

Networks of Solidarity

A broader concept than the provision of assistance

Klaus Vellguth

In discussions about the universal Church as a solidarity-based fellowship, the concept of solidarity²⁷⁸ frequently tends to be narrowed down to an economic or monetary dimension and is understood in terms of financial support for needy Christians and regional churches provided by financially stronger Christians or regional churches. However, solidarity means more than financial support for the poor by the rich. Etymologically, it stems from the Latin words *solidus* (sound, robust, securely founded) and *solidum* (firm ground, foundation).²⁷⁹ It refers primarily to an attitude comprising an allegiance to and mutual support for ideas, activities and aims, based on shared values.

Following the concept of solidarity elaborated by Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim distinguished between two types of solidarity: mechanical solidarity, based on given group characteristics (e.g. we as workers, as Christians or as Catholics), and organic solidarity, based on mutual dependence and reliance (e.g. people in a process which involves a division of labour or people in a value chain). It is worth noting that both types of solidarity are marked by reciprocity. Both mechanical and organic solidarity are not primarily a matter of subsidiarity (or even assistentialism – the mere provision of assistance), but concentrate on participation and on building community. The focus is

²⁷⁸ Translator's note: In this article the author uses the term *Solidarität* – translated here as “solidarity” – as defined in Catholic social ethics, where it forms one of its five principles (cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_social_teaching). In other articles the German word *Solidarität* has been translated as “care for the poor”, “care for the vulnerable”, “identification with the poor and vulnerable”, etc. Such a translation, however, would be too unilateral here, as the author emphasises an important reciprocal aspect, i.e. more than the provision of assistance. Both uses differ from everyday use in English.

²⁷⁹ Cf. Baumgartner, Alois, Stichwort ‘Solidarität’, in: *Lexikon Theologie und Kirche*, volume 9, Freiburg im Breisgau, Basel, Vienna 2000, 706f.

not on commitment or advocacy on behalf of an individual, but on a shared, unifying quality.

It was only later, in the early 20th century, that the concept of solidarity became an ethical ideal, particularly in Christian social ethics, influenced by the works of Heinrich Pesch²⁸⁰, and later by his students Gustav Gundlach and Oswald von Nell-Breuning. The emphasis was not so much on a solidarity based on ethical principles or on interests, but on a solidarity of action, commitment to and identification with the socially weak. The global dimension of such solidarity-focused commitment was highlighted by John XXIII in his Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* and also by his successor Paul VI's Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* as well as John Paul II's Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*.²⁸¹ This understanding of solidarity – etymologically reduced and more focused in character – also prevailed in a paper on social welfare published in Germany by its two major denominations (i.e. Roman Catholic and Lutheran/Reformed Protestant). Entitled “For a Future in Solidarity and Justice”, it describes solidarity as a constitutive feature of the Church²⁸², since “the decision concerning people’s ultimate fellowship with God is dependent on real-life solidarity with the lowest of the low.”²⁸³

In view of this world’s unfair global economic structures, its marginalising, often deadly poverty and its exclusion of the poor, it would be totally unrealistic, ignorant and perhaps even cynical to question the de facto importance of the solidarity of the rich towards the poor in financial and monetary terms. It is a great strength of the Church in Germany that, in its commitment to the universal Church, it has developed a keen sense of the need to look beyond its own horizons and is actively involved in care for socially disadvantaged regions in the world.²⁸⁴ Year by year, Catholics in Germany provide some €500 million to support universal Church project partners in Africa, Asia,

²⁸⁰ Cf. Pesch, Heinrich, *Solidarismus*, in: *Stimmen aus Maria Laach* 32 (1902), 38-60.

²⁸¹ Cf. also *Ecclesia Catholica*, *Katechismus der Katholischen Kirche*, Munich, Vienna, Leipzig and Fribourg 1993, no. 1939.

²⁸² Cf. *Kirchenamt der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland / Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz*, *Für eine Zukunft in Solidarität und Gerechtigkeit – Wort des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland und der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz zur wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Lage in Deutschland*, Hanover and Bonn 1997, 101.

²⁸³ *ibid*, 106.

²⁸⁴ Cf. Spiegel, Pirmin; Büker, Markus, *Misereor als Querschnittsaufgabe und Querschnittsauftrag der Kirche*, in: *Anzeiger für die Seelsorge* 123 (2014) 4, 20-24.

Latin America, Eastern Europe and the Pacific.²⁸⁵ In doing so, they send a signal against the “globalisation of indifference” which has been so frequently highlighted by Francis, helping to create at least some oases of a fairer world.

