

# Ecclesiology and the Theology of Diaconia and Christian Social Practice

Case Studies from Central and  
Eastern Europe & Central Asia



**interdiac**

Research Series 1

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Ecclesiology and the Theology of Diaconia and Christian Social Practice Case  
Studies from Central and Eastern Europe & Central Asia  
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# Preface

The rapid changes in Central and Eastern Europe are profoundly transforming the pattern of the lives of people and societies. They are often making them more challenging and demanding, and especially they affect the wellbeing of disadvantaged people. Over the years of constant social turbulence, in the face of those changes, the feeling of anxiety and powerlessness within people has been increasing. At this point in our lives, with the impact of COVID-19 on top of everything else, we take it for granted that the research in diverse local contexts is needed in order to uncover the way in which the changes influence people's lives and to inform practice for the new tasks they present to the work of diaconal organisations.

The need for more research was in fact already identified by interdiac partners several years ago, because the deep changes and growing complexity of social life in the today's world need to be better understood to make the work of their churches and organisations more effective. Eventually the routine professional methodologies of work have become inadequate and they often fail to grasp the diverse life worlds of people. Consequently, people, who are approached with an offer of help, often respond with aggression and lack of trust, provoked by their precarious situation. Although the churches and organisations have been developing their responses to the contextual challenges there is an urgent need for more collaborative knowledge development, which should be grounded in experience and reflection on professional practice. Therefore interdiac – the International Academy for Diaconia and Christian and Social Action has launched a Research Programme with the aim of providing the space and support for new research initiatives.

The starting point for this initiative was a meeting of 13 practitioners, academics and students in diaconia and Christian social practice from 10 countries in 2017, where they shared their understanding of the needs for research and the ways in which it could be supported in the future. They agreed to form the interdiac Research Platform to support networking, research and development.

In light of the discussions, five topics for future research were identified and the participants agreed to continue to work on these initiatives and to search for other partners. From the five topics, three themes were selected for immediate follow-up action:

People on Move – Diaconia with migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons.

Youth on the Margins - addressing especially the context and needs of young people facing a precarious and jobless future.

Ecclesiology and the Theological Understanding of Diaconia and Christian Social Practice, addressing ecumenical and interfaith diversity and the need for a deeper dialogue about different traditions and contemporary applications.

Another important outcome of the discussion was a choice of the research methodology. The practitioners agreed on use of qualitative people-centred approach for the first two themes. It was meant to give voice to the 'voiceless' people to communicate their perspective and, at the same time, the research should closely examine the existing practice so that it would present a feedback closely related to the realities of the context and work of the organisations. Furthermore, it was agreed that the research should contribute to building the curricula for new learning programmes.

Since then the practitioners of different denominations from 11 countries (Armenia, Czech Republic, Georgia, Estonia, Hungary, Kyrgyz Republic, Latvia, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine) have been working in collaboration in three Research Theme Groups in order to plan and gradually carry out the research process. Mutual commitment, intensive distance communication and steering of the process have resulted in obtaining rich picture from the contexts and practice of diaconal organisations. It allows us to give a better understanding of diaconia in Eastern and Central Europe and Central Asia

Moreover, interdiac hopes that this research will facilitate international discussion among practitioners to deepen the knowledge about diaconal practice and contribute to development of more creative and effective diaconal initiatives. interdiac also expresses hope that this research programme will contribute to the development of the interdiac Research Platform. The Platform aims to support the task of developing good practice and achieving recognition of diaconia in a context where faith-based actions are insufficiently acknowledged. We invite you to join our growing learning community and welcome your feedback and comments!

Janka Adameová  
Director, interdiac

# Foreword

It seems that every church has its own understanding of Christian social practice based in different historical traditions and contemporary contexts. The rich variety of these understandings are signalled by a diversity of names. In many churches, the main term is diaconia, but the terminology in this field also includes Caritas and Filantropia as well as quite secular terms – for example simply church or Christian social work. The context of the work of interdiac spans this diversity and this publication gives the reader a first-hand look at a cross section from different churches and national contexts. All the case studies come from different countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia and in different ways they all comment on diaconia or Christian social practice on the basis of the writer's particular church and confession and the concrete work. This book does not pretend to be comprehensive in terms of confession or approach but invites further exploration of the theological basis and practice of diaconia.

In fact, this book is the result of the first interdiac research programme devoted to the theme 'Ecclesiology and the Theological Understanding of Diaconia and Christian Social Practice'. It gathers together chapters produced by desk researchers, some of whom are engaged in local diaconia and others who are engaged in diaconal organisations or in research. The collection is introduced by the Coordinator for this theme, Herman Noordegraaf who, in an introductory essay situates the different chapters in the overall field. He also contributes the concluding analytical chapter which relates the diverse concepts to the approaches to diaconia in the Bible and searches for common ground and differences as well as raising some further questions.

This book therefore provides a window into diaconia across the region, produced by people with first-hand knowledge, who take an inquisitive look at their own church and its self-understanding and practice. Here you will discover how 'diaconia' is an essential part of all the churches and how in many different contexts diaconia operates as an intrinsic part of all the churches' lives. It reveals how the churches in the region aspire to give an answer to the call of those who are in need, with integrated love and compassion. While you can use this book to become acquainted with this rich experience of practice-rooted diaconia, we would also like to invite you to let it provoke your own curiosity about how diaconia is understood and practiced in your church or organisation. We wish to promote a 'receptive' attitude which seeks to learn from diversity rather than just reinforcing one previously held position! You might like to start a dialogue with your colleagues on some of the points in order to reflect on your vocation, evaluate joint work or enrich your expertise. This book is an expression of our belief that the mutual exchange of experience, rooted in practice, can be a powerful resource for facilitating ecumenical cooperation and supporting development of the field of Diaconia and Christian social practice.

In conclusion, we would like to thank Prof. Noordegraaf for his work in coordinating this project and all those who took the time to research and write the chapters. We would also like to thank Tsovinar Ghazaryan who is a member of the Research Steering Group of interdiac for her careful feedback on the process and the text. Tony Addy worked on the texts with Prof. Noordegraaf and all the contributors and did the final proof reading. Last but not least we would like to thank our expert reviewers who provided a critical feedback on the work as a whole, which will also be useful in the future research programme.

As you can read in the text, this is the first step in a longer process, because it does provide an interesting overview, but it also raises new questions for further research. We invite you to read the results so far and to contribute your responses and feedback to the interdiac learning community.

Oksana Prosvirina  
Research Coordinator, interdiac

# Introduction

## Dr. Herman Noordegraaf

*Dr. Herman Noordegraaf (1951) lives in the Netherlands. After his studies in sociology and theology he worked in the field of church and society/diaconia in the Netherlands Reformed Church and the Council of Churches in the Netherlands. From 1998 till 2018 he taught diaconia at the university, from 2007 till his retirement in 2018 he was external professor for diaconia at the Protestant Theological University at Groningen. His field of research was focused on the role of diaconia in combating poverty and social exclusion in the context of a changing welfare state. He was member of the executive board of Interdiac (2008-2014), the editorial team from Diaconia Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice (2010-2018) and member of the ReDi (International Society for the Research and Study of Diaconia and Christian Social Practice) Executive Board (2016-2020).*



## Introduction

So long there is the Christian church there is diaconia: the involvement in activities to improve the life of people in material and social need. Of course, that is not accidental, but has to do with the heart of the biblical message, Gods love for the world is indissolubly connected with the appeal to love our neighbour. The word 'diaconia' is not used in every church; also, words such as Caritas, Filantropia, social services, Christian social action and many others are used. Nevertheless, these express the same thing: church involvement to take care of the poor, the widows, aliens and orphans etc. But how this takes shape varies with time and circumstances and varies with theological views on diaconia. These affect the way it is organised, the kind of activities, who are the actors and what is the position within the life of the church. One of the presuppositions behind this publication is that we all can use this variety to learn from each other, by enquiring into how diaconia in other contexts and other churches than our own are doing diaconia, as well as by enquiring into the churches which have connected diaconal organisations doing diaconia. We aimed to enquire into the diverse understandings, activities, agents and so on in different contexts. This is one background to the exploration of the self-understanding of churches and church related diaconal organisations as regards diaconia itself.

