



Presentation
of the Synodal Forum II
“Priestly existence today”
for the first Reading
at the
third Synodal Assembly (3-5 February 2022)
for the implementation text
“Prevention and dealing with perpetrators”

[Voting result in the Forum: 26 Yes, 1 No]

Introduction

From the experiences gained with cases of sexualised violence in institutional contexts and in particular on the basis of the findings of the MHG study, various insights have developed that form the basis for sustainable victim protection. These include, on the one hand, systemic framework conditions and, on the other hand, clear procedures in concrete cases of sexualised violence. In addition to prevention concepts, clear rules for dealing with perpetrators are also part of dealing with the abuse scandal and preventing sexualised violence.

Since the many cases of sexualised violence in the Catholic Church have become public, the German Bishops' Conference has developed standards for the prevention of sexualized violence¹

¹ “Framework Regulation - Prevention of sexualized violence against minors and vulnerable adults within the domain of the German Bishops' Conference” (Würzburg, 2019) and Handout “Framework regulation - Prevention of sexualized violence against minors and vulnerable adults within the domain of the German Bishops' Conference” (2021).

as well as a clear set of rules for dealing with cases of abuse² and for investigating them.³ These are updated regularly.

The standards are to be supported by this option for action and specified in individual places. As an option for action of the Synodal Forum "Priestly Existence Today", the focus is particularly on the clergy.

Even though topics such as sexual development, respect for boundaries, personality development, education and training, etc. have already been addressed in various other texts, we consider it important, especially in this option for action, that dealing with sexualised violence and respect for boundaries is given attention again and again (from the time of education and training to retirement).

Proposals

1. The Synodal Assembly asks the German Bishops' Conference to ensure that prevention regulations are adopted and implemented in all Catholic institutions and associations. This includes all those working in the Church, whether full-time or voluntary, and whether they are consecrated or lay persons.
2. Prevention work is an integral part of priestly formation. This is reflected through the following standards:
 - The prevention of sexualised acts is the subject of the admission interview between the training supervisor and the interested person. The basis for this is a code of conduct which contains binding rules of behaviour for a professionally appropriate relationship of closeness and distance towards minors and other adult persons in need of protection. This code of conduct is to be signed by the seminarian.
 - Within the institution of the seminary, seminarians as trainees find themselves in a hierarchical and dependent relationship to the seminary leader. Seminary-specific structures that can promote the abuse (of power) should be addressed from the beginning of the training. In addition, the aim is to create a sensitivity for respecting boundaries, also between seminary participants, and to name transparent procedures and known contact persons in order to effectively counter behaviour that violates boundaries in the seminary context. Each seminary has a prevention concept that is discussed with the seminarians.
 - Prevention work is ensured by continuing education units in all phases of priestly formation (propaedeutic, study phase, pastoral course, training for the 2nd service examination). To this end, each seminary or the dioceses cooperating in priestly formation draw up a training concept. These training modules are to be developed with the diocesan prevention officers and those responsible for pastoral psychological training.

² "Regulation for dealing with sexual abuse of minors and of vulnerable adults by clergy and other church staff" of the German Bishops' Conference (Würzburg, 2019).

³ "Joint declaration on binding criteria and standards for an independent examination of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in Germany" (2020).

- Sensitisation to behaviour that respects boundaries is part of the training with regard to all areas of life (incl. the seminary situation, the training path and the future pastoral ministry).
- If, in the course of the training, repeated transgressive behaviour occurs and there is no change in behaviour despite expressed criticism and the imposition of possible conditions, acceptance into church service is ruled out.

Explanation: These measures may deter potential perpetrators from aspiring to enter into church service.

3. The Synodal Assembly asks the German Bishops' Conference in cooperation with Commission IV to anchor the feedback culture of all those working in church ministry in a framework regulation. For example, there should be regular supervision in (pastoral) teams.

