

# NACHRICHTEN

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## Celebration of Handing the Rule to Verena Leinen

On Saturday, February 19, 2011, our Postulant Verena Leinen took a further step into our community. She received the Rule from the Prioress, Sr. Hildegard Jansing, in Bernried. For this ceremony, the refectory had to be somewhat re-arranged because the church in Bernried is being renovated and hence, the community room serves as our prayer room. However, in our festive group we, the Sisters of Bernried, had guests from Tutzing, among whom were also Sr. Irene Dabalus and Sr. Ana Maria Raca who were staying in Germany for some days.



For this occasion, Verena had chosen the passage about the storm on the lake from the Gospel of St. Matthew. Sr. Hildegard pointed out, that this passage presents an important question on the way of one's vocation, namely: „Do you trust me?“ And this question stands not only at the start of our way, but all along our life.

The story does not just start out creating confidence. But in the process of searching for one's decision before and after entry in the convent, there may be, again and again, situations similar to distress at sea. However, the scene shows that at such times it is decisively important that Jesus, in spite of the raging sea, calls the attention of the disciples to himself. He makes clear to them that his „Trust me!“ is the foundation of discipleship. This experience in our life is familiar to all of us. Contrary to our own concerns, fears, doubts and hopelessness, Jesus calls our attention to Himself, grants clarity, calms down, gives new security and invite us to trust HIM.

At the end of her talk, Sr. Hildegard wished Verena „an alert listening to the voice of God, the courage to walk to HIM on the waters, and the firm look: at Jesus who encourages you: „*Have confidence, it is I; do not be afraid.*“



*In the following lines, Verena introduces herself briefly:*

I was born and grew up at the outskirts of Augsburg, as the youngest of three children. After my training as pediatric nurse, in my intensive search for a meaningful life, I felt drawn to France, Taizé, where I helped for two years in the organization of international youth assemblies. There I also felt the ever more urgent call to follow Christ in a religious community. At one of these youth assemblies in 2010, which took place in the Philippines, visiting a school in Legaspi I met the Missionary Benedictine Sisters. There, suddenly, the call of God became very concrete and it led me – at my own amazement – back to my native diocese. I gave up my work as pediatric nurse in Frankfurt, which I had taken up again in the meantime, and in October 2010 I entered the community in Tutzing.

## **Missionary Benedictine Sisters in Germany**

Since two years, we, the Sisters of Bernried, are in a constructive exchange with Dekan Kirchensteiner, with Regionaldekan Peter Brummer, parish priest of Tutzing, as well as two ladies, pastoral workers from the dean's office of the diocese.

Together, we are trying to become cognizant of our local church's situation and to see how we, as a convent, can be involved. Today we want to present to you a very enriching and vibrant action.

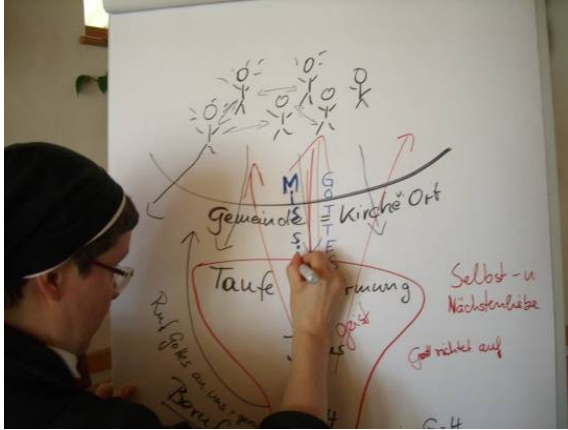
Parallel to the elections of the new parish councils in the Diocese, a small working team with Sr. Mechthild Hommel prepared a concept to effectively and offensively support these volunteers in the parishes. We called it „Vergewisserungstag“ („Assurance Day“) and we offered it to the parishes in the region. Since autumn 2010 until spring 2011, 7 parishes and parish communities showed their interest about this offer; in varying forms. An evening-seminar or a day-seminar, the parish coun-

cils of the communities of Benediktbeuern, Kochel, Penzberg, Wessobrunn with Birkland, Obersöchering with Habach, Antdorf and Sindelsdorf met with our team for this „assurance initiative“. Steingaden, Bernbeuren and Tutzing are yet to meet. In every case, Sr. Mechthild agreed with representatives of the parish council and she herself, together with Srs. Beate, Helga Gabriela and Katharina, have organised the meetings.



