

Church with a future

For an extended version of the Lobinger model

- 1) The present pastoral situation urgently calls for a fresh orientation. Pastoral units are increasingly expanding. Oftentimes vacant parishes are added to these units, thereby causing an overload of administration work, thus leaving parish priests with next to no time for genuine pastoral care.
- 2) Agglomerations of parishes may lead to a situation where charisms at local level are doomed to remain unused or go undetected.
- 3) Laity already engaged in their parishes tend to get overburdened by further demands on their time and energy. Exhaustion and resignation often follow.
- 3) A mentality concerned with mere supply of services from above, no longer works. It is the wrong way to make ends meet. It doesn't help either, to increasingly hire priests from other parts of the world where vocations abound. Enriching as cultural exchange and personal encounter can be, it can't be a solution to the problem in the long run.
- 5) Full time pastoral staff for parishes only would perpetuate the prevalent service mentality. It might lead to a clericalisation of laity.
- 6) Therefore, we propose a model similar to the one advanced by bishop Fritz Lobinger and the Vienna pastoral theologian Paul Zulehner of "Paul priests" and "Korinth priests". In Rom 16 and 1 Kor 16 the apostle Paul offers a variety of leadership roles exercised in Rome and Korinth.
- 7) God's Holy Spirit is present in every community of Christians, regardless of their numbers, a Spirit, prepared to act. This requires prayer, reflection and exchange.
- 8) Each community that opens itself to that Spirit, reflects its situation and sets priorities in order to live out their faith in today's world. In order to be a community of mission, they will spell out their activities under the guidelines of liturgia, diakonia and martyria.
- 9) In this process, the community will be accompanied and supported by "Paul priests" and fulltime lay people who assist in the discovery of charisms.
- 10) The aim is, building of a team of "Korinth priests" of at least 3 persons. Lobinger/Zulehner speak of viri probati, eventually also of feminae probatae. We are thinking of women, men, single or married. Couples remind us of Prisca and Aquila, often mentioned in the Acts of Apostles, missionaries and community leaders in Rome, Korinth and Ephesus.

Like present day deacons in civil profession there will emerge a team of leaders, accepted and supported by all members of a community, whatever their size or number. This team may well undergo formation and eventually be ordained for service.

- 11) In this way, there will be no disintegration of Christian communities. In each community the celebration of Eucharist as centre and source of life will be guaranteed. Such a community enjoys pastoral activities and develops a mission of being salt of the earth and light for the world.
- 12) Different teams of Korinth priests of a city or rural area come together for exchange and consultation. They will be supported by a moving celibate „Paul priest“ who offers pastoral care to the teams.

Fulltime lay theologians will be integrated according to their charisms for catechesis and categorial pastoral services.
- 13) In case of conflicts in teams or communities there will be psychologically qualified lay persons or priests to deal with the situations.
- 14) In a parish where a vacancy is foreseeable, immediate preparation for this model should be intensified.
- 15) Church administration will assist, when asked for, according to the principle of subsidiarity. Deans or “Paul priests” are responsible for solidarity in the communities. A variety of forms and services may develop over time.
- 16) This model regards the community as subject of pastoral care and confides in the multiple gifts of the Holy Spirit who is known for drawing us towards new shores.
- 17) We trust the word of Pope Francis, spoken to bishop Kräutler in the context of the Lobinger model: “Come up with courageous suggestions”.
- 18) Our plea, reflect about this model, correct it, supplement it.
- 19) Finally, we propose to reconsider the theological formula „in persona Christi“. According to the letter to the Ephesians it applies to all baptized, men and women. It, therefore can't be a hindrance to ordination neither for a woman nor for a married person. “Persona” in Trinitarian theology is not linked to a gender, as little as is the risen Christ.

Dr. Wolfgang Gramer