The second reason was because the diversity of diaconia is not well documented or widely understood in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. This is the case both within the region and beyond. The research aimed to shed light on the diversity of the actions being undertaken and also to make a small contribution to raising the profile of diaconia in the different countries. It was also hoped that the results of this research would be useful in learning programmes in interdiac and beyond. This first research will be used in interdiac learning programmes as a resource, and maybe by others and it may lead to a wider ranging and deeper research programme.

We have carried out this research using a practical theological approach. This publication does not contain a dogmatic study, though dogmatic views are found in it, especially in official documents of churches and organisations. The research deals with the ways in which diaconia is organised and structured within churches and organisations and asks which activities take place and which theological and other views are implied in these expressions of diaconia. In this publication six case studies are presented from different countries and confessional families:



### Part One: Local Diaconia & Diaconal Church

- > Understanding the Diaconal Church and Local Diaconia
  - Cross congregation Liepāja and the Diaconal Centre Liepāja, Latvia
- > The local Christian Church of the Full Gospel and the Public Association “Children of Tien-Shan”.
  - A case study from Balykchy City, Kyrgyz Republic
- > Diaconal attitudes and practice in congregations of the Reformed Church in Hungary

### Part Two Church & Organisational Diaconia

- > The Serbian Orthodox Church and Social Practices
- > Social Ministry in the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church
- > The Code of Ethics of Silesian Diaconia in the Czech Republic
  - the Interpretation of Selected Formulations

Pastor *Martin Urdze* describes and analyses a Latvian congregation with a Lutheran background, which sees itself as a diaconal church and which has a closely connected diaconal centre. He deals with theological views on diaconia, the way diaconia has a place in the church service and he describes the wide variety of activities and the aims and work of the Centre, carried out in close cooperation with the groups that are the focus of the work. He also pays attention to their participation in an international project, the full-time workers, the funding of the diaconal work and the cooperation with other organisations and congregations.

*Irina Trofimova* writes about a local Pentecostal church in the Kyrgyz Republic and a public association that, as an NGO, is connected with the church. She makes clear, against the background from the Kyrgyz Republic, why this choice for a public association is made and explores the possible advantages and disadvantages. She describes the aims of diaconia, as part of the church’s ministry, the understanding of diaconia, the activities with families, women and children and with other congregations to implement integral mission, including diaconia. Also, the training for diaconal work, the funding and the cooperation with other organisations get a place in this chapter.

*László Dani* presents a picture of the diaconal organisation and activities of the Reformed Church in Hungary in congregations and diaconal institutions. A large part of his contribution is based on basic documents of the church on diaconia and on interviews with pastors and other persons connected with diaconal work in congregations about their way of thinking and speaking about diaconia. The results show how diaconia is perceived and the practice of diaconia at the local level.

*Deacon Ilija Jovic* and *Professor Dr. Dalibor Petrovic* portray the Serbian Orthodox Church and her social practice. He shows how the historical and geographical circumstances have conditioned the development of the social services in different stages. Theologically speaking, the Church Fathers and especially the Cappadocians have, with their Trinitarian faith, given the background for charitable activities. Of relevance also are the monasteries. The author describes the ‘Circle of Serbian Sisters’ and the organisation, theology and activities of the Religious Charity, Guardianship, which both operate within the Serbian Orthodox Church. Moreover, he presents two case studies of the charitable foundation Philanthropy and of the diocese of Dusseldorf and Germany.

*Andrej Nahirniak* deals with the diaconal work of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, that is connected with the Roman Catholic Church and has a Byzantine ritual. He also sets the diaconal work against an historical background and the rise of a wide range of organisations and institutions from the 19th century. An exposition is given of the Bishop’s view on the ministry of the church and the position of diaconia within that. There follows a description of the development of the social ministry, the work of Caritas Ukraine, monasteries, other charitable organisations and congregations.

*Vladislav Volný* describes and analyses the organisation and work of Silesian Diaconia, a private, non-profit organisation that provides services in the social field in the Czech Republic. Silesian Diaconia is connected with the Silesian Evangelical Church AB, that has a Lutheran background. The author

especially analyses ‘The Code of Ethics’ that contains the desired principles of employee behaviour towards clients and colleagues. So, the theology, explicitly stated and implied, comes forward and attention is given to the Christian values and the way it gets a reality in the culture of the organisation.

Of course, we do not claim that with these articles we have a representative picture of diaconia in eastern and central Europe and central Asia. But with these case studies from different countries and confessional families we get insight into how, in different contexts, diaconia takes shape. By seeing which choices are implicitly and explicitly made we can come to a deeper and wider understanding of diaconia. By asking ourselves what is striking in the description and analysis of each case study, when compared with our own situations and how the case studies resonate with or critique each other we can develop our own understanding. The case studies are in themselves thought provoking.

Each author was provided with a list of points for their attention and which they were asked to deal with:

### Framework Questions for the Research

#### Understanding of the Church

- > How does the church understand diaconia as a defining characteristic? (Mark or essence of the church) Please refer to any official documents of the church which define diaconia
- > How does the church define or understand the call to diaconia?
  - > For all Christians?
  - > For congregations?
  - > For the regional or national church?
- > Is there a special Diaconal ministry which is ordained or commissioned and if so, what are the special tasks of this ministry? Do deacons have any specific social or caritative function?
- > Are there any specific theological or Biblical understandings of Diaconia which are important? Or any specific themes, such as dignity, justice, mercy ?
- > How are Diaconia and diaconal issues linked to other aspects of the church’s life and ministry (such as liturgy, education, pastoral work, mission etc.)?
- > How is diaconia represented in the decision-making structures of the church?
- > What are the aims of diaconia?
- > Does the church have a plan or strategy for Diaconia?
- > Are there any special concerns for diaconia and diaconal workers (which groups are important, what issues in society etc.)?
- > What types of action or practice does diaconia encompass?
- > Is diaconia involved in advocacy or awareness raising?
- > Does the diaconia of the church have any special staff? What are their roles and responsibilities? How are they trained?
- > If there are special diaconal organisations, how are they related to the church?
- > What study programmes for diaconal work are available to the church (members, pastors, others)? Are there any specific training or learning needs for the future?

