



First Synodal Assembly 30 January -1 February 2020, Frankfurt

Minutes

Opening of the first Synodal Assembly

Following the Eucharistic celebration to open the first Synodal Assembly, the President of the Central Committee of German Catholics, Prof. Dr Thomas Sternberg, welcomes those present in the Bartholomäus Cathedral in Frankfurt on behalf of the Synodal Committee. He especially welcomes the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Dr Nicola Eterović, the Bishop of Limburg, Dr Georg Bätzing, as well as the City Dean of Frankfurt, Canon Johannes zu Eitz. A special greeting is also extended to the observers sent from the neighbouring countries and from the sister churches. Professor Sternberg welcomes the members of the Synodal Assembly and not least the numerous representatives of the media. Sincere thanks go to all those who have been involved in the preparation of the Eucharistic celebration.

In his opening address, Professor Sternberg underlines that the Synodal Path now beginning is also a spiritual process in which space is to be given to the often surprising twists and turns of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual character and necessary debate are not incompatible in this process. Professor Sternberg refers to Pope Francis' letter "To the Pilgrim People of God in Germany" and emphasizes that the Pope is speaking here of a turning point in time that raises new and old issues. Professor Sternberg explains that the scandal caused by the revelation of abuse by clergy and the resulting unrest, dissatisfaction and anger were added to the frustration over stalled reforms and thus became the motivation for the Synodal Path, which is met with high expectations as well as great scepticism. It is important to do justice to this in a structured and binding process of departure. In doing so, the Assembly unites people from all walks of life. But, Prof. Sternberg emphasizes, their efforts should not be primarily about the Church per se. First of all, the focus must be on the faith and its proclamation, which the Church is supposed to serve. The topics of the Synodal Path result from the indications of the interdisciplinary research network project on sexual abuse by clergy, the so-called "MHG Study". Here it was stated in the

sense of hypotheses that the handling of power in dioceses and parishes, the problems of priestly life today, a sexual morality that is hardly understood and lived any more, and the lack of participation of women in ministries and offices in the Church must be considered as factors that promote the danger of sexual abuse and its cover-up. These issues are considered crucial when it comes to the Church gaining credibility. Even if these are by no means all the issues that currently affect the Church, it will be important in the next two years to come to binding decisions and clear votes on these issues. These votes must be divided into three categories: Votes on what can be put into effect in Germany, votes to be submitted to the Pope and votes to be addressed to a council. Even the questions that cannot be decided here must nevertheless be discussed here. What is needed is a "healthy decentralization" in the sense of Pope Francis, while at the same time keeping in mind that we are part of the universal Church. With reference to Pope Francis' letter, Professor Sternberg also underlines the importance of the term "aggiornamento" for the Synodal Path. He makes clear that the perception of the signs of the times and faithfulness to tradition are not opposites. The way to the upcoming decisions is also important and should be the way to a "Chiesa Sinodale" in the sense of the Pope, which is characterized by lasting forms of participation. For this, a culture of dialogue is necessary that follows the rules of the game: frank exchange, respectful debates in which people do not deny each other's piety, overcoming prejudices and differentiating between the truth of the faith and the social form of the Church. In this way, God's people are to have their say and be perceived in their plurality. At the centre of the process, as Pope Francis urges, is evangelization, which means transforming Church and society according to the Gospel and speaking credibly about what and who sustains the lives of the faithful. The Church has a servant function towards faith and the Gospel. Therefore, she must be ready to listen to the message of Jesus Christ, but also to the people and especially to the poor with whom Jesus identified. For the Church as the people of God does not exist in a small enlightened group, nor in structures or hierarchies. She is the community of all the baptized who carry on and impart what gives them support and strength. Finally, Professor Sternberg once again stresses the importance of the Holy Spirit who comes to meet his Church and renews the face of the earth. With this confidence, he calls on those present to set out on the Synodal Path.

Six participants in the Synodal Path will give a statement on the motivation of their commitment in the Church and especially in the framework of the Synodal Path during this ceremonial opening:

Christian Kobert*, a priest from the diocese of Magdeburg, reports on his childhood and youth in the GDR, where he experienced an atmosphere of intellectual narrowness and conformity in the state youth organisation "Junge Pioniere" (Young Pioneers). In contrast, he later discovered the freedom of faith in the Church and experienced a spirit of encouragement. Today, he lives as a member of a Christian minority in a largely non-denominational environment, but one that has the potential to positively shape society. For this, he would like to rediscover the expressive capacity of faith in the good and respectful togetherness of the Synodal Path.

Michaela Labudda* from the Federal Association of Parish Assistants also describes her experience of freedom in faith. However, she sees her church membership and her participation

in the Synodal Path strongly under the aspect of a "nevertheless". She participates despite her experience of inner narrowness, dogmatism, limited participation of women and systematic injustice. She wants to move away from this "nevertheless" towards a "because" and "for this reason". In view of this, she wants to believe in change, talks about "airing out" and cleaning up the "shop". She has seen too many people leave or fall bitterly silent. In this she sees the reason for the necessity of departure.

Bishop Dr Stefan Oster SDB*, Passau, speaks of the life-changing power of faith that he has experienced himself and wishes that through the ministry of the Church as many people as possible will be touched by the loving and liberating presence of the Lord. He sees the crisis of the Church in people experiencing and believing in the absence of God. Without mysticism as a way of making experiential dimensions of the presence of Jesus available, all that remains is morality, humanism of niceness and the attempt to gain self-interested relevance through structural changes. In contrast, he wants to engage in an honest and open conversation about the consequences of abuse and the renewal of the Church. Along the way, he also hopes to experience the presence of the Lord.

Michaela Brönnner* from the Kolping Youth wants to work for the future of the Church, for which the course must be set now. She wants the Church to once again become a place where community can be experienced, where people are there for each other and can trust each other. It should also be a place where everyone can contribute and participate. In the Synodal Path, she sees much more than a structural issue. That is why faith, hope, love, courage and trust are demanded of those involved, and why it is not enough to just make nice speeches. Action is needed.

