

GERMANY PROVINCE

Official Language: **German**

Vision Statement

Conscious of the call of Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, we proclaim the message of the Kingdom of God "in season or out of season" (2 Tim 2:4.2).

Mission Statement

We take part in the mission of God in an environment characterized by globalization, growing social conflicts and de-Christianization. We reach out to people in prophetic dialogue, especially those who have no faith community, those in search of meaning and faith, and those disaffiliated from the Church. We dialogue with the marginalized poor, with people of different cultures and faith traditions, and with those espousing secular ideologies.

We live by the mission charism of our founder in cooperation with the local Church, with lay people committed to the missionary mandate of the Church, and with all who champion the dignity of the human person and promote justice, peace and integrity of creation.

1. Societal Setting

Germany has the largest population of any country in Western Europe, standing at 81.3 mil-



lion. This includes some 18.6 million immigrants. The religious affiliation of the population is dominated by Christians at 58.3% (Catholics represent 28.5% and Protestants 26.5 %); Muslims now are some 5.5% of Germany's population.

Germany also has the largest economy in Western Europe. Despite its long history, the nation of Germany is one of the newest in Europe. Until being unified under the leadership of Prussia in 1871, the area we now call Germany was a patch work of many small kingdoms, duchies and principalities. That is one reason that even today, Germans tend to take their identity more

from their local region, dialect and traditions and less from any sense of national patriotism. Present-day Germany was formed by the (re)-unification of Eastern and Western Germany in 1991. As a consequence of the Second World War, Germany had been divided and the former Federal Republic (BRD) and the former Democratic Republic (DDR) became the new Germany.

Along with the challenges of (re)-unification, the building of a multicultural society has become a task. Waves of foreign immigration to Germany began in the 1960s. After migration from the former eastern German territories (today Poland, Russia, etc.) to Western Germany after the Second World War and after the wave of "Gastarbeiter" (guest workers), the present worldwide migration has increased the "foreign" population in Germany. In 2016, the population with a migrant background reached a new record high for the fifth time in a row. The Federal Statistical Office (*Destatis*) reported that roughly 18.6 million people in Germany had an immigrant background in 2016, 20.3 percent of the population. This showed an annual rise of 8.5%, the highest increase since recording began in 2005.

With regard to demographic developments, there are three clear trends in Germany: a low birth rate, rising life expectancy, and an aging society. With 1.4 million new-born babies, Germany registered its highest birth rate in 1964; since then the country has slowed down as far as births are concerned (in 2014 there were 715,000 births). At the same time life expectancy is rising, with an

average for men of 77 years and for women 82 years. It is an aging population.

2. Ecclesial Setting

One third of the German population does not belong to any religion or denomination. In eastern Germany and in the big cities, people who do not claim any religious affiliation already constitute the majority of the population. A little less than a third of the people are Roman Catholic or Protestant Christians. The third largest religion is Islam, about 5.5% of the population, due to the strong influx of Muslim refugees. The Jewish population is 0.2%.

The number of priests working in pastoral care is decreasing every year. In the coming years many priests will retire, and there are few local vocations. Despite the increased number of foreign priests, not all positions can be filled again. Because of this development, the past pastoral and parish structures in Germany have changed dramatically in recent years. The dioceses reduce the number of parishes steadily, and thus the number of Eucharistic celebrations offered is also greatly reduced.

The number of people leaving the Church continues to rise, partly due to sexual abuse and financial scandals. The support of the Church's ministries by the state is jeopardized, since the system of the Church tax is being increasingly questioned and the Church's assets are publicly discussed. As income will decrease substantially in the next few years, the dioceses have been analyzing their financial situations. Dioceses are

implementing drastic measures by reducing staff positions and selling properties.

In 2014 there were 4,246 religious men in Germany, of which 55% were older than 65 years. The total number of members in clerical communities has been reduced by more than half in the past 30 years. This process, which is much more dramatic in the female orders, will continue in the coming years. Traditional tasks in which religious were active are becoming less important and provinces are being merged. The annual meeting of the German Bishops that took place in spring 2005 for the first time in 25 years dealt with the life and mission of the Institutes of Consecrated Life, during a study day. This was followed by a two-year joint exploration of the importance of religious life for the local Church. One of the results of this joint study of the Bishops and religious orders appeared in 2007, in a document of the Bishops entitled "To serve the Gospel together: the Communities of Consecrated Life in the Church". Unfortunately, in the process of restructuring the German dioceses, religious congregations are often no longer seen as an important factor.

