



THE BISHOP OF LIMBURG
Dr Georg Bätzing

13 June 2020

The "Seventy",
Members of the diocesan synodal council (DSR),
Ms Burgsmüller,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are not gathered at this location steeped in history today in order to celebrate. We will not pat ourselves on the back and say, "Mission accomplished." It is not completed – in fact we are only at the beginning.

We have just heard this once again from Ms Burgsmüller, who told us about the difficulties that occurred in the project "Listen to victims – prevent abuse". And, as we would expect from an external project observer, Ms Burgsmüller was honest.

For me, honesty is one of the main themes of this project and almost all of my experiences in the project have to do with honesty. It began with the staff of the diocese who were involved in the project and wondered whether they would be able to name the problems honestly without suffering disciplinary consequences. There are the 70 people engaged in the project who asked me at the end of May whether the project results would be implemented, and expect an honest answer. And there are the victims, who also gave honest expression to their disappointment and will continue to do so.

From my experience, we in the diocese will also be honest: we will name what happened. And we will clearly name what we do. We will account for it. And none of this will take place behind closed doors. Today the point is not people's lost trust in the Church, but it's about recognition and resolution and above all about taking the victims' perspective seriously and looking to the future from this perspective.

I would like to briefly present our plans for implementing the project results. In accordance with the "Joint declaration on binding criteria and standards for independent resolution of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in Germany" (*"Gemeinsame Erklärung über verbindliche Kriterien und Standards für eine unabhängige Aufarbeitung sexuellen Missbrauchs in der katholischen Kirche in Deutschland"*), I will start by convening an Independent Diocesan Commission for a period of three years. It will have seven members – whose professions are set out in the declaration: experts from academia, professional practice, jurisprudence and public administration – and I propose that they be chosen as follows:

Two members will be selected from the "Seventy", from the ranks of the external people involved in the project. Two members will be chosen by the diocesan synodal council without having to be members of the council themselves, two members will be drawn from among the victims, and one will be appointed by me in accordance with the joint declaration.

This Commission will elect an executive committee and will back up implementation, and report to the Independent Commissioner for Child Sexual Abuse Issues (ICCSAI) and to the bishop. In the wider context, it will maintain contact with other commissions throughout Germany. The implementation measures will be coordinated and driven forward by an episcopal commissioner whom I will also appoint. This will demand trustful cooperation with the heads of divisions in the episcopal administration and with the other members of the diocesan administration and of the synodal office.

Although I have supported the project intensively, so far I have only just begun to look at the extensive final results it has produced. But even a first encounter with the results shows me that measures will have to be initiated that hurt and provoke discussion. And yet I can say that we will implement the measures. It will not be possible to implement every single measure to the letter, but every measure will be implemented in spirit. We owe this to the victims. It is worth fighting for and I regard implementation as the top priority.

However, today I am also representing those involved in putting the measures into effect and who wish to see changes – the heads of divisions and departments and the many members of staff in the episcopal administration and its local offices. We all know that we have a lot of work to do and the paths we take will be painful.

It now remains for me to thank a large number of people. My thanks go to those who have worked on the project, the “Seventy”. Shouldering this burden was not something that could be taken for granted, either for the internal or the external personnel. It was hard for all of you, and we struggled, worked and sometimes argued. You have all put your energy into this project alongside your working lives, families and other activities. The benefits that your commitment has generated for us and, above all, for the victims, will only become apparent over the coming years. I would like to shake every one of you by the hand to express my personal thanks – but unfortunately corona does not allow that.

From among the victims who have been recognised, and those who have not, I wish to emphasise the experience and expertise they have contributed to the project. For you it was more difficult than for the rest of us. We have ripped open injuries and wounds that for a long time were ignored – sometimes out of ignorance, sometimes out of a lack of sensitivity. I don't know what words I can use to pay appropriate tribute to your contribution, apart from saying an honest and heartfelt “Thank you”!

Ms Burgsmüller, some of your interventions were difficult for us to swallow. But you not only had the right to intervene as you did – it was also your duty! Many thanks for all your efforts. I know that you did not act as project observer – a difficult job – first and foremost for the benefit of the Church, but above all for the benefit of the victims. I hope to take this viewpoint away with me personally and establish it increasingly in Church structures.

I wish to thank Stefan Andres, our external project manager, even though he decided to leave the project. Although we ultimately had differing views of the course the project was to take, by setting up a professional project organisation he laid the foundation stone for all the results that followed. Mr Andres, thank you very much for your time, the energy you invested, your frank contributions and your honesty.

Dr Suharjanto, you bore a major burden, and now we also express our thanks to you! Neither Ms Schillai, nor I myself, nor you knew what this type of project would demand from a project manager in terms of mental and personal burdens and the huge volume of work. You always managed to juggle the roles of being a system for the externals, and an external for the system.

You had my complete confidence at all times. Again and again I saw that it was not misplaced. I hope that you can now have a break and take a step back from this project to divest yourself of the burdens of the past year.

My heartfelt thanks also go to your team: Hannah Ringel, Susanne Körber and Robert Malorny. In our recent meeting with you, the Vicar General and I were convinced of the quality of the work you have put in.

Thanks also go to those who laid the foundations for this project – Ms Schillai has already mentioned how it began: the members of the diocesan synodal council, the support group and Johannes Weuthen, who together developed a first draft.

And I wish to thank you, Ms Schillai, for deciding together with me to commission this project. As far as I know, this is the first time that a project for recognising and tackling sexual abuse in the Church has not been commissioned solely by a bishop, but also by the most senior synodal representative. Thank you for your work in supporting the project right up to the end of your term in office on 27 June.

I am sure that I have forgotten many people who have contributed to the project “Listen to victims – prevent abuse”. I wish to thank you, too! And today these thanks are the beginning, the beginning of honesty – and we accept the challenge.