



Presentation

of Synodal Forum III

“Women in ministries and offices in the Church”

for the First Reading

at the Second Synodal Assembly (30 September - 2 October 2021)

for the action text

“Management of parishes, congregations and pastoral spaces” (draft file)

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“Vigorous, broad and active involvement of the laity”

In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “Querida Amazonia”, Pope Francis gives direction for pastoral care, and encourages us to “be open to the Spirit’s boldness” (QA 94). He calls for “the vigorous, broad and active involvement of the laity”, and for the presence of “mature and lay leaders endowed with authority” in the parishes (QA 94). In a synodal Church, women have access to permanent ministries and offices which entail “public recognition and a commission from the bishop” (QA 103). Women must “have a real and effective impact on the organization, the most important decisions and the direction of communities” (QA 103). In the Amazon region, in the German local church, but also in many other parts of the universal Church, the congregations and other church places rely on the supporting role of women. This is also expressed in leadership, as Pope Francis explicitly emphasises: “Women in Amazonia - both lay and religious - lead whole congregations. To say that they are not really in leadership because they are not priests is clericalism, and is disrespectful.”<sup>1</sup>

The following action text starts from these statements, and formulates concrete proposals in relation to different levels and areas of the Church. The exclusion of women from ordained ministry is regarded by many as hurtful and unjust. It is rightly questioned and discussed. The Forum “Women in ministries and offices” will also develop action texts on this. Greater participation by women in offices and ministries of the Church can currently only be made possible by expanding the competences of qualified lay women. The experiences of the local churches in for instance Latin America, Asia, Africa and Europe are mutually enriching.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, Let us dream - The Path to a Better Future, 2020, 90.

## Legal latitude that already exists

New models of pastoral leadership are being practised and tested in many dioceses. There is a differentiated, broad spectrum of leadership concepts. In addition to the model of the canonical priest, which is predominantly applied in the German dioceses, there are different leadership concepts in which leadership tasks are delegated or are carried out by a team who share responsibility. There is a need to distinguish here between the level of the parishes, the local congregations or church locations, and the larger areas such as the deaneries.

### *The parish*

- Nomination of pastoral coordinators or employees to support the parish priest in pastoral and administrative leadership tasks in parishes, parish communities or new-merged parishes, working closely with the pastoral team and the elected bodies (e.g. parish council and administrative council).
- Deployment of the full-time pastoral team in which pastoral employees are involved in the leadership tasks of the parish priest.
- Deployment of heads of administration in parishes or larger pastoral territories (e.g. in parish associations at city level).
- Establishment of leadership models according to c. 517 § 2 CIC (Code of Canon Law of 1983), according to which deacons and laywomen can participate in the exercise of “the pastoral care of a parish”, i.e. in comprehensive pastoral care in parishes. Pope Francis also refers to this canon in *Querida Amazonia* (QA 94), as does the Congregation for the Clergy in its Instruction entitled “The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church” (87-93). In its letter on the Parish community, the Congregation for the Clergy mentions this extraordinary form as a possibility in an extraordinary situation, such as especially that of the shortage of priests (87-93), a situation which undoubtedly applies to the local churches in Germany and is currently worsening. The diocesan bishop can therefore involve full-time and voluntary workers, alone or in a team, at the level of a parish or of a Parish community by commissioning them to exercise pastoral care. These commissioned persons are called “parish commissioners” in some dioceses. They then exercise pastoral responsibility together with a priest appointed by the bishop who coordinates and directs pastoral care as a “moderator”, but is not the priest of the parish or parish community.
- Mixed teams with full-time and voluntary workers, or purely full-time teams, are commissioned according to c. 517 §2 CIC. Diocesan rules specify the respective competences and responsibilities.
- The parish commissioner has the following tasks amongst others:
  - o being a point of call for members of the parish, groups and associations
  - o developing and implementing the pastoral objectives

