



Presentation

of Synodal Forum II

“Women in ministries and offices in the Church”

for the Second Reading at the Fifth Synodal

Assembly (9 - 11 March 2023) for the

implementation text

“Proclamation of the Gospel by lay people in word and sacrament”

[Result of the ballot in the Forum: 23 Yes, 1 abstention]

Introduction

The proclamation of the Gospel is the purpose of all the Church’s activities and the Christian confession is Good News for every day. At the same time, the Gospel is heard with open ears in special life situations, such as at the beginning of a faithful relationship that is intended to last for a lifetime, at the birth of a child, or in times of illness, nearing death, and in times of mourning. It is in these existential situations of life that the Church’s ministry of proclamation is very especially called for. Then it is a matter of being present by providing pastoral guidance, sharing joy and successful life, imparting blessings and an uplifting word and in sacramental services with all the charisms that God gives to people. Women and their charisms are naturally part of these ministries. At the same time, all pastoral carers need to receive assurance through the trust placed in them that their actions in the mentioned existential situations are welcomed and considered effective.

The testimony of God’s salvific acts becomes weaker if the fulness of the existing charisms and skills is not respected. Pope Francis opens up perspectives in *Querida Amazonia*: “The laity can proclaim God’s word, teach, organize communities, celebrate certain sacraments” (QA 89).¹ Likewise, in *Querida Amazonia* he refers to can. 517 § 2 CIC 1983 and calls for the “stable presence of mature and lay leaders endowed with authority” (QA 94). In several German dioceses, lay people are increasingly being entrusted with leading tasks in parish pastoral care according to can. 517 § 2 CIC 1983. It seems sensible and necessary that these persons should

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

also be more present in the proclamation of Word and Sacrament. The working document for the Continental Synod also emphasises that the issue of the full and equal participation of women is mentioned in almost all local church reports. This concerns inclusion in decision-making processes, but also in liturgical ministries, such as the preaching ministry by women (nos. 64, 91).

Well-trained persons such as parish expert workers and pastoral assistants or commissioned volunteers participate in the proclamation ministry of the Church in various forms of worship. In this way, they promote the presence of diverse perspectives in the proclamation. According to can. 766 *CIC* 1983, it is possible for lay people to preach publicly in churches and chapels in accordance with the regulations of the Bishops' Conference, for example in celebrations of the Word of God. There is also the practice of an introduction at the beginning of the Eucharistic celebration (*statio*) and the testimony of faith by lay people or the dialogue sermon. The homily, the sermon in the Eucharistic celebration, is to be distinguished from this. It is reserved for ordained ministers entrusted with an episcopal mission for this purpose (can. 767 § 1 *CIC* 1983).

A regulation would be necessary by which qualified persons and those commissioned to serve in the Church would also be permitted, on the basis of an episcopal mission, to preach in all the usual forms in the Eucharistic celebration, which is already good practice in some (arch)dioceses. Among other things, pastoral workers are in intensive contact with families of baptised children, the sick and their relatives or with young couples. Many lay people work full-time or on a voluntary basis in hospital chaplaincy, hospice work, telephone chaplaincy, in counselling or in the railway station mission. People are open to talking about their life situation in such church-related contexts. Many people come to monasteries to make a life confession as part of spiritual exercises or of a spiritual conversation, also with women religious; prayers asking for forgiveness are experienced as helpful. People feel a painful rupture in pastoral guidance if the pastoral workers cannot also take on leadership of the celebration of baptism, the sacrament of reconciliation, or the anointing of the sick. It would be consistent if the sacramental character of pastoral care were to be brought together in such a way that a female pastoral worker could also be specifically responsible for leading the celebration of the sacrament where this is desired. In the meantime, several German dioceses have issued or are currently working on codes for commissioning lay people for the extraordinary conferring of baptism. Women are also increasingly acting on their own responsibility in the universal Church context in organising sacramental celebrations, not only in the celebration of baptism, but also in the celebration of the sacrament of marriage, which takes effect in a promise made by two people to love and respect one another throughout their lives.

Resolutions

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

Thus, the following should be aimed for:

Bishops and other persons responsible for the liturgy are to treat the homily (interpretation of Scripture after reading the Gospel in the celebration of the Eucharist), and other forms of proclamation, as part of the ministry of full-time and appropriately trained personnel (priests, deacons, pastoral assistants and parish expert workers according to can. 517 § 2 *CIC* 1983). They commission pastoral workers to preach in the Eucharistic celebration accompanied by their ecclesial mission (*missio canonica*), so that they may carry out their preaching ministry officially and in the name of the Church.

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

2. In the German (Arch)dioceses the pastoral requirements with regard to introducing the extraordinary conferral of baptism according to can. 230 § 3 *CIC* 1983 are to be examined, the possibility of introducing it will be created and the corresponding criteria will be developed. The experiences with the conferral of baptism by lay persons are to be evaluated in the dioceses; the results are to be presented to the diocesan councils after three years.

A framework regulation for the qualification and commissioning of lay men and women to lead the celebration of baptism is to be developed in the committees of the German Bishops' Conference.

Appropriate training is being developed.

3. In the German (Arch)dioceses, the need for marriage assistance by lay people is being examined in accordance with the legal requirements (can. 1112 *CIC* 1983).

In the committees of the German Bishops' Conference, a framework regulation for the qualification and commissioning of lay people is being prepared. Appropriate training courses are being developed.