### Understanding of the Diaconal Organisation (Diaconia, Filantropia, Ecumenical, Independent)

- > How does the organisation define or understand diaconia?
- > How is the organisation linked to the church and at what level, in which ways?
- > How does the church support the diaconal organisation?
- > Are there any specific theological or Biblical understandings of Diaconia which are important? Or any specific themes, such as dignity, justice, mercy ...?
- > What types of action or practice does diaconia encompass?
- > Are there any special concerns for diaconia and diaconal workers (which groups are important, what issues in society etc.)?
- > In which skills are workers in diaconia trained?
- > What training specifically for diaconia is available (apart from training as social worker, youth worker etc.)? Are there any specific training or learning needs for the future?
- > How is the diaconal work funded?
- > Is diaconia involved in advocacy or awareness raising?
- > Is there ecumenical cooperation in diaconia? Cooperation with other social organisations?

Through these questions we wanted to get a better vision of what is going on in diaconia and so to acquire information, but the questions also imply a vision on what is of relevance for understanding diaconia. The choice of questions is not neutral, and the authors have been free to choose their own emphases in dealing with them, depending on their own context and the availability of material (for instance official documents).

In our opinion each good reflection on diaconia implies at least the following elements:

- What is the view of the calling and task of the church? What makes a church to be church? Of course, this is based on the Bible and tradition. But there are different views on the relationship between Bible and tradition and on the way that we interpret the Bible and the tradition. Moreover, we should be aware of theological concepts that are formulated (what is and should be the church, theologically speaking) and the reality in practice. Furthermore, we should be aware that the church has more levels: the congregational, the regional, the national and international. In the case studies we find examples of local practices and those on the national level, but in each case, we find some link to other levels of being church, be it sometimes also receiving money from churches abroad. But principally, there is the question about the way we link our concept of church with the followers of Christ all over the world, these can be other groups and churches in the geographical neighbourhood and those who are more distant.
- The ecclesiological position of diaconia: which place has diaconia within the church? In theological discussions about the church often fundamental functions of the church are distinguished as proclamation (preaching, bringing the gospel to the world), liturgy (sacraments, praying, rituals), community (the Greek word in the New Testament: *koinonia*; being as brothers and sisters, a feeling of being brought together by the relationship to God) and diaconia (service to people in need). How is the ordering between them and what are the relations between them? Are these separate working fields or are there connections? For instance, in pastoral care, in the preaching, in the prayers, in the sacraments (especially the Eucharist), is attention paid to social and material needs?
- What is the calling and task of diaconia? This is based on theological views on diaconia and these are or should be connected with the Bible and church tradition. We should be aware that diaconia is more than the 'application' of biblical rules or guidelines. In diaconal acting we find,

not always explicitly articulated, theological views about the human being (anthropology) and on the will of God, the relationships of the human being with other persons and with creation and the responsibility for them. To take one example: if you see the other person as a creation of God, made in God's image, even if they are poor, if they have an addiction, are homeless or who in another way are 'repellent' to us, then you will have an attitude of attentiveness, involvement and respect. The fact that I want to connect myself with a person in need, involves the presupposition that the other is worthwhile in themselves. An essential issue for diaconia is, what is our vision of people in need and what are the characteristics of our relations with them. Is our relationship based on respect, attention, listening, hearing and seeing them, learning from them or is there another type of relation? So, the vision of the human being is of relevance to diaconal practice and can be found, often implicitly, in that practice.

- The aims of diaconia originate from our theological views of diaconia. Often diaconia is supposed to imply giving assistance to people in need. But if diaconia is directed to the improvement of the living conditions of people in need, then there is a wider scope for ways of acting. We can also think about community building with people, the empowerment of people, raising awareness among other people of the problems of people in need so these take care of them, facilitating the possibility that people in need can raise their voice in the public domain and in politics. This view of diaconia based on our theological understanding leads advocacy in relation to policy and the policy and practice of relevant organisations in society. It can also lead to campaigning with and on behalf of marginalised people. We speak about 'people in need', but we should also specify who are the people in need, which specific groups are there and how relief can be given in relationship to these groups?
- The organisation of diaconia. How is diaconia organised within the church? And who are the agents? This question has different aspects, that strongly depend on church tradition and context. There is the question of who is responsible for diaconal work? Is this the whole church community? Sometimes, there is a specific office, that of deacon. But in many churches not every deacon is doing diaconal work. They are, for instance, especially involved in liturgy and other church tasks such as pastoral care, educational work or church community building. Otherwise, diaconia is (also) the responsibility of other offices, such as bishops, elders or still other ones. If there is a deacon, he and sometimes also she can be ordained.
- If we look at the institutional side, the responsibility can be a task of the church council, the synod, the council of bishops or specific diaconal committees. A lot of diaconal work has been and still is done by religious orders. Besides this work directly of churches and congregations, there are also be diaconal institutions which are part of the church but often not of the local church. The way of organising diaconia is not a purely technical question, because the position of deacons and diaconal organisations has specially to do with the vision of the church, the offices and on diaconia. Still, one step further, diaconal organisations can be organised as faith based non-governmental organisations (NGO). Among our case studies we find examples of them. That of course, raises questions about the relationship between the church and the diaconate, which is put to an external body and the question why the form of an NGO is chosen. The work of diaconia can be done by volunteers, not only professionals or deacons. This raises the question as to how they are organised and which training or support they receive etc.

So, we see that the exploration of diaconia and ecclesiology opens a wide range of questions. We shall see that in the case studies a variety of answers is given. We shall reflect on these in a concluding chapter.

## part one

# LOCAL DIACONIA & DIACONAL CHURCH

### 1.

Understanding the Diaconal Church and Local Diaconia

Cross congregation Liepāja and the Diaconal Centre Liepāja, Latvia

### 2.

The local Christian Church of the Full Gospel and the Public Association “Children of Tien-Shan”.

A case study from Balykchy City, Kyrgyz Republic

### 3.

Diaconal attitudes and practice in congregations of the Reformed Church in Hungary





# 1.

## Understanding the Diaconal Church and Local Diaconia Cross congregation Liepāja and the Diaconal Centre Liepāja, Latvia

### Pastor Martin Urdze

In 1990 Martin Urdze passed the Second Theological Exam in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Oldenburg, Germany. After this he was ordained as a pastor in the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad. In 1993 he was certified as a nurse for elderly people. Since 1995 Martin Urdze has been living in Liepāja, Latvia where he has helped to develop diaconal work in the local deanery. In 1999 he started to work as a pastor in the Cross Congregation, Liepāja. In 2006, he also became a co-founder of the NGO “Diaconal Centre Liepāja” where he is currently working in different projects.



### Introduction and Background

Until 2016 the Cross Congregation Liepāja was a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia (ELCL). After 2016, when the ELCL synod accepted changes to its constitution that have made it impossible for women to be ordained as pastors, the Cross congregation left the ELCL and joined the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad (LELCA).

As a diaconal congregation, the Cross congregation started to work in 1999 when it fused with the Diaconal Centre of Liepāja and agreed to be a diaconal congregation. At that time, the Cross congregation had only a very few active members left and they were glad that our team from the Diaconal Centre came in, because otherwise they had no perspective. I started to work as a pastor and the leader of our Diaconal Centre became the leader of the congregation. We had to build up a functioning council, find new members, find new premises for the existing tenants, renovate the buildings, etc.

At this time, the Diaconal Centre had no legal status but was responsible as a regional organisation for supporting diaconal work in 26 parishes of the deanery of Grobiņa. In 2006 members of the congregation, as individual persons, founded an NGO named “Diaconal Centre Liepāja”, because as a religious organisation it had difficulties to apply for certain funding programmes. Also, it was now possible to involve people who were interested in the diaconal activities but were not members of the congregation. The congregation has a church council with ten members who decide about the aims, general work and budget etc. Five members of the council are on the board that take care for the everyday planning and realisation of the aims. The council meets about 3-4 times a year, whereas the board has its meetings once a week. At least once a year there is a meeting of the whole congregation.