- ensuring the realisation of the fundamental ministries (*diaconia*, proclamation and liturgy), together with the pastoral team and the bodies
- carrying out individual activities in pastoral care; e.g. leading church funeral services
- promoting volunteer responsibility, including but not limited to the elected bodies
- personnel management tasks
- legal representation via delegation
- carrying out representational tasks e.g. in ecumenical work and in the interfaith dialogue
- networking with other places in the Church, e.g. with day-care centres for children and Caritas facilities
- The supervising priest mainly exercises his office through
  - providing spiritual support for all concerned
  - carrying out tasks tied to the authority conferred by ordination
  - taking responsibility for the celebration of the sacraments
  - taking joint responsibility with the other commissioners
- C. 516 CIC also provides scope for the governance of parishes and quasi-parishes as well as for other types of community.
- Different church property management laws and asset management laws apply in the German dioceses. The consequence of this is that lay people and deacons have a seat and a vote in the church council (or administrative council) as “parish commissioners” in some dioceses, and not in others. Since this means a considerable restriction in the exercise of the leadership tasks, this calls for a new arrangement in the provisions of state-church law.

### *The parish/congregation*

Greater legal freedom exists at the local level of the parishes or congregations (the level below the parish) for their leadership. There are:

- the elected pastoral councils (e.g. local church councils or local committees) and administrative bodies
- elected or commissioned voluntary contact persons (e.g. teams in the congregation)
- full-time contacts or coordinators, performing the following tasks, amongst others
  - being a point of call for members of the parish, groups and associations
  - developing and implementing the pastoral objectives
  - ensuring the realisation of the fundamental ministries (*diaconia*, proclamation and liturgy), together with the pastoral team and the bodies

- carrying out individual activities in pastoral care; e.g. leading church funeral services
  - promoting volunteer responsibility, including but not limited to the elected bodies
  - personnel management tasks
  - legal representation via delegation
  - carrying out representational tasks e.g. in ecumenical work and in the interfaith dialogue
  - networking with other places in the Church, e.g. with day-care centres for children and Caritas facilities
- mixed teams consisting of full-timers and volunteers

### *The deanery*

New leadership models are also emerging with regard to the leadership of deaneries:

- dual leaderships with equal numbers of men and women, where a priest and a woman have joint responsibility for a deanery.

### *New social forms*

- There are different pastoral places and centres, for example in categorial pastoral work (e.g. pastoral work in hospitals and airports, city pastoral work, social pastoral work), which are led by lay people. This also corresponds to the stimulus from the Instruction of the Congregation for the Clergy entitled "The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church" on the promotion of "pastoral centres" (115-117).
- New social forms of religious life are developing alongside traditional territorial structures. These include associations in digital networks and fluid forms of community building. The roles in pastoral relationships are also changing so that baptised people of all genders - whether they are ordained or not - are acting on a more equal footing.

### **The Synodal Assembly is requested to resolve as follows:**

1. All the dioceses promote different models of leadership in shared responsibility in congregations, parishes and deaneries, enabling the competences and charisms of women and men to be effective together. Teams are always mixed. The dioceses promote greater gender equality when exercising leadership, including when it comes to pastoral work. They make greater and more creative use of the scope offered by canon law. The dioceses will be presenting concepts for this to their diocesan committees within three years.

2. The experience gathered with new leadership models will be evaluated in the dioceses, and the evaluations will be made available to the other dioceses.
3. The dioceses are to revise the Church Property Management Acts (*Kirchenvermögensverwaltungsgesetze* - KVGs) and the Property Management Acts (*Vermögensverwaltungsgesetze* - VVGs) with the aim in mind to ensure that parish commissioners are enabled to have a seat in the church council (administrative council). The second step will be to develop corresponding sets of rules of procedure.
4. Attitudes and competences that aim to bring about a contemporary understanding of leadership and gender sensitivity are to be intensively promoted in the basic and further training of the pastoral staff, and when providing guidance to volunteers.
5. Theologically-qualified individuals and/or people with an interest, and in particular theological faculties, institutes and Church Universities, support these processes in Germany through (scholarly) reflection. The relationship between ordination and leadership is to be further clarified in this context (see also the basic text of Forum III). Further models are to be developed in which the relationship between ordination and leadership will be redefined, starting from the principle of participation, not only delegation. The German Bishops' Conference and the dioceses will provide appropriate funds for this purpose, and theologians can apply for them by submitting their projects.
6. The rights and duties of lay people in the parish leadership are to be interpreted as broadly as possible and enhanced.