Nevertheless, there is more to solidarity than the strong supporting the weak. This was pointed out by Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. While he emphasises that solidarity is a spontaneous response on the part of those who understand the social function of property and have grasped the universal significance of goods as realities, he also reminds us that “solidarity must be lived as the decision to restore to the poor what belongs to them”.²⁸⁶ But a few lines earlier he points out that the term “solidarity” has become “a little worn and at times poorly understood.” The word, he says, “refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few.”²⁸⁷ The concept of solidarity cannot, therefore, be reduced to the provision of finance. Rather, it is an attitude based on the community and on the priority of life as a shared value. Francis thus advocates a holistic concept of solidarity, following Durkheim’s distinction between organic and mechanical solidarity. Monetary solidarity primarily means the dependence of the poor on the rich (so that it is apparently unilateral) and is, therefore, organic. An emphasis on community and on the shared value of life, on the other hand, is a characteristic feature of mechanical solidarity. The solidarity of the universal Church, therefore, has two sides. As well as economic support for the weak, solidarity is also a characteristic feature of community within the universal Church as a fellowship based on a shared faith, shared traditions, shared prayers and a shared hope – not merely the provision of assistance. Christian solidarity, therefore, (also) exists independently of financial needs and can even be

²⁸⁵ The total expenditure of the German aid agencies *adveniat*, *Caritas International*, *Kindermismissionswerk*, *Misereor*, *missio* and *Renovabis* was €493,224,575 in 2011. Cf. *Konferenz Weltkirche / Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, Jahresbericht Weltkirche 2012*, Bonn 2012, 27.

²⁸⁶ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World, 26. November 2013, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html, no. 189.

²⁸⁷ *ibid.*, no. 188.

regarded as a synonym of the Church's catholicity and the Church as a community (*communio*).

Paul's collection

This understanding of solidarity was a characteristic feature of the Early Church and fundamental to Pauline theology.²⁸⁸ Speaking about the collection for the impoverished Early Church in Jerusalem, the Apostle Paul emphasises that the essence of this solidarity-focused financial support is not the money as such but the fellowship created by its provision. It is a manifestation of God's grace, showing itself through their action of giving freely and generously to others.²⁸⁹ Essential to Paul's understanding is that his collection was occasioned by a reciprocal relationship that went beyond the economic dimension²⁹⁰ – a relationship that created fellowship and reciprocity beyond any financial considerations. Whereas, on the one hand, the Gospel initially originated from Jerusalem and was received by the Gentile churches from that church, the Gentile churches now responded through financial contributions to Paul's collection. Within the community of the Early Church this was a way in which Gentile Christians could give something back to their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem and thus respond to what they themselves had received from them, "for if the Gentiles have been given a share in their spiritual possessions, then in return to give them help with material possessions is repaying a debt to them" (Romans 15:27). By taking this collection, Paul displayed an understanding of solidarity in which, financial gifts notwithstanding, the focus was on a certain understanding of community and not merely on the provision of assistance.

²⁸⁸ Cf. Vellguth, Klaus, *Kirche und Fundraising – Wege einer zukunftsfähigen Kirchenfinanzierung*, Freiburg im Breisgau 2007, 79-102.

²⁸⁹ Cf. Frettlöh, Magdalene L., *Der Charme der gerechten Gabe – Motive einer Theologie und Ethik der Gabe am Beispiel der paulinischen Kollekte für Jerusalem*, in: Ebach, Jürgen; Gutmann, Hans-Martin; Frettlöh, Magdalene L.; Weinrich, Michael, *Leget Anmut in das Geben, Zum Verhältnis von Ökonomie und Theologie*, Gütersloh 2001, 105-161. Müller, Oliver, *Vom Almosen zum Spendenmarkt – Sozialethische Aspekte christlicher Spendenkultur*, Freiburg im Breisgau 2005, 89.

²⁹⁰ Today similar thoughts are being developed about the functional position of money. In his talk "The World of Communication – a Global Society" (held at the first Convention on Communicative Theology in Innsbruck in February 2003), Wolfgang Palaver described money as a "monetary means of communication". (Cf. Palaver, Wolfgang, *Kommunikationswelt Weltgesellschaft*, in: Hilberath, Bernd Jochen; Kraml, Martina; Scharer, Matthias, *Wahrheit in Beziehung – Der dreieine Gott als Quelle und Orientierung menschlicher Kommunikation*, Mainz 2003, 37-50.)

