

**SUMMER SCHOOL ON HUMAN RIGHTS: *“STAND UP FOR WOMEN’S  
AND CHILDREN’S RIGHTS”***

**31 MAY – 4 JUNE 2016, Thessaloniki, Greece**

**The rights of women in practice**

***“How the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD) promotes equality  
between women and men”***

*Senior Church Counsel Katrin Hatzinger*

Ladies and gentleman, dear colleagues,

thank you very much to the organizers for the invitation to address you on the issue of gender equality. Same rights and same dignity for women and men are important issues for the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD). For many years, EKD has been committed to highlighting the reality, experiences and competences of women to the same extent as those of men. Therefore I am very happy about the opportunity to present EKD’s position here at the summer school and to depict how my church is promoting gender equality in Germany.

The term „equality“ is used in my presentation to describe a process of active support for gender equity. The aim is not only formally to

achieve same rights for women and men, but actually to achieve same participatory possibilities and opportunities for development.

Within EKD the spiritual office is open for men and women. In the 1950ies and at the beginning of the 60ies most of EKD regional member churches introduced the ordination of women. For more than 30 years now female and male priests have been formally equated with each other.

Already during World War II female theologians were active in parish service - due to the state of emergency - instead of the priests who had to fight as soldiers. This experience gave later an impulse for a scrutiny of the bible's witness with regard to the equality of the sexes and the ordination of women. In the course of this endeavor it became apparent that according to a protestant understanding there was no difference in theological terms between man and woman. All Christians are in the same way invoked by baptism to be members of the Church and to be priests (Gal 3, 28: „There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.“).

But coming to this conclusion was a long process nevertheless. Only in 1991 the lutheran church of Schaumburg-Lippe (evangelisch-lutherische Kirche Schaumburg Lippe) agreed to the full ordination of women to priesthood. Today within EKD there is a consensus that obedience towards the bible does not mean that single biblical verses

are singled out and taken as evidence ignoring their immediate and their wider context.<sup>1</sup>

Since the 1980ies the Protestant Church is striving to add weight to the formal equality of women and men by realising it in practice. The Church Parliament, the EKD Synod, took in 1989 in Bad Krotzingen far reaching decisions aiming at a renewed community of women and men in the church. The members of the Synod underlined that the equal spiritual vocation of men and women was supposed to be visible in church life.

Furthermore, theological research and ecclesiastical studies from a female perspective should be promoted and the participation of women in leadership positions considerably improved, the Synod concluded. As one step to a more balanced composition of church committees a female proportion of 40 percent within 10 years was to be implemented. As a follow-up to these resolutions of the Synod a “Women study and learning centre” and a “Women Desk” were established in the beginning of the 1990ies. In 1999 the EKD Council, the governing body of EKD, established the Hanna Jursch-award promoting theological research from a female perspective which is awarded since then every second year to a female theologian. Hanna Jursch (1902- 1972) was the first woman holding a chair at a theological faculty at a german university.

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<sup>1</sup> EKD Texte 44: Frauenordination und Bischofsamt. Hannover 1992, p.5.

What were the tasks of the “Women Desk”?

The priority of the “Women Desk” in the EKD Church house in Hannover was to correct unfair structures and to fight openly or latently discriminatory rules. Moreover the desk established and fostered networks reaching out to women desks on the regional church level, protestant women associations and comparable bodies of other churches.

The desk had the task to identify individual and structural discrimination of women and acted against existing inequalities by means of assistance measures for women. In 2005 the EKD Council transformed the “Women Desk” into a “Desk for equal opportunities”. Its task is to promote equal opportunities for both sexes by paying special attention to societally, socially and culturally shaped gender issues. One central aim of the desk is to foster a better work- life balance for fathers and mothers enabling them to be an active parent and at the same time to professionally develop to take over management positions.

In 14 out of the 20 regional churches there are women or equal opportunities or gender desks. 11 have ecclesiastical gender equality laws and regulations.

In April 2014 the aforementioned “Women study and learning centre” was restructured responding to the vision of a gender

equitable church. It had become clear that not only women are suffering from fixed roles and clichés, but also men in the church world oppress some of their charismas in order to respond to traditional male role patterns.

The centre was renamed „Study Center for gender issues in church and theology“. The new centre is supposed to foster the integration of gender perspectives in church action and to apply it for the further development of the church. Officially, the aim of the centre is “to contribute to the creation of a church where the diversity of human abilities appears on all levels notwithstanding gender roles and identities.” The Study centre for gender issues has the task to monitor scientific discourses around the question of gender, to draw conclusions for the church practice and to analyse in which way the church could benefit from the existing research. The priority of the work is not to do own research projects, but the evaluation of scientific research approaches. The work of the centre is targeting the functional and management level in the church.