In the years 2010-2012 the sexual abuse of minors scandal hit the Catholic Church heavily. Only at the end of 2013 was a neutral clearing house set up by the state, whereby victims can claim compensation of up to EUR 10,000. In December 2013, the Catholic Church signed an "agreement on the implementation of round-table meetings on sexual child abuse", by which it accepted the state procedure without any conditions.

3. Intercultural Mission – *Ad Extra*

IN ACTIVE MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005*
Parish	22	8.2	16.0	23.5
Education	15	5.6	0.6	0.9
Schools	0	-		
Universities	15	-		
Formation/ SVD Vocation	4	1.5	1.6	3.8
Administration/ Support	25	9.3	16.0	28.1
Other Apostolates	23	8.6	20.4	9.1
JPIC	0	-		
Bible	0	-		
Communication	0	-		
Mission Animation	1	-		
Others	22	-		

Those in Final Vows

NOT IN MINISTRY	Personnel	2018 (%)	2012 (%)	2005*
Studies/ Orientation	11	4.1	10.4	4.3
Retired/Sick	163	60.5	35.0	29.7
Others	6	2.2	0	0.6

* Based on 2005 Yellow Book data of former North and South German provinces.

** This includes all confreres over the age of 75, even though some are still active. The total of those in final vows is 269, of whom 163 are 75 or older.

Our mission statement strongly emphasizes prophetic dialogue with "people who belong to different cultures and follow different faith traditions or secular ideologies". Our activities in the "intellectual apostolate" are mainly oriented towards this. We are working in a good number of parishes and we are continuously challenged to look at our charism and specific contribution as SVD. Some started to look for new ways, but often we are doing the work of diocesan priests in parishes.

Characteristic Dimensions

Biblical Apostolate: Different confreres are involved in the biblical apostolate, especially in the parish apostolate. Together with an SSpS, two continue to offer courses with new approaches to understand the Word of God in the context of everyday life. One confrere started a new pastoral ministry in a context where new evangelization is demanded, based on a pastoral approach in which the biblical word is re-told to relate with the life-stories of people.

Mission Animation: An important priority for our province is caring for the needs of the global SVD through the provision of financial resources. The Mission Procure plays a central role here and we have re-organized the Mission Procure and assigned a new leadership. The Mission Secretary is responsible for mission animation in the province. There is a small team assisting him in this field and with the task to animate and support other confreres to get involved in mission animation. *Steyl Medien* and its produc-

tion of the TV magazine *Grenzenlos* is actively involved in mission animation. The 50th issue of *Grenzenlos* was released and each part is presenting aspects of SVD mission today.

JPIC: The SVD, in accordance with our priorities, is committed to refugees and has already provided housing in several of our own houses. In many of our parishes, we have also begun initiatives to help refugees. In the face of the great challenge of integrating these many new neighbors, the SVDs could play an important role with their intercultural competence. But there has been little movement within the province with regard to the challenges of the refugee crisis. Even the "JPIC Commission" has not said or done much about the problem of refugees. As recommended by the General Visitation of 2014, one confrere at present is finishing a course on work with migrants.

Communication: Since the Founder's time the German SVD has been publishing some journals for families and children (*Stadt Gottes, Weite Welt*, etc). In spite of declining numbers this apostolate continues with a broad lay participation ("Förderer"). In addition we are present on the internet with different websites as well as involved in other media (*Steyl Medien*). All these are parts of our mission to communicate the Christian message in our time.

Priorities among Congregational Directions

After the 2012 General Chapter, the province chose three priorities for its mission *ad extra*.

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These priorities do not in themselves lead to a new orientation of our work, but only unfold what is already meant by the "fourfold prophetic dialogue".

Primary and New Evangelization is another name for what is expressed in our mission statement: "We encounter in the prophetic dialogue, in particular, people who are not part of a faith community, that are in search of meaning and faith and those disaffiliated from the Church."

Migration and Social Justice /Poverty Eradication can also be found in our mission statement: "We dialogue with the marginalized poor, with people of different cultures and faith traditions, and with those espousing secular ideologies."

Our main mission *ad gentes* (first evangelization) is extended by the *inter gentes* (intercultural and interreligious dialogue, intercultural life within the SVD), with the priority of "putting the last first" (*Migration and Social Justice / Poverty Eradication*).

The concern for migrants and refugees is theoretically accepted as a priority by most of the confreres, and it is also an excellent response to the "signs of the times". We must, however, be honest that we have not dealt with this area as a priority in terms of human resources and finances. While we have twelve part-time or full-time workers caring for migrants, there is still no structured SVD work in this area. There are a number of confreres who are involved pasto-

rally with groups of migrants from their own countries in various ways.

