

# “Being the Church Together”

Statement by the German Bishops  
on Pastoral Renewal

August 1, 2015

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## Foreword

“Being the Church together” – this is what many people in our Church would like to see for the Church. They would like to see more communication, both within the Church, and between the Church and the outside world. They would like to see genuine sharing in the griefs and anxieties of people – particularly those on the margins – and broad participation in shaping the life of the Church. These were and are the expectations that have been communicated to us Bishops over the last few years – for example as part of the “Faith today” discussion process. They are a hallmark of our age, and a challenging one at that. We have considered them in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council texts, and summarised our thoughts in this Statement by the German Bishops entitled “Being the Church Together”.

“Being the Church Together” is the result of a long process. This text is the outcome of listening to what people told us in the archdioceses and dioceses, and in numerous different groups and committees, followed by a process of theological reflection on what we heard, plus a sharing of experiences and mutual learning. At this point I would like to expressly thank the Commission for Pastoral Care (III) and its President Dr. Franz-Josef Bode (Bishop of Osnabrück), and the Commission for Clergy, Consecrated Life and Laity (IV) and its President Dr. Felix Genn (Bishop of Münster), who put the various perspectives together and produced the text of “Being the Church Together”. The paper picks up and further develops the working hypotheses that the “Priests and Laity” Advisory Board of the Joint Conference of the German Bishops’ Conference and the Central Committee of German Catholics formulated in their text “The interplay of charisms and ministries in the priestly, prophetic

and royal People of God”<sup>1</sup> (June 15, 2012). It also applies some in-depth theological analysis to the basic concerns of the “Letter to Priests”<sup>2</sup> (September 25, 2012), and places the conclusions in a concrete pastoral context. “Being the Church Together” also incorporates the changes in the professional profiles of pastoral and parish workers that were included in the revision of the framework statutes<sup>3</sup>. It will not escape the reader’s attention that the present text comprises to a large extent a re-reading of key Council texts, most notably *Lumen gentium* and *Gaudium et spes*. I am pleased to say that through “Being the Church Together” we are able to recall the ideas put forward by the Second Vatican Council and bring them to life for the Church today.

“Being the Church Together” is designed to support those people in the various archdioceses and dioceses in Germany who find themselves on the path from a national Church to a Church of the People of God. This is why the text speaks so frequently of a shift in perspective and a change of mentality in the Church as a whole. It places fresh emphasis on the universal calling of all the baptised; all who are ordained or appointed by a Bishop accordingly are in its ministry. “Being the Church Together” does not deny the concerns of those who would again like to see more parish priests. Yet nor does “Being the Church Together” seek to recruit volunteers to now perform the tasks that were previously performed by full-time professionals in the Church. We were guided rather by the theological consideration that Jesus Christ became a human being in order to offer God’s sal-

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.zdk.de/veroeffentlichungen/erklarungen/detail/Das-Zusammenwirken-von-Charismen-und-Diensten-im-priesterlichen-prophetischen-und-koeniglichen-Volk-Gottes-203u/> [German only].

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse\\_downloads/presse/2012-166a-Anlage-Brief-Bischoefe-an-Priester.pdf](http://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse_downloads/presse/2012-166a-Anlage-Brief-Bischoefe-an-Priester.pdf) [German only].

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.dbk-shop.de/media/files\\_public/yuryyftlht/DBK\\_1196.pdf](http://www.dbk-shop.de/media/files_public/yuryyftlht/DBK_1196.pdf) [German only].

vation to all humankind. In the Church as a sacrament, i.e. as a sign and instrument of union with God and the unity of humankind, this mission of Jesus Christ is continued. Therefore we can no longer afford to delegate this “being the Church” to a small few, or restrict it to certain tasks and ministries in parishes. “Being the Church Together” invites the reader to take a dynamic view of Baptism and life as a Christian, and seeks to persuade the reader that the Church is a “Church in progress”. This Statement by the German Bishops is expressly intended as a “discussion paper”. It is designed to initiate and facilitate processes, and to seek debate – including debate in ecumenical contexts and with many other people who are seekers. Finally, it is intended to prompt dialogue, fully expecting responses and further development.

It goes without saying that a joint statement by the German Bishops cannot take account of the many regional and territorial peculiarities or the asynchronicities in the archdioceses, dioceses and parishes or pastoral care units. For some, “Being the Church Together” perhaps formulates something like a new vision; for others it will corroborate their experiences in the pastoral change process, while others will find in it important theological priorities and pastoral approaches for the path of renewal that they have already embarked on. The addressees of “Being the Church Together” are those responsible for pastoral restructuring in the archdioceses, dioceses and parishes, the heads of department and division in the Episcopal ordinariates and ordinariates, Church institutions, associations and communities, priests, deacons, parish and pastoral workers, chairpersons of councils, and all committed Christians. I invite all of you to ensure that “Being the Church Together” is broadly discussed and received.

“Being the Church Together” cannot and does not set out to solve all the theological and pastoral questions that affect us

today. The Bishops were concerned to keep the text short enough so that it could be easily read. We therefore agreed to further deliberate on supplementary and more in-depth issues in the responsible commissions, and to prepare appropriate working materials for this purpose. In this connection the Commission for Pastoral Care (III) will be preparing a brochure that will for instance include an in-depth theological analysis of the concept of charism, present best practice examples from the archdioceses and dioceses, and provide further suggestions for implementing “Being the Church Together”. The Commission for Clergy, Consecrated Life and Laity (IV) will further discuss the often conflictual issues of the priestly ministry and priestly life, and prepare a publication on this topic.

All those who are now holding the Statement by the German Bishops “Being the Church Together” in their hands are cordially invited to get actively involved in pastoral renewal of the Church in their own parishes and local communities, associations and groups, using the key theological ideas contained in our text. Please provide us Bishops with your feedback on how we can make this a success. You can do so either by speaking to your local contact person, or by getting in touch with the Secretariat of the German Bishops’ Conference.

I am confident that God’s blessing and many committed Christians will be accompanying us on the path of pastoral renewal.

Bonn/Munich, August 1, 2015

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Reinhard Cardinal Marx". The signature is written in a cursive style and is enclosed within a simple rectangular box.

Reinhard Cardinal Marx  
President, German Bishops’ Conference

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## 0. Introduction – We do not need to save the Church

“Christ is the Light of nations” (*LG* 1) – this programmatic declaration strikes the keynote of the Second Vatican Council’s Constitution on the Church. Almost 50 years after the solemn proclamation of *Lumen gentium* on 21 November 1964, Pope Francis opens his first apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* of 24 November 2013 with the sentence: “The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus” (*EG* 1). These two statements circumscribe the space in which we, the Church, stand. Jesus Christ – not the Church as such – is the Light of nations. Yet all who encounter Jesus are so filled with His Gospel that they must reach out to people to tell them what is burning in their hearts. Christ is the Light of all human beings. The fellowship of all those who allow themselves to be embraced and transformed by the Light of Jesus grows in the Holy Spirit. This is why the Church cannot but live and act “to the praise of His glorious grace” (*Eph* 1.6; see *EG* 267). The person and the life of Jesus Christ fill Her with light, and at the same time shine forth into the world far beyond Her. Moved by Christ and the life He led (see *Phil* 3.12), the Church is also called to praise the Father in Her prayers and actions, as He did (see *Jn* 15.8). Moved and enlightened by Christ, She must allow Herself to be renewed continuously, and on Her own initiative reach out to people, especially the marginalised. Her task will not be complete until Jesus Christ truly shines as the Light of all people, and leads them through the Holy Spirit to communion with each other and with God: “... one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all” (*Eph* 4.6).

This view of the Church provides enormous relief as well as a huge opportunity. We cannot make the Church, nor do we need

to save Her. But it should make us very uneasy if we as a Church shut ourselves off, if we only wish to preserve one specific form of the Church and Her life, instead of being truly moved by the “joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted” (*GS* 1). Fifty years after the Second Vatican Council, the German Bishops have therefore proposed a fresh reading of the Council texts in light of experiences and the challenges in the Church today. To read the Council texts with our ears and eyes of today, and our hearts and minds of today, we need to engage in a process of change. This is the only way we will be able to accept, internalise, realise and apply in our prayers and actions the outlook for “being the Church” that the Council created for us. Like any such process of change, this renewal will only take place by turning anew to Jesus Christ, and by meeting Him. What direction is He pointing the Church in today, through His Holy Spirit?