Sister Philippa Rath OSB* from the German Conference of Superiors of Religious Orders reports that she is currently seeing her vocation as a religious woman put to a hard test because she loves her Church, but also suffers from her and is not infrequently ashamed of her. She suffers with the wounded people who come to her abbey and who, as faithful and committed Christians, are about to leave the Church: People who are longing for God and are looking for credible witnesses of the Gospel, and women who wish for participation and co-responsibility in the Church. Nevertheless, she expresses her conviction that here and now is the *kairos* to be seized with hope, in listening to each other, without taboos, without prohibitions on thinking, without prejudices, without self-righteousness and without denying each other orthodoxy. Not only do many people look at this assembly; it is also held before God's face, who looks into our hearts. Christian Gärtner* of the Diocesan Council of Catholics in the Diocese of Eichstätt makes his Christian socialisation the starting point of his statement. Above all, credible believers in his home parish have played a role with regard to his faith, and it is for the Church as a joyful community of lovable people that he wants to commit himself and take responsibility. This is also true for him in a situation where the misconduct of priests and bishops has created a crisis that must nevertheless be tackled together. Trusting in the Holy Spirit, he therefore wants to

make his contribution along this Synodal Path so that people in the Church may once again be credible witnesses of the Gospel.

At the end of the solemn opening of the Synodal Path, the President of the German Bishops' Conference, Reinhard Cardinal Marx, thanks all those who were involved in the preparation and implementation, but he especially expresses his gratitude to the six participants of the Synodal Path who gave important, exciting and inspiring testimonies through their personal statements, and he gives expression to the hope and confidence with which it is now necessary to tread this path.

Opening: Expectations as regards the Synodal Path

Karin Kortmann, member of the Synodal Committee, welcomes the members of the Synodal Assembly and the guests and observers from other European countries, the friendly Christian churches and the media. She opens the first working session of the Synodal Assembly and asks the host of the Dominican Monastery for a word of greeting.

The Evangelical City Dean of Frankfurt and Offenbach, Dr Achim Knecht, welcomes those present and describes the history of the Dominican monastery. He emphasizes that the Christian churches in Frankfurt must jointly adjust to being minority churches in the future. He points to the Evangelical theologian Philipp Jacob Spener, whose name was given to the conference centre and who in his time strongly promoted the activity of the laity in the Church. He sees this as a good connection to the synodal dialogue between clergy and laity, which constitutes the Synodal Path of the Catholic Church in Germany. The Evangelical Church observes the deliberations of the Synodal Path with interest and anticipation and wishes God's blessing for it.

Karin Kortmann leads through the formalities. The invitation was issued within the time limit stipulated in the draft Rules of Procedure. There are 217 of 230 voting members present. This means that there is a quorum in accordance with the Statutes of the Synodal Path. Karin Kortmann introduces the Synodal Committee, which includes the President of the German Bishops' Conference, Reinhard Cardinal Marx, the President of the ZdK, Prof. Dr Thomas Sternberg, the Vice-President of the German Bishops' Conference, Bishop Dr Franz-Josef Bode and one of the four Vice-Presidents of the Zdk, Karin Kortmann.

The agenda proposed by the Synodal Committee is approved by a very large majority. The Synodal Committee proposes to the Assembly three moderation teams for the First Synodal Assembly, each consisting of one man and one woman: Bishop Dr Franz-Josef Overbeck and Dr Irme Stetter-Karp, Marcus Leitschuh and Sr. Katharina Kluitmann OSF, Prof. Dr Claudia Nothelle and Auxiliary Bishop Wilfried Theising. The Synodal Assembly agrees to this proposal. Karin Kortmann explains the procedure for requests to speak and for voting through electronic voting machines.

Bishop Dr Franz-Josef Bode first of all congratulates the designated new Bishop of Augsburg, Prelate Dr Bertram Meier, and then introduces the Spiritual Companions of the Synodal Path, Maria Boxberg and Fr. Bernd Hagenkord SJ. Their task is, in particular, to keep spaces open, to

facilitate a good discussion situation, to provide support in difficult phases of the deliberations, to grant times of silence, and to place prayer alongside debate. There is no fixed structure for spiritual accompaniment, it develops out of the meeting. This requires a willingness and ability to communicate as well as a willingness and ability to deal with conflict on the part of all participants. In the conference booklet, which was made available to all members, there are texts of spiritual accompaniment that may serve for individual reflection.

Prof. Dr Thomas Söding* gives a keynote address on synodality in the light of Pope Francis' letter. He begins by looking at the references in the Acts of the Apostles to the situation of the Church today at the beginning of the Synodal Path. On this basis, he pleads for a good clarification of tasks and definition of goals for the Synodal Assembly. Resolutions and their implementation should develop from the thorough consultations ("first think and pray, then talk and then act"). In the discussions, all problems must be put on the table without taboos. To this end, four thematic areas have been chosen, each of which are key issues for conversion and renewal in the Church: Power and separation of powers, priestly existence, women in ministries and offices in the Church, and life in succeeding relationships.

None of the issues can be dealt with and clarified by the Church in Germany only. With his letter to the Catholics in Germany, Pope Francis has given decisive indications as to the perspective in which the issues could be advanced on the Synodal Path. He calls for "a frank response to the present situation". Frankly means: openly and honestly, without fear, with confidence and trust in God. Present means: not nostalgic, not utopian, but realistic. The situation in Germany is serious, not only because of sexual and spiritual abuse, but also because of the gradual departure of many people from the Church. To give an answer means to let oneself be asked. The letter speaks of temptations faced by the actors of the Synodal Path and warns against only talking about structures, organisation and administration and only reacting to the challenges of the present instead of being proactive and creative. Pope Francis gives three hints to withstand these temptations: First, the Synodal Path must be a spiritual process. The spiritual dimension opens up when the work of the Holy Spirit is recognised in the hopes and crises, ruptures and departures of the present.