By regarding his collection as based on reciprocity and community, Paul continues a line of thought that centred on the principle of equality and was well known at his time, particularly in Hellenistic culture. The Apostle says: "It is not that you ought to relieve other people's needs and leave yourselves in hardship; but there should be a fair balance – your surplus at present may fill their deficit, and another time their surplus may fill your deficit. So there may be a fair balance; as scripture says: No one who had collected more had too much, no one who collected less had too little." (Corinthians 8: 13-15). In his argument Paul emphasises the principle of equality between people, but he also works on the assumption that there is equality between spiritual and material giving. Furthermore, Paul's argument in this respect goes hand in hand with his understanding of equality between the Gentile and Jewish Christian churches.²⁹¹ Paul's collection, says Klaus Berger, was a "sign of fellowship and a desire to be part of it."²⁹² Joachim Gnllka, too, interprets the agreed collection as something that went much further than economic or monetary assistance. It was, he says, an "expression of fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians."²⁹³ It was, therefore, more than the provision of financial support to the Early Church in Jerusalem. In fact, financial assistance is merely the visible sign of a far more important dimension: the community of the Church. Within this community, offerings may differ in size but they must nevertheless be valued as equally important.

The universalism of Christian solidarity

In taking the collection, Paul's underlying understanding of equality and solidarity focused on the worldwide fellowship of all local churches, a community that goes far beyond the narrow confines of a given church and overcomes all cultural and economic differences. The concepts of solidarity and catholicity are thus very closely related and partially overlap. Following *Evangelii Gaudium*, the model of soli-

²⁹¹ Cf. Gnllka, Joachim, *Die Kollekte der paulinischen Gemeinden für Jerusalem als Ausdruck ekklesialer Gemeinschaft*, in: Kampling, Rainer; Söding, Thomas, *Ekklesiologie des Neuen Testaments*, Freiburg im Breisgau, Basel, Vienna 1996, 313.

²⁹² Berger, Klaus, *Almosen für Israel*, in: *New Testament Studies* 23 (1976/77), 204.

²⁹³ Gnllka, Joachim, op.cit., 312. Elsewhere Franz Mussner describes a handshake as a "public seal (perhaps a demonstrative gesture against 'false brothers') of an abiding 'community'". (Mussner, Franz, *Der Galaterbrief*, in: *Herders Theologischer Kommentar*, volume IX, Freiburg im Breisgau, Basel, Vienna 1974, 121.)

solidarity must, therefore, not be understood in terms of higher-ranking givers and lower-ranking takers (i.e. focused on the mere provision of assistance), but rather as a “polyhedron which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness. Pastoral and political activity alike seek to gather in this polyhedron the best of each. There is a place for the poor and their culture, their aspirations and their potential. Even people who can be considered dubious on account of their errors have something to offer which must not be overlooked. It is the convergence of peoples who, within the universal order, maintain their own individuality; it is the sum total of persons within a society which pursues the common good, which truly has a place for everyone.”²⁹⁴ Solidarity does not mean uniformity, but a living universalism, one which trusts that the very differences of all the sides of the polyhedron will contribute to its special character. In the pastoral domain, solidarity also means trusting that the various regional churches – with all their differences and different contextual settings – can contribute something specific that is also relevant to other regional churches. This can offer a glimmer of hope for everyone, including the economically wealthy churches, as many of them – despite the availability of financial resources – consider themselves to be in the throes of a profound existential crisis, not knowing how they can pull themselves up by their own bootstraps and so overcome this crisis.

Although a Christian understanding of solidarity is much broader than a financial understanding which focuses merely on the provision of assistance, the conceptual narrowing of this understanding has acquired a surprising degree of plausibility in recent decades, especially within the Church. It would be good, first of all, to ask why this is so and what the contributing causes are. We might hypothesise that the concept of solidarity is easily reduced to an economic dimension (which it also contains) during a period and in the face of a *zeitgeist* which are dominated by economic and monetary considerations. Indeed, this seems so plausible in its affirmative character that it has even found its way into theological discourse. Furthermore, when we look at the original concept of solidarity (with its emphasis on equality and connectedness) and when we observe its replacement by a concept restricted to financial support, we might further hypothesise that this development reflects endeavours in society to divide the

²⁹⁴ Francis, op.cit., no. 236.

world into two types of players: the dominant and the marginalised. The dominant players in this system could be seen as having active and supportive roles, while the marginalised are relegated to passive and vulnerable roles. The reduced concept of solidarity would thus be a reflection and at the same time the cause or tool (we might almost call it an “anti-sacrament”) of an understanding of the world based on inequality. These two hypotheses should trigger some fundamental questioning of the (conscious and implicit) self-image of aid organisations, especially those operating within the universal Church. Based on our understanding of solidarity, it would be good to ask whether the work of church aid organisations – which might superficially appear critical of the current *zeitgeist* and may well contain elements of social critique – are genuinely critical of the system or whether this is merely the first impression, whereas in reality they are the exact opposite, with a stabilising effect on the system (ultimately also in the way they see themselves).

