The voice of the Catholic Laity in Germany
Our Faith is our Abundance

Prof. Dr. Thomas Sternberg MdL
Präsident des ZdK

Many Catholic Christians work with and in their communities through our church to assist with the tasks of society, politics and government. Our faith is both our motivation and our guide in this. The Central Committee of German Catholics (ZdK) is an alliance of representatives of the diocesan councils and Catholic associations as well as institutions of the lay apostolate and eminent persons from the church and society. The mission of the ZdK is to bring their concerns together and provide a place to share their views, form opinions and build consensus.
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The Central Committee of German Catholics (ZdK)

Voting at the ZdK General Assembly in April 2013
The Central Committee of German Catholics (ZdK) is the highest representative federation of laypersons active in the Catholic Church in Germany. Under a single roof, it brings together diocesan councils, Catholic associations and initiatives, institutions of the lay apostolate, spiritual fellowships, and eminent persons from the Church and society. The ZdK sees itself as a forum for the formation of opinions and policies that affect politics and the Church itself. It represents the concerns of Catholics in the public sphere, participates in processes of political decision-making and advises the German Bishops’ Conference in matters relating to religious life.

The credentials of the ZdK derive from two sources: from democratic elections held in the various parishes active in the dioceses and from recognition by the German Bishops’ Conference as the highest federation of laity in the Church in Germany. Laypersons are all members of the Catholic Church who are not ordained deacons, priests or bishops. Since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), there has been a new view and valuation of the laity. The Church acknowledges the full community of the faithful, who are all truly equal by virtue of the sacrament of Baptism. All – laypersons and clergy alike – are called to carry out the mission of the Church.

The ZdK wants to draw on faith to help shape the world. Through its members, who come from various segments of society, the ZdK is a knowledgeable and active presence in many areas of community life. It embodies the Church in the world – and the world in the Church. Thanks to numerous personal and institutional relationships, the ZdK also maintains contacts with Catholics in other countries of Europe and in the Church worldwide. An important part of its work is also ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue.

Above all, the mission of the ZdK is one of communication. The ZdK is a forum for exchange, information and personal encounter. It moderates opinion-shaping processes, frames questions about the future of Church and society, maintains contact with the media, seeks out dialogue with representatives of relevant stakeholder groups and parties, and provides ideas for the activities of Catholics in the public sphere.
The Plenary Assembly

The **Plenary Assembly** is the highest governing body of the ZdK. It consists of:

- 97 representatives of the Working Group of Catholic Organizations in Germany (AGKOD), representing around five million members;
- 87 representatives of Diocesan Councils from all of the dioceses throughout Germany;
- 45 individuals drawn from the fields of science, business, culture and politics.

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

The **Executive Committee** is the body that carries out the work of the ZdK between Plenary Assemblies. It consists of around 35 members (Presidency, spokespersons from the field areas and 15 additional elected members) and meets roughly every six weeks. Here, all topics are deliberated and resolutions not expressly reserved for the Plenary Assembly are drafted.

The ZdK has established **seven field areas** for its work on social, political and religious topics. The spokespersons for these thematic areas are elected by the Plenary Assembly. The Presidency has convened discussion groups for dialogue with Judaism and Islam.
The **Presidency** consists of the President, four Vice-Presidents and the Secretary General. The Clergy Assistant, appointed by the Bishops’ Conference, participates in the meetings in an consulting capacity. The President represents the ZdK and is assisted by the Vice-Presidents.

The **Joint Conference** meets twice a year. Ten representatives each of the German Bishops’ Conference and the ZdK discuss common themes and tasks here.

The **Office of the Secretariat General** is located in Bonn-Bad Godesberg. Under the leadership of the Secretary General, the Spiritual Rector and an Executive Director, some 30 employees carry out the organizational work of the ZdK. The Secretariat General is divided into the working groups "Church and Society", "Katholikentage and Major Events", "Press and Public Relations Work" and the Office.

**President:** Prof. Dr. Dr. Thomas Sternberg, Münster  
**Vice-President:** Dr. Christoph Braß, Homburg /Berlin  
Karin Kortmann, Düsseldorf  
Dr. Claudia Lücking-Michel, Bonn  
Alois Wolf, Erfurt

**Secretary General:** Dr. Stefan Vesper, Bonn  
**Clergy Assistant:** Bischof Dr. Gebhard Fürst, Rottenburg-Stuttgart

**Rector:** Pastor Stefan B. Eirich, Bonn
‘Freedom for the Church is the mother of a brighter future for Germany.’ That is how the ‘Catholic Society of Germany’ described the mission that the lay movement set out to fulfill in 1848. That year of revolution not only brought the bourgeoisie freedoms of speech, press and assembly; it also marked the birth of what would come to be called ‘Katholikentage’, the meetings that gave rise to the Central Committee of German Catholics.

Already in 1837, a movement of Catholics had begun forming in response to arbitrary treatment by public officials and state regimentation of the Church. Then, in 1848, the movement appealed to the public with the ‘Pius Association for Religious Freedom’ ['Piusverein für religiöse Freiheit']. Before long, there were hundreds of similar organizations in many places. They convened in a plenary assembly from 3 to 6 October 1848, constituting the first Katholikentag. Soon it was suggested that an ‘executive central committee’ be formed for this annual event. The committee was to form a ‘perpetual focus for the associations’ and was elected to office for the first time in 1868.

Its mission included preparations for the plenary assemblies, monitoring implementation of resolutions passed by the assemblies and promoting Catholic community life ‘both through frequent declarations in the press and through personal contact’. The efforts of the early organization were dedicated to pressing issues in the Church and society, issues such as Diaspora and mission, charitable works, science, the economy, journalism, education and social justice.

