



**Spring Plenary Assembly of the German Bishops' Conference
from 18 to 21 February 2013 in Trier**

**Final declaration of the study day
„Cooperation between women and men in the service and the life of the Church“**

“God created man in his image; male and female he created them.” (*Gn 1, 27*) A fulfilled human existence is not possible without this interaction between man and woman. The Creator wanted and intended the gender difference for the mutual enrichment of man and woman. On the basis of this view of man we again dealt with questions of cooperation between women and men in the service and the life of the Church within the framework of a study day held during the Spring Plenary Assembly. The discussion focused on the perspectives of women in voluntary church work, their role as full-time employees in pastoral care, education, Caritas and church administration as well as theologians in university education.

Subsequent to the study day we commit ourselves to promote women even more when exercising the responsibilities for church life which is a task for all Christians. There has been a considerable increase in responsible commitment of women to the Church in recent years. The work in the Church is enriched by female professors of theology, heads of departments, Caritas and financial directors, councillors of the diocesan curia, ecclesiastical judges, and school headmistresses but also by spiritual leaders in Catholic associations and by presidents of parish councils. Not least for many centuries nuns have exercised spiritual leadership in the Church. However we bishops are aware of the disappointment of many women being active in the Church and we regret that the possibility to entrust women with responsible tasks within the Church is not sufficiently used according to many women. Many women, especially younger ones, miss female role models in leading positions within the Church whom they might follow.

To a high degree life in the Church is supported by women and their mostly voluntary work. Especially women contribute to the life of the Church by taking part in proclamation and catechesis, in diaconal actions and liturgical services. By the participation of women many people perceive a female face of the Church. We want this high percentage of women being active in the mission of the Church to be also reflected in the public portrayal of the Church. In the field of church public relations women shall become more noticeable and visible.

Today women as well as many men are well-educated and provide highly qualified work in many professions – also within the Church. We bishops are committed to develop framework conditions in the Church and in society, which guarantee a real freedom of choice for women and men to share the roles and tasks in marriage, family, work and voluntary work in a fair way.

We expressly reject any defamation of women who want to balance work and family life or of women who stay at home to dedicate themselves solely to their family. Their services for the education and training of their children are invaluable. We also think that the situation of women who want to return to work after having taken parental leave should be made easier. Moreover, we highly appreciate women who are childless or single parents or who are unmarried and dedicated to work within the Church. It is our wish that more women than before will be able to contribute in a responsible way to the Church and its mission with their charisms and competences.

We witness that the Church of our times is getting a new face. Some tasks which do not require the sacrament of Holy Orders are increasingly taken over by the laity. For this reason we would like to clarify theologically what leadership in the Church really means. For which tasks the sacrament of Holy Orders is needed for theological reasons? What leadership positions can be taken over by women and men upon the request of the bishop? We want to find out, which new services and ministries can be developed that do not demand an ordination.

Experience shows that mixed teams consisting of women and men work more creatively and are more goal-oriented. So we expect that the consequences for the life and the service within the Church will be positive, if management positions and tasks of leadership are increasingly assumed by women. The Church cannot afford to do without the competences and charisms of women. In the different bodies of the Bishops' Conference we want to ensure that a high percentage of women will be appointed advisers. At the same time we call on all lay associations to develop concrete suggestions on how the high percentage of women in voluntary work can also be reflected on the management level. The present share of women of up to 19 per cent in managerial tasks in ordinariates and vicariates general points to the right direction, but is still not sufficient. So we will look more intensively for possibilities to increase the proportion of women in management positions. In five years we will again study the developments in this area.

We appreciate the high share of young women studying theology. It is in the interest of the Church, if qualified women are also aspiring to academic careers in theology. Women should be involved in the training of teachers, parish workers and pastoral workers as well as in the formation of priests. Especially these women serve as an important role model in the Church, if they contribute to further develop the relationship between priests and the laity in the sense of a mutual recognition of the different vocations, charisms and services within the Church.

We are grateful for the large number of women being active in pastoral care. For the activities of the Church in today's society a gender-sensitive pastoral care is of great importance. It can only be successful, if women and men contribute their respective specific gifts and perspectives to the proclamation, the church service and to Caritas.

Together with Pope Benedict we would like to say: *“let us always invoke the Holy Spirit, so that he may inspire in the Church holy and courageous women, like St Hildegard von Bingen, who, developing the gifts they have received from God, make their own special and valuable contribution to the spiritual development of our communities and of the Church in our time.”* (Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, 8 September 2010)

Trier, 21 February 2013