

# Charisms as Signs and Instruments of Evangelization – Being Church Together

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On 23 September 2015 Germany's Roman Catholic Bishops published a joint statement entitled *Gemeinsam Kirche sein* ("Being Church Together"). The message, which was about renewal in pastoral ministry,<sup>281</sup> was inspired by a nationwide five-year dialogue forum, called *Im Heute Glauben* ("Having Faith in Today's World"). This forum had come to an end in Würzburg in September 2015, and in the course of the exchange it was said that the Church should increase its inward and outward communication, that it should be involved more deeply in people's needs and concerns, particularly those on the fringes of society, and that as many Christians as possible should have a share in shaping Christian life. The resulting document, which was still very fresh, also included several working hypotheses contributed by the Clergy and Laity Advisory Council which had resulted from a joint meeting between the German Bishops' Conference and the Central Committee of German Catholics (ZDK).

The hypotheses had been published in a paper entitled "Interaction between Charisms and Ministries among the Priestly, Prophetic and Royal People of God".<sup>282</sup> The authors also picked up thoughts presented in a *Letter to Priests*<sup>283</sup> (published in 2012) to which they added theological depth and a specific pastoral dimension. And of course the authors also re-read and were inspired by several influential Council papers, particularly the Dogmatic Constitution on the

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<sup>281</sup> German Bishops, "Gemeinsam Kirche sein": Wort der deutschen Bischöfe zur Erneuerung der Pastoral, Sekretariat of the German Bishops' Conference (eds.), Bonn 2015.

<sup>282</sup> <http://www.zdk.de/veroeffentlichungen/erklarungen/detail/Das-Zusammenwirken-von-Charismen-und-Diensten-im-priesterlichen-prophetischen-und-koeniglichen-Volk-Gottes-203u/> (20.10.2015).

<sup>283</sup> [http://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse\\_downloads/presse/2012-166a-Anlage-Brief-Bischoefe-an-Priester.pdf](http://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse_downloads/presse/2012-166a-Anlage-Brief-Bischoefe-an-Priester.pdf) (20.10.2015).

Church *Lumen Gentium*<sup>284</sup> and the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*<sup>285</sup> – half a century after the Second Vatican Council.<sup>286</sup> “What we wanted to do,” said Franz-Josef Bode when he presented the document, “was to use the theological and spiritual perspective of the Church, as presented to us by the Council, so that it could then bear fruit for the pastoral ministry of our present-day Church, its responsible bodies and its activists.”<sup>287 288</sup>

The title *Being Church Together* is also a reference to another document that forms an implicit basis for the German Bishops’ pastoral message. In 2000, the German Bishops had published a widely read paper entitled *Zeit zur Aussaat – Missionarisch Kirche sein* (“Time to Sow – Being a Missionary Church”) in which they called for a new missionary awakening in pastoral ministry.<sup>289</sup> In this document, which clearly bears the signature of Bishop Joachim Wanke, the Bishops wrote: “Something is missing in our Catholic Church in Germany. It is not money. Neither is it the faithful. Our Catholic Church in Germany lacks the conviction that it can win new Christians. This is currently its most serious deficit.” In this pastoral letter the German Bishops expressed the view that the most crucial challenge in today’s pastoral

<sup>284</sup> The passages quoted verbatim in “Gemeinsam Kirche sein” are LG 1, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 15, 17, 18, 28, 31 and 33.

<sup>285</sup> Only GS 1 is quoted verbatim in “Gemeinsam Kirche sein”.

<sup>286</sup> The German Bishops had already agreed in 2011 that they would re-read the Council documents with a view to its forthcoming anniversary. The Commission for Clergy, Consecrated Life and Laity (IV) and the Commission for Pastoral Care (III) of the German Bishops’ Conference then conducted a thorough re-reading of “Gaudium et Spes” and “Lumen Gentium” for their respective areas of specialisation.

<sup>287</sup> Franz-Josef Bode at a press briefing for the presentation of the document “Being Church Together: A Message from the German Bishops on the Renewal of Pastoral Ministry” in Fulda on 23. September 2015.

<sup>288</sup> It took several years to compile the sources for the document “Gemeinsam Kirche sein”, a task that was undertaken by the Commission for Clergy, Consecrated Life and Laity (IV) and the Commission for Pastoral Care (III) of the German Bishops’ Conference.

<sup>289</sup> Cf. Bünker, Arnd, “Missionarisch Kirche sein in Deutschland”, in: *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft*, No. 94 (2010), 243–254, here: 248–250; Vellguth, Klaus, “Sag mir, wo die Christen sind: Studie zum Milieuhandbuch ‘Religiöse und kirchliche Orientierungen in den Sinus-Milieus 2005’”, in: *Anzeiger für die Seelsorge*, No. 115 (2006) 10, 29–41; Bünker, Arnd, “Deutschland – ein Missionsland: Zwischenrufe zu einer pastoralen Strategiedebatte”, in: *Orientierung*, No. 69 (2005), 40–44, here: 41f.; Armbruster, Klemens, “Zeit zur Aussaat: Missionarisch Kirche sein: Anliegen, Inhalt und Struktur des Schreibens der deutschen Bischöfe”, in: *Erzdiözese Freiburg* (eds.), “Zeit zur Aussaat”: Missionarisch Kirche sein: Ermutigung zu einer missionarischen Pastoral, Freiburg 2001, 7–9.

