

Gemeindereferent_innen-Studie

Spotlights on an often underestimated profession



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Katholische Hochschule
für Sozialwesen Berlin

Dear readers,

„Liquid jobs in a liquid church“ was the motto under which a group of researchers from six Catholic Universities of Applied Sciences, commissioned by their Rectors' Conferences, set out to analyse the professional profile of parish workers. At the centre of their interest was the question of how the competences and potentials of this professional group could be used for the necessary and ongoing processes of transformation and innovation in the church and in pastoral work.

The keyword „liquid“ („fluid“, „mobile“) sums up these structural and content-related framework conditions and challenges: The professional group of parish workers is directly involved in the current ecclesiastical transformation and disestablishment movements, its role and task profiles have been strongly questioned for some time, future contours are being discussed, but remain blurred for the time being. The concepts of life and activities in pastoral and social spaces are

subject to constant change, and all pastoral professions are existentially confronted with questions of identity and relevance. In this scenario, a „liquid church“ can only be realised through „liquid jobs“. But what does this mean in concrete terms for the professional image of the exemplary occupational group of parish workers, and what role can they play in the universally expected „change“ of the church?

The overall aim was to collect a broad spectrum of assessments of, among other things, the training and continuing education concepts, the conditions on the ground, the understanding of the church and of pastoral care, the satisfactory and dissatisfactory aspects of the professional group and, last but not least, the assessment of one's own professional understanding as a basis for change processes in the church. The results of the various empirical research stages were continuously discussed and scrutinised by the project group, theologially and sociologically interpreted and prepared for publication and further use.

As a result of the various approaches taken by the project group, the evaluation of the extensive empirical data base has led to theological impulses and options for action which can be helpful, for example, in the development of study programmes at Catholic Universities of Applied Sciences, in the organisational and development structures of pastoral professions in the ordinariates of the (arch)dioceses, in the self-evaluation and external evaluation of the professional group and, last but not least, in church transformation processes. With the publication of the project results, the path described at the beginning is by no means complete - on the contrary: the extensive results of the surveys and the further reflections are intended to invite to joint discussions and further reflection.

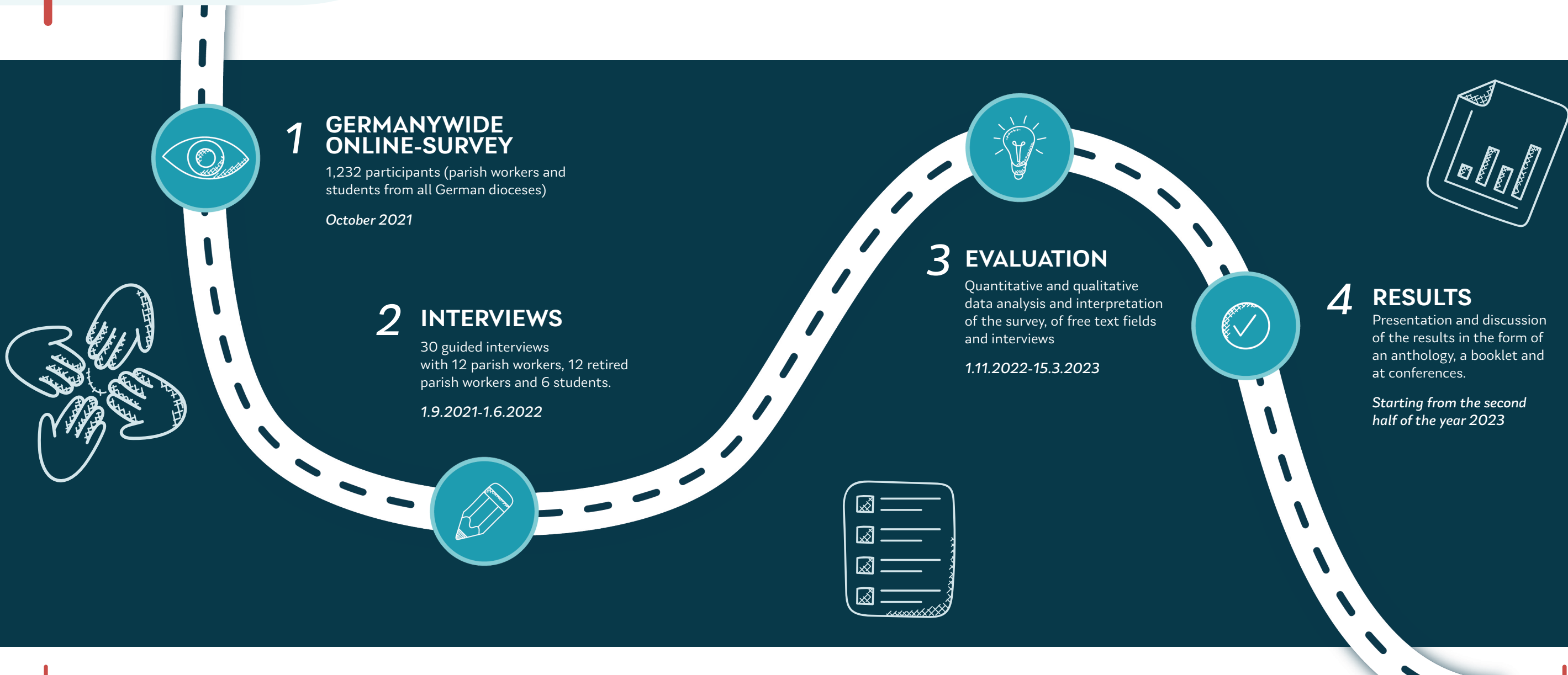
The purpose of this brochure is to encourage the reader to discuss and share the results of the project in their own settings and to make use of the content and structure of the study. We look forward to receiving feedback, are available for discussions and