The Diaconal Centre also has a board with three people who are also members of the board of the congregation. We have our Centre board meetings together with the meetings of the board of the congregation. We have only about 20 members, because we want to keep it small.

### The Meaning of ‘diaconia’

Diaconia literally means ‘through dust’. In accordance to its use in the Greek society the word ‘diaconia’ refers to an activity that is connected with a concrete task. These tasks could differ very much, e.g. to bring somebody a message or parcel, to serve at the table, by washing feet, bringing food, etc. In order to understand the actual meaning it is important to see in whose name the task was done.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, in 1. Cor. 12,5 the apostle Paul characterises all gifts of the congregation as equally important tasks as diaconia in the name of the Lord: *“and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord”*

Therefore, diaconia is a term that is rooted in the Greek and Roman societies. It was not a specific Christian term. Later Christians used this term in order to describe their response to Jesus serving, starting from the social work of the Church and up to the ‘service’ at worship. When I’m using the word ‘diaconia’ I generally understand it as the service of a congregation/church/NGO to people in need, if another meaning is not mentioned.

### Understanding Diaconia

The constitution of the ELCL says that it is the responsibility of the congregation to do diaconal and mission work.<sup>2</sup> The council of the congregation has *“the right and obligation to care ... for the diaconal and mission work, for music, life, for work with children and youths and for the other branches of the congregation”*<sup>3</sup> This is all that is written in the constitution about diaconia. The 19<sup>th</sup> synod of the ELCL accepted the *“Resolution about the Diaconal board of the ELCL, the Diaconal Centre and the diaconal centres in the deaneries and congregations”*. There, diaconia is defined as follows:

*“Diaconia is the concern of the Church about man as a whole – for spirit, soul and body. Diaconia is an essential aspect of the Church and an integral part of its work. Mutual serving in the congregation makes the serving of the Church in the society possible.”*<sup>4</sup>

In our daily work we saw that diaconal work in the congregations was generally not highly regarded and not at all an ‘essential part’. The constitution of the ELCL says that every congregation must have a responsible person in its council who takes care for the diaconal work in the congregation, in reality this rule is often only formal with no practical implications. Also, when it is applied there is no sense of the diaconal responsibility of the whole congregation. The different work fields in the congregation are separated and don’t connect.

This neglect of the role of diaconia in the church and the congregation is already rooted in the Book of Concord, that collects the founding documents of the Lutheran church. In the Augsburg Confession the church is defined as *“the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered”*.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the main emphasis is laid on the ministry of proclaiming the gospel and on the administration of the sacraments. Good works are a consequence of true faith. Diaconia cannot be an obligatory request but is a natural response to the gift of God’s grace. Nobody can be forced to do good things. The element of freedom is constitutional for serving or doing diaconal work. If somebody doesn’t do any ‘good’, his or her faith is not in order. I think that the word has to become flesh, otherwise it’s simply talking. Or looking at this from the point of view of the Hebrew language, the word for ‘word’ is ‘dabar’, which also means an ‘event’, a ‘word that is happening’.

I like the moment of freedom that can be found in the Lutheran theology. But this has to go hand in hand with an option for those who suffer, because these are the people to whom we have to give account to in our theology, work, services etc. The main questions for our faith and work also come from there. So, in my opinion we need much more focus in the studies of theology, in the work of the congregations and the church institutions working with and for those who are living on the margins of

1 See: Anni Hentschel, ‘Dienen / Diener’, December 2008, [https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/47853/and Anni Hentschel, ‘Diakon – Diakonin’](https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/47853/and>Anni_Hentschel,_Diakon_-_Diakonin), May 2011, <https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/59458/>.

2 See: ‘Latvijas evaņģēliski luteriskās baznīcas satversme’, 2016, chapter 2, v.16, p.4, <http://www.lclb.lv/lv/?ct=satversme>

3 Ibid. Chapter 37, v 6, p.6

4 Latvijas evaņģēliski luteriskās Baznīcas Diaconijas Centrs, Latvijas evaņģēliski luteriskās Baznīcas Diaconijas programma, 1999, p. 8

5 Book of Concord, The Augsburg Confession, Article 6: of New Obedience, Article 7: Of the Church, <https://bookofconcord.org/pdf/TrigBOC.pdf>

society. This has to be a deliberate decision because if this is not done, then other issues will determine the agenda.

One main obstacle to becoming active is fear. Many people in Latvia, especially the older ones, have lived for long years in a totalitarian state and learnt to become quiet. Also, the contemporary culture with its emphasis on individual self-realisation and on consuming plays an important role.

Here is the relevant text from the Preface to St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans in Martin Luther's writing on Good Works:

*“Thus, faith is a divine work in us, that changes us and regenerates us of God, and puts to death the old Adam, makes us entirely different men in heart, spirit, mind, and all powers, and brings with it [confers] the Holy Ghost. Oh, it is a living, busy, active, powerful thing that we have in faith, so that it is impossible for it not to do good without ceasing.... But he who does not do such works is void of faith and gropes and looks about after faith and good works and knows neither what faith nor what good works are yet babbles and prates with many words concerning faith and good works. [Justifying] faith is a living, bold [firm] trust in God's grace, so certain that a man would die a thousand times for it [rather than suffer this trust to be wrested from him]. And this trust and knowledge of divine grace renders joyful, fearless, and cheerful towards God and all creatures, which [joy and cheerfulness] the Holy Ghost works through faith; and on account of this, man becomes ready and cheerful, without coercion, to do good to everyone, to serve every one, and to suffer everything for love and praise to God, who has conferred this grace on him, so that it is impossible to separate works from faith, yea, just as impossible as it is for heat and light to be separated from fire.”*<sup>6</sup>

Following this line, the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer criticised the proclamation of 'cheap grace', that leads to the acceptance of sinful behaviour and structures. For him, the reason that the organised churches were collapsing during the Nazi time was that the proclamation of grace didn't include the necessity to follow Christ.<sup>7</sup>

In the 19th century, during the diaconal renewal in Germany, diaconia was generally established through non-government organisations, largely independent from the local congregations and church structures. The advantage of this model is that it is possible to concentrate on diaconal issues without having to come to terms with a mainly middle-class congregation/church that doesn't want to involve itself in diaconal activities because of its "dusty" background. But there are also negative impacts: on the one hand, the congregations might lose an important part of the gospel and become implausible in their proclamation of the Word, whereas on the other hand the diaconal organisations are in danger of becoming estranged from the church and its message.

Therefore, we developed the model of a diaconal congregation that emphasises diaconia as the responsibility of the whole congregation. In the statutes of the Cross congregation the following self-understanding is set forth: *“The congregation understands itself as a diaconal congregation, that means that diaconia is an essential part of the congregation and is reflected in all work fields of the congregation.”*

The Cross Congregation has defined the following aims for its work:

- to give witness in words and deeds to the unconditional love of the Triune God for every human being, but especially for those who suffer
- to create in the congregation a safe space where people feel accepted and can develop their gifts, serving each other
- to engage against the forces that overshadow this love - in ourselves, in others, in church and society<sup>8</sup>

As the LELCA is still searching for its place in the Latvian society, the Cross congregation is aware that it has to act autonomously in fulfilling its' mission as a diaconal congregation. We are thankful that

<sup>6</sup> See: Book of Concord, <http://bookofconcord.org/sd-goodworks.php>

<sup>7</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Nachfolge, München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1964) 25

<sup>8</sup> See: <https://www.kalpot.lv/par-mums/Liepajas-krusta-draudse/>

we belong to the one Christian church where we have many brothers and sisters, congregations and churches in different countries who support our diaconal work.