Secondly, the Synodal Path needs the *sensus ecclesiae*. Many questions need to be clarified by the Catholic Church in the German dioceses. Where clarification is needed from the universal Church, the Catholic Church in Germany may raise her voice after a formation of opinion-and will has taken place. Thirdly, the Gospel must be at the centre of the Synodal Path. The persuasive power of the Gospel must prove itself precisely when there are conflicts and real changes are imminent.

In conclusion, Professor Söding emphasizes the importance of theological precision on the Synodal Path: Because the status under canon law is not clear, theological persuasiveness is important. To this end, a programmatic explanation of what is being worked on in the Synodal Path and where it should lead can also be helpful.

What follows is a detailed general debate in which the following topics and questions in particular are taken up:

The necessity of further scientific deepening of the conclusions from the MHG study is underlined. On the other hand, it is also pointed out that the reform issues of the Synodal Path

will not be revised by this scientific deepening, which is already being worked on in various ways. Both the problem of sexual abuse and the issues of the Synodal Path did not first become virulent through the MHG study. Scientific deepening and the Synodal Path complement each other and are not mutually exclusive. The Synodal Path must therefore not avoid the questions also raised by the MHG study.

It is highlighted how important it is, especially against the background of the 2011-2015 discussion process, not only to develop a contemporary and fair culture of discussion and conflict, but also to take action. It is said that not least the practitioners of church work in pastoral care and counselling, who are faced with the problem of bridging the gap between life and doctrine, suffer from the unresolved conflicts, for example with regard to the Church's sexual morality.

The debate also points out that much has already been done in the past ten years in the field of combating and preventing sexual abuse.

In the speeches, the Synodal Assembly is called upon to listen to the voice of the poor and the refugees, to perceive the potential for fear in the Church, to critically question the power structures and to draw appropriate consequences. The guiding questions for this are as follows: Where is life promoted? Where is life being prevented? The Synodal Path is seen as a great and at the same time probably last chance to counteract the loss of relevance of the Church, provided that binding decisions and consequences for action can be reached.

The breakdown of popular church structures, the moral lapses that have come to light and the inconsequential nature of many previous efforts at reform are seen as mortgages for the process now beginning, which must be overcome with a view to the Gospel and the people. Reference is also made to those people who have no access to faith and the Gospel. The Church must also be able to explain to them what she is good for.

The Chair concludes the general debate and thanks for the wide range of contributions.

Rules of Procedure

Karin Kortmann explains the structural framework: The Statutes of the Synodal Path were drawn up jointly by the German Bishops' Conference and the ZdK in a complex procedure and then adopted by the two General Assemblies. They form the basis for the Synodal Path and are not open to change by the participants of the Synodal Path. On the basis of what is laid down in these Statutes, it is now necessary for the Synodal Path to establish its own Rules of Procedure, which regulate further activities in more detail and thus guarantee fair cooperation and a participatory process. A draft was prepared for this purpose, which is now presented to the Synodal Assembly for decision in accordance with Art. 14 SSW. The draft was also checked for its legal admissibility before it was sent out and found to be without fault. In compliance with the specified deadlines, the draft Rules of Procedure were sent to the members of the Synodal Assembly and they had the opportunity to submit, in due time, amendments to this draft in writing. The Synodal Committee has set up a motions commission for the preliminary assessment

of these and future motions, consisting of Auxiliary Bishop Dr Christoph Hegge, Vicar General F. Manfred Kollig SSCC and Nadine Mersch. This motions committee has made a recommendation on each of the motions, which is available to the Synodal Assembly together with a list of all amendments in the form of a book of motions as a handout. A simple majority of those present and entitled to vote is required for the adoption of the individual amendments, and a two-thirds majority is required for the adoption of the entire Rules of Procedure.

F. Kollig explains on the work of the motion commission that the primary criterion in assessing the submitted amendments was whether they were matters of the Rules of Procedure. Votes submitted that do not have the form of a motion are nevertheless passed on to the Assembly as a recommendation. All decisions of the motion committee were unanimous.

According to the numbering in the book of motions, the following resolutions emerged:

1. The motion to "revise the Statutes and Rules of Procedure to ensure that a participatory, equal and transparent structure of the Synodal Path is guaranteed for all members of the Synodal Assembly" goes far beyond the subject matter of the Rules of Procedure and can therefore not be put to the vote, irrespective of all aspects of content, which are discussed in detail and controversially.
2. The motion to stipulate that the chair of the meeting must consist of two non-voting persons (§ 3 (3)) is rejected. (Y73/N113/A12) The stipulation of equal gender representation is approved. (Y151/N47/A8)
3. The modified proposal to formulate in § 4 (4): "The list of speakers is interrupted by a motion on the Rules of Procedure, which is indicated to the chair of the meeting by a double show of hands. This motion shall be dealt with immediately. After it has been dealt with, the deliberations shall be resumed, taking into account the established list of speakers", is adopted. (Y196/N6/A1)
4. The motion to add the sentence "Only members of the Synodal Assembly are entitled to submit motions", in § 5 (4) is adopted. (Y190/N2/A3)
5. The inclusion of the sentence "The provisions of these Rules of Procedure may be derogated from if more than two thirds of the members of the Synodal Assembly present agree:" in § 5 (5) is rejected. (Y54/N139/A7)
6. The modified motion to insert the sentence "If, in accordance with § 5 (3) I, a motion is made for a separate vote of the female members of the Synodal Assembly present, the majority of the female members of the Synodal Assembly present shall be required for the resolution to be passed", in §6 (3) and, consequently, also to the insertion of the passage "request for a separate vote of the female members present" in §5 (3) is adopted. (Y134/N62/A14)
7. The addition to § 6 (4), sentence 2 "This committee [the motions committee] shall examine the amendments tabled to a motion to be decided before the vote on a motion and may make recommendations for a decision" is adopted. (Y191/N7/A1)
8. The modified motion to include the sentence "On request, a roll call vote may be taken on substantive motions, without prejudice to a possible motion for a secret ballot (Art. 11 (4) sentence 2 SaSW)" in § 6 (6) and, as a consequence, the inclusion of the phrase "Request for a roll call vote on substantive motions" under § 5 (3) m. is adopted. (Y183/N23/A4)

