this shall be possible without any complications.

(10) 1.2 It should also be made possible for transgender faithful to have their civil status (i.e. the entry on gender as well as their first name(s)) changed in the register of baptisms. Standards in the Church's administrative law should be established here in the same way as for item 1.1.

(11) 1.3 If transgender or intersex believers are denied the sacrament of marriage, blessing ceremonies for their partnerships are available. Corresponding preparation courses are also open to couples in which one or both partners are transgender and/or intersex.

(12) 1.4 Spiritual guidance for transgender and intersex faithful, characterised by acceptance, shall be ensured at pastoral level. LSBTI* commissioners shall be established in all (arch)dioceses for this purpose. In parishes and Catholic institutions education programmes and offers shall be provided that raise awareness and sensitivity to the issue of gender diversity.

(13) 1.5 Education and training for priests, pastors and church employees deal with the topic of gender diversity with the aim of building up and expanding appropriate competences.

(14) 1.6 Persons with an intersex or transgender identity are not to be excluded from pastoral ministry, or from other full-time or voluntary employment relationships. Gender identity does not constitute grounds for non-employment or dismissal within the meaning of the Basic Order of Church Service in the context of church employment relationships.⁶

⁵ Australian Catholic Bishops Conference: "Created and Loved - A guide for Catholic schools on identity and gender", 6 September 2022, <https://www.catholic.au/s/article/Bishops-support-Catholic-schools-with-guide-on-gender-identity#>. Biological gender ("sex") already shows a considerable range of how people experience and express their gender. Thus, from the moment of conception, "a unique set of male or female characteristics" develops prenatally for each individual person in a complex genetic and hormonal process. This unique biological imprint as man and woman is connected with the social sex ("gender") in the course of life. Social gender is itself influenced by a variety of factors such as early childhood experiences, family expectations or general cultural and social patterns. Thus, there is a "much natural variation in how individuals experience their masculinity or femininity". In certain cases, according to the Australian bishops, conflicting experiences between biological and social gender can develop into a crisis of gender identity. If this crisis continues, in certain cases there is a "transition" of the biological sex characteristics to the perceived and experienced gender.

⁶ Cf. implementation text "Fundamental Order of Ecclesial Ministry".

(15) 1.7 Church communities examine whether and, if so, under which circumstances inter- and transgender people may have equal access or may remain in an institute of consecrated life or a society of apostolic life.

(16) 2. The Synodal Assembly together with the bishops recommend the Holy Father to ensure that transgender and intersex individuals may live their lives and their faith in our Church in their own way of being as creatures of God without experiencing harm, hostility or discrimination. This also includes explicitly distancing ourselves as a Church from views which portray intersex and transgender realities as a pathological, negative or even sinful deviation. Within the framework of the initiated consultative process of the International Theological Commission for the preparation of a Vatican statement on gender, we recommend an open, serious and fundamental theological and human-scientific examination of gender diversity, which reflects the diversity of God's good creation. We see an urgent need for theological-practical action in particular in the following areas:

(17) 2.1 A normative natural law positivist gender anthropology and above all its legitimation by recourse to Gen 1:27 must be put to the test in view of the findings of modern biblical studies and theology.⁷

(18) 2.2 Any devaluation of trans and intersex people must be avoided.

All church institutions and persons in positions of responsibility shall strive to use a language that values gender diversity and support learning processes to the best of their ability.

(19) 2.3 The physical safety and integrity of intersex people is to be respected and protected by the Church. The Vatican Congregation for Education must therefore reassess its view that a gender "clarification" in the direction of male or female is to be produced in children by medicine, if necessary even without the consent of the parents.⁸

(20) 2.4 The Church must distance herself unequivocally from so-called conversion therapies for transgender (as well as homosexual and bisexual) people - irrespective of the right to freely give consent to such measures - as these efforts could massively endanger the physical and psychological integrity and health of the respective people as well as their faith and trust in God.

(21) 2.5 Access to the ecclesiastical ordination ministries and pastoral vocations must not be excluded across the board for intersex and transsexual baptised and confirmed persons, but must be examined in each individual case.

