



# Seeking Conviviality

Re-forming Community Diakonia in Europe



THE  
LUTHERAN  
WORLD  
FEDERATION

A Communion  
of Churches

# Contents

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>PREFACE .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>3</b>
The European context.....	3
Seeking conviviality .....	3
Re-forming Community Diakonia in Europe—the Process .....	4
The Structure of the report.....	4
<b>PART ONE – THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT .....</b>	<b>5</b>
1. Four Contextual Challenges.....	5
2. Four Challenges for the Church.....	9
<b>PART TWO – THEMES FOR REFLECTION &amp; ACTION....</b>	<b>15</b>
1. Vocation .....	15
2. Conviviality.....	17
3. Justice .....	20
4. Dignity .....	22
<b>PART THREE – RE-FORMING COMMUNITY DIAKONIA ..</b>	<b>27</b>
1. Starting Local .....	27
2. Supporting Actions .....	37
3. Next Steps in the Process.....	39
4. Conclusions and Questions.....	41
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>APPENDIX 1 – THE PARTNERS &amp; THE PROCESS.....</b>	<b>45</b>
The European Solidarity Group.....	45
Relation to Lutheran World Federation Strategy .....	45
The partnership with interdiac.....	45
<b>APPENDIX 2 – EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY GROUP MEMBERS.....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>APPENDIX 3 – FOLLOW UP CONTACTS .....</b>	<b>48</b>
LWF European Solidarity Group .....	48
Lutheran World Federation (LWF) .....	48
interdiac .....	48

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# Preface

Since 2011, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches in Europe have engaged in a process of critical reflection about community diakonia and advocacy in Europe. A resource group of diaconal practitioners from all three European LWF regions has worked together under the theme of “Seeking Conviviality—Re-forming Community Diakonia in Europe”. The process is being coordinated by the LWF/Department for Mission and Development-Europe Desk.

The outcomes and insights from this process so far have been captured in this report. *Seeking conviviality* is a practical guide that shares the experiences and practices of diakonia from the diverse European contexts and particularly focuses on the building of inclusive communities at various levels.

This report aims to raise the awareness of churches in different contexts of the issues involved in community diakonia and advocacy and enables them to be better equipped. It represents an important resource for enhancing learning among different areas of diaconal work in Europe, including the understanding and practice of diaconal church and developing strategies towards meaningful changes in the lives of vulnerable individuals and communities.

*Seeking Conviviality* shares practical strategies as well as identifies tools that support a holistic approach to diakonia. Drawing on European experiences, it emphasizes “conviviality” as its key conceptual framework. It implies the foundation of communities based on reciprocal relationships, mutual respect for their differences, and strength among people and communities that enriches living together.

The report presents a variety of contextual realities and good practice that contribute to the LWF approach of mutual engagement in holistic mission. In view of



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the increasing experience of change and diversity within societies across Europe, the report envisions European community diakonia as space for building trust and living together in inclusive neighborhoods; striving for solidarity and justice.

It also affirms the specificity of each member church which informs how they understand and express Lutheran identity in their diaconal calling. It highlights participatory approaches as an effective way to engage in diaconal and advocacy action. The report encourages a deeper understanding of the contextual social challenges faced in Europe and promotes mutual learning and commitment to one another.

*Seeking Conviviality* calls for the radical reorientation of diakonia. It gives voice to people forced to live in the margins of society. They become leading stakeholders and actors in the process of analyzing their situations and identifying viable solutions. It challenges the “giver and receiver approach”, both in terms of serving those in need and sharing resources among the churches. Therefore, the vision for diakonia is developed in context and aims to empower

people to take ownership of their own community’s transformation and to live and write new life stories as active members of community.

This report re-affirms the church’s diaconal call: from God and from the neighbor. It invites churches to rethink their diaconal methods in ways that address structural inequality and injustice. It encourages us to work towards long-term transformation while recognizing the importance of responding to the most immediate daily needs of people and neighborhoods. Diakonia must be rooted in the local levels where social, political, and religious issues are most felt and better understood.

In the spirit of the journey towards the celebration of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation and even beyond, this report is commended with the hope that it inspires its readers to apply the methodologies identified in their individual contexts.

Rev. Dr. Musa Panti Filibus  
Director,  
LWF Department for Mission and  
Development

# Introduction

## The European context

Within the past 20 years, first the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and increasingly, other parts of Europe, have been confronted with drastic political and economic changes, which have affected millions of families in their sustainability. The collapse of the former centrally planned economies twenty years ago has cast a long shadow and the consequences are still being worked on. In particular the development of an independent civil society and a functioning democracy is still in process. Churches and communities have also had to respond to the unprecedented impact of economic restructuring as a result of the deepening impact of competitive globalisation. In that region, systemic political and economic changes are affecting a large number of countries with a serious impact on everyday life and culture. In addition, many national contexts lack an agreed consensus on the need for the public support for health and welfare and alongside this, the need to build up a working social contract remains a huge challenge also for the churches and diakonia.

On top of this, the financial crisis, which has its roots in the global North, has had an enormous impact on the life chances of ordinary people across the whole of Europe and especially on already marginalised people and communities. Many taken for granted assumptions about work and social life have been challenged and new policies are being implemented very rapidly. All this is changing the landscape in which the churches are engaged in diakonia.

At the same time, there has been a process of growing secularization and declining church affiliation which



has mainly impacted the traditional and mainstream churches (with a few notable exceptions). On the other hand there are growing new churches and a growing presence of a wide diversity of religions and spiritualities, especially among communities with an origin in immigration or migration. Religion has come to be seen as an important factor in community and society—and even in politics and economics. Furthermore, the growing diversity of the European population poses new challenges in neighbourhoods which have experienced large-scale population changes, but also in the wider societies. These combined developments pose existential, spiritual and theological questions to churches as they live out their faith and engage in service in these contexts.

It is for these reasons, briefly stated, that there is a need to rethink diaconal

approaches in the different European contexts. Diakonia in Europe is a broad topic and it includes developed institutional approaches to health and social services employing thousands of workers and small locally based initiatives based on voluntary action. The whole church is called to be diaconal and the roots of diakonia are to be found at the local level. This is the point at which very often the social challenges are most sharply felt and so the decision was taken to build the process of reforming diakonia in Europe with a focus on community, parish or local diakonia (See Appendix 1).

## Seeking conviviality

As the participants in the process discussed their experiences, it became clear that one of the most important

questions is: 'How can we live together in local communities?' These questions arise in all contexts, in spite of the diverse histories of European countries. We searched for a way to express this, recognising the need to support the creativity of people in addressing their situation. The overarching key concept the group chose was 'seeking conviviality'. This became the key programmatic conceptual vision; therefore here we give a brief introduction to our understanding of the word. The term basically means 'the art and practice of living together'. It refers to the Spanish term 'convivencia' and it encompasses living together in solidarity, in sharing resources and in the joint struggle for human dignity and sustainable community life. It draws from old traditions of neighbourhood support in sustaining common life and the traditions of migrant communities in supporting life in new environments, which in some cases are not as welcoming as one would hope and expect. It is important to emphasise that the group linked the work in local communities to the need to work 'structurally' for good working and living conditions, to address questions of justice and work for the common good of all. But the entry point is lived experience in the locality.

'Seeking Conviviality—Re-forming Community Diakonia in Europe' is working on a programmatic vision, affirming life in community, over against trends of individualisation, and fragmentation. Conviviality as a concept leads directly to ideas about diaconal practice and action and to a concern for justice and dignity which are reflected in this paper.

The people engaged in diakonia take part in a process of creating conviviality. On the basis of their own biography and motivation for their work and with their inner spiritual and theological, and professional resources they are active with some of the most marginalised people across the region. In many cases they are in a reciprocal

relationship of 'giving and receiving', surprisingly very often receiving new insight as a gift from those with whom they are working. Nevertheless, paid and voluntary diaconal workers are also in need of 'receiving' and of gaining, for example, new motivational strength and insight for their own service.

Diakonia is viewed by the European Solidarity Group as 'Gospel in action' and as a mark of and task for the whole church, it is not simply for specialists or a specific group of volunteers. The perspective of the neighbour as being the image of God and as sister or brother in Christ—and therefore as equals has informed the work of the Group. Theologically we can also say that the picture of the Christian who engages in diaconal work is that of an imperfect person helping another imperfect person to find the way toward fullness of life. This viewpoint prevents patronising and excluding attitudes which can reflect so negatively on the church and the gospel.

## Re-forming Community Diakonia in Europe—the Process

Seeking Conviviality, Re-forming Community Diakonia in Europe is a process which has brought together a 'Solidarity Group' of 28 participants from across Europe. Most of the participants are active in local diakonia. The process is led by a partnership of LWF and interdiac—the International Academy for Diaconia and Social Action—Central and Eastern Europe. The LWF Europe Secretary, Eva Sibylle Vogel-Mfato is joined by Janka Adameová the Director of interdiac and Tony Addy, the Head of Education. The process has been developed inductively based on the participants' personal experience, motivation and engagement as well as their hopes for the future. The group has had two face to face meetings and developed the ideas which are found in this report. The Solidarity

Group has taken on board the task of ensuring that the findings for the process are brought into discussion and action in their respective contexts. Through working nationally and in collaboration with the LWF European Church leaders, the process will influence diaconal developments and create a lasting contribution to the reformation Anniversary in 2017. By creating an open process, the chances of the outcomes being sustainable is much greater and the energy and commitment of the Solidarity Group is a very important contributory factor to this development. This report is one important outcome of the process which will be used in developing the next steps in Europe and hopefully, in the wider LWF communion.

## The Structure of the report

This paper is divided into three main sections. The first attempts to give a background contextual picture of the complex European situation especially as it affects the most vulnerable people and communities. It includes also the challenges from this context for the church and diakonia. The second section identifies, on the basis of the experience of the Solidarity Group, four themes for reflection and action in thinking about the present and future of community diakonia in Europe. We start with the basic concept of vocation or call and then move to conviviality—life in community—as the two fundamental building blocks for diakonia. Then we broaden the picture to consider questions of justice and finally we look at how the wider context influences our understanding of dignity and what this implies for diaconal action. The final section points to some hopeful strategies for change. The whole document is intended to invite the reader to become part of re-forming community diakonia in Europe, under the key concept 'seeking conviviality!'

# PART ONE

## The European Context

### 1. Four Contextual Challenges

#### *i. Financial Crisis—Social Crisis—Political Crisis*

##### **The financial crisis....**

The major driver of change in Europe, as it affects the welfare of people and communities is undoubtedly the consequence of the so-called financial crisis. The origins of the crisis are well documented by such commentators as former World Bank chief economist, Joseph Stiglitz. (Stiglitz, 2010) However, the consequences of the financial crisis will have very long term implications. The impact of competitive financially driven globalisation, which was able to take advantage of the deregulation of financial services and the creation of new financial products, was to bring the entire banking system of the main Western economies to the brink of collapse.

The banking and financial system was only stabilised by the massive intervention of the European and other Western governments which used and continue to use public finance in an attempt to support it. In contradiction to expectations, this crisis has not proved to be a short term matter and it is now a question whether the word 'crisis' is relevant five years after the trigger events!

##### **...led to a social crisis...**

The most damaging result of the banking crisis has been a ballooning of state indebtedness, which has to be paid for somehow. The way this has

been dealt with is through so-called 'austerity policies' and the consequence of this has been a massive reduction in welfare in many national contexts in Europe. This affects not only social transfer payments but the provision of all kinds of welfare services. In fact the methods being used to solve the crisis by national and European institutions mean that a large part of the price for the original crisis is now being paid by the most vulnerable people, communities and regions.

One very significant factor which has resulted from the crisis is the growth of unemployment, especially youth unemployment in many countries. The methods used to deal with the crisis, which have included cutting salaries and jobs in the public sector and introducing severe austerity measures have contributed to the creation of unemployment and a major reduction in working conditions and pay, either directly or indirectly. Unemployed people and those in lower paid jobs are bearing the costs of the crisis and the long term impact of this on health and welfare will be substantial. (European Commission, 2013a, 2013b) Through the impact on welfare and labour markets, the economic crisis precipitated a social crisis.

##### **...and a political crisis**

The third development is that because of the inability of governments to manage the original crisis without creating a till now deepening social crisis, we have entered a phase of political crisis in Europe. Behind this, there is the issue of public debt, but it is very important to note that there was only one

country in the European Union where there was any kind of financial crisis before the onset of the need to pay huge sums of public money to finance bank bail-outs. We have now entered a kind of vicious spiral, where public debt has become a major budgetary item and when states have to borrow at growing interest rates (risk premium) as their financial status is downgraded.

##### **Consequences for welfare, well-being and politics**

As governments were compelled in this process to cut budgets, social benefits and welfare can be seen to have borne the brunt of the cuts. It can be argued, furthermore, that that financial crisis has been used as a convenient mechanism to force through unprecedented and deep changes in the European welfare states. This then precipitated a crisis of democracy because it became clear that democratically elected governments have, under the present financial system, to follow the demands and priorities of the financial markets. Hence the whole project of European integration is called into question by the actions of unelected actors in the private economic sector, supported by national, European and international financial institutions, such as the European Central Bank (Wall-Strasser, et al 2012). This continuing process has led to deepening dissatisfaction and growing unrest, fuelling political movements, some of which have disturbingly nationalistic, racist and xenophobic overtones. The culture of defensive individualism, which

## The Bratislava Declaration

The re-formation of diaconal work is a continuous process which should reflect the changes in the local social & working life reality and the personal motivation of diaconal workers and volunteers, in order to tackle social phenomena properly. Furthermore changes to approaches, attitudes and policies are required, as defined in the interdiac Bratislava Declaration from March 2010:

- Diakonia needs to develop a strategy of working with and on behalf of people and communities who are excluded, to create change at different levels from local to national to international.
- Diakonia needs to work not only with excluded people, but also to work for an economy and society which does not produce exclusion.
- Diakonia and Christian social action should work for strategic working partnerships with civil society and the creation of dialogue between diaconal actors and state/ political powers.
- Ecumenical and participatory work should be the norm and national and regional platforms for inter-church working, sharing experience and coalition building should be created.

*Janka Adameová (see: interdiac, 2010)*

has grown up under the globalising economy, breeds fear and is not only breaking down the social fabric but also increasing the distance between governments and people.

One further important point to consider is that in all the discussions in the international media, the impact of this development on the 'new' members of the European Union and on those countries of Eastern Europe outside the Union is hardly mentioned. In the Solidarity Group, the representatives of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe pointed to the fact that the impact in their context (where the welfare structures are not so resilient or developed) has been far more severe in many cases. This has included sharp reductions in wages and other working conditions, closures of important health, welfare and educational facilities and the curtailment of already minimal welfare benefits.

However, when we look at the whole picture, we can also see evidence of new political initiatives which may have a positive long term impact and also a growth of social innovation in different countries. For example, the public reaction to the government handling of the crisis in Spain has, on the one hand, involved

major self-organised discussions of the ways forward held in public spaces as well as continuing political protest. On the other hand it has also led to a resurgence of interest in a huge variety of local economic alternatives in such areas as food production and non-money exchange systems (local currencies) (Conill et al, 2012).

In the light of the experiences of the Solidarity Group, it is very important to start the contextual discussion with this issue because it has such

*"In the presence of all forms of human suffering, we confess God's initiating and justifying grace, which liberates us for the needs of others."*  
(LWF, 2011)

an enormous impact on well-being and especially on poor and vulnerable people and communities and regions with less economic resisting power. Just as we could calculate the excess deaths and health and social costs which were a result of the 'transition'

from central planning to market economies in Central and Eastern Europe so we can now begin to evaluate the costs of the so-called economic crisis in human terms. For example, every 1% rise in unemployment in the European Union correlates with an average 0.8% rise in suicides, with the rise being higher the less social protection there is. (European Commission, 2012) It is also clear that the political policy direction being implemented in the majority of European countries does not have a monopoly of thought or acceptance. Iceland was one of the countries which was most seriously affected by the financial crisis but it did not follow the policies adopted by the majority of European countries. It refused to force the population to pay for the mistakes of the banking system. With different policies in place, based on different priorities it has followed a different trajectory, coming out of the crisis already, even though some people have inevitably lost out. Therefore there are growing calls, backed by detailed research, for a radical change of policy in Europe (See: e.g. Schulmeister, 2010, Lehndorf, ed., 2012).

