



## **Synod of Bishops in Rome**

### **Statement by Thomas Andonie**

*At the Synod of Bishops in Rome on Friday, 5 October 2018, Thomas Andonie, Federal President of the Federation of German Catholic Youth (BDKJ), who is taking part in the Synod as an auditor, spoke about the Instrumentum laboris. We document his speech before the Synod:*

Dear Pope Francis, dear participants of the Synod,

I am Thomas Andonie, President of the Federation of German Catholic Youth, and represent over 660,000 young people who are active in Catholic youth associations in Germany.

There is one issue that is currently of particular concern to us: In Germany, five percent of all diocesan priests have been accused of having committed sexualized violence against children and young people between the middle of the last century and 2014 – and not only in Germany, but also in the USA, in Mexico, in Australia and in Chile. It has happened everywhere and we must assume that it will continue to happen. This is a disaster.

What is needed now is listening to and caring for those affected, adequate compensation payments, independent investigations into cover-ups, assumption of responsibility, removal of the perpetrators from the church service and standardized and structurally secure preventive measures. But that is not enough! We must uncover clericalist structures. It is not a question of individual cases, the problem lies in the system! No justification for church-law regulations can last if it becomes clear that sexualized violence was favoured by them. There is no paragraph in canon law that is more sacred than the dignity of a human being! Now words no longer count, but deeds do. If the Church does not resolutely fight and end this injustice, it will not regain its credibility and trust, especially among young people. Then everything we are discussing here will be in vain.

In addition to this important topic, I would like to address three others which, for young people, concern the subject of 'being an authentic Church' at its core.

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1. On the role of women: We cannot continue to exclude fifty percent of the population from the leadership of the Church. Due to this injustice, many young women no longer find a home in the Church. And the question of leadership is also related to the question of consecration. In the youth associations, women and men, lay people and priests already work together on an equal footing and in gender parity and show how enriching it is to be Church in such a multifaceted way.

2. On the sexual morals of the Church: A large number of young people rejects the sexual morals of the Church, especially its attitude towards same-sex partnerships and premarital sexual intercourse. They understand very well what the Church demands of them, but – as baptized and confirmed Christians – they simply hold a different view. Values such as faithfulness and responsibility for one another are particularly important to them. Only if the Church is prepared to acknowledge these realities of life will it be able to engage in a new dialogue with young people on these important questions.

3. On accompaniment: In our youth associations, young people support each other in finding their vocation. This corresponds to our principle: Youth leads youth! For this, however, they need a proper education and the support of good spiritual counsellors. We are very concerned that fewer and fewer people in Germany are prepared to take up a pastoral profession. Here, too, changes are needed in order to provide an attractive personal offer for young people! Vocational ministry must be thought of in its entirety and be a natural component of a diverse youth ministry.

We know that the realization of an 'authentic Church' is also our responsibility. We accept this task! And this is precisely why I am speaking openly to you here: We need more participation by young people! Let us discuss this openly. Take a concrete approach to the problems I have mentioned. Promote decentralization. It is time to respond better to the instructions given by Jesus and to His kingdom!

Thank you very much.