

After the Second World War, the first Catholic Convention was held in 1948 in Mainz. In 1952, the Central Committee resumed its work as well, now under the name of the 'Central Committee of German Catholics' – 'Zentralkomitee der deutschen Katholiken' (ZdK).



[Bishop Fürst, Baden-Württemberg State Prime Minister Teufel and Central Committee President Meyer open the 2004 Catholic Convention in Ulm.]

The 'Lumen Gentium' Foundation

The mission of the foundation of the Central Committee of German Catholics, the Lumen Gentium Foundation – 'Lumen Gentium – Stiftung deutscher Katholiken', is to lend weight to the voice of Christians in processes of political decision-making – particularly in questions tangential to the boundaries of life itself – such as care for the dying, pregnancy, stem cell research and gene technology. The Foundation promotes political dialogue for Catholics in Germany and Europe. It also presses the concerns of the Catholic laity – in the form of Catholic Convention projects, for instance.

www.stiftung-lumen-gentium.de

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Masthead

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The Central Committee of German Catholics, Organiser of German Catholic Conventions (Katholikentag) and Co-Organiser of the Ecumenical Church Convention

Every other year, working with the particular host diocese, the Central Committee organises the German Catholic Convention (Katholikentag) and works to promote the ongoing advancement of this major meeting for the laity in the Church. These meetings are part of the origin of the Catholic lay movement, and to this day they represent an important focus of the work of the Central Committee. Spatially and temporally concentrated, the biannual meetings also reflect the factors that constitute the Catholic lay movement and the Central Committee.



[Angela Merkel, Rita Waschbüsch and Wolfgang Thierse at the Catholic Convention.]

More than 150 years ago, the Catholic Conventions arose out of the Catholic lay movement; this movement remains their home. In an era in which religion is increasingly relegated to the private sphere, these conventions take the issues of the world and make them topics for the Church. The conventions seek to promote a sense of togetherness and dialogue. At the same time, they are a workshop and a clearing-house for new ideas.

The diversity of topics and positions to be found at a Catholic Convention reflects the social pluralism that characterises the circumstances of our lives. With forums, lectures, discussion groups and workshops, the conventions address a broad spectrum of religious and secular issues.

A Catholic Convention issues its communiqués within the framework of major events; these messages are then disseminated in the media throughout the country. Not infrequently, these communiqués contain political demands and provide an impetus to new ways of thinking.

Catholic Conventions are political, spiritual, communicative and joyful gatherings. They offer an opportunity for people of all ages, different religions and denominations to gather. An atmosphere of shared work, prayer and celebration lends this major event its special appeal.



The meeting is held every other year, each time in a different German city. With each new *Katholikentag*, there are different people involved, and new topics on the programme. Catholic Conventions fill the trade fair halls and city centres of large cities. Coverage in the print media, and on radio and television, carries their message to a public of millions.

It is a tradition, and a form of ecumenicalism put into practice, for the presidencies of the Central Committee and of the German Protestant Kirchentag (DEKT) to meet regularly and to plan projects together. In 2003, the two presidencies joined co-hosted the first Ecumenical Church Convention – *Ökumenischer Kirchentag* (ÖKT) in Berlin. The second ÖKT is scheduled to take place in 2010, in Munich.

www.katholikentag.de

www.oekt.de

[Concluding services at the Ecumenical Church Convention in Berlin, 2003]



Central Committee of German Catholics

Zentralkomitee der deutschen Katholiken (ZdK)

Voice of the Laity



The Central Committee of German Catholics – *Zentralkomitee der deutschen Katholiken (ZdK)*

Voice of lay Catholicism in Germany

The Central Committee of German Catholics (*ZdK*) is the representative organization of laypersons active in the Catholic Church in Germany. Under a single banner, it unites diocesan councils, Catholic associations, institutions of the lay apostolate, lay movements and communities, and figures in the Church and in society at large. The Central Committee views itself as a forum in which opinions on issues in politics and the Church are formed and the determination to bring about needed change is encouraged. It represents the concerns of Catholics in the public arena, participates in shaping public policy, and advises the German Bishops' Conference on issues of social, political and religious life.

The term 'laity' is used to describe all members of the Catholic Church who have not been ordained as deacons, priests or bishops. Since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), there is a new view and a new assessment of the role of the laity in the Catholic Church. The Church acknowledges the entire community of faithful. Among its members, by virtue of baptism, true equality exists. All – laity and clergy alike – are called upon to carry out the mission, the earthly fulfilment of which God has entrusted to the Church.



[The plenary assembly sets the guidelines for the work of the Central Committee.]

Linking Church and society

The Central Committee wants to help shape the world, working from a position of faith. Through its membership, hailing from many different spheres of society, the Central Committee constitutes a well-informed and dedicated presence in nearly all areas of the life of society. It embodies the Church in the world, and the world in the Church. Through numerous personal and institutional relation-

ships, the Central Committee of German Catholics is in touch with Catholics in the other countries of Europe and, beyond this, with the Church throughout the world.

