

3rd Symposium of the German Bishops' Conference on Aspects of Gender Equity

in Frankfurt/Main on November 30, 2009

Welcome Address by **Georg Cardinal Sterzinsky**, Archbishop of Berlin and Chairman of the Subcommittee on "Women in the Church and in Society" of the Pastoral Commission

Honored, dear guests of our symposium on „Leadership in Honorary Office – Women’s Perspectives“

I am very happy that so many of you have accepted our invitation and warmly welcome you

- who represent the interests of women in your associations and make an important contribution to the pastoral ministry of the church;
- who have management responsibility in the diocesan administration offices, the pastoral care of women, in the diocesan councils and in the "Caritas";
- who are engaged in the realm of politics and of scholarship;
- with special thanks I welcome the moderators and speakers of our symposium;
- I am grateful that so many fellow bishops are taking part in this symposium. I welcome the President of the German Bishops' Conference, Archbishop Dr. Robert Zollitsch. His participation is a good indicator of the importance of this conference also in the eyes of the departments of the Bishops' Conference.

This is the third symposium on aspects of gender equity, which has been carried out by the Subcommittee on "Women in the Church and in Society" on behalf of the Commission for Pastoral Care. The focus is on the dialog between bishops and Catholic women in leadership positions. This will become especially clear in the discussion forums this afternoon. In each of the forums you will have the opportunity to discuss aspects of women's perspectives on leadership in honorary office with one or more bishops.

It has been an important goal of the Subcommittee on "Women in the Church and in Society" to increase the number of women in responsible positions in the church. To this end, three symposiums have been held on aspects of gender equity.

Our goal for the **1st Symposium in 2002 held in Schmerlenbach** was to discuss what opportunities women have in the Catholic Church to influence the organization, how new ones can be opened up and their use be widened. Women have perspectives, which they can bring to bear in church and in society and which can be particularly helpful in times of change. In order to enable women to bring their perspectives to bear, we encourage women in

salaried and volunteer positions of leadership.

The **2nd symposium in 2005 held in Munich** focused on the reconcilability of family and job. It considered the implications for the church of the changes in the self-conceptions of men and women and in their relationship to one another. In this context, salaried executives in diocesan structures and institutions were a focus of particular attention.

The Munich symposium proposed that a course be conceived for the professional development of women in responsible positions within the church. This suggestion has since been implemented and the course has already successfully been held once. We are happy that the Department for the Pastoral Care of Women of the German Bishops' Conference will be offering it again in 2010 - 2011 in cooperation with the Katholisch-Sozialen Institut in Bad Honnef.

Our **3rd symposium today** focuses on women who hold leadership positions as an honorary office. Here we have acted on a suggestion of women's associations. It was Mrs. Magdalena Bogner, who was President of the Catholic Women's Association (Katholischen Frauengemeinschaft kfd) at the time, who emphasized the importance on this topic.

Today's conference is special in that for the first time the German Bishops' Conference has organized a symposium in cooperation with the Catholic women's associations. Representatives of the Union of Catholic Women's Associations were members of the steering group that planned our conference and will be responsible for the follow-up work. I am especially happy, that this cooperation has been so harmonious and so goal-oriented. It is my hope, that we will all be able to sense this during our stay here in Frankfurt.

For all of us, who are participating today and who have played a role in the success of this conference, the issue of sustainability is of particular importance. The things we discuss here today should not be without consequences; on the contrary our goal is to effect change. Therefore, the subcommittee has already discussed how the follow-up of this conference will be handled. One point of special emphasis will be the options for action, which we hope will be developed during our discussions, and how we can highlight their importance.

In the past weeks, much interest in our conference has been expressed in the dioceses and in the associations. Therefore, we have already decided to prepare a documentation of the lectures given here. We hope that our speakers, both for the plenary session and later for the forums, will cooperate actively in this project.

Honored ladies and gentlemen: Many of us have come to Frankfurt with high expectations. We will not be able to fulfill *all* expectations, but I am confident that through our joint effort, we will take another step forward on the issue of gender equity. With this in mind, I wish us success and God's generous blessing and ask you to join me in a prayer chosen from Frauengebetbuch (Women's Prayer Book):

Prayer at the Start of a Study Day

Humane God,

You have given each of us different gifts.

We want to mobilize these talents for the benefit of others.

For this reason we came together,

In order to strengthen each other for the further steps on our path of faith.

We each bring our own experiences and expectations into this day.

Help us, to put aside our daily routine for a while.

Open our hearts and ears for each other and for everything, which will strengthen us on our path.

Bless our joint work and remain among us.

We ask this of you through Christ in the name of the Holy Spirit.

(Ulrike Delbeck)

Now I turn responsibility for overall moderation of the conference to two representatives of women's associations:

- Mrs. Maria Theresia Opladen, Chairperson of the Katholischen Frauengemeinschaft kfd,
and to
- Madam Lecturer Dr. Hildegard König, Vice-President of the Katholischer Deutscher Frauenbund KDFB

Mrs. Opladen, Dr. König: you have the microphone.

Translation: Dr. Diane Gössing