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An administration of the future for a pastoral of the future

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Introduction

The German Catholic Church is undergoing change. Believers have been leaving the church, the number of baptisms have been dropping dramatically and dioceses are desperately looking for young priests. In 2016 about 162.000 Catholics left their Church. Only around 55% of the Germans are Christians nowadays (compared to more than 90% 60 years ago), many of them do not regularly attend service. Thus, the German Catholic Church is in a real crisis. Only by having a solid and authentic pastoral concept and team, the Church will be able to stop this outflow and could consolidate the status quo. Pope Francis himself proposed some impulses for this pastoral change: “I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security“(EG 49). The Church should take the initiative and proactively go to the edges of society, to the poor, and should enter a dialog with the modern world. Dioceses must consider the specific contexts and pastoral teams to adjust to the respective situations. In a world of globalization, digitalization and demographic change, new ways of evangelization need to be found.

To tackle this pastoral challenge, the pastoral teams, the priests, pastors and volunteers need a functioning administrative support in the background. By being a good working gearwheel, the administration is the basis of the proclamation of the gospel. Through various institutions the German Catholic Church is actively present in society and can validate the ongoing and life-giving gift of the gospel. These institutions include for example day care centers and kindergartens, schools, and counseling facilities for marriage and family or people in debt. To enable these different areas of pastoral work to subsidize the Kingdom of God, the Church needs an efficient administration. Thus, the administration can be seen as an important

transmission belt between the gospel and the effective pastoral work. As the main administrative body, every of the 27 German dioceses has a general vicarage to coordinate and organize the work. Besides this, the general vicarage is also responsible for redistributing the funds from church taxes. In contrast to many other national churches, the German Catholic (and Protestant) Church are depending on church taxes rather than donations. Every member of one of the big institutional churches pays up to an additional 8 or 9% (depending on the province a believer lives in) of their income tax to the Church. The German state is responsible for collecting that money and gets a compensation for this service. The church tax makes up around 80% of the budget of a diocese and added up to 6,15 Billion Euros for the whole German Catholic Church in 2016. The general vicarages then are responsible for redistributing the money to their parishes. The head of the general vicarage is the vicar general, who is appointed by the bishop of a diocese. Every diocese is split up into multiple parishes, which are managed by a priest. As these sub-units, parishes are partly independent of the general vicarage.

Since the pastoral work is changing a lot, the general vicarage must do so accordingly. The church cannot afford to have a static and inefficient administration, leading to deficits in pastoral work. Often enough, general vicarages are rather self-referential and turned to inward problems rather than focusing on the demanded services. This leads to a blindness towards upcoming problems and to the creation of a service-supply, nobody asks for.

But what kind of administration, what kind of vicarage does the future pastoral work need? How can a vicarage and the whole diocesan administration be organized to support the parishes and the other pastoral entities as best as possible? The general vicarage is not just an office, it is a pastoral enabler and thus needs pastoral reflection. A pastor working for the church expects such a reflected and suitable administrative structure. According to these expectations, the general vicarage must develop on many levels: service, controlling and transparency and professional completion of administrative tasks. Finally, the general vicarage also supports ongoing pastoral changes by giving impulses for innovative church development. Analyzing the interfaces between these areas reveals concrete problems to work on and shows possible solutions.

Starting with the administrative support pastors and priests expect, this article will further analyze the problems general vicarages are facing regarding their administration. This topic ranges from organizing professional and voluntary workers to the juristic support of parishes. Afterwards, the special financial situation of the Catholic Church in Germany is considered. Regarding this, especially controlling and compliance are hot spots of recent challenges. The

spiritualization of these areas is crucial for ineffective structures and processes. Thirdly, the role of the general vicarage as an initiator of pastoral processes and engine of innovation is more closely illuminated. Keywords here are digitalization and innovation through flexible structures which allow change to happen. Progression is more important than conservation. Finally, this article will show how administration can support these ongoing processes, for example by implementing a quality management system and other standards in the process of administrative work. All proposed actions should always answer to the vanishing point of pastoral work and support the proclamation of the gospel.