ministry is the need to return to the Church’s missionary nature. When the letter was presented in December 2000, Karl Lehmann, the Chairman of the German Bishops’ Conference, emphasised one point in particular: “A basic concept of Church life is coming back – the word ‘mission’. If I’m not completely mistaken, we are currently experiencing a renaissance of this word and, more importantly, of mission itself.”<sup>290</sup>

Rarely had a pastoral letter from the German Bishops attracted so much attention and been so well received as the document *Time to Sow – Being a Missionary Church*. It is therefore no coincidence that the recently published letter of the German Bishops on the renewal of pastoral ministry bears a similar title to that of the earlier document published in 2000. The authors state their intention at the very beginning of the paper, in the preface, where they say they want to show how the Catholic Church can be transformed from a *Volkskirche*, a national church (literally “people’s church”), into a *Kirche des Volkes Gottes*, a “church of the people of God” – a church which emphasises the shared baptismal calling of all the baptised. *Being Church Together* invites us to adopt a dynamic review of baptism and of being Christians; it encourages us to be a ‘church that is becoming the Church’.<sup>291</sup>

## We do not need to save the Church

In their introduction to the document the Bishops point out that the Christian faith does not centre around the Church but around Christ and that the aim should therefore not be to preserve the Church as such. They say: “We cannot create the Church and we do not need to save the Church either.”<sup>292</sup> They go on to say that this view of the Church should ease the burden enormously and that it represents a

<sup>290</sup> The German Bishops, “Zeit zur Aussaat”: Missionarisch Kirche sein, Secretariat of the German Bishops’ Conference (eds.), Bonn 2000.

<sup>291</sup> “Gemeinsam Kirche sein”, 7.

<sup>292</sup> “Gemeinsam Kirche sein”, 11. Felix Genn said at the press briefing in Fulda on 23 September 2015, when the pastoral message was presented: “In the creation of this message the words ‘We do not need to save the Church’ are associated with an experience that may well be the most crucial of all: addressing people’s questions, needs and concerns with humility and courage and thus also with far less anxiety, and – with Jesus behind us, alongside us and in our hearts – boldly envisaging a fresh start.” (Felix Genn at a press briefing for the presentation of the document “Gemeinsam Kirche sein”: A Message from the German Bishops on the Renewal of Pastoral Ministry in Fulda on 23. September 2015.)

major opportunity.<sup>293</sup> They stress that it is important always to point to Christ. They expressly link this idea to Pope Francis's first Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, in which he sets the scene at the very beginning: "The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives all who encounter Jesus."<sup>294</sup> It shows that the authors of *Being Church Together* were substantially inspired and influenced by the Apostolic Exhortation.<sup>295</sup>

*Being Church Together* starts with six key questions which are of major importance for all the subsequent reflections as well as for the structure of the message:

- What is the vision of the Church as presented in *Lumen Gentium* when it talks about the common calling of all within the Church?
- How can the Church as the one Body of Christ with all its many charisms be experienced in the celebration of the Eucharist despite a shortage of priests?
- How does our approach to today's people change when we view the Church as a sign and instrument of union with God and unity between people?
- What strength can we derive for our mission as the Church from the common priesthood of all believers and from the indispensable ministry of the priest?
- How can we ensure that the leadership talents of so many men and women bear fruit for the Church and its ministries?
- How can we shape a parish and the life of a local church in such a way that clergy and laity mutually enrich and strengthen one another in their different ministries and charisms?

### Each person is called to holiness

When the document *Being Church Together* was being prepared, the Chairman of the Commission for Pastoral Care, Franz-Josef Bode, suggested that the starting point should be the working hypotheses,

<sup>293</sup> "Gemeinsam Kirche sein", 7.

<sup>294</sup> EG 1.

<sup>295</sup> The passages quoted verbatim in "Gemeinsam Kirche sein" are EG 1, 28, 130, 201 and 267.

which had been worked out with the Central Committee of German Catholics (ZdK), entitled *Interaction between Charisms and Ministries among the Priestly, Prophetic and Royal People of God*. The purpose was to re-identify and clarify the theological foundation for voluntary work within the Church. "In this way," says Franz-Josef Bode, "we refocused on concepts such as calling, charisms, holiness and mission and their special relevance to the pastoral ministry. It was a matter of clearly spelling out the participation of all Christians in all three basic manifestations of the Church: preaching, liturgy and charity."<sup>296</sup> This background to the German Bishops' message is clearly in evidence, a background which led them to focus, in particular, on the baptismal dignity and common priesthood of all believers: All the baptised are jointly called upon to be Church together and to be responsibly involved in fulfilling the mission of the Church. The most distinctive Christian element is primarily baptism, as it expresses the shared calling of all Christians.<sup>297</sup> It is the sacramental bond between all Christians and something that unites us straightaway before we can start thinking about differences in callings, charisms, ministries and offices. Baptism is a dynamic event which has a focus on the apostolate and is reinforced through confirmation. Within this context our willingness to be involved in the Church and in the world is a "sign and instrument" of the Church's mission.

It is with a view to this dynamic perspective of being a Christian that the Bishops point out in their pastoral message that all Christians are called to holiness. In doing so, they establish a connection with the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* which in Chapter II and Chapter IV speaks of the "universal call to holiness" of all Christians. Felix Genn describes the statement "Everyone is called to holiness" as the "hermeneutical key with which the Council messages were read, especially *Lumen Gentium*."<sup>298</sup> He goes on to say that there can be no distinction between holiness for the clergy, on

<sup>296</sup> Franz-Josef Bode at a press briefing for the presentation of the document "Being Church Together": A Message from the German Bishops on the Renewal of Pastoral Ministry in Fulda on 23. September 2015.