Explanation: It is essential to address misconduct and to provide support for change, up to and including conditions and target agreements. If staff and priests do not respect boundaries, openness to a culture of criticism and error is indispensable. In this context, it is imperative that this also takes place as a matter of course and without fear, beyond hierarchical and professional boundaries. It must be possible to make complaints easily without causing disadvantages to the person making the report. A team culture and regular team meetings, also across professional groups, are helpful in the parishes or pastoral units.

4. During the visitations in the pastoral unit, the entire system must also be examined with regard to the prevention of sexualised violence. The visitors should proactively address the topics of sexualised violence, of a protection concept and behaviour respecting boundaries in the various discussions. This should be included in the respective visitation regulations.

Explanation: This encourages those affected or those with knowledge about certain cases to report violations of boundaries and sexual violence. In addition, the discussion fills the protection concepts that have been developed with life.

5. The Synodal Assembly calls on the German Bishops' Conference to develop a disciplinary regulation for priests. Bishops are to have the option of imposing a condition of cooperation with regard to possible external counselling or therapy on priests who have not been proven to have engaged in criminally relevant behaviour, but who do engage in behaviour that crosses boundaries. In this case, the term "condition" is not to be understood in the legal sense, but analogous to service agreements in the case of problematic behaviour.

Explanation: Often, bishops feel that they are unable to take disciplinary measures as long as the facts have not been clarified. This causes a vacuum leading to insecurity and restraint/passiveness.

6. Specialised counselling centres dealing with men, violence and conflict or contact points such as "Don't become a perpetrator" should be regularly advertised among the staff and also in clergy circles.

Explanation: For priests and other staff members who notice that they have problems with transgressive behaviour or develop fantasies of sexual assault, a low-threshold offer of psychological help must be available and accessible to them. From a research perspective, it is

known that a certain percentage of the population has a sexual preference towards children or adolescents. For these people, therapy in the counselling centres can be very helpful in dealing responsibly with their predisposition and preventing perpetration.

7. With regard to perpetrators, everything must be done to prevent them from re-offending. Work with perpetrators is considered part of victim protection. If a cleric has been proven to be a perpetrator, the perpetrator must be required by decree to undergo therapy. The therapy should be carried out by special offender counselling centres or therapists specialised in the topic. The contents and goals of therapy with perpetrators of sexualised violence must above all be victim protection (assessing and averting danger for those among the perpetrator's environment who are directly or indirectly affected) as well as accepting responsibility for the acts and the consequences of their actions. In addition, recognising his own patterns and motivations that the perpetrator uses for sexualised violence is imperative in order to find perspectives for the further field of employment and suitability.

Explanation: The danger of repeat offences must not be underestimated. Statistically, the risk of re-offending is extremely high in this field. It is therefore all the more important to ensure that (suspected) offenders attend therapy and do not come into contact with children, young people and people in need of protection in the course of their work.

8. Ideally, each offender is assigned a kind of "case manager" by the Ordinary, i.e. a responsible person who checks the therapy requirements, follows the further career and life path of the offender in accordance with the "Regulation for dealing with sexual abuse of minors and of vulnerable adults by clergy and other church staff" (50ff).

Explanation: Too often, due to transfer and/or temporary "leave of absence", keeping track of and control over previous offenders has not been possible.

9. As regards this issue, we consider a conversation with a well-skilled interlocutor to be a self-evident prerequisite, especially for conversations with victims of violence. If necessary, special training for bishops and other responsible persons on how to conduct conversations would be useful.

Explanation: From the reports of those affected, it has often become clear that they had not been treated with the necessary sensitivity and sympathy. The people in charge sometimes seemed out of their depth when it came to dealing with this topic and the people involved.

10. The Bishops' Conference should clarify open questions in a specialist committee, including how to proceed with accused clerics as long as the facts of the case have not yet been clarified or if the outcome of the proceedings was not relevant under criminal law but the behaviour of the accused was problematic.