Pastors need the best administrative support

Many priests and pastors are overwhelmed by their administrative responsibilities and therefore cannot focus on their pastoral mission. They find themselves more and more in the role of a manager instead of being part of the pastoral team for the people. Tasks like human resource management, construction management or accounting are not part of the theological education anyway. A remedy can be a non-pastoral employee whose only responsibility is organizing the parish's administration, relieving the strain on the pastoral personal, and leaving more resources for focusing on the mission of the church. Since decentralization will be part of the future in the German Catholic Church, a good coordination and organization is crucial for being still present for the believer. Realizing the importance of this relief, the archdiocese of Cologne hired 180 administration managers, one for every priest in a leading position. Through this task division the diocese hopes to establish a more efficient pastoral team, which can focus on the church's mission.

In addition to the administrative challenges priests are facing, the numbers and the commitment of volunteers are dropping continuously. Many volunteers rather engage themselves in short-term and low responsibility tasks than administrative and long-term commitments. Reasons are for instance a generally decreasing time quota of the believers and inefficient processes without digital support. By reorganizing and standardizing the formal processes integrating the people coping with the system, the church could make these tasks more attractive for volunteers. An example for this modernization could be an accounting software with an interface with the smartphone, integrating the work into the already existing digital environment of the volunteers. The trend of volunteers tending to do rather less responsible tasks is caused by the tasks becoming too complicated and the responsibility becoming too big for an untrained volunteer to do. It feels too risky to take over one of these jobs in a parish. On the other hand there are

also big risks for the church, if an untrained volunteer does one of these tasks, because of being liable for the action others do in behalf of it. There is a moral hazard, if the risk is separated from the worker, because of him not having to face the consequences of his actions. A solution could be to establish a superordinate structure like the diocese of Essen did, when they centralized responsibility for the day care centers of the parishes. The aim of this kind of reconstruction must always be a better administration- and controlling-system with everybody being aware of their area of responsibility.

Not only the volunteers, but also many employees working for the Church lack solid knowledge regarding specific topics like taxes, employment law, process management or office organization. These lacks lead to big insecurities within the administration, especially when the law changes in a complex way. A current challenge is the change of §2b in the value added tax law. From 2021 on the parishes – because of being separate subunits – need to pay value added tax for services they did not need to before. Many parishes feel left alone by the diocese not knowing how to cope with this change. They ask for individual support by the general vicarage with a customer orientated and a well-organized communication. The vicarages could and should answer this with a specialized task-force for this change, supporting their parishes with solid information.

These administrative challenges and examples of solutions affect all areas of work of the German Catholic Church. Everyone, from the volunteers to the vicar general, must prepare for fundamental changes regarding responsibility and their work field in general. Especially the distribution of tasks must be reconsidered and supported by modern and digital processes.

The church cannot work without money

Closely connected with the questions regarding administration and responsibility is the question of church finances and property. The general vicarage is also mainly responsible for this crucial area. As shown in the introduction, the German Catholic Church is financially dependent on its believers since they are its main source of income. Due to the very good economic situation, the outflow of the believers can still be compensated. But considering the variability of the economy, the church faces bigger financial problems in the nearer future. Without an efficient asset management, the core mission of the Church, evangelization and being there for the people, is in danger. Thus, the highest priority should be preventing any kind of fraud and loss

of control. In a second step the aim should be, to have an efficient and sustainable asset management, oriented on ethical standards, securing authenticity of the church.

Often enough, the general vicarages already fail in preventing fraud, leading to big deficits in the financial budget. Church culture is one of blindly trusting each other without controlling mechanisms, even when decisions about huge amounts of money with big impact must be made. This system recently backfired in the diocese of Eichstätt when the financial director misappropriated 60 million Euros through uncertain real estate investments in the US. Missing transparency allowed this director to freely invest the church's money without having to justify his decisions to anyone. The Bishop has reacted to this scandal with multiple interventions for more transparency. First, the finance council of the diocese has been staffed completely new. Instead of clerics without profound knowledge in finance, external experts constitute the new council, reducing the risk of mismanagement. In a second step the bishop consequently separates the cathedral chapter from the ordinary conference to differentiate the controlling from the administrative board. Additionally, the diocesan administration no longer should be organized by a cleric but by a qualified leader who is associated to the vicar general. The aim is to establish governance structures in which everyone's responsibility is clear and diffusion of responsibility is avoided. Lastly the accounting standard should fulfill all criteria of the German Commercial Code. Regarding finances the church is not any different from other companies and thus should not be treated differently. Through these legal requirements and restructuring measures, a bishop can systematically fight against this kind of fraud as happened in Eichstätt.