## Biblical orientation

The model of diaconia as one of many branches of a congregation is rooted in Acts chapter 6, where serving with the word is separated from serving at the table. The reason for this separation was a complaint that the widows of Greek Christians didn't get sufficient care from the congregation in Jerusalem. Therefore, the apostles abandoned the diaconia at the table and wanted to concentrate on proclaiming the word. For the serving at the table, seven reliable men were chosen who all were Greek Christians. But in reality, this distinction didn't work, because those chosen also preached, baptised and were missionaries whereas Paul, as an apostle collected donations from his congregations in order to support the poor in the congregation of Jerusalem. Exegetical research has shown that Acts 6 doesn't speak about the establishment of the deacon as a new profession but about leadership for the Greek Christians in Jerusalem<sup>9</sup>. All in all, the conflict shows that the first Christians had problems with conviviality and accepting differences between them.

## Jesus and the Kingdom of God.

Jesus crossed many boundaries in the Jewish society, He went to the outsiders, to publicans and the unclean, possessed and poor people who were excluded from the temple. The parable of the Good Samaritan shows that helping the one in need defines what is meant by loving your neighbour. The neighbour who did this act of mercy was despised by the majority of the Jewish society. The parable about the last judgement states that Jesus Himself is to be found in those who are dependent on the help of others. So diaconia is a way of discovering your own humanity or the image of God. It is not limited to a special organisation but again and again transcends the borderlines we have built up in our minds. Jesus' death on the cross shows God's solidarity with everyone who suffers. The resurrection of Christ makes His presence universal and encourages His followers to do the works of love.

Searching for the Kingdom of God is an invitation to look for God working in the world and engaging in the development of this Kingdom, however in his letters, the apostle Paul concentrates more on the internal life of the congregations. For example, he sees the congregation in Corinth as the body of Christ where all parts are connected and have the obligation to use their charisms for each other and the whole congregation. The notion of being one body stems from the union that Christians receive during communion as we see in 1. Cor. 9,16ff. In 1. Cor. 11,20ff Paul criticises the congregation for selfish behaviour during communion and the agape meal. Paul says that under these conditions it is not possible to celebrate the Lord's communion.

In our work in Liepāja, we try to reflect both the Kingdom of God and the body of Christ. The task of the Diaconal Centre is more focussed on going outside in the society to support people in need, to give them the possibility to engage in our activities without being a member of our congregation. The congregation concentrates more on activities for its members. Although we are not a deliberately missionary church the diaconal work has opened the door to the church, because most members of our congregation have joined us through our diaconal activities.

## The Cross congregation Liepāja as diaconal congregation

The congregation has now about 100 members. As a congregation we try to have the diaconal focus in mind in all our activities. In the Sunday service the collection is not only donated money for the needs of the congregation, but people can donate also food or other things that are distributed to people in need. The large prayer is open for all who would like to express their praise, their needs and prayers for other people. After church service we sit together, drink coffee and tea and share our thoughts about the sermon and our experiences during the week. We also organise transport for elderly people to and from the church.

<sup>9</sup> Alfons Weiser, Die Apostelgeschichte, Kapitel 1-12, (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus 2011), 168-169



The pastor speaks about diaconia in the sermons. In a way the sermons are therefore also diaconia, because many of the people who come on Sundays to the worship are looking for encouragement and for hope, and that's what the gospel is about. The congregation has no deacons, because as a diaconal congregation we have a different concept. More or less, in one way or another, all our council members are involved in the diaconal work.

A group called 'Talks about Bible and Life' meets every Wednesday evening. One important moment is that from time to time the group opens up to other people and tries to focus the talks in some concrete action. For example, we organised the first celebration of the Way of the Cross in Liepāja on a Good Friday during which we visited different places where people were suffering.

Many children from disadvantaged families come to the Sunday school. The first thing they get is breakfast because many of them have not eaten at home.

Our church music ensemble participates not only during the church services but also in the services that happen in a home for elderly people.

The senior's club has already been organised by its members on an ecumenical basis for 20 years. Amongst their activities, they have for example collected money and bought school equipment for children in a refugee camp in Turkey.

At the Apple Festival that happens at the beginning of October every year, before Thanksgiving, about 80 farmers donate fruit, vegetables and other things that we are able to offer at a market for donations. So poor people can afford e.g. a bag with potatoes. The income that we earn from the food, the lottery and the auction is given to a good purpose. The whole congregation is involved in different activities.

The congregation also holds services in a home for people with learning difficulties and in a home for elderly people.

## The Work of the Diaconal Centre, Liepāja

The Diaconal Centre, Liepāja is closely connected to the Cross congregation. Most of the activities happen in the premises of the congregation. Since the congregation left the ELCL in 2016 because of the refusal of women's ordination by the ELCL and the consequent decision to join the ELCA, the ELCL has sued the congregation in order to reclaim the church and the parish house and this means that the existence of many of the activities of the Diaconal Centre are in danger.

The Diaconal Centre Liepāja aims:

- to support people from socially disadvantaged groups, including people with special needs, in the city and region of Liepāja, by providing spiritual, medical and material help;
- to strengthen the community and self-help of the inhabitants;
- to support and to promote diaconal work in the Christian congregations; to coordinate education, common projects and to use the resources in a responsible way.<sup>10</sup>

During all the years of its existence the Diaconal Centre has tried to support people in their **basic needs**. Especially in times of economic crisis this has been very important. For a long period, we received humanitarian help from Germany, provided by a support group in the Landeskirche of Oldenburg and by an organisation called 'Brücke nach aussen'. We distributed clothing and other things to people in need and to other congregations and institutions. For the last five years this transport has stopped and our second-hand exchange is ensured with donations by local people. There is still a need for this, for example among homeless people and single parents who use it regularly. Another offer for people with low income is our health room, where once a week a nurse offers basic health services and once a month a doctor sees people who need medical help. We also have established the rent of support tools for people with disabilities, for example, wheelchairs, because the state offered services take a very long time until it is possible to get the needed support tool.

<sup>10</sup> See: <https://kalpot.lv/sakums/>

The main group which is the focus of our work is **people with disabilities**. We have registered a day care centre with the Welfare Ministry. This helps us to apply for different funds from the European Union and the local municipality. The latter supports the activities of the centre with a sum of 4000€ per year. With this money we can finance the honoraria for different handicraft activities. The limited finances hinder us in offering our activities during the whole year. The day care centre works only eight months every year on weekdays. Between 80 and 100 people, mostly with physical disabilities, participate in the different groups. We offer a wide range of activities, for example, ceramics, floristics, art therapy, drawing, sewing and gymnastics for elderly people. The groups are led by qualified teachers. At least once a year we organise an open meeting where people can share their views on the activities and propose new activities etc. The participants can take one part of the handicrafts they make for their own use, the other part is given to the 'Domino' market where it is possible to sell the products. The earnings of the 'Domino' market are used to buy necessary materials for the handicraft groups. It is also an opportunity for people with disabilities who work at home and who want to sell their goods thereby adding some income to their very low pensions. Because of the uncertainty of the future ownership of the buildings we can't plan on a long-term basis. Therefore, we have reduced the activities of the 'Domino' market at present.