## Challenging the culture & values behind the crisis

However, behind the banking crisis there is a specific culture, meaning a well understood system of values and beliefs which orient and support behaviour and which result in material effects on personal and institutional life. The well documented possessive individualism and related neo-liberal economic practices constitute in effect a credo which should be rigorously analysed from a Christian point of view (See: Elliott & Atkinson, 2009). The second critical point is to notice that in spite of the media concentration on cases of gross malpractice and corruption, there is a real sense in which we are dealing with what liberation theo-



logians refer to as ‘structural sin’ in the financial, economic and political system. If we take this seriously, then we can, after five years no longer speak about a crisis, we have to speak about a new and damaging ‘normality’ as an unacceptable reality. Therefore, it is important not just to address the immediate practical problems but also to deal with the underlying issues and to work for transformation. The churches and diaconal organisations need both to call people and organisations to account ethically and also to vigorously promote creative alternatives to the beliefs and practices which have so eroded the common good of all. This is the reason why we have elaborated this point as our entry to the contextual issues. To address this in a European context would also have positive global implications, especially if it was done in partnership with church and diakonia in the global South.

## ***ii. Young and Old Pay the Price***

### **Introduction**

As the crisis has unfolded it is clear that apart from the fact that the social, health and educational costs are being borne by the most vulnerable and marginalised sections of the European population, there has been an enormous impact on young people and the elderly.

### **Impact on young people...**

To start with young people, first of all changes in the labour market have borne most heavily on them because new and less protective labour market regulations are introduced first for newly hired workers. It means that for the first time in the last 60 years, younger workers face worse conditions and lower remuneration in real terms

than their parents. The intergenerational comparison, which has been well researched, shows that labour market conditions are now more stressful for the more recent generations than for those who entered the labour market in the 1970’s. This has produced more illness and family violence as well as other negative social and psychological effects and means that we have a young generation which is not only more likely to be out of work or underemployed but which is also more likely to have mental health problems than previous generations (Collshaw, S., et.al. 2010, European Commission, 2012). Moreover it is clear that the costs of marginalising young people into unemployment will be borne by the society in the short term by increasing mental ill-health and non-legal behaviour and in the longer term by increasing the danger of creating a lost generation.

### **...and the elderly**

As far as elderly people are concerned, certainly there is a demographic element to be taken into account as the numbers of elderly people and also longevity are both increasing, which means growing demands on health and social services. But when the austerity packages are examined it is clear that a large percentage of elderly people will suffer reductions in income and service provision because they are more likely to be dependent on social income and need health or social services. This is a huge challenge for diakonia as it struggles with growing demand and reducing financial contributions from public finances (Age Platform Europe, 2012).

In examining the impact of the crisis and its aftermath on these two groups it is plain to see how the social contract which underpinned the European (Union) social model is under threat, in spite of rhetoric to the contrary.

## ***iii. Forced to Move— Forced to Stay***

### **Introduction**

We can see that Europe is a continent of migration—people move both within the continent and from outside the region. Migration is a complex phenomenon and it is important to be aware of all the differences in the causes and experiences of migration. For example, it is one of the key aims of the European Union labour market policy to promote the mobility of labour and a different language set and legislative framework relates to this form of ‘internal migration’. On the other hand in migration from third countries is also diverse and complex and the legal position of migrants is governed by different national and European rules. In addition to migration, Europe is a region which receives refugees from other world regions and there are also European refugees and displaced persons.

### **Dynamics of migration**

One ‘face’ of migration and of mobility is the fact that people feel compelled to move because of poverty, the result of environmental degradation or because of war or civil conflict. The other ‘face’ is that some people and communities are forced to ‘stay’ and these people may also suffer from extreme poverty. In recent years intra-European mobility has increased due to the impact of the financial crisis on the more peripheral countries. In Germany, for example, it has been observed that young families are moving there from countries in Southern Europe. This is a kind of poverty-migration which reflects the state of the economy and the reduction or relative lack of state services for health and welfare in the some of the countries of origin. Many people have also moved for short or long term periods from the countries of Central and Eastern Europe

and the newly independent states in search of income and work.

One of the impacts of intra-European migration (or mobility) is that in many marginalised and poor communities large numbers of people are 'left behind' and this contributes to an even greater immiseration, regardless of remittances. In some countries where there is a large out-migration in search of work, children are left behind in the care of (often elderly) relatives and this contributes to further problems in the development of those children and communities. The churches and diakonia in Europe have to face up to this issue which is normally disregarded in countries which have been seen as 'recipients' of migrants searching for work. In fact most countries are both 'sending' and 'receiving' countries but the aftermath of the transition to market economies and the financial crisis has created very imbalanced

situations in some countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

### Growing problem of trafficking

As well as migration, which is a normal if heavily regulated process and the reception of refugees, European societies have also been affected by the trafficking of people for different reasons, not only for the sex industry but also for work which is sometimes tantamount to slavery in hidden and often non-legal enterprises. Therefore it is important to support diaconal work with people who are trafficked and to engage in the political task of preventing trafficking.

### Challenges & consequences of migration

On the other hand the growth of migration has created many new challenges in local communities which

receive immigrants. First and foremost are the challenges faced by migrants themselves who may suffer discrimination on the labour market and exploitation by unscrupulous employers or 'middlemen'. Those immigrants who settle long term also face many problems in housing, education and social and health care. One key issue arising from this situation is the need to provide social support and health care for the growing numbers of immigrants (and others) who are not entitled to receive care from the national systems and who, in some cases, cannot be helped inside the law. The biggest group in this category are those who come to Europe seeking refugee status and for whatever reason are without necessary 'papers'. Here there is a clear conflict between universal human rights and the rights granted by individual states and the European Union.

Secondly, churches and diakonia in Europe are challenged by the racism and discrimination which affect immigrants and the later generations of previous immigrants. To find ways of overcoming racism and xenophobia and of living together is one of the most important tasks in creating liveable communities. The churches have some advantages in this field since religion is often very important in the lives of immigrant communities and religion can make a positive contribution to building civil society (Modood, 2013). However the presence of large communities of diverse religious faiths means that especially the traditional majority national churches have to find a new place in ecumenical and interfaith context. In addition to this, the impact of racism and xenophobia on migrants, whether they are recent or second, third or fourth generation and European citizens is a continuing challenge. One of the most serious issues is the continuing and nowadays deepening discrimination of the Roma communities and the abuse of their human rights.

### Migrants on the Margin – London Chinese Lutheran Church

In Britain, the London Chinese Lutheran Church (LCLC) is a 'spiritual home away from home' for students and other immigrants from China. Xiao Ming (name changed to protect identity) is one of the migrant workers who go to LCLC. He is among the thousands of people from China who have sought asylum in the United Kingdom in the past decade.

Many of them come from the coastal rural regions of China where poverty remains, despite the economic boom in a few major cities. The migrants often pay large sums of money to "snake heads" who smuggle them into Britain using all sorts of delivery such as container trucks or coaches, hiding them regardless of health and safety. They travel overland through Eastern European countries.

Once arrived in London, migrants have to work long hours in take-away restaurants etc. to pay back the debts they owed to snake heads. It is human trafficking that has been rampant for a decade and which can trace its links all the way to East Asia. LCLC became a place where migrant workers become part of a church community in which they can speak their mother tongue—Chinese—with comfort when outside work and have a place they can call 'home' in a foreign land.

Xiao Ming is considered to be lucky. Many other migrant workers have not been granted asylum status by the authorities as he has. This means he does not have to fear forced deportation if caught by one of the immigration officers who may randomly raid Chinese take-away restaurants searching for illegal immigrants. Almost all Chinese immigrants have to live and work secretly, often for long hours and low pay.

*David Lin (Great Britain)*



© LCGB/David Lin

Churches and diakonia have developed innovative projects working with Roma communities and in many countries there are Roma churches which, for example as in Finland, are linked to Lutheran churches which support them.

Thirdly, the churches should work not only to support and accompany migrants, asylum seekers and refugees but should also work politically to create and enforce just and transparent structures, to combat corruption and to prevent the extreme exploitation of migrant labour.

#### ***iv. Hidden People & Marginalised Groups***

##### **Exclusion of people from health and social services**

Europe is marked by a growing number of people whose needs are 'hidden', meaning that they do not qualify for some or all of the normally accepted services provided by the welfare state. As mentioned above, the most notable groups are those who have come to Europe as refugees but who do not have that status. Churches and diakonia, often in partnership with other organisations have been developing more or less 'hidden' and 'non statutory' (even illegal) services for people who fall outside the law. This is also an important issue for advocacy. Other examples of groups who need such services are those who for whatever reason do not have social security income or who do not have legal rights to health care, education or to be housed. Here again diakonia and local churches are engaged, but there is a growing mismatch between needs and resources, between expressed human rights and actual practice.

##### **Discrimination and prejudice**

Other groups which face discrimination and who find it difficult to access the services they need include people

#### **Working with Roma Communities**

The Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation (EHO) in Novi Sad, Serbia has established a Roma Resource Centre (RRC), which addresses the situation of the Roma community in Serbia. Activities include: the promotion of equal rights for all citizens, overcoming of prejudice against marginalised groups, information, advice and consultations, advocacy and lobbying, empowerment through education, on the job training, employment and self-employment, assistance with improvements in living conditions etc. EHO RRC has targeted institutions such as schools, social welfare services, city governments, municipalities, provincial governments and other stakeholders to develop specific activities related to the position of Roma. One of the major successes of EHO RRC has been to put an end to the legal limbo which for decades has especially afflicted one of the Roma settlements. Housing rights are under dispute in Roma settlements all across Eastern Europe and it is important that EHO RRC takes a rights based approach to its work.

By helping the residents to organise and create a platform for dialogue and negotiation with local authorities, EHO RRC has contributed to solving the legal maze surrounding property rights and induced local authorities to take up a more active role in improving living conditions. The approach requires the involvement of the Roma in all stages of the project, which was developed in cooperation with men and women from the Roma community. They take the most important decisions, in line with their culture and traditions. Specific attention is given to the involvement of women and to a resident-driven approach to sanitation and house up-grading. This model is economical as only about €1,500 in building material is required to repair one house. This is only possible if the Roma themselves carry out the construction work and if they provide additional recycled construction materials themselves. Over a 3 year period 135 houses in two communities were upgraded, 5 Roma businesses were supported and connection to mains electricity for all was assured. The housing renewal project was accompanied by legal counselling, educational work with adults and children and vocational training. The educational work is one of the most important successes of the project.

As a basis for its work EHO RRC finds motivation in God's love and is promoting God's love towards all in need. The EHO RRC way to show and to witness to God's love is to put it into practice—to act. EHO RRC is there to serve, help and support fellow human beings who are poor, vulnerable, stigmatised and systematically discriminated. EHO RRC helps fellow human beings, and is a witness to love without borders in action and thus it promote Christian values in local society.

*Robert Bu (Serbia)*

living with HIV or Aids especially in contexts where the health and social services do not have the capacity or resources to provide the needed services. Another marginalised group are people with disabilities who may be excluded from mainstream services because of lack of access or of resources. Public attitudes are also a barrier in some contexts, where until recently most people with disabilities were living in institutions or receiving education and other services in segregated environments. However, even those with relatively good conditions for integration in everyday life are now finding the basic resources they need being withdrawn as a result of the austerity measures in some countries. In the UK, for ex-

ample, there are a growing number of examples of elderly or disabled people committing or attempting suicide as a result of the actual or even threatened cuts in social benefits.

## **2. Four Challenges for the Church**

### ***i. One Church, Many Realities***

#### **Introduction to the regions**

The European context is very diverse and it is important to recognise the differences in the background



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*We will be peacemakers, building bridges among people, communities, societies, and religions.*

*We will empower people and communities to achieve their universal rights and an adequate quality of life.*

*We will address the underlying causes of poverty, exclusion, injustice and conflict.*

*(LWF, 2011)*

*In the face of human structures of competition and exclusion, we affirm that Christians are a priestly people, receivers of mercy who proclaim God's works (1 Pt 2:9–10), among whom the vocations of all should be honoured and the service of each equally welcomed. (LWF, 2011)*

of Lutheran churches in the various contexts. We can notice several main groupings but even within these groupings there are large differences.

Normally the Nordic region is counted as one, with large traditionally national churches, but even though there are commonalities, the ways in which the churches relate to the state and the organisation of diakonia are varied and are changing quite rapidly. Among the biggest challenges are the need to reorient diakonia in the diversifying multicultural context and the need to develop models and methods of diakonia which enable marginalised people to have their own voice so as not to reproduce victim identities. A further issue is the impact on the church and diakonia of the restructuring of the welfare state into a more market oriented pluralistic model which has been accompanied by renewed requests in some countries (for example Sweden) for the churches to take over responsibilities for delivering services.

The Central and West European region includes a wide range of different contexts and includes both Lutheran and united Protestant churches. For example, in the German context the

large Protestant churches have a key role in welfare through regional and national organisations of Diakonisches Werk, which is a major provider of health and social services and where there is also extensive congregational diakonia. There are some similarities in other Western European countries. But there are quite small churches in Latin Europe and diaspora churches in other Western European countries. These have also become more significant at a time of growing immigration from other world regions.

Central and Eastern Europe is also a divided reality although the Lutheran and united Protestant churches to some extent share their common experiences under the centrally planned former communist regimes. However there are distinct national differences, for example in some cases, such as the former German Democratic Republic and Hungary, the churches carried on their diaconal activities but in others such as Latvia and the former Czechoslovakia, organised diakonia was forbidden. This experience had a bearing on the development of diakonia after 1989. Another difference is the fact that in some cases, there was a highly developed diaconal structure

before 1945. Where this was the case, in the new post-communist conditions, this diaconal tradition was a resource to be drawn on. Another factor, which also is important in the region of central and Eastern Europe, is that there are small diaspora churches which have a different historical roots and present day experiences. There are also present day differences which are related to the state of development of social welfare in each country before 1945, because the post 1989 experiences have also mirrored these previously existing historical situations. For example, the Czechoslovak welfare system was more developed than that of Hungary and the experiences of the former Soviet Republics have also differed. (Adascalitei, 2012)

### **Common issues & differences across Europe**

However, in spite of the differences between contexts, in the work of the Solidarity Group we found many common issues which have to be reflected through local realities and engaged with. Traditionally in discussions about Lutheran churches in Europe, a division

has been made between minority and majority churches, with a tendency also to reproduce centre-periphery dependent relations. In the process of working on the renewal of diakonia, this divide was questioned. The Nordic group expressed the wish to become more engaged in learning from partner churches which are located in regions with less material resources, convinced that the quality of work is not simply related to material conditions and resources. In the future, churches will probably have to rely more on volunteers and therefore the need to learn more about 'quality' in this work is important. This thinking underpinned one main focus of the findings from the regional process, which is that in every case the most important factor to focus on is the rich resource represented by the contribution of motivated and committed people. This implies a focus on the renewal of community or congregational diakonia as important in its own right and not simply as an

instrument to compensate for declining or non-existent state resources.

Another aspect of the divide that was highlighted was the difference in the resource base of diakonia in the various countries. This ranges from the situation where diakonia is financed mainly by voluntary giving and external project resourcing to highly developed national systems where diakonia is recognised by the state (sometimes also through taxation structures) as a part of the system of social and health care, as in Germany. In other contexts, diakonia may also be supported by regular state grants. There are also examples where the national governments, which have created large welfare systems, are challenging the churches to take over the responsibility for delivering services. These systems all produce their own possibilities but also dangers. If the state funds the service there is a chance that diakonia becomes an arm for the implementation of state policy, through cost reduction processes

for example. On the other hand opening diaconal services to competition and market forces may reduce quality and also support for more 'unfashionable' services. The idea of creating diakonia as a form of social enterprise is seen to be a way forward in some contexts but may also be subject to the pressure to create profitable services. In any case financial resources are needed for diakonia and the main point is to be constantly aware that money can be used as a driver to realise an ideology, which may be at odds with diaconal values. Furthermore, the relations between relatively affluent churches and regions and those with fewer financial resources need to be renewed in the changing situation, so that resource sharing does not lead simply to the transfer of working models and priorities developed in financial resource rich areas to poorer areas. This problem is exacerbated by the European Union (EU) border, which also affects the level of available



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resources for social and diaconal work. But even within the EU there are deep divisions. The change to market based or project based financing for diakonia also creates major challenges to sustainability and working culture.

### **Renewing local Diakonia**

The common theme which crosses all regions is the desire to renew community and congregational diakonia as an integral part of church identity and to develop a clear vision for this in every context. This is the bedrock for the development of other expressions of diakonia which may be needed for specific purposes. Even if we look at larger diaconal organisations however, there is a problem of recruiting people who have an active faith background, informed by diaconal values and spirituality. The more vivid diaconal activity is at the base and the more normal a part of congregational activity it becomes, the more chance there is of finding new motivated paid and unpaid workers in diakonia with a Christian self-understanding. In some contexts there have been experiments with specially focussed programmes for young people in order to encourage this development.