The "trust-before-control"-culture in many dioceses becomes even more problematic when the bishop himself is not interested in transparency. In Limburg the ex-bishop was able to build a very expensive bishop's residence costing 31 million Euros, bypassing all official boards. The members of the supervisory board were chosen by the bishop, therefore being very loyal and tolerant. Additionally, many of these members did not even know how to do this job and were not qualified enough to be supervisors. To avoid such structural weaknesses within a diocese, a well-reflected cast constituting the boards is necessary. People in these supervisory boards should be highly independent from the bishop and be aware of the great responsibility they have for the church finances. Therefore, the access requirements should be high and include a basic understanding of finance and supervisory tasks.

Not only regarding the boards a lot of mistakes can be made, but also when with the multiple accounting authorities within the area of a diocese. In the archdiocese of Freiburg, the German

pension insurance found some irregularities regarding the social contributions of the archdiocese. In many cases the accounting authorities made mistakes in paying the social contributions for low-income service personal the church hired, leading to tax evasion. As a precaution, the archdiocese of Freiburg made a provision of 160 million Euros to cover unpaid social contributions and fines. This example shows that the Catholic Church sometimes feels like being above the law. This attitude is very risky, not only regarding finances. To avoid such fines, tax evasion must be prevented by strictly following the (tax) law. The church should see itself like a regular company in this point which has to fulfill its liabilities like everyone else.

These three examples illustrate huge deficits in the Catholic Church, allowing fraud and mistakes to happen. Even without these manipulations it is hard enough for many dioceses to cover the costs and fulfill obligations. An efficient and foresighted asset management is not standard everywhere, leading to huge debts and less money for pastoral services even without fraud in their own rows. Exemplary for this is the situation in the archdiocese of Hamburg. After a review of an external consulting company, the vicar general announced to shut down eight of the 21 Catholic schools of the archdiocese. The reason for this is a financial deficit of 79 million Euro with a growth of the debt up to 353 million Euro in 2021, if there was no austerity. Mismanagement in the past inevitably led to a high investment backlog in the schools and uncovered pension obligations of the staff. Closing these eight schools is the only way to save the other ones and leaving resources for the church's mission, being present for the poor in society. For being able to focus on the church's mission, it is necessary for Hamburg – and many other dioceses – to practice sparing and modesty. A good start is having a small and efficient administration in the general vicarage.

After the scandal in the diocese of Limburg, the German dioceses started a transparency initiative, disclosing the financial situation of the dioceses. With the help of external experts, this transparency initiative revealed huge financial deficits and problems all over the German Catholic Church. Looking into the future, these problems will thicken since the revenue through church taxes will go down, due to believers leaving the church or dying. The general vicarages are challenged to respond to this change by having controlling mechanisms against fraud and arbitrariness on the one hand, and an efficient and foresighted asset management for long-term survival on the other hand. The general vicarage – from a financial point of view – must understand itself like a normal company, which at least must cover all costs to fulfill its core mission. Criteria for employees working with church's money should be a fundamental knowledge of finances. Besides this, the bishop should understand himself not only as a shepherd, but also as a controller.