Quite a few believers are reproaching the Church for fundamental shortcomings. Some are complaining about the shortage of priests, of people taking Holy Communion on Sundays, or of volunteers for the councils and associations. Some are complaining about the Church’s loss of importance in society. Others are drawing attention to the lack of participation in the Church, as well as what they see as its lack of credibility, witness to the Gospel and responsiveness to people. We must not ignore these difficulties that many people are having, nor do we intend to. In the chapters that follow we will listen to the Council texts afresh, as we seek answers to the questions and challenges that we face in the Church today:

- (1) What vision of the Church does *Lumen gentium* provide us with when it speaks of the universal call in the Church?

- (2) How can the Church as the one Body of Christ with Her many charisms be experienced in the celebration of the Eucharist, bearing in mind also the shortage of priests?
- (3) How does a view of the Church as a sign and instrument of the union with God and the unity of humankind change the way we approach people today?
- (4) How can we draw strength for our mission as the Church from the common priesthood of all the baptised and the vital ministry of the priest?
- (5) How can we use the leadership capabilities that many women and men possess in ways that are productive for the Church and Her ministries?
- (6) How will we organise and manage parishes and the life of the local Church such that priests and the laity enrich and strengthen each other through their respective ministries and charisms?

## **I. Every human being is called to holiness**

The Church is changing. This is inevitable, because She is the People of God moving through time under changing societal conditions. She is the Body of Christ with its many different members beneath the one Head of Christ. And She is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who continually breathes fresh vitality into Her. One clear sign of the change we are experiencing as the Church is the wish expressed by many of the faithful to play a stronger role than in the past in helping shape and take decisions on the life of the Church. This desire manifests a renewed self-assurance among Christians, which includes a sense that all the baptised are called to be the Church and participate respon-

sibly in Her mission. According to the Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, this Christian sense of self is reflected in an awareness that all Christians belong to the People of God and are called to holiness. We see this emphasis on the dignity and responsibility of each baptised person as the key to understanding the Council texts in our situation in the Church today.

### **a) Every Christian is called through Baptism**

Before we speak of the differences between the various vocations, charisms, ministries and offices within the People of God, we must begin by calling to mind our common vocation as Christians through Baptism. This establishes a fundamental communion and commonality of all the baptised, created by God as equals and of equal status as participants in the development of the Church. The Second Vatican Council expressly emphasises Baptism as the sacramental bond of unity that already exists between all Christians (see *LG* 15; *UR* 22).

In Baptism, a person receives a pledge that their life is enveloped by God's steadfast love. Before we launch into action, God has already long since taken action that affects us, through Jesus in the Holy Spirit. The baptised person does not enter the congregation of Jesus Christ only when s/he takes on his or her first task within it. We would misunderstand Baptism if we were to construe it as a separate event taking place at a specific point in time, because we would then fail to recognise its dynamic unfolding in the life of the person baptised. What God has promised a person at Baptism for all time needs to be realised anew on a daily basis. This gives greater weight to renewal of the baptismal promise for instance at the Easter Vigil, the celebration of First Holy Communion, Confirmation and the Sacrament of Penance, as well as in any celebration of the Eucharist

and the deepening of personal faith. As a dynamic event, Baptism is also directed toward the apostolate, which is strengthened through Confirmation. A person's willingness to become engaged in the Church and the world, motivated by a sense of Christian mission, demonstrates that the Gospel has taken hold of a person. At the same time, when the Gospel is passed on it is always received in a new way. This dynamic understanding of what it means to be a Christian is what we are referring to when we say that all are called to holiness.

Admittedly, we must soberly take note of the fact that today, the word "holiness" will alienate quite a few people and make it difficult for them to share our understanding. Some will associate the word with "unworldliness" or "aloofness". Others will have great respect for the exemplary life led by great saints, but feel hopelessly out of their depth when it comes to relating "holiness" to their own lives. The Church's highly discerning canonisation procedure also leads Christians to avoid associating the attribute "holy" with their own person.

This and other problematic understandings of "holiness" have helped create a situation in which this visionary view of the Council regarding the "universal call to holiness" has yet to be integrated appropriately into theological or pastoral work here in Germany. The Council was seeking to correct a one-sided view of the Church, according to which aspiring to holiness – i.e. a life congruent with divinity – seemed to be reserved for religious and priests. The Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* contrasts this with the universal call of all Christians to holiness, right from the outset and particularly in the second and fifth chapters. It speaks expressly of a calling in particular of the laity in the Church, whom it encourages to exercise and develop the spiritual authority conferred on them in faith through Baptism and Confirmation.

Presumably the shortcomings currently being experienced in the Church are necessary in order to rediscover the central truth: Through Baptism and Confirmation, every Christian is called to continuously unfold the holy in his or her life, and thus help shape the world and the Church in the spirit of Jesus Christ. This importance and responsibility of each and every Christian also applies irrespective of the number of priests and full-time employees of the Church.

## **b) Jesus Christ sanctifies us**

The central word for Church used in the New Testament – *ecclesia* – articulates the awareness of the first Christians of having been called and sanctified by Jesus Christ as the congregation of the baptised. Just as the people of Israel had seen themselves as the people chosen and called by God, the Church too sees itself as the congregation “chosen” and “called out” by God. In our times, as faith is losing its automatic place within society and Christians are coming to see themselves as a minority of which questions are being asked, this view is gaining fresh plausibility.

The *First Letter of Peter* is already addressed to the “exiles [...] chosen” (see 1.1), and thus to Christians who on account of the values they uphold are causing offence in their environment. The Apostle Paul addresses his *Letter to the Romans* to those “who are called to be saints” (1.7). As he sees it, the Church as a whole is in a profound sense the congregation of those called to be saints. Prior to any human effort whatsoever, the Church’s holiness has been bestowed upon Her sacramentally. The universal call to holiness is grounded in the Church’s rootedness in Christ as the founding sacrament. This is the source of the Church’s sacramentality. This sacramentality is realised for Christians as participation in Jesus Christ and his prophetic,

priestly and royal office through Baptism and the other sacraments, and is renewed each time Holy Communion is taken.

In the call to holiness, Holy God allows us to participate in His Holiness. Biblically speaking, God is *the* Holy One (see *Is* 1.4; 5.19, and frequently elsewhere). Only by returning to and re-connecting with Him can human beings be holy and be called holy. The God of Israel revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. As “the Holy One of God” (*Jn* 6.69), He is the measure of all human striving toward holiness (see *Eph* 4.13–15). When Christians seek to realise God’s sanctification through their lives, they do not achieve this by observing precisely a large number of particular imperatives; they do so through a growing orientation toward the person of Jesus Christ. Christ’s Holiness is realised primarily through love, and works in two directions: by giving top priority to God’s Will in one’s own life, and by living in communion with one’s sisters and brothers. Without this union of the love of God and love of our fellow human beings in our lives, and the longing to realise it more and more, there can be no holiness in our lives as Christians. At the same time, however, this desire is combined with unwavering trust in God’s compassion and willingness to continuously forgive.

We must certainly take seriously any objections to a pastoral approach based on the universal call to holiness. These objections are important because they draw attention to possible overly narrow understandings and inappropriate forms of “holiness” such as moralism, unworldliness or fanaticism, which must be avoided and overcome. The call to holiness is a gift, a response to a call of God, and one which must therefore be clearly distinguished from merit or wrongly understood heroism. Our task is to accept this gift with gratitude, and to develop that which manifests our calling as individuals in our personalities and the lives we lead.

### c) **Holiness is manifested in the relationships in our lives**

Holiness is the *one* basic calling of every baptised individual, which we realise in the various ways we lead our lives. Consequently, holiness for the clergy is no different from holiness for the laity. Any two-tiered ethics is thus obsolete. Priests and the laity should and must work together; neither can go their own way without the other or on the other's behalf. Unlike a clericalism or wrongly understood salvific individualism, the gift of holiness is realised only in communion with our sisters and brothers and in solidarity with all human beings.

This does preclude the response to the universal call to holiness being manifested in very different personal vocations of individual Christians. The different spiritualities of religious orders demonstrate the diversity of ways in which Christians past and present have practiced the gift and the acceptance of holiness. Associations, spiritual communities and Church-based movements seek each in their own way to inject vitality into the shared faith in Jesus Christ, and serve as a continuous reminder to the Church that God's Spirit sometimes leads people in surprising directions that cannot be planned.