will certainly continue to monitor the profiling of the parish assistant profession and its far-reaching possibilities for influencing transformation and innovation processes in the church.

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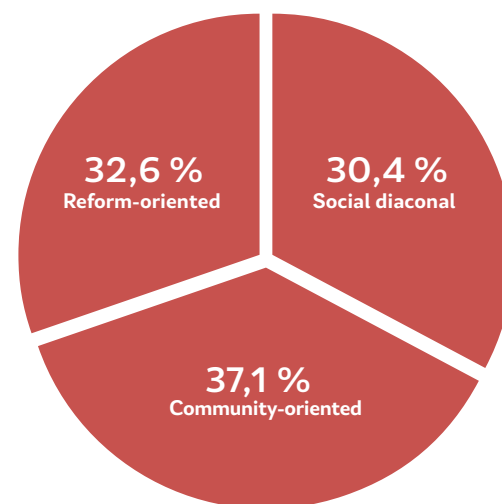
«If you want a liquid church, you need ecclesial professions that understand themselves as liquid jobs and act accordingly.»

*Ulrich Feeser-Lichterfeld
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Parish workers bring different understandings of church and ministry into their profession

We asked parish workers and students what understanding of church and pastoral ministry underlies their professional work. For a total of 27 aspects, respondents were able to indicate the extent to which the aspect shapes their work or will shape it in the future. This shows that parish workers bring very different understandings of church and pastoral ministry to their work. Using statistical factor analysis, these can be grouped into three types, which we call social-diaconal, community-oriented and reform-oriented.



This is not to say, for example, that congregationally oriented parish workers are not interested in reform or that socially diaconal parish workers are not interested in congregational work. The aspects described below, in their combinations, are thus 'only' important in a particular way for each of the presented types.

«For many parish workers, spirituality is an important motivation for their profession. The spectrum of approaches is colourful. Whether it is more private, church-related or diaconal is worth discussing.»

Katharina Karl
KU

Social diaconal parish workers

They see it as a central task of their pastoral work to combat structural conditions of poverty and injustice. The concerns, worries and needs of the people are their central starting point. Accordingly, the church should be present in people's immediate social environments, in the many different places where people's life issues can be experienced in their unique ways. In addition, the church has to be responsive to needs, which needs structures that enable all Christians to meaningfully participate and share responsibility. The church can also learn from people for whom religion is not of importance.



Community-oriented parish workers

They see the living and active congregation as the centre of their pastoral activity, for which the Sunday Eucharist is above all constitutive. They want above all to gather and support convinced believers, to encourage their commitment and to give them a sense of God's closeness. Accordingly, they believe that pastoral work benefits from the fact that the place of residence and the place of ministry of pastoral workers are close to each other. They see the loss of meaning of faith and church as a central challenge of their pastoral work.