Networks of solidarity in the universal Church

In addition to the necessary reflection on the reasons and causes of such an understanding it is equally important to ask how relationships which are narrowly focused on the provision of assistance, especially within the Church, can be dissipated. This applies to relationships between the universal Church and regional churches, but also between the regional churches themselves. One sustainable model might be to develop and promote networking structures within the Church. These structures would be based on an understanding that different players within the Church can contribute valuable theological, pastoral and spiritual skills and thus enrich other players in the network. Moreover, they can make their contributions independently of their respective financial situation. The development of such networks would involve the help and perhaps also the facilitation of universal Church aid organisations. Their role would partly be to contribute to a lively (South-South or South-North) exchange between different players within the Church. On the other hand, they might also help to change the self-image of universal Church aid organisations, so that they start defining themselves not primarily by their roles as givers but also by their roles as representatives of “recipient regional churches”. By building up universal Church networking structures, the word “mission” would no longer be seen as a one-way street. It

would be stripped of its ideological baggage and genuinely brought to life.²⁹⁵

Creating a pastoral network

This is the background to a range of pastoral networks that have been set up in Asia and Africa in recent years. They aim to provide international environments for reflection on pastoral theology, to act as forums for an international exchange delivering pastoral stimuli, and to serve as leaven for innovative approaches in pastoral ministry.²⁹⁶ Networks of this kind have brought together representatives of leading pastoral institutes, enabling them to share their experiences and to strengthen and inspire one another. These pastoral institutes, many of which were founded in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific in the 1950s and 1960s, are ideal networking partners. Stimulated by the Second Vatican Council, many of the institutes have developed into influential training centres, offering initial and further training not just for priests, but also increasingly for the laity and for members of religious orders. Although Germany's Catholic Church has supported the work of pastoral institutes in the past, particularly the Church aid organisations *missio* and *adveniat*, the Church's contact with these institutes did not extend much beyond financial support and was rather sporadic in nature. These pastoral institutes were primarily regarded as project partners in need of support and not as valuable pastoral exchange partners and sources of inspiration for other regional churches. There was very little perception of the work performed by these institutes in the southern hemisphere or, indeed, of the pastoral input that might be relevant to the German church. Moreover, there was virtually no networking between pastoral institutes in the southern hemisphere. They knew very little about each other's programmes and so a joint learning process was virtually ruled out.

To improve communication between pastoral institutes, establish a pastoral network and facilitate a joint learning process, a project entitled *Netzwerk Pastoral* ("Pastoral Network") was launched in 2010. Under this research project, *missio*, *adveniat* and the Institute of Missiology (IMW) at the Vallendar College of Philosophy and

²⁹⁵ Cf. Vellguth, Klaus, *Pastoral global – Kirche als weltweite Lerngemeinschaft*, in: *Anzeiger für die Seelsorge* 120 (2011) 10, 20-23.

²⁹⁶ Cf. Vellguth, Klaus, *Pastorales Netzwerk wächst in Asien – Pastoralinstitute suchen gemeinsam nach neuen Perspektiven*, in: *Verbum SVD* 54 (2014), 1-2.

Theology contacted a large number of pastoral institutes and sent them a questionnaire designed to provide a more accurate idea of the work carried out by these institutes. This information was to be shared with all the other pastoral institutes worldwide, so that they could be inspired by one another and, if they were interested, establish contact with each other. The responses from the pastoral institutes were subsequently published in a separate wiki in four languages (English, German, French and Spanish), so that each institute's profile became globally available on the internet.²⁹⁷ This wiki now includes 31 pastoral institutes from Asia, 17 from Africa and 17 from Latin America.