9. The inclusion of the passage "Abstentions and invalid votes are considered as votes not cast. A tie vote is considered a rejection" in § 6 (7) is declined after the motion commission has pointed out that this is obsolete with regard to § 6 (2). (Y49/N130/A10) The same applies to the inclusion of the same passage in § 6 (6) sentence 2. (Y51/N141/A7)
10. On a modified motion, in § 7 (3) the sentence "It shall decide on the permissibility of a live stream offer during the meeting of the Synodal Assembly." shall be replaced by the sentence "It [The Synodal Committee] shall decide on the implementation of a live stream during the meetings of the Synodal Assembly without prejudice to the protection of personal rights." (Y179/N18/A5)
11. The addition of the sentence "On a motion to the Rules of Procedure, the public may be excluded from individual agenda items," in § 7 (2) and, as a consequence, the addition of the passage "o. Motion to exclude the public" in § 5 (3) are rejected after the motion commission pointed out a collision with the Statutes (Art. 4 Para. 5). (Y44/N160/A3)
12. In § 7 (3), on a modified motion, the phrase "This also includes the observation of the accompanying (supra-) diocesan events..." shall be replaced by the phrase "This also includes the accompaniment of (supra-) diocesan events...". (Y184/N17/A6)
13. Upon a modified motion, it is decided to establish an Interpretation Commission. Accordingly, the following amended text shall be established for § 7 (4): "If there is ambiguity about the interpretation of a provision of the Rules of Procedure, the following bodies shall decide:
 - a) between meetings of the Synodal Assembly, the Synodal Committee, insofar as the handling of a Synodal Forum is concerned, in consultation with its two chairpersons, and after consulting the Interpretation Commission, on the further course of action. The decision shall be communicated to the Synodal Assembly.
 - b) during the sessions of the Synodal Assembly, the Synodal Assembly on the interpretation after consultation with the Interpretation Commission. The Interpretation Commission, whose three members shall be elected by the Synodal Assembly for the duration of the Synodal Path, shall examine the matter in dispute and make a recommendation for decision to the Synodal Committee or the Synodal Assembly." (Y184/N14/A6)
14. The composition of the Synodal Forums is the subject of an intensive discussion. As a result, the following passages are added to § 7 (5): "It provides for five seats for members of the Synodal Assembly who are elected by the Synodal Assembly to the list before it is then voted on as a whole. Interest in this may be expressed by those members of the Synodal Assembly who have not yet been designated for any Synodal Forum." (Y183/N21/A3) "The list shall be voted on *in cumulo*." (Y170/N34/A6)
15. The motion to delete § 7 (6) without replacement is rejected. (Y44/N162/A3)
16. The motion to add to the sentence "The meetings of the Synodal Forums are not open to the public" in § 11 (3) "However, open to all members of the Synodal Assembly" does not receive approval. (Y76/N128/A5)
17. The motion to change the majority requirement for Synodal Forum submissions to the Synodal Assembly in § 13 is also rejected. (Y26/N181/A2) It therefore remains as it is: "Proposals for the Synodal Assembly require an absolute majority of the members of the Synodal Forum".

18. Finally, the motion to insert a new § 14, shifting the further numbering, which lays down a regulation for mutual salutations without ecclesiastical or academic titles within the framework of the bodies of the Synodal Path, is also rejected. (Y79/N115/A10)

In the final vote on this agenda item, the Rules of Procedure are adopted by the Synodal Assembly with the approval of significantly more than the required two-thirds majority of those present and entitled to vote. (Y187/N20/A1) (Annex)

“Power and Separation of Powers in the Church - Joint participation and involvement in the Mission”

Bishop Dr Wiesemann, who co-chaired the Preparatory Forum "Power and Separation of Powers in the Church - Joint participation and involvement in the Mission" with Dr Claudia Lücking-Michel, reports on the results of the work of this body. He explains the substantiating statements of the working paper presented by this Preparatory Forum. With reference to *Evangelii gaudium* No. 27, it should be noted that power and the division of powers in the Church are to be organized in such a way that the proclamation of the Gospel can unfold credibly and in all freedom of the Spirit. Church structures are therefore accountable, in need of control and capable of development for theological reasons. This first requires a clear analysis of the ambivalent power phenomena in the Catholic Church. Then the impulses of Vatican Council II have to be taken up more consistently and implemented more decisively in the sense of the participation of all in the journey of the pilgrim people of God. In particular, the opening chapters of the two major church constitutions of the Council (LG 1 and GS 1) provide a criteriological framework in mutual reference. In this perspective, it is necessary to ask how the common participation of all believers in the exercise, responsibility and control of power can be put in concrete terms and be secured. It needs to be clarified in more detail how leadership power in liturgy, teaching and *diakonia* can be shared in such a way that abuse is prevented, blockages are solved, resources are used and strengths are bundled. This is based on the conviction that courageous new approaches are needed in order to listen to the Gospel anew, and that a transparent process and a solid theological foundation are necessary for this.