On those “assurance-days” these questions always come up. Why do I collaborate with the parish council, what is my motivation? To this comes an input from our side that the basic reason for this action has its roots in our vocation from God, in our own baptism.

A passage from the Bible which we meditate together, helps to deepen this being-rooted and one's own vocation. Then follows the imaginary exercise: „How would we form today the community of Christ, if we belonged to his first disciples?“, and we gather distinguishing marks of a Christian community. Thereafter, these distinguishing marks are transferred to one's own present community situation in order to concentrate and direct them according to the local „sign of the times“.



The drawing on the Flipchart which gradually becomes completed, brings to the eyes of women and men present at the meeting, how we are all called into the mission of God which he effects through his Spirit in the mission of Jesus, then in the early Christian community and until today.

These days have gifted us with awe and joy. We experienced enthusiastic Christians with very different motivations. Many of them have „caught fire already in their youth work“. Others said: „I did not really know what I should do here, and now I absolutely do not want to give up this mutual faith and this work.“ Others have been recruited by those who were already involved, by parish priests, and thus grew into their vocation in this place and in the parish community and learned to identify themselves, but also to try new ways. „For 8 years I did these Bible Weeks for Children. My children were always present. My daughter, now at 16, takes it over this year. She is so enthusiastic. I can start something new.“ The groups show that they are grateful for the experience, and we, too, are grateful for these encounters with the Church as it is. For us, too, these are „days of assurance“: Yes, it is good that we as Missionary Benedictines in Germany are doing such things.“

Sr. Beate Grupp

## Church in Upheaval

*Two events, at which the Sisters participated, occupied themselves intensively with the challenges for and changes in the Church. These are the „Advice for a Prophetic Church“ and the „Annual Assembly of the Working Pool for Vocational Pastoral of the Religious Orders.“*

### „Prophetic Signs in Threatening Times“ – Advice for a prophetic Church

On January 21 and 22, 2011, an assembly of the German Catholic Mission Council (Deutschen Katholischen Missionsrat = DKMR) with the theme „Prophetic Church“ took place in the „Haus am Dom“ („House at the Cathedral“).

The occasion for this assembly was the call for a Prophetic Church „Life in Fullness for All“, which had been presented last year and in the meantime has been signed by more than 500 Christians.

Facing the challenges of our times which show themselves in dramatic consequences of the destruction of creation, the growing gap between rich and poor (nationally and internationally), in financial crises and economic instability, this call is more than an appeal, but bears the character of a „confession“ and demands fulfilment of a duty based on the message of the Gospel.

The desire of the initiators was: A push must go out from amid the Church, it must be more than lip service – the appeal aims at energetic, active change. Prophecy needs a sober sense of realism and an eye for reality, a clear sense of judgment and determination for action.

Thereby, one thing must be clear: prophecy does not let itself be limited by structural and institutional boundaries. Therefore, the initiative must go through all areas of the Church! Hence, every individual Christian bears the responsibility.

More than 80 interested persons from religious orders, parishes or associations had met in Frankfurt to discuss further steps to concretely effect this obligation in their respective spheres of activity, to strengthen themselves in content and in person and to water something like an „oasis in the desert of global crises“.

According to the principle „See – Judge – Act“, the first part of the day followed the theme: Looking at Reality and Judging of Options for Actions.

## I. The Drama of the Actual Crises

Sven Giegold, „Green Representative“ in the Europe-Parliament, Co-Founder of the German branch of the globalization-critical network „attac“



and economist, made clear in his talk the urgency of a paradigm-change and of a concrete and consequent action. He described forcefully the three great crises which leave the world not only at cross-roads but at an abyss.

- the climatic and resource crisis (devastation of creation, climate change and destruction of the multiplicity of species and resources),
- the justice crisis (growth of social inequality, the basic social rights are ever more difficult to ensure),
- the economic and financial crisis (global markets but no global economic politics, lacking control of global undesirable development, among others due to problems of distribution)

All these crises which are strongly interconnected, show several common features: All of them can be solved only by international engagement on political, finance-economical and social levels. Here, Mr. Giegold points out that it is not only a matter of technical points of departure, but of

societal and social innovations, of change of one's point of view.