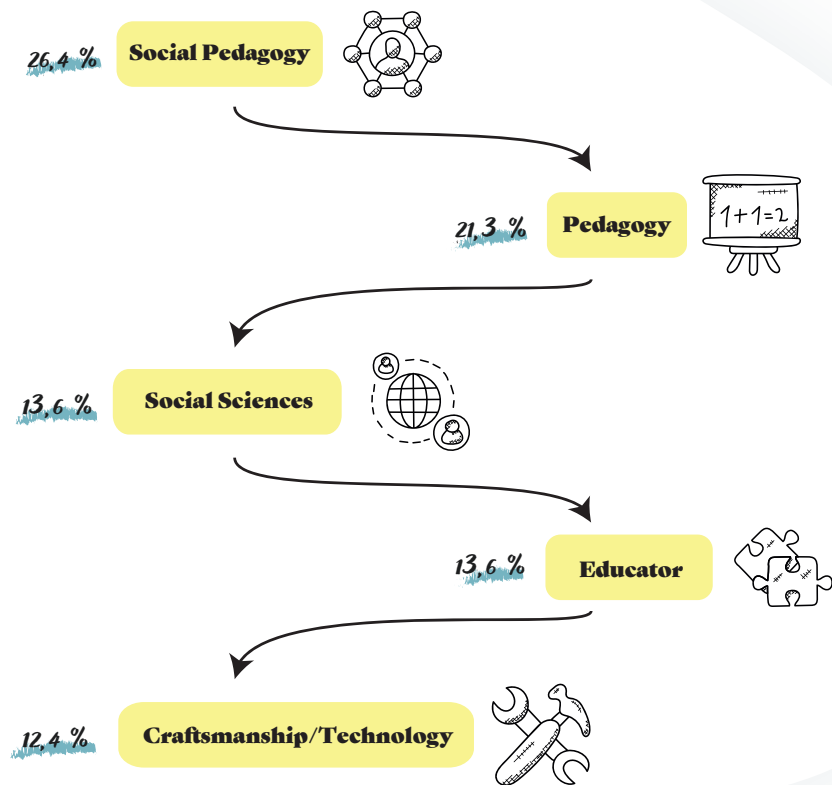
Reform-oriented parish workers

They believe that pastoral ministry thrives on the courage to experiment: It needs new places and formats beyond the classical parish ministry, as well as new ways of communicating the gospel in a contemporary way. Reform-oriented pastoral workers are less likely than the other two types to have additional qualifications and a professional interest in their vocation. They rate the professional preparation provided by their studies and the leadership competence of their superiors less positively and are less likely to want to work in a diaconal capacity.



Parish workers bring a wide range of skills to their work

58% of parish workers have a second degree and/or training



«Chaos and design skills can be trained and developed. A chaos-affine environment supports this by making the opportunities in chaos visible, fostering passions and creativity, and encouraging people to develop their own style.»

Clarissa Vilain
KH Mainz



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Parish workers emphasize their closeness to the people

For them, the following aspects are important in their profession:

To work on eye-level with local people

To receive recognition and appreciation from superiors

Working well in a team

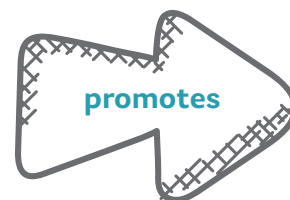
Carrying out meaningful activities

To be self-actualised

„The ability to reflect the faith in the context of everyday life and to be close to a wide variety of people.“ (B64, F, 58)

„The closeness to the people, because the distance to the consecrated persons has disappeared, makes it possible for us to have an open ear for the people.“ (B353, F, 53)

„Parish workers can combine theory and practice and are often closer to the people in their theological expression than graduate theologians and priests.“ (B255, F, 55)



Stronger professional commitment

Almost 2/3 would choose the same profession again

97,5%
chose the profession primarily because they wanted to help people.

«Parish workers know the problems of the people, their needs and what is needed.»

*Joachim Burkard
KSH München*

The respondents' job satisfaction was measured using the Short Form Questionnaire on General and Aspects of Job Satisfaction (KAFA).

A quantitative content analysis shows that satisfaction and stress are primarily related to working conditions. Overall job satisfaction has by far the greatest influence on job retention.



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Parish workers would like to have different job profiles

We asked respondents what they think characterises the profession today - and what they would like it to be like in the future. The results show facets of the profession that are more desirable than others and, in some cases, significant differences between aspiration and reality. With the help of a factor analysis we were able to identify four different types, which differ mainly in their understanding of church and pastoral work and in their age.

1. Chaplain

- a clear professional profile
- a clear relationship with other pastoral professions
- work as a spiritual adviser (Seelsorger)

2. Change-agent_in

- provide irritation and innovation
- score points with theological competence
- give impulses for the further development of the church
- bear responsibility in leadership positions

3. All-rounder

- be an all-rounder
- stand for a community-centred church
- work as a subordinate worker