4. The Pastoral Commission of the German Bishops' Conference is to coordinate a consultation process in which, among others, members of the Central Committee of German Catholics' Subject Area 1 (Theology, Pastoral Care and Ecumenism), of the Conference of Major Superiors as well as of women's, men's and youth associations, are to participate: Given today's pastoral contexts, it is to be examined how existing ministries and offices are to be developed, and what new ministries and offices are to be designed with which the Church can and must respond to new challenges. Possibilities for revitalising lay confession in the context of spiritual guidance are also to be discussed.² The importance of blessing and anointing the sick with regard to all pastoral carers who are active in attending the sick is also to be considered. The whole wealth of pastoral activity already practised in the history of the Church is to be

² The origins of lay confession lie in Eastern monasticism, among other places. There was the practice of confessing one's sins to a spiritually experienced person. Lay confession also reached the Western Church from the East and established itself there according to the words "Confess your sins to one another" (*Jam* 5:16). Since Thomas Aquinas, lay confession has increasingly receded into the background.

rediscovered. This consultation process also includes the development of qualification criteria for further developed ministries. Topics and concerns of this consultation process will be brought into the universal church synodal process by the delegates from Germany.

5. In the German (Arch)dioceses, the need for the commissioning of lay people to participate in the leadership of parishes and communities will be examined in accordance with the legal requirements (can. 517 § 2 and can. 516 *CIC* 1983). In the committees of the German Bishops' Conference, a framework for the qualification and commissioning of lay people to participate in the leadership of parishes and communities is being developed, taking into account existing documents in individual German dioceses and in the universal Church. Appropriate training courses are being developed.

Reasoning

Re 1. In accordance with *Lumen Gentium* 31, all faithful are by baptism made part of the service of sanctifying, proclaiming and ruling. By virtue of their baptism and their individual mission based therein, lay persons are obliged and possess the right to work so that the divine message of salvation is made known (Can. 225 *CIC* 1983). This mission of proclamation relates to their witness of life and word, as well as to the fact that “they can also be called upon to cooperate with the bishop and presbyters in the exercise of the ministry of the word” (Can. 759 *CIC* 1983). The Second Vatican Council signals openness by not prohibiting lay preaching. In accordance with canon law as it stands, lay persons can be permitted to preach publicly in a church or oratory in various forms of worship, according to the prescripts of the conference of bishops (Can. 766 *CIC* 1983). The Church’s book of law aims not to neglect the service of preaching on Sundays and Holy Days; for “it cannot be omitted except for a grave cause” (Can. 767 § 2 *CIC* 1983). As the moderator of the entire ministry of the Word of God, the diocesan bishop (cf. Can. 756 § 2 *CIC* 1983) has the task of ensuring the quality of the sermon. He carries this out for example through the possibility of restricting or withdrawing authority to preach.³ In view of the absolute need for quality in preaching and the professionalism of pastoral activity, the interpretation of Scripture according to the Gospel is to be undertaken by competent individuals who have been trained for this purpose. These include priests and deacons who have received appropriate training, as well as those among the non-ordained faithful who have completed theological studies and homiletic-pastoral training⁴. Making use of the richness of existing competences and charisms also with regard to the homily would benefit the quality of the preaching of the Word as well as enable more diverse perspectives and possibilities of identification for the worshipping congregations. The mutual interconnectedness of the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Eucharistic meal is borne above all by the communion of the worshipping community (cf. Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 26 and 35).

³ Cf. the revised version of the can. 1336 § 4 n. 2 *CIC* 1983.

⁴ Cf. H. Hallermann, Die Beteiligung der Laien am Predigtendienst, in: C. Bauer/W. Rees (eds.), *Laienpredigt - Neue pastorale Chancen*, Freiburg i. Br. 2021, 266-298, here: 297: “Without doubt, it seems important and justified theologically as well as in terms of canon law to come to an opening in this regard (regarding the homily) at least for the group of lay people who, as full-time pastoral workers, already have an episcopal *missio canonica* for all other pastoral and ecclesiastical fields of action and can therefore - especially in the area of the preaching ministry - act officially and in the name of the Church.”

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

Re 2. Many candidates for baptism and families of persons baptised today have not experienced any socialisation within the Church. Pastoral workers often come into contact with these people through activities in day-care centres or through preparation for the sacraments. The connection between pastoral care in the sacraments and the celebration of the sacraments is highly significant. The anticipated development of personnel and structures in the dioceses shows that there no longer are, or at least soon will not be, a sufficient number of ordinary conferrers of baptism in the ministry. It is therefore all the more important to heighten the baptismal awareness of all in the local parishes, and the introduction of extraordinary authority to baptise can contribute to this if a congregational awareness process is associated with it. As the German Bishops emphasised in 2015 in their statement entitled “*Gemeinsam Kirche sein*” (Being a Church together):

“Current obstacles can be resolved if, through baptism, we hear the call to holiness that is common to all of us.” (*Gemeinsam Kirche sein*, p. 27).

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

Re 3. Forms of preparation for marriage and guidance of married couples with their families pose a major pastoral challenge. If possible, the conclusion of marriage should be integrated into an event involving an encounter with members of the Christian community who can themselves contribute their own experiences of married life to the discussions. It should be the concern of the entire congregation to give an authentic witness to the values of a marriage lived out in Christ. In accordance with Can. 1112 *CIC* 1983, the diocesan bishop can delegate lay persons to assist at marriages with the previous favourable vote of the conference of bishops and after he has obtained the permission of the Holy See.

Re 4. The Church is “a sign and instrument both of a very closely-knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (*LG* 1). Her ministries and offices are also to be thought of in terms of this mission. Their diversity has developed historically, not least because of pastoral challenges, concerns and necessities. In the necessary revival and development of ministries and offices, it is also necessary to consider which symbolic acts and rituals are meaningful for people today.

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

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