Ultimately, all these crises have their common origin in the paradigm of „growth“ which permeates all global thinking like a measuring instrument for progress and development, for „more, more, more“ of money, of consumption, gross inland product, gain, etc.

One essential danger which arises from these crises is, that people who do not evade these questions, are placed before a fear of the overwhelming power of these problems. If here the feeling of powerlessness of the individual increases, the danger of resignation is great. Hence, it is more important to point out key projects, good possible starts and credible consequent action in order to strengthen the motivation for initiatives.

Thereupon, Sven Giegold presented clues which, if approached together, produce an important contribution for lasting development.

- According to Mr. Giegold, we must urgently start to find solutions and visions for basic structural questions of future economy, that is, a basic restructuring of our manner of running the economy and our model of an affluent society. We must realize a manner of our consumption and our production which does not burden our environment and the (world-wide) justice but from which it will profit. This concerns, for ex., our provisions for energy by means of renewable energy, or the global responsibility for humanly dignified living and working conditions by means of conscious, fair and ecological purchase and consumption.
- Giegold sees the defense of the welfare state in Germany and in Europe as an important point for retaining the basic social rights and social justice, and to serve as an example for other parts of the world.
- In order to be able to realize the first two points, investments are necessary. This capital must be oriented on a long-

term basis. From the experiences of past years – when the capital markets, completely uncoupled from real economy, resulted in the demand for a global regulation of the finance markets. The capital in itself is not bad, but it needs to be directed into the right channels.

- For Giegold, the role of Europe is central: Europe must go ahead as a credible example, both in view of the environmental as well as of the social or financial politics.

In a further step he emphasized the role of a credible sign of each individual Christian: Everyone is responsible for the shaping of tomorrow's world! The social-economical and ecological process of change must start with every individual person! Thereby it is important to see this necessary re-thinking in the light of an increased quality of life – and this also in a global sense – and to campaign for it. It is a matter of the life of the values which above all the churches want to transmit: justice, responsibility for one another, respect for the human dignity of every individual. Thus he sees the Church to be a community which binds together the differing social circles, and which possesses the possibility on one hand to raise her voice clearly and distinctly, and on the other hand has the duty to act consequently and credibly corresponding to her conviction and her appeal.

## II. Faith and Credibility Oblige to Action

After these aspects of Sven Giegold, Prelate Bernd Klaschka (Adveniat Essen), turned to the aspect:



What does „acting prophetically“ really mean?

A prophet is somebody who can look through the present, not one who looks into

the future. He is somebody who first makes a diagnosis, not prognoses. He is one who points out what is the will of God and what it is not, who criticizes abuses and who, for the sake of God, also accepts annoyances due to his clear words. Because a prophet is and remains an „uncomfortable“ person who demands conversion in the name of God.

Prophecy needs movement, not a standstill, needs inner strength and above all, a divine frame, being anchored in God's call and mission. Biblical examples are for us, for ex., the prophets Amos, Jeremiah and others, not least Jesus himself who, in the perfect form of man, proclaimed the will of God and his kingdom. In Jesus, God himself became a human being who - in his concrete environment - was concerned about joy and hope, grief and fear of people (cf. Gaudium et Spes). To go ahead, continuing from here onward, means following Jesus.

Prelate Klaschka gave four examples presenting guiding attitudes, and which encourage every individual Christian to raise his voice on behalf of God's justice and mercy. These were:

Fr. Antonio de Montesino OP (15th/16th century) who condemned the inhuman treatment of the aboriginals (Indios) by the Spaniards,

Fr. Epifanio de Moirans OFMCap (17th cent.) who spoke up against slavery in Venezuela, as does in our times Archbishop Oscar Romero and Bishop Dom Erwin Kräutler CPps.