Another activity of the day care centre is guided tours to other places. At least once a month we organise a tour in which people with disabilities can take part at an affordable price. There is a big demand for these tours because the long wintertime forces many people to stay at home and the tours are a great opportunity to see other places and countries and enjoy the company. Everything is organised by people with disabilities, who themselves know how important the breaks are and who can ensure accessible buildings etc.

A way to support **self-help** is to provide our rooms to other initiatives that are not directly connected with our work. Twice a week, for example we have meetings of the Alcoholics Anonymous. Furthermore, different NGO's have also used our facilities, for example an umbrella organisation for NGO's that support people with disabilities offers a training course for unemployed young people with special needs in our rooms.

We ourselves have developed a support group for unemployed people with disabilities that meets every Friday. A very important part of the meeting is a common meal. Especially when we started, this was the main motivation for people to come to the group. With monthly pensions of 120€ and even less, many of the group members can't afford to have a meal regularly. The group is led by a retired social worker. There are three parts. At first the group members share what they have experienced during the week, then they speak about a topic of common interest, for example debt or how to write a CV, then they close with lunch. The group has about 15 members and takes an active role in workshops, seminars and other activities of the Diaconal Centre.

Another group that we have organised is for people who use wheelchairs or e-scooters. They meet in the fore-room of our church because this is accessible and provides enough space to come in with an e-scooter. The group is very actively involved in campaigning for more accessible streets and buildings. They demand that they are involved in decisions about city planning. At a round-table talk in September 2018 a documentation of inaccessible streets was presented to the representatives of the municipality. One result was the actualisation of a plan for accessible roads. Many members of the group are frustrated that changes take such a long time, that officials promise things that they don't keep, that they are not involved in decision-making and so on. Now the group has founded an NGO, called 'Challenge Fate'. Many group members are not used to cooperating in a group, so they have to be very patient with each other and forgiving if they want to go on working together.

## Support groups in the region

From 2016-2019 the Diaconal Centre participated at an international project called "**SEMPRE**" (**Social Empowerment in Rural Areas**). The project was funded by the Interreg programme of the EU under the leadership of the Diakonisches Werk Schleswig-Holstein.<sup>11</sup> The main idea was to strengthen social service providers by helping them to involve service users in service development and practice.

<sup>11</sup> See: <https://www.sempre-project.eu/>

We planned our activities step by step. We had four regional conferences to which in cooperation with other partners people with disabilities and their support persons were invited. One of the largest problems that was mentioned was isolation and lack of social contacts. Therefore, we initiated continuing meetings in a support group. With the help of the local social services and other interested organisations and private persons seven groups were founded in the Liepāja region. These groups are meeting mostly once a month and carry out different activities together. An important element of the project was that the end-users themselves realise a micro project in their place. We had three micro projects. In Durbe the members of the support group developed a training programme for assistants that helped them to care more for each other. In Grobiņa the support group in cooperation with the local Red Cross organisation prepared a “Meeting Garden” that will be open for every inhabitant of Grobiņa. The support group in Rucava discovered that many of their members didn't know how to use food packages that they receive regularly from the EU, so they started to cook together and collected recipes. These recipes have now been published in a special brochure. We will continue to work this micro project. The aim is to develop a training course with different topics about food and eating. We hope that this training course can be easily transferred to other municipalities in Latvia.

Since 2018 we have been running a project named ‘**Home - for people with disabilities**’ which is supported by the German lottery fund ‘Aktion Mensch’ and the ‘Diakonisches Werk Schleswig Holstein’. In 2019 we have had three meetings with people with disabilities, their relatives and friends in different suburbs of Liepāja. In these meetings we heard a lot of stories and were confronted with the many holes in the social net. We will now organise a roundtable talk about the issues that people with disabilities are facing in their everyday life. Also, we plan to start a support group for the care persons of people with disabilities, who often feel left alone without sufficient support. In June 2019 we organised a conference about poverty and how it affects people with disabilities. Many people with disabilities have a monthly income between 80€ and 150€. For us it was very important that the participants overcame their fears and feelings of shame and spoke about their situation. We understand this to be a way of empowerment as we create spaces where people can meet with politicians and other responsible persons and talk to them about the things that really matter in their lives. In a resolution, we gathered the problems and proposals for improving the situation. The resolution was sent to the Latvian Parliament and to different ministries with whom we have now started a dialogue. Our experience is that most politicians don't like to be confronted with people's real problems. They don't have any medium and long term strategies and are often just reacting to those groups who have many members and are interesting to them as voters. The churches with their leadership are only very rarely and infrequently involved for a limited time in advocacy of the issues facing socially disadvantaged groups.

In our centre we have four full time **workers**, about 10 people who work on an honorarium basis in the handicraft groups and about 20 volunteers. We try to support the people who come from our groups so that they can themselves take over responsibility, for example by leading a handicraft group. Our full-time workers have different backgrounds, but all have a depth of experience. For us the possession of a qualification is not the main priority but an open attitude and the right motivation. One good training model that we got acquainted with during the SEMPRES project was ‘action-learning’. This approach focuses not so much on knowledge from experts and different media, but on the strength of the people themselves to look for ways in which to improve their situation. It is clear that not everybody has the necessary skills (such as working within a group and group leadership), but action-learning gives opportunities to motivated people to take the necessary steps that are needed to solve a limited problem together. A good help for this are the action-learning workshops where people can work together and prepare the next steps.

At ‘SEMPRES Accelerators for Service Co-Creation’, the follow up of the original SEMPRES project, we will continue to work with action-learning. Also, we hope that we can learn a method called ‘appreciative inquiry’ that focuses on the strengths of people, not on their deficits.

Again and again we are confronted with situations where people have become stuck in a conflict and are afraid to communicate in an open way, or they are resigned and depressed. Therefore, we are looking for a way to learn nonviolent communication, which is a method developed by the American civil rights activist Marshal B. Rosenberg. The problem is that there are no qualified teachers for it in Latvia.

## Funding for diaconal work

Our work is funded in four ways. The main resource is our involvement in different international projects. Our partner ‘Diakonisches Werk Schleswig-Holstein’ has helped us a great deal by enabling our participation in this field. The second way is the donations that we receive from individual persons and organisations that know our work. We also get support from the municipality of Liepāja. Our own means are the donations people give in the church. As our members are mostly poor, we have to look for other ways to ensure our salaries and our work. Through the diaconal work we can also help the congregation to meet the costs for electricity and heating and provide the income for the main workers, including the pastor and others.

For us, the most important need is to come to terms with our legal issues. The main question is whether we, as a congregation, had the right to leave the ELCL and to keep our buildings. If we lose the court trial, we will have to look for other ways of working and also to find other facilities.

## Cooperation with other NGOs, institutions and congregations

The fact that since 1990 the population in Latvia has decreased by 27% (about 700.000), because of emigration and the fact that more people dying than being born means not only that there is a lack of qualified workers in many fields but also a weakening of the non-government sector. People are not so active as they were some years ago and those who are in power are not questioned by the younger generation. From our point of view, one of the main topics on the agenda of European diaconia and church organisations should be to tackle the consequences of emigration. For example, it is not right that diaconal institutions from Western churches are engaged in recruiting medical staff from Eastern Europe, in a situation where the public medical sector in many Eastern European countries is on the brink of collapse and is often inaccessible to people with low income.