⁷ An example of such an approach at the pinnacle of the exegetical debate is for example the recent document entitled *Che cosa è l'uomo?* published on the subject of homosexuality by the Pontifical Biblical Commission. Similarly, there is a need for a process of rethinking with regard to the issues of transgender and intersex identity in Biblical studies as well as in other areas of theology. Pontifical Biblical Commission: "Che cosa è l'uomo? Un itinerario di antropologia biblica", 2019, Nos.185-195. https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20190930_cosa-e-luomo_it.html.

⁸ Congregation for Catholic Education: "Male and Female He Created Them. Towards a path of dialogue on the question of gender theory in education", 02 February 2019, No.24, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20190202_maschio-e-femmina_ge.pdf.

Reasoning

(22) There are various reasons for the above recommendations, which should be examined in greater depth in further discussions, taking into account the following arguments in particular:

(23) Recent exegetical, theological-anthropological, moral-theological and pastoral-practical approaches offer argumentative foundations for reviewing the traditional, constricted gender anthropology in the Church's doctrine and fundamentally revising it in the light of the medical, biological and (neuro)psychological knowledge that is available today. Transgender and intersex identities are realities which the Church has to face and to reassess. Transgender and intersex individuals are part of God's good creation and share in the inviolable dignity of human beings created in God's image. Acknowledgement of the diversity of human ways of being, including in relation to gender identities, is part of a credible commitment to protecting this dignity, and must be the highest commandment guiding the Church's actions. This also refers to dealing with transgender and intersex people.

(24) When proclaiming the Kingdom of God, Jesus directly reached out to the marginalised of His time and went to them. The criterion of his attention was the boundless mercy and recognition that God shows to His creation - and not gender, social status or any social "standardisation". The more the Church becomes a place of recognition for trans and intersex people who want to live their Christian faith in the community of the Catholic Church, the more credible this standard of universal charity becomes. By her actions the Church becomes responsible when transgender and intersex faithful, as well as their friends and relatives, turn away from the Church as an institution in order to protect themselves. She will only become a space for life, for encounters and for protection for all faithful if she guides and supports them unreservedly, including their gender identity, in their life of faith and at the same time advocates concretely against all forms of discrimination and exclusion in Church and society.

(25) Pope Francis describes the core message of our faith in his Encyclical letter *Fratelli tutti* with the guiding principles of universal fraternity and social friendship. This message of love that transcends all boundaries is also a "utopia" (FT 180, 190) or a "dream" (FT 6,8 and frequent other mentions) in the Church that can and should guide actions: He challenges us to acknowledge our respective neighbours in their respective own way of being - beyond all boundaries and differences (cf. the interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan in FT, Chap. 2). This also includes to see and acknowledge the suffering of people who have been and are marginalised in the Church because of their gender identity, and to identify the causes of such marginalisation in the Church's doctrine, proclamation and practice as well.



Implementation text

Women in sacramental ministries - Perspectives for the universal church dialogue

Decision of the Synodal Path adopted by the Synodal Assembly on March 11, 2023

Introduction: Arguments in a universal church context

(1) In the context of the universal Church, theological arguments with regard to the participation of women in ministries and offices in the Church are presented and discussed in a controversial way. It is time to exchange insights in professionally qualified conversations at the international level constructively and with mutual respect. This concern is also expressed by voices in many local churches, which have been compiled in the working document for the continental stage of the worldwide synodal process under the title "'Enlarge the space for your tent' (Is 54:2)" (October 2022). There it is stated: "Almost all reports raise the issue of full and equal participation of women" (No. 64). The report by the Holy Land Bishop's Conference says: "In a Church where almost all decision-makers are men, there are few spaces where women can make their voices heard." (No. 61). Expectations for a new reflection on women's ministries are expressed in the South as well as in the North, in the East as well as in the West of the universal Church. Distinctions in regard to specific issues are called for - also with regard to the diaconate and the ordination of women to the priesthood (cf. No. 64). The implementation text presented here also follows this insight.