<sup>297</sup> Cf. Lenz, Hubert, "Die Pastoral von der Taufe her erneuern: Bischofswort 'Gemeinsam Kirche sein'", in: *Anzeiger für die Seelsorge*, No. 124 (2015) 10, 29–32, here: 30.

<sup>298</sup> Felix Genn at a press briefing for the presentation of the document "Being Church Together": A Message from the German Bishops on the Renewal of Pastoral Ministry in Fulda on 23. September 2015.

the one hand, and holiness for the laity, on the other. Instead of such “two-level ethics” one can only speak of holiness as a basic calling of all the baptised, which then takes different forms in people’s lives.<sup>299</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, too, emphasises the calling of the laity, encouraging them to use the spiritual authority they have received through baptism and confirmation.

Based on the concept of holiness, *Being Church Together* then stresses the central New Testament concept of *ecclesia* as something which expressed an awareness among the Early Christians that they were the community of the baptised who had been called and sanctified by Jesus Christ. In fact, this is what prompted the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans to refer to them as “all God’s beloved in Rome, called to be his holy people” (Romans 1:7). The Apostle, who was instrumental in paving the way for the missionary work of the Early Church, saw the Church as “the community of those called to be saints”, based on the Church being “rooted in Christ as the original sacrament”.<sup>300</sup> This rootedness in Jesus therefore means that all the baptised are rooted in the prophetic, priestly and royal office of Christ. Yet holiness must not be confused with casuistic observance of specific commandments. Rather, it grows out of a “focus on the person of Jesus Christ”.<sup>301</sup> This Christ-centredness of faith and of the Church’s mission was expressed very concisely by Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*: “Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but an encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”<sup>302</sup>

When the Bishops point out that the holiness of Christ manifests itself above all in love – with the highest priority given to God’s will, on the one hand, and love within the fellowship of one’s brothers and sisters in Christ, on the other – this is a reflection of Paul’s theology of charisms. In his theology the decisive criterion of a charism is precisely

<sup>299</sup> “Gemeinsam Kirche sein”, 17.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, 16; cf. Lenz, Hubert, *op. cit.*, 31.

<sup>301</sup> “Gemeinsam Kirche sein”, 16.

<sup>302</sup> “Deus Caritas Est” of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Men and Women Religious and all the Lay Faithful on Christian Love, Announcement of the Apostolic Seat, No. 171, Bonn 2005, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20051225\\_deus-caritas-est.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html) (15.03.2016), No. 1.

whether it helps to build up the Church.<sup>303</sup> The Bishops therefore point to Paul’s understanding of charisms (see 1 Corinthians 12:7) and Pope Francis’s exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* where he picks up this theology and says: “A sure sign of the authenticity of a charism is its ecclesial character, its ability to be integrated harmoniously into the life of God’s holy and faithful people for the good of all.”<sup>304</sup> The Church can only realise its original commission when individual Christians recognise and accept their call to holiness.<sup>305</sup> Holiness, however, must not be seen as a status which a person achieves, but as a lifelong programme which, ultimately, can never be attained in full. This, according to the Bishops, is an important paradox: “You are holy because you are still aiming to be holy.”<sup>306</sup> Christian holiness is in fact characterised by two elements: a day-to-day relationship with God and a loving relationship with others. These are two different facets which cannot be separated but must be seen as belonging together: “Interpersonal love and solidarity are always closely intertwined with God’s love towards people and people’s love towards God.”<sup>307</sup>

### A multitude of charisms is the wealth of the Church

In their pastoral message *Being Church Together* the Bishops emphasise that the charisms of Christians are the real wealth of the Church.<sup>308</sup> It is therefore the central function of pastoral ministry, they say, to discover those charisms, to encourage and recognise them and to give space to their positive development for mission in the Church and in the secular world.<sup>309</sup> It must never be a matter of recruiting people for specific tasks and establishing them in honorary positions. That would be a “recruitment-focused pastoral ministry”, based on a

<sup>303</sup> Cf. Leimgruber, Stefan, “Was ist eine charismenorientierte Pastoral? In der Pastoral von Paulus lernen”, in: *Anzeiger für die Seelsorge*, No. 123 (2014) 6, 11–13; Kasper, Walter, *Die Kirche und ihre Ämter: Schriften zur Ekklesiologie* (WKGS 12), Freiburg 2009, 185–187; Küng, Hans, “Die charismatische Struktur der Kirche”, in: *Concilium*, No. 1 (1965), 282–290.

<sup>304</sup> EG 130.