Dr Lücking-Michel follows Dr Wiesemann and explains some perspective exacerbations from the work results of the Preparatory Forum. *Lumen Gentium* describes the Church as an "instrument of unity" in its mission. The question of how the Church can do justice to this mission is also consistently framed in her structures, which know various forms of power. How do these present themselves linguistically, choreographically, aesthetically and pragmatically? Reflections on such and similar questions can be initiated, which in the area of tension between the status quo, the mission and the theological centre as well as the contemporary expectations placed on the Church, allow structures for a Church of tomorrow to be considered. It should be emphasized that ecclesiastical power means service in the sense of the Gospel. Proven models, such as elements of democratic socialisation, should also be brought into these considerations. The following questions arise from the point of view of the separation of powers:

Executive: How can the necessary prerequisites for taking on a leadership position be created? What about participation through elections? Where can "checks and balances" be put in place to maintain a separation of powers? Where can transparency in processes and decisions be ensured? Can high offices be subject to time limits?

Legislative: How can the participation of the faithful in the regulatory processes of the Church be strengthened? Could the rights of all believers be strengthened through consultation obligations of those in positions of responsibility? How can corresponding structures be strengthened in the wake of the Würzburg Synod? Should bodies in charge of finances be made more accountable?

Judiciary: How can an ecclesiastical administrative jurisdiction be introduced and how can the independence of the judiciary in the ecclesiastical sphere be guaranteed?

The topic of "women in the church" is also a decisive aspect in this Forum. For it is here in particular that the degree of real participation becomes apparent. As a future perspective, Dr Lücking-Michel outlines the idea of perpetuated formats of a permanently Synodal Church.

Prof. Dr Julia Knop* offers an overview, based on an anonymized sample, of the topic-related inputs within the framework of the participation module on the homepage of the Synodal Path. For this purpose, she establishes connecting lines and looks for accumulations that trace the basic pattern of the feedback. A preliminary observation refers to the fact that "power" is consistently referred to as an issue of office.

There are roughly three levels to which the feedback on the topic of "power and participation" can be assigned. The first is the level of individual experience. The second level relates to structures and the question of expertise in the exercise of power. The third level operates with ideas and concepts on the notion of power that open it up and make it accessible to a broader approach.

The following key issues are identified:

Democracy, separation of powers, control of powers: Democracy is considered a reference value throughout. The control of power through elections and accountability as well as the time limits of bishoprics and priesthoods are often addressed. In addition, corresponding discourses and suitable spaces for them are demanded.

Office and competence, authority and qualification, power and effectiveness: Here, legitimacy is questioned and how the allocation of authority and abilities relate to each other; in other words, the issue is about the connection between positions and competences. In addition, cross-connections are drawn to the forum "Priestly Existence Today", for example, by questioning celibacy and the specifics of this form of life and its effects on the ability to work in a team.

Women: The women's issue is taken up with different references in every second sheet. In addition, power is not only understood as a question of office, but also as an issue of women. Professor Knop predicts: this connection will be seen as an indicator of the seriousness of the Synodal Path.

Faith and spirituality, attitudes and ways of dealing in the Church: These feedbacks are rather virtue-ethical oriented and mostly not connected with feedbacks on the other topics. The following example appears repeatedly and almost identically in wording, suggesting the extent to which networked political agendas are also at work here: "Do not worship the *zeitgeist* (gender, gay marriage, children's rights, feminism, ecology) and make it a substitute for religion".

Professor Knop draws as a synthesis: The proclamation mission is perceived as dependent on the credibility of church structures. Justice within church structures and the professionalism and effectiveness of church action are significantly connected. This reflects a distinctly Catholic perspective, derived for instance from the Church Constitution *Lumen Gentium* and the concept of sacramentality. The latter in particular cannot be asserted, but must be effectively presented.

The orientation debate that follows is intensive. The scope that opens up for the Synodal Path in this area of structural further development is generally considered to be particularly large among the topics and questions at hand. Not all the interventions directly follow one another, but rather cover aspects in a broad panorama that are considered important for the further treatment of the topic in the Synodal Forum. These include:

Leadership models in team structures as practised in church youth work are recommended as examples.

The "option for the poor" should be a guiding criterion.

"Power" has a mirror concept in "control". There is a lot of scope in the particular-church sphere. Sound theological reasoning is expected for proposals from the Forum.

Canon law is to remain in force in the evaluation of roles, since a "substantial distinction" is to be made between lay people and "consecrated pastors" which continues to require differentiation.

Lumen gentium provides for a broad development of ministries, and the "sanctification ministry as a world ministry" has not yet been sufficiently elaborated.

The Jesuan metaphor of the "turn of time" is to play a role in the reflections because dynamics for process development arise from it.

"Participation" should be understood broadly and enable an "inclusive we" that reaches beyond the church sphere.

"Power" should also be considered in a structural context, for example when legitimized bodies are arbitrarily and unilaterally undermined.

Gratitude and reliability are to be applied as a therapeutic agent against fear in the Church.

Existing democratic elements have to be appreciated and developed further.

Democracy in the Church does not mean that the contents of the faith are negotiable, but it is not alien to it institutionally and structurally, which becomes clear, for example, in the various election procedures. Church history also offers points of reference here.

Teachers are important multipliers and should be given more support.

The regional differences in the Church require corresponding responses. Strengthening volunteerism should help in these processes of finding answers.

"Judiciary" and "jurisdiction" are not synonymous.

"Self-commitment" can deconstruct power on the one hand, but on the other hand it can also strengthen it.

The monarchical image of the Church has to be reduced in order to catch up with the present situation.

"Priestly existence today"

Stephan Buttgereit and Bishop Dr Felix Genn give an introduction into the work of the preparatory Forum. Fr. Dr Arno Zahlauer* (Freiburg) provides an insight into the responses received in the participation module for this Forum as a "people's advocate". He systematizes these into eight points.

Members of the Synodal Assembly suggest the following aspects for the work of the Forum: Priests are perceived as burdened in many ways and the role image must be reflected and delineated accordingly.

The priesthood is currently suffering from a "festering wound" which should be the focus of attention when dealing with this topic. The Recollectio House of Münsterschwarzach Abbey and the Association of Married Priests have expertise in this area.