### ***ii. Poverty and Marginalisation in the Church***

#### **The socio-economic position of the Church**

The previous discussion on the position of the church in different European contexts can be deepened by a reflection on how the churches are 'positioned' in relation to the growing splitting of national and regional societies and economies. The question of where the church is rooted and identified is related to historical trajectories as well as present realities. By and large the church has been more rooted in the

relatively economically successful part of the society but because of recent history the position is changing. Still however, the church is more weakly present in the more disadvantaged regions and parts of cities. There are some significant developments in diakonia which are attempting to develop strategies to deal with this issue. It is important to analyse, in every case, the socio-economic position of the church as it is today and to notice the historical change. The 'image' of the church maybe completely false compared to the present day reality and this has to be addressed. A key part of this analysis is the relation of marginalised people and communities to the church and vice versa.

#### **The challenge of a multicultural, multi-faith context**

This is an even more critical question as Europe becomes an increasingly multi-faith and multicultural context. How does a 'traditional' Protestant church relate to people with diverse backgrounds? This is, for example, a question of developing a deeper understanding and practice of being an open and affirming congregation towards others with a different culture, life style or faith. It also includes being receptive to Christians who may express their faith 'differently' and to recognising the need for these expressions in relation to everyday life in a new context.

### ***iii. New Emphasis on Diaconal Church***

#### **Introduction**

For reasons mentioned above, there needs to be a renewed emphasis on diakonia as a basic mark of the church. We could even say that mission in Europe needs to be diaconal, meaning it has to focus on listening to and accompanying the 'marginalised other'. It is not based

primarily on a 'message' but much more on empathy and compassion leading to change and transformation.

### **Two approaches to community diakonia**

Community based diakonia divides into two main approaches:

The first approach is concerned with developing the concept of a diaconal church or congregation. Building on the idea of the church as a community and developing the church's role in the local neighbourhood or parish area, there are two variants of this approach. The first is the creation of so-called 'diaconal congregations' which are made up mainly of marginalised people and the second variant is to work with programmes in regular congregations to create a stronger diaconal identity. Congregational based diaconal work should be based on building connections with the life-worlds of people outside the church—a kind of 'outside in' approach.

The second approach, which is diaconal or mission work located outside the church congregation or parish, starts with 'forgotten people in forgotten places' or as it were in the 'street' or 'neighbourhood'. Sometimes these initiatives have a small meeting place and an office located for example in a former shop or housing unit. Common examples are work in urban mission grounded in neighbourhoods and so-called street work with children and young people.

In any case, local pastoral leaders or in some contexts, Deacons, in churches where they exist, have an important task in:

- ✓ building bridges to the local community in all its diversity,
- ✓ being alongside people in all aspects of life,
- ✓ creating spaces and processes for learning,

- ✓ enabling lay people to have the skills to be community builders,
- ✓ facilitating reflection on voluntary community based diaconal work.

#### **iv. Motivation, Presence and Participation as Keys to Practice**

##### **Motivation is grounded in experience and relationships...**

Because people are the main resource in diakonia, it is important to reflect and enable people to reflect on the motivation and strengths which they bring to the work in order to clarify the basis of service, rooted in personal life-narrative. Based on the experience of the Solidarity Group, it is clear that key motivational experiences happen in relationships. Therefore in building diakonia great emphasis should be placed on creating relationships which will be formative of diaconal engagement. This will enable people to find their own motivation and resources in their biography. For example, participants in the Solidarity Group named as significant their education within family history and its values, the relation to important people who had

become role models showing different aspects and values of life, participation as youth in Christian education and church youth programmes. Some Group members mentioned their own health issues or other crises in their personal life which had become turning points. Others realized that exposure to a different country or cultural context or to difficult world events, had led them to more awareness of suffering, injustice and inequality and motivated them to become active.

##### **...and in faith and spirituality**

Faith and spiritual values ranked high in the biographical motivation of participants, nourishing compassion and solidarity. Christ as the wounded healer is reflected in many life stories which led to the choice of a professional career in the field of diaconal service. Real-life experience helps workers to understand others and their situations from within, and to look for solutions from within as well as working for changes in the context.

##### **Diakonia as 'presence' with people**

The second aspect which should be emphasised is 'presence'. Dia-

conal work is not simply instrumental and result orientated, it emphasises accompanying people in a process of changing their life. This may be a long term commitment and to be continually 'present' with people in all aspects of their life. This is a different perspective to that often required by 'official systems' which increasingly focus on time-limited interventions and prescribed outcomes which must be achieved. In some cases this is not realistic and even undermines dignity. Diaconal work requires a spirituality which can support long term accompaniment of people in their own right and not just as 'clients' and this may be one creative contribution it can make. (See box on Dialogue & Diakonia, below, and Menkveld, 2011, Addy, 2011)

##### **Diakonia, participation and power**

Thirdly, 'participation' is an important key to working for change. Much diaconal practice traps people in the position of 'passive recipient' and places the church and diakonia in a donor (power) position. Therefore there is a need to find an approach in each context which builds relationships and participation into all steps of the process, both deciding and doing!

### **Dialogue & Diakonia**

The Triune God enters into an inner dialogue when creating humankind. God is a community by the divine nature. Hence God also calls on human beings to be in community with him, in the community of God's creation. That is why he calls human beings into life—life with him and life together.

Diakonia is not an appendage to church work. Diakonia is not some kind of value added. Diakonia—simply put—leads to the start of biblical proclamation, human calling, human life and human community through God. God calls us into life with one another.

The great Jewish philosopher Martin Buber calls the tandem I-THOU a fundamental concept. And adds: I become through the THOU. And he ends with the famous phrase "All real life is encounter."

This image of God is oriented to dialogue from the start. We are wanted and called to talk together and to show care with and for one another.

Being made in the image of God means that every person has dignity and this implies that they cannot be 'used' by others. However, our being made in the image of God is also—and best—expressed in community and in the shared life of human beings.

For that reason the *dialogical* principle in human life is also a *diaconal* principle. So the likeness to God of us humans is an element of diaconal self-understanding. Diakonia is an event that reminds us of the creation of humanity and is God's creation is thus also a sign of God's diakonia towards us.

*Bishop Dr. h.c. Frank Otfried July, May 12<sup>th</sup> 2012, Ostrava (Morning prayer on the Diakonia Day of the LWF European Church Leadership Consultation)*



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# PART TWO

## Themes for Reflection & Action

### 1. Vocation

#### ***Diakonia is a faithful response to God's call through the other***

#### **The call from God and suffering people**

The diaconal church has a double call—a call from God and a call from people who are suffering, those who are ‘the least’ amongst us, those with no voice, whom the powerful do not hear. Just as Christians are called to serve God they are also called to serve their neighbour. The ‘Good Samaritan’ story is often cited as one of the mainsprings of diakonia and if you look closely, you can see that the ‘call’ to service comes from the wounded man by the wayside. One cannot disagree with that, but what is the content, model and method of appropriate diaconal service in the present context? What happens if we begin to create a model for this service from the idea that the diaconal call comes from those outside the church, from those whose voice does not register among the political and economic decision makers, those who do not even figure as successful consumers? Maybe the people in need are those who express God’s call to us (Luke 10: 30-37).

In reality, the motivation to become involved in diakonia comes from relationships and experiences and therefore it is very important in developing and strengthening diaconal vocation to pay attention to the biographical dynamic which underpins

and resources commitment. This is important whether the person is a volunteer, an activist or is employed in diaconal service. The deep personal understanding of service springs from these experiences and develops in reflection on unfolding practice.

#### **Complexity of ‘seeing reality’ & working for change**

The ‘Good Samaritan’ story provokes another reflection: what does it mean that those who passed by were unable to hear the call because of their concern with their religious, economic, or political position and tasks? The one who could ‘hear’ was also on the margins. The implication is that we have to pay very special attention to our ‘position’ in diakonia. We have to be close to everyday life and this implies that we have also to think very carefully and reflect on the ways in which we see and analyse reality. The way in which we see ‘the other’ is framed by our biography and expectations and maybe shaped by theological or professional assumptions. Therefore we have to find ways to be conscious of our ‘frames’ and how they may inhibit our relationship with others. It is important to remember that our expectations are geared to our own culture and context and our own story and that others have different expectations and these will be related to their own personal life narrative.

If we want to work for change in people and communities, there are important implications which follow on from these reflections. We can conclude that the most fundamental

change is to help people to experience and live a ‘new story’. This has also to be thought through in context because each person is also embedded in their own community and culture. This means that often more significant changes will come through working with a whole group not on working with individual persons who are taken out from the group and put into a different context.

*“...truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me” (Mat 25:40)*

#### **Sympathy, empathy & compassion**

Because of the significance of relationships, it is important to clarify the basic orientation in diaconal work. We can draw a distinction between sympathy (I feel sorry for you) and an attitude of empathy. Both sympathy and empathy imply that we form a relationship with another person, that we ‘recognise’ them and may even form a bond with them. But there is a difference between empathy and sympathy. Sympathy involves us in imagining how the other person feels. Maybe from their own experience, the diaconal worker or volunteer may have an idea how someone feels in a situation of loss. On the basis of sympathy the worker relates to the person in their need. But in contrast, empathy

## Motivation for change

'Living Hope' is a project with two day care centres for children in Odessa. Normally, a central problem in diaconal work with children and young people is how to motivate excluded groups to participate or how to keep them motivated. However, we can clearly see that today, that in our context, young people lack opportunity more than motivation. In fact the more the young people with whom the centre works are involved in the whole process, the more they are able to change themselves and the world around them. That's why we changed our working methods over the years from a service providing orientation to participatory methods.

Those involved in leading the centre teams are determined to implement participatory working methods in the daily activities. Out of our experience, it has been shown that this approach is one of the most effective ways to prepare children and young people for life and that it opens possibilities for their development despite their family and contextual background.

Now about 50% of the work in each centre is done by young Ukrainian volunteers. But they are not only serving there. Some of them are also finding other places, where their help is needed and they can make a difference. This might be in their school, their churches, in the neighbourhood or in other projects and even with the development of a third centre in a village 40 km from the city. Some also volunteer in other countries such as the Czech Republic or Germany, participating in the European Voluntary Service Year. The hope is that over the years, the thinking and attitude of the growing generation will change and they will obtain the skills and knowledge to change the world around them.

*Nicole Borisuk (Ukraine)*

involves trying to be increasingly aware of the experience and identity of the other person on their own terms. It means allowing the different experience and culture, the different identity to be present to us without trying to reinterpret it into our own framework. In the words of Richard Sennett, sympathy is an embrace and empathy an encounter. As he puts it 'Sympathy overcomes differences through imaginative acts of identification; empathy attends to another person on his or her own terms'. He goes on 'Sympathy has usually been thought of as a stronger sentiment than empathy, because 'I feel your pain' puts the stress on what I feel; it activates my own ego. Empathy is more demanding because it demands that the listener has to get out of him or herself' (Sennett 2012). With an empathic approach, we do not imagine that 'we are like the other' but rather, we are in a way curious about the other. Empathy is vital in community diakonia because we are dealing with difference all the time. The feeling of compassion is linked

to empathy and is as a fundamental part of Christian love of neighbour. It is an important virtue because it is the emotional counterpart of empathy and implies the active desire to work to remove suffering and injustice. Compassion is also a cornerstone of greater social interconnection and helps build community and conviviality.

## Starting from strengths

If diaconal workers and volunteers want to work with marginalised or dis-

advantaged people and communities towards empowerment and transformation, it is very important to use an approach which has been called starting from strengths—not simply seeing the deficits of people and communities in comparison to others but looking at the whole of life and seeing those things which are positive. Developing this further, it is important that diaconal workers learn to recognise the specific expertise of those with whom they work. Of course, hopefully the worker has professional expertise and the volunteer coming from another milieu may also have some training, but the people with whom professionals work are 'experts in their own reality'. This means that if our communication does not recognise and work with that expertise, the chances are that we will miss very many important factors on which positive change may be based. We may even destroy important survival strategies or at best demean or undermine them. Examples abound of the professional and well-meaning 'invasion' of the life worlds of marginalised communities.

## Openness to 'The other'

Another implication of this line of thinking is that the kinds of relationship which are implied by diaconal empathy and compassion should, as far as possible, be unconditional and 'barrier

## The world in one Parish

Angered is an area of Gothenburg with 50,000 residents of whom about 75% are immigrants from all over the world. In the local parish where I work, 90% are immigrants or children of immigrants or refugees. Many of them come from Iraq, Somalia, former Yugoslavia and Syria. To meet the world in the same area is in many ways fantastic and exciting, but it also leads to huge social challenges. Compared with many other countries in Europe there is not so much poverty in Sweden, but the relative poverty is growing and that is obvious in our area. In the church you can buy second hand clothes and we have a café. If you need food, we also supply that but our main activity is working together to try to find empowering solutions for a lasting change. We work hard to find well-functioning methods to recruit, train and work together with volunteers in diaconal work. This networking among people might be the most crucial part of my work. God calls all people to diakonia!

*Gunnel Claesson (Sweden)*

free' as people are accompanied in their life situation in an open-ended way. Diakonia has no expectation of a 'return on investment' or a necessary 'prescription' for the outcome. Indeed, it is often the case that those involved in diakonia received unexpected 'gifts' maybe of understanding or perception from those with whom they work. Diaconal service is not a 'one way street'!

Going back to the story of the 'Good Samaritan', a further implication we can draw is that we should not readily assume which persons will have a vocation to serve. In the case of this story, it was an 'outsider' who had empathy and was moved by compassion. So in diaconal work we should not construct 'one-way streets' where the workers and volunteers are the caring actors and 'the others' are seen as (passive) recipients. Part of the transformation process involves recognising the potential of 'clients' to become active participants, volunteers or activists. This can clearly be seen both in diaconal churches made up of people normally seen as recipients of welfare and those who are lacking rights and also in approaches to diakonia based on community development or community organising. Diakonia assumes that there can be a mutual relationship between helper and helped and of course that at one moment a person may be either or both! This viewpoint is essential in changing the image of the diaconal worker or volunteer and in opening up views of diakonia as social action, advocacy and campaigning with and on behalf of people and marginalised groups and communities.

### **Diakonia is for all!**

From this introduction we can see that there are a wide range of possible actors in diakonia—there may be motivated individuals who volunteer or persons and groups who



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are themselves living with problems or facing issues and who begin to support each other and take action. However it is important to emphasise that all congregations should have the priority to be diaconal churches open and affirming to 'the other' and supporting voluntary action. On the other hand diaconal organisations and institutions can also learn from the approach being advocated in this paper and can support transformative processes which are based on similar ideas. We can speak of one mandate and two profiles in this case, but too often diaconal organisations with their specific structures and forms become separated from the 'life-world' of the people they set out to serve or even from local congregations and parishes.

### **Diakonia is involved in everyday life!**

Developing this idea, we can see that one of the questions which diakonia has to address is that very often diaconal actors are 'distant' from the life world and actual situation of the people and communities who are excluded or marginalised. The consequence is that sometimes

programmes are developed which do not correspond to real needs or existing cultural or religious norms. This means that those involved in diaconal processes at different levels have to find ways to be sensitive to the situations and not to be prescriptive based on well-intended external criteria. When constructing criteria for project funding, it is important that donors and funders recognise the different contexts and create frameworks which have expectations related to diverse contexts. What can be achieved in one context may be much more difficult in another. More attention also needs to be paid to developing processes which enable actors in congregational diakonia to feel confident in relating to situations of otherness before starting their work.

The involvement of diakonia in everyday life aims at fullness of life for all! This naturally leads to creating conviviality because it leads to building relationships between different groups and communities and it is on this that we now focus.

## Diakonia is a faithful response to God's call through the other

- ✓ Diakonia is in itself an expression of faith in God's presence, in the 'other', the one who is marginalised or 'different'. What does this mean for us today, in Europe?
- ✓ In secularizing and multi-religious contexts, how do we address the new questions arising regarding the involvement of and working together with people from diverse backgrounds of faith and outlook?
- ✓ Who will do the work? Between professional approaches and voluntary commitment?
- ✓ How can we develop volunteering in the neighbourhoods? And how do we resource and accompany volunteers and activists?
- ✓ In the midst of all the diverse challenges, how do we decide which groups and issues we are going to focus on, in our respective contexts?

