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To the Chairman of the German Bishops' Conference

To the Bishops and Auxiliary Bishops of the 27 Dioceses in Germany

(addressed individually)

Munich, 9th November 2014

To His Eminence / To his Excellency

With the Pastoral letter convening the Extraordinary Synod on the Family, Pope Francis has begun a process long overdue, for which he is to be thanked. Cardinal Kasper, Cardinal Marx, Ms. Ute Eberl and many other participants, both before and during this Extraordinary Synod, have also offered statements that bring hope for reform. The fact that even profound differences of opinion have been brought forward for discussion has strengthened the credibility of this Synod in the eyes of both secular observers and church insiders. Despite the disappointing conclusion of the first round of the Synod, we are convinced that many bishops are taking the voice of the People of God more seriously than has been the case in official meetings up to now.

In accordance with the process outlined by Pope Francis, the local churches have a very short period of time leading up to the October 2015 Ordinary Synod in which to develop constructive proposals on all points of the "Relatio Synodi," including the still disputed issues of pastoral practices and employment rights for the divorced and remarried, and the acceptance of people living homosexual lives. It is good that you, as bishops, subscribe to this process, as has been announced in hearings and at the various levels of the dioceses, parishes and associations, so as to support a dialogue with no repression of thought or speech. In many ways, valuable preliminary work on this has already been accomplished. We are thinking of the initiative of the bishops of the Upper Rhine in 1993; the latest results of the "process of dialogue"; and the theological research of recent years, which has all too often been suppressed. We anticipate that the writings and statements of theologians, both male and female, who have suffered professional losses because of their openness, will be heard. Inviting them back into the conversation will contribute to the credibility of the process that has begun.

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Hence it is essential that the Catholic Church in Germany voice unequivocally its fundamental and much-discussed demands. As examples we mention:

1. a new concept of sexuality that bases its understanding of marriage on the model of human relationship;
- 2 a thorough-going reconsideration of what the Church understands by "the indissolubility of marriage," without pushing aside the exceptions mentioned in Matthew (5:32; 19:9) and Paul (1 Cor 7:15);
3. a fundamental clarification of the sacramental nature of marriage, taking into account the history of dogma, which has led to a one-sidedly legalistic understanding of marriage;
4. a definitive end to discrimination against homosexuals and homosexuality, which means going beyond calls to treat these people with kindness, and dealing with all the implications for ethics and canon law;
5. a persuasive position against any and all discrimination against women inside and outside the church, including reckoning with the obvious implications for our understanding of church ministries.

Thus, the work to be done in the coming months work is enormous. After a long period of stagnation, teaching and pastoral practice in the broad and highly sensitive areas of marriage, the family, and sexuality should now be further developed so as to take seriously, understand, and accompany men and women in their real life situations in light of the Christian message.

This task can only succeed if the diverse life experiences and challenges facing the laity (LG 12 AA and 4) are taken into account, as was done in the "Instrumentum laboris." Therefore the lay church movement *We Are Church* will once again be calling for dialogue and new initiatives. We specifically declare to you our willingness in these matters to work closely with you and with competent women scholars to reflect on new paths in theory and practice, so that the process affirmed by all may progress without interruption. For us, as for you, it is very important that we not let this moment, this *Kairos*, pass.

With fraternal greetings



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Steering committee of *We are Church* Germany