

Den Nordiske Bispekonference  
Gammel Kongevej 15  
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To the President of the German Bishops' Conference,  
Bishop Georg Bätzing  
Domplatz 7  
D — 65549 Limburg

Tromsø, 9 March 2022

Your Excellency, dear Brother

The Nordic Bishops' Conference is, like that of the German Bishops, in session this week. We send cordial greetings from Tromsø, accompanying you and all our German colleagues with our prayers for your meeting in Vierzehnheiligen and for the ever more complex pastoral and social challenges of our times.

Strong bonds unite Catholics in our countries to the Catholic Church of Germany. The post-Reformation reestablishment of Catholic life took place here largely thanks to the support of Catholics in Germany. A number of bishops, many priests, and countless religious sisters have generously given their lives for the mission in the North. Through their witness to Christ and their love for the Church they laid the foundation on which we are still building. The German Church's financial support remains to this day vital for Catholic life in the Nordic countries. For all this, may God reward you richly!

Immense challenges confront the Church globally. It is evidently necessary that we, as bishops, give thought to how we may best negotiate these in order to be faithful to Christ, to meet the needs of the women and men of our time, and to communicate the truth of our faith.

That said, the orientation, method and content of the Synodal Path of the Church in Germany fill us with worry. We realize that the felt need for changes must be seen against the backdrop of Germany's concrete situation. Yet neither the topics covered nor the hopes, nurtured by some, for specific results are exclusively German concerns. The terrible wounds afflicted by abuse cry out for healing. It is incumbent on us all to respond. We *wish* to respond. Everything must be done to acknowledge the suffering of victims and to prevent future abuse. It is a matter of justice, a Christian imperative. It is a matter, too, of the Church's credibility.

The Holy Father is summoning the whole Church to a synodal search for life-giving potential in the Church's current life and work. This process presupposes radical conversion. First of all we must re-discover the promises of Jesus and communicate them as our source of joy, freedom, and thriving. We are commissioned to embrace as ours, with gratitude and reverence, the undiminished deposit of faith handed down through the Church. Throughout the world, a number of Catholics ask questions about the lifestyle and formation of priests, the role of women in the Church, the range of views on human sexuality, etc. In the legitimate search for answers to the questions of our time, we must nonetheless respect boundaries set by topics that stand for unchangeable aspects of the Church's teaching.

It has ever been the case that true reforms in the Church have set out from Catholic teaching founded on divine Revelation and authentic Tradition, to defend it, expound it, and translate it credibly into lived life — not from capitulation to the *Zeitgeist*. How fickle the *Zeigeist* is, is something we verify on a daily basis.

The global synodal process has aroused great expectations. We all hope for a revitalization of Catholic life and of the Church's mission. However, there is a risk that we, in so far as we stay enclosed within paradigms of process thinking and structural change, end up conceiving of the Church as a *project*, the object of our agency. The synodal process presupposes the image of the Church as the People of God on pilgrimage. It is obvious that such a people needs to be sensibly organised.

However, 'People of God' is only one of several images with which Tradition describes the nature of the Church. If our synodal discernment is to bear fruit, it must be

enriched and oriented by these other dimensions. It seems to us paramount, precisely at this moment, to focus on the Church's sacramental mystery. In what ways can we, now, contemplate — and experience — the Church with amazement also as *corpus mysticum*, as Bride of Christ, as mediatrix of graces? The Church cannot merely be defined as a visible community. The Church is a mystery of communion: communion of humankind with the Triune God; communion among the faithful; communion of all the particular Churches with the Successor of Peter.

We find that Catholics who constitute and carry the life of our parishes and communities instinctively sense this sacramental mystery but are not necessarily the ones inclined to fill in questionnaires or participate in group discussions. Let us not forget, in the context of the synodal process, to attend carefully to their witness also.

Right now, when Europe, subject to deep divisions, is threatening to explode, we ascertain: we need a higher criterion of unity. Christ alone is our hope! In his name the Church is called to be 'a lasting and sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race' (*Lumen Gentium*, 9). Only if the Church's life *ad intra* is rooted in Christ, only if we live out of the fullness of his revelation, shall we measure up to this vocation. We can hardly expect a new fullness of Catholic vitality to follow from impoverishment of the content of our faith.

We are convinced that the Church in Germany, even in the throes of present crisis, possesses potential for renewal. We are all called, as on the first day of the Gospel, to radical conversion and to holiness. With gratitude we recall the great German saints, the theologians who have enriched us wonderfully, and the throng of German missionaries sent to the ends of the earth to labour in humble obscurity. We are sincerely thankful for the generosity of German Catholics who have contributed, worldwide, to relieve suffering and enable growth. From this patrimony, seeds of blessing will sprout also in the present day.

We hope and pray, then, that the faith handed on to us, the graciously transformative life *in Christ*, will continue to be upheld in the Church, also in the face of a society in violent transformation.

We wish you and all our colleagues in the German Bishops' Conference courage and hope to preserve unity. We remain fraternally united with you in pursuit of this great purpose. Trustfully we commend the Church in Germany to the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church.

With every good wish for a blessed Lent,

Bishop Czeslaw Kozon, Copenhagen, President

Anders Cardinal Arborelius OCD, Stockholm, Vicepresident

Bishop Bernt Eidsvig Can.Reg, Oslo

Bishop David Tencer OFM Cap, Reykjavik

Bishop Prelate Berislav Grgic, Tromsø

Bishop Prelate Erik Varden OCSO, Trondheim

P. Marco Pasinato, Diocesan Administrator of Helsinki

Bishop Peter Bürcher, Bishop *emeritus* of Reykjavik

Bishop Teemu Sippo SCI, Bishop *emeritus* of Helsinki

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