

## Head of RC bishops in Germany says laity will move Church forward

Lockdown liturgy has raised expectation of German Catholics, says Bishop Georg Bätzing

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[Germany](#)

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Bishop Georg Bätzing (Photo: Andreas Arnold/dpa/MaxPPP)

Online liturgies during the coronavirus lockdown have made Catholics in Germany more discerning about the quality of worship services and preaching, according to [Bishop Georg Bätzing](#), president of the country's Catholic episcopal conference.

"I have noticed that when I preach dialogically I get a lot of feedback. When I talk about my faith, my struggle to believe, then I get super feedback," he said in an interview published May 28 in *Publik Forum*, a progressive Catholic fortnightly.

"Attention to the quality of sermons and services has seldom been as high as now... People immediately tell you what they liked and what they didn't like. I see that as a challenge," he continued.

"The faithful will not allow us simply to fall back into old patterns," said Bätzing, who was ordained bishop less than four years ago (Diocese of Limburg) and elected president of Germany's episcopal conference this past March.

## **Germany's Synodal Path**

The 59-year-old bishop said he is therefore more supportive than ever of the German Synodal Path (or procedure) for Church Reform and has more concrete ideas about what changes are possible and how they can be achieved.

The procedure has set up forums on four topics – power and checks and balances; sexual morality; priestly life; and the place of women in the Church. Bätzing said they focus on the problem of how to talk of God in the contemporary world.

"That means what our talk about God means for today's world as far as power distribution in the Church and sexuality and partnership are concerned. But also concerning the role of priests and on the question – which I personally think the most important – namely the role of women in the Church," he said.

The bishop stressed that these were the pivotal questions that determine whether people feel they belonged to the Church or not.

### **Deep rift between real lives and Church teaching**

Especially as far as the question of sexuality and partnership is concerned, he said, there has been a deep rift for a long time now between the reality of people's lives and the Church's teaching.

He said this is deplorable since the Church has a great deal to offer here, based on its image of God and what it means to be human. It could give an orientation.

"But for many people the message we proclaim comes over as a type of moralizing that only forbids. People feel alienated," he said.

"Continuing in this way cannot be the aim of the synodal procedure. Therefore I sincerely hope that we will be able to further develop certain wordings on the Church's teaching in the present Catechism," he explained.

All resolutions that the synodal procedure passes will then have to be ratified by two-thirds majority in the bishops' conference.

Bätzing was asked if that doesn't prove that there's still an imbalance of power between priests and the laity. And given that, how is it sure that Church reform will move forward.

### **Reform-minded bishops must stand together**

He admitted that he's not sure. But he said he hopes that, in the end and after two years of discussions, bishops who favor reform – "and there are many of them" – will form coalitions on reform resolutions.

He also hopes that dioceses that have already begun implementing certain reforms will form networks.

For instance, those that allow other Christians to partake of the Eucharist at Catholic liturgies or look for solutions to help Catholics whose relationships are not fully recognized by the Church, such as couples who are divorced and remarried or in same-sex partnerships.

Did this mean that a new Church was emerging – or simply a renewed Church, he was asked.

The bishop said the answer was to be found in a renewed Church.

"At the moment, we can only see the first tender sprouts of the new social form of the Church, but it is on these tender sprouts that we must focus. God's self-revelation never stops, but the deposit of the faith remains the same," he said.

"I recall the groundbreaking words of the Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* 4: 'In every age, the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel' – and the responsibility of drawing conclusions from this," Bishop Bätzing emphasized.

"That means that the maturation of faith is a process that can never be declared completed," he said.

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