<sup>305</sup> “Gemeinsam Kirche sein”, 18.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>308</sup> Cf. Leimgruber, Stefan, *op. cit.*

<sup>309</sup> “Gemeinsam Kirche sein”, 19; cf. Seip, Jörg, “Die Ordnung der Charismen: Anmerkungen zu einer charismenorientierten Pastoral”, in: *Anzeiger für die Seelsorge*, No. 123 (2014) 6, 20–23.

demand-led approach.<sup>310</sup> After all, the reason why people want to be involved is not because there is a need, but because a given activity matches their personality, and so there has to be a greater focus on charisms, i.e. resources. Moreover, charisms are not just natural human gifts. Theologically, they must be understood as “signs and instruments of evangelization”.<sup>311</sup>

This wording automatically prompts us to associate charisms with the sacramental concept of the Church which the Council Fathers highlighted in their description of the Church as a “sign and instrument”. Yet the word “instruments” was chosen not so much in an instrumental or utilitarian sense, which could easily be misunderstood, but with a focus on hands-on action. Moreover, charisms, the Bishops say, form part of that state of tension between one’s relationship with God and loving one’s neighbour. “Just as charisms are expressions of praise and gratitude in our relationship with God, they create circumstances in people’s lives through relationships with them – circumstances marked by solidarity and help, by an encouragement towards faith in God and by the creation of communities.”<sup>312</sup>

Charisms have an ecclesiological quality: whereas, on the one hand, bearers of charisms are sent out to their fellow-human beings to serve them,<sup>313</sup> they also enable the Church to come together as *ecclesia* in all its diversity – a community of Christians who all have totally different charisms, so that the Church becomes a place where God’s Spirit and His work can be experienced by everyone together. After all, it is only through the fellowship of the Church that charisms can develop – gifts which are not based on the merits of individuals, but which are continually brought into play by the Holy Spirit.<sup>314</sup>

When the Pastoral Commission met for its consultations on the draft wording for *Being Church Together*, one central question raised was that of the Eucharist: Where and how should it be celebrated, so

<sup>310</sup> Cf. Kröger, Elisa, “Das Unplanbare einplanen: Charismenorientierung als Fundament einer pastoralen Strategie”, in: *Anzeiger für die Seelsorge*, No. 123 (2014) 6, 14–19.

<sup>311</sup> “Gemeinsam Kirche sein”, 20.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>313</sup> Cf. Wustmans, Hildegard, “Die Vielfalt der Charismen im Volk Gottes zulassen und fördern: Ein möglicher Weg aus der Bedrängnis”, in: *Anzeiger für die Seelsorge*, No. 123 (2014) 6, 5–9.

<sup>314</sup> Cf. Lenz, Hubert, *op. cit.*, 31.

that the Church can truly show itself as “a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race”<sup>315</sup>? Based on the understanding that charisms are ecclesiological in character and that they develop within the entire community of the Church, the pastoral message *Being Church Together* also highlights the celebration of the Eucharist on Sundays in the face of Germany’s declining numbers of priests. First of all, the Bishops say, there is a mutual dependence and complementarity between charisms in the Church, and any Church unity is very much the effect of the Holy Spirit at work within it. They go on to emphasise that the Eucharist is a celebration of sacramental fellowship with the local Church and the universal Church. This idea picks up on the theology of charisms, presented in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, which specifies that “every layman, in virtue of the very gifts bestowed upon him, is at the same time a witness and a living instrument of the mission of the Church itself”.<sup>316</sup> Charisms do not develop outside the community of the Church. No one can walk the path of faith on their own; everyone is dependent upon the fellowship of the Church as a context for the development of their charisms.

In some parts of Germany the pastoral situation for Roman Catholics is that of a diaspora, as a consequence of which Church members are unable to celebrate the Eucharist regularly every Sunday. Under these circumstances they are encouraged not to abandon their Sunday meetings but to come together for prayer. The Bishops expressly support the commitment of those who facilitate the (priestless) Liturgy of the Word every Sunday without a priest: “We would therefore like to thank all men and women who ensure that God can continue to be praised in local churches which no longer have a priest.”<sup>317</sup>

Subsequently, however, the authors also point out that fewer priests are now available in Germany who might “maintain a national Church structure which has become so familiar and dear to us.”<sup>318</sup>

<sup>315</sup> LG 1, cf. also Franz-Josef Bode at a press briefing for the presentation of the document “Being Church Together”: A Message from the German Bishops on the Renewal of Pastoral Ministry in Fulda on 23. September 2015.

<sup>316</sup> LG 33.

<sup>317</sup> “Gemeinsam Kirche sein”, 26.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

They express their understanding that the Church's social structures, which arose in and reflect specific historic periods, must not be confused with the essence of the Church. On the other hand, however, we can also see relics of a focus on "professional priests" here, an emphasis which the pastoral paper otherwise seeks to overcome. Another point that appears problematic is the authors' use of the term "liturgical substitutes". After all, the problem that can be observed in Germany is more an overemphasis on the Eucharist and not so much an excessive cultivation of a wide variety of liturgical celebrations. Furthermore, the impression may be raised that "liturgical substitutes" are any liturgies which are not presided over by a priest.

The document *Being Church Together* presents an almost "reflex-like" response to the possibility of a theological misinterpretation of such wordings. This impression is created when the authors reiterate that, for Christians, the very basis of being the Church is the sacraments, i.e. Christians are the Church through baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist, and that this is a gift of God which cannot be enhanced any further – even by the Sacrament of Holy Orders.<sup>319</sup> They therefore expressly invite the reader to put "renewed trust in the charisms of every Christian"<sup>320</sup> – charisms which express themselves in a wide diversity of offices, ministries and callings. One particular function which the authors define for priests and full-time church workers is that of encouraging Christians to contribute their personal charisms to the life of the local church. The pastoral staff are therefore no longer seen as "doers", but as those who should identify charisms and give them space within the local church. This approach reflects certain elements of French pastoral theology, in particular, as it emphasises two aspects of pastoral work: inviting others<sup>321</sup> and bearing witness<sup>322</sup>.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> Cf. Dagens, Claude, Proposer la foi dans la société actuelle: rapport présenté par Mgr Claude Dagens à l'assemblée plénière de Lourdes, Paris 1994. On German responses to this French approach cf. Müller, Hadwig/Schwab, Norbert/Tzscheetsch, Werner (eds.), *Sprechende Hoffnung: Werdende Kirche: Proposer la foi dans la société actuelle: Den Glauben vorschlagen in der heutigen Gesellschaft*, Ostfildern 2001.