Nevertheless, we as a Diaconal Centre are well connected locally and we try to organise regular network meetings with people from NGOs and official municipal institutions that work in the social field. Since we have left the ELCL our official cooperation with its congregations has been reduced, but individual people from different ELCL congregations are still participating in our activities. We hope that we can develop ecumenical cooperation with other denominations, for example with the United Methodist Church. In our opinion the main focal point should be on the issues that people in need face, not on the doctrines of faith and the hierarchies in the churches.



## 2.

# The local Christian Church of the Full Gospel and the Public Association “Children of Tien-Shan”. A case study from Balykchy Kyrgyz Republic

## Irina Trofimova

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## Introduction

This case study is based on the experience and ministry of the local Christian church of the Full Gospel, the Pentecostal movement “Isa Tenir”, which is located in Balykchy city, Kyrgyz Republic and the Public Association “Children of Tien-Shan”

## A short history of the country and development of Christianity

Christianity only gained the right to legal existence and spread in the Kyrgyz Republic in 1991, when the collapse of the Soviet Union occurred and the country gained independence.

With the advent of independence, the doors of the country were opened for many religions, including Christianity. Christianity spread widely throughout the country, from 1993 to 2010; there was a rapid growth of local churches of various denominations and confessions and an increase in the number of people practicing Christianity. During the last few years we began to experience the Islamization of the country, more and more Kyrgyz people (the official figure is 86 – 91%) accept and actively practice Islam, which has led to persecution of Christians especially in rural areas. This has led many believers to begin to leave the country, because of the constant threat to their well-being, health, and life. The country experienced a general reduction in the number of Christians especially in rural areas of the country. In meantime, there are more mosques in the country than public schools.<sup>12</sup> Currently, in the Kyrgyz Republic, about 5% -13% of the population consider themselves Christians of various movements - these are Orthodox Christians, who make up the bulk of Christians in the country, as well as Roman Catholics, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventist Christians, Pentecostals, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Charismatic churches, missions and foreign organisations of the Protestant movement.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, in the Kyrgyz Republic, we have a restriction of the ability to openly preach the gospel in public. On December 31, 2008, the President signed a decree of a new Law “On the freedom of

<sup>12</sup> See: EurAsia Day: <http://bit.ly/3cVoFAG>

<sup>13</sup> See: <http://www.center.kg/article/177>

religion and religious organisations in the Kyrgyz Republic”.<sup>14</sup> The new law forbade Christians to share the Gospel outside the walls of their buildings. This law tightened the rules for the existence of Christian churches, but also helped them to begin to revise their approaches to ministry in their communities by focusing on developing diaconal ministry. At the initial stage, churches used to spread the gospel through verbal preaching, conducting campaigns and open proclamation, but after the restrictive religion law was signed, many churches revised their approach by converting it from verbal preaching to diaconal ministry – meaning preaching by hands, through caring and fulfilling the basic needs of the poor in their communities.

## Context of the church; why we had to register a Charitable Organisation

This church was founded in April 1997 by my husband and me; we were sent out as missionaries by our mother Pentecostal church “The Church of Jesus Christ” in Bishkek to plant a church in the city of Balykchy, Issyk-Kul region (with a population of 40,000 people, where 98% are Kyrgyz and more than 90% are Muslims); and we still run the ministry in this church. In November 2005, in order to facilitate the ministry, to create security (since we are far removed from the capital) and on the recommendation of the head pastor, our church received a separate registration. The church council of elders was established and the church began to exist independently, but at the same time remained in close contact with the head church. Currently, there are 50 members in our church who regularly attend church meetings, we also have about 60-70 secret believers who are afraid to speak openly about their faith because of persecution, but deeply connect with the pastor and church leaders. The ministry is conducted by the pastor and his assistants, and the church is governed by the church council of elders.

When we arrived, first of all, we made prayer walks, walked around the city, talked with people, explored the needs of local people and the city in general; we tried to hear the voice of God, to understand His plan for this city. We also began to build relations with the city authorities, with various state social services and with existing churches in order to get a complete picture of the city, its inhabitants and main needs. We prayed for God’s mercy and his love to come to this city and God showed us how we can share the Good News with people, and it was via the diaconal ministry. God directed us to start a ministry helping street children and a poor and vulnerable group of people in our community.

Our church understands diaconia as a calling from God for everyone who calls themselves a Christian. This is something without which we cannot reach this world and bring transformation; for us, diaconia is a tool for how we can practice our faith in God in our daily life.

Leading bible verses for our work are:

**James 2:14- 17** “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So, faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead”.

**Micah 6:8** “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

After three years of running diaconal ministry in our church we came to the understanding that due to the increase in the spread of Islam around the country it was difficult to run this ministry in the name of the church. We had to find a way how to develop diaconal ministry outside of the church in order to reach as many people as possible in our community. This was important, especially to reach Muslims who do not accept Christians, since poverty has no nationality, has no religious affiliation and no gender. We did not want to become a small diaconal ministry that could operate only inside its own walls. In our country, the civil society sector is very developed and anyone who wants to do charitable work can register a charity organisation.

Thus, in May 2001, we registered the Public Association, “Children of the Tien Shan” that consists of members of our church, where the pastor is a head of this charity. The charity is managed by a Board

<sup>14</sup> See: <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/202498>

of trustees of 5 people, which includes members of our church, one pastor from another church from our city, and another pastor from our head church in Bishkek. The organisation is fully accountable to the church and performs community ministry on behalf of Christians. We started our work with the opening of a shelter for street children, then we were able to expand our programmes and we involved the poorest people in our community in this work. In the beginning, many single mothers were afraid to come to our church because of prejudice, but when we continued our work as the Charity, many women with children began to contact us, despite the fact that the organisation's office is located in the grounds of the church and all people in our city know that the church leads this organisation. These women could protect themselves from the aggression of relatives who began to persecute them for turning to Christians for help, instead, they could say that they turned to the Charity for help. And this worked for us!

## How does the organisation define or understand diaconia?

Since the organisation was created as a part of the church's ministry, diaconia is at the heart of its mission and vision. Our vision is the development and mobilisation of the local community and through the local church to reduce the poverty level in the Kyrgyz Republic, and we focus on mobilisation and capacity building of local churches through training and education programmes on work with poorest and marginalised group of people in their communities, and we do direct work with poor and vulnerable families in the city of Balykchy. We believe that God has called us to be His diaconal workers!

**2 Corinthians 3:6** "Who has made us competent to be ministers (diaconoi in Greek) of a new covenant."

The head of the organisation is the pastor of the church and this allows this Charity to remain as a part of the church; having very close contact with the parishioners, involving them in the activities of the organisation. In our work, we use a holistic approach where a person is considered as a complete being. What do we mean by the holistic approach and why should the church take an active part in it? Our mission is to reduce the poverty level in our country, bringing God's love, restoring dignity and justice.

My husband and I are the professional workers. My husband has a higher education in theology and management, and I have higher education in social pedagogy. There are 5 more employees in our organisation, including a social worker.

There are three main activities that we run nowadays:

1. Mobilisation of local churches to implement integral mission - training church members and providing consultations to pastors in the process of solving problems connected with poverty and various forms of violence and abuse in their communities.
2. Work with families experiencing difficult life situations - providing to package of social services for vulnerable families, carrying out training, seminars and consultations on how to lead families out of the crisis.
3. Protection of women and children from domestic violence and abuse; we work with women and children who have been subjected to violence in their communities, provide them with a package of social services, and conduct training and counselling to protect them.