Concepts for pastoral progression are needed

The general vicarage not only functions as an administrative unit, but also has huge impact on the content of pastoral work. Administrative form and pastoral content are interlocked. By using its centralized services, the general vicarage is in the position to gather innovative ideas and spread them all over the diocese. Thus, the general vicarage should develop concrete concepts for pastoral work and support new ways of evangelization. To cope with the rapidly changing world, many dioceses have started a pastoral process with the aim of adapting to the new situation. These processes are often initiated and coordinated by a small and exclusive amount of clerics, leading to a top-down mentality rather than a bottom-up. This is problematic since the believers are used to a democratic political system in which they have the right to discuss, vote and dismiss decisions. To avoid irritations and anger of the believers, a good concept with a clear timetable is crucial. The responsibilities need to be distributed before the process starts and moderators need to accompany the process from the start. Every process should ensure that the people who need to implement it get involved and prepared for their new tasks after the process is finalized. Otherwise, even the best concept created by a few leaders is worthless. Mediators in the interface between the general vicarage and the concrete pastoral contexts might support developments within a diocese. The role of the church leaders and their administration should rather enabling exchange and creating space for innovations than actively prescribing the content of the process beforehand. Not realizing the importance of this base-focused approach to new processes, the diocese of Würzburg faced huge resistance, when representatives of the general vicarage presented their first results of the process “Pastoral of the future” to the pastoral workers. The 130 visitors of the congress complained about the insufficient communication during the process. Besides this the process-responsibilities change too often, a member of the pastoral laity complained. They felt left alone with their fears accompanying the restructuring measures the diocese faces according to the bishop.

Recognizing the huge numbers of people leaving the church, another deficit of many pastoral concepts is illuminated: they are not innovative enough. One of the reasons is that most people active in the process grew up and lived in the recent pastoral system – and love it. They rather focus on keeping the status quo instead of thinking radically new. Of course, a pastoral process is always very emotional, especially since people have to let go of cherished things. Thus, good concepts create rooms for fears and doubts of the believers and should try to translate these into

creative and prospective energy. Another reason for missing progress apart from the believers' attitude are the church leaders. Rather than developing a positive vision of their church, often a culture is established where people are afraid of making mistakes. Thinking too much from a legal point of view, many innovative ideas are blocked before tested out. Therefore, many people rather keep on doing their jobs like they always did to not risk any bad consequences. This culture must change, if any kind of innovation shall happen. For innovations to happen, the people need to be enabled and enforced to try something new without having to fear to be punished if it does not work out. This cultural change within the management has become even more urgent since Pope Francis has been demanding it as well. The diocese of Essen is setting a positive example regarding this cultural change. Even though the diocese is facing financial challenges, the leaders realized the importance of innovation and created an innovation fond, providing 6 million Euros for a period of three year for innovative ideas. One funded idea for instance came from a priest working in the hospital pastoral. He developed a system to identify patients who probably need the most pastoral attention based on data supplied by the hospital. With the help of the money from the innovation fond, six employees are payed to analyze the concrete demand of the patients. Afterwards they function as mediators to many volunteers who then visit the patients. In this case the fond helped to increase the pastoral team from one priest to 20 people being there for patients in need with the priest as coordinator. To spread this idea a congress with participants from other dioceses was held, but often enough there are no structures to share innovative ideas like this. The general vicarage needs to find ways to enable communication about innovative ideas to other parishes and dioceses.

Often, the different departments within a diocese are not connected at all and have no efficient way of communication. This problem exists on the one hand regarding the communication within the church (intranet) and on the other hand regarding the communication to the base of the believers. Here the church should use advantage of the ongoing digitalization. The general vicarage should establish a legally sound infrastructure for digital pastoral work. The pastoral teams do not only need technology to work with, but also the competences to use it efficiently. Instead of demonizing new technologies, the church should take advantage of the new chances given. Realizing the importance of the new ways of communication, the bishop of Hamburg created his own WhatsApp-chat, allowing anyone who wants to get in touch with him easily. He regularly sends updates of his work, including selfies and inspirational texts. The already 1300 registered users can also ask any questions they want, which are then answered by himself or his representative. Using WhatsApp not only in this way but also for example in youth pastoral is an innovative way to cope with the given circumstances.

To have successful pastoral concepts, the key point is to have a good working communication. The leaders of the church, who in history often trusted their natural authority to establish new ideas, will not be successful shepherds if they do not enter a dialog with the believers. In a complex world, new concepts for pastoral work cannot be created in closed boards of 10 people. The more people are integrated in the process by efficient communication using digital resources, the more successful a pastoral process can be. For this to happen, a culture of fear needs to give way to a culture of trust, where innovative ideas can grow bottom-up instead of being implemented top-down.