## 2. Conviviality

### *Diakonia is an approach to life in community*

#### Community & conviviality

Diakonia is, as we have seen, rooted in congregational life and congregational life is community life! Yet communities can be exclusive and can build up walls which prevent them from relating to people from 'other' communities. Community also has a number of different meanings—it can be linked to place (the village or neighbourhood) or interest or identity.

It may also carry connotations from an imagined past situation when people remember bygone village or urban neighbourhood life or of norms drawn from different religious traditions. Because of this community may also be a factor in oppression. Therefore, whilst agreeing that we are seeking life in community as a basic factor of diakonia, we also have to be careful to choose our understanding of community in a way which encourages openness to the other and which allows also for internal diversity. For these reasons we have focused on conviviality as a key word. Conviviality refers to the art and practice of living together. The word was first used in

the contemporary context by Ivan Illich to refer to the idea of creative relationships between people and people and their environment (Illich 2001). He contrasted conviviality, which he saw as a free give and take between people as they create their own reality, to the mechanical and conditioned responses to demands made on people by others with power. Nowadays, conviviality is also used as an alternative concept to multiculturalism because conviviality refers to the everyday interactions and practices of living together across diversity and without domination.

Conviviality is based on:

- ✓ Relational nature of the person, in distinction to a view of the person which is based on possessive individualism,
- ✓ Respectful views towards people and communities which are 'different',
- ✓ Reciprocal relationships of give and take between people as a foundation for life together.

Conviviality emphasises the building of creative relationships between people which recognises interdependency and which promotes companionship (related to the growing sense people express of being 'lonely').



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### Tackling Racism

'White people must listen very well to the painful racist experiences of black people in our society. Black people can help white people to find ways to join in the struggle against racism. The building up of sustainable communities starts with people's needs, strengths, and beliefs, and with public discussion. The place to hold these may not be the church itself, but where there are people who know about suffering and getting up again! To build such communities we need all the gifts and qualities that people and traditions have. We need old people because of their long-suffering patience, children because of their cheerfulness, migrants because of their solidarity and hospitality, refugees and outlaws because of the strong survival systems they have developed. We need to learn conviviality, living together where people are. Then we shall find together the solidarity that we need for sustainable communities, in which we can resist difficulties, fight against injustice and racism, and experience a really inclusive, diverse society. And I believe that this will bring a lot of joy and thankfulness back into our European churches.'

*Ina Koeman, (Belgium) European Diaconal Forum*

The origins of the word conviviality lie in the historical period in Spain when Christians, Jews and Moslems lived together until the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It is a very useful concept to frame our work for creating liveable cities and villages in a context where there are many different communities living side by side—for building society in diversity. If we use this idea as a basis for diaconal practice we will come to a new understanding of the basis of relationships in conversation, which takes time to be alongside people in everyday activity, creating space for developing the 'art and practice of living together'. This can include simple activities such as preparing food and may lead to other more complex actions which may in turn create new alternatives or may involve people organising and supporting each other in work for change. This has implications for training, development and support of diaconal workers and for the financial support and resourcing of diaconal work because in this experience based and inductive approach outcomes cannot easily be predicted.

### Using time and conversation in Diakonia

One of the main issues this approach involves is a consideration of the use of time and conversation. In conventional project design, the framework is often built around defined objectives and

timescales and this mentality can in fact also be a mirror of cultural mechanisms that exclude people. One reason for this is that financially driven efficiency models restrict the amount of time which can be 'spent' with each person. Often the goals of the work are also predetermined and conversation is then pushed into the frame of a time-limited meeting. Basing diaconal practice on 'conviviality' encompasses the idea of building creative relationships which result in activities which are not pre-determined. This enables the production of new knowledge and new actions, maybe even new ways of living together! Such an approach to building trustful relationships enables people to identify their own common themes and tasks and to work together. In contexts where the tradition of people working together has been lost, time has to be taken to gradually build up trust relationships through conversation and confidence building actions. It is also important in areas where political change does not seem to be likely, but where change can be made on the local level, by treating people with dignity and developing new ways of working together. This approach cautions diaconal workers against stereotypical presuppositions about the behaviour of particular groups, for example young people or immigrants. If we work with people about whom we have negative assumptions, however much we try to hide them, they are bor-

ders or fences which prevent us from doing creative work for change. In fact such assumptions or hidden prejudices are 'visible' and will be 'mirrored' in the behaviour and response of the other people concerned. However it should be emphasised that we are not proposing an approach which implies giving up one's own culture and identity but of bringing them into a dialogue with others, which maybe leads all to change. This approach to living with diversity may be one of the most important ways in which trust can be built and the fear of the 'other', which sometimes may even lead to violence if not dealt with openly, may be addressed.

In this way, professional, voluntary and congregational diakonia is a visible Christian witness standing for the worth of all human beings as made in the image of God. It is a fundamental building block of social change because we know that marginalised people and groups do not often engage in civil society, partly because they have no experiential basis of working together to achieve common goals, beyond everyday survival. In some contexts, belief in self-worth and trust in other people have been so undermined that basic relational strategies are fundamental. Without this life-world based engagement there is no lasting change. However it also means a reappraisal of the models of diaconal professionalism and even of pastoral professionalism. The appreciation that diakonia is a way of life should provoke a reflection on the secular professional models which diakonia 'borrows'. The close working with people in all aspects of life means that 'boundaries' have to be dealt with in a different 'non-formal' way (not regulated by office or centre opening times for example).

### Diaconal Church

This understanding of diakonia approached through the concept of conviviality supports the concept of diaconal church or the creation of open church meeting points. It is also

## Diakonia is an approach to life in community

- ✓ Christian identity is built on and in community. How can we strengthen the understanding of Christian witness becoming alive in working together with other actors, for better community?
- ✓ Diakonia is a life style, as consequence of Christian faith—how can we bring today's managerial and professional requirements into dialogue with Christian values?
- ✓ What will strengthen churches' integrating capacities, i.e. towards creating good neighbourhoods and restoring conviviality with those living in situations of vulnerability?
- ✓ How can diakonia become a motivator and thought changing movement which brings visibility to Christian witness, in the broader community and society?
- ✓ How will it be possible to sustain diakonia in contexts of financial crisis in churches and the wider economy? How are we able to strengthen the identity of Diakonia and give it space, also in church structures, as the 'liturgy after the liturgy'? What does it mean to be a diaconal church?

similar to the experiences with urban mission in the Netherlands, which is based in neighbourhoods, usually with a small centre, but which starts with 'presence in the everyday life-world' of people. Very often the role of a volunteer in diaconal work is clear because a person with resources, maybe of time, is involved in supporting another person or an activity. But in neighbourhood based activity, the volunteer may also be someone who is in the same situation as the group or person who needs help. The whole group may become active in working for change and in this context; the distinction between the traditional volunteer role and that of an activist working for change is blurred. People may be in different roles at different times because the activities are rooted in everyday life and voluntary workers may take on many different roles. On the basis of

the work of such local centres, or engaged local churches the connection between mutual aid and social or political action is easier to make because of the trust relations which are built up over time. Critical roles for diaconal workers include community building and making connections between different groups and interests. There is also a strong emphasis on networking and bridging with other institutions and organisations in the field. The worker is a combination of organiser, spider and supporter. Furthermore this perspective on diakonia is supportive of ecumenical and interfaith working.

However, as we have noticed, diakonia has a special concern with marginalised groups and it is important not only to focus on relationships in the locality where relationships with people are the direct concern. The vocation of diakonia is to secure justice and participation with

excluded groups and it is on this question that we focus in the next section.

## 3. Justice

### *Diakonia promotes equality and justice*

#### **Diakonia and issues of injustice**

A key role of diakonia is to focus on people and communities who suffer from injustice and exploitation. This work is grounded on direct engagement with people who are marginalised, for example people who are out of paid employment or who are under-employed or who otherwise suffer from bad working conditions. Other important justice issues which diakonia has to address include the rights of immigrant and minority groups, people with disabilities and especially the rights of people who are not legally recognised.

In general terms the focus of diakonia on justice issues follows three main lines:

The first stems from the focus on people who are marginalised or who are in some way disadvantaged. Based on the understanding that all are made in the image of God and are valued equally

### Homeless People organising themselves

A group of homeless people and street activists in Niedersachsen, Germany had begun to organise themselves. With support of Diakonia they managed to build up a network called Armutnetzwerk e.V. (Poverty Network) and create an internet forum with political, legal and practical information for homeless people. They network and database they founded can be accessed from every internet café and from every social worker's office ([www.berber-info.de](http://www.berber-info.de)). Members of the network are delegated to the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) and are in touch with other attempts to build self-organisations of homeless people in other countries.

*Peter Szynka (Germany)*

regardless of their status, class or abilities and therefore cannot be denied the basics for a life in dignity, diakonia has to work directly with those who are marginalised in order to address their needs. But meeting needs has to be done in a way which enhances the dignity of all the people involved and which enables them to participate in addressing the issues which affect them. For example, it is not only a question of food but of how food is shared and how the context of sharing food promotes conviviality which includes action.

The second main line stems from this. Social justice is also about participation. Meeting basic needs is fundamental, but it is also important to enable all people to participate in political, economic and cultural life. The problem is that financially and resource poor people also lack time and resources for civil participation. A functioning democracy involves wide participation in the institutions and processes which affect everyday life.

The third main line is to press for the implementation of political and economic policies which ensure that the resources of society serve the common good of all. This means that economic and political powers also should be responsible for the wellbeing of all and for the care of creation. It has been remarked that we not only need to meet the immediate needs of people but also to work for a society and economy that does not produce poverty (interdiac, 2010).

Recent studies by the UNDP in Central and Eastern Europe and the CIS region have produced a model for overcoming exclusion which emphasises three interlinked dimensions: economic exclusion (work, social income etc.), access to quality health and social services and education and opportunities for civil participation. All three are essentially linked (UNDP 2011). This self-understanding takes into account the need to relate

### Single Parents Fight against Child Poverty

A group of single mothers and fathers in the village of Uslar in Niedersachsen, Germany were worried about child poverty and the future for their children. The German government had introduced a so-called 'Education and Participation Package' (Bildungspaket) which was meant to change the situation of poor children for the better. However, accessing the finance involved a very bureaucratic process and so most of the money did not reach the children. In autumn 2012 the parents' organisation decided to go to Berlin to confront the politicians of the national Government with the poor outcome of this 'Package'. The group also decided to symbolically return the 'Package' to the sender. In Berlin, the group organised a public hearing, supported by Diakonia, to advocate their case for a change and to hand the 'Package' back! Following this and other actions, the government improved the programme.

*Peter Szyuka (Germany)*

to different 'levels' of decision making in societies from local to national and international institutions.

Local diakonia should be based on all the three lines of meeting needs, promoting participation and advocacy for policy change and can impact on each of them. In some contexts, we have seen in the work of the Solidarity Group, that it is possible to create services in ways that foster the self-organising and action of the participants. The wider society benefits from this as people often classified as passive become active. Furthermore, by creating a strategy for change, diakonia with others, can overcome pessimism at the local level and begin to open up participation in contexts where it seems to be unlikely.

The concept of human rights together with diaconal self-understanding also implies that diakonia is able to ally with other civil society organisations to both provide support and to campaign for change. As the aftermath of the financial crisis impacts, the role of diakonia in defending social and economic rights assumes even more importance. However, the ways in which diakonia and the church work with people facing the consequences of extreme inequality and injustice have to be adapted to the context and the possibilities. In some countries the church in combination with civil society will have means of access to decision makers (for example the work

of the church with local 'Associations of Unemployed People' in Finland); in others it is more difficult. Nevertheless the key point is not just to work with individuals or even groups but also to address the structural causes of the problems of inequality and injustice. This is one of the reasons for stressing empowerment and the need for the church and diakonia to work with and not only for marginalised people. The slogan of 'nothing about us without us' coined by activists in the movement of people with disabilities is relevant to this work too!

### Diakonia does not discriminate

The presence in Europe of people with few, or minimal, social and economic rights, presents a conflict because states that have signed up to the majority of declarations of human rights may deny the fulfilment of those rights to people within their borders. The churches and diakonia cannot accept this double standard and have to respond to the suffering and injustice caused by this clash of the concepts of rights by providing services, advocacy and campaigning. The more societies are split, the more diakonia has to ally itself with the people who have lost out in this process and who, especially in the present time, are called upon to pay the price of rescuing financial institutions. This is a kind of forced sacrifice and according to Christian

## Diakonia promotes equality and justice

- ✓ How do we take up responsibility for sustaining justice, as individuals and churches?
- ✓ Diakonia is a voice advocating for those who suffer injustice. Who should diakonia address, with and on behalf of those who are not treated justly?
- ✓ How do we avoid simplistic answers to contextual complexities?
- ✓ Diakonia is committed to deal openly with ethical challenges, but how do we deal with a situation where working silently may be a basic requirement to support vulnerable people (for example in working with people without documents)?
- ✓ What are the elements for a constructive relationship between church/diakonia and the state at a time of reducing resources and changing values?

self-understanding, no one should any longer be forced to sacrifice themselves for the good of others. This is one of the meanings of the cross and resurrection.

The question of justice also comes to the heart of church and diakonia because it challenges all situations where the churches are selective in deciding whom to help and it also challenges diakonia to practice participation and non-discrimination in all its activities. Diakonia cannot fight for justice and equal treatment if it and the churches do not also practice justice in their structures and activities

The skills which diakonia needs to further develop in future include advocacy and campaigning with and on behalf of others and also working with civil society partners for common objectives. Justice issues should be central to the ecumenical action of the churches and action should offer practical support, including the provision of 'hidden services' where appropriate, but support is not a substitute for political action to remove the causes of injustice. In all dealings with this matter, the work of diakonia should not be based on the concept that the church is an adjunct of law-giving and enforcement, but that its work is based on grace and the recognition of the ultimate worth of each person. These issues, which are growing in importance, should be

reflected not only in diaconal work and not only on the margins of the church, but rather diakonia has the task to bring them to the heart of the church's life on every level.

As well as the overall conditions in the society, which have to be addressed by diakonia, the underlying values which inform economic and political decisions are of great importance. This is because at the moment, the values behind the present form of the market economy form the underlying culture and shape social services, health and welfare. The consumer culture celebrates choice for those with resources but the tendency is to limit choice for people and communities on the margins. So now we turn our attention to the question of human dignity in the present economic context.

## 4. Dignity

### *Diakonia opposes consumer society and market driven economy*

#### **Introduction—A consumer led and market driven society?**

It was already in the 1970's that churches in Europe began to register the growth of a consumer society which was strongly shaping personal and community life. The expectations of ever-rising consumption and the growing market in new technology—especially communication technology—have had a profound effect on employment and social relations. The breakdown of the former centrally planned economies



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*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (Lk 4:18-19).*

opened the whole European space to consumer pressures. In the experience of the Solidarity Group, the combination of consumer values and the pressure of financial markets have contributed to the splitting of society, especially between a smaller group of very affluent people, and a growing number living in poverty across the region. This continual growth of inequality is antithetical to the promotion of the common good of all. Previous generations had experienced shortages of even the most basic goods and services and lack of resources to meet basic needs. These conditions have now returned to some regions and for some groups in Europe. Critical new factors are the drive to keep consumption led demand growing (not relating this to basic needs) and the perceived priority of restoring the finance system. This means that very often official efforts to deal with the economic situation create more poverty and do not address basic needs.

The formation of a consumer society has an impact on people’s self-understanding because it is based on ever increasing stimulus of people’s desires, which are actually endless, in comparison with finite basic needs. In consumer driven economies and societies, personal identity and fulfilment are linked to the consumption of certain goods and services. This in turn creates a view of fulfilment and ‘the good life’ which is based on insatiable desires and compulsive

product innovation. A society based on rampant consumerism leads to stress, unsustainable personal and household debt and reduces the time available for relationships and reflection. The emphasis in the Christian teaching on greed as a fundamental sin is related to the fact that desire is without limit and it is this limitless consumption which is now celebrated, but which has led to the growing poverty of people and communities across Europe. One implication of this is that the present economy and the underlying economic model is an important focus for the engagement of the church and especially for diakonia.

We headed this section with the one word ‘dignity’ and by this we would like to explore the link between dignity and welfare. This is also relevant, because in many discussions of poverty, one of the links made is between poverty and human dignity. It is taken for granted that everyone should be treated with dignity, but dignity is rarely defined in policy or operational terms (Addy, 2011).

