

German website allows congregations to rate clergy

by [Ruby Russell](#)

August 18, 2011

Berlin, August 17 (ENInews)--Does your pastor set a glowing example to his or her flock? Or does the herd tend to drift? A new website launched in Germany allows churchgoers to rate their "shepherd's" performance on worship, youth work, work with seniors, credibility, and engagement with current issues.

"The idea behind Hirtenbarometer [shepherd barometer] is that pastoral work should be and often is qualitative," one of the website's founders, Andreas Hahn, said in an email interview. "We wanted to create ... an open platform for dialogue between priests and the members of congregations."

A snow-white sheep represents top marks on the site. Pope Benedict XVI is awarded sheep with greyer wool. His average score is 3.81 out of 6, with youth work and engagement with current issues judged his weakest areas.

Earlier this year, the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) released a brochure looking at ways to encourage feedback on church services. One of the brochure's authors, Folkert Fendler, said in a statement, "It is clear that feedback is essential if one wants to improve the quality of a worship service." He also called the Hirtenbarometer a "positive development."

Hahn said the website has attracted half a million clicks, indicating that many feel digital media is an effective way to provide feedback.

But some in the EKD are skeptical. Christiane Bertelsmann, press spokesperson for Evangelischer Kirchenkreis Berlin Stadtmitte (Protestant Churches in the Berlin city center district), said that the website does not take a "serious" approach.

"If you move to Berlin and you don't know anyone and you try to find a Christian community where you feel good, this website could be used as a kind of orientation, but you really need to go to a service and see for yourself," said Bertelsmann.

Pastor Holger Schmidt, a priest in Berlin, is described in one comment on the site as, "a very charismatic, talented and modern young shepherd who finds a way into every heart." But Schmidt is critical of the site. "It's not open, it's anonymous," he said in a phone interview. "Such conversations must be open, and then the priest can answer comments."

But Hahn believes that anonymity can help stimulate discussion. "Many people do not want to talk directly to a priest and tell him what they don't like in his work and where they see room for improvement," he said.