What has not yet been achieved is our first and most important priority: "primary and new evangelization". Of course one can say that all pastoral work and our scientific activities are also geared towards this. But we still

have to exert special effort to contribute something unique in these fields in our contexts. As a religious missionary congregation, which has called young confreres for the "mission in Europe," we should at least try to go beyond the framework of ecclesiastical structures and explore new ways of preaching in post-Christian society. When Pope John Paul II first used the concept of "new evangelization" in 1983, he characterized it in the following way: "New in its zeal, in its methods and in its expression." Twenty-five years after the "Roscommon Consensus", particular attention should be given to primary and new evangelization.

Our main mission *ad gentes* is extended by the *inter gentes*

Collaboration with SSpS and Others

In Steyl, with the presence of all three congregations of the *Arnoldus Family*, there is close collaboration with one another. The same is true in Berlin, especially among SVD and SSpSAP. In Munich one SSpS is living together with SVD confreres for biblical and retreat apostolates. On the level of the province there is regular communication. In different places we are collaborating also with other congregations, depending on si-

tuations and possibilities. But there are no real inter-congregational projects.

SVD Lay Association

A good number of lay people are supporting us in our mission. On January 15, 2017, the Feast of Arnold Janssen, six women and two men bound themselves to the Society of the Divine Word in their capacity as lay associates. In a solemn Eucharistic celebration at St. Michael mission house in Steyl, they made the promise to take the spiritual orientation for their life from our religious congregation.

4. Intercultural Life – *Ad Intra*

MEMBERSHIP	2018	2012	2005*
Clerics	191	222	239
Brothers (final vows)	71	84	107
Brothers (temporal vows)	0	3	1
Scholastics	22	16	33
Novices	1	1	3
Total	285	326	383

AGE AND COUNTRY	2018	2012	2005*
Average age	67.5	67.4	64.1
Nationalities	22	19	

* Based on 2005 Yellow Book data of former North and South German provinces.

Spirituality: The bigger communities (Steyl, St. Wendel, St. Augustin) still follow a common schedule for common prayer and celebration of the holy Mass. In addition, there are special prayer services, recollections, and retreats with a rather good participation. Confreres who live in smaller, often parish-based communities, normally meet for common prayer once a day. For other prayers and liturgical celebrations, confreres follow different schedules or the programs of parishes, etc. Not only individual, but even common spiritual practices are understood as the basis and foundation of our religious-missionary life. They are increasingly pluralistic, which is an enrichment for the spiritual life of the province.

Community Life: There are bigger and small communities in the province. Some confreres even live alone in parishes and are members of districts. As different as the individual confreres are, community life varies. All are aware of the importance of community, but this does not mean for all that they need to be present physically at all community events. There are special challenges for new missionaries in the province. Communities are also more and more open for others, so we can distinguish community life *ad intra* (among SVD's) and *ad extra* (also with others, e.g. lay partners and friends, collaborators). Improving intercultural community life, as well as developing intercultural spirituality, remains as a challenge.

Leadership: Leadership in the province is increasingly intercultural, and consideration of

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nationality in the choice of leaders is not that important anymore. We try to establish intercultural leadership teams, who try to involve members of the province / community in decision making processes as much as possible. We have to continue to prepare confreres for leadership positions, although it's increasingly difficult to find those available for it.

Finance: Financial issues are a challenge – both the self-reliance of the province as well as fund-raising for mission work *ad extra*. Because we do not have specialized confreres anymore, we have to employ more and more procurators. It is also difficult to motivate young confreres to specialize in issues related to finances. In addition to the fundraising work of the mission office, it should be noted that the care of our founding place of Steyl, and the birthplace of our founder, Goch, are left to our province.

Formation: The intercultural formation program works well, and a good number of those who have been assigned to the German province these past 20 years finished their formation here. There are few local candidates; at present there is one novice (from Austria). Two postulants will start their novitiate in January 2018 (one from Romania, one from Germany). We share the same fate with many religious congregations and dioceses in Germany (and even Europe) – there are few vocations to religious and priestly life. We continue vocation promotion, we try to adapt formation programs to present needs and present SVD demands, and we plan to invite formandi from other zones to have some parts of their formation in Germany. We will be in a new situation after the basic theology program in our own school of theology is closed. We are looking for alternative locations for the community of confreres in temporary vows.