### **The implications of the inclusive love of God for all**

The inclusive love of God for all stands in sharp contradiction to all self-definition of persons through the capacity to consume and the growth

of their personal income and wealth. Dignity in neo-liberal terms is founded on an individualistic view of the person and focuses on autonomous decision making and a person’s responsibility for their own (economic) welfare. In Christian terms dignity is a more relational concept, which while not denying that people are responsible and should be able to make choices in life, recognises the interpersonal grounding of decision making. Furthermore, dignity in Christian terms is grounded in the fact that the person is created in the image of God and the love of God extends to all. This implies that systems should not damage the dignity of people, whether they are systems of care or of employment or financial systems. The focus of the diaconal understanding of the person is on relationships and creation care. The putting of markets (especially financial markets and markets which speculate on commodities which are basic needs, such as food) ahead of human need is a form of idolatry which undermines dignity and should be exposed for what it is. This has become even clearer in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis.

### **Consequences for welfare and diakonia**

As a consequence of the implementation of neo-liberal policies, the welfare

*Recently, global financial crises and environmental disasters have dramatically exposed the underlying scandalous greed—of seeking profit through any means, and at the cost of our fundamental humanity.*

*As a faith-based organization, it is crucial that the LWF communion speak to greed, which at its root is a deeply spiritual matter (cf., Luther’s discussion of the First Commandment in the Small Catechism). Systemic greed dominates, enslaves and distorts God’s intentions for human communities and for all of creation. This is in direct contradiction to the petition “Give us today our daily bread,” which is based on the conviction that there will be “enough for all.” (LWF, 2010)*

## Diakonia opposes the consumer society and market driven economy

- ✓ How can we transform the consumer society and market driven economy, which are factors of marginalization and at the same time create a real basis for people's livelihood?
- ✓ What constructive ideas can diakonia offer to resolve the present world's economic systemic deadlock? Do Christian values and practice offer alternatives to market driven economy?
- ✓ How can we address the contextual complexities which cause the 'splitting' and differentiation in society?
- ✓ Churches are part of the market system and of society, its culture and structures of marginalization. This raises the question as to how the church can be in solidarity from a position of being privileged.
- ✓ Where does diakonia find open spaces for developing its responses?
- ✓ How can diakonia contribute to a world with more justice and love?

state is also being transformed through market mechanisms and competition. This means that the church and diakonia are more and more in danger of being 'captured' by economic ideas. We are witnessing the dismantling of social systems which have been developed over long struggles in the past and the reduction in welfare for people in countries where welfare has just begun to develop. When we emphasise dignity as a key concept for us, it implies the fact that all people, including those who have no stake in this market driven economy also deserve to be treated with total respect. Centring our understanding on dignity means that each human being, as created in the image of God, presents the same ethical demand as any other (Lévinas, 2006). The fact that this is not so, calls for a committed response from diakonia and the churches both on the practical level, with the people who are losing out and on the political level, to change the priorities. It has implications for the quality of diaconal and social service and for public policy. Diakonia cannot rest content with the role of simply supporting the growing numbers of people with diminishing resources.

In practice, this dominant ideology creates homelessness, splitting families and creating human suffering. For example, after system change

in Latvia, under pressure of market driven solutions, the state privatised flats. People were thinking about freedom of choice and imagining that a flat would provide security and many people bought their flats with bank loans. The consequences were, firstly, that the state divested itself of common responsibility for housing and secondly, when the economic crisis hit, many could not maintain payment of their loans. This is one reason why so many people sought even low-paid work in other countries. They were in a kind of personal debt crisis and in the end had no choice.

Furthermore, the values underpinning the consumer oriented and market driven society are increasingly informing the policies of social welfare, health and education. Therefore the overarching social values impact on the work of diakonia, especially where the work is supported by public funds. The concrete impact of these ideas on diakonia is to push for market driven solutions and cost effective services which can transform models of practice. Interventions become time limited and mirror mainstream institutions which have to focus on goals which are accepted by the social and economic



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systems. In some contexts diakonia and the churches are resisting this role by using a mixture of creating alternative models of practice and campaigning for change. In diaconal thinking it is not possible to work with marginalised people on a purely instrumental model, there are no time limits or success criteria which can be applied to the expression of the love of God and God's grace (Menkveld, 2011).

### Innovation and resistance

The strategy of diakonia and the churches has to encompass both innovation and resistance. It is important to work with civil society to create new social and economic alternatives which enable people to survive and build capacity. Diaconal and church centres should develop their role as open spaces for innovation and policy development. Out of this experience the churches should use their capacity to impact on national and international policy. The church and diakonia also need to model new responses by developing their own internal life in a just and ecological way.

The open question which we now face is to work out 'how this economy can be transformed and yet enable the creation of a real basis for people's livelihood and well-being'?



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### The Apple Festival, Liepaja, Latvia

A big event in the life of our congregation is the Apple festival. Someone called it a chain reaction of giving. It's just one time each year before Thanksgiving, in October. More than sixty farmers donate their products—vegetables, fruits, jam and bread. At the apple festival we distribute them for a donation. The collected money is given to support groups of people with disabilities in the rural areas around Liepaja. There is much singing, joy and music around. The whole congregation is involved with different activities. Later on we also invite the farmers to a social afternoon in our church.

*Martin Urdze*



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# PART THREE

## Re-forming Community Diakonia

### 1. Starting Local

#### Introduction

In spite of all the differences of context and experience, the representatives involved in the 'Seeking Conviviality' process agreed that priority aims include:

- ✓ engaging in empowering and transforming service with marginalised groups and communities,
- ✓ discovering the potential within such groups, enhancing compassion, reciprocal respect and justice,
- ✓ improving the quality of life in marginalised communities,
- ✓ raising awareness of people's situation and working with them for change.

The Gospel, and the hope and faith it gives, sustains diaconal workers in their endeavours to motivate volunteer commitment, activate local congregations and communities and to support action for change.

Working methods vary, depending on the respective diaconal service and include:

- ✓ having a sustaining presence in local communities, close to everyday life,
- ✓ encouraging people's participation and community development,
- ✓ counselling and coaching of individuals,

- ✓ campaigning, advocacy and lobbying with and on behalf of those in need, in the broader church and society,

- ✓ team building, networking, and dialogue.

Organising learning programmes and education as well as research is also a priority and should be oriented on issues raised in this paper. Below we follow up the key points addressed in the second part of the paper and trace them through into practice.

#### Vocation

#### Diaconal vocation is grounded in congregational life...

When we examined the experience of the group, as reflected in the section on vocation, we rediscovered both the importance of relationships and the need to focus on the local level. It is a truism to say that the development of diakonia depends on motivated people and it is clear that in this development the role of the congregation or local Christian group is critical. If a congrega-

#### Cross Congregation, Liepaja, Latvia

Our main idea is that diakonia is not just a section among others in the congregation. It has to be present in all aspects of the congregational life, beginning from Sunday morning, where the children who often come from disadvantaged families get a meal, and ending with the choir that regularly sings in a home for elderly people. Over and over again we have to ask ourselves how can our groups open up for people in need and not be just self-serving.

The congregation has 115 members. Many of them participate in diaconal activities as volunteers. From time to time we have had several projects but the finance is limited to a period not longer than two years. Afterwards we have to wait again for some years for a new programme. In the meantime we try to promote self-help activities. The projects can help disadvantaged people to get new skills and some of them become confident enough to register and sell their products. We try to support these people by finding markets and providing training. Occasionally, we organise meetings where people can exchange products and services. The personal contact is very important to build up trust. Out of this work many people have become interested in the congregation and also become members.

We have a church and a parish house which are open for several non-governmental organisations (NGO's) and self-help groups to meet. It is very important to build the network of NGO's working in the social sector. We regularly meet with politicians and municipal workers and we do advocacy work. Also our centre helps other congregations to develop their diaconal work, for example by providing training for voluntary workers.

In order to get access to funding the congregation founded Liepaja Diaconal Centre as an NGO. This also allows us to include people who don't want to be a member of our congregation, but nevertheless are interested to support our work.

The aims of the diaconal centre are to:

- offer socially disadvantaged people, especially people with disabilities, in the city and region of Liepaja material, medical and spiritual help,
- strengthen the community and self-help efforts of all the inhabitants,
- support diaconal activities in the Christian congregations of the Liepaja region.

*Martin Urdze (Latvia)*

tion has Diakonia as a central aspect of its life then it is more likely that people will be enabled to develop their own vocation. An inclusive, open and affirming congregation is more likely to foster diaconal vocation among its members because it will be seen as natural and not as some specialised action.

Diaconal vocation may be, to use a traditional phrase, ‘caught not taught’ by being in such a supportive milieu. This can be enhanced by ensuring that all the aspects of church life, such as learning programmes for confirmation include a diaconal emphasis and an exposure to Christian social action. For developing diaconal vocation amongst young people, special programmes can be developed on the local level and lead to participation in such initiatives as the ‘Diaconal Year’ in the country or abroad. But these must be grounded in a diaconal culture or they remain an option linked to a stage of life, not integrated in the whole of life.

### ...but it needs a clear strategy for development

Secondly, congregations should have a strategy for developing diakonia with clear goals. Here is an example adapted from Swedish experience:

- ✓ From the church as an ‘association for mutual interest’ to a church that corresponds to actual social needs,
- ✓ From a church that supports some individuals to a church that supports many groups of people,
- ✓ From a church that exists for a minority to a church that recognises and acts with many minority groups,
- ✓ From trying to fill the (growing) gaps in public provision to shaping public provision and collaborating with civil society and public bodies where appropriate,



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✓ From silent diakonia to prophetic diakonia.

*(Adapted from a model created by Grytnäs Parish, Sweden)*

Guidelines such as these can shape congregational life and provide a background for a diaconal culture. This spans the full spectrum from worship to social action and includes decisions about the use of property and its accessibility to different groups and the different programmes with age groups and identity or interest groups. Through such a process we can see that diaconal vocation is not only a personal issue but is grounded in the vocation of an entire congregation.

### Personal motivation should be nurtured

Empowering and transformative diaconal approaches can enable people who received support and care to become actors in their own right. Very often the motivation is rooted in struggling with personal issues and seeing that others have similar problems too. It is important for this and other reasons not to trap people in

the role of service users or recipients, but to see them as participants and contributors—as having their own strengths and potential.

On the other hand, many people who have no explicit Christian faith become involved in diakonia and given a context where there is open reflection on the work and a link between worship and diakonia, they may also become Christian believers. As one member of the Solidarity Group pointed out, ‘the ability to do good is rooted in the fact that people are created in the image of God’, therefore it is no surprise that the vocation to serve is a common human characteristic. This leads to two conclusions—firstly, diakonia should seek to collaborate with all people and organisations which have a similar vocation and, secondly it is helpful not to limit ourselves to the traditional idea: first the call of God and then the call of the neighbour. As Luther emphasised, love of God and love of neighbour go together. Sometimes the call of God comes through the neighbour and sometimes the call of the neighbour leads to the call of God (Collins, 1994).

Each person, when they reflect on their biography and their motivation to

become involved in diakonia, finds that they have a specific understanding of service. It is related to their experience and to ideas which they have taken up from their surroundings in church and society. It is very important not only that people are called to diaconal service but they reflect on the model of service which is nearest to their experience and self-understanding. In a similar way, congregations and diaconal organisations need to reflect on their 'service model', especially at a time when there are rapid changes in the actual context and in the financing of welfare in each society. Of course for different situations, different forms of service are needed and maybe different knowledge and skills also. A good match between personal ideas and models of service and organisational models probably means that the worker will be less likely to become a victim of burnout! This is especially important when thinking about personal diaconal work and seeking people for more specialised voluntary tasks in diakonia such as working with people in prison or with more severe problems, for example with mental illness.

### **Diaconal service begins close to everyday life...**

In the work of the Solidarity Group we have developed the understanding that diaconal service must begin close to the everyday life of the people. It is based on seeing people whole and not just as problems and starting from their strengths and expertise. Diaconal service should avoid two pitfalls. The first is that of assuming that problems can be neatly defined from outside and solved by an approach which delivers the service without involvement of the people concerned. This is the route to dependence on workers and volunteers and eventually to overload and burnout. Furthermore, it creates passivity among service users and

does not create resources. The idea of the human being as one who both gives and receives is fundamental to diaconal service.

The second pitfall is in assuming that human need can be met according to fixed models and fixed timeframes. Project funding tends increasingly to favour time limited and outcome related processes but it may be that for some people long term involvement is necessary and the outcomes prescribed by the dominant groups may be either unrealistic or inappropriate for many reasons. Just as diaconal vocation is linked to biography and motivation—and therefore to expectation—so is diaconal service. The key word is grace—the unexpected gift -which often comes from the 'least' and surprises those who are involved in paid and voluntary diakonia.

### **...and includes diakonia of the marginalised with the marginalised**

Much thinking about diakonia is based on the assumption that the church congregation is in a position where it has financial and other resources and that the people of the church are relatively advantaged compared to people around who are in need. But in the experience of the Solidarity Group we have found that there are diaconal congregations, made up mainly of people who would be described as 'in need' who are able to provide support for each other and to include people in a similar position

outside the congregation. This is to be seen in congregations in marginalised neighbourhoods of large cities, in congregations with a migrant background and in congregations strongly linked to diaconal work. Much of the existing literature about congregation and diakonia misses the point that these inclusive congregations embody diakonia in their very being.

## **Conviviality**

### **Conviviality as the art and practice of living together...**

Choosing conviviality as the core concept through which we are developing diaconal thinking and strategy builds on the importance we have already identified in building up relationships in the congregation and with wider society, as a springboard for diaconal action. It already brings in ideas which are critical of the dominant individualistic view of the person and emphasises the importance of relationships. As the 'art and practice of living together' conviviality provides an approach to diakonia grounded in everyday life. This should also affect the liturgy, opening it to concerns of and participation by marginalised people and groups, where this is appropriate. The emphasis on 'living together' implies a change of service model towards activities which are reciprocal and where all are 'givers and receivers' at different moments. It implies a 'horizontal' rather than 'top-

### **Migrant's Congregation, Geneva**

The congregation invites resource people from the organizations who provide support services to migrants who do not have the right to access normal public services, such as the health service. They also share information about the social rights which exist even for those without documentation. Through this kind of sharing in community the congregation supports the growing inner security and orientation of people who before felt insecure and vulnerable. This inclusive approach extends to participation in the leadership of the liturgy which enhances dignity and leads to empowerment.

*Eva-Sibylle Vogel-Mfato (Switzerland)*

down' model of communication where all can contribute ideas and practical action according to their possibilities, skills and strengths.

### **...is a key to affirming different identities and sharing resources**

The situation in Europe is marked by ever increasing diversity and one of the most important challenges is to create living spaces where different groups can live together peacefully and creatively. Combatting 'mixophobia' is one of the biggest tasks which diakonia faces. (Bauman, 2008) Positively, there are examples of churches living as minorities with very few material resources that yet have a self-identity as open and welcoming. The metaphor of 'bridge' is sometimes used by people in this context and this enables them to welcome people in need without seeing them as 'outsiders', whatever their identity. There is a big difference between those congregations, ready to share even their small resources and churches which see their diaconal service as being only for the church members or only for those of one social or national group. Depending on the context, we found there is also sometimes a tendency for church members to see themselves as 'mainstream' and people who are in need as 'outsiders' or in a negative way 'different'. Conviviality as sharing life's resources should be a mark of every congregation. In our work in the Solidarity Group we found out that maybe it is even more a strength of small churches than large ones! However, as is well known, sharing is a tradition which goes right back to the earliest church (Acts 6:1-7).

### **Conviviality can be translated into diaconal service...**

This approach to diversity can also be translated to diaconal institutions

### **Act Fast, Act Local**

According to a proverb if you help fast, you help twice! In 2010 there was a serious flood in Hungary, especially in the North, and the South-Eastern regions. Within 24 hours the local Lutheran volunteers and professionals were in the field (Csikóstóttós-Tolna District) helping the local people with warm meals, blankets, cleaning supplies, and other priority supplies. In a short time a more than 25,000 Euro was provided to helping people to clean their houses, to buy new furniture and building materials, etc. With the local church's help 22 houses were renovated in a very short time, before any state donation or help arrived. During those hard weeks people experienced the spiritual and financial encouragement of the nearby congregations and institutes. In fact this is just one example of how local congregations and diaconal institutes have collaborated. For example in several places, including Dombóvár (South-Western region) local congregations organise food for elderly people in the district and the local elderly home provides the cooked meals. There is now a national coordination being developed to support these kinds of initiative.