In the past 30 years EKD has become more diverse, credible and colourful. In comparison to 1989 EKD is managed on all levels from the bishop to the volunteer by women and men. Still, the work on equality of women and men in the Protestant church in Germany turns out to be a process which has not been finalised yet. In the last decades the unequal representation of the sexes could be

attenuated, but not cured completely. To check for statistics on how far the targets agreed upon in Bad Krotzingen have actually been met and which tasks still remain on the agenda the „Atlas on the equality of women and men in the Protestant Church in Germany - A state of play“ (2015) is a helpful tool<sup>2</sup>. The Church Atlas aims at providing at a quick glance information on the regional differences and specificities with regard to equity issues within EKD's member churches on regional level highlighting the existing heterogeneity and discrepancies based on 24 indicators. On the basis of the available data and statistics the Atlas provides for a quick overview on the facts concerning the state of play on gender equality. The format is chosen as a reference to the Gender Equality Atlas published on a regular basis by the Federal Ministry on family affairs, senior citizens, women and youth.

One of the most frequent measures used by the public for the degree of gender equality is the representation of women and men in management positions and decision-making functions.

The EU stipulates the target of achieving “a balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process“. However, “balanced“ is not further defined. The amount of 30 % is frequently given as the minimum standard of women's representation.<sup>3</sup> The

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.ekd.de/download/Gleichstellungsatlas\\_1\\_2\\_16.pdf](https://www.ekd.de/download/Gleichstellungsatlas_1_2_16.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Report by the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee on the implementation of Council recommendation 96/694 of 2nd December 1996 on the balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process COM/2000/0120 final.

target, however, should be full parity of participation. According to the 2nd Gender Equality Atlas for Germany (2013) the threshold of 30 percent has been reached for the number of women in the state parliaments (32 percent), the number of female ministers and senators (34 percent), junior professors (38 percent) and the second management tier in private industry (38 percent). In all other areas of decision making presented in this category, the percentage of women is lower on average, often considerably so.

Let's take a closer look on the Protestant Church in Germany again:

The comparative view on management positions and decision-making functions in the Protestant Church in Germany reveals that the amount of men increases with every structural level while the amount of women decreases. To put in other words: the higher the distance to the parish level the lower the proportion of women. In Germany protestant parish life takes place in 15 000 parishes. Traditionally in Germany women are more church bound than men. 1992 Maria Jepsen was elected as the first women bishop in Hamburg by the Nordelbische evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche. Nowadays you will find in the 20 regional churches in Germany two female bishops (proportion of women: 10 percent). The EKD Synod, the Church Parliament and the EKD Council consisting of 15 members have a proportion of women of 46/47percent. The president of the Synod is a women, Dr. Schwaetzer. In comparison the amount of

women in the German Parliament, the Bundestag, is 38 percent (2014) and out of the 16 heads of Bundesländer three are women.

When we look at the proportion of female theologians in active church service it is at 35 percent. Compared to that the proportion of women is rather low on the middle management tier (“mittlere Leitungsebene”). So, in 2013 only 21 percent of the deaneries were run by women.

When evaluating the progress over the years it is also necessary to consider that the church and its welfare organisation “Diakonie Deutschland” are employers of women mainly. In figures that reads: 75 percent of the church employees and 80 percent of the diaconical employees are women. On federal average women only represent 46 percent of employees in Germany.

Also the volunteering in church and diaconia is female in majority. 69 percent of those volunteering in the Church and 84 percent of those active in the volunteer work of the church’s welfare organisation are women. Interestingly according to the volunteering survey of the German government of 2016 volunteering is slightly more common among men (45,7 percent) than among women (41,5 percent).<sup>4</sup>

Given the huge proportion of women in professional and volunteer work within the church it could be expected that they were more

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.bmfsfj.de/BMFSFJ/freiwilliges-engagement.did=224988.html>



represented in management and decision-making positions. But the high profile of women is still not reflected on the top and middle management level.

What can be done?

Strict guidelines alone are not enough in order to sustainably improve the representation of women in management and decision-making positions. The EKD regional churches report with regard to the second management tier that very often potential female candidates are not willing to take over management positions. Therefore it is necessary to address the organisational culture. The question is which values, aims, norms and attitudes the organisation's culture implies and in how far this culture is hindering women to take over leading positions. Therefore the EKD Synod has asked to carry out a study analysing these cultures and profiles for the second management tier. The Fraunhofer Institute and the EKD "Study Centre on gender issues in church and theology" will commission the study in five regional churches. The results will show where to find further room for action and improvement in order to allow men and women equally to take over management jobs.

So, I hope my presentation gave a rough overview about the developments within EKD on gender equality over the past decades.

Allow me a little outlook at the end: Next year we will commemorate 500 years of protestant reformation in Europe. One of the main

findings of reformers like Martin Luther and others was that the scripture is our canon and that as humans we are only justified by God alone notwithstanding our status, performance or gender. In this context EKD will renew the reflections on how to be a church embracing the talents and charismas of women and men, but will also tackle the question: how do we witness in our ecumenical relations on the question of the ordination of women and share our experiences? How do we position ourselves when facing discriminatory practices in church and society and how do we cherish the life and faith experiences of women and men?

Still many questions to reflect and to act upon which are hopefully also an inspiration for you.

Thank you for your attention.