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“Be brave and implement reforms”

Following the disclosure of more than one thousand cases of abuse in the Catholic Church, the parish of Adligenswil in the canton of Lucerne has suspended payments to the diocese. There needs to be fundamental change, says parish president Monika Koller Schinca, a voice from the rank and file.

INTERVIEW: SUSANNE WENGER

“Swiss Review”: You are church council president in Adligenswil. What does that entail?

Monika Koller Schinca: The Roman Catholic Church in Switzerland is the only one in the world with two pillars: one is pastoral with bishoprics and parishes, and then there is the secular pillar under state church law with the cantonal churches and congrega-

We are shocked by the high number of documented cases of abuse. We feel solidarity with all the abused. There were so many instances where church officials covered up what had happened. We find that shameful. The final straw was the unsatisfactory response of the bishops to the findings of the study. Now is the time for action and not just words: we demand a full investigation, and drastic measures across the board. People are losing faith in the Catholic Church. They are leaving us in droves.

That’s why you are taking a stand, although the abuse has been known about for a long time now?

Yes, the rank and file should take a stand and show they mean business. That’s why we are making payment contingent on our demands being met. The church is still an important part of the community in the villages of our region. Many people are involved in the church and want to contribute to it. After the study was published, we received more notifications of withdrawal from the church than usual. What hit me hardest was that this time we also saw older people leaving, people from the generation of regular churchgoers. Something has gone seriously wrong. Besides revisiting the response to the abuse, we also need reforms and cultural change. We want to set the wheels in motion and shake up the system.

What needs to change?

One of the most important things is equal rights for women. In the canton of Lucerne, 60 per cent of church employees and 75 per cent of volunteers are female. Women do a lot for our church; however, the higher up the ranks you go, the more men you find. Women are still ineligible for ordination, either as priests or deacons. The

vow of celibacy for the priesthood also needs to go. Anyone who is happy to remain celibate should be free to do so. But it can no longer be compulsory. Sexuality is a gift from God. Besides, mandatory celibacy creates a risk factor for abuse. Studies indicate that it can attract people with problematic traits, paedophile tendencies for example.

You are calling for Swiss bishops to commit to reforms. They argue it is a matter for Rome.

That sounds like an excuse to me. Rome is ponderous and completely detached from the reality of life in Switzerland. Swiss bishops are talking the talk without walking the walk. We need to be brave and find a way to at least implement some reforms in Switzerland, even if that risks incurring disapproval from the Vatican. Time is not on our side. In my view, time is running out for the Catholic Church.

What is your personal relationship to the Catholic Church today?

I grew up in the Church and it’s in my heart. I haven’t entirely given up hope that it can change. That’s why I’m investing time and energy to set things in motion. It’s heartening that our small parish in Adligenswil has made its presence felt at such a high level. People are seeing that something is happening. Time will tell whether it’s enough to restore the church’s credibility.

Monika Koller Schinca has been president of Adligenswil parish near Lucerne since 2021. The 50-year-old has a coaching business. She is married with three children.



Monika Koller Schinca calls for “a full investigation, and drastic measures across the board”, arguing that people are losing confidence in the Catholic Church.

Photo: provided

tions. My position is on the secular side. Our democratically elected church council is responsible for finances, buildings and recruiting, while the pastoral side is in charge of the church’s teachings. We work closely together.

Your parish began the resistance movement by withholding payment to the diocese, which the cantonal church parliament subsequently also threatened to do (see main article).

What made you take this unusual step?