*Szilard Szabó (Hungary)*

of the church located in such urban neighbourhoods. It is important to create service models where the members of different groups, for example those with a migrant background, can develop their own activities in relation with each other and those who are the traditional residents. In some cases such church based initiatives are the only source for many services which are denied to some groups of immigrants and they also provide a focal point where the skills and expertise of different groups can be enhanced and shared. One special example of this approach, which we shared in the Solidarity Group, is the existence in Europe of migrant led and created churches which give support to immigrants who are often faced with exploitative and oppressive situations in work and life. Because the members have daily life contact with each other and know the reality of work and social conditions, the so-called 'immigrant churches' possess expertise and perspectives which are invaluable for developing mutual aid and in some cases self-organisation. These churches may also combine solidarity with an invitation to enable people to get to know the gospel and come to faith. They are a reminder to the 'majority' churches that they are not closely connected to the life world and cultures of the im-

migrant communities. However, in our Solidarity Group, we found examples of congregations whose life was shaped by acceptance of diversity even if they were members of 'majority' churches.

### **...and has implications for creating a diaconal congregation.**

Working out the idea of conviviality extends diakonia from the making and sharing of food to the sharing of culture and to the development of local economic activities using people's skills and interest. However to build on conviviality also demands reflection on the use of time, because it cannot be constrained within 'office hours' and it requires an open and affirming attitude. It is very different to the normal 'service delivery' model which dominates traditional diaconal thinking. Furthermore, the whole congregation can be a diaconal actor in the expression of its life together.

Diaconal thinking can even influence the way the church building is organised. It should give expression to this open, welcoming attitude. Buildings convey 'messages' of inclusion or exclusion and the arrangement of rooms and furniture also convey the values and preferences of the congregation. It is not a question only or mainly of finance as some



very well furnished buildings can be intimidating and excluding because the official infrastructure of some churches reminds people of official buildings, which often do not provide a very empowering atmosphere. On the other hand, sometimes congregations with few resources are able to create warm and welcoming spaces in their buildings (Lønning, 2010).

### Diakonia is creating conviviality!

Summarising, we can say that it is not possible for the churches to promote in the wider society that which they do not share and live in their own life. So if the society should be open and accepting of diversity, so should the church. If society should practice more participatory forms of decision making so should the church. And if we really believe that human beings are relational, that caring and service belong to being created in the image of God and that God requires that people live in justice and peace, then conviviality is a valid keystone concept for diakonia today! Such an approach would require formation for diaconal work which emphasises the careful 'listening' to the needs and interests, the biographies and stories of people

and communities. This has implications for the development of diaconal service, proclamation and the liturgy. The result of the process of being present with people changes the service model, contextualizes the gospel and deepens the meaning of worship.

An orientation to community development work and empowerment is a way to support conviviality especially if it incorporates the following criteria:

- ✓ Being close to the life world of people (time and place)
- ✓ Being involved in the whole of life (seeking connection and communication)
- ✓ Integrated into the daily pattern of life (not just dealing with problems)
- ✓ Open to the agenda of people (exposure to the reality of 'the other' and their reality)
- ✓ Making a difference in people's lives (working on meaning and story; organising and empowering work)

*(adapted from Addy, 2013)*



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## Justice

### Local diakonia is committed to seeking justice

In a context where change is happening very fast and where ever more people are being marginalised, it is tempting for local churches to become completely absorbed in meeting the often escalating immediate needs. However, because of the basic commitment to justice, it is very important to find ways of working which do not perpetuate the injustices being done to marginalised groups.

### The basis of community diakonia

If community diakonia is going to meet the challenges of the new context it will need to be based on working approaches which build participation and empowerment in from the start. This means community diakonia is grounded in a long term process rather than short term projects. It is based on building relationships with people. Therefore diakonia in local communities needs creative people and a readiness to begin to act without having all the structures clearly in place (Horstmann, 2013). The reason is that the basis of local diaconal work is an inductive approach which does not start with preconceptions of the definition of the problem or the solution. Even if traditional elements are there, such as sharing food, these are constructed in a way which is empowering. It is clear that the development of community based diakonia which is empowering and transformative needs to be grounded in a leadership model which combines the ability to take initiative with an ability to listen to and reflect with people. On each step of the way, care has to be taken not to 'leave the people behind'! Because the approach is inductive, learning about other initiatives can be inspiring but models may not therefore,

simply be transplanted from one place to another. Contexts and relationships are diverse but of course, learning from each other's experience can be very fruitful in developing and benchmarking good practice

### **First steps in the process— participation is the key!...**

The process of developing community begins with listening to the stories of people in the context of everyday life. This is in contrast to service systems and official projects which begin either by identifying the need in advance or by specifying the goal. There may be an exception where there is a pressing issue which cannot 'wait', but care then must be taken not to create a precedent which prevents more considered and reflected action later. For instance a church which starts a feeding programme for hungry people sets up an expectation which becomes difficult to fulfil as the news spreads to the increasing numbers of hungry people present in most contexts. Or to take another example, churches start diaconal services with external models and finance but which cannot be sustained beyond the initial funding period. Basing work on a long term 'listening' approach can avoid these pitfalls. On the other hand, diakonia also has to respond with emergency help when there is a catastrophe such as flood or other environmental emergency or in cases of civil conflict but even in these cases, as is well known, the long term perspective is also important.

The question of how we 'see' the other person and their situation has to be worked on as a first step, because if only a 'need' or a 'problem' is seen not a person or group, then the scope for change will be limited. On the basis of shared 'seeing' and analysis, community diakonia can build different strategies and processes. In any case it is good practice to presuppose that

### **The Night Shelter for Women**

At the end of 2011 it became clear that the 14 bed night shelter for women would have their funding from Oslo City Council drastically reduced, meaning that half of the employees would have to be fired. This was a desperate situation but it forced the Oslo City Mission to think differently and innovatively! To be able to maintain the service at the night shelter a completely new approach was needed!

The night shelter is used by women who are homeless, have experience with prostitution and are addicted to illegal heavy drugs. The night shelter is a permanent offer with no pre-booking arrangements. In 2012 almost 200 different women made use of this offer that has existed since 1990.

So what to do? A meeting was called with the women who were regular users of the shelter and the situation was presented to them. The women were asked if they were ready to take co-responsibility for the management of the shelter. Surprised by the question and not being used to being seen as having any possible contribution—rather always be seen as needing and victims, they were overwhelmed by the fact that they were needed to make things go along. Different tasks were defined; night duty, cleaning the rooms, organising laundry, wake up call, etc. And women who were using the shelter were asked to sign up for the task they thought they could manage! Also former users of the night shelter were contacted and the response was overwhelming!

Additionally the night shelter contacted the drug rehabilitation centres in the Church City Mission and elsewhere, the employment office and many others, to see if there were any volunteers who would like to contribute. And many came!

Today the night shelter is more dynamic than ever before. The women are empowered to take responsibility for the shelter. Without them it would not function! The opening hours have been extended. More people than ever are involved in the management of the shelter. The employees now have a more of a coaching and advisory function. The practical management is in the hands of the women.

The initial thought was; "If the women can manage a difficult life in the streets, without a home, protection and security, they must be able to manage a shelter more or less on their own. We just have to let them, and stay with them! Not victimise them!"

*Steinar Eraker (Norway)*

beneficiaries should, as far as possible, be active participants from the beginning. Diaconal processes are based on complex relationships. There will probably be at least three groups involved, a leader or leadership group, members of a congregation (who should not only be seen as 'givers') and people who are in some way marginalised or facing problems. This is further complicated by relationships with power-holders such as donors and decision makers as well as with civil society organisations.

### **...also in identifying the issues!**

Normally, diakonia focusses on different kinds of needs or problems and certainly some needs are really urgent. But the emphasis on working with and not for people means that the problems and needs also have to be analysed and

acted on together with the people affected. There are many situations where congregations see a need and set about meeting it (for example addressing hunger by running a food bank) but do not work with people to analyse their own situation and also develop action together. If this is not done and the demand is very great, at least the congregation will get overwhelmed. For the long term development, the even more problematic outcome can be that people will simply learn that whenever there is a problem, the church will meet their needs. So demand will increase and if the congregation is small and hard pressed itself, if it will also soon get overrun and burnt out. One very important way to reflect this is to think that if in a community one or two people are hungry or unemployed, maybe they have a problem which can

be addressed through personal support. But if many are unemployed, have an inadequate income or face other related difficulties, then the congregation does not face a series of personal, private problems but rather a public issue. Public issues can be brought into the open and worked on politically whereas private problems are usually addressed singly or with small groups. In the context of local congregational diakonia, working with people, building self-organisations or community organisations and linking them to wider civil society are important ways of addressing needs. Very often there is a need to change the way municipalities operate or to address national or international decision makers. Making the connection between personal problems and structural conditions is one of the tasks of diakonia.

*But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream (Am 5:24).*

Community organising or community development can lead to action on different levels, for example putting pressure on the municipal authorities to provide resources for addressing a certain issue—for instance provision of day care facilities or of resources to support local initiatives. It may also lead to an expansion of self-help which will also generate new resources. Building confidence through these steps may also lead to taking on bigger issues which are related to the policies and practices of institutions which are in themselves exclusionary. The linking of local initiatives related to congregational diakonia, where possible with other faith groups and civil society, can create and sustain movement for change even in national policy. So if people are in poverty and the income maintenance system of the state or the legislation about fair pay

is not adequate or implemented, then campaigning is an important strategy for justice. But this must always include the active participation and voice of the people affected (Powered by People, 2013).

### Creating new role models...

Congregations depend for their survival on voluntary work and when we extend the picture to focus on community diakonia, it is clear that most of the work is done by volunteers or activists. Therefore it is very important to reflect on the role of volunteers and their own life situation. For example, in one very large Lutheran parish, an extensive and well used system was established to provide food for families with too little income. When the church analysed who was coming for food, it turned out that most were unemployed, but it also turned out that most of the volunteers who were operating the food bank and providing the meals were unemployed too! One group of unemployed people was queuing and the other group serving! In the church there was a worship service at lunch time on the day when food was distributed, but even though there was a meal afterwards, the roles

of giver and receiver remained completely separate. If we use conviviality as a guiding image for diakonia we can easily see that this picture can be changed, if relationships change and if all are givers and receivers! This small example is a window through which we can see that the role of being a volunteer, in the position of being unemployed, does not allow the common experience of unemployment to be discussed with the unemployed service users! Actually, both the volunteers and the service users share the common problem of unemployment and probably of insufficient real income but the service structure does not promote a shared analysis or the search for a more structural solution. In other words, a short term solution is substituted for working for systemic change. Yet with a small change of emphasis the same resources could be used to combine meeting needs and working for change. (interdiac, 2012)

### ...including organising for change...

In the Solidarity Group we found out that it is important to have an organising approach to working with people, for example who are home-



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less, because otherwise the meeting of immediate needs is substituted for the provision of longer term solutions. In this process, traditional volunteering can be transformed by supporting the self-organisation of homeless people. The same relationships can be used but the process and outcomes may be different!

Diaconal work on the local level has to engage with local municipal or regional structures and this is not simply or mainly about project funding, but also about the whole situation facing marginalised groups and the need for policy changes. By allying with other groups in different parts of one country or even of Europe, then actions for change can be supported. There are examples, which were shared in the Solidarity Group of local actions which had, by consistent campaigning pursued change in national policy and also worked for change in the practices of private companies—for example campaigns for a the payment of a Living Wage in London.

*The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; Is 61: 1*

### **...in community and other contexts**

This approach can be transferred to many areas of local diakonia. For example, one priority of diakonia is work with offenders and people who are, for whatever reason, imprisoned. Voluntary prison visiting is usually highly regulated and the visitors receive training and accreditation, but by applying some of the principles already

### **Diaconal Voluntary Work in Prison—Estonian Innovations**

Estonia is a small country with a population of 1.3 million, but still we are rich enough to have four prisons and 265 prisoners for every 100,000 inhabitants.

I was invited to meet life prisoners by a prison psychologist. She was the only person who worked with them and she had her hands full. Prisoners felt abandoned and said that they are seen as outcasts by the society. They were quite angry about it and had hundreds of questions.

We tried to explain that to us they are human beings first of all, as are we, and it was a small light of trust. I said that we have taken time for them, but they should not take advantage of it. Time that we will spend together must be quality- time, a meaningful meeting of human beings, not empty lost hours. If they are ready to work with themselves, we will be ready to serve time with them. And quite spontaneously we made a plan to prepare and carry out a new social programme together. We were supported by the chaplain general and the director of the prison and it was a really good beginning for us.

Normally, we put people in prison and forget them for a long time. When I speak with my incarcerated brothers, they tell me about how they see the meaning of a life sentence and death penalty. Life-time imprisonment in reality takes away the hope, future and dignity from a human being. She or he will be nobody. And if prison is not run in a healthy way, the sentence will lead to the degeneration of the person. So we made a proposal to change the Penal Code to give the possibility for earlier release and to improve the treatment principles of life sentenced prisoners.

We started a programme of 'Life Questions' during which a group of life sentenced prisoners along with the same number of outside volunteers participate in thematic forums led by two coordinators. The volunteers have been chosen considering the theme chosen for the module. There are about two forums a month and each is concerned with one special issue for which there is a volunteer expert joining. Each pair of forums is one module and there are seven modules in an eight month period. The issues for discussion are those important for the prisoners and they are making decisions about the topics and co-preparing the sessions. Each forum is evaluated and there is a debriefing session. Other supportive activities take place, related to the forums and the issues raised. Two volunteers (a psychologist and a priest) coordinate the programme.

*Avo Uprus (Estonia)*

elaborated, the task of prison visiting and caring for ex-offenders can be transformed. The first question which should be asked is: which people are in prison and why? It is noticeable that in different societies the numbers and types of offenders who are imprisoned are different.

The second question is as to whether prison is 'suitable' and positive for the people imprisoned. The role of a prison visitor and of diakonia in the prison service (or in other public bodies for that matter) is not just counselling and support for prisoners and prison staff but also to be eyes and ears, becoming aware of the reality of the criminal justice system. So, for example, it is a part of the identity of diakonia to make pressure for a change in the national policy

towards imprisoning people for often minor offences. There are many other examples where local diakonia could work for justice and where volunteers could play an important role (interdiac, 2012).

### **Dignity**

#### **The link between dignity and consumerism...**

The impact of the dominant model of society driven by market values and the celebration of possessive individualism is shaping the culture in which all are involved throughout the society. The result of this process in its impact on social, economic and cultural development constrains deci-

*The Lord says, “Come, every-one who is thirsty — here is water! Come, you that have no money — buy corn and eat! Come! Buy wine and milk — it will cost you nothing! (Is55 v1)*

sion makers and confronts actors in community diakonia every day. Diaconal actors focus especially on those who are marginalised by this process and whose numbers are growing, in some contexts exponentially. The operation of the consumer market often traps people in unsustainable debt and transforms their life as they try to manage it. Very small loans taken in an emergency, at high interest is very often the cause of family financial crisis. Research has shown that poorer people pay more for credit than richer people and yet credit may be vital for everyday survival (Dearden et.al, 2010). The concept of dignity enshrined in this model is related to the idea of the person as an isolated and autonomous rational decision maker who seeks to maximise their economic advantages. It implies that those who are not successful on this model are seen to be in some sense morally inadequate and social policies which are based on this ideology reinforce this view. People in poverty are treated as being unable to manage their daily life; increasingly cash benefits are replaced by vouchers and food hand-outs. This hardly reflects dignity on a Christian basis, as we explored it in the earlier section.

### **...is challenged by Christian thinking**

The relationship between dignity and grace and our understanding of eucharistic theology provide theological entry points which are sharply critical of the view of the person which is in the background of neo-liberal thinking. In the reflections of the Solidarity

Group we developed these theological ideas in a way which informs the practice of diaconal work and of diaconal congregations.

The first point is that dignity is not dependent on performance according to any economic or political norms; it is based on the fact that each person is created in the image of God and secondly, the human being is fundamentally relational. Society is built up on the relationships between people and the resources (particularly in this case financial resources) in a sense belong to God and people have them in trust. The trust implies, from a Christian perspective, using those resources to build up the common good and to care for creation. It means that finance should be used for the welfare of all people and not to enhance the power and dominance of any one group. A key concept for Lutherans is grace—and common grace in everyday life means that resources should be shared in order to create fullness of life for all. One of the fundamental criticisms Luther made was against the financiers and commodity traders of his day who deprived the poor of the means of life. So it is today, that a small minority in each country (and in the whole world) capture financial and other resources and charge extreme rent (interest) especially to the poor (Luther, M.). Political decision makers report nowadays, that they are often constrained by pressure from these financial power holders and the result is what has been called a ‘market conformed democracy, which favours them (Wall-Strasser et.al, 2010). The consequence is that many people suffer undignified treatment at the hands of those who hold economic power or who administer welfare systems.