There are as many callings and ways to holiness as there are human beings. Any human being leading any kind of Christian life can become holy at any age. The words of the Apostle Paul in the Letter to the Romans "he who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law" (*Rom* 13.8) apply to everyone, whether they are Christians or non-Christians. Of course, holiness is not a status that a person holds once and for all time. It is a lifetime project that is never finished. Thus we see a paradox: You are holy, because you wish to become so. Of all people, the great saints of the Church were always also aware of their own sinfulness. Ge-

nuine holiness goes hand in hand with humility. Humility does not mean bowing down in servility or being subservient to others. It means inner truthfulness and a realistic self-assessment. Dedicating oneself to the “lifetime project of holiness” presupposes a willingness to make God’s Will the supreme priority in one’s life, and to embark on the spiritual development of one’s personality and processes of maturation in faith.

Since human holiness is rooted in the Holiness of God, who has turned toward the human person in Jesus Christ to the very end, holiness also affects interpersonal relationships. In successful human relationships, there can be an inkling that Holy God is fellowship per se. Christian spirituality is not about experiencing ourselves in an individualistic way; it is a profoundly communal and social happening. On the other hand, relationships between people would remain incomplete if they were to deny and ignore the relationship that God offers to human beings. Interpersonal love and solidarity are always profoundly intertwined with God’s love of the human person and the human person’s love of God.

The more that individuals recognise and accept their call to holiness, the more the Church will come into Her own and realise Her own mission. The call to holiness thus generates an inherent momentum to join in building up the Body of Christ, in order to be “in Christ [...] a sign and an instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (*LG 1*).

## 2. The many charisms are the abundance of the Church

A pastoral approach designed to serve the universal call to holiness will embrace the biblical message of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that God will not allow His Church to be without (see *1 Cor* 12–14; *2 Cor* 9.8,11). The baptised and their charisms are the real abundance of the Church. Discovering these charisms, developing them, and recognising and shaping the space in which they can unfold positively and support our mission in the Church and the secular world is the key task of this pastoral approach.

This is reflected in a process of rethinking the traditional status of the “volunteer” – a process that is already beginning, and is meeting with a highly positive response in parishes. Increasingly, people do not wish to be recruited and assigned as volunteers for prescribed tasks. On the contrary – what they do want to do is discover, contribute and develop their personal gifts. Changing the way we think from a needs-based to a resource-based approach might allow entirely new manifestations of the life of the Church to emerge. Because they come from the gifts of the Holy Spirit, who is working through the faithful, in many cases unforeseeable surprises will be made possible. This is already starting to become evident in some new Church movements, in spiritual communities, and in a number of initiatives of parishes and associations.

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## a) The charisms are more than our natural talents

In the lists of charisms in the Pauline epistles (see *1 Cor* 12.8–10, 28–30; *Rom* 12.6–8), very different gifts and tasks within a community are mentioned: teaching, comforting, acts of mercy, prophesying, leading, healing, strength of faith etc. Here, St Paul does not distinguish between tasks that are allocated to an office within the Church, and skills that a person acquires through vocational training, or activities that are performed on a voluntary basis. What all the offices, ministries and tasks mentioned by St Paul have in common is that they involve charisms.

In a general sense a charism is a gift bestowed on an individual human being: something that a person does not acquire through training or practice and hard work, but already possesses before all that. However, if a gift of this kind is to develop into a charism then it needs a trigger. The charisms are given and brought forth by the working of the Holy Spirit. They are sparked off in the first instance by encounter with Jesus Christ and His Gospel. This is not always a smooth process or one which the individual in question readily accepts. Sometimes a person feels overtaxed by a charism that has been awoken in them. In other words, charisms are not simply identical to the natural aptitudes of a human being. They are a sign and a consummation of evangelisation.

Spiritual gifts can only become fully effective as charisms in the life of the Church if and when they become the subject of expression of a human being who has heard the Gospel, has personally accepted it and wishes to respond. In other words, they do not possess the structure of a monologue. They are designed to bring about a relationship and dialogue between God and the individual, between the individual and other believers,

indeed, between the entire “Body of the Church” and God. As such, they are always of the nature of a response, and unfold concretely and in manifold ways the Church’s perpetual praise and everlasting thanks to God the Father through the Son and his Gospel, together with the Holy Spirit (see *Eph* 3.20 f.).

One crucial aspect of the charisms is that they are a gift to the Church. No one has earned them or might receive them as a reward, or pride themselves in them. The way in which they develop is the free and at the same time necessary way in which the baptised and confirmed respond to their encounter with the Gospel and Christ’s grace. The charisms thus demonstrate that, and how, baptised and confirmed individuals live in a genuine and vital relationship with God and at the same time in manifold relationships with their fellow human beings. Just as the charisms manifest praise and thanks to God in the individual’s relationship with God, in the individual’s relationships with his or her fellow human beings they also bring forth urges to provide help in solidarity that awaken faith and create union.

The authenticity of a charism is demonstrated by its serving, giving, benevolent and supportive nature. “A sure sign of the authenticity of a charism is its ecclesial character, its ability to be integrated harmoniously into the life of God’s holy and faithful people for the good of all” (*EG* 130). The Apostle Paul puts it succinctly: The Holy Spirit is manifested by the very way in which His working in and with each individual benefits others (see *1 Cor* 12.7). The charisms are thus entirely personal and at the same time ecclesial ways in which baptised, confirmed and sanctified individuals with a mission pass on their evangelisation.

However, anyone who abuses their charism in order to place themselves above others or to consider themselves more important than others does great damage to the Church. This may not only

upset the spiritual harmony in the life of the Church, it can also jeopardise Her unity. This often leads to polarisation. Factions arise that seek to discredit each other and put up barriers, which ultimately erodes their unity or in the worst case scenario revokes it entirely.

When the charisms become productive as spiritual gifts, however, they trigger movement in two directions: They *send out* their bearers to others in order to minister to them, and thus can enrich the individuals concerned. They do not set their bearers apart from others as better or of higher status. Secondly they enable the Church to *assemble* anew as the congregation of the many and the varied, who are then all able to experience joyfully the one shared Spirit of God and His working.

Such forms of mission and assembly are therefore never final, and are certainly not exclusive. They bring Christians together again in new ways. No single community, no single parish, no single diocese, indeed not even the entire Church spread across the world today represents exhaustively the missions and assemblies set in motion continuously by the working of the Holy Spirit. Until the Lord returns, no human being can therefore ever be excluded from the fact that the Lord has sent His followers to them, and wishes to make those who are far away from Him come close, with the help of the spiritual charisms. We owe the Gospel to every human being, indeed to every creature (see *Mk* 16.15).

## **b) Sunday Eucharist unites the parish**

The more the many different charisms affect the life of a parish and Church community, the more clearly the question arises as to the cohesion of these manifold charismatic manifestations.

What is the unity of charisms based on, and how can this unity be preserved, experienced and regained anew in specific cases?

St Paul interprets the diversity and unity of the charisms using the image of the body and its many members (see *1 Cor* 12.12–31). “The eye cannot say to the hand: I have no need of you, nor again the head to the feet: I have no need of you” (*1 Cor* 12.21). The charisms thus need each other because they are mutually complementary. The more insignificant a charism is assumed to be, the more vital it is for others. This unity arises from the working of the Holy Spirit in the many members of the Church and in the one Body.

When St Paul speaks of the “Body”, however, this is more than an allegory. It also refers to the fact that Christ loved the Church and sacrificed Himself for Her. Because He saved Her, She is His body. The Church experiences and consummates this inseparable link again and again in the mystery of the Eucharist. This is why the whole Church continuously celebrates the Eucharist – because She comes forth in Her entirety from the death and resurrection of the Lord. Through the Eucharist, even the smallest gathering enters into sacramental unity with the local Church and with the universal Church, and participates in the indissoluble union of the Church with the Lord.

This is why the Eucharist is the celebration in which the unity of the many different charisms in the Church is deepened anew time and time again sacramentally. “By the sacraments, especially holy Eucharist, that charity toward God and man [...] is communicated and nourished” ... “Thus every layman, in virtue of the very gifts bestowed upon him, is at the same time a witness and the living instrument of the mission of the Church itself ‘according to the measure of Christ’s bestowal’ (*Eph* 4.7)” (*LG* 33). Through the Eucharist, the path of each individual Christian’s personal calling becomes part of the path shared

with the other faithful and with the entire Church. No one can follow the path of faith alone. No one can discover and develop their charisms without being truly part of the union with others. Ultimately, no one can preserve and fully realise the gift of their baptism, and thus reach the consummated Kingdom of God, alone.

