

10/10/2018  
165 – eng

PRESS RELEASE  
GERMAN BISHOPS'   
CONFERENCE



## Synod of Bishops in Rome

### Statement by Bishop Dr. Stefan Oster SDB (Passau)

*At the Synod of Bishops in Rome, Bishop Dr Stefan Oster SDB (Passau) spoke on the Instrumentum laboris. We document his statement before the Synod:*

Holy Father, dear sisters and brothers,

Young people seek freedom, especially freedom from constraints and freedom to choose whatever gives them joy. The Church, on the other hand, is considered by many young people in our country to be an institution that restricts freedom and sets rules of conduct that begin with “you must”, “you shall”, “you may not”. Nevertheless, many young people also feel that the freedom of having many opportunities alone does not lead to a real and authentic life, but often leads to arbitrariness or the slavery of addiction. But when is a person so authentic that one feels that this person is really free – even when living conditions are difficult?

In number 121 of the *Instrumentum* it is written: “God takes seriously the freedom He has given to human beings”. In this context, I would like to propose a relational concept of freedom that takes young people seriously in their longing for freedom and at the same time leads them deeper into an existential dimension of freedom. A first definition is: “Freedom means that in the heart of another I can be myself and I can become myself”. The biblical concept of the heart refers to the centre of the person. And we can also imagine this centre in a three-dimensional way. We say we have a big heart or a deep heart. And the bigger and deeper a human heart is, the more space it can give to another person within itself – a space in which the other person can feel accepted and loved and where he/she can grow. And some people have such a heart for many people: The young people, for example, who came to Don Bosco's Oratory, did not simply come to an abstract institution with rules, but they came to a place that was filled with the openness of Don Bosco's heart. They felt at home with Don Bosco where they could be themselves and learn to become even more themselves. Don Bosco knew each of them – and had them in his heart. With him they were free. And then they also learned almost automatically to respect his rules and to live as a community: “Freedom means that in the heart of another I can be myself and I can become myself”.

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At the same time, we now know that the capacity of our own hearts is limited. Often we are broken, wounded and selfish. Our heart is often narrow and has little room for others. Or we use others for our own purposes and cling to them and don't let them go – so that our own heart doesn't feel so empty. Young people feel this and wish, as it is expressed in number 132, that mentors recognize their own humanity and fallibility. Also our heart constantly needs new healing and liberation.

But Christians can live from the experience that the true depth of our freedom is the Heart of Jesus. His outstretched arms on the cross and His heart pierced for us tell us: “Here is the place of your freedom, here you find infinite, unintentional love for you, here is forgiveness of all your sins. Here is the heart of the world, here you are really at home.” Whoever finds their way to this place through faith is allowed to recognize from within: Here I can be myself – and become a deeper version of myself without having to disguise myself and without becoming addicted to superficial pleasure. Deeper, existential freedom is therefore: "In the Heart of Jesus I can be myself and I can become myself".

Therefore, we live freedom with and for young people authentically only when we ourselves are at home in the Heart of Jesus. And when we ourselves let our hearts be healed and widened by His Heart. Then young people can learn through us to understand where they are truly at home. And then we too can let them go and give them free – towards Jesus. Then we do not have to use or even abuse them for our own glory or our own satisfaction, because "real freedom is to be myself and to become myself in the Heart of Jesus".

Thank you for your attention.