The second theological idea which stands in criticism of the dominant model is the Eucharist. In this symbolic context, we take bread and wine which are in fact ‘manufactured’ products.

This means that (unlike baptism) if there is no production, there is no communion! So we see that in Christian thought, manufactured elements become the means of grace. As well as standing for bounty of creation, the elements also stand for systems of production and trade, for the work of human hands and the conditions under which people work. It is these which are transformed into the means of grace. They become the means of grace because they are shared freely and equally to all who are at the table. There is no limit to God’s graceful invitation in Christ to the Eucharist! There is no expectation that you should be ‘economically successful’. Indeed in the early church, one of the contentious issues was the fact that the Eucharistic meal was not always shared equally (1 Cor. 11:20-30). But in the Eucharistic context there is no difference of economic class and this radical idea was one factor that led to the expansion of the early church amongst marginalised groups.

*Martin Luther spoke out against sinful systems and practices that oppressed and impoverished people. He clearly said “No” to practices of the banking and trading companies of his time: “... they will not change. If the trading companies are to stay, right and honesty must perish. If right and honesty are to survive, the trading companies must perish” (WA 15, 313: LW 45, 272.). He was referring not only to a few greedy individuals, but to the system and assumptions upon which it was based, which divorced making money from meeting human need and required some to acquire ever more. (LWF, 2010)*

**In Vesper churches**, the main church is converted so that areas for serving drinks and the distribution of food are created and the space is divided into dining and living rooms. They generally operate over the winter months. The idea emerged in 1995 in Stuttgart and today there are more than 20 in Baden-Württemberg. Vesper churches are financed by donations and are mainly based on the commitment of volunteers.

The Vesper churches offer people in need not only enough food and a warm place in the cold season, but also medical and practical help and human care. Volunteer doctors give their time to care for the guests and even vets take care of the pets. Visitors can get free haircut and use other services. Devotions, cultural offerings and free concerts make the Vesper church a meeting place for people of all ages. One very important principle is that a Vesper church is for people from all walks of life, not just those on the margins. Mixing and conversation is an important aspect of the project.

Bishop Frank Otfried July underlines the importance of Vesper churches: 'In a society in which politicians want to be seen on the backs of welfare recipients, unemployed and socially disadvantaged, it is particularly important that the Church takes a clear stance. We are on the side of the poor and disadvantaged. A clear symbol of this partisanship for people in difficult situations is the Vesper Church.'

See: [www.vesperkirche.de](http://www.vesperkirche.de) (Germany)

alternatives related to local conditions, skills, needs and interests. In some cases congregations can work with diaconal organisations and with other community groups. In some contexts it is necessary to create new organisations to manage the projects and initiatives, for the positive goal of increasing partnership and participation. This may also be needed in cases where church or state regulation does not allow churches to participate in social projects directly. In all these efforts, the focus is on creating sustainable community and fostering conviviality.

### Grace and Eucharist in diaconal practice...

The deep meaning of grace and the experience of Eucharist are a constant challenge in a world which is organised on different values. Diakonia is one of the most important ways in which the church can show that it stands for these different values in practice. This understanding of grace and inclusive community should be incorporated in everyday congregational and local diakonia. This is one of the reasons why the Solidarity Group focussed its reflections on conviviality which stands for a new expression of the art and practice of living together. The question then is how can diakonia implement these ideas?

it will have implications for the way in which we share food with those who are forced to go without. But it also means that we have to think of ways to innovate so that all can share food with dignity and without people being made to feel less than full human beings. Diakonia can be an effective force for innovation in local communities, supporting the economy of everyday life. This is an important strategy because in many contexts the mainstream economic and social systems are not functioning adequately. These innovations can be in the field of finance (through developing local currencies, local savings associations etc.), local food production and distribution and through other working

### ...and resistance

The second strategic line is linked to resistance and transformation and uses the relational base of diakonia and the local congregation to support the building of organisations to resist those policies of government or the private sector which are so damaging to community life and which threaten human dignity. This may include campaigning and advocacy for changes in municipal policies towards people in need of welfare support or social care, for example. Such small scale advocacy and campaigning can have results even when resources are limited. However, these local initiatives should be linked into wider national and even international efforts to change the

### ...of innovation

In the Solidarity Group we propose two complementary approaches. The first is to examine all the practices of diakonia in the light of Eucharistic sharing and to notice how important the concrete sharing of food is to the practice of our faith. In the symbolic heart of the church the meaning of the Eucharist for the wider society should be transparent for all who participate. If we take this as a template for our work

### Generation Meeting Green—Germany

In a rural and economically marginalized region in eastern Bavaria, older people with long professional experience and technical competence are living alone and forgotten. On the other hand, there are many young people who are unemployed, do not cope well with their lives and have the impression that they are not needed. Diakonia in cooperation with the neighbouring Protestant and Catholic churches has been given a plot of land from a Benedictine monastery. There a plant nursery has been started in which young people can organize themselves and work. The older people, often themselves unemployed or already retired, accompany the younger ones as consultants to organise the sale of products or to make flower arrangements for special occasions. Customers include churches who order their altar decorations there, or nursing homes. There are also private customers placing orders for festive occasions such as weddings or funerals. Both food and flowers are produced. Within three years the project will be so advanced that it can finance itself.

Fritz Blanz (Germany)

direction and content of policies which are harmful because they demean and degrade poor people and communities and do not provide the care and support needed. A very critical area is that of care for the elderly where the cutting of resources is leading to suffering and in some reported cases, suicide. For example, there are documented cases in Germany where elderly people are fed with feeding tubes because of a lack of carers and other cases where the care is exported to other parts of Europe or even to the global south (Haarhoff, 2013).

## 2. Supporting Actions



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### Analysis & Research

#### The changing context demands deeper analysis and research

It is recognised by the Solidarity Group that the European context, as the whole world, is facing unprecedented challenges. In the light of this, one of our key findings is that diaconal actors need more support in analysing the overall developments in economic and social policy and that the follow up to this report should address this need. In the face of the changes traditional models, which may have been positive at one time, may have negative implications and therefore to develop and share analysis is a very important contribution to equipping the churches for social political action. This research needs also to take into account the very different European national contexts both inside and outside the European Union.

#### The economy—research to promote innovation and change

Making this general point more specific, at a time when the whole economic and political system seems

to be in permanent crisis, it is a priority for the churches with others to explore ways of transforming the economy in the direction identified in this report and to create a real basis for people's livelihood and well-being. This must include both innovation at the local level and strategic change of national and international political and economic policies. As many LWF documents emphasise, the linked challenges of creating a humane and environmentally sustainable economy are central questions to be faced.

#### Democracy, the changing role of the state and diaconal approaches

The role of the state and the functioning of democratic institutions are so diverse in European thought and practice and the position and role of the churches in these diverse contexts should be better understood in order to support relevant action. There is a need for more analysis of the different contexts and the related relevance of different approaches to diaconal engagement. Generalised statements need to be qualified and the different

contexts taken into account. The context of Sweden is different from that of Germany and that of Britain is different from the Ukraine! Furthermore, in the Solidarity Group we found that there are contexts where there is almost no analysis of diaconal work and this should also be addressed especially when change is so rapid.

*Diakonia continues to be affirmed as an essential calling of our communion and, together with ecumenical, interfaith, and other partners, we empower and accompany people and communities in overcoming injustice, exclusion, and the impacts of conflicts and natural disasters. (LWF, 2011)*

#### The need for a Diaconal Observatory

The idea of creating a Diaconal Observatory should be explored (maybe ecumenically with partners) with the aim of providing updated information about actual conditions, policies and practices. This could coordinate and pool research analysis and practice.

The newly formed International Society for the Research and Study of Diaconia and Christian Social Practice is one possible organisation that could be addressed with this responsibility since it has, through its membership access to research organisations and networks.

## Training

### Training for participatory and community diakonia

The Solidarity Group recognises the need for training in new participatory methods of community diakonia. Specific training for pastors in the skills needed to promote community diakonia should be introduced generally. There are some well-developed national and international approaches to training but just as there is a new emphasis on sharing experience and networking in terms of theological education in the LWF, experience of training in innovative methods of diaconal work could be strategically relevant at the moment. The training approaches, models and approaches of community diakonia may also be relevant to all those training for ministry in the church.

### Financing Diaconia in a former Communist country

Diaconia in the Czech Republic is under pressure because the state funding is being cut back, but on top of that the rules for providing finance to non-state actors put them at a disadvantage compared to state actors. One answer would be increasingly only to provide services for those who can afford to pay for them on the market price level. But this is not the group that Diaconia would like to prioritise!

Another solution would be to go outside the official system, but this is not feasible! However, it is possible to reduce dependency so that the official system is not the only financial contributor. Because there is more flexibility outside the system and because there are ways to work with people who require services which can be met in innovative ways, diakonia is developing social enterprises as one part of its programme. In the Solidarity Group, we found others who are doing this in similar contexts. In West Bohemia, the diakonia of the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren has started to develop social enterprises and now has nearly as many employees in these as in services with mainstream funding. The social enterprises at present comprise a number of cafes and restaurants and second hand shops. Diaconie is collaborating with others to develop a network of such enterprises as second hand shops. Maybe this is the start of a new interest of diakonia in the local economy.

*Petr Neumann (Czech Republic)*

### Resourcing diaconal action on the local economy

Participatory tools should be developed to enable diaconal actors to do their own local and wider economic analysis. Training would support local diaconal actors in doing economic analysis and developing local economic initiatives and alternatives. This would be an important support for local economic development and would support the strengthening of the economy of everyday life.

### Improving skills for organising, advocacy and campaigning

Training models for supporting church and diaconal organisations in their involvement in organising, advocacy and campaigning have been developed by a number of movements and institutes in recent years. Intensified (ecumenical) work is needed to share these models and make them more available. They could support and develop lobbying and campaigning for alternative economic and social models building on Christian insights.

These three main lines would also support the goals identified by the Special Committee '500 Years of Reformation' by providing tools for the implementation of the subthemes of the celebration in different European Contexts. (See p. 40 for more about the Reformation Anniversary)

## Resources

### Financial Support for Diaconia

The Solidarity Group concluded that there is a need for developing policies for funding community diakonia which take a longer term view and



Center of Diaconia ECCB



which are based on the key principles put forward in this paper. A number of members who are in situations where public support for Diakonia is lacking also pointed out that Diakonia in community needs its own resources and these should be provided in a long term and sustainable manner. The priorities identified are long term community development and the development of the community economy. Working for sustainable diakonia not only by seeking state and other funding or by running care businesses which can be paid for privately, but also developing more social enterprises linked to diakonia is a core issue. On the other hand a need was identified for smaller amounts of funding to start new community initiatives where there is very little resourcing. Such resourcing could be linked to training and support.

### 3. Next Steps in the Process

#### Introduction

The production of this paper is just one step in the process of the work of the European Solidarity Group. The paper is meant to be a tool in re-forming Community Diakonia in Europe and is being actively followed through by members of the group and other actors in the LWF European Region and beyond. We do not want this to be a report that gathers dust on a shelf and so all the members of the group have produced personal action plans to follow up the process and the report in their own contexts. The group will meet again in January 2014 to monitor progress and plan for actions towards the reformation anniversary (2017). In this chapter we outline the scope of the individual action plans being developed by some of the participants

and then we outline how the LWF will accompany the follow up process, including a preliminary look at the theme of diakonia in the overall celebration of the Reformation Anniversary.

#### Personal action plans

At the 2013 workshop in Odessa, Ukraine, the Solidarity Group members developed their personal Action Plans to promote advocacy for community diakonia in their own contexts on national and local levels. They include:

- Reporting and sharing in church and diaconal institutions' governance, in diaconal formation institutes and in thematic working groups, both on sub regional, national, district and local levels,
- Making an impact on the strategic plans of churches and diaconal organizations,
- Using the Diaconal Process outcome text in teaching on diakonia,
- Writing articles for professional diakonia journals and church magazines,
- Finding cooperation partners and allies to promote the concept in church and diakonia,
- Spreading and using the outcome text to deepen understanding of advocacy and develop further the concept of church in conviviality, in each one's working context,
- Putting learning and experienced good practice of others into own practice.

A number of new partnerships were established between participants to implement the findings of the process.

#### **LWF accompaniment of the Follow-up Process**

##### **1. The European Diaconal Process is part of the Department for Mission and Development's Advocacy Programme:**

The LWF makes use of its unique position both reaching deep to the grassroots and having representation in global policy making forums. The "Capacity for Advocacy Programme" seeks to accompany and strengthen member churches in developing capacities and mechanisms to advocate against structural and systemic violence. Processes of mutual accompaniment enable member churches to develop capacities for prophetic diakonia and contribute towards affirming and defending dignity. The promotion of human rights increases awareness and empowers actions for responsible citizenship in societies. As part of this programme the LWF will support the follow-up process of the work developed by the Solidarity Group. The focal themes of the process: vocation for transforming service, community, dignity and justice enrich the values and strategic directions of the LWF. Furthermore, the process will also gain from connection to the learning and good practices of the global communion.

##### **2. The European Diaconal Process contributes to capacity building for diakonia in the global Lutheran communion**

The LWF enhances sharing of learning and good practice in diakonia among the LWF regions. One instrument for global exchange is the newly developed concept of annual global virtual conferences on diakonia. In 2013, participants from the European Diaconal Process have contributed to the Global Virtual Conference on Dia-

konian held under the theme “Stand up and Walk (Mk 2)”, with two activities: a workshop on Life Together—Diakonia for communities, using the material from the Diaconal Process; and a thematic forum on Training Volunteers for Diakonia.

### **3. The Process contributes to the development of a theological and pedagogical basis for capacity development in the LWF**

“Growing together in capacity for holistic mission—a theological framework for LWF communion learning” has been approved by the LWF Council in June 2013. It underlines participatory and empowering methods of learning, drawing from concepts and good practices in Africa, Latin America, and in Europe, including from the “bottom up” working method used in the European Diaconal Process. At the LWF Council in 2013, the General Secretary expressed his appreciation of what he sees developing into the “pedagogy of the communion”: *“If the LWF is really to move to become a polycentric communion, we need to do something about the ‘pedagogy of the communion.’ How is it that we intend to teach and learn, to accompany and admonish, to mutually support us towards increased maturity as we continue journeying together?”* and he continues, underlining that the participatory concept reflected in the Seeking Conviviality document *“provides an important foundation for the task of developing pedagogical models for the LWF communion of churches.”*

### **4. Programme plans ahead**

According to the LWF Department for Mission and Development programme plans for 2014, with perspectives into 2015, approved by the LWF Council in June 2013 the following goals and results are anticipated:

#### ***Programmatic goals of the Diaconal Process for the work in 2014 and 2015:***

1. Enhanced advocacy among European member churches for a diaconal church identity, and for social economic justice and conviviality in church and society.
2. Strengthened joint efforts in the global communion through sharing and reflection on community diakonia and economic justice advocacy work among the European Process resource group and actors in other LWF regions.

#### ***Expected results in the next phase 2014 and 2015:***

1. The European Diaconal Process, through the individual action plans of the resource group members, is meaningfully contributing to advocacy for diakonia, in the member churches.
2. Member churches have increased their commitment to economic justice and inclusion in their neighbourhoods and in society.

#### ***Methodology***

In a workshop in January 2014, to be held in Nuremberg, Germany, the individual action plans from the second half of 2013 will be assessed, good practice and success identified, and what did not succeed will also be evaluated. The individual action plans will be revised according to the results of the assessment and continue in 2014. The workshop will further identify immediate next steps and longer term perspectives for follow up, beyond 2014. Possible directions for 2014 which have emerged from the process are the following:

1. A diaconal observatory: monitoring diaconal action and sharing of good experiences and practices,

2. Focused analysis of the European socio-economic context,

3. Building up partnerships for research and training for participatory approaches to diakonia, in Central, Western and Northern Europe.

Which elements will be the most important ones to follow up in 2014, and which ones will be developed further in 2015, will depend on feedback to this paper and the assessment of the follow-up in January 2014, in the Nuremberg workshop.

Inter-regional sharing and reflection on community diakonia, within the global Lutheran communion, has started through participation at the Virtual Conference in 2013. Initial discussions held in 2013 with the region of Latin America and the Caribbean will be developed further in 2014.

