

PRESS INFORMATION
PAPAL VISIT 2011

24.09.2011

Embargoed for broadcast until: 24.09.2011, 6.15 p.m.!

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Alois Glück

President of the Central Committee of German Catholics

**Speech at the meeting with
the Board of the Central Committee of German Catholics
at the Seminary in Freiburg
on 24 September 2011**

Holy Father,

It is a very great pleasure and honour for me to thank you on behalf of the laypersons of the Central Committee of German Catholics for taking the time to meet us.

We also see it as recognition of the many kinds of work performed by laypersons within our Church and in public life. These dedicated men and women play an important role in Church life and in maintaining the presence of faith and the Church in society and the state. The Central Committee brings together diverse elements of Church life, different paths of faith and spirituality and the activities of baptised and confirmed laypersons in our Catholic Church in Germany. These associations, many of which have very long traditions, include Caritas, members of councils at all levels, spiritual communities and movements and – a salient feature of the Catholic Church in Germany – the Church aid and development agencies.

We find great encouragement in the seminal words that you, Holy Father, used when opening the Pastoral Convention of the Rome diocese on 26 May 2009: That laypersons – and I take the liberty of quoting – “should no longer be seen as “collaborators” of the clergy but truly recognized as “co-responsible”, for the Church’s being and action, thereby fostering the consolidation of a mature and committed laity.”

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The aim of our church work is not to superficially modernise or adapt the Church. Rather, the question that drives us is how to bring Jesus Christ and His message to the people of today. In the long run, the appeal and influence of our Church will depend on its spiritual magnetism.

Holy Father!

The shocking events of 2010 have changed the Catholic Church in Germany both internally and externally, affecting its position in society and public life. The severe loss of trust is enduringly noticeable.

We thank you, Holy Father, for your clear, unequivocal position on the facts of the dreadful sexual abuse in our Church and on the necessary consequences.

This was – and continues to be – an important source of guidance and one to which I have repeatedly referred in numerous public statements.

We thank our bishops for their concerted decisive actions in the spirit of these guidelines.

The shockwaves from this scandal have led to many discussions in our Church, some veering far beyond the matter in question, that could only be blocked at the cost of further estranging many of the faithful and leading them to leave the Church.

Because of this, we are very thankful for Archbishop Zollitsch's initiative and the German Bishops' Conference's decision to initiate a dialogue process.

By "dialogue" we do not mean "calling everything into question".

Rather, we take it to mean listening and, above all, being willing to change. And we are well aware that we must first apply this yardstick to ourselves.

The opening event of the dialogue process in Mannheim in July was a very encouraging occasion.

The outcome of the talks also showed that, in spite of the diversity of communities and experiences represented, there was an overwhelming consensus in the analysis and in the necessary conclusions. This manifests itself above all in the call to provide care for people who have experienced crises and upheaval in their lives – "compassionate pastoral care", as it has often been termed. This was cited as the most urgent task.

Of particular concern to us at present are the consequences of the dramatic fall in vocations to the priesthood. We are very concerned that, by establishing larger and larger units, the Church will be removed from the immediate social environment of its members, and that faith and the

Church will have less and less of a presence in society. Because of this, it is of particular importance for priests and laypersons to work together and share responsibilities.

We believe that, when it comes to cooperation between priests and laypersons, we can learn much from developments in the Catholic Church worldwide.

Holy Father!

The motto of the 98th German Catholic Congress, which is to be held in Mannheim next May, is: *“Einen neuen Aufbruch wagen”* – Courage for new beginnings.

For us, this means that we want a new departure based on the spirit of Christ and moving closer to Him. Such a departure is essential for our society – and ultimately for the whole of civilisation. There is no viable future for the way we live today.

In the world around us, we are experiencing an increasingly dense series of crises, all stemming from a blinkered focus on material values and selfish expectations of freedom without responsibility.

Our work in this area is based on and oriented towards Christian social ethics and its key principles of personality, solidarity, subsidiarity and sustainability.

In recent years, we have focused in particular on human dignity and protecting life. We firmly believe that the Christian view of humankind, the inviolable and non-negotiable dignity of each and every person, is an essential compass for a humane future. However, we have also taken a position on the protection of creation, on international solidarity, family policy and other urgent questions.

Particularly at this time of upheaval, we wish to play our part and to act as ambassadors for our faith on behalf of Christians all over the world.

Holy Father, we see this mission as bringing us together with you, the bishops and the Catholic Church worldwide.

We thank you for coming to meet us and wish you the blessing of God for your great and challenging work.