With these engaged Christians – all of whom, by the way, were members of religious orders – further facets of the image of a prophet can be shown: Prophets are „Charakterköpfe“ (character heads) who convince by their very personality and thus draw others along. Thereby they are in a certain sense „anstößig“ (=offensive) as they shake up, give a push to think and act in a manner different from, beyond all existing structures and institutions. Being aware if a constantly present tension between the State, Institution Church and

Prophet, obedience to God is for them task and support („We must obey God more than men“).

Important for all these four persons was the support of their religious communities which gave them inner freedom and a certain autonomy vis-a-vis the „official Church.“

As encouragement for the participants of the „Advice“ as well as for every Christian, Prelate Klaschka stated the following aspects based on the Latin-American examples:

- We are not alone! Beside a tradition of thousands of years and remembrance of different prophets, it is especially our faith and our hope in Jesus Christ that bears us up.
- Do not believe in experts only, but also in the Kingdom of God!
- Let ourselves be contaminated by the courage of the prophets and trust in the uniting community of all who are on the way with the gospel!
- Let us retain our interior freedom towards the institution and let us endeavour to look beyond the rim of our own plate!
- Let us stay on the move, because while being on the way, there happens the encounter with the Risen Lord (see story of Emmaus and Acts 9,2), with him who overcomes all resignation and hopelessness.

### **III. Engagement for a „Life in Fullness for all“**

On the second day of the Assembly the session presented concrete examples for an engagement for „a life in fullness“: Persons who in differing areas of life stand up for their Christian convictions and strive for improvements within their possibilities. For example, the pastoral minister, religion teacher and local politician who in his city promotes ecological projects and represents his Christian conviction and actively stands for the preservation of creation. Or the student, who, after a stay in Cameroon, endeavours to be an ambassador for mutual

(faith) learning and who sees herself as collaborator toward a more just world. Or the working priest in the Gallus Quarter in Frankfurt who, besides his priestly service in three communities in Frankfurt, is a member of the work's council of a big logistics firm, who fights against low wages, contract work and poverty in the rich metropolis of Frankfurt and who again and again poses the question: “How can we, as Christians, keep our place among the poor (also here with us) in whom we encounter Jesus, in order to approach the needs of the people?”.

Or the Provincial Superior of the Missionary Sisters of Steyl who sees Germany to be a mission country and recognizes the orders in general and her own community concretely to stand in the duty of paving the way for justice, peace and preservation of creation.

Or the professor of theology who promotes a global learning in view of an „intercultural theology“.

Starting out from the above examples and the participants' own experiences, the rest of the day stood under the aspect of listening – judging – gathering ideas – strengthening one another. In different small groups there was first exchange of experiences, then of gathering ideas about various themes: strengthening of consciousness / dissemination; communes, groups, religious communities as source and fire places; Good Practise: examples for action from different areas; Church as economic factor; change in growth-thinking / paradigm thinking; inter-religious cooperation. Thereby it became clear that there is a great demand for action and for possibilities. Every aspect might appear just like a „drop of water on a hot stone“ but: Many persons must make many little steps to bring about some change.

### **IV. Outlook:**

Sr. Miriam Altenhofen SspS in her concluding statement wished for a network of the different actors and further prophetic

signs „to work toward the inside in order to be heard at the outside.“

In these two days, the „Urgency of the Now“ became once more clear to all participants, as well as the responsibility not to close one’s eyes, to reflect also one’s self and one’s own actions. We Christians – especially we as Missionary Benedictines – are called upon, in the effective power of the Gospel, to get on the way toward a more just society and to make exemplary steps of change.

Being Christians, we are not faced with the question whether we should act, but how we should act! It is a matter of concrete re-thinking and acting!

Sr. Katharina Rohrmann

### **Church that is Coming Annual Convention of the AGBO in Hünfeld**



„You have so many strong sides, but the Church knows too little of it!“ This was the conclusion of Christian Hennecke after one-and-a-half days with more than 50 religious who are engaged in the vocational pastoral all over Germany. The priest and regens of the Diocese of Hildesheim had come as a resource speaker for the annual assembly 2011 of the AGBO (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Berufspastoral der Orden = „Working Convergence for Vocational Pastoral of Religious Orders“), from March 8 to 11 in Hünfeld. His theme was: „Integration of our vocational pastoral into the total pastoral of the Church: Places of the religious with their hospitality and their spiritual profile.“ As well-known insider in matters „Church in Upheaval“ he knew

how to fill this theme convincingly and passionately with life – and to mobilize in the religious their resources. In his talks he led the religious women and men along on a promising way: from „seeing what is“ via a presentiment-filled look at the „Church that is Coming“ towards an interpretation of the role of the orders in this context.