<sup>322</sup> Cf. Bacq, Philippe, "Für eine Erneuerung vom Ursprung her: Auf dem Weg zu einer zeugenden Pastoral", in: Feiter Reinhard/Müller, Hadwig, *Frei geben: Pastoraltheologische Impulse aus Frankreich*, Ostfildern 2012, 31–55; Bündgens, Johannes, "Zeugungspastoral: Die Ruhe nach dem Sturm", in: *Anzeiger für die Seelsorge*, No. 119 (2010) 10, 5–9; Müller,

### Jesus Christ becomes visible through the life of the Church

The Council Fathers of Vatican II had already done something similar when they structured the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*. They did so by ensuring that their starting point was not clerical functions, i.e. offices, or indeed a possible distinction between clergy and laity, but statements about the nature of the Church as the salvific sacrament of Jesus Christ in the world. *Being Church Together* is based on the same premises and therefore starts by quoting the key message of *Lumen Gentium* that "the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race".<sup>323</sup> Both the existence and the essence of the Church can be derived exclusively from the incarnation which makes fellowship with God accessible to all mankind.<sup>324</sup>

The basic tenet of *Being Church Together* is that the Church cannot be imagined as anything other than Christ-centred, as it owes its existence to "the incarnation of Jesus from his birth to his crucifixion, his resurrection, his sending of the Holy Spirit and his witnesses, the Apostles".<sup>325</sup> This centrality of Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit had already been pointed out repeatedly by the Council Fathers in their ecclesiological thoughts when they described the Church as "a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit"<sup>326</sup> and as the "Temple of the Holy Spirit" or the Body endowed with "heavenly gifts".<sup>327</sup> It was also important to the authors of *Lumen Gentium* to emphasise in their imagery that the Church has certain personal characteristics, e.g. the Church as a "flock"<sup>328</sup>, "our mother"<sup>329</sup>, a "bride"<sup>330</sup>, etc.

Hadwig, "Leben zeugende Pastoral: Leben erzählende Pastoral", in: *Anzeiger für die Seelsorge*, No. 119 (2010) 10, 11–14; Gilbert, Christine, "Relecture: Wenn seelsorgliches Handeln noch einmal angeschaut wird", in: *Anzeiger für die Seelsorge*, No. 119 (2010) 10, 15–18.

<sup>323</sup> LG 1.

<sup>324</sup> "Gemeinsam Kirche sein", 29.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>326</sup> LG 4.

<sup>327</sup> LG 8.

<sup>328</sup> Cf. John 10:11.

<sup>329</sup> Cf. Galatians 4:26.

<sup>330</sup> Cf. Ephesians 5:26; Revelation 21:2.

After characterising the Church primarily as Christ-centred and incarnational, the authors then proceed to specify an anthropological component, quoting *Redemptor Hominis*: “This man (...) is the basis of all the other ways that the Church must walk because man – every man without any exception whatever – has been redeemed by Christ.”<sup>331</sup> For the second time within several paragraphs the authors quote the Church as being a “sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.”<sup>332</sup> This key message in *Lumen Gentium* is followed by a quotation from another Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Gaudium et Spes*, where the key message is: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.”<sup>333</sup>

Having thus specified two focal points – the Church and the world – the authors go on to say that the life of society – and thus the laity – is the developmental space of the Church’s Gospel message. Although they admit that evangelization is not something which the Church carries outside, into the world, they nevertheless establish a relationship between the two, as the mutual interdependence between the Church and the world hits “the nerve of the calling of the laity within the Church and for the world.”<sup>334</sup> The Church, they say, is “existentially present within the world” through baptised and confirmed Christians. Considering that, in their previous point, the authors made such an effort to emphasise the Church’s mission, based on the sacrament of baptism, it would have been a major gain if, at this point, they had focused not on a specific calling of the laity, but on a specific calling of all the baptised who are commissioned in this way to manifest the Church in the world. After all, it now remains an open question what the function of an ordained Christian – a “professional priest” – might be, if it is not to be present within the world. We would do well to remind ourselves of the thematic focus in an issue of *Concilium* where an article bore the very apt title “Extra mundus nulla salus”.

<sup>331</sup> RH 14.

<sup>332</sup> LG 1.

<sup>333</sup> GS 1.

<sup>334</sup> “Gemeinsam Kirche sein”, 33.

However, this passage expressly concludes with a warning against any form of ecclesiastic triumphalism, saying that the Church must move along the path of penance and renewal.<sup>335</sup> This path must be the way of ecumenism and kenosis, with an awareness that the Church’s path of renewal will involve risk-taking. Taking risks, however, should be acceptable – “even if it means that mistakes might be made”.<sup>336</sup>

### The Church as a priestly people

The Church is the sacrament that manifests the life and dedication of Christ in the world. All Christians participate in this sacramental concept of Church through baptism. The Spirit of God is at work within the Church. He is the one who commissions all God’s people and thus the priesthood of all the baptised. In their pastoral letter the German Bishops emphasise that, through baptism, Christians have a share in the priesthood of Christ and that the priestly dignity of all the baptised cannot be “enhanced or outdone by any offices, ministries, callings or appointments of individual Christians”. This wording is more than the rejection of some kind of clericalism that might favour “priesthood as an office” (or “priesthood as a ministry”, as expressed in the pastoral letter). It also questions ecclesiastical structures in Germany which, as a distinctive mark, occasionally create the impression, on the one hand, of a “caste” of full-time Christian workers in the Church – people with sound theological training, resources and expertise – and, on the other, of a “caste” of volunteers who are not subjects but all too often still objects of a pastoral ministry which is dominated by full-timers, even in the 21st century. Again, the Bishops point to the priestly dignity of all the baptised, a dignity which cannot be “enhanced or outdone by any offices, ministries, callings or appointments of individual Christians”.