Other regional developments will include a special programme of the engagement of LWF member churches with the issues of racism and exclusion facing Roma communities, being developed jointly with the Churches’ Commission for Migrants in Europe.

### **5. Connection to Reformation Anniversary**

The period from 2015-2017 will be the core time for commemorating the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation and the year 2017 will have a special importance throughout the global Lutheran communion. The focal points of the commemoration in 2017 will be the LWF Assembly in Namibia in May and the Reformation Day, which most of the Lutheran churches are celebrating on 31<sup>st</sup> October. However the main idea is not just to have a one day celebration but to build up to the celebration with activities on every level across the communion. The Special Committee formulating the draft proposal is also seeking to ensure that the activities started in

this period are sustainable into the future. The main theme proposed is **'Liberated by God's Grace'** and this is intended to lead to an exploration of themes including the idea that Christians are free to serve their neighbour, that they are responsible citizens in the world and stewards of creation. The central idea of grace contrasts sharply with the idea that nowadays 'everything is for sale'! Three key sub themes are proposed, which link into the themes developed by the Solidarity Group:

**Salvation—not for sale** which handles the doctrine of justification and freedom to serve the neighbour

**Human beings—not for sale** which emphasises the uniqueness of each person created in God's image and therefore must be fully respected in dignity and integrity. This relates to some of the key themes about economic and social policy and diaconal practice covered in this report, including policies that increase poverty and homelessness as well as such issues as trafficking and bad working conditions.

**Creation—not for sale** which focusses on creation care and the understanding that human beings should not plunder the earth and that its rich resources should not be exploited for profit especially when they are the basis of well-being (for example water).

Having introduced the draft report on Renewing Community Diaconia to the 2012 LWF European Church Leader's Consultation, held in Ostrava, Czech Republic, the hope is that the church leaders will consider this outcome paper as a stimulus for actions around the Reformation Anniversary and beyond. A number of ideas for national celebrations have been floated by members of the Solidarity Group and these will be the subject of elaboration in the January 2014 workshop. The Solidarity Group

hopes that the work reported in this paper will be further developed and will become one of the central elements in the celebration in 2017!

## 4. Conclusions and Questions

The diagram on the next page summarises some of the key themes of this paper. The Solidarity Group invites you to join them in the journey to re-forming community diakonia in Europe! Specifically, we would like to invite you to think about how the themes reflected in this paper touch your life, whatever your position in the church. As we have emphasised, diakonia is a mark and calling of the whole church and a diaconal culture should pervade everything we do together as Christians ourselves—and in our engagement with marginalised people and with others who wish to join with us in social action. We started our process in the Solidarity Group by putting 'to ourselves' some key questions arising from our diaconal action and you can find these in the boxes in each section in Part Two. In our work together, we have elaborated these points and developed some ideas for practice. The diagram presents in general some convictions arising from our journey, but the process is an open one. We invite you to discuss the questions below with those in your church, diaconal organisation and locality, in the light of the report and to continue the dialogue towards re-forming community diakonia in Europe!

On pages 27 and 28 of the paper we have set out some aims and methods for community diakonia and an example of a strategy which is expressed in a way that can form the basis for pastoral planning. There are further check lists in the paper—about pastoral leadership on pages 12 and 13, conviviality on page 18 and community

development on page 31, which also summarise some of our thinking about practice. We invite you to consider these questions and to produce your own statement of aims, methods and strategy with people in your congregation, district or organisation:

### *How are you:*

- Strengthening diaconal vocation by creating a stronger diaconal culture in your local congregations and initiatives?
- Creating a community which is open and affirming of others?
- Developing conviviality through creative relationships and building up 'art and practice of living together'?

### *What are the issues which are the biggest threat to conviviality in your context?*

- Which persons and groups are excluded or are being discriminated against and how are you related to them?
- Where is human dignity threatened because of the way income and work, social and health care, etc. are organised and delivered in your context?
- Which economic and political policies and decisions have a negative impact on people and communities in your context?

### *What actions are you taking, or could you take?*

- To develop diaconal presence with people who are marginalised?

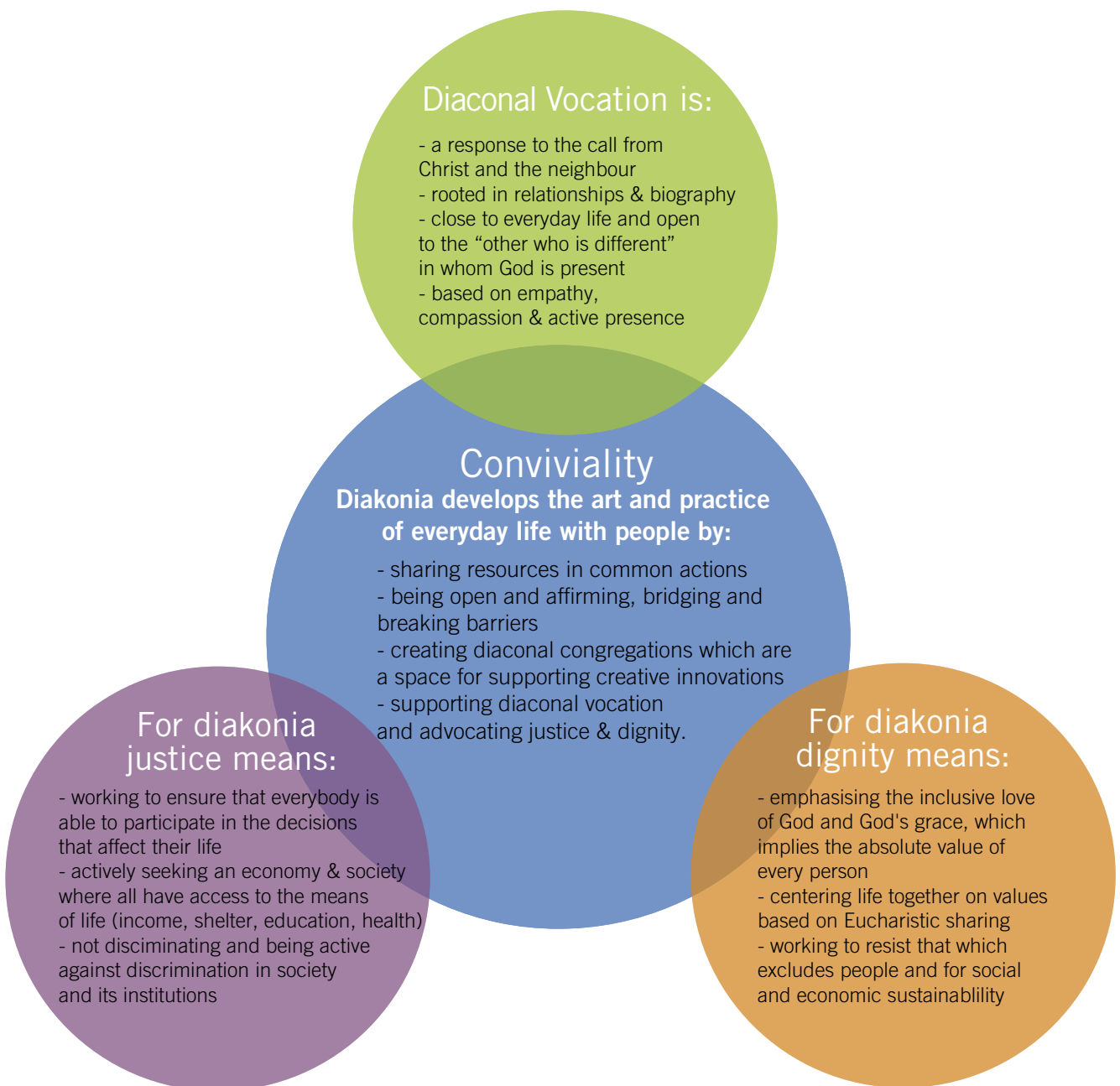
- To work for change with people who are marginalised in your context?
- What approach and methods do you use in your work with disadvantaged people and groups?
- How are you building up alternative practices for living and working

which would create more possibilities for excluded groups

- Who are or could be your allies in this work?

***What difference does diaconal culture make to theology and spirituality?***

- Which theological and spiritual ideas are important for you when you reflect on the concept and practice of conviviality?



- How does the worship and spiritual life of your congregation or organisation reflect diaconal culture?

We look forward to your reports and ideas in response to this report! These will inform the next steps of our journey. The contact details for the team involved in the process are listed in Appendix 3

Below, you will find the diagram with the four circles and we invite you as a first step to start to put your thoughts and reflections in the empty spaces! You can give a personal response, or use it with your congregation or your team, whatever is appropriate in your situation.



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# Appendix 1

## The Partners & the Process

### The European Solidarity Group

The European programme has been built purposefully with diaconal actors from 28 different contexts who strongly represent local diakonia, which is the main focus of the project. They come from urban and rural contexts and are involved in church & community diakonia and street work as well as in institutional diakonia. The participants bring a rich variety of experience, most working directly with people who are in different ways marginalised, facing unsustainable living conditions, or who have problems related to age or disability. Since the participants are drawn from all the European regions, the diversity of contexts enabled the group to reflect on concrete issues such as homelessness and the conditions that migrants face. Other participants are working with prisoners and ex-prisoners and on the reform of the criminal justice system or on the problems faced by people as a result of substance misuse. In some contexts, working with people who are affected by European and cross continental migration or who are in other ways uprooted is a central focus of diaconal work.

It is important that the process also includes representatives of those with wider responsibilities for the development of diaconal strategies and for diaconal formation. The group, which decided to call itself the Solidarity Group for Re-forming Community Diakonia in Europe, works with a process of face to face and on-line meetings and has consulted with the European

LWF Church Leadership Consultation, holding a one day exploratory workshop in Ostrava, Czech Republic in May 2012. The results of the process so far, including this report, are being used by members of the group to share the findings from the process and to develop reflection on the main themes. The next phase of the process will be built on the feedback and evaluation of the work so far.

### Relation to Lutheran World Federation Strategy

The new LWF Strategy 2012-2017, 'The LWF Communion—With Passion for the Church and for the World', strongly underlines the communion's commitment to holistic mission as 'encompassing proclamation, diakonia, and advocacy'. This is reflected in the 3 priority areas of the Strategy:

- ✓ A communion strengthened in worship and on-going theological discernment.
- ✓ Member churches growing in capacity for holistic mission and deepening relationships with each other.
- ✓ Effective and empowering diakonia addressing human suffering, injustice, and emergencies.

The LWF has published two handbooks, 'Mission in Context' and 'Diakonia in Context' both with the sub titles of Transformation Reconciliation and

Empowerment, pointing to contextual challenges for holistic mission and diakonia in today's world. Member churches of the Lutheran communion, in all 7 world regions, are reviewing and deepening their diaconal engagement. The Solidarity Group mentioned above is leading the European consultative process. Over 3 years, from 2011 to 2013, this group has been addressing factors perpetuating and in very many cases deepening marginalisation in European societies. It is working to clarify models of diaconal processes for transformation and empowerment. This project builds on the Handbooks mentioned above and contextualises them for community diakonia in Europe.

### The partnership with interdiac

The programme is working in close collaboration with interdiac, the International Academy for Diakonia and Social Action, o.p.s., (a project supported by LWF, based in Český Těšín, Czech Republic), and is drawing on their experience of integrating theory and practice and of a participatory model of diaconal formation.

Interdiac was founded in 2008 to develop training and research for new developments in the field of diaconia and social action in Central and Eastern Europe. Diaconal initiatives in the region have been developing since the breakdown of the previous regimes about twenty years ago. Even though the countries came through similar historical and cultural developments;



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they each had a different starting point to respond to the challenges in their communities and societies.

One of the most important developments in the societies could be seen as working out the implication of the diaconal value of 'human dignity' in practice. This means that each individual regardless of their health and social status has been treated as a person with his/her gifts which can be further developed, and s/he can be a part of a community and society. Then a value based approach has been enabling diaconia to respond to absolutely new phenomena which did not previously exist in the region (e.g. homeless people, children & youth in the street, internally displaced people and others). A wide range of services has been under development, provided by both professionals and volunteers. Regarding training and education with a focus on diaconia

and social action, interdiac gives great importance to being close to the working situations of the 14 interdiac partner organisations in 12 different countries. The learning programmes are all developed based on the expressed interests of the members and the network structure enables continuous relationships. Mutual exchange of experience using a participatory and process based approach to interdiac's work is a guarantee for lasting learning which can influence the social realities in different local and national contexts.

The re-formation of diaconal work is a continuous process which should reflect the changes in the local reality as well as the current working life reality. But one key factor to build on is the motivation of workers and the consequent development of their approach to diaconia and their skills, whether employed workers or volunteers. Besides this, more changes to

approaches and attitudes are required, as defined in the interdiac Bratislava Declaration (interdiac 2010).

The European consultation process, led by LWF and interdiac is gathering together people from different local and national contexts as well as different working positions and interdiac hopes that it will open new perspectives for the re-formation process of diaconia across Europe. In the long term perspective, the hope is also that the learning from this process, focusing on the European realities will be a good starting point to find synergies with diaconal work in other continents. This may bring new fruits especially as diaconal actors, globally, nowadays face many common issues in the economy and society as well as having to work with fewer resources and growing needs.



# Appendix 2

## European Solidarity Group Members

Title	First name	Last name	Organization	Country
Ms	Janka	ADAMEOVÁ	International Academy for Diaconia and Social Action, Czech Republic	Czech Republic
Rev.	Tony	ADDY	International Academy for Diaconia and Social Action, Czech Republic	Austria/ Czech Republic
Ms	Alexandra	AP'ONKINA	German Evangelical Lutheran Church Of The Ukraine	Ukraine
Rev.	Borre	ARNOY	Church of Norway, Kirkens Bymisjon	Norway
Mr	Fritz	BLANZ	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria	Germany
Ms	Nicole	BORISUK	Living Hope NGO, Ukraine	Ukraine
Mrs	Gunnel	CLAESSON	Church of Sweden	Sweden
Rev.	Steinar	ERAKER	Church of Norway, Kirkens Bymisjon	Norway
Ms	Maria	HALLDÉN	Church of Norway	Norway
Rev.	Vladislav	IVICIAK	Slovak Evang. Church A.C. in Serbia	Serbia
Ms	Maria	KULJU	Kirkon Ulkoasianosasto	Finland
Rev.	Zsolt	LÁZÁR	The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary Ecumenical & Foreign Affairs	Hungary
Mr	David	LIN	Lutheran Church in Great Britain	United Kingdom
Ms	Marjut	LUKKARINEN	Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland	Finland
Mr	Petr	NEUMANN	Czech Brethren Church	Czech Republic
Ms	Marija	PARNICKY	The Slovak Evang. Church A.C. in Serbia	Serbia
Rev.	Daniela	SCHWIMBERSKY	Evangelical Church A.C. in Austria	Austria
Ms	Aleksandra	SELIVERSTOVA	The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia	Russia
Dr	Ulla	SIIRTO	Church of Finland	Finland
Ms	Kristina	SOROKO	The Evangelical Lutheran Church in European Russia	Russia
Rev.	Szilárd	SZABÓ	The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary Northern Diocese	Hungary
Dr.	Peter	SZYNKA	Evangelisch Lutherische Kirche in Oldenburg Diakonisches Werk	Germany
Rev.	Avo	ÜPRUS	Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church	Estonia
Rev.	Martin	URDZE	Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia	Latvia
Rev. Dr	Eva-Sibylle	VOGEL-MFATO	The Lutheran World Federation	Switzerland

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# Appendix 3

## Follow Up Contacts

### LWF European Solidarity Group

Web Site: [www.lutheranworld.org/  
content/european-diaconal-process](http://www.lutheranworld.org/content/european-diaconal-process)

### Lutheran World Federation (LWF)

Web Site: [www.lutheranworld.org](http://www.lutheranworld.org)

Email: [evm@lutheranworld.org](mailto:evm@lutheranworld.org)

### interdiac

Web Site: [www.interdiac.eu](http://www.interdiac.eu)

Email:

For information about interdiac and  
its programmes: [office@interdiac.eu](mailto:office@interdiac.eu)

For questions about and responses to  
the report: [education@interdiac.eu](mailto:education@interdiac.eu)



“How can we live together in local communities?”  
The question arises in all contexts, in spite of the diverse histories of European countries. We searched for a way to express this, recognising the need to support the creativity of people in addressing their situation. The overarching key concept the group chose was “seeking conviviality.”

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International Academy  
for Diaconia and Social Action,  
Central and Eastern Europe



THE  
LUTHERAN  
WORLD  
FEDERATION