This is why the Church incessantly invites all the baptised to join others in celebrating the Eucharist, and encourages them to take this celebration personally to heart. She cannot and must not stop celebrating the Eucharist, particularly on the Lord's Day, until the Lord returns. Sundays and the gathering of the Church on this day for the Eucharist thus also establishes a universal responsibility for the life of the Church. All are invited to participate actively in making it easier and easier for people to experience the presence of the Lord in the celebration of the Eucharist, and enabling His presence to shine out into the world.

In order that this may succeed, we need to continuously review and renew the concrete ways in which the Eucharist is celebrated. Currently this concerns above all the questions of where, how often and in what forms Sunday Eucharist should be celebrated in the enlarged pastoral spaces. Not infrequently, parishes struggle with these issues when it proves impossible to meet all expectations due to the shortage of priests. When times, places, distances and established rhythms for Sunday Eucharist keep changing, many of the faithful experience profound fear of loss and uncertainty as to what the future will bring, indeed, even as to the future of the entire Church.

We must not simply underestimate or dismiss such anxiety and insecurity. On the contrary, we must patiently join together to think about how we can cautiously move forward and overcome

these challenges. The following points are particularly important in this context: How can we succeed in ensuring that

- people are able to *celebrate* Sunday Eucharist as a gathering of many – with their various cultural backgrounds?
- Sunday Eucharist really is a part of the life of each parish, and unites the different communities and congregations within the parish together with their many charisms?
- the dwindling numbers of priests also experience the Sunday Eucharist as the highlight of their priestly work, and celebrate it gladly and with personal commitment?

If we take these concerns seriously, then presumably we will identify more and more central locations that are well situated, and that can be reached relatively easily by large numbers of people, meaning also that the time required for attending meets the needs of as many people as possible. Certainly it will not be possible to meet everyone's expectations. Furthermore, the established and well-loved traditions of earlier situations in which the Church was a popular institution will have to change, and open up to further development. Yet this process of further development of the Sunday Eucharist is very closely linked to the renewal of the life of the Church as a whole.

The Church can never forego celebration of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the supreme and most important act, into which all other manifestations of the life of the Church can and should flow in praise of God. On Sundays, the Eucharist is utterly irreplaceable. Yet here in Germany, more and more we are seeing diaspora situations in which the faithful are barely able any longer to attend Sunday Eucharist. In such cases it is a good thing that the faithful meet to pray in cases where there would otherwise be no religious service at all. Our thanks to all those

women and men who are ensuring that God's praises are continuing to be heard in churches where no priest is available locally.

Together we must strike a balance between the local community that wishes to worship, and Sunday Eucharist held in a centrally located Church. Realising the unity of the Church will always be dependent on the laity and the priesthood both looking forward to celebrating the Lord's Eucharist together, especially on Sundays, with each performing their various roles and tasks.

### **c) We trust in the charisms of all the faithful**

So far it has become abundantly clear that no kind of unity within the Church can be based on mutual exclusion; it must come forth from mutual relationships. Relationships enable people with different backgrounds to gain their identity as part of the Church, and maintain their vitality. Maintaining rigid distinctions, on the other hand, leads to inflexibility and impoverishes everyone. This applies particularly to the relationship between priests and the laity, and to the interplay between the various offices, ministries and tasks within the Church.

Here in Germany we no longer have enough priests to maintain the structure of the Church as a popular institution that we had come to know and love. This is why some would like the Church to change the rules of admission for sacramental consecration. Believers who are no longer able to feel at home in the new pastoral structures of the Church as they once did, are accusing the Bishops of not really taking their distress seriously. Other conflicts can arise if this distress leads to the emergence of surrogate local liturgical forms and a life within the parish that is detached from the sacramental life of the Church, where those involved believe they can do without union with a

priest. Further disappointments arise where priests disregard the charisms of the laity.

In these situations and others like them, the clergy can easily develop a sense of suspicion and mistrust of the laity, and vice versa. Relationships of competition, power struggles and attempts by both sides to contain the other can place laypersons and priests in situations of bitter conflict, stultify people by leaving them isolated, and rob the Church's witness of its credibility.

Current situations of deadlock can be resolved if we respond to the call to holiness through Baptism that we all share. The sacraments of becoming a Christian and a member of the Church as the Body of Christ are the foundation for all of us to participate equally in Christ. They enable us all to share the same dignity in bearing the name of Christ truthfully, each with his or her own different responsibility for the Church's mission, albeit a responsibility that we can only develop together.

To put this another way we can say that for the faithful, being the Church is something that is established and unfolded through the Word of God and the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist. This ecclesial being of the entire People of God is in an exclusive sense a gift of the Lord, who has chosen the Church and taken Her for himself in love, like a bride. As a gift of God, this ecclesial being of the baptised and confirmed thus cannot be surpassed, not even through the sacrament of Holy Orders.

Against this background, everyone in the Church is invited to place a new trust in the charisms of each and every Christian person. This will allow a new diversity that will be manifested in the many offices, ministries and vocations. It is this trust and confidence that enables cooperation in mutual respect for the different gifts and tasks. Priests and the full-time employees of

the Church in particular can only perform their duties properly if they encourage all the faithful to each contribute to the life of the Church through their own personal charisms.

### **3. Jesus Christ is made manifest in the life of the Church**

In a Church that derives its vitality from trust in the charisms of all the faithful, a fixation on the question as to what a priest is “entitled to do” or what a layperson is “not entitled to do” will not take us any further. We need to ask the much more radical questions as to what a Church with Her many ministries and charisms is there for, and whom She serves. Anyone reading *Lumen gentium* with the universal call to holiness in mind is led to change their perspective. The very structure of *Lumen gentium* indicates this change in outlook. The point of departure for the ideas it contains is no longer the office, nor even the structure of clergy and laity, it is the entire Church as the salvific sacrament of Jesus Christ in the world. What is shared takes precedence over what distinguishes: We first of all hear about the mystery of the Church as the People of God. Only then do we go on to read the chapters about the hierarchical structure of the Church and the laity.

Consequently, the Church cannot be about competition or the competence of clergy on the one hand, and laypersons on the other. On the contrary, we must devote our efforts to establishing and developing an understanding of the Church that is theologically and spiritually well founded. What we need are visions of the Church that not only encompass both the clergy and the laity, and relate them to each other, but also visions that relate the Church to the world in which She lives. And we need visions of the Church that can answer particularly the questions

concerning authority, responsibility, self-reliance and membership.

### a) **The Church comes forth from the love of God**

“ [...] 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). Through this pointed statement, *Lumen gentium* identifies in the very first paragraph the entire frame of reference in which the Church is placed. As the fundamental sacrament that Jesus Christ manifests through His life path, the Church exists because God became a human being in Jesus of Nazareth. The life and the actions of the Church should continue Jesus’ life’s work, which was to offer all human beings union with God. By following Jesus Christ, the Church will therefore continue to unfold and grow until reaching her eschatological consummation in the union of God with the whole of humankind.

A Church that, as described in the first section of *Lumen gentium*, exists thanks to the incarnation of the Son and therefore thanks to the love of the Father for His creation, the world and all human beings, thus also has its own path mapped out for it as a result. Jesus’ incarnation begins with His birth to His mother Mary, and continues along a path of lifelong maturation and growth (see *Lk* 2.52). As He proceeds down that path, Jesus allows Himself to be touched more and more by the fate of the people, all the people, He comes across. Through the path He takes right up to His death on the Cross, He opens up for them the possibility of communion with His Father. By creating this possibility and keeping it open, He becomes what He is: the link between God and every single human being, no matter how

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far away they may be. This is so today and will remain so as long as history continues. He was in any case raised not alone, but as “the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (*1 Cor* 15.20).

If we construe Jesus’ path from His birth to His death on the cross and His resurrection as “becoming human”, then logically speaking this process of maturation shapes all those who are baptised into Him (see *Rom* 6.3–11). The baptised are then not just the group that transmits a message or a teaching. In the Church, what is continued is rather that which was introduced into history and became reality in Jesus Christ, and which has opened history to the coming consummation. Jesus’ incarnation and path through life are communicated in the Gospel, and given to us as a tangible gift in the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. His message becomes credible when the baptised allow their hearts to be touched by what they have heard, and when the Gospel comes about and can be experienced in and through them. In other words, the Church exists thanks to the incarnation of Jesus from His birth to His death on the cross, His resurrection, His spiritual mission and His witnesses, and the apostles. And She is growing, where the message of the Gospel is coming to pass anew in those who hear it. The Church develops and grows in a process of reception and transmission.

