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PRESS RELEASE
GERMAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE



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Statement
of the President of the German Bishops' Conference,
Bishop Dr Georg Bätzing,
at the press conference
marking the end of the German bishops' ad Limina visit
Rome, 19 November 2022

The German bishops' five-day ad Limina visit to Rome drew to a close yesterday evening with a Eucharistic celebration in the Basilica San Giovanni in Laterano. During this visit, we prayed at the graves of the apostles, informed the Vatican about our work in the (arch)dioceses and our Bishops' Conference and – this was a very special morning for us – had an audience with the Holy Father Pope Francis.

This was my first ad Limina visit. Other bishops have much more experience in this respect; for some, it was their fourth visit. I can say quite honestly and with relief in my heart that yes, this was a challenging visit. And yes, all – without exception all – subjects were discussed in the most varied places: whether it be during the audience with the Pope, in the dicasteries or during yesterday's interdicastrial meeting on some questions relating to the Synodal Path of the Church in Germany.

The meetings with the dicasteries were good, albeit very different. We bishops were impressed by how intensively the reform of the Curia has already taken root, how professionally some dicasteries have prepared themselves and with which prospects regarding content they intend to shape their work in the coming years. Although I do not want to single out any individual institutions, I would like to emphasise how intensely we experienced the spirit of synodality in many of our meetings. We were particularly impressed by the obviously good and fruitful cooperation between bishops, priests and the laity – at all levels – in some dicasteries.

As I already said, all issues were discussed, above all the question as to how evangelisation can succeed when faced with the challenge of a secularised age. It is always about discovering the message in the here and now, and not just

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looking to the past. In this respect, we must always be aware of the risk of what Pope Francis calls a “Church that is bruised”.

The audience with Pope Francis encouraged us. Here too, the different positions within our Bishops' Conference were presented. The Holy Father made it clear to us that tension is necessary. He also spoke of the tension he experiences and the fact that courage and patience are needed to find a solution. Our discussions in Rome were tough but civil and we sensed that dialogue can – and indeed did – succeed in this way.

Yesterday's interdicastrial meeting was important. There too, all issues were raised. You are familiar with the joint statement of the Holy See and the German Bishops' Conference, which was published yesterday. I would like to add a few remarks on some aspects: this encounter was – as one of our bishops put it – “a serious test of synodality”: listening, weighing up and accepting that the other has his opinion. It is not about deciding who has the privilege of interpretation, but about honest reflection about where we are as a Church and what the other person's viewpoint is. I am grateful that the reservations that exist in Rome were openly expressed. I am also grateful that the worries and opinions of our Bishops' Conference – on the full range of topics – were heard. The interdicastrial meeting was, for me, a sign that we will – despite our contradictory viewpoints – continue on our path together. The Church in Germany is not going its own way and it will not make any decisions that would only be possible in the context of the universal church. However, the Church in Germany wants to and must provide answers to the questions being asked by the faithful. We experience this on our Synodal Path and we tried to get this message across in Rome. It was important to me to make it clear that the uncovering of abuse and structures that facilitated abuse in the Church have so shattered trust and called into question the authority of the bishops to such a degree that new paths are necessary in order to confront the crisis in the Church. Pope Francis' letter to the “pilgrim people of God” provided important orientation in this respect, which requires further reflection. We would like to initiate the tasks that we bishops can implement in the Local Church and to feed questions relating to the *magisterium* into the global synodal process. I would like to emphasise once again: the different opinions from our Bishops' Conference were voiced. The serious test of synodality is, therefore, very real for us and will continue to be so in the coming weeks.

I am grateful that the situation in the Archdiocese of Cologne was also addressed during the ad Limina visit, not only by me. It was raised not only in the meeting with the Dicastery for Bishops but also during the audience with the Holy Father.

As you can see, I am not ending the ad Limina visit by presenting a catalogue of results. We never expected to do so or suggested that we would. This is the end of a working visit marked by a great degree of pensiveness, a large number of subjects and the fact that we do not share one uniform viewpoint on important theological questions – especially with regard to the Synodal Path. This does not discourage me, and it is wrong to speak of a so-called “showdown”

in Rome. The follow-up phase begins now, as does the phase of reflection on what was said and heard: our concerns, which we raised in Rome, and the considerations that Rome gave us to take home. I am confident that we will continue this dialogue well and I hope that we will soon be able to further intensify this dialogue with those people in Rome that make up the largest part of the people of God: the laity.

A first opportunity for reflection will arise during the Permanent Council of the German Bishops' Conference in Würzburg on Monday and then, just a few days later, within the Extended Synodal Committee of the Synodal Path. Naturally, these subjects must be discussed with everyone within the Synodal Path. I am going home with a certain sense of relief, because we raised subjects, and no one can say that he heard nothing about these subjects or did not have the opportunity to say something. I am also going home with a certain degree of worry too because I cannot yet say what kind of dynamic the synodal processes will develop. But perhaps this tension is good: relief and worry. It is a wonderful expression of the title of the synodal document from Rome for the upcoming continental phase: "Enlarge the site of your tent". This expresses well what we feel at the moment: the space of the tent is created by the tension of the ropes that hold up the tent. Perhaps this image will also be helpful for our Synodal Path and the path of the Church in Germany overall.