



ERZBISTUM  
HAMBURG

# Pastoral Letter for the Feast of St. Ansgar 2023



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**Dear Sisters,  
Dear Brothers,**

Hope and confidence are essential for human life. Currently, many people are facing the future with great concern. The war in Ukraine and its consequences, climate change, and the situation of the church all pose major challenges. It's not easy to endure these uncertainties. Without hope, one gives up. On the other hand, those who can hope are always a few steps ahead. Hope is an "inexhaustible source of energy," as John Paul II said.

As Christians, we find powerful encouragement towards hope in the Holy Scriptures. 'Do not cast away your confidence' (Hebrews 10:35); hold fast to hope (Hebrews 3:6); 'understand what is the hope to which you are called' (Ephesians 1:18); always be ready to give an answer for the hope that is in you (1 Peter 3:15).

Choosing hope is not a lighthearted matter. It is not naive. As Christians, we live knowing that our lives have meaning. This hope and confidence help us endure current difficulties.

One of the most significant writings of the recently deceased Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI is the encyclical 'Spe salvi'. In it, he writes about Christian hope: 'We need the small or larger hopes that keep us going on our journey every day. But they are not enough without the great hope that must surpass everything else. This great hope can only be God, who encompasses everything and can give us what we cannot attain alone. Receiving gifts is a part of hope. God is the foundation of hope – not just any God, but the God who has a human face and

who has loved us to the end: each individual and humanity as a whole.’  
(Spe salvi, 31)

Hope is not simply optimism and certainly not naive. Those who hope to maintain a clear view of the seriousness of the situation but are not discouraged by it. On the contrary, they acknowledge what is and try to change it with all their might. ‘Hope jumps into the gap left by uncertainty’ (M. Seewald). It does not make us look back to the past and tradition and does not keep us trapped in the ‘in-between’ but gives us the courage to look beyond the horizon and go into the future.

It is therefore good that as the Church in Germany and in the Archdiocese of Hamburg, we have embarked on addressing serious and necessary issues. Some things have already been started; many more lie ahead. The issue of abuse, the synodal way, and not least the world synod challenges us. The more we need hope to go into the future, which will always remain unknown.

Dear sisters and brothers,

At the turn of the year, several thousand young people came to Rostock – to us in the Archdiocese of Hamburg for the European meeting of the Taizé Community. It was moving to be among them and to experience this sign of hope.

I am glad to have met some from our diocese there. Our communities in the region were great hosts. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks for that!

The meeting in Rostock set up two beacons of hope that the young people took with them into the new year: inner life and solidarity.

As Christians, we need a deep inner life. Those rooted in it can hope. The symbol of hope is not by chance the anchor that reaches deep down to the sea floor and becomes firmly rooted, like a person in God.

At the meeting in Rostock, one could feel something about the inner life of young people, especially in the prayers: The beautiful hymns from Taizé were repeated meditatively and led to depth. A few words from the Holy Scripture were spoken and could penetrate us in silence, like on a field. Special symbols, such as lighting the candles or praying before the cross, were very impressive. I have experienced something similar for almost a year when we gathered for two hours of silent worship before the Blessed Sacrament in our cathedral on the first Wednesday of each month. Externally, nothing seemed to be happening, but there was a lot going on internally.

For hope to grow and become a solid foundation, we need an inner spiritual life. Here we find strength, direction, and encouragement, then we can take the necessary external steps.

In our archdiocese, we have many external changes to overcome. I am thinking particularly of the property reform that literally goes to the substance of all parishes. It is understandable and human that letting go of familiar forms and places is difficult and painful. Not a few are wondering what will happen to the community life. The thought of breaking down and tearing down the church makes us sad and sometimes paralyzes us.

Dear sisters and brothers,

In view of these challenges, I invite you to consider how inner life can grow. Being grounded in hope that sprout from inner life, one moves forward equipped and strengthened. Our Archdiocese offers numerous activities for hope to deepen and grow ranging from retreats to Bible workshops or lecture series. Some communities have discussion groups and Bible groups that can serve to root in the Word of God. If there is no such thing in your area yet, be brave and take the first step to do it by offering your time for prayer time in your parish, starting a reading group for theological or spiritual literature, or seeking it elsewhere. It would be a great sign of hope if in our communities and in our personal lives we accompany the great upheavals with prayer.