In their pastoral message, the Bishops show particular appreciation for the diversity of different roles, functions, ministries and charisms in the Church as an expression of a sacramental reality in Christ. The way these different charisms must work is not alongside each other, but by “serving one another” within the one Body of the

<sup>335</sup> LG 8.

<sup>336</sup> “Gemeinsam Kirche sein”, 34.

Church. The authors expressly warn against any thinking in terms of power logic. “Wherever the relationship between, say, priests and laity or men and women becomes a matter of power, it contradicts the very theological foundations of relationships within the Church as derived from the Church’s sacramental character.”<sup>337</sup>

It is obvious that the pastoral letter was written by individuals who work within a highly differentiated and professionalised local church. However, we can also see that the drafting of this document was partly the work of Commission IV of the German Bishops’ Conference which focused, above all, on the changing roles and profiles of pastoral and local church advisers within the newly formed church districts. Several passages were implicitly written against the background of conflict between clergy and laity, between full-time and voluntary church workers and between men and women.<sup>338</sup> The authors express their appreciation that, in a society with a high level of functional differentiation and thus a tendency towards professionalisation in the Church, there are full-time theologians and other specialists who work in various different segments of society. Yet at the same time the authors also recognise that such differentiation and professionalism within the Church involve the risk of “removing independent thought or causing alienation between full-time workers and volunteers”. In fact, I would see this tendency in the German Church as being at least as dangerous as an excessive clericalism. Perhaps the dichotomy between a “Church of full-time professional Christians” and a “Church of Christian volunteers” (as well as a Church of Christians who have long lost any rapport with their denomination) may well be the most crucial challenge facing the German Roman Catholic Church today.

In this context the authors highlight the importance of a ministry of enablement that aims to develop the baptismal dignity of the baptised. They warn against exaggerating or understating its importance within the Church, although they also point out that the ministry of the priest is indispensable in the Church. Interestingly, having focused on the idea of a ministry of enablement, they then speak about “priesthood as a ministry”, not “priesthood as an office”. What characterises

<sup>337</sup> “Gemeinsam Kirche sein”, 36.

<sup>338</sup> Cf. Franz-Josef Bode at a press briefing for the presentation of the document “Being Church Together: A Message from the German Bishops on the Renewal of Pastoral Ministry” in Fulda on 23. September 2015.

the ministry of a priest is that he should lead the baptised towards a deeper understanding of the love of Christ, and thus their shared priestly calling or their share in the priestly, prophetic and royal office of Jesus Christ.<sup>339</sup> In the same context the authors also refer to the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* which specifies that the common priesthood of all believers and the priesthood as a ministry are not a matter of degree, but of essence, although they do of course relate to each other.<sup>340</sup> The authors emphasise the unity of the Church’s mission<sup>341</sup>, on the one hand, and every Christian’s joint share in the priesthood of Christ, on the other.<sup>342</sup> To ensure that their remarks about these differences in essence – shared priesthood and priesthood as a ministry – are not just left “dangling in the air”, they then attach a certain quality to the priesthood as an office: the quality of acting *in persona Christi capitis*.<sup>343</sup> They briefly outline the theological background of this thought, but without developing it in any depth, so that it lacks conviction for any sustainable and differentiated specification of the common priesthood and the priesthood as a ministry. Nevertheless, in a later chapter, the document does in fact deal critically with the idea of acting *in persona Christi capitis*, stating that the concept does not “describe any immunising authority of the priest” in the sense that others might be excluded or that the priest might be beyond criticism.<sup>344</sup> This may well be an area for future research in ecclesiology or in clerical theology.

The authors conclude this part of the paper by talking about a “change in mindset” which Benedict XVI implied when he pointed out that lay people “must no longer be viewed as ‘collaborators’ of the clergy”, but must be “truly recognised as ‘co-responsible’ for the Church’s being and action”.<sup>345</sup> In particular, they point out that,

<sup>339</sup> Cf. AA 2; AA 10; AG 15.

<sup>340</sup> LG 10.

<sup>341</sup> AA 2.

<sup>342</sup> LG 10.

<sup>343</sup> Cf. Kasper, Walter, *Die Kirche und ihre Ämter: Schriften zur Ekklesiologie* (WKGS 12), Freiburg 2009, 189; Schillebeeckx, Edward, *Christus: Sakrament der Gottesbegegnung*, Mainz 1960, 61f.

<sup>344</sup> “Gemeinsam Kirche sein”, 44.

<sup>345</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Opening of the Pastoral Convention of the Diocese of Rome, 26. May 2009 – [https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2009/may/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20090526\\_convegno-diocesi-rm.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2009/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20090526_convegno-diocesi-rm.html) (07.03.2016).

elsewhere in the universal Church, some interesting experience has been gathered about the way one might rethink the combination of ministries and charisms and then turn this combination into something fruitful. Essentially, being Church can only succeed if all the different charisms relate to one another and work together, rather than being in confrontation with each other.