More than once, the Central Committee’s independence, and its determination to play a role in shaping society, proved a thorn in the side of state rulers. The Committee was banned from the public arena during the cultural struggle under Bismarck, and during Nazi rule. Nevertheless, its ideas and its mission remained alive throughout these periods of distress and persecution. In 1948, in the wake of the Second World War, a Katholikentag was held again in Mainz. The Central Committee then resumed its work in 1952, now operating under the name ‘Zentralkomitee der deutschen Katholiken (ZdK)’. 
We host Katholikentage!

ZdK as sponsor of the German Katholikentag and Co-organizer of the Ecumenical Kirchentag

Good Atmosphere | Wise Guys Concert at the 99th Katholikentag in Regensburg
We host Katholikentage!
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Every two years, the ZdK joins with the host diocese to organise the German Katholikentag. These large-scale meetings of laypeople are part of the origin of the Catholic lay movement, and to this day they form an important anchor in the work of the Central Committee. Concentrated in space and time, they are a reflection of the things that make the Catholic lay movement and the ZdK what they are today.

Katholikentage arose out of the Catholic lay movement more than 160 years ago, and the movement remains their home to this day. In an era in which religion is increasingly a private affair, the Katholikentage take the issues that face the world and make them topics for the Church. These meetings seek out togetherness and dialogue. They are a workshop and a clearing-house for fresh ideas.

Worship Services in other Place | For example, under the bridge at the Eucharist Celebration of the Cusanuswerk at the 99th German Katholikentag in Regensburg

Night of the Lights | A beautiful experience, rich in spirituality, the Taizé Prayer at the Katholikentag

The social pluralism that characterises our lives is reflected in the diversity of topics and positions represented in a Katholikentag. With forums, lectures, discussion groups and workshops, they address a broad range of issues of ecclesiastical and secular relevance.

The messages of a Katholikentag are articulated in major events and disseminated nationwide in the media. Not infrequently, they contain political demands and prompt a rethinking of the issues.

Katholikentage are political, spiritual, communicative and joyful. They give people of all age groups, different religions and denominations an opportunity to come together. The special attraction of this major event is its atmosphere of shared work, prayer and celebration.
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ZdK as sponsor of the German Katholikentag and Co-organizer of the Ecumenical Kirchentag

The meeting is held every two years in a different city, where different people and different topics for discussion are involved. Katholikentage fill large cities’ trade-fair halls and the town centres. Press, radio and television carry them to an audience of millions.

A tradition and an ecumenical practice is for the presidencies of the ZdK and of the German Protestant Kirchentags (DEKT) to convene regularly and plan projects together. The two organisations jointly hosted the first Ecumenical Kirchentag (ÖKT) in Berlin in 2003. The second ÖKT was held in Munich in 2010.

www.katholikentag.de/english
We host Katholikentage!
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The Foundation directs its society-shaping power towards the fulfilment of the vision of a church relevant to the world. It wants to be the voice of the mature laity in the church, to promote independent dialogue between the church and the world and strengthen the autonomy of the lay apostolate of the Catholic Church.
The ZdK Foundation "Lumen Gentium"

Lumen Gentium – with the name of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of the 2nd Vatican Council, we have given the foundation of the Central Committee of German Catholics (ZdK) a name which summarizes the aspiration and the mission of the Foundation of German Catholics: to make an effective contribution to evangelization, "the proclamation of the message of Christ through the testimony of life and the Word ...in the ordinary relationships of the world." (LG 35)

Christian Values

That Christian values – above all, respect for the value of every human life – be heard and understood in a plural society influenced by the media. That the voice of Christians may have an impact on political decision-making processes – particularly in crucial questions of life, such as assisted dying, pregnancy and birth and in the discussion around stem cell research and gene technology. That faith shaped by Catholicism may remain alive, spiritually inviting and ecumenically open. This is what the Lumen Gentium foundation of German Catholics stands for.

The Foundation Leaves its Footprint

The Foundation leaves its footprint with projects that grow out of the work and mission of the Central Committee of German Catholics (ZdK). It promotes the interests of the ZdK, for example through certain projects at Katholikentagen, or the dialogue with politicians in Germany and Europe on significant societal questions.

"I support Lumen Gentium in its efforts to encourage and support young people in the church to engage actively in politics and take on political responsibility"
Wolfgang Thierse MdB, Former President of the German Bundestag
“Since the laity, in accordance with their state of life, live in the midst of the world and its concerns, they are called by God to exercise their apostolate in the world like leaven with the ardour of the spirit of Christ (…)

From: “Apostolicam actuositatem” Decree of the Second Vatican Council on the Lay Apostolate

“It is the laity in fact who, in a secularized environment, live out the commission to dialogue and seek solidarity: in marriage and the family, the neighborhood, the working world and culture, to bring in the message of the church. Ultimately, it is the laity who make the questions of the world topics for the church.”

Prof. Dr. Hans Joachim Meyer, Former President of the ZdK

ZdK on the Web

Social Media

www.facebook.com/ZdK.Bonn
www.twitter.com/zdkonline

Discussion Groups

www.juden-und-christen.de
www.christen-und-muslime.eu

Dialogue Process

www.einen-neuen-aufbruch-wagen.de

Katholikentag and Ecumenical Kirchentag

www.katholikentag.de
www.oekt.de

Foundation Lumen Gentium

www.stiftung-lumen-gentium.de