



Implementation text

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

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

Resolutions

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

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

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

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

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

Reasoning

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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