Religious are formed by a classical paradigm of being Church: their personal faith and their manner of expressing it belong naturally to their life. They grow up by it, the parents and the rest of their milieu show how it ought to be and join in it.

Who does not become a Christian in childhood, does also not become one as adult. This reality belongs to the past. The type of „practising Christian“ has become a minority. Instead, we find more and more a form of being Christian which according to Hennecke may be best described by „pilgrim and convert“. They are not necessarily to be found in parish communities; rather can they be seen at world youth days, in Taizé or in movements once in this, or then in that denomination – always in search for a place where they could remain. They want to determine their way by themselves, but are – contrary to so many prejudices – certainly not noncommittal. „They live in a high commitment“, says Hennecke, „but not to us.“ And he continues: „Taking this seriously would change every pastoral fundamentally.“ Because then the big question would be: How can we lead people, independently of their age, into the faith and continuously lead them on? „You are living in a high obligation,“ so Hennecke, „but not towards us.“ And he continued: „Taking this seriously would change every pastoral fundamentally.“ Because the big question would then be: How can we lead people, independently of the age, guide people into the faith and continue to guide them? Guiding people to the faith (which is inevitably bound up with a community) and the search of people for „veritable“ divine services - in this, the great hour of the orders could strike in our time. The original charisma of every community would

thereby become the road sign – because „the people are searching for their origin.“ The question which every community has to ask, in view of future fellow sisters and fellow brothers, is no other than that which future parents have to pose: Do we want children? He who answers „yes“ , says also „yes“ to this that everything will be different.

Thus, Hennecke was justified to ask: Are the orders open for a new, different reality, or must everything be made to fit ?

„The upheaval demands from all of us a change in directing our view: not backward to the fleshpots but forward to the promise.“ The way to the promise has a price which at the same time offers a great chance: It is a matter of learning two things: Bearing with non-simultaneousness (because not every-body will join) and as ex-cultured religious to learn to understand people anew.

The model to „get the people from where they are“ in order to lead them back into the Church, is a thing of the past. Instead, it is a matter of going to where they are and there to be Church with them.

That these considerations are not utopian but are already starting to be realized, Hennecke pointed out by way of examples from the Diocese of Poitiers and a community in London. Here it is a matter of maximal participation of all, the relationship between the bishop and the faithful is characterized by mutual trust and the question at which the office orients itself is that how it can best serve the people and the growth of the Church. Here, too, Church is no longer bound to a place, but it expresses itself in a manifoldness which cannot be evaluated. Besides those for whom a pub becomes a place for Church, there are the others who look for this place in a church building.

But which place do the orders and their vocational pastoral occupy in this structure?

As it is already written in „Lumen Gentium“, it is above all an effort „to make the Church really from day to day more capable to make Christ visible, to the faithful as

well as to the unfaithful.“ Every community effects this under a specific charisma. So are various persons being approached by varying charisma. The place of the orders is thereby in the real sense of the word „catholic“, that is, all-embracing and beyond the concentration on communities. Already by their very structures, the orders form a network and thus are images of the Church in her multiplicity. As places where people can be present and may cooperate, where they can learn to get involved with one another and grow in their Christian identity, they emphasize the maternal side of the Church. One further strong side of theirs is their hospitality which can be better realized in community. „Pilgrims and converts need people who have found so that they can orient themselves at them“, sums up Hennecke.

On the last day, these ideas were concretised in collegial consultations. There was an exchange in groups on how good offers could be brought to those who are seeking, and how monasteries can become schools of faith. There was also discussion on forms of alternative affiliation. What is already being done in individual communities and which could be stimulating for others, too, this will be the theme of the annual convention of 2012, when the participants will present to one another their own projects of vocational pastoral.

Sr. Michaela Leifgen SSps

(A participant who kindly placed the article at our disposal)

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