In their feedback many of the pastoral institutes indicated that they were very much interested in getting to know each other and in intensive mutual networking. This prompted *missio* and the East Asian Pastoral Institute to invite several principals of Asian pastoral institutes to Manila for an initial meeting of the Asian Pastoral Network.²⁹⁸ The conference, which was held at the East Asian Pastoral Institute in the Philippine capital from 29 October to 1 November 2012, was attended by representatives of the Saigon Pastoral Institute (Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam)²⁹⁹, the National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre (Bangalore, India)³⁰⁰, the Pallottine Animation Centre (Nagpur, India)³⁰¹, Pusat Kateketik (Yogyakarta, Indonesia)³⁰², the Singapore Pastoral Institute (Singapore)³⁰³ and

²⁹⁷ Cf. www.pastoral-global.org, retrieved 15. May 2014.

²⁹⁸ Cf. Vellguth, Klaus, *missio – The Network Pastoral and the Pastoral Institutes of Asia*, in: *East Asian Pastoral Review* 50 (2013) 4, 313-323.

²⁹⁹ Cf. Nguyen, Thi Lanh, *The Saigon Institute*, in: *East Asian Pastoral Review* 50 (2013) 4, 376-382. Nguyen, Thi Lanh, *Pastoralinstitut der Erzdiözese Hoh Chi Minh Stadt*, unpublished manuscript, Ho Chi Minh City 2012.

³⁰⁰ Cf. Fernandes, Cleophas D., *The NBCLC: A Renewed Mission and Role*, in: *East Asian Pastoral Review* 50 (2013) 4, 313-323. Leeuwen, Gerwin Van, *Fully Indian – Authentically Christian, A Study of the First Fifteen Years of the NBCLC (1967-1982)*, Bangalore – India in the Light of the Theology of Its Founder, Duraiswami Simon Amalorpavadass, Kampen 1990.

³⁰¹ Vijay, Thomas, *The Pallottine Animation Centre of Nagpur*, in: *East Asian Pastoral Review* 50 (2013) 4, 355-363. Vellguth, Klaus, *Eine neue Art, Kirche zu sein – Entstehung und Verbreitung der Kleinen Christlichen Gemeinschaften und des Bibel-Teilens in Afrika und Asien*, Freiburg im Breisgau 2005, 245-250.

³⁰² Cf. Putranto, Carlos, *Participation in a Growing Local Church: Reflection on Pusat Kateketik*, in: *East Asian Pastoral Review* 50 (2013) 4, 364-375.

³⁰³ Cf. Arnold, Thomas, *Where Will You Bring Christ? The Singapore Pastoral Institute*, in: *East Asian Pastoral Review* 50 (2013) 4, 383-407. Goh, Arthur, *Eine Kirche für eine moderne Welt – Missionarische Herausforderungen der Kirche Singapurs*, in: *Forum Weltkirche* 130 (2011) 2, 20-25. Steffen, Paul B., *Places and Models of Formation for Mission and Ministry – Pastoral Institutes in Africa and Asia*, in: *Verbum SVD* 51 (2010), 423-438.

the East Asian Pastoral Institute (Manila, Philippines)³⁰⁴.³⁰⁵ In order to learn from one another and to identify potential synergies, the representatives of the pastoral institutes started this first convention of the Pastoral Network by introducing their own organisations and the work on which they focused. Next, they formulated a joint definition of pastoral ministry which was supported by all delegates and took account of the Church's Asian context. One year later, in November 2013 in Bangalore (India), the second convention of the Asian Pastoral Network also attracted representatives of the Verbiest Institute (Taiwan), the National Catechetical Educational and Biblical Centre (Sri Lanka)³⁰⁶ and Ishvani Kendra (India)³⁰⁷. This time the meeting focused on the question of inculturated pastoral training in Asia at the beginning of the third millennium and what shape it might take. After the first two conferences in Manila (2012) and Bangalore (2013), the Asian Pastoral Network now plans to expand further. The third conference of the Asian Pastoral Network, scheduled for October 2014, will be held in Ho Chi Minh City (former Saigon, Vietnam). By then a range of new relationships will have been formed in the Asian Pastoral Network and further pastoral institutes will have joined. The first national network meeting of Indian pastoral institutes was held in Bangalore, for instance, in the first half of 2014. Twenty-four pastoral institutes were represented. Based on the final declaration of the Asian Network meeting, they developed a number of prospects for the work of the pastoral institutes in India. In Africa, too, there is a growing interest in a pastoral network. In December 2013 the first conference of the African Pastoral Network took place at the

³⁰⁴ Cf. Leger, Arthur, *The EAPI: from Mission Apologetics to Mission Networking*, in: *East Asian Pastoral Review* 50 (2013) 4, 324-336. Meili, Josef, *East Asian Pastoral Institute – A Power House of Inculturation and Interreligious Dialogue*, in: *Forum Mission* (2005) 1, 221-222, especially 222.

