

Short Biography:

Paul Metzloff works in the Area for Youth in the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life. He is married and originally comes from Germany, where he studied Catholic and Orthodox Theology and Philosophy. He is doing his Doctoral thesis about the Philosophy of Romano Guardini. He worked for five years in the Youth Office of the German Bishops Conference and for three years as director of the Commission for Clergy, Consecrated life and lay pastoral ministers of the German Bishops Conference.

Sharing of experiences

„Working as a lay person in the Secretariate of the German Bishops Conference”

Eminencies,

Excellencies,

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure and joy for me to share with you some of my experiences in working for the Secretariate of the German Bishops Conference. I was responsible for World Youth Days in the Youth Office for 5 years, so for the WYDs in Krakow and Panama, and as Director of the Commission for Clergy, Consecrated life and lay pastoral ministers for 3 years. I want to share three experiences with you.

First experience: Being a lay among lay, priests, religious and young people.

I began my service in the Secretariate of the German Bishops Conference in the Youth Office, where 8 persons worked: all lay. Also, in the pastoral section of the Secretariate all 12 people were lay. Our collaborators in the Youth Offices in the Dioceses often had a priest or a religious sister in their team, but most pastoral workers on diocesan level were lay persons. In the Catholic Church in Germany, around 7.500 lay women and men do pastoral work full paid on the level of the parish, the Diocese, or the Bishops Conference. This lay-minister-service was introduced in Germany few years after the Second Vatican Council and is now established more than 50 years. As myself, these lay pastoral ministers have studied five years catholic theology or Religious Education, have had years of pastoral und spiritual formation and are send in their service by their bishop.

According to my experience, it is normal that priests and lay collaborate to achieve the goals. Especially in the Youth pastoral care it was important to cooperate and have shared responsibilities according to the abilities and charism of everyone. For creating a good team to do youth pastoral service, it is important to unite under one shared vision different charisms and life choices, so that young people can see and experience living examples of different vocations within the church.

Furthermore the co-responsibility has to be extended to young people themselves. They are protagonists. I experienced that just work done together with them and their creativity is fruitful. It would be a waste of charisms granted by the Holy Spirit not to give them real responsibility.

Second experience: Being called as married men to walk together with bishops.

Before I began my service in the Youth Office of the Bishops Conference I had a dialogue with the responsible Youth Bishop. My wife and me were happy, that he sent me in this “vicarious service” for him. Over the years I had the opportunity to work for different bishops, walking together with them and to support them in their service. They granted the freedom to develop pastoral plans and listened openly to ideas. And of course it was always clear, that it is the bishop to finally decide. Let me maybe mention two short concrete experiences: the first is with Bishop Dr. Michael Gerber, Bishop in Fulda, whom I supported in the Commission for Clergy. Always when we had meetings together personally or via Zoom, we started it with a time of praying for one another. It is a great experience for me of walking together in the Spirit and supporting each other in prayer. A second experience is with Bishop Dr. Felix Genn, Bishop in Münster. After every meeting he said to greet my wife or when he wanted to call later in the evening he asked if it would be ok for my wife. I experienced, and I am grateful for it, being seen in my service and vocation in the Church as a married man.

According to my experience I would state: First: Founded in baptism my primary vocation is my marriage. Second: Also my service in the Church is a vocation, because: (1) I am send by a Bishop, (2) it is spiritual walking together and (3) my vocation in baptism unfolds in the vicarious service in the Church, as *Praedicate Evangelium II*, number 5 mentions.

Let me state two questions: First: Are we aware that lay persons have an own vocation in their service for the Church and do we support it through formation? Second: Do we construct the work environment for lay people that is supportive for their marriage and do not see and trade them as little assistant priests?

Third experience: having a vocation in the Church and being missionary outside at the same time.

I grew up in the Eastern part of Germany in a small village near Dresden. In this region 3 percent of the people are catholic and around 7 percent protestant. Most of my friends are non-religious and they see me, working in the Church, as her representative. Whenever we speak about our “jobs”, it is me telling about the Catholic Church, about World Youth Days, about Bishops, Sacraments, the latest travel of Pope Francis and so on. Of course, because of the enormous crimes of sexual and spiritual abuse in the Catholic Church in Germany, I get also questioned by friends and young people, why I still work for this institution. Could I not as a lay easily change my job and work for a “normal company”?

Being together with my friends I am not preaching or giving a catechesis. It is just the normal sharing of life, which consists in my case of working in the Church. Therefore, I get also asked nearly every time after the last good German Beer if I would have time for a talk, more deeply, about life and faith questions. I would reflect this as a normal and organic missionary work. In the last years I experienced a suffering because of the abuse crisis as the biggest “obstacle” for this missionary task.

Because this missionary work is concrete rooted in the daily work life and is an organic speaking about it, this daily work in the Church should be organized in the best way. This implies according to my experience: (1) that the teams in the church have a good atmosphere, (2) that they are based on spiritual life, (3) that the structure of work and of communication is clear and that it is always a walking together from lay with their pastors: a concrete synodality.

Summarizing my experience, I would highlight three points:

- First: Giving lay people and young people real responsibility sets free the different charisms of the Holy Spirit. It leads to a concrete and living picture of a dynamic *communio*: a synodal Church.
- Second: Lay persons have a specific vocation to enrich the Church.
- Third: Lay persons working in the Church are the first organic missionaries among their families and friends. The concrete working structure should be synodal and so supportive to create joyful missionaries.

Thank you very much for your attendance.