

## **Dicastery for the lay persons, the families and life itself**

### **Meeting in Rome, 26.-28. 2018**

**Subject.** Support and formation of lay persons in the Church

#### **Basic information that demands the support of lay persons**

### **1. The situation in Germany**

Since Vatican II in Germany there have been lay persons engaging themselves in the Church not only as volunteers, but on a full-time basis. All of them study theology or do religious studies at a university or college of higher education and are professionally trained for mission in their own country. Between 1980 and the 1990s this job opportunity saw a real boom with very high numbers of students. Lay persons, full-time in service of the Church, are the normality in German parishes and in pastoral centres. They do pastoral work in the service of caritas or liturgy, they teach theology at schools and universities, and they foster parish life. For about ten years this trend has been declining. There is not only a lack in the vocation to the priesthood or to religious orders, but pastoral tasks for lay persons are also drastically declining. And not only this: Year after year the Church in Germany is losing members and is losing in social significance. The Catholic Church must find a new orientation in a society which defines itself mainly as a secular society.

On the ground of this changing pastoral situation in Germany the theme of formation and support of **voluntary lay persons** gains immensely in importance, because they are rooted in secular life on a private and on a job-basis.

More Church administration in the parishes is done by lay persons. These lay persons, however, need a formation and advisors, not only as an aid for their mission, but also in the sense of pastoral and human care.

Considering the development of this pastoral situation, the German Bishops published a statement in 2015, entitled "To be Church together".

This statement by the Bishops takes into view primarily a stronger participation of lay persons in the life of the Church.

### **2. Important insights**

The employment of lay persons in the life of the Church must not serve as stopgaps, whenever persons holding "full-time jobs" decline in numbers.

The service of lay persons rather belongs to the innermost core of the Church. That is why Vaticanum II published an extra decree dealing with the vocation of lay persons (Apostolicam Actuositatem). But this decree deals above all with the service of lay persons in their profession. Lay persons are so to speak the leaven that has to spread the faith right into the secular world. In the service of the lay persons the Church is to recognize the word of God in the world and the world is to recognize its feeling of belonging to God. This is surely true even today. But today - fifty years after the Council - we have a different situation.

Lay persons are needed not only for worldly service, but increasingly for service for the Church and within the Church. They have to find and live anew their vocation within and for the church. In this the Church in Germany can rely on the service of lay people that is carried out already. This service deserves appreciation. The decree of the bishops underlines the following points:

- **Every human being is called to holiness.**

Because of their consecration through baptism, all faithful are called to service in the Church and for the welfare of all people. In future this call must correspond with a greater share of responsibility within the Church, even up to leading positions. The **keyword participation** will gain in importance!

- **Charisms are the riches of the Church.**

Many gifts of the faithful are still undiscovered or are not fully used as they should be. In fact the abilities and gifts of individuals (also of volunteers) are starting points of activities of the Church, not as up to now the tasks that have to be met in a parish. In this, the offices of priests and the bishop consist first of all in the **service of unity**, that means collecting, appreciating and integrating of the various charisms into the one body of the Church.

- **In the life of the Church Christ is made visible.**

The decree of the bishops is changing the theological perspective. In accordance with Lumen gentium the point is not the difference between clerics and the laity, but the Church as mystery and God's people. The Church serves all people and expresses in its doings what holds good for all people. All full-time persons, clerics and lay persons, serve together (though in different ways) for this spiritual-pastoral aim.

- **The Church is a priestly people of God.**

In this getting-together of priests and lay persons is made concrete the getting-together of the priestly office of service and the Common priesthood of all faithful. This calls for a **change in mentality**. The faithful lay persons (full-time persons and volunteers) must learn that not only clerics, but they themselves carry the news of God's kingdom. The clerics again must better learn that lay persons are not only unprofessionable helpers, but in fact co-workers on the same level.

### **3. Examples**

My job in my diocese of Eichstätt is ongoing learning of full-time persons and volunteers. At the same time I am a member of a Spiritual Community (Hauskirche fiat verbum), that for over thirty years has worked out a formational concept and offers many courses for persons in leading positions in the Church and society.

Three points are central for this formational concept:

- an interdisciplinary togetherness of psychology and theology or philosophy,
- the Christian image of God and man. We are created according to the image of the Trinitarian God. This togetherness and the For-each-other of the God in three persons marks out togetherness in the pastoral work.
- The formation of persons can never mean only growth in knowledge or competence. It is in fact important to work on your own person, to speak about one's own faith and to reflect on one's own life. This calls for group work, meeting regularly for a long time. We believe in the following principle: formation takes place in small groups that offer a binding place of faith.

