

Women's delegation of the Austrian Catholic Women's Movement

together with Mag.a Doris Schmidauer

and supported by Ambassador Dr.ⁱⁿ Franziska Honsowitz-Friessnigg

in exchange with high-ranking representatives of the Roman Catholic Curia in the Vatican

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The Austrian Catholic Women's Movement (ACWM) was founded in 1947 as a sub-organization of Catholic Action in order to help shape society and the Church by proclaiming the Gospel in the lay apostolate in the sense of Catholic social teaching.

The Austrian Catholic Women's Movement is a community of women who are actively engaged in church, society and politics for the concerns of women and thus committed to the good life of all in the sense of the coming Kingdom of God. With about 90,000 members, it is the largest women's organization in Austria. ACWM supports and strengthens women on a personal level and advocates for women's rights and self-determination. With its „Aktion Familienfasttag“ (Family Fasting Day Campaign), it lives out a commitment to development policy in the world church. Its feminist self-image is expressed in its commitment to gender justice at all levels of society and church as well as in its lived spirituality.

Traditionally, the ACWM works in the following areas:

- Education as empowerment and self-strengthening
- Development cooperation: Support for women's projects in the global South financed by donations from the „Aktion Familienfasttag“ (Family Fasting Day Campaign).
- Programs for coping with everyday life
- Spiritual services
- Campaign work

The following developments can be observed:

- 1st Classical educational formats are being replaced by programs based on the principle of community work, as process-oriented, participatory and interdisciplinary work to change the living situation of women.

The ACWM orients its educational work to the Gospel, which defines the kingdom of God as „...not male and female“ (Gal 3:28) and advocates for new gender role models.

Particularly in the area of violence prevention against women, it strives to change and unlearn traditional gender stereotypes, such as tolerating violence against women as a false ideal of femininity, through adequate offerings.

These campaigns are financed by public funds and through EU projects. A best-practice



example for this is the EU Leader-campaign „I am beautiful“ in the diocese of Gurk-Klagenfurt: www.jaichbinschoen.at

The aim is to counteract the high number of femicides, which unfortunately also occur in Austria and can be traced back to patriarchal violence.

- 2nd The lay apostolate of the ACWM in the field of social welfare to cope with the everyday life of women experiences a special demand due to the Corona pandemic and shifts in the direction of spiritual services as time-outs for women, which are offered and demanded online.

A new apostolate is currently opening up, the development of which is just beginning and is fundamentally different from traditional work such as mother-child weeks.

The ACWM develops specific devotional and adoration services - which are made available via new media and can partly be celebrated online - for occasions in the church year as well as for turns in women's lives, which can be celebrated in women's groups. We observe that many committed members of the ACWM like to use their charisma to create prayer services and make themselves available both for online formats but also for new, communal forms of living our faith such as women's pilgrimages.

- 3rd Devotional, adoration and prayer services have become more diverse and are also carried out by lay people.

The basis for the shaping of such services is the excellent further training offered by the dioceses with regard to prayer services by lay people.

Due to the shortage of priests, more and more members of the ACWM are involved in liturgical services in parishes. The demand for active participation in the preparation of sacraments, in taking over sermon services or funerals prompts women without theological training to acquire this expertise in diocesan training courses and programs offered by the ACWM.

Practicing spirituality has become more diverse not only in the church context. Turn-of-life accompaniment is increasingly being provided by wedding speakers, celebrant for naming ceremonies, or the like, even by women outside the church context.

Conclusions regarding the shift from lay social caritative apostolate to liturgical ministries within the ACWM:

- In doing so, it becomes necessary to rethink how lay people with theological training and lay people without theological degrees, as well as priests, relate to each other in their ministry. There are some models in Austria of how leadership can be redesigned, and laypeople are able to take on co-responsibility. Gender parity in



church leadership bodies is a desideratum to be striven for, not only between clergy and laity but also with regard to the distribution of leadership functions between male and female laity and the exercise of voting rights by laity.

- The Apostolic Constitution Praedicate Evangelium symbolizes in an extraordinary way the awakening of the synodal process in the field of the work and structure of the Church. The ACWM and with it the Catholic Action of Austria thank Pope Francis for the focus on the new evangelization: in the concrete norms of the Constitution, it becomes clear that evangelical life and authentic following of Jesus can also succeed better in the Church if non-ordained women and men are given the opportunity to share responsibility in leadership and teaching.

In the sense of gender justice and as a mandate for the representation of Christ founded in baptism, the ACWM will work for parity and equal cooperation between women and men.

The ACWM actively supports the synodal process in Austria. An important and overwhelmingly often mentioned concern is the fundamental further development of the Roman Catholic ordained ministry, for both women and man, so that the Church is able to fulfill its vocation to its fullest: to be a sacrament of salvation in the world.

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