

Towards intercultural pastoral care

Impulses for migrant pastoral care
in Switzerland



SCHWEIZER BISCHOFSKONFERENZ
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Towards intercultural pastoral care

In today's culturally diverse world, we need places that offer people with different backgrounds a spiritual and cultural home. In moving towards intercultural pastoral care – which includes both stronger ties and respectful coexistence – the Catholic Church in Switzerland sees a new opportunity to work as a community to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

With the development of their general strategy for migrant pastoral care in Switzerland "Towards intercultural pastoral care", the Swiss Bishops' Conference and the Roman-Catholic Central Conference of Switzerland have laid the cornerstone for constructively shaping this complex process.

In this brochure, key aspects of the general strategy are highlighted and points of reference as well as recommended courses of action are given.

Starting point and challenges

The Catholic Church in Switzerland is facing several challenges, and new approaches are needed to deal with issues such as the rising numbers of people leaving the Church, the trend towards secularisation in parts of society, and the impact of migration on Switzerland. The Catholic Church in Switzerland endeavours to meet people and address their life and spiritual needs where they actually live and practise their faith, be it in parishes or missions where the faithful worship in their mother tongue. (In the following, we speak of language communities and pastoral care in the language communities.)

Some 40% of all Catholics in Switzerland have a migration background. This diversity gives rise to opportunities for mutual benefit, as cultivating stronger ties between local pastoral care and the language communities can help us to discover new aspects of being Christian.

**Some 40%
of Catholics
have a
migration
background**

Cultural
diversity as
an enriching
experience

Structural adjustments needed for a diverse church community

The percentage of church members with a migration background varies greatly from region to region. The need for local pastoral care is also different, and many people of faith living in Switzerland regardless of their migration background have complex origins and cultural affiliations. As such, it is impossible to draw clear boundaries between local pastoral care and migrant pastoral care.

In parishes and larger pastoral regions, people with diverse cultural backgrounds work together to create a vibrant church life. In contemporary pastoral care, little interaction between language communities and local parishes are no longer acceptable. Moreover, a lack of communication can also lead to difficulties when ensuring an equitable distribution of church resources. Migrant worshippers make a significant contribution to financing church life in Switzerland. They are therefore entitled to have their pastoral needs taken seriously and considered when funds are disbursed. Church members with a migration background are equal members.

To transition from the previous model that focused on coexistence towards building stronger ties between communities, structural adjustments are necessary. In addition, awareness must be raised both in local pastoral care and pastoral care with the language communities; further training in interculturality for church staff as well as financial support are also needed. However: there is no nationwide recipe for success. There are only supportive measures that foster stronger ties, and these must be developed locally.

**Church
members with
a migration
background
have equal
rights and
deserve
equal respect**

Key statements on intercultural pastoral care

Immigration and increasing mobility have changed our world, Switzerland included, and with it the Catholic Church. The language communities that have arisen represent an opportunity to make better use of cultural diversity and to acknowledge its value by increasingly cultivating ties across language and cultural boundaries. For this reason, the Catholic Church in Switzerland has decided to work towards intercultural pastoral care; a general strategy for migrant pastoral care has been drafted to realise this aim. The strategy includes numerous considerations, principles, measures and recommendations, which are summarised in the following key statements:

1. The Catholic Church assists a very diverse group of people in their search for a spiritual and cultural home.
2. Pastoral care in the various language communities play a major role in this work.
3. Migration and cultural diversity pose complex challenges to the Church, especially to pastoral carers and state-church authorities, as they are required to accommodate wide-ranging needs with limited resources.
4. All members of the one, yet also diverse, church community are entitled to have their specific customs and their differing needs taken into account.
5. Guiding principles for intercultural pastoral care include stronger ties and a conscious, respectful coexistence among communities.