Interestingly, later on in the document, the Bishops talk about the mutual benefit of full-time ministries and voluntary work. They mention the possibility that full-time ministers may sometimes mainly function as providers of instruction and professional support, while leadership functions can be fulfilled by Christians working as volunteers.<sup>346</sup> They point to experiences elsewhere in the universal Church where leadership functions can be held by individuals who do not “exercise functions as a matter of gainful employment”.<sup>347</sup>

### Leadership has many faces in the Church

Chapter 5 of the pastoral message *Being Church Together* is about issues of leadership, and we can clearly see that this part of the document touches upon a highly sensitive area within the German Church. The authors point out that, in the history of the Church, different forms of leadership were always occasioned by their historical context. They list a variety of leadership concepts, such as *pastor*, *episcopos*, *presbyter*, *kybernetes*, *munus regiminis*, abbot/abbess, prior(ess), provincial, superior general, spokesman/spokeswoman<sup>348</sup>, *primus inter pares*, chairman/chairwoman<sup>349</sup>, *cura animarum* (pastoral care), *delegado de palabra*<sup>350</sup>, contact<sup>351</sup>, *équipe d’animation* etc. The last term shows again that the authors of the pastoral document were (partly) inspired by French pastoral theology.<sup>352</sup>

<sup>346</sup> “Gemeinsam Kirche sein”, 49.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> Speaker of a team.

<sup>349</sup> Chairman/chairwoman of a decision-making body.

<sup>350</sup> Person instructed to preach God’s Word in a basic community.

<sup>351</sup> Contact in a parish or congregation.

<sup>352</sup> Cf. Feiter, Reinhard/Müller, Hadwig (eds.), *Frei geben: Pastoraltheologische Impulse aus Frankreich*, Ostfildern 2012; Müller, Hadwig, “Seelsorge im säkularisierten Frankreich: Befreiende Orientierung an der Gegenwart und am Evangelium”, in: *Theologisch-Praktische Quartalsschrift*, No. 153 (2005) 3, 256–262; Müller, Hadwig, “Solidarität und das Glück, wir selber zu werden”, in: Krockauer, Rainer/Körber; Manfred (eds.), *Glaubenszeugnisse in*

The document clearly emphasises that leadership skills include working on one’s own attitudes and abilities so as to set an example for others. This implies the ability to see oneself in perspective and to change directions.

Whenever Christians have leadership functions in the Church, they must never use theology to obscure Christ as the real leader of the Church. Any form of ecclesiology therefore needs to be Christ-centred. Even though the pastoral document displays a fair amount of caution when talking about the leadership ministries of “office holders”, one might ask whether it was really theologically wise to talk first about the leadership ministry of an office holder and only then about the leadership ministries of men and women within the Church. It might even have been theologically interesting to abandon the distinction of leadership ministries by “estates” altogether and not to classify them at all. Yet, in view of Church practice, it also seems plausible to show a measure of pragmatism and to make specific statements about “callings within the Church”. The authors underline that priestly ministry must be a “ministry towards salvation and one that facilitates freedom, orderliness and everybody’s combined efforts”, something which is only possible if a priest discovers charisms, encourages commitment and also supports Christians in their apostolate within the Church and for the world. In particular, they emphasise that “concepts such as ‘ministry’ and ‘being in ministry’ must be reflected in the way that leadership is perceived.”<sup>353</sup>

### But what are the essential distinctive features?

The specifics of the priesthood as a ministry, the Bishops say, is the irreplaceable ministry of celebrating the sacraments, on the one hand, and their special responsibility of passing on Scripture and tradition. In addition, the priest is also responsible for maintaining unity among Christians within the universal Church (sic!) and for finding ways in which God’s people can realise their mission in the world in a way that is appropriate to a given context and time. In view of national church traditions in Germany and the numerous representative commitments a parish priest has, the authors point out in particular – and indeed

*sozialer Arbeit und Diakonie: Impulse für Kirche und Gesellschaft*, Berlin 2008, 97–115.

<sup>353</sup> “Gemeinsam Kirche sein”, 44.

with a wholesome emphasis – that priests must rid themselves of complex management functions and representational duties. These are jobs which are not genuinely part of their priestly ministry and should therefore be delegated to others – men and women who work either full-time or on a voluntary basis.

However, the document also addresses the leadership ministries of non-ordained men and women in the Church, pointing out that lay people already have leadership ministries in so many spheres of Church life. When it comes to fleshing out leadership ministries, the authors highlight the wealth of experience that has been gathered in religious orders and which should encourage us to develop innovative leadership structures where a given office may sometimes only be held for a limited period of time. Furthermore, the Bishops point out that “leadership can ultimately only be exercised collectively”<sup>354</sup> and that this is an area where synods, councils and other consultation processes are vital within the Church.

### Self-renewal of pastoral ministry in the Church

Next, the Bishops comment on the changing pastoral situation in Germany where traditional territorial parishes are developing into “parishes of a new type”. These have been described as “church districts”, “pastoral care districts”, “communities of parishes” and “communities of communities”. Also at issue are structures in pastoral ministry.<sup>355</sup> But before saying anything about the transformational processes within a parish, the Bishops quote three statements made by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* in the hope, as it were, of first building up some “encouraging theological momentum”. Pope Francis describes the local parish as “a centre of constant missionary outreach”.<sup>356</sup> In view of the current changes that can be observed in Germany’s church districts, the Bishops also quote Pope Francis’s description of the local parish not as “an outdated institution”, but as something that “possesses great flexibility”<sup>357</sup> because it is “the

<sup>354</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>355</sup> Cf. Felix Genn at a press briefing for the presentation of the document “Being Church Together”: A Message from the German Bishops on the Renewal of Pastoral Ministry” in Fulda on 23. September 2015.