³⁰⁵ It should be pointed out here that pastoral institutes face difficult situations in some places. Pakistan's Multan Pastoral Institute had to cancel its participation at short notice, as did representatives of the National Catechetical Centre from Bangladesh, since both groups were barred from leaving their countries. Cf. Vellguth, Klaus, *Pastorale Initiativen in bedrängter Lage – Der Einsatz des Multan Pastoral Institute für Dialog und Verständigung*, in: *Cibedo-Beiträge zum Gespräch zwischen Christen und Muslimen* 3 (2012), 92-97.

³⁰⁶ Cf. Fernando, Piyal Janaka, *Challenges Faced in Pastoral Contextualized Formation in Sri Lanka*, unpublished document, Colombo 2013.

³⁰⁷ Cf. Kendra, Ishvani, Institute of Missiology and Communications, Pune 2013. Kendra, Ishvani, 2014 Programmes, Pune 2013. Malipurathu, Thomas, *Ishvani Kendra and Its Contribution to the Field of Evangelization*, in: *Mission Today* 3 (2001) 3, 329-337. Kavunkal, Jacob, Ishvani Kendra, in: *Dharma Deepika* 2 (1998) 2, 67-68. Kavunkal, Jacob, Report about Ishvani Kendra, Pune, in: *Verbum SVD* 35 (1994), 269-271.

South African Lumko Institute, and the second meeting will be held in Malawi in November 2014 with a focus on “inculturation”.

Solidarity-based fellowship implies a learning community

It seems at first sight that the development of pastoral networks in Asia and Africa is strengthening the universal Church as a learning community³⁰⁸ by promoting a South-South and a South-North dialogue. After all, the main point of a pastoral network is to embark on a joint pastoral exchange and learning process. However, when a pastoral network is developed, such a process clearly reflects a concept of solidarity that overcomes any reduction to mere assistance (assistentialism). In fact, the process expresses the very essence of solidarity, as its players move forward in fellowship with one another and so manifest the universal Church as a solidarity-based community. This community overcomes any distinctions between (financial) givers and takers among the regional churches as well as the dichotomy between the universal Church, on the one hand, and the regional churches, on the other. The Church becomes a living network, a microcosm which demonstrates what the Church in its universality can be at this level, if only it manages to overcome its fixation on itself. It is this kind of forward-looking ecclesiological profile that Pope Francis has in mind when he says in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: “The papacy and the central structures of the universal Church also need to hear the call to pastoral conversion.” A few sentences further on he adds: “Excessive centralisation, rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church’s life and her missionary outreach.”³⁰⁹

Promoting the development of international church networks represents a contribution to the work of the universal Church in Germany in that it projects the universal Church as a learning community and also as a solidarity-based fellowship (the real meaning of solidarity).³¹⁰

³⁰⁸ Cf. also Wustmans, Hildegard, *Connections alone are not enough. The universal Church as a learning community*, in: Krämer, Klaus; Vellguth, Klaus, *The Universal Church in Germany – Living the Faith Together, One World Theology*, volume 6, Freiburg im Breisgau 2014. Ackermann, Stephan, *Learning Laboratories of the Universal Church – an invitation and a challenge*, in: Krämer, Klaus; Vellguth, Klaus, op.cit.

³⁰⁹ Francis, op.cit., no. 32.

³¹⁰ In addition to the pastoral networks supervised, among others, by Monika Kling there are plans to launch other networks which should enrich the global work of Germany’s church in the future. The Small Christian Communities Network, set up by Michael Meyer, will have its first meeting in Accra (Ghana) in November 2014. The first meeting of the Religious Freedom

If representatives of the Church in Germany participate in pastoral networks, it may help them to discover pastoral visions, models and initiatives and may, therefore, be of good use to them back home. Such participation means trusting that the Holy Spirit is at work – which is especially important in this age of globalisation – not exclusively in the universal Church or in one’s own regional church, but in all regional churches. After all, this is part of its polyphonic Pentecostal character. Pastoral networks are environments which encourage us to listen attentively to the work of the Spirit, “advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are.”³¹¹

Network, established by Christoph Marcinkowski, will be held in Cyprus in April 2015. Another meeting scheduled for the first half of 2015 will be that of the African Theologians’ Network, set up by Marco Moerschbacher.

³¹¹ Francis, *op.cit.*, no. 25.