The current situation is perceived as contradictory to the formulations of the Magisterium on celibacy. The positions are divergent: thus, it is partly described as not livable, whereas reference is also made to the "beauty" of celibacy; this has its own formative possibilities, which should not only be presented as "acceptance". Nevertheless, married priests can also serve as examples.

Priestly formation is often called into question. It is demanded that more concreteness be included and that space be given for supervision. Intellectual formation should be an important component. The profession is perceived as tension-filled in its many aspects: from being courted to being burnt out, from sacral exaltation to being pilloried, from being an administrator to being a pastor... For whom is it still attractive to be trained as a priest? Who can be attracted by which training concepts? What do pluralized fields of activity mean for the understanding of priests? Quality should be given more weight than quantity, since a wrong selection leads to bad personnel.

In view of the problem of loneliness and isolation, it is necessary to think more about communal forms of life. How could the parishes also support the priests (orientation of the different vocations towards each other)? What support can be offered for a priestly way of life and what culture is associated with it?

There is a perception that priests are often described as "abnormal" and that women are more likely to be sought as "normal" contacts in the community context.

Charismatic teaching and appreciation of a diversity of biographies must gain space.

What does "relationship" mean and how far-reaching is the term really?

A theology of priesthood must be conceived from the sacramentality of the Church; the freedom to choose celibacy must be considered as a possibility.

Bishop Dr Genn and Stephan Buttgerreit conclude with the following thematic lines:

- Formation and structure of the seminaries,
- Overcoming an over-idealization of the office,
- Way of life and shaping,
- Theology of ministry on the basis of a sacramental understanding of the Church,
- The relativization of any over-idealization from reflections on the wounds.
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“Women in Ministries and Offices in the Church”

Bishop Dr Franz-Josef Bode and Prof. Dr Dorothea Sattler inform about the consultations in the Preparatory Forum "Women in Ministries and Offices in the Church". Bishop Bode recalls the prophetic statement of Pope John XXIII, who already in 1963 counted the issue of women among the signs of the times ("*Pacem in terris*", No. 41). The inner-church treatment of this question is still pending. The attitude of synodality, the concern for evangelization and attention to the *sensus ecclesiae*, these three topics that Pope Francis addresses in his letter to "the pilgrim people of God in Germany", were taken up by the Preparatory Forum. The report gives an outlook on perspectives that can either already be implemented today or that are to be presented in Rome for further elaboration by the universal Church.

Professor Sattler refers to the hermeneutic of trust that characterizes the report of the Preparatory Forum and wishes this spirit also to be present in the deliberations of the Forum "Women in Ministries and Offices in the Church" in order to take further steps together. She emphasizes the breadth of the subject matter that has been included in the text of the report and does not fixate on a few positions (e.g. the question of ministries). However, the report also makes it clear that the theological justifications for women's participation in the offices of the Church go back to the time of the Second Vatican Council, but have not been received in part. Future forum work, according to Professor Sattler, will be about seeking God's will for us today. The consideration of Scripture and tradition, the question of the binding nature of previous magisterial decisions and the reception of theological insights serve this search. The inclusion of the Orthodox and Reformation traditions, the dialogue with the religious orders and in the universal Church should also help to search creatively and imaginatively for ways in which the Church can respond to the topics of this forum.

Bishop Dr Michael Gerber* gives the Synodal Assembly an insight into the feedback received via the participation module for this Forum. Some of the feedback reveals hurts that women have experienced in the Church and which, not least, also challenge theology. The feedback deals with theological and sociological arguments, different images of the Church and women, gender polarity and gender justice, specific charisms and existing leadership competences of women. The feedback is partly differentiated, reflective and carefully elaborated, partly undifferentiated or even polemically formulated. In the feedback, some speak in favour and many also against the ordination of women.

Again and again, the contributions deal with the attitude, the spirit of service in the Church, which applies to all, to clergy and laity, to men and women. Here, according to Bishop Gerber,

lies the challenge of the Synodal Path, to reach, in this spirit, a new and deepened communication with those who argue from other biographical and ecclesial contexts.

The Synodal Assembly's contributions to this Forum also express different positions. The participants thank the Assembly for the report presented and stress the importance and urgency of continuing to work on the issues raised in the report for the sake of the future of the Church. The desire for open and also controversial discussions on the topics mentioned is expressed several times. The specific issues are preaching by women, the hearing of confessions and the anointing of the sick in pastoral care by women, the gain or loss of credibility of the Church and her relationship to modern, liberal society, young women leaving the Church, the meaning of tradition and change, experienced injustice and suffering, appreciation and justice. It is suggested that the women of the Synodal Assembly network with each other.

“Life in succeeding relationships - Living love in sexuality and partnership”

Bishop Dr Georg Bätzing and Birgit Mock give an introduction into the subject matter. They first give an overview of the genesis and composition of the Preparatory Forum and its working methods, which - despite conflicts over content - were characterized by trusting and fair cooperation.

Fundamental topics of the three sessions of the Preparatory Forum were the meaning and goal of Christian sexual morality given a Catholic understanding of marriage and family, its plausibility, the stated loss of plausibility and the resulting gap to the changed reality of people's lives, as well as the contours of a sexual ethic appropriate to human beings in today's world (different dimensions of meaning / polyvalence of sexuality). In view of a dissent on the question of the possibility and necessity of a further development of Catholic sexual teaching, the working paper of the Preparatory Forum documented the opposing positions on important points in the form of a synopsis. Bishop Bätzing emphasized that a different, early uniform presentation would not have done justice to the discussions of the Pre-Forum Group. A majority of the Forum members underlined the great need for reform in the area of doctrinal development. A minority stressed the continuing validity of traditional doctrine, which must be communicated anew to the faithful. The speakers illustrated this with three examples of the relevance of church sexual morality today: the basic understanding of sexuality and the evaluation of homosexuality and same-sex love. A consensus was reached that forms of relationships in which values such as love, friendship, reliability, faithfulness, mutual support and solidarity are lived out deserve moral recognition and respect. Sexuality should be linked to love, friendship and a sustainable relationship. However, the question of whether this postulate also applies independently of the formal commitment (marriage) and the sexual orientation of the partners remained controversial.