Pastoral development must be supported

To be able to support a continuously changing pastoral by the pastoral processes, a general vicarage must be highly adaptable as well. Often general vicarages tend to be very sluggish, working the same way like many years before. Changes only happen very slowly; or faster when the (financial/public) pressure is high enough. Many people in church feel that everything works just fine and live in a mental stance of self-deception. They do not see the importance of change. But as shown before, a lot of dioceses are struggling with their financial situation. By openly communicating these problems, a diocese can emphasize the need to act to their believers. The diocese of Essen attaches importance to having a transparent dealing with money. Therefore, the diocese publishes a balance sheet like a normal company. The profit and loss statement for 2017 shows an annual loss of 8,9 million Euros. Like Essen, more and more dioceses publish their balance sheets, which is already a great step towards more transparency. Most of the balance sheets are not oriented at the standards of the German Commercial Code, only nine fulfill the conditions completely. Thus, the next step should be not only to have balance sheets for every diocese but also to standardize them with the German Commercial Code. By this the financial budget of all 27 diocese would be comparable. In an act of solidarity, the richer dioceses should then continuously support poorer dioceses like Essen or the ones in Eastern Germany. A minimum requirement for this compensation to happen is transparency on the highest possible level. At the same time these compensations should not veil the importance of process.

In addition to an ignorance towards the financial pressure and need of change, often enough innovative ideas are blocked by high formal hurdles and doubt of their efficiency by people who do not see the need to act. In challenging times like these, the general vicarage should rather practice openness for new ideas by supporting new attempts of subunits within the

diocese. The diocese of Freiburg for example has recently been supporting a process of their deanery in Mannheim where the dean is managing his own process. The aim of this process is to put main emphasis on multiple pastoral tasks and centralize them in one area of the city. In other parishes of the city these services will not be provided anymore, and everybody must go to the according churches. Thereby, the deanery can still offer a vast range of pastoral work, for example regarding baptism, youth church or phone pastoral on centralized places instead of little pastoral work in every single parish. This specialization requires openness and flexibility not only from the people but also from the administration which must offer structural support for this to work, for instance changed timetables of employees and better coordination of different parishes. Even though this process is very exhausting, without trying, the deanery of Mannheim would fall into lethargy.

Nobody knows where this process will lead, and this requires an administration which can adapt. In the worst case, a meaningful process is undermined by an inefficient administration. Thus, transformation of the administration should be standard all the time and not only in exceptional situations. The dioceses could be inspired by agile companies. about organizing the next confirmation, the next pastoral process or even something as big as the German Catholic Day by using the scrum-method? The German Catholic Day is an event held by the German Catholic Church periodically every two years. Over 30.000 participants pray, discuss and meet for five days and the cities which host this event change every time. In the scrum-method big projects like this are divided into smaller pieces, which are then worked off in small sprints. Everybody can see the status quo of the work all the time and after a sprint has finished, the next block gets done in another sprint. Very important rules are to have constant communication and the process needs to be planned from the goal that wants to be reached. These goals should be specific, measurable, achievable, reasonable and time-bound (smart). Generally, before making any strategic decisions, the general vicarage should think about the goal which should be reached. Instead of controlling the input, the focus should rather be on the output of projects. Thus, the general vicarage must give decision aids for pastoral decisions in subunits of the diocese. To control the output and get constant feedback on the work, the general vicarage should establish regular evaluation and quality management in general. Quality management is not really implemented in the church yet but can be a good instrument to use resources more efficiently.

So far, the Catholic Church in Germany is only at the beginning of focusing on the output control. Often enough there is a spirit of putting a lot of resources into pastoral work without checking and adapting to the outcome. Through the general quality management in hospitals,

the clinic pastoral was the first area of pastoral work to get quality management. In the meantime, the diocese of Münster for example has implemented a quality management system for their Catholic schools to improve their quality of pastoral work. Having a well-working quality management system not only in the pastoral but also in the general vicarage could ensure a constant drive for change and development. Pastoral decisions which should be supported by the general vicarage cannot be made without knowing the available resources.

A new relationship must be formed

These new perspectives on administrative work as basis for pastoral work can be summarized and connected with six theses for the administration of the church. First, digitalization would reduce the resources for administrative work and allow more people to participate. Discovering the potential of the digitalization opens up completely new ways for the church to reconnect with people who have turned their backs on church. These new channels need to be combined with a new openness for innovation to adapt to the new situations. Digitalization itself is not the all-round-solution for every problem of the church but can help to reform pastoral work enormously by shifting more human resources towards pastoral work on the one hand and connecting the church with the world on the other hand. By using new forms of communication, for example social media, WhatsApp or Twitter, the church can stay in contact with the next generations and be inspired by their view of the world. For reform to happen, the structures then must be responsive to innovative ideas and the administration must be very flexible to let those Ideas infiltrate, grow, tested out and implemented if they work. This can be supported by a digitalized process-management and a culture of braveness.