The Council Fathers use many images to express this process: The Church is “a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (*LG* 4), She is receptive to “the entire world” becoming “the people of God” (*LG* 17). She is the “temple of the Holy Spirit” that dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful (see *LG* 4); and She is Herself the “Mystical Body of Christ”, the visible community of the many “enriched with heavenly things” (*LG* 8). Most importantly, these images of the Church that *Lumen gentium* draws from Holy Scripture and tradition, and focuses fresh attention on, are hu-

man images, images of relationships, images of love (see *LG* 6): The Church is the “flock”, whose shepherd is Christ Himself (see *Jn* 10.11); She is “our mother” (see *Gal* 4.26), and the “bride” that Christ loves and to whom He has given Himself (see *Eph* 5.26 and *Rev* 21.2). These images express the interaction between, indeed the merging of, the divine and the human in the Church’s process of unfolding. This is why comparing the incarnation of Jesus and the path of the Church is “no weak analogy” (see *LG* 8). Whoever comes to the faith and is baptised becomes themselves a sanctuary of God, a member of the Body of Christ, the bride of Christ the bridegroom, and thus is able to proclaim God’s magnificent acts from their own experience. Christ’s incarnation, His becoming human, is thus consummated through human beings becoming Christ-like and through the completion of the Body of Christ.

## **b) The Church goes out to all human beings filled with confidence**

As She proceeds along Her path and performs Her ministry, the Church that comes forth from God’s love cannot but orient Herself entirely toward Jesus Christ, His person and His works. Becoming human in the aforementioned sense of the path and the works of Jesus as self-giving for all will therefore always be the way of the Church – until Her consummation (see *LG* 8). And in this sense “[...] man is the primary route that the Church must travel in fulfilling Her mission” (*RH* 14). Union with Christ also leads the Church down a path along which She must go out to all human beings and open Herself to all that is human: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ” (*GS* 1). The profound analogy and connection

between Christ, His incarnation and the Church is inconsistent with any interest in creating and maintaining boundaries with other people and societies, i.e. with the so-called “world”. Consequently, despite all the differences between the Church and the world it will never be possible to draw a sharp or even definitive boundary between the two. The Church is the “sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (*LG* 1); the Church wishes to facilitate, and enter into, relationships. This does not rule out the possibility that She will also discover resistance or sinister elements in the world or within Herself. But even where She is compelled to engage critically with a situation or a behaviour in the interests of the Gospel, She will seek not to divide or exclude, but to distinguish – in order to enable communion. The trust that enables the Church to go out to all human beings and meet them with great respect is not a naive kind of trust; it is a trust grounded in Christ and His incarnation itself.

The Council also sees this central point of the analogy between Christ’s becoming human and the way of the Church as being the place of the laity. The interdependence of the Church and the world captures the spirit of the laity’s vocation within the Church and for the world (see *LG* 31). The life of the laity within society is the Church’s space for the unfolding of the Gospel. In other words, evangelisation is not something that the Church carries out and introduces into the “world” as if it were coming from outside. In actual fact, through the baptised and confirmed faithful the Church exists as a presence *in* the world (see *ibid.*).

### c) **We remain a Church in progress**

The Church can also obscure its own origin in the love of God. We must concede that there are also elements within the Church that are not in conformity with the Gospel, and that compromise the life of the Church for all. This is why the Church “always follows the way of penance and renewal” (*LG* 8). Yet whenever the necessary penance and renewal is lacking, the life of the Church is rocked.

The Church’s pilgrimage includes Her becoming more and more what was originally bestowed on Her; She has yet to be consummated. This eschatological view of the Church has several practical consequences. These include the orientation toward ecumenism that the Council took in hand. There are therefore “many elements of sanctification and of truth” that “as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, are forces impelling toward catholic unity”, even though they remain “outside its [the Catholic Church’s] visible structure” (*LG* 8). Here the Council envisages affiliations to the Church that are outside the Church led by the Pope and the Bishops. This makes ecumenism a vitally important concern of the Church, for the sake of the open and growing catholicity. And furthermore, the Council draws attention to the path of poverty that Jesus himself followed, and along which the Church is still a learning Church. The Church must continuously renew its efforts to proclaim the Gospel like Jesus Christ “even by its own example, humility and self-sacrifice” (*LG* 8), and above all to be close to those who are poor and afflicted. Consequently, as the Church we remain in progress not only in a purely temporal sense; as the Church we are also on the move in a continuous process of becoming, growing and maturing as we follow Jesus Christ. This is why a path of renewal in the Church also includes us allowing ourselves, en-

couraged by God's call, to take some risks – even if that means we might make some mistakes.

## **4. The Church is the priestly People of God**

The Church is primarily not an institutionally tangible Church of priests and full-time professionals who then use the baptised to perform further tasks. She is the sacrament in Christ that makes His life and His self-sacrifice present. Every believer participates in this sacramental being of the Church. God's spirit fills the entire Body of the Church, and moves the baptised to give themselves and minister to each other and the world. This devotion and mission of the entire People of God, which Christ makes present in His devotion, is what we mean when we speak of the common priesthood of all the baptised.

### **a) The priestly dignity of all the baptised is unsurpassable**

The common priesthood of all the baptised thus arises from the sacramentality of the entire Church. It makes clear that Christ Himself lives in the midst of His People. Thus it is a priestly, royal and prophetic people that through their life bear witness to and proclaim what God's promises to the world are: "Christ the Lord, the high priest, chosen from among men (see *Heb* 5.1–5), has made us 'a kingdom, priests to His God and Father' (see *Rev* 1.6; 5.9–10). The baptised, by regeneration and anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ [.....and] declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light

(see *1 Pet* 2.4–10)” (*LG* 10). The priestly reality of the People of God is therefore a collective attribute of the faithful as a body rather than an attribute merely of individual believers; it describes the being of the entire People of God, which points to Christ and bears witness to Him (see also *SC* 14, 48; *LG* 9, 10, 26, 34; *AA* 3; *AG* 15; *PO* 2).

Through Baptism, Christians participate in Christ’s priesthood and thus in the common priesthood of the entire People of God. Consequently, the baptised are not mandated to build the Body of Christ at some later point in time or in some separate and special way. The priestly dignity of all the baptised cannot be increased or surpassed either by offices or ministries or appointments of individual Christians. This participation in the priesthood of Christ is not owned by anyone. In fact it is realised – as long as the Church remains in progress – on a path of growth, along which a congregation of baptised and confirmed Christians must also be accompanied and supported.

The more consciously the faithful follow this path of Christ, the more their gifts and charisms manifest the special mission of the individual to build up the Body of Christ in this world. In this respect, the gifts and charisms realise the common priesthood of all the baptised in vital and manifold individual ways. It is therefore evident that we cannot speak of specific roles and tasks in the Church in isolation from each other. The reality of the bodily union created in Christ opens up the space for the development of different ministries. These special roles, tasks, ministries and charisms are the manifestation of the sacramental reality in Christ. The logic of how they fit together corresponds to the Body-of-Christ-structure of the Church, and unfolds in reciprocal ministry and shared witness in the world. The gifts, ministries and tasks should, after all, fit together in a way that reflects “the stature of the fullness of Christ” (*Eph* 4.13).

Based on this understanding of the mutually complementary and supportive nature of the various ministries and charisms within the one Body of the Church, it becomes possible to re-think certain specific questions and challenges of Church life. First of all, the relationships between all the members of the People of God need to be construed in terms that are beyond the logic of power or hierarchy. Where the relationship for instance between priests and laypersons or between men and women is shaped by power, this contradicts the basic theology of relationships within the Church, which is rooted in the sacramentality of the Church. The Church is therefore not about increasing power or competence. The Church is about facilitating the full realisation of the dignity of Baptism, which is nourished by the sacraments and proclamation. Our understanding of the sacramental priestly ministry therefore also needs to be based entirely on ministry to the People of God. Among the People of God, the differences that exist enable mutual recognition of the various capabilities. Without establishing hierarchies, the entire Church should demonstrate to all by example that the various genders, offices and ministries and age groups do not debase or humble each other in order to be fully themselves.

## **b) The priestly ministry is essential to the life of the Church**

This new, deeper perspective on the common priesthood of all the baptised at the same time helps us to understand the nature of the priestly ministry in a more appropriate way. The priestly ministry is designed to ensure that all the baptised come to recognise and love Christ more and more deeply, and in doing so, find their way more and more deeply into the common priestly calling of all the baptised, and live their lives on that basis.