(2) At theological training centres in German-speaking countries - at faculties and institutes - there has been a solid theological, philosophical and social-scientific debate in recent decades on questions of gender justice and the participation of women in all areas of church life, taking ecumenical aspects into account. In recent years, important studies have been presented on the ministry of the deaconess and on the representation of Christ in the sacramental office. We see the significance of the Synodal Path of our German local Church for the universal Church essentially in taking up these arguments and considering concrete consequences in the sense of gender justice.

(3) The "sensus fidelium" of the whole people of God, and here in particular that of women, may continue to be given space. In the women's associations and in initiatives of the faithful at the grassroots level, for decades there have been many voices in every age group that speak out in favour of opening up all ministries to women as well. We therefore submit to the Synodal Assembly a statement on the sacramental diaconate of women and a statement on how to deal with the debate on women's admission to the entire sacramental ministry.

(4) Women's access to the sacramental offices must also be considered from the point of view of equality. The position of the Church's teaching authority is becoming less and less convincing worldwide. There are calls worldwide for an end to unequal treatment on the basis of gender, which contributes to the Catholic Church's credibility deficit.

Statements

Opening of the Sacramental Diaconate for women

(5) The discussion about women's admission to the diaconate has been conducted in the German local church on a broad theological and ecclesial basis since Vatican Council II. With the establishment of the permanent diaconate as an independent sacramental ministry with an ordination "unto a ministry of service" (LG 29), the diaconal profile of the Church has been sharpened. The diaconate is understood as a special representation of the diaconal Christ within the framework of the one sacramental salvific ministry of the Church. The biblical writings testify to the activity of deaconesses in the early congregations. The records of early councils document forms for ordaining women deacons in liturgical celebrations. In the Eastern Christian churches the office of deaconess has long been preserved and is receiving renewed attention today. In view of the strong presence of women in very many different diaconal areas in voluntary and full-time ministries, the question of opening a diaconal ministry for women has arisen in recent years. Given the ever increasing professionalisation of the various diaconal activities, the danger of a divergence between Caritas and pastoral work must be countered. Diaconal practice is a form of proclamation of the Gospel, and conversely, the proclamation of the Gospel needs to be related to experiences in diakonia.

(6) With the admission of women to the diaconate many associate the strengthening of the basic charitable activity of the Church, which the Second Vatican Council emphasised as the third essential element of the Church's identity, alongside the task of evangelisation through the proclamation of the Word of God and the liturgical celebration of the sacraments. The Church becomes the Church of Jesus Christ when she makes God's mercy concrete in the footsteps of the "poor Jesus" (LG 8).

Statement in the universal church context:

(7) The German bishops advocate that the regional bishops' conferences have a say in the appointment of members of papal or curial commissions to advise on questions of the diaconate to promote the positive opportunity presented by the diaconate of women. The results of work carried out by the commissions already established should be presented as soon as possible.

(8) In this context, the German bishops continue to advocate at the level of the universal Church and at the World Synod, the admission of women to the sacramental diaconate for all the particular Churches which desire this on the basis of their pastoral situation.

Statement in the context of the German local church:

(9) At the various levels of the German local church, in the dioceses and associations, in further training events for pastoral staff and in theological training at faculties and institutes, a deeper understanding of the diaconal nature of the Church is sought.

(10) In scientific-theological research, further research is being done on the diaconate from a sacramental-theological and diaconal-theological perspective. Special attention is to be paid to the diaconate of women, also in ecumenical conversation with the Orthodox churches and their experiences with ordained women deacons.

(11) Those responsible for the training and deployment of permanent deacons at the national level (Federal Working Group for the Permanent Diaconate) and, where possible, also in the dioceses, take note of the work of the 'Diaconate of Women' network in an appreciative way, enter into a lively exchange with those responsible for this network and integrate the experiences of the network's training courses into the local training of deacons in order to prepare a common training for a time when women will be admitted to the applicant circles.

