

Lenten Pastoral Letter 2026

“Have courage, arise!” (Mark 10:49)

Dear sisters and brothers,

At the beginning of this Lenten season, I would again like to share some thoughts and reflections with you. During the past Holy Year, we reflected extensively on the theme of “hope.” Hope in Christ remains a fundamental attitude for us Christians, inscribed in our hearts and minds long after the Holy Year has ended.

We want to remain bearers of hope and become ever more so, especially when we encounter people burdened by heavy worries and challenges in friendships, relationships, and at work. People who are exhausted and who observe the tensions in our society and our world with uncertainty. The complexity of our time sometimes makes us realize soberly: there are no easy, straightforward solutions.

Nevertheless – or perhaps precisely because of this – we repeatedly feel within ourselves the longing to rise up, to begin anew, to move forward; in our personal lives, in our Church, and in our society. We need new beginnings in many areas of our lives in order to live more freely, contentedly, and joyfully. We need courage to embark on these new beginnings.

“Have courage, arise!”

These words from the Gospel of Mark are the theme of the upcoming *Katholikentag* (national Catholic Congress) in Würzburg. They are called out to the blind Bartimaeus, because Jesus wants to see him (Mark 10:49). Similarly, our courage to set out grows from the hope of the Gospel as well – from the hope that God’s love is stronger than evil and hatred, and that life triumphs over death.

In this regard, Lent can teach us courage and the necessity of a new arising. A new beginning requires that we first perceive and confront our inner weariness and resignation, the fears and worries that debilitate and burden us: Where am I tired and why? What bad habits paralyze me? What holds me captive inside?

Lent calls for silence, prayer, and conversations with supportive people who accompany us. It is a time for thought and reflection; a time to pause the daily grind and examine the direction of our lives. Only when we recognize what burdens our lives can we find the inner strength for new beginnings. Recognizing our own weaknesses, repenting, and receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation helps us in this process. How would our own lives and the life of our society change if we could live in reconciliation with ourselves, with our fellow human beings, and with all of reality in our world?

I invite you: During this Lenten season, take ample time for this reflection and contemplation. Today's Gospel reading reminds us of precisely this: Before Jesus began his public ministry, he sought silence, faced temptations, and then returned with determination, strength, patience, and perseverance to proclaim the Word of God.

There are many opportunities and challenges that invite us to embark on a new path. Take time to consider where your life needs a fresh start – and where such a new beginning would also be important for those around us, especially for our Church and, beyond that, for our entire society.

This year, elections for councils and boards will be held in our parishes. This is more than just a formal vote – it is a service to the renewal and future of our community. Those who participate send a clear signal: We want to contribute actively, take on responsibility, and help shape the direction of our parishes.

Wouldn't it also be a particularly courageous step to declare, despite any reservations, one's willingness to be elected to one of these bodies, which are so vital to the life of our parishes? Those who are elected play a crucial role in creating spaces in their parishes where people experience a sense of community and live their faith. Do seize this opportunity to help shape the future of our parishes and, thereby, the Church in your local community.

State elections are coming up in Berlin and Western Pomerania, within our archdiocese. We Christians should heed the call to democratic participation and make a conscious and responsible electoral choice that respects the dignity and worthiness of every human being and demonstrates a sense of responsibility regarding the challenging societal conditions we face. I thank all those who are willing to stand for election and assume political responsibility for our free and democratic system. This commitment, too, is a Christian service. Our service, both within the Church and in society, is a courageous response to God's call to responsibility. Answering this call from God, even if we are perhaps afraid to commit ourselves in this way, is a decisive and powerful sign. This sign is needed, even if many do not share our convictions and religious beliefs.

The call to be courageous alone does not give us strength, however. We need encouragement, and those around us need our encouragement. We need people who walk with us and strengthen our determination. We need communities that support us as we embark on new paths. As Christians, we know that Christ stands behind us, giving us fortitude, walking with us, demonstrating courage repeatedly on his own life's journey, persevering and setting out anew time and again, and calling us to a fearless life as well. It is not a matter of presumption, but a sign of courageous faith, that even with our limitations and weaknesses, we trust God and thus what is possible more than perhaps some past disappointments. Let us dare again and again to take a first fearless step toward a new beginning.

There are a thousand reasons for discouragement, but in faith we are on the path to Easter. We are on the path of overcoming all discouragement, all inertia, and all resignation. We are on

the path with the Risen One. He is our perspective, our hope, our salvation. He gives us courage. He is our courage.

With this certainty, we can dare to be a courageous Church with courageous Christians. This is my wish for you and for all of us on the journey to Easter.

May Almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless you. Amen.

Heiner Koch
Archbishop of Berlin

Translation/Übersetzung: Diakon Dirk Verheijen