The priestly ministry is thus at the same time ministry to the unity of the People of God. The priest is responsible for ensuring that the standard of the Gospel and the faith of the Church is applied and safeguarded – and where necessary for making corrections. The ordained priest and his official sacramental actions are a manifestation of the fact that God is loyal and that Christ Himself – His real, concrete, personal and authentic Self – is present in the Church. However, since there is a difference between the ministry and the minister, it is also evident that an individual priest will only be credible if he lives his existence in and through the presence of Christ. Ultimately, spiritual authority derives its strength and fruitfulness from inner communion with the Lord, from “He who abides in me, and I in Him” (see *Jn* 15.5). At the same time, this means that the ordained official is tasked to help all believers to find an inner and personal communion with Jesus themselves. This is important for individual believers because for them too, spiritual authority – meaning the strength to be spiritually fruitful – also grows through this personal dimension. The priest therefore has the lofty task of facilitating the continued unfolding of the priesthood of all believers. This succeeds when the faithful consciously and actively participate in the priestly, prophetic and royal office of Jesus Christ (see *AA* 2, 10; *AG* 15). At the same time, all believers as a result experience a growing sense of belonging to the entire Church, and the entire People of God.

This is why the Council does not seek to describe the relationship between the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood in terms of “less and more”, or on the level of possible competition. It seeks to include them in the common path of the People of God: “[...] the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless inter-related: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ” (*LG* 10). The most important thing

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is what they have in common, namely their participation in the priesthood of Jesus Christ. They belong together. “In the Church there is a diversity of ministry, but a oneness of mission” (*AA* 2). The difference that the Second Vatican Council is referring to here does not mean that a priest would be able to claim higher spiritual status as a Christian, because all the faithful participate in the priesthood of Jesus Christ through Baptism.

The reference to difference “in essence, and not only in degree” requires explanation. The spiritual office is not founded on an increase in the degree of Christianness, even though the minister is to a certain extent called on to meet certain demands in his life as a Christian. It is not based on an increase “in degree”, see *LG* 10, 28; *PO* 2). It is founded (“in essence”) in something different. The ministerial priest is “acting in the person of Christ”, i.e. in His name and with His authority, e.g. when performing the celebration of the Eucharist and the other actions reserved for the priest. The spiritual authority conferred on the priest through ordination is thus an authorisation to minister to the faithful. Priests exercise this ministry through proclamation, worship and pastoral leadership (see *LG* 28 and *CCC* 1591 f.). By doing so, they serve the union of all members of the Body of Christ with each other and with Jesus Christ.

### **c) We need a change in mentality**

If the view outlined here leads us as the Church to the path of common growth and maturation to the glory of Christ and the Father, and of ministry to our fellow human beings, then it follows that we need a “change in mentality”, as Pope Benedict XVI demanded of us. Christ’s faithful will then no longer be there simply to do the bidding of the clergy; they will be “co-responsible for what the Church is and what actions She takes”

(*Opening Address to the Pastoral Convention of the Diocese of Rome*, May 26, 2009). It certainly will not be easy to move beyond understandings of roles whose emergence is part of our history and culture. Yet if we trust in God's Spirit, change will be possible: "Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (*Is* 43.19). In some dioceses, parishes, communities and movements – and not only in Germany, but also in other parts of the Catholic Church – new lessons are being learned concerning how the ministries and charisms can be reconfigured in complementary and fruitful ways for the life of the Church. Mindful of their mutual dependency, the only way for priests and laypersons, women and men alike, to fulfil the Church's mission, bear witness to the Gospel and invite the Lord to make His love present by serving others, is to do so together.

Here we should not overlook the fact that under the conditions which prevail in a society based on an advanced specialisation and division of labour, a tendency toward professionalisation will take effect. It is a good thing that professional theologians and other experts enable the Church to participate in the highly specific systems present in the various spheres of our society. Like society at large, the Church must adopt a critical approach and counteract any tendencies toward incapacitation or alienation in the relationships between full-time professionals and volunteers which this may entail. Priests, deacons, pastoral workers and parish workers will work professionally when they foster participation by many, and reduce to a small number those to whom they delegate. On the one hand, full-time professional staff will enable the Church to engage professionally as they minister to society. On the other hand, they will be there to develop the gifts and charisms of baptised women and men for building the Body of Christ.

Every office and every level of office will also remain an integral part of the entire proclamation and action of the Church. Ultimately, offices are only supportive when they are a part of the community. Isolation would therefore not be in keeping with the personal, cooperative and community-based nature of office. The lessons learned by the World Church give depth to this: Where bishops, priests and deacons practice and help develop a culture of trust, where they give space to the engagement of the faithful and allow fresh impetus to be provided, a credible Church grows.

Admittedly, a sense of reality and a glance at the modern world show that charisms, ministries and offices also require continuous training. And certainly as gifts assigned by God to human beings, they need to be appropriately managed and developed. Consequently, seeking a certain quality standard in charisms and ministries does not contradict the fact that they are gifts; on the contrary, it is one of the most appropriate ways to express our appreciation of them as gifts received.

## **5. Leadership in the Church has many faces**

Not infrequently, the issue of leadership in the Church is reduced to the question: What are others allowed to do that I'm not allowed to do? Leadership and power are equated with each other; leadership is construed as setting people apart and creating hierarchy. Not least, authority to lead is tied to decision-making authority concerning money, wage-earning staff and real estate. Sometimes it is founded on nothing but this. In an understanding of leadership based entirely on secular management, the Church's basic understanding of Herself pales into insignifi-

cance; and not infrequently, what we all have in common and what we can all do together is forgotten.

Leadership is an open and ambiguous term that can be filled with manifold definitions and understandings. In the history of the Church too, many forms of leadership are evident. These are manifested in a wealth of theological and canon law terms, in Biblical images, and in spiritual and community-based experiences of leadership. Based on the understandings of leadership in a given age, the Church has selected terms, and assimilated them in the spirit of the Gospel and to perform Her mission: *pastor*, *episcopos*, *presbyter*, *kybernetes*, *munus regiminis*, ab-bess, prior, provincial superior, superior general, spokesperson (of a team), *primus inter pares* (of a group), chair (of a decision-making body), *cura animarum* (care of souls), *delegado de palabra* (Delegate of the Word – the official responsible for the proclamation of the Word of God in a basic community), contact person (at a Church location or in a parish) etc. Some local churches are current using the term *equipe d'animation*. The form of leadership and the way it is exercised is also always a reflection of the community being led. Mindful of these diverse understandings of leadership, the Church is seeking ways in which the participation of as many as possible can be harmonised with the *repraesentatio Christi* of the priest.

### **a) Those who govern must lead by example**

Both the development of charisms and the exercise of official leadership require a structured framework, and must be reliable. Governance must not be arbitrary, just as a calling to a charism cannot take place against Christ and the Church.

Governance in the Church is a task that absorbs an individual's entire personality. Those who govern must work on their own

attitude and capabilities, in order to set an example to others. This is why governance also means the ability to continuously reflect on one's own leadership, and if necessary change course. Governance cannot be performed on a top-down basis, or from outside. It must be based on a willingness and an ability to understand and accept people's situation, and persuade them to follow the path of unity. Understood this way, governance again comes to adopt the posture of a traditional profession in which a skill set encompassing technical expertise, decision-making and interpersonal skills are expected. Governance will generate positive results when it acts inconspicuously, remaining almost invisible, while focusing chiefly on enabling, motivating and inspiring others.

The basic attitudes identified by the "Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops" are self-giving (*DB 2*) and an openness to dialogue (*DB 42*). Those who govern in the Church should foster participation and accept a healthy pluralism of responsibility (*DB 59*). Work in close union with others (*DB 63*) is recommended, and inappropriate trends toward centralisation are called into question (*DB 60*). Detailed emphasis is placed (*DB 158*) on governance by counsels, exhortations and example, and governance in the spirit of charity and zeal.

## **b) The ordained ministers are the servants of their brothers and sisters**

The sacramentality of the Church as described in the previous chapters is also the basis on which we can answer the questions concerning leadership in the Church. Given that the Church is a sacramental reality, the Body of Christ, it is evident that it is the Lord who leads the Church. When a priest is ordained, the candidate is therefore asked: "Are you resolved with the help of the

Holy Spirit, to discharge, without fail, the office of Priesthood in the presbyterial order as a conscientious fellow worker with the Bishops caring for the Lord's flock?" God Himself leads His Church through the ages. He leads Her through the Holy Spirit, through the power of His Word and the sacraments, through the charisms of the baptised, through the "signs of the times" that reveal themselves to the Church as points of reference.

