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PRESS RELEASE
GERMAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE



Continental stage of the worldwide synodal process concluded in Prague

“Finding our way towards a synodal church”

Today (9 February 2023) the European continental stage of the worldwide synodal process has been concluded. Delegations of 39 bishops' conferences have taken part in this stage. Moreover, 40 other guests had been invited by the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE). In addition to the delegates in Prague, up to ten participants from each country were also connected online. The meeting in Prague, which began last Sunday (5 February 2023), will be followed by a conference of the presidents of all European bishops' conferences. Today, the German delegation draws the following conclusion to the consultations in Prague:

The Synodal Assembly of the European continental stage of the worldwide synodal process initiated by Pope Francis has brought us many insights. We were able to learn how the Church in the countries of Europe is setting out to become more and more a synodal Church. This path is not easy and - if one compares the different contributions and experiences - it is marked by different speeds and views. We are grateful that we had opportunities to contribute our experiences of the Synodal Path of the Church in Germany in Prague, especially in the discussions on site and to a limited extent online. However, the chosen methodology of listening reaches its limits if there are no opportunities for giving a response and for discourse.

In the continental assembly, it was important for us to remind people of the necessary changes the Church needs in order to live up to her responsibility. We wanted to speak out about the systemic causes of sexual abuse and demand the presence and participation of those affected by sexualised violence. We hope that this will happen at the World Synod in Rome. In the discussions and the many comments we heard, we often felt that we received considerable support from other countries. This includes in a special way the question of the participation of women in our Church. However, it also became clear that there are considerable differences between basic attitudes here and in countries with other cultures. We are convinced that the coming months must be used to remain in dialogue - Europe-wide - to understand each other better and to convince each other with arguments. There are still a few months left until the Synod will take place in October. This time must be used well.

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The final document of the European Assembly discussed today in Prague (an editorial team will prepare the final version in the coming weeks) repeats in large parts the actual preparatory document of the synodal process, "Enlarge the space for your tent; Is 54:2". It is good that the topics are mentioned again here. Thus, the final document is a record of the meeting in Prague. However, the document does not say how concrete questions can be solved for the Church. We see it as our task to continue to ask precisely these questions and to clarify them in dialogue. The document invites us to continue along the path we have chosen. We are already eager to see what final documents will be written as a result of the other continental stages of the worldwide synodal process.

As the German delegation, we embrace what has been mentioned in many places. Living synodality means agreeing and reflecting on the forms of communication and participation with all those involved. In 2015, Pope Francis recalled a long-practised rule of communication in his speech on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops: What concerns everyone must at least be discussed by everyone. Synodality means not talking about each other, but with each other. We regret that people living in same-sex partnerships were not able to tell their life stories here in Prague. This also applies to those affected by sexual violence and spiritual abuse.

Obviously, we in Europe experience and shape reality differently in the respective culturally shaped contexts, i.e. in non-simultaneity and decentralisation. At the level of the universal church, clarity and transparency are needed to communicate diversity and unity in a new way. In which places and in which synodal structures deliberations and decisions should take place in the future needs to be rediscovered. How can diversity be recognised as richness, where do opposites destroy unity? Who takes decisions in this regard and in what way? In the pastoral spaces of Europe and around the world, future issues are arising with great urgency: participatory community leadership structures; new missionary services and ministries; blessing ceremonies for people in special life situations - and many more challenges. We have learned that in many countries exactly the same issues as in Germany are being addressed with great urgency.

This also applies to the role of theology. All the material and content-related topics of the synodal process cannot be adequately discussed without reference to scientific theology. There are standards in university education worldwide which also apply to synodal processes. Further efforts are needed to strengthen the international exchange of theologies, also with regard to their methodology. Without exegetical knowledge and without insights into the hermeneutics of interpreting historical documents, we can no longer find convergences. Church history proves this: A church doctrine without adequate theological justification will not find reception in the long run.

Synodal processes will only be successful with regard to the topics mentioned if not only the internal circle of people close to the Church gathers and talks to each other. There is a need for external prophecy - the intuitive view of the reality by people who do not move daily in the spaces of the church institution, belong to it and are obliged to be loyal to it.

In Prague we were able to experience that synodal processes are not simply over. We need more time together and we need growing trust in each other. We need permanent synodal structures and international - also European - networks. Living synodality, means meeting often and giving each other space. The Synodal Assembly from 9-11 March 2023 in Frankfurt will serve this purpose, as will the World Synod in Rome in October 2023 and in 2024. We want to and have to continue to walk the Synodal Path together.

The members of the German delegation:

Bishop Dr Georg Bätzing, Dr Irme Stetter-Karp, Prof. Dr Thomas Söding, Dr Beate Gilles, Kerstin Fuchs, Sr. Dr Katharina Ganz OSF, Lisa Holzer, Hendrik Johannemann, Bishop Dr Peter Kohlgraf, Prof. Dr Charlotte Kreuter-Kirchhof, Fr. Andreas Murk OFMConv, Dr Ralph Poirrel, Prof. Dr Johanna Rahner, Prof. Dr Dorothea Sattler.

Notes:

The speeches, free visual material and further information on the meeting in Prague are available for download at www.dbk.de on the topic page [Bischofssynode Synodale Kirche 2021-2024](#) (*Synod of Bishops Synodal Church 2021–2024*) as well as at <https://www.facebook.com/dbk.de>. A video with Dr Beate Gilles can also be found there. The final document of the continental stage will soon be available at www.dbk.de.

The German Bishops' Conference is an association of the Roman-Catholic bishops of all dioceses in Germany. It currently has 67 members (as per: February 2023) from the 27 German dioceses. The German Bishops' Conference was established to promote joint pastoral tasks, to advise one another, to coordinate the Church's work, to jointly adopt decisions and to maintain contact with other Bishops' Conferences. The highest body of the German Bishops' Conference is the Plenary Assembly of all bishops, at which the bishops regularly meet in spring and autumn for several days.