Secondly, the German church should reflect, which tasks needs to be done by the individual parishes themselves and which services should be handed over to the central administration of a diocese to professionalize these services. Respecting the principle of subsidiarity, priorities and posteriorities need to be established in the cooperation between parishes and general vicarages. By specializing and professionalizing the services, the created synergies help to emphasize pastoral work and channel resources more efficiently. A great way of implementing this new form of cooperation is the establishment of administrative managers like in the diocese of Cologne. Especially priests can easily be relieved from administrative tasks by professional aid. But also for voluntary work the reorganization of services is crucial since more and more volunteers can take over responsible tasks with a high complexity.

Highly connected with the revision of the distribution of tasks is, thirdly, the revision of the offered tasks themselves. Many services are traditionally offered by the church but are not demanded anymore. A reevaluation of the services for example through standardized quality management systems can help identifying outdated services. For this to happen, it is necessary that the perspective of pastoral work shifts from an input-focus to a priority of the outcome. Regarding this it might be helpful to think about the believers as costumers, even though this term needs to be used carefully since church is not only a service company. Once different “customer groups” (e.g. adults, singles, married, elderly, refugees) are identified, adequate services need to be found which are then supplied by either the parishes or the general vicarages. For every service it needs to be examined whether it is important or not and which institution can offer it the best way.

A fourth thesis for the administration of the church is that a completely new relationship between general vicarage and the parishes needs to be found. The general vicarage rather needs to see itself as administrative partner of the parishes rather than an authority. A new way of thinking is needed in a new world of living. The administration in a diocese, including the vicar general and the bishop, should no longer understand themselves as the heads who lead everything hierarchically top-down. Instead a more cooperative way of interaction and communication is required on every level. By understanding the general vicarage as a partner on eye-level for deaneries and parishes, more participation should be enabled. The pastoral process of Mannheim is a good example to show that slowly, but surely church leaders are trying to put these structures into reality. But this learning process is still in the beginning and needs to be enforced looking into the future. Some movements within the church even propose a synodal structure, which would totally change the way church works.

Fifthly, the administration needs a boost of professionalization and an orientation on industry standards. This applies especially for ecclesiastical property and finance management. For tasks like finance, management or accounting, religiousness should not be a selection criterion for staffing. There is no Catholic accounting, which would allow exceptions to happen. For a maximum of transparency church finance needs to be treated like a normal company. This includes a balance sheet according to the German Commercial Code. What applies for Catholic hospitals where religiousness is no criteria for good treatment, also applies for Catholic administration. Thus, for people to work for the church, fundamental knowledge regarding the area of work is a must have and much more important than religiousness. Controlling and standardized processes are efficient instruments to secure the economic survival of the diocese in the long run, enabling more freedom for pastoral work. Additionally, the “trust-before-

control"-culture needs to be repressed by a culture of controlling, clear processes and responsibility. The bishop should not only see himself as a shepherd but also as a controller and – if necessary – enforce new the discipline himself. After the finance-scandal in Eichstätt the bishop realized that some people actively tried to fake things and that a consensual way not always is the best way of leading a diocese. To avoid fraud, regulatory structures are indispensable.

Lastly, the structure of the administration of the future must be flexible and adapting to keep up with the changes happening in the world. For this to happen mandatory standards need to be established and – more importantly – lived by the people creating them. The flexibility of the administration starts in the minds of the people working within it. Thus, a new culture of flexibility and trust regarding innovation and change is highly recommended for an administration of the future to be adaptable. The general vicarage should rather understand itself as proactive creator of the change into the future instead of a passive victim of the changing circumstances. Especially digitalization will shape the world to yet unknown dimensions. An administration unable to keep in touch with this reality will more and more loose connection to its associated pastoral teams in the parishes and loose itself in self-referential work.