After the introduction, Andrea Heim presents an overview of the feedback given on the internet. The common denominator of the highly diverse and controversial feedback was the demand for a return to what Jesus said. Ms Heim presents three qualitative focal points of the feedback: The sexual teaching of the Church

- ... is good and right - no compromises are to be considered in its commandments and prohibitions: the idea of achievement (having one's sexuality and urges under control) and an ambivalent evaluation of modernity play an important role here.
- Is good and right - but to be implemented in a way that is true to life: Sex is not the most important thing in a relationship; high standards apply, but those who fail them should receive mercy; people should not be discriminated against and the individual case should be considered.
- ... must change - it is not up to date; hardly anyone adheres to it; scientific findings must be taken into account; Church has forfeited its credibility in the field; a paradigm shift must be brought about.

Ms Heim finally points out that only the contributions submitted could be included in this descriptive evaluation. It would also be worthwhile to look at who was not reached at all or no longer reached by the given questions. She also reports that some of the contributions evaluated were characterized by crude language and in some cases included massive insults.

In the following debate, additional aspects are introduced and expectations of the work of the Synodal Forum are expressed. The situation of those working in Caritas is recalled, who have to carry out their work in the area of tension between doctrine and the world in which they live. In view of this, the great importance to include pastoral experience in the further development of teaching and to listen to pastoral workers who accompany wounded and vulnerable people is emphasized. A confession of guilt by the Church for an exclusionary and rigid sexual morality is also demanded. From the perspective of young people, it is pointed out that many young people consciously distance themselves from the teachings of the Church despite their knowledge. They are not willing to follow her, because her prohibitions and exclusions do not seem to be in line with the Gospel.

This is countered by the fact that sexual morality, as formulated for example in the "Theology of the Body" of St. John Paul II, must not be reduced to a caricature of itself. The Church's sexual morality is "deliberately unworldly".

Other contributions deal with the situation of homosexual, intersexual and transsexual people. Being stigmatized as sinful makes those affected susceptible to blackmail and they feel dependent, unfree and speechless in the ecclesiastical sphere. Church doctrinal statements on homosexuality, such as those found in the Catechism, are accused of being unrealistic and of appearing arrogant. A change of perspective and respect are demanded. This also includes no longer speaking only of men and women.

The consideration of experiences of sexualised violence is also strongly called for. The members of the Synodal Assembly must be aware that victims of violence and exclusion are listening to and following the discussions of the Synodal Path.

In conclusion, the chairs of the Preparatory Forum thank the participants for their contributions, especially for the very personal testimonies, and make it clear that one of the tasks of the Forum would be to develop a new view of homosexuality and same-sex relationships and to work towards an opening.

Reports

Bishop Dr Franz-Josef Bode introduces the agenda item. He thanks Bishop Dr Stephan Ackermann and Archbishop Dr Ludwig Schick for their subsequent reports, which may refute the accusation that nothing is progressing in the Church. Although no general debate is planned due to time constraints, requests to speak are possible following the reports.

Examination and investigation of sexual abuse

Bishop Dr Stefan Ackermann reports on the current status of the work carried out to examine and investigate the cases of sexual abuse. However, it is also important for him to report on what has been done in the last ten years since the cases of abuse at the Canisius-Kolleg in Berlin have become known. The dimension of abuse in the Catholic Church has gradually become clearer to all involved in recent years. In 2018, the MHG study commissioned by the bishops impressively demonstrated to the Church the significance of the structural dimension of sexual abuse. It has made clear how institutional failure in particular has contributed and continues to contribute to continued sexual abuse in the Church. At the Spring Plenary Assembly of the German Bishops' Conference in Freiburg in 2010, the Church committed herself to numerous measures:

- Appointment of a Commissioner
- Establishment of a counselling hotline for affected persons
- Participation in the Round Table on Child Sexual Abuse
- Guidelines and framework regulation on prevention (contact persons and prevention officers in the dioceses)
- Procedure for the material recognition of suffering
- Research projects
- Prevention fund

At the Autumn Plenary Assembly of the German Bishops' Conference 2018 in Fulda, the following steps resulting from the MHG study were announced:

- Greater participation of affected people and external experts (establishment of an affected people's advisory board)
- Continuous reporting on the part of the German Bishops' Conference
- Additional independent contact points for affected persons
- Further development of the procedure for the material recognition of suffering
- Independent examination
- Standardisation in clergy personnel record keeping
- Monitoring for the fields of intervention and prevention
- Entry into force of the revised regulations on 1 January 2020 (Regulations for Dealing with Sexual Abuse, Framework Regulations - Prevention against Sexualised Violence)

The report concludes by pointing out that the Independent Commissioner for Child Sexual Abuse in the Federal Republic of Germany, Johannes-Wilhelm Rörig, has highlighted combating sexual abuse as a national task. The Catholic Church must fulfil her part of this task. This is not the sole responsibility of the bishops and the specialists appointed for this purpose, but a joint task of everyone in the Church.