Goals and guiding principles of the general strategy

The general strategy for migrant pastoral care is an instrument to promote greater collaboration between local parishes and pastoral care in the language communities. In addition, there is a need for organisational adjustments that can be set in motion by the general strategy. The aim is to support the development of closer organisational ties among the language communities and with local pastoral care.

**“We”
and “us”
as the
new reality in
the Catholic
Church**

Stronger ties and respectful coexistence

The strategy is designed to foster stronger ties and a conscious, respectful coexistence among communities.

The following basic assumptions have been formulated for the general strategy for migrant pastoral care:

- Far from being a temporary phenomenon, migration has a lasting impact on our society. As such, the understanding of church unity as a “community in diversity” gains new meaning.
- In life at the local parishes as well as in the language communities, more attention must be paid to strengthening intercultural and cross-linguistic ties.
- Intercultural pastoral strategies are increasingly supported.
- Meeting one another as equals is the basis for stronger ties and respectful coexistence among the communities. We are interested in our fellow Christians and in their cultural and spiritual heritage.
- Because the boundaries between pastoral care and migrant pastoral care are becoming more fluid, raising awareness for linguistic and cultural diversity is a cross-sectional task. Migrant pastoral care is therefore an aspect in the work of all those who bear responsibility in the Church.

Implementation of the general strategy

Implementing the strategy for migrant pastoral care “Towards intercultural pastoral care” takes place at different organisational levels. To achieve success in promoting stronger ties and respectful coexistence, responsible persons at all levels must be addressed. A detailed overview of the individual measures and recommendations for each organisational level are found in the general strategy for migrant pastoral care in Switzerland (chapter 4).

Swiss-wide, diocese and state-church levels

The overall aim of the strategy for migrant pastoral care is to promote stronger ties as well as a respectful coexistence between communities. Another aspect concerns the transfer of what have previously been national pastoral and administrative tasks from the language communities to the dioceses and state-church entities. Tasks at the Swiss national level will remain the pastoral responsibility of the Swiss Bishops’ Conference. There, the *migratio* office supports and advises the dioceses and cantonal church organisations in migration and intercultural issues. The office raises awareness for developments in migrant pastoral care through its basic work, further training programmes and by providing impulses for pastoral care that is sensitive to migrants; in addition, *migratio* is responsible for pastoral care with a nationwide reach.

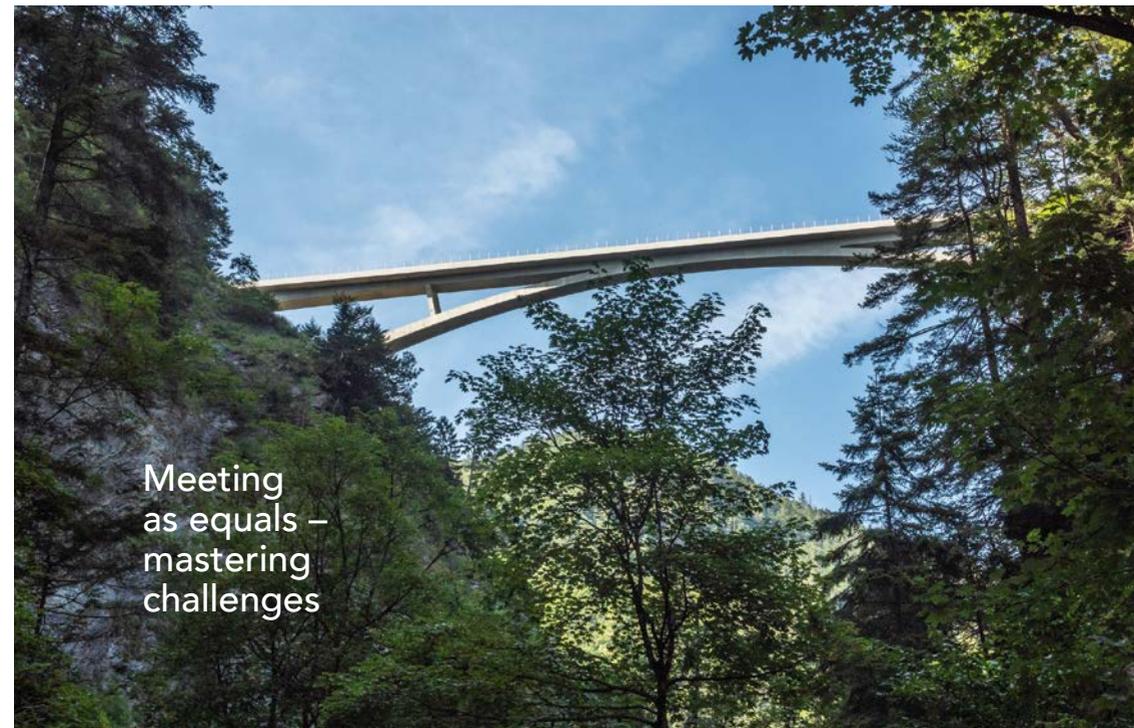
At the level of the dioceses, leadership takes decisions on migrant pastoral care. With regard to migrant pastoral care, the dioceses are guided by the following principles:

- Each bishop bears responsibility for all Catholics. Pastoral care for migrants is part of general pastoral care.
- Each bishop names a person responsible for issues related to migrant pastoral care.
- Pastoral carers in the language communities are integrated into a diocese’s pastoral/human resources management. The dioceses’ planning for pastoral care and human resources favour strategies and assignments that promote intercultural and cross-linguistic ties.

The state-church entity is the most important level for securing financing for migrant pastoral care. The following principles serve to guide migrant pastoral care at this level:

- Parishes and state-church entities include all Catholics living in their territory.
- The participation of members of language communities in the parishes/cantonal church bodies is encouraged.
- The state-church entities are responsible for ensuring that pastoral care in the individual language communities are adequately equipped and that funds are fairly distributed across the different language communities. The state-church authorities understand that all communities, regardless of heritage, participate in financing church life.

Cultivating mutual understanding of each other’s customs



Meeting as equals – mastering challenges

Local level

Local parishes and language communities are confronted with the question of what it means to be one Church. This raises further questions about collaboration among pastoral carers and communal church life. Being one Church requires that an understanding of the “other’s” culture is cultivated at the local level, that church members are allowed to remain “for each other yet different”. For this, meeting as equals is key.

It is important to raise awareness that we all, whether in a local parish or a language community, wish to share our faith practices. Such experiences of deeper ties have already been made in various places, and we must build on them – by worshipping together, for instance. Strengthening ties can also be realised in the form of liturgical celebrations and diaconal activities. Moreover, the sacraments of Baptism, Reconciliation, the Eucharist and Confirmation create spaces where belonging to the wider religious community can be lived. Here, linguistic and cultural diversity must be taken into account by adequately including pastoral carers from individual language communities.

Guiding principles for intercultural pastoral care

The following principles have been formulated with the aim of making the requirements for stronger ties and respectful coexistence both possible and tangible:

- Diversity places higher demands on a religious community and on pastoral carers. This condition must be given due consideration when making organisational, financial and staff-related decisions.
- Wherever pastoral care has an intercultural dimension, one person on the pastoral care team is given the role of bridge-builder.
- Local parishes and language communities have equal access to church infrastructure.

- Education and further training programmes are created for people active in pastoral care.
- Pastoral carers new to Switzerland are familiarised with life in Switzerland and the local culture through educational programmes.
- Where the conditions are right, individuals are actively encouraged to work simultaneously in pastoral care for both the language communities and the parishes.

