

The pastoral conversion of the Parish community of St. Brendan's, Muirhouse

Highlights from the document by one of our younger parishioners

Pope Francis has encouraged us to seek new ways to proclaim the Gospel. Instead of being afraid of doing something wrong, we should be more afraid of becoming so closed up, so secure, so judgmental within our existing structures that we fail to see the great need of our brothers and sisters who have no community of faith to support them.

The Church must now use its structures and customs in a new way – her role is the evangelisation of today's world, not the Church's own self-preservation.

The Holy Spirit invites us to “renew the face of the Church” and we must embrace this opportunity. As Pope Benedict XVI taught, “the parish is a beacon that radiates the light of the faith..... giving meaning and hope to the lives of individuals and families”.

We must enthusiastically look for new ways to form a community. where people form relationships, serve one another and perform traditional observances. If the Parish merely performs repetitive actions that have no impact on people's concrete lives, if it has no missionary drive, it will be met with indifference.

Becoming part of a community where everyone works for the common good, a parish must bring people together and foster long-term personal relationships, The parish is not a building but a specific community of the faithful, with the Parish Priest as the pastor.

The parish community is made up of clergy, sometimes those in religious life and lay men and women. Every one of these people has their own personal vocation and “charism” (spiritual gift). When offered in the service of the community, these roles complement each other in creating the church, the body of Christ. As a ‘sanctuary’ open to all, the parish should remember that the poor and excluded must always have a privileged place in the heart of the Church.

When lay parishioners undertake pastoral activity they must not be regarded as acting as substitute clergy; rather, led by the Holy Spirit they are offering their unique gifts for the benefit of the parish or group of parishes or at diocesan level. Parish Priests must motivate the people so that they understand that they are the driving force of evangelisation. The Priest must encourage the life of the parish to grow and mature in its various vocations and ministries.

Personal comment by another parishioner: We have begun to use “digital culture” to enhance and connect with our parishioners during the lockdown. How do we build upon this to strengthen our parish and spread the Gospel? The daily streaming of Holy Mass I believe is a gift from the Holy Spirit to embrace those parishioners who are physically unable to attend at Mass or are anxious about safety in a confined space such as a church building. During the months of lockdown with no access to church or the Eucharist for most people I thanked God every day for being able to participate in Holy Mass every day at my table. It was a Godsend, transforming the domestic into the spiritual. I witnessed elderly parishioners embracing the digital technology daily in order to access Holy Mass when they could not do so in person. Through the charisms of our younger Parishioners, we were able to have Mass in our homes we most needed spiritual comfort. It is wonderful to see our parishes and our priests using these means to reach out and spread the Gospel in a time of “distance”

VATICAN INSTRUCTION 20TH JULY ON THE ROLE OF LAY PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH

Würzburg, Germany, Aug 24, 2020 The German Bishops' Conference has said it will accept the Vatican's invitation to discuss the new Instruction on parishes at a meeting in Rome, suggesting that it will be accompanied by laymen representing the "Synodal Process" under way in Germany.

The permanent council, comprising the diocesan bishops of the 27 Catholic dioceses in Germany, announced the decision that Bishop Georg Bätzing of Limburg would "accept the offer of conversation made by the Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy, Cardinal Beniamino Stella".

Furthermore, Bishop Bätzing "will suggest to the Congregation for the Clergy that the conversation be conducted with the Presidium of the Synodal Way, since bishops, priests, deacons and laity are equally addressed in the Instruction".

Cardinal Beniamino Stella, prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy, said July 29 that he would be happy to receive the bishops to "remove doubts and perplexity" voiced by German clergy. Cardinal Stella said that the meeting could take place "in due course" if the bishops wished to present their objections to [the Instruction](#), issued by his Congregation July 20. He reportedly declined to respond to specific criticisms ahead of the possible meeting.

He made the comments after several German bishops sharply criticized the document, which underlined that according to canon law only priests can direct the pastoral care of parishes. Some commentators saw the instruction as a response to plans drastically to reduce the number of parishes in German dioceses. The Vatican recently blocked a plan by the Diocese of Trier in Germany to turn 800 parishes into 35. Meanwhile, the Archdiocese of Freiburg has said that it will press ahead with plans to reduce its 1,000 parishes to 40.

In [a July 28 interview with the Italian newspaper La Stampa](#), Cardinal Stella said that "care must be taken not to reduce the parish to the rank of 'branch' of a 'company' -- in this case, the diocese -- with the consequence that it can be 'directed' by anyone, perhaps even by groups of 'officials' with different skills." He added that the instruction encouraged parishes to see themselves above all as a "missionary community."

The document provoked a mixed reaction in Germany. While Cardinal Rainer Maria Woelki of Cologne and Bishop Gregor Maria Hanke of Eichstätt expressed their gratitude for the text, Bishop Franz-Josef Bode of Osnabrück, vice-president of the German bishops' conference, described the instruction as a "strong brake on the motivation and appreciation of the services of lay people."

Bishop Bode said he feared that the text indicated a "conversion to clericalization" because it emphasized the priest's role in directing parishes.

Cardinal Walter Kasper, meanwhile, defended the Vatican intervention, saying: "The German criticism completely misses the actual concern of the Instruction: the pastoral conversion of all to a missionary footing. Precisely this basic concern of Pope Francis would be highly topical in view of the disturbing recently published numbers of departures from the Church."