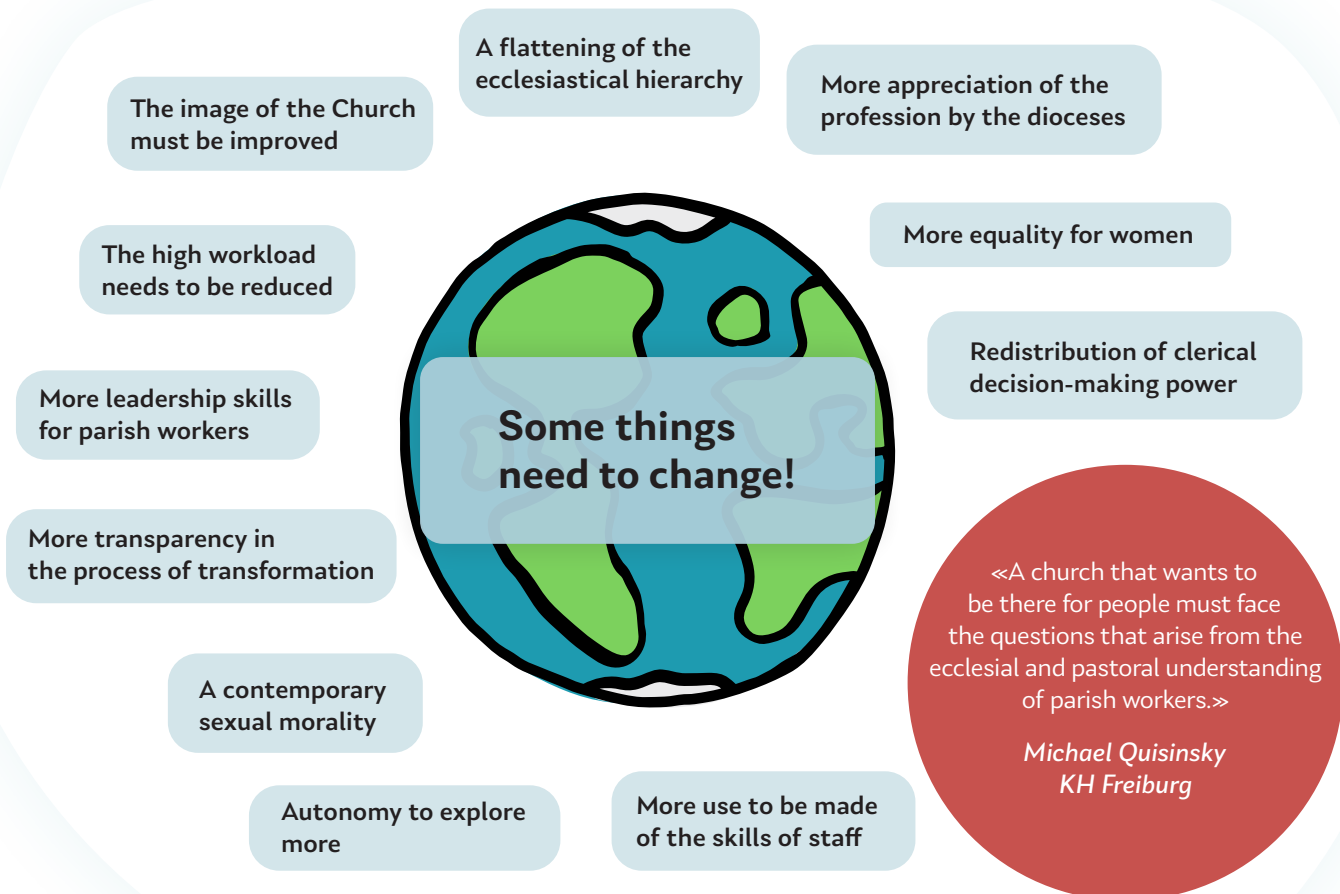
4. Translator

- support volunteers in discovering their charism
- translate faith issues into the language of the people
- conceive actions from the addressee's point of view

What do pastoral workers want for their profession in the future?



Parish workers aim to shape church and pastoral care



I talk about this all the time, what a great opportunity I have to be a different church with local people, to try out different church services... There are things to be moved. Yes, we can do things that give local people the opportunity to act in a self-determined way.

(Rolf)

Because I think we are more courageous in designing our church services. Also freer.

(Monika)

Parish workers can and should participate in shaping ...

I believe that we have something to contribute, how we assess and perceive the people and the situation in the community, and that this should be listened to.

(Karin)

And at the same time, I have to say that our profession is really good at winning people over or keeping them interested or, let's say, conveying a positive image of the church.

(Petra)

The anthology for the study will be available as
print and ebook from 1.11.2023



ISBN: 978-3-429-05925-5

Contents of the anthology

The book contains in-depth contributions on professional commitment, transformation, the interconnection of pastoral and social work, change potentials, human closeness, ecclesiology, pneumatology, spirituality, study, and further education.

Further information available at: www.gr-studie.de

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