Recommended actions

The following recommendations have been formulated in the interest of successfully transferring migrant pastoral care from the national level to cantons and dioceses; they also serve to promote stronger ties and a conscious, respectful coexistence among the communities within a parish:

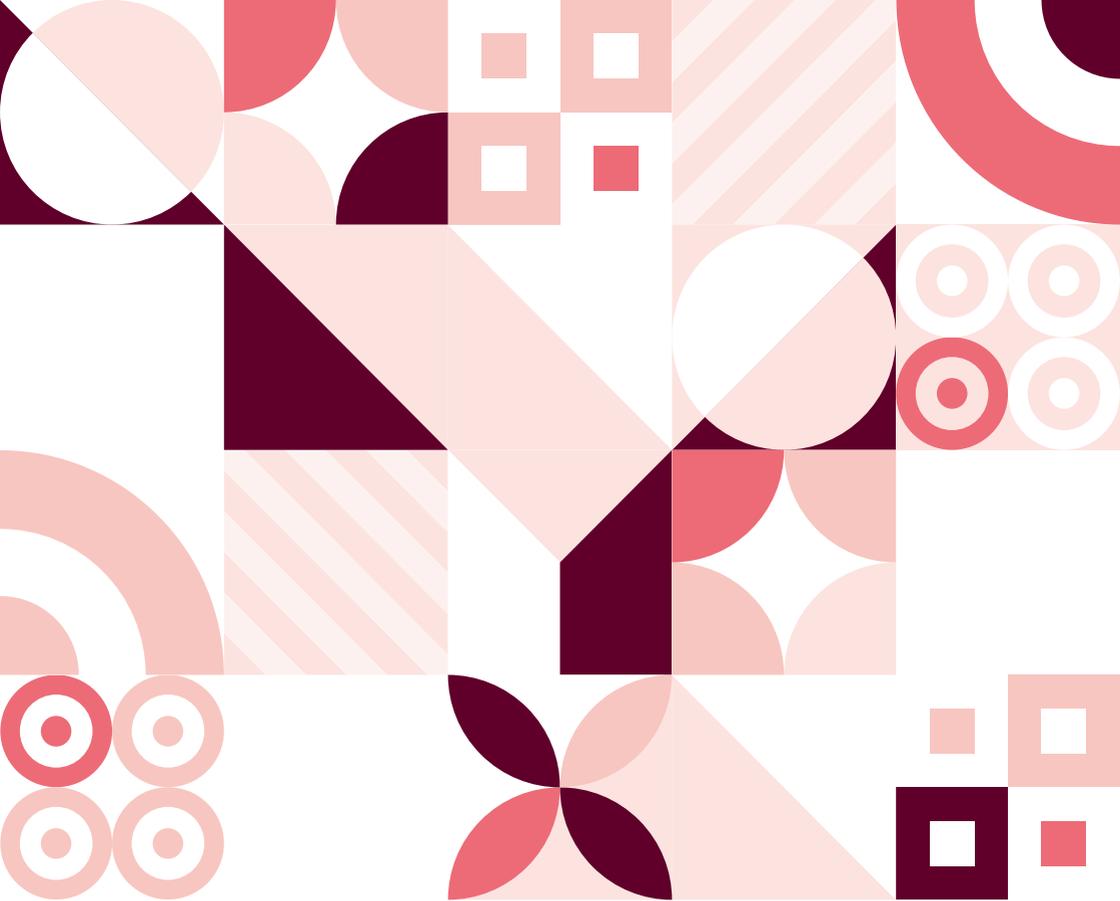
- Designate a team or an individual to be responsible for intercultural pastoral care and the development of intercultural competences.
- Support intercultural pastoral competences through education and further training programmes.
- Support the involvement and commitment of members of the language communities in church authorities and entities.

Download strategy or order print version free of charge

The general strategy for migrant pastoral care in Switzerland “Towards intercultural pastoral care” is available at www.migrato.ch in German, French and Italian. Additional information in other languages is also available on the website. They can be obtained free of charge at:

migratio Office of the Swiss Bishops’ Conference
for migrant pastoral care and for people in transit.
Alpengasse 6, 1700 Freiburg im Üechtland, info@migratio.ch





www.migratio.ch
www.bischoefe.ch
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