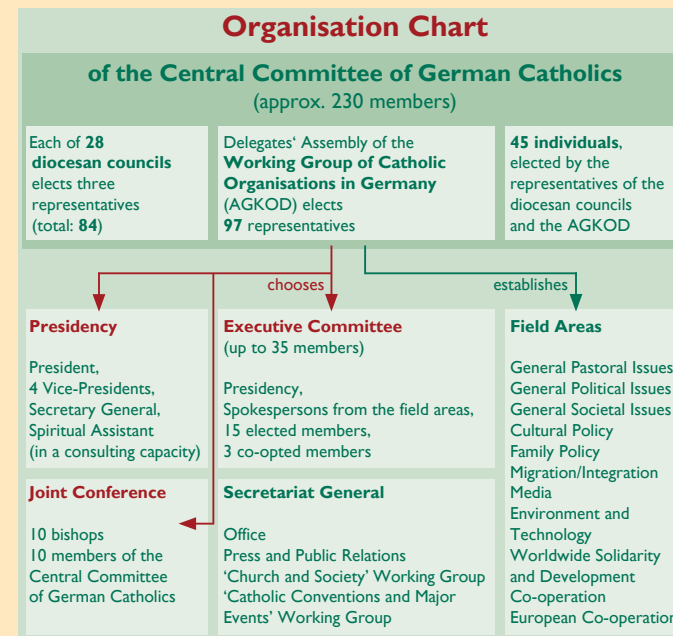
A forum for dialogue and a source of ideas

First and foremost, the task of the Central Committee is one of communication. The Central Committee is a forum for exchange, information and personal encounters. It moderates the processes involved in the formation of opinions, takes positions on questions relating to the future of Church and society, seeks out dialogue with representatives of socially relevant groups and parties, and serves as a source of ideas for contributions by Catholics to public life.

Executive bodies of the Central Committee of German Catholics

The **Plenary Assembly** is the highest executive body of the Central Committee. It consists of:

- 97 representatives of the Working Group of Catholic Organisations in Germany – *Arbeitsgemeinschaft der katholischen Organisationen Deutschlands (AGKOD)*, numbering together about 5 million members;
- 84 representatives of the diocesan councils in all of the dioceses of Germany; and
- 45 individuals from the areas of scholarship, the business community, culture and politics.



All members of the Central Committee belong to the Plenary Assembly that convenes for two days twice each year, in spring and autumn. The Plenary Assembly issues the guidelines for the work of the Central Committee.

The **Executive Committee** is the executive body that carries out the work of the Central Committee in between Plenary Assemblies. It consists of around 35 members (Presidency, spokespersons of the Field Areas, and another 15 elected members) and meets roughly once every six weeks. This is the body in which all of the topics are discussed and the resolutions formulated that are not expressly reserved for action by the Plenary Assembly.

The Central Committee has established **ten Field Areas** for its work relating to societal, political and religious themes. The spokespersons of the Field Areas are elected by the Plenary Assembly. The Presidency has established discussion groups for the dialogue with Judaism and with Islam.

The **Presidency** consists of the President, four Vice-Presidents and the Secretary General. The Spiritual Assistant appointed by the German Bishops' Conference participates in meetings of the Presidency in a consulting capacity. The President represents the Central Committee and is assisted in this capacity by the Vice-Presidents.

The **Joint Conference** meets twice each year. The German Bishops' Conference and the Central Committee send ten representatives each to discuss topics and undertakings of common interest.

The office of the **Secretariat General** is located in Bonn-Bad Godesberg. There, under the leadership of the Secretary General, the Spiritual Director and a Executive Director, some 30 full-time employees carry out the organisational work of the Central Committee. The Secretariat General is broken down into working groups on 'Church and Society' and 'Catholic Conventions and Major Events', as well as the Press and Public Relations and the Office Operations areas.

President:

Vice-Presidents:

Secretary General:

Spiritual Assistant:

Rektor:

Prof. Dr. Hans Joachim Meyer, Bonn

Dr. Christoph Braß, Homburg/Saar;
 Heinz-Wilhelm Brockmann, Osnabrück;
 Magdalena Bogner, Neumarkt;
 Dr. Claudia Lücking-Michel, Bonn

Dr. Stefan Vesper, Bonn
 Bishop Dr. Gebhard Fürst, Rottenburg-Stuttgart

Fr. Dr. Detlef Stäps, Bonn

History

'Freedom for the Church is the mother of a brighter future for Germany.' This is how the 'Catholic Society of Germany' described the aim the lay movement set out to achieve in the year 1848. In that year of revolution, the citizenry fought for, and won, freedoms of speech, press and assembly. The same year also marked the birth of what would later be referred to as the 'Catholic Conventions' [*Katholikentage*] out of which arose the Central Committee of German Catholics.

Already in 1837, a Catholic movement had begun to take shape in response to arbitrariness by public authorities and state regimentation of the Church. In 1848, the movement appealed to the public with the 'Pope Pius Association for Religious Freedom' [*Piusverein für religiöse Freiheit*]; soon, hundreds of such organisations were created in many cities and towns throughout Germany. They convened a general assembly, held 3rd-6th October 1848 – the first Catholic Convention. Before long, it was suggested that an 'executive central committee' be established for this annual event. This committee, which was to serve as a 'permanent focus for the associations', was elected for the first time in 1868. The tasks with which it was charged included organisation of the general assemblies, assistance in implementing their resolutions, and promotion of Catholic associations, 'both through frequent announcements in the press and through personal contacts'. The Central Committee became involved in the pressing issues affecting Church and society, issues such as diaspora and mission, charitable works, science, business, journalism, education and social justice.



[While the membership cards were already printed, the outbreak of the First World War kept the Catholic Convention – scheduled for 1914 in Münster – from taking place.]

On many occasions, the independence and determination of the Central Committee proved to be a thorn in the side of the rulers of the state. In the cultural struggle, or *Kulturkampf*, under Bismarck, and under Nazi rule, it was banished from the public scene, and yet its ideas and its tasks remained alive through the years of distress and persecution.