Subsequent to the report, the following aspects are introduced:

No total figure is available on current cases of sexual abuse because there are no common statistics of the German dioceses available so far. The question of recognising suffering has not yet been satisfactorily resolved. Complex factors and plausibility issues have to be considered in this process. After the publication of the MHG study, more victims of sexual abuse have come forward. This means that a culture of attention, which is to be judged positively, also brings incidents of sexual abuse increasingly into the public eye. Victims of sexual abuse expect the Church to do more. Like most people, they have very different expectations. The form in which victims of sexual abuse can have a voice in the Synodal Path, e.g. through testimonies, still has to be agreed on. In the meantime, there is an obligation for all church institutions to develop and comply with protection concepts to prevent sexual abuse. Non-compliance can only be sanctioned through the issue of funding or the level of financial support from the Church. In the USA, a study has shown that six to ten percent of seminarians have experienced sexual violence in the seminary. Of 33 priests, according to the study, 14 have experienced sexual violence themselves. The issue of violence by priests and in seminaries should be put on the agenda in the Forum "Priestly Existence". Various blind spots are pointed out that need even greater attention in the Church: Female perpetrators, adults affected by abuse, other forms of abuse such as violence against religious women, spiritual exercise of power or dependence (e.g. in confession) and sexualised violence.

Criminal and Administrative Jurisdiction

Archbishop Dr Ludwig Schick* presents, after some introductory remarks on the function of law in the Church, the projects planned by the German Bishops' Conference as a result of the MHG study for a criminal and administrative jurisdiction and a disciplinary code for clergy. He holds out the prospect that the draft texts developed since May 2019 will be presented to the Spring Plenary Assembly of the German Bishops' Conference in early March 2020. After that, contact is to be made with the corresponding offices of the Roman Curia. This will be followed in spring/summer of this year by an information and exchange phase with the vicars general, legal advisors and personnel managers of the German dioceses. Archbishop Schick hopes that all three projects can be completed in the course of 2020 so that implementation may begin in 2021.

In the following debate, the demand is made to draw consequences from the MHG study at all levels of the Church.

The question is raised as to what is done for those affected by abuse and to what extent they are involved. Abuse of children is an official offence. It is planned that those affected may act as joint plaintiffs. The envisaged ecclesiastical criminal jurisdiction does not provide for legal action against bishops and cardinals. This is regulated by the Apostolic Exhortation "*Vos estis lux mundi*" of 7 May 2019, which for the first time also provides for judicial investigations and, if necessary, convictions of bishops in cases of cover-up.

Election of the members of the Interpretation Commission

The Synodal Assembly elects the Interpretation Commission provided for in the Rules of Procedure and consisting of three members: Archbishop Dr Ludwig Schick (144 votes), Dr Barbara Wieland (102 votes) and Prof. Dr Dr Ulrich Hemel (95 votes).

Members of the Synodal Forums

The Committee's lists of nominees for the Synodal Forums are available to the members of the Synodal Assembly. In accordance with the Rules of Procedure of the Synodal Path, five additional persons may be elected from the Assembly for each Forum.

The following persons are elected to the list of nominees for the Synodal Forum "Power and Separation of Powers in the Church - Joint Participation and Involvement in the Mission": Lukas Nusser (75), Kerstin Stegemann (72), Dr Thomas Arnold (60), Prof. Dr Dr Ulrich Hemel (57), Dr Wolfgang Picken (57)

The following persons are elected to the list of nominees for the Synodal Forum "Priestly existence today":

Prelate Dr Bertram Meier (116), Franziska Kleiner (102), Fr. Simon Hacker OP (92), Dr Matthias Leineweber (86), Auxiliary Bishop Wilhelm Zimmermann (82)

The following persons are elected to the list of nominees for the Synodal Forum "Women in ministries and offices in the Church":

Sr. Philippa Rath OSB (159), Finja Miriam Weber (105), Gudrun Lux (81), Lukas Färber (78), Ludger Urbic (61)

The following persons are elected to the list of nominees for the Synodal Forum "Life in succeeding relationships - Living love in sexuality and partnership":

Dr Katharina Westerhorstmann (144), Michael Berentzen (108), Sarah Henschke (70), Gregor Podschun (62), Marcus Schuck (62)

A request is formulated from the Plenary Assembly to include Janosch Roggel, who was not elected to the Forum "Life in succeeding relationships - Living love in sexuality and partnership", as a permanent guest due to his perspective on the Forum's topic. The Forum will decide on this after it has been constituted.

Finally, the supplemented lists of proposals for the Forum "Power and Separation of Powers" (92% approval), for the Forum "Priestly Existence Today" (97% approval), for the Forum "Women in Ministries and Offices in the Church" (91% approval) and for the Forum "Living in Successful Relationships" (92% approval) are adopted by the Synodal Assembly (Annex).

Feedback from the observers of the Synodal Assembly

Dr Thies Gundlach, Vice-President of the Church Office of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), praises the courage of the Catholic Church in Germany to embark on the Synodal Path. The Evangelical Church has a lot of experience with this form of work due to its synodal constitution and practice. Every observer feels that a lot is at stake. It is true that ecumenism is not a central theme in any of the forums. At the same time, however, all the forums are of great importance for ecumenism. The Evangelical and Catholic Churches are mutually connected and a credible ecumenism is the prerequisite for social recognition of the Christian churches. Bishop Didier Berthet of the French Bishops' Conference states that the very beginning of the Synodal Path with the First Synodal Assembly is a first achievement. For him, participation is

connected with discoveries and the spiritual impulses are examples for this. He describes as impressive the freedom of the word and the community of different vocations and charisms, who accept each other with gratitude. He is convinced that the Synodal Path will help the Catholic Church in Germany to renew herself and to find new credibility.

The Synodal Committee thanks all observers for their participation and their interest in the Synodal Path.

Conclusion of the meeting

Cardinal Reinhard Marx and Prof. Dr Thomas Sternberg speak the closing words to the first Synodal Assembly. They appreciate the culture of exchange and discussion that has been found and which gives confidence for the further course of the Synodal Path. They thank all participants and all guests very much for their cooperation. A special thank you goes to all those who contributed to the success of this First Synodal Assembly by preparing and implementing it. The spirit of partnership in the Assembly must now prove itself in the work of the Forums and in the next meetings, when the content will also be voted on.

* The contribution has been published and can be found at: www.synodalerweg.de