



Foundational text

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

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Part I:

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

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

Dimensions and challenges of the crisis

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

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

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

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

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

2. We have understood!

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

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

(15) We have understood

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

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

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

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

3. We are on a path of learning.

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

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

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

3.1 God's revelation in the Church's tradition

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

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

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

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

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

3.2 The Church on the path through time

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(30) A church culture of conflict presupposes:

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

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

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

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

5.1 The sacramentality of the Church ...

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Part II:

Necessary steps on the way to reform church power structures

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

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

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

6. We need clear terms and precise distinctions.

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

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

6.1 Terms clearly defined in canon law

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

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

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

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

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

6.2 Precise distinctions

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

Differentiations in canon law

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

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

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

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

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

Perpetuating a living tradition

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7. Defining standards and criteria together.

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

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

7.1 Common standards

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

Creating spaces, securing participation rights and preventing abuse

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

Inculturation into democracy

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

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

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

Democracy as a place of learning for the Church

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

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

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

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

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

Synodality as a principle of the Church

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

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

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

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

7.2 Joint criteria

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8. We address requirements for access and promote competences.

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

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

8.1 Leadership tasks

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

8.2 Celibacy

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

8.3 Enabling women to access the ordo

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Liturgy

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

Martyria

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

Diaconia

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

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

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

The parish level¹¹

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

The diocesan level

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

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

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

The level of the Bishops' Conference

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

The universal church level

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

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

Finance

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

Human resources development

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

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

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

(102) In *matters of personnel*

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

Planning: decision-making processes

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

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

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

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

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

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