The sacramentally established ministry of leadership performed by the priest in conjunction with the Bishop clearly enables and reflects the fact that it is Christ who heads and leads the Church. The Constitution on the Church describes very precisely the task of this ministry in the Church: "For the nurturing and constant growth of the people of God, Christ the Lord instituted in His Church a variety of ministries, which work for the good of the whole body. For those ministers, who are endowed with sacred power, serve their brethren, so that all who are the People of God, and therefore enjoy a true Christian dignity, working toward a common goal freely and in an orderly way, may arrive at salvation" (LG 18). The priestly ministry is there to serve salvation and the working together of all in a free and orderly fashion. It succeeds through the discovery of charisms, the support of engagement and the enabling of others to act in the Church and for the world. In his ministry as a delegate of the Bishop, the priest thus also works to bring about union with Christ in the Church. At the same time this marks a boundary in the priest's competence to lead. Terms such as "ministry" and "service" must be reflected in the manner in which leadership is performed. When acting *in persona Christi capitis* (in the role of Christ the Head), the priest must point to Christ and make a crucial distinction while doing so: Through the person of the priest, it is Christ Himself who acts. Christ is the source of union. The authority of the priest is thus an authority to build up the

unity of the Body of Christ. The phrase *in persona Christi capitis* does not describe a priestly authority that renders the priest immune by excluding others, or by allowing the priest to refuse to accept criticism. The ministries of the Bishops, priests and deacons are gifts of grace to the Church as a whole, to enable Her to fulfil Her mission. All the baptised are called to build up the Church through the witness of their lives; a few are set apart to serve them as they do so (see *EG* 201).

In the irreplaceable service they provide when performing the sacraments, the ministers make manifest the fact that the signs of salvation have been entrusted to them for the salvation of people and the world. As servants of proclamation they bear special responsibility for ensuring that the tradition of the Word is handed down reliably. Although Bishops, priests and deacons are then not the only individuals who proclaim the Word, they are responsible for guaranteeing the fidelity of tradition. At the same time there is a need to recognise the fact that all the baptised are called in accordance with their charisms and competences to proclaim the Gospel among their families and friends, at their professional workplace and when volunteering, and in policy-making and business settings. It is important that the responsibility and competence of priests and lay faithful go hand-in-hand, and are not placed in competition with each other.

In their sacramental bond with the Church as a whole in the College of Bishops in communion with the Pope, the ordained ministers bear special responsibility for the unity of Christians within the World Church. This responsibility is part of their ministry of reconciliation.

Concretely, the sacramental ministry of leadership today is tasked, together with the whole People of God and under changing societal conditions, to find a path along which this common pilgrimage can best be realised. Clearly, then, priestly leader-

ship will also be performed in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Those who govern the Church today are seeking to discover how, from our common roots in Christ and His Spirit, we can become listeners together and facilitate experience of becoming the Church. We wish to encourage fresh and individual responses to the call of the Spirit, by creating space for participation, and awakening and nurturing gifts and charisms, while not losing sight of our common direction in the whole of the Church: we wish to seek and find the Kingdom of God and His Justice in all.

This is the point of departure from which we need to describe the ministry of leadership of priests in the new large pastoral spaces. Some tasks of the priest – including the complex administrative tasks in a parish, but also manifold representative duties – and not by their nature tied to the Sacrament of Holy Orders. They only came to be added to the priest's tasks in the course of the Church's more recent history. Priests who see their ministry of leadership as being about serving unity in a parish, will only be able to perform this ministry in cooperation with many other men and women – whether they be full-time professionals or volunteers. Concretely, this means that the priest will see and affirm the charisms of the faithful in his parish, and nurture them to the best of his ability. When serving the unity of the many charisms, he will also need to allow for and respect the fact that he must not seek to bring them into line. He must recognise that in this plurality of ministries and gifts there will also be differences whose deeper unity will only be revealed when all concerned turn toward and seek the Lord.

### **c) We support the ministries of leadership of women and men in the Church**

There are women and men in the Church who expressly perform ministries of leadership in the Church. These include professionally trained Christians who are appointed by the Bishop as pastoral workers, parish workers or employees of one of the various bishops' organisations with managerial or leadership responsibility. Yet there are also areas of the life of the Church in which women and men exercise leadership that cannot be described as having been delegated or mandated by the Episcopal or priestly ministry. These include responsibility for leadership in groups, in diocesan or parish councils, in associations and Church-based movements that operate across Germany, in religious communities or in Caritas organisations. Prophetic awakenings, good ideas and initiatives will also take the Church forward. Without this kind of (often voluntary) engagement for the manifold forms of association and organisation of the faithful, the Church would not be able to perform Her mission of proclaiming the Gospel in word and deed in our modern, pluralist and diversified society. This clearly shows that all the baptised are called to help responsibly shape the life and the mission of the Church. It is also clear that these manifold forms of leadership, which any of the faithful would in principle be able to exercise by virtue of their membership of the Body of Christ, also need to be tied to the priestly ministry, which represents the unity of the Church in Christ.

A glance at the theology and spirituality of leadership developed by the religious orders in the Church will help us in our search for a new and cooperative way for priests and laypersons to work together. In a religious community with its different personalities and specific tasks, the rules and regulations help people get along on a daily basis. They enable the community

to manage its plurality, and describe the ministry of leadership in the context of the common mission to serve God and human beings. The religious orders thus always address the problem that today presents itself in a more acute form in our need to manage the diversity of charisms in the Church. We can learn from the religious orders: how to join together in seeking and finding the Will of God; how to involve in decision-making, where possible, everyone who will be affected by the decisions in question; how appointments to ministries of leadership – canon law permitting – can be made by election; what a relief it can be to accept a ministry of leadership for a specific and limited period of time, and then returned to the community as a brother or sister with one's specific charisms. The same things apply in more recent types of Church-based community, such as secular institutions, Church-based movements etc., particularly those that also contribute toward missionary pastoral work.

Fostering the ministries of leadership and leadership competence of women and men in the Church will require guidance and support. In a Church that is called to be a community, leadership can ultimately only be performed by and from within the community itself. Synods, councils and other consultative processes serve this purpose within the Church. Concretely, community-based leadership can only be performed by a team. Teams of this kind are becoming increasingly important for the Church's pastoral work. However, leadership by a team can only work if and when the areas of responsibility are described precisely. Responsibilities must be clearly defined in relation to what activities are to take place and where, and the necessary qualifications and desired aptitudes must also be defined. It will also be necessary to specify clearly and transparently the time limit on such community-based forms of leadership, how these forms of leadership will be constituted, and what provisions will be in place to manage any conflicts.

Leadership requires expertise and professionalism. Competence of this kind is imparted through specific training. The study of theology guarantees a profound connection with Holy Scripture and the faith of the Church. Yet professionalism in the actions of the Church also includes many other skills in the organisational, pedagogical, psychological, economic and methodological fields, and in a great many others. The professionalism of staff also encompasses their personal life histories, specific aptitudes and not least their charisms. Professional expertise of this kind is contributed by both full-time professionals and volunteers who are committed Christians.

Many of the ways in which full-time professionals and volunteers have ended up working with each other have arisen on an ad hoc basis. We therefore need to decide on a case-by-case basis whether the full-time professional ministries should be responsible for guidance and professional support while leaving leadership to the volunteers, or whether leadership in some areas might best be performed by professionals, in cooperation with volunteers. As a glance at the World Church shows, leadership in the Church need not be provided primarily or exclusively by individuals performing this task as a full-time gainful occupation. Given the right preparation and safeguards, work can be performed in almost all areas on a part-time or voluntary basis, provided that the scope of the work and the time involved are specified.

All ministries of leadership in the Church will remain an integral part of the responsibility of all members of the People of God for the path of the Church. This precludes any exercise of autocratic leadership. The more that leadership is exercised (by whomever) autocratically, the greater the risk that power and influence will be abused in pastoral and other settings.

## 6. The Church's pastoral ministry is undergoing renewal

The theological and pastoral ideas developed above must be put to the test in the ecclesial structures that are undergoing renewal. This is particularly true with respect to the parish, whose structures have undergone massive change in recent years. Pope Francis has expressly asked parishes to examine their consciences so that they can become “a centre of constant missionary outreach” (*EG* 28).

