



1 December 2019

Dear sisters and brothers,

to communicate the joy of the Gospel in word and deed, to witness to Christ and to praise and thank God is the task of God's people. It is conferred on all the baptized: together we are Church.

Pope Francis invites us to become a synodal Church - to go our way together. This is the purpose of the Synodal Path of the Church in Germany, which we as bishops of the German Bishops' Conference and as representatives of the active laity in the Central Committee of German Catholics want to follow in the next two years with many Catholics, religious, priests and particularly with young people.

This Path shall also be a path of change and renewal serving to venture a departure in the light of the Gospel, talking about the importance of faith and the Church in our time and finding answers to pressing questions of the Church. For we must admit self-critically: the message of the Gospel has been obscured and even terribly damaged. We are thinking especially of the sexual abuse of children and young people. We have to take the consequences and make sure that the Church is a safe place.

Together we will seek the way how we as Church can serve people, the world and God today, how we can share “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”, as expressed by the Second Vatican Council more than 50 years ago (*Gaudium et spes* 1). To want to proclaim the faith anew requires that we have a discussion especially on topics that impede the proclamation, if they are not clarified.

Today, on the first day of Advent, we invite you to help shape this Synodal Path. We are aware of the great commitment with which many of you live your faith in God in congregations, associations, initiatives and works, in families, professions and honorary offices and carry the message of Jesus Christ into the world. We also invite those of you who have difficulties with faith and the Church, who have lost confidence or are on the way as seekers.

We invite you to follow this Synodal Path in freedom and diversity. In so doing, we rely on the involvement of all those who are committed to a living faith in our Church. As baptized women and men, we are called to proclaim in word and deed the “kindness and love of God” (*Tit* 3:4). On the Synodal Path we would like to improve the conditions to be able to credibly fulfill this task. It is an open path which should lead to decisions and votes directed at the responsible church officials.

On 29 June 2019, Pope Francis wrote a letter to the “Pilgrim People of God in Germany“. He shares with us our “concern for the future of the Church in Germany“; he has encouraged us to seek “a candid response to the present situation“. He called upon us to preserve the unity of the whole Church and to shape the synodal process from the bottom up. He has encouraged us to embrace the “primacy of evangelization” and to combine the spiritual dimension of the Synodal Path with the structural challenges.

We ask you to support the Synodal Path through your comments and prayers. Follow this Path in your local congregations and accompany the work of the Synodal Assembly and the Synodal Forums. You will find all information at www.synodalerweg.de. The four Synodal Forums, which will focus on power and separation of powers in the Church, partnership and sexuality, the priestly existence and the role of women in our Church, will be explained there. Please take part in the issues and discussions presented on the Internet.

Only in the solidarity of the many who, in different ways, wish to promote the mission of the Church, in respect for one another and in listening to God's Word, will it be possible to renew the life of the Church and overcome obstacles. Only together we are Church, also together with the Universal Church! Only together can we witness to the Gospel! Let us walk this path of change and renewal together! In this way we can succeed, for the sake of the people, in convincingly speaking of what and who carries our life.

Today, at the beginning of Advent, we are preparing ourselves for the Synodal Path with the prayer of the Psalmist:

Your ways, O LORD, make known to me;
Teach me your paths,
Guide me in your truth and teach me,
For you are God my saviour,
And for you I wait all the day.
(*Ps* 25:4-5)

With kind regards and best wishes for a blessed Advent!
The Presidents of the Synodal Path



Reinhard Cardinal Marx
President
of the German Bishops' Conference



Prof. Dr. Thomas Sternberg
President
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