#### **Formation of one's personality**

Formation of one's own person and support in developing one's person are the main tasks of any on-going learning of pastoral co-workers. This formation of one's personality must always take in view the whole person: spiritually, theologically, psychically, intellectually, morally. The following principle holds good:

In this three main points are in focus:

- the ability of autonomy of the individual co-workers (e.g. ability to defend their own points of view against resistance; ability to stand loneliness, etc)
- ability to interdependence (ability to begin relations and to create community)
- ability to self-transcendence (ability to transcend one's own self in faith; ability to accept criticism, to forgive, etc)

These three main points are trained not one after the other, but always together. A person is autonomous in the degree of being able to start a relation or of transcending himself.

This method of formation is entered for our community at the European Office for Intellectual Ownership to be used in the fields of education and health and for scientific research.

### **Teamworkshops**

For some time we have been offering workshops for pastoral teams. These teams always consist of all full-time jobholders. The themes of these team-workshops are intervention in crises, education in communication, management of conflicts, insights in group-dynamics and spiritual-theological aspects of community, parish, pastoral work.

In the workshops that see several teams together, the teams train mutual support. In this way the teams are to learn to support each other in ordinary situations and to learn from each other and with each other.

### **Theology correspondence course**

For lay persons there is the possibility in Germany to do theological ongoing studies without having to study at a university. This chance has been offered for ----- years in the project "Theology as a correspondence course". All persons wanting to do ongoing studies in theology can gain a high degree of competence in the subject by means of letters and days of meeting in seminars. There are people interested in this in order to be trained for a full-time job in the Church and others that simply want to gain better knowledge of e.g. the Scriptures or documents of the Church for their personal life of faith.

Dr. Bettina-Sophia Karwath, Diocese of Eichstätt, Germany, september 2018

Consultant of the Commission IV for the spiritual vocations and church ministries of the German Bishops' Conference,

Head of the department for the further education of the pastoral staff of the Diocese of Eichstätt,

Member of the ecclesial community *Hauskirche fiat verbum*

## German Statement, Part II

In order to make Dr. Karwath's fundamentals more specific, I can name the following examples for training lay persons for pastoral services in parishes/pastoral communities and institutions/organisations:

### 1. Spiritual support/mentoring / guidance (Geistliche Begleitung)

- in associations/groups for adults and youth (Erwachsenen- und Jugendverbände)
- of individual persons
- of employees and patients in institutions for the old-age or sick

These different services (related to spiritual guidance) would include all of the church services like preaching, communion for the sick, preparation of the sacrament of sick unction, spiritual discussions with individuals, bringing spirituality into decision making processes, etc. There are training courses available through the federal republic, through the sponsorship of religious orders, or through clerical educational establishments. The dioceses would delegate most of the participants chosen by them. In the individual dioceses, the names of persons interested in carrying out spiritual support/ guidance would be published.

### 2. Funeral services by lay persons

Since the beginning of the year 2000, it has also been possible for lay persons who are either volunteers or who are full-time to carry out funeral services in many dioceses (although not all dioceses). The dioceses offer their own training courses, the priests submit the applications and are then responsible for assigning the trained laypersons. The bishops give their episcopal commission for each person personally.

### 3. Lay Ministers for the Liturgy of the word

There are an increasing number of parishes where there are no masses celebrated on Sundays or this only happens irregularly. In these cases, celebrating the Liturgy of the Word with and without the communion, including preaching, has established itself. The appointees are both full-time or volunteers. The training is the responsibility of the dioceses and is organised within the dioceses. Also for these lay ministers an episcopal commission is required.

### 4. Catechism by lay persons

The assistance from full time or volunteer lay people, especially with catechism preparing children and young people for the sacraments, has been a given in all dioceses for many decades. Often the entire preparation for the first communion and confirmation is part of their responsibility, sometimes also the preparation for confession in both of these areas.

There are training courses and material in all dioceses. In some dioceses, some lay people are also involved in the preparations for baptism and the sacrament of marriage - at the level of pastoral units, parishes, deaneries or dioceses.

#### 5. Contact persons for pastoral questions/Contact persons for parishes

The increasing noticeable shortage of priests for the already existing parish structures has resulted in many different ways in which lay persons have been engaged in the field, which has manifested primarily in them taking over responsibility as a coordination or contact person for the parish or individual pastoral areas.

#### 6. Congregational leadership

The question of congregational leadership by lay persons is a topic that is becoming more and more relevant. In several dioceses there are already the first attempts in parishes without canonical priests to commission teams out of full-time and volunteer lay persons to lead the parish through the bishop (for example, Osnabrück, Munich, Magdeburg). These attempts are still in the initial phases.

#### 7. Inclusion of lay persons in development processes

There are development processes taking part in many dioceses, which are different as regards both their organisation and legal structure. Their common element is the attempt of the dioceses to incorporate the voice of lay persons and their ideas about the route the church should take into the development processes in the dioceses. From the point of view of many lay persons, there is a lack of real form of co-determination and involvement, particularly when it comes to the restructuring of pastoral units. In this case, the German tradition of parish councils is of particular significance, but also problematic, as in light of the low voting turnout, the issue of their representation is a matter of discussion.

Msgr. Dr. Michael Bredeck  
Archdiocese of Paderborn  
Responsible for diocese development