## Reasoning

There is a need to re-ascertain what new forms of pastoral care and leadership can contribute towards living out the mission of the Church against the backdrop of the challenges of today's society. Nuanced pastoral realities and complex leadership challenges require differentiated models of leadership in territorial and categorial pastoral care, where different perspectives complement one another. When an essential task of the Church and all Her members consists of "scrutinizing the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel" (Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* 4), then "scrutinizing", "interpreting" and "deciding" also require the experience and realities of the different genders at leadership level. This creates a new style of "collaboration, of encounter and closeness, of mercy and solicitude for the proclamation of the Gospel" (Instruction by the Congregation for the Clergy "The pastoral conversion of the Parish community" 2). What this cultural change means is that it is only in interaction between the different charisms and competences of women and men that the Church can do justice to Her mission; it is only in the interaction of the gifts that She can create the appropriate space for pastoral care and be there for people in their diverse life situations.

In their document "*Gemeinsam Kirche sein*", the German bishops encourage new models of leadership: leadership in teams, leadership by election, leadership for a limited period of office (i.e. for clergy). They explicitly seek to promote leadership ministries of women and men. Team models make it possible for qualified lay women to take on more leadership. Their bap-

tismal dignity, charisms and competences form the crucial basis for their taking part in the leadership of parishes and pastoral settings. The goal is to make better use of the richness of the existing charisms, regardless of the number of ordained priests. Seeking new paths for the proclamation of the Gospel (Instruction "The pastoral conversion of the Parish community" 1), makes the experience of women particularly indispensable in leadership tasks. Women are naturally to be found in leadership positions in our society and culture. The "fruitful and creative encounter between the Gospel and the culture" (Instruction "The pastoral conversion of the Parish community" 4) therefore demands a stronger presence of women in leadership at all church's levels.

The leadership models mentioned above as examples, as well as the legal stipulations, show that both administrative and pastoral leadership tasks are not bound to the ordained ministry in exclusivity. Leadership models that provide for cooperation between spiritual leadership as well as pastoral and administrative responsibility can and must be further developed and tested. This requires further scholarly and theological reflection, and a redefinition of the relationship between ordination and leadership. The legal directions following the Second Vatican Council are to be tapped into and applied more consistently: Canon law designates lay leadership, "which cannot be described as a derivation or delegation from episcopal or priestly ministry" (*Gemeinsam Kirche sein*). Lay people thus exercise ecclesiastical offices by virtue of their separate mission through baptism and confirmation (c. 145 CIC). It is necessary for the tasks to be distinguished in the different models of leadership according to charisms, training, profession, commissioning, mission and ordination, but to remain free of superordination and subordination. When lay people undertake leadership tasks in parishes and congregations, this task should also be marked and described as "leadership". Although the Instruction on the pastoral conversion of the parish community describes the use of expressions such as "preside over the parish community" with regard to lay women as illegitimate (96), at the same time Pope Francis emphasises in "Let us dream" that women lead church congregations, and that this should not be diminished (see above). The clear designation as "presiding over the parish community" takes into account the participation of all who are baptised in the *munus regendi* (pastoral ministry), and it contributes to the understanding of the role and task by the members of the parish/congregation.

The developments of leadership models mentioned here are accompanied by church development processes in several dioceses where the attitudes and competences of those involved are described. Willingness to be transparent and participate; trust, willingness to learn and ability to handle conflict are only a few examples of attitudes that full-time staff and volunteers practice in joint learning processes with one another in some cases. Leadership teams provide a space in which to be more mindful of and provide more mutual support and care to colleagues. This cultural change also includes working on a contemporary understanding of leadership, which in turn is fed by theological reflection, spirituality and knowledge of organisation.