



KirchenVolksBewegung

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To the Bishop of Rome, Pope Benedict XVI

To the Archbishops, Bishops and Auxiliary Bishops of the 27
German dioceses

München, im August 2006

Open Letter to the Bishop of Rome and to all German Bishops

Your Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, your Excellencies, 1.845.141 people, of which 1.483.340 are explicitly confessed Roman Catholics and alone in Germany have in autumn 1995 signed the five postulates of the Church Referendum (Kirchenvolksbegehren). They did this on the basis of the dogmatic Council Constitution "Lumen Gentium" Art 37 and of Can 212 §3 of Church Law. In accordance, the faithful have *"the right and at times even the duty to advise their spiritual leaders of their opinion in what pertains to the good of the church and to inform the other faithful, whilst safeguarding the entirety of faith and morals and the reverence towards their pastors and under consideration of the common good and the dignity of people"*.

Time and again, members of *We are Church* over the past years have approached the pope in Rome, individual bishops as well as the German Bishops 'Conference yet without a real dialogue materializing. This is the more regrettable as the signatures of lay-people, priests and religious under the postulates of *We are Church* – as investigations have repeatedly shown – today as before stand for the vast majority of practising Catholics who support the reformatory steps that originate from the II Vatican Council (1962-1965), the "Common Synod of dioceses in the Federal Republic of Germany" (1971-1975) as well as the Dresden Pastoral Synod (1973-1975) and which, since then, have been further developed theologically and pastorally.

On the occasion of Pope Benedict's pastoral visit in September 2006 we must state:

1. For more and more people the **"faith" in the church is made more difficult, or even made impossible**, by holding onto antiquated church structures. Hundreds of thousands resigned, millions have withdrawn into inner emigration. **Especially women feel it progressively unbearable** that patriarchal church-structures should bar them from living their call and their faith in the church.
2. The number of people and congregations grows that support church reforms such as ordination of women, admission of married men ("viri probati") to the priesthood, cancellation of compulsory celibacy for priests, or the admission to the sacraments of re-married divorcees. **Likewise, the numerous votes of councils, commissions, associations, synods and of pastoral discussions show the necessity of reforms more and more clearly.**
3. Owing to the continuing scarcity of priests, **the parish-pastoral is facing radical changes** which the church is not prepared for. Half of our parishes in Germany will, in the near future, be without ordained pastors and without regular celebration of the Eucharist. Present Episcopal structural thoughts have lost sight of the parish as the basic model of Christian community and usher in the departure of the local parish system. During the 26-years-pontificate of John Paul II the number of priests worldwide was reduced by 4 percent, whereas the number of Catholics worldwide increased by 40 percent.

4. The world-synod on the Eucharist of bishops in 2005 in Rome showed that **the concern for reform as voiced by *We are Church* for years is far from being a purely German problem**. Bishops, especially from third-world-countries, the USA and from United Orthodox churches voiced this concern.
5. **The actual crisis in finance and confidence is sign of a serious mental and spiritual crisis**. In many dioceses the drastic economic measures are practised without transparency nor wider cooperation. The result of this pastoral and social reversion is that the church more and more moves away from the people.
6. **The Roman Catholic Church reaches merely a progressively shrinking fraction of the social environment with its message**, as has been shockingly presented in the recently published "Sinus Study", which investigated the public attitude to religion and church together with concrete wishes and expectations that are directed at the Catholic Church.
7. Being too preoccupied with its own problems, **the voice of the church is conspicuous by its absence in the present process of re-distribution and restructuring and to the results of the worldwide globalising**.
8. **The far reaching interventions by the Vatican** during the last years, exemplified by the "Instructions for lay-people", the Apostolic paper "At tuendam fidem", further the declaration that put such serious demands on ecumenism: "Dominus Jesus" plus the liturgy-instruction "Redemptionis Sacramentum": **they all deepened the chasm between the leaders of the church and the congregation**.
9. **Particularly grave for the Catholic Church in Germany were and still are** the recent harsh criticisms by the new prefect of the congregation of faith, Cardinal Levada, concerning the Central Committee of German Catholics, the questioning of parish-, deanery- and diocesan councils, that function since the Wuerzburg Synod, and of all their decisions by the clerical congregation, as much as from Rome ordained ostracising of full-time and honorary helpers in church-service who engage in counselling women with pregnancy conflicts ever since the German bishops withdrew in 1999.
10. **The refusal of dialogue with the faithful, already registered by the Central Committee of German Catholics in 1994 continues un-abated**. The numerous dialogue-offers by *We are Church* have been accepted by the bishops only hesitatingly if at all. The requests by the *International Movement We are Church* for a discussion with popes John Paul II and Benedict XVII did not even receive a reply.

The Roman Catholic Church in Germany, in Europe and worldwide faces dramatic changes and demands which can be mastered only jointly by faithful and bishops. If you want to be true pastors of the church, in solidarity with their needs and hopes, then you should - being successors to the apostles - in keeping with the apostle Paul, act "not as masters of the faith but as servants of our joy"(Kor 1/24)Therefore, we appeal to you:

- Utilize the **scarcity of priests as a chance** for a new awareness of co- and self-responsibility in the parishes. Tie in the so-called lay-people competently into the propagation of the faith and into the administration of parishes!
- Regard **the urge of women** as a token of identification with the church. Especially the vision of women for a renewed service offer chances for a pastoral pointing to the future.
- Give room for formation and responsibilities to **juveniles and young grown-ups** Only that way can a at-home feeling in the church be created!
- Recognize the **engagement especially of critical Catholics** as a clear token of their love to the church and as an alternative to actual or inner emigration!
- Seize the **special responsibility for ecumenism** with the churches of the reformation! Give a clear profession for the bond in faith as well as to the second ecumenical church meeting (Kirchentag) in 2010!
- Show courage in christian confidence! We need **an open and towards people sympathetic and brotherly church. Be prepared for an open and serious dialogue with the faithful**.



Dietgard Heine



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for the national team of *We are Church Germany*

Translation: Karl Rauscher