### a) The parish gives faith its “sense of place”

First of all, we should note one thing: A Church that is grounded in the incarnation of Jesus Christ also needs places where people can experience the fact that Christ is come into *this* world and to *these* people, in order to save them. The parish gives faith its sense of place. Pope Francis rightly emphasises that: “The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours” (*EG* 28). This is why the parish, despite all its flexibility in terms of its contours and location, is more than just a structure. It also has theological significance. “The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, for proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration” (*EG* 28). Despite all the current changes in the structures of our dioceses, this must remain a given. Within a parish the priest and the pastoral team, along with all the faithful, shoulder responsibility for ensuring that faith does not evaporate but is nourished, that hope does not die, and that charity can still be experienced.

The contours of the parish are also changing here in Germany. This is creating new challenges and opportunities. From the traditional “parish community”, which was a self-contained system with a fixed structure, we are now seeing the “new type of parish” emerge, which is described using terms that vary from archdiocese (or diocese) to archdiocese (or diocese), e.g. “pastoral space”, “pastoral care unit” etc. What they all have in common is that they are open and plural. This means they make different forms of participation possible. Within a given territory, the focus is now shifting onto the diversity in the lives of the faithful and their forms of community organisation in that territory. This kind of parish is developing more and more into a community of communities, and bringing forth various loci of Church life. Here we see first of all the various groups organised into associations that represent different aspects of Church engagement in society. Some parishes contain vibrant groups belonging to the Church movements that invite participants to enter into an intensive relationship with Christ. Certain parish-run institutions attract communities of people who are seeking, or are at least open to, contact with the Bible and the Church: the parents of children who attend Catholic day-care centres, students and teachers from Catholic schools, or the inhabitants and staff of care institutions. Sometimes the territory of a parish is home to a small religious community, which through its presence opens up the possibility of prayer or spiritual support. Caritas staff also form a locus of the Church, as do groups of various ministries (altar servers, lectors, lay ministers etc.) who participate in celebrating the liturgy. We could also mention many other communities, which vary according to the historic situation of the particular diocese or parish. Furthermore, the diversity of parishes also supports the continued emergence of new groups in response to different needs or current problems. New challenges attract the faithful to paths along which they

wish to join in making the message of the Gospel known to people.

This kind of diversity of communities requires networking. The various loci of Church and community life within the parish require a structure to bring them together and relate them to each other, and a centre. The different charisms of community organisation will then help the Church to unfold, provided that the actors involved remember that what is at stake is the Lord, and that all revolves around the presence of the risen Christ in the midst of the Church. Everyone needs to discover anew for themselves what “the Spirit says to the churches” (*Rev 2.7* and frequently elsewhere.). Only then will their zeal for evangelisation and their ability to dialogue with the world grow.

These various communities are meeting places for Christians who take their baptism seriously and have resolved to follow the path of Jesus, but also for Christians who are experiencing a crisis of faith or are far from the life of the Church. Other participants in the life of a parish include non-Christians, for whom contact with that particular community marks the first time they have encountered the Church. This encounter is a challenge for everyone involved, which points to the fact that everyone – including those resolute in the faith – is on a path, because as the Church we too always remain a Church in progress. This is why we need a fundamental solidarity among the baptised and confirmed, and a spirituality of hospitality through which faith is offered convincingly and lived by example.

The image of the parish as a community of communities (see *CL 26–28*) enables us to see the parishes that have emerged with all their diversity in the larger pastoral units as an enrichment, and to continue developing them. Merging small parishes into large ones must not restrict the diversity of the life of the Church. On the contrary, this will rather enable the plurality of

place and forms of practice to grow, and allow the principles of the liturgy, proclamation and charity to be further developed and diversified as the situation requires. In this huge diversity of communities we will also require the necessary depth for all communities that will allow a relationship to Christ to grow, thus making the communities witnesses to the Gospel. This cannot be a matter of simply describing or justifying a new structure. For the present and the near future, we need to discover that the catholicity and universality of the entire Church are right there in the diverse communities of a parish.

## **b) We need new appointments**

In this new reality of different communities within a single parish there will be new forms of participation and responsibility. This will bring the different charisms of individuals to light.

Basically, alongside the priest and the full-time professional staff in any parish there will also be other initiators of faith, hope and charity who perform pastoral work in their own way. This is a treasure that in many cases remains undiscovered. Priests in particular therefore in a certain sense perform the task of a “birth attendant” in bringing this treasure to light: “And His gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the Body of Christ” (*Eph* 4,11–12). The ministry to which St Paul refers here was authorised through Baptism. However, under certain circumstances or in certain cases it may be appropriate to acknowledge such ministries or make them public by the Bishop or priest announcing an express appointment. Specifically, this would mean limited-term appointments to coordinate diaconal, catechetical or liturgical ministries at a certain place. And ap-

pointments of this kind can give the faithful concerned an assurance that their works are acknowledged and appreciated. A public appointment of this kind will only be necessary for a ministry that is important for only a part of the parish and/or for a limited period. In his *Motu proprio* of 15 August 1972, *Ministeria quaedam*, Pope Paul VI already made this possible by saying: “the conferences of bishops may request others of the Apostolic See, if they judge the establishment of such offices in their region to be necessary or very useful because of special reasons”. Such appointments will deepen the baptismal calling of any Christian. Sacramentally they will add nothing to it.

## **7. Conclusion – We want to be the Church together for all humankind**

When we read the Council texts today against the background of current pastoral issues, we see that this leads to a process of change for the entire Church. That change involves a fresh turn toward Jesus Christ, and a deepening of our recognition of Jesus and our love of Him. Inseparable from this is the renewed turn toward evangelisation, toward a Church that is growing and reaching out to people, particularly those on the margins. Only this sweeping path of change will enable us to tackle the concrete issues concerning the balance between the ministries and charisms among the priestly People of God. The Church is currently struggling to achieve an appropriate understanding of leadership. This struggle to achieve the right relationship between priests and laypersons, particularly concerning questions of leadership, is necessary and is a good thing. We Bishops see this as presenting an opportunity for change and renewal in the Church. The goal must remain clear: the union of God with the

whole human race, of which the Church is a “sign and instrument”, and the unity of the Church with the “joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted”. In other words, we need to be even closer to people in order to offer them the communion into which God is calling everyone. To achieve this, the Church must grow in specific directions. These paths were described in the preceding chapters. As the Church, we will be closer to people when we devote ourselves to the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ and trust the working of His Holy Spirit. Consequently, we intend to

- foster awareness of the universal call to holiness, and deepen it in friendship with Jesus as we turn to our sisters and brothers;
- give space to the abundance of charisms, and in celebrating the Eucharist receive anew time and again the gift of unity in this diversity;
- devote the reciprocity of the clergy and laity entirely to the Church’s ministry to humankind;
- view the different callings and tasks within the Body of Christ not in terms of hierarchy, but as manifold manifestations of the one mission;
- enable as many women and men as possible to participate equitably in the Church’s ministries of leadership;
- support our parishes, so that they can develop as communities of communities with numerous forms of participation.

The ideas formulated here are intended to stimulate discussion. We do not claim that they will enable us to solve all problems. They include a number of open questions that can only be an-

swered by those who, through their witness, give a face to the local church. We therefore ask that you take the ideas presented here with you into your parishes, communities, groups and other Church institutions, discuss them, and put them into practice. We trust in the fact that where people allow themselves to be moved by the joy of the Gospel, the Church will grow and faith will have a future:

“Where God is, there is the future”  
(Pope Benedict XVI, homily in Mariazell on September 7, 2007).

Würzburg, April 27, 2015

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## List of Abbreviations

- AA Apostolicam actuositatem – Decree of the Second Vatican Council on the Apostolate of the Laity
- AG Ad gentes – Decree of the Second Vatican Council on the Mission Activity of the Church
- CCC Catechism of the Catholic Church (1997)
- CL Christifideles laici – Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of His Holiness John Paul II on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World of December 30, 1988
- DB Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops – Congregation for Bishops of February 22, 2004
- EG Evangelii gaudium – Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father Pope Francis of November 24, 2013
- GS Gaudium et spes – Pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council on the Church in the Modern World
- LG Lumen gentium – Dogmatic Constitution of the Second Vatican Council on the Church
- PO Presbyterorum ordinis – Decree of the Second Vatican Council on the Ministry and Life of Priests
- RH Redemptor Hominis – Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II at the Beginning of His Papal Ministry of March 4, 1979
- SC Sacrosanctum Concilium – Constitution of the Second Vatican Council on the Sacred Liturgy
- UR Unitatis redintegratio – Decree of the Second Vatican Council on Ecumenism