In our teams – whether they are full-time, volunteer, or mixed – we can then bring the strength of our hope to fruition if we take the time to bring it into words, to practice and express it. At the Taizé meeting in Rostock, this was palpable: hope that finds expression in community and prayer. Dare to speak about your hope together!

Our prayer and inner life should not lead to a flight from the challenges of the world. That is why at the Rostock meeting, the young people constantly sought ways during workshops and discussion rounds to advocate for justice and to promote solidarity among each other.

It was encouraging to see the level of commitment discussed and reflected. Each of us can contribute in small ways to strengthen the sense of community. Instead of competition, cooperation is the key. Only from the strength of Christian hope can we live fulfilling lives and shaping our own lives.

Dear sisters and brothers,

How do we live justice and solidarity? This mandate is not solely directed to the professionals at Caritas. It is up to each one of us. During the Advent season, I received numerous letters from people who are lonely or close to the poverty line. I was moved to read about the serious and burdensome situations that some of our brothers and sisters must endure. It is good that we are aware of the major struggles of the world – for that I am very grateful! The package campaign for Ukraine was a great symbol of solidarity.

Do we also see the people around us who hold back due to shame or helplessness? Elderly loneliness remains a taboo topic that receives too little attention. Inflation has added another worry for many already needy people. I propose that we develop a watchful eye in our communities and neighborhoods, where we can live in solidarity – beyond our Catholic circles.

Inner life and solidarity – these two priorities will change our church and bring it back on track again and again.

In the large assembly hall of the youth in Rostock, modern model ships hung, as they traditionally hang as votive gifts in some of our churches here in the north. The church is no longer a big and proud luxury steamship. On the contrary, the church's ship has many leaks and a strong tilt. And yet, in this image of the small ships, something new suggests itself to me, a new form of church. It will probably resemble the small boats, the barges, found in every large harbor by the sea.

If our church increasingly resembles barges, it may seem like a decline at first glance. However, these boats are much closer to the small boat in which Jesus sat on the Sea of Galilee with his disciples. Small boats are less showy, but more maneuverable and quicker. Small boats mean that more people take responsibility and feel accountable. Therefore, I reiterate the heartfelt invitation to become conscious: How can I live and bring justice? How can I promote inner life in myself, my family, and my community? Small boats also mean closer relationships, even in a smaller circle.

Here, I would like to address a group from our Archdiocese: Dear young people, the church is also your boat. Faith in Jesus Christ always brings community with it. Some of you were in Rostock, others have registered for the upcoming World Youth Day in Lisbon. Meeting peers for whom faith is important strengthens one's own path with God and it is an important experience. That's why I'd like to suggest something: under the motto "Show Your Hope!" I invite you to exchange ideas in the open bishop's house this summer. Here we can discuss in small groups the significance of faith and the church for you.

In preparation for our meeting, I would like to know what fills you with hope and how you live it. I would be happy if many of you would share your thoughts with me – whether by email or through our social media channels, as a video, text, or in any other way.

Dear young people, please bring your creativity, your commitment to justice, and your search for God and inner life with full force. Find one or two companions and dare to do something. Build a bridge between you. Hope always involves community. You cannot hope all alone for yourself. Together, you are the young face of a diverse church here in the Archdiocese of Hamburg.

Dear sisters and brothers,


“Who hopes, is young,” says the poet Rose Auslaender. I wish that this freshness and youthfulness not only to the young people, but to all of us. Stay protected and blessed with good hope.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in red ink, appearing to be 'H. J. J.', written in a cursive style.

bischofshaus@erzbistum-hamburg.de

 @erzbistumhamburg

 fb.com/erzbistumhamburg



ERZBISTUM  
HAMBURG

Erzbistum Hamburg  
Am Mariendom 4  
20099 Hamburg  
[www.erzbistum-hamburg.de](http://www.erzbistum-hamburg.de)