Admission of women to the whole sacramental ministry

(12) With regard to the question of women's admission to the entire sacramental ministry, what was formulated as a mandate in the foundational text "Women in Ministries and Offices in the Church" (No. 1 with reference to No. 5.3) applies: "Therefore, the question must be addressed to the highest authority in the Church (Pope and Council) whether the teaching of *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* should be reviewed: In the service of evangelisation it is a matter of enabling the appropriate participation of women in preaching, in the sacramental representation of Christ and in the building up of the Church. Whether or not the doctrine of *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* binds the Church infallibly must then be examined and clarified bindingly at this level."

(13) The theological arguments presented so far in the present magisterial documents must therefore be subjected to a critical review in the context of the universal Church, in which the necessary scientific expertise must be obtained. In addition to the theological disciplines, philosophy as well as the cultural, historical and social sciences should also be involved in the process of reflection in view of hermeneutical pre-understanding. To this end, we want to integrate the pastoral considerations and theological research from the context of the German local church into the universal church discourse. We are encouraged to do this by the preparatory document for the Synod "Enlarge the space of your tent", which documents in No. 64 that this question is also being asked in "some areas" of the universal Church.

(14) There shall be established, as a form of continuing deliberation on the topics of the Synodal Path, a commission to deal exclusively with the subject of the sacramental ministry of persons of all sexes.

Reasoning

(15) Many theologians working in academia - not only in Germany - state that there is a considerable discrepancy between various doctrinal arguments for the exclusion of women from the

sacramental ministry on the one hand and the findings from current research and teaching in theology that speak against it on the other.

(16) In the history of the Church, there have been several occasions to reconsider a doctrinal position once taken. The realization of the historicity of the knowledge of a religious truth is familiar to theological hermeneutics. Only an exchange of insights while practising all methods and including different theological, spiritual and pastoral views can be convincing today in view of the complexity of the topic.

(17) The Church is credible when she bears witness to God's mercy as a diaconal Church. People of all genders stand alongside those who are in need, who face violence, who are marginalised because of gender, social or ethnic affiliation. Opening the sacramental diaconate to women will contribute to this credibility and raise the diaconal profile of the Church. People of all genders are equally called to diaconal ministry. It is precisely the discussion of opening the sacramental diaconal ministry for women that offers the opportunity for a fundamental process of reflection on the sacramental structure of the Church. Such a path can also lead to the shaping of new forms of ministries and offices on the way to a fraternal Church.

(18) Women in the sacramental diaconate strengthen the "gaze of life" in the diversity of our realities of life and in this way can have a healing effect on the church and society. The theological argumentation continued on the Synodal Path in Germany with regard to the participation of women in the sacramental ministry presupposes that the doctrinal texts available so far have not reached the degree of final bindingness - or that in view of new insights and cultural developments such a binding nature must be reconsidered and, if necessary, revised. In the controversy surrounding this question, it should be thought-provoking that a large number of believers in Christ refuse to accept the assumption that only a man can preside over the Eucharistic liturgy because of his natural resemblance to Jesus. It is the task of the Magisterium to clarify the binding nature of the letter "Ordinatio sacerdotalis". Only then can the "sensus fidelium" ("sense of faith of the faithful" in the sense of LG 12) be understood as a "consensus fidelium" which, according to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, cannot err.

(19) It is the biblically attested doctrine that unity with Christ Jesus is grounded in baptism, which would eliminate the distinction according to gender as well as according to the religion of origin and social status on the level of salvation (cf. Gal 3:28). This results in a distinction, guided by the Holy Spirit, between the divine ground of salvation and the earthly form of the Church that has become historical as the place of experiencing a redeemed existence. In this context, the soteriological intention, i.e. the intention to redeem people through the incarnation of God in Christ Jesus is the guiding principle of the reflection: in following the Crucified, the God-man Christ Jesus, people give their lives day after day for the proclamation of the Gospel, they strengthen the Easter hope, they heal in spiritual needs and exhort to a life of love even towards those who are hostile. In their official ministry, they represent Christ Jesus, in that they are called, despite all human weakness, to constantly point to his presence. With their comprehensive spiritual and theological education, they encourage all people through their official proclamation to believe in Christ Jesus, to be baptised, to encounter Jesus Christ in the celebration of the sacraments and to act in a diaconal way.