

The Synodal Path in Germany

– a responsible answer to the crisis of the Catholic Church

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1. The synodal traditions in Germany found a sustainable form.

In Germany, the Christian culture is part of a post-secular society. The Protestant Churches and the Catholic Church are about the same size; Ecumenical relations have been growing well for a long time. With a clear separation of church and state, there is close cooperation in many areas of education, social work, and health care.

This context influences and inspires the inner-Catholic relations. The role of the German Bishop's Conference is clear, like in other countries. It is a special feature of the Catholic life in Germany, that there is also an independent representation of the church people, whose pillars are the millions of members of Catholic associations and the tens of thousands of elected representatives of the pastoral councils on local and regional levels.

Since decades there were synods and synodal processes in Germany. The Synodal Path in Germany is the fruit of this vivid tradition.

2. The problem of sexual abuse by clergy needs a systemic solution.

In 2019 the Bishop's Conference reacted to an independent scientific report about sexual abuse by clergy against young people ("MHG-Studie" 2018). The study identified not only a terrible number of cases, but also systemic structures both of origin and of cover-up by leaders, not least bishops. Therefore, the Bishop's Conference invited the ZdK, to organize together a Synod of common deliberations and decisions. Four topics were identified: balance of power, role of priests, rights of women, and moral teaching of the Church.

The first stage of the synod ended after 5 general assemblies with groundbreaking decisions. The second stage will start in November this year. The third phase is scheduled to begin in 2026: a well-organized collaboration between the Bishop's Conference and the ZdK. In this counsel fundamental questions about the future of the church will be discussed and decided together.

3. The Synodal Path in Germany is part of the synodal process of the whole Catholic Church.

The synodal process of the whole Catholic Church in Rome (2023-2024) answers the question how the community of the faithful can be deepened through true participation of all members in such a way that the Church's mission ("faith, love, and hope") becomes more radiant.

Pope Francis said that the Catholic Church is a Synodal Church. Now is the time to look for the best examples and develop them further. Hot spots are currently Latin America, Australia and Germany. However, in many other countries there are strong initiatives to overcome clericalism.

The synodal process of the Catholic Church is a sign of hope in a wounded world. It has the promise to overcome ideological fights by listening to the Gospel of justice, freedom and peace. However, the promise will only be fulfilled if the church does not isolate itself from the global movements to strengthen democracy, human rights and international solidarity, but rather engages in dialogue with them.

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