<sup>356</sup> EG 28.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration.”<sup>358</sup> It is good to see the appreciation with which the Bishops emphasise that different areas of church life – or parish life – take different forms, and that they must nevertheless be closely networked among themselves and stay connected with Christ as their real centre.

Particularly in view of the current social situation in Germany, with its movements of migration and immigration, it is good to hear of a fundamental solidarity among the baptised and confirmed in this context and of a “spirituality of hospitality”. When the authors say at this point that, by exercising hospitality, the Christian faith must be “offered in a convincing manner”, this shows again that the document was inspired by pastoral input from France. This influence can also be seen subsequently, when the Bishops talk about new forms of participation and responsibility and when they describe the priest as an “obstetrician” in this process. What we can see here is an understanding of pastoral ministry as a “procreation” activity.<sup>359</sup> Finally, basing their thoughts on the *motu proprio Ministeria Quaedam* (1972), the Bishops point out that, when it comes to coordinating diaconal, catechetical and liturgical ministries, specific responsibilities might be given to people for limited periods of time.

### Being Church together for all humanity

The document concludes by referring back to the six key questions that were asked at the beginning. Based on the reflections presented, the authors formulate the following goals for the Church in Germany:

- Increase awareness among all Christians that they are called to holiness and that they can deepen this holiness through friendship with Jesus and serving their brothers and sisters.
- Allow scope for the wealth of charisms and keep receiving the gift of this unifying diversity through celebrating the Eucharist.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

<sup>359</sup> Cf. Bündgens, Johannes, “Zeugungspastoral: Die Ruhe nach dem Sturm”, in: *Anzeiger für die Seelsorge*, No. 119 (2010) 10, 5–9; Müller, Hadwig, “Leben zeugende Pastoral: Leben erzählende Pastoral”, in: *Anzeiger für die Seelsorge*, No. 119 (2010) 10, 11–14.

- Ensure that fellowship between and among the clergy and the laity fully enables the Church to serve all humanity .
- Understand the wide range of callings and functions in the Body of Christ not as a matter of ranking above or below one another, but as multiple expressions of the one mission.
- Ensure that the largest possible number of men and women all have a fair share in the Church's different leadership ministries.
- Support our parishes in developing into communities of communities with many different forms of participation.

Interestingly, the compositional structure of *Being Church Together* concludes with the “era of two Popes”. In their last sentence the Bishops say: “We trust that wherever people allow themselves to be gripped by the joy of the Gospel, the Church grows and faith has a future.”<sup>360</sup> This thought unites Pope Francis’s programmatic words about the joy of the Gospel<sup>361</sup> and a dictum by Pope Benedict XVI which expresses two core concepts – a “growing Church” and “faith that has a future.”<sup>362</sup>

### New stimuli for Evangelization

The Bishops’ message *Being Church Together* picks up core ideas from *Lumen Gentium* and – like *Gaudium et Spes* earlier on – accepts the challenges of the present and identifies important key concepts of evangelization in the 21st century. The two most crucial components are the calling of all humans to holiness and the centrality of Christ. Both aspects are signs and instruments of the promised salvation and unfold as such particularly clearly in the sacrament of baptism. Baptismal dignity is the essential criterion of a person’s life as a Christian<sup>363</sup>, while all further distinctions must remain relatively insignificant. In line with this is a charism-focused pastoral ministry that is primarily geared to people and not models. In

<sup>360</sup> “Gemeinsam Kirche sein”, 56.

<sup>361</sup> EG 1.

<sup>362</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, sermon in Mariazell on 7.September 2007.

<sup>363</sup> A few weeks before the pastoral message “Gemeinsam Kirche sein” was published, the Roman Catholic Faculty of Theology at the University of Bochum held a conference together with missio and KAMP, entitled “Baptismal Dignity and Leadership”, which was attended by 350 pastoral theologians from Germany. The good turnout shows that clarifying the issue of baptismal dignity and leadership is currently recognised as an important challenge for the Church in Germany.

view of the reorganisation of church districts, *Being Church Together* presents a beneficial way forward in opening up horizons, yet without prematurely establishing definitive paths. This is good, because we are going through a time of profound transformations – a time when the pastoral ministry is very much in need of (sometimes tentative) searching, rather than hastening the establishment of models. When it comes to evangelization in Germany, the document abandons any adherence to (fondly cherished but) outmoded social forms within the Church, while encouraging us to be Church together in a way that allows new forms of participation.<sup>364</sup> In many regions of the universal Church, Christians have already gained a substantial amount of positive experience with new forms of being Church. The pastoral message *Being Church Together* encourages us to think of evangelization in Germany in future as including the following categories: participation, a focus on charisms and experimental pastoral ministry – yet without forgetting the centrality of Christ as the crucial element of any evangelization.

<sup>364</sup> Cf. Hennecke, Christian (ed.), *Kleine Christliche Gemeinschaften verstehen: Ein Weg, Kirche mit den Menschen zu sein*, Würzburg 2009.