We also function as a community centre, where anyone can apply and get help and assistance.

These activities require us to address certain issues in the life of poor and marginalised people:

1. **Meeting physical needs**, which are lack of material resources: income, food, clothing, housing. In our case, we have a lot of business people who are willing to donate material things to the poor. I want to stress that our organisation has become a kind of bridge between rich Kyrgyz people (many of them confess Islam) and poor people who live in our community. We have several influential and wealthy people who were looking for reliable and decent people through whom

they could provide assistance to the poor. These people trust us because we are Christians, they say that we have the fear of our God, and this fear will not allow us to steal, we become trustworthy people for them, so they gladly donate.

2. **Meeting spiritual needs**, which are being poor in our relationship with and towards God, and/or being spiritually dull, hard of hearing God and unable to respond to Him. Only the church can help to meet these needs and it's a key aspect! We have a group of church activists who are responsible for the spiritual growth of poor people that we are working with. Church activists conduct home visits, share the Good News and pray for those who are open for spiritual support. Since we work with Kyrgyz people and many of them confess Islam, we prefer to build good and trustworthy relationships before we touch the spiritual aspect.

**Luke 9:25** "What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?"

3. **Meeting emotional needs**, which are being in a poor relationship with or towards yourself, having low self-esteem and being unable to maintain a position of faith, peace, and inner contentment. God can restore the fullness of a person on this level, but He needs His church to be involved in this process. We have a training programme where we try to meet these needs, we have one to one consultations and even prayer support. In this aspect, the church plays a key role in our work.
4. **Meeting social needs** - Being poor in relationships with and towards other people or being unable to relate comfortably and consistently with people around (family/relatives, neighbours, etc.) without conflict, resulting in loneliness, divorce, abuse, alienation, disconnection, etc. In this aspect we share our work with the local church since meeting social needs requires professional support; we as a charity workers conduct training on different themes like "Building healthy relationships with others", "Prevention of domestic violence and abuse", "Conflict resolution", "What does it mean to be a good wife and mother". Church members provide personal consultations and very often they are just ears that are ready to listen to all the pain that people have inside, giving comfort and support including prayer.
5. **Meeting political needs** - being poor in relationship with and towards people in the position of power, powerlessness, lacking access, opportunity (e.g. to secure documents, registration, health, education, employment, etc), lacking freedom and/or power to change the circumstances, persecution and injustice. We call it advocacy and there is so much debate about whether the church should be involved in advocacy. Very often a church does not have the potential to be involved in advocacy campaigns, or because of persecution, does not want to intensify aggression in society, especially not to spoil relations with people in a position of power. In this case, a Charity can use its independence to conduct or be involved in advocacy campaigns. For example, our organisation became a member of the secular Association for the Protection of Children's Rights, which allowed us to lobby for amendments to the current legislation of the country to increase benefits for poor people. Since we are located in a rural area, where the poverty level is higher than in big cities, we have no reliable information about the needs of poor people, so we conducted a survey, collected information and gave our recommendations to the Association. Later we took an active part in making adjustments in the legislation, and after three years of hard work, we were able to increase benefits for poor families at the country level; our government has signed a decree to increase benefits for the poor, especially for poor families with children. We understand that if we would carry out this work on behalf of the Christian church, no one would listen to us and we could not reach this result.

We know for achieving good results in poverty reduction, we should have a very close partnership with the church since so many needs of a person can be met only by God through His church. In this partnership church members are involved in providing substantial assistance through constant prayers, ministry of accompanying people who need support, promoting changes in their thinking which allow them to solve their own problems in their life independently and simply to be good friends.

Since our church is small, and the organisation is located in the same place as the church, we have a very close relationship between the organisation and the church. The pastor often preaches about diaconal ministry, if we have a lack of human resources in the organisation, then we turn to the church. Our church has a ministry of home groups, where in the middle of the week believers gather together in their homes and conduct services, at such home meetings we invite poor people with whom the organisation began to work and encourage the home group leader to take responsibility for these



people (for us it's outreach). Youth ministry is actively involved in providing physical assistance to older people. We also have prayer services where we often pray for the unsaved poor people that the organisation works with and for their specific needs. Also, we have a very close connection with 2 other churches in our city and we share our experience with them through seminars and training, including visits to exchange experience.

## Learning and Training for Diaconal Work

First of all, diaconal workers must have good social work skills, we pay special attention to the professional growth of all employees. In our organisation, we adhere to the principle of personal growth and self-development and in connection with this, we ask our employees to regularly analyse their training needs and make plans for taking part in training and seminars. We know that there is not always money in the church, this is the case for our church and at the same time most of the churches that we work with do not have extra money for educational needs, and in the diaconal sphere of their parishioners, for additional staff training. In connection with this, we often turn to various donor organisations with a request to fund the training of our staff, and many donors are happy to support this initiative! Two months ago, our social worker, who also is a good minister in the church, completed a series of training sessions on the theme "The Healing Community", this cycle was aimed at equipping diaconal social workers with the necessary tools for working in the Muslim community, meeting the spiritual needs of people.

All staff members are also encouraged to take part in various spiritual conferences where the word of God is studied. Since our city is located 170 km away from the capital, where most of the seminars and training programmes are held, as an organisation, we have the opportunity to pay for their participation in various training events. We also try to conduct trips to exchange experience, visiting other churches that are involved in social diaconal ministry; where we can share our experience and exchange the knowledge, gain new ideas from each other. Our training programmes are usually also open to volunteers from other local churches.

## How is the diaconal work funded?

The organisation receives funding from various sources. First of all, from our church, part of the expenses are covered by the church budget. Church members also conduct fundraising campaigns to raise funds for low-income families and children, involving businessmen and other churches in these initiatives. Since we are an officially registered charity, we can submit projects to various international organisations. From 2002 to the present, our organisation has signed an agreement with Tearfund UK to support our programmes. For 7 years (from 2007-2015) we were actively cooperating with the Global Fund for Children USA, who funded our Street Children Shelter. Also, for several years we received support from Samaritan's Purse, UK through funding for our programmes and for conducting various activities for children from our projects. We believe that for sustainability it is very important to have several sources of funding and our registration as a charitable organisation gives us the chance to consider and receive funds from international agencies.

## Is diaconia involved in advocacy or awareness raising?

Very often, because of persecution, a local church does not take part in advocacy. Since even having an official registration with the Committee on Religious Affairs, if you become inconvenient for local authorities, then such a church is very easy to close. In this regard, many churches do not dare to participate in advocacy campaigns. A couple of years ago, we decided to start defending the rights of women subjected to domestic violence. First of all, we started by educating the women themselves about their rights, showing what they need to do if they have been abused, how they can protect themselves and their children. After the training, women began to come to us with children in their arms who simply ran away from home to protect themselves and the children from violence by their husbands or relatives. We needed to place them somewhere, so we decided to contact our city hall with a request to assist us in opening a shelter for such women.

Recently, we were invited to a meeting with the vice mayor of our city, earlier we requested financial support from them for partial financing of this shelter. Since we have known her for a long time, she invited us to say that the deputies decided to refuse us because we are Christians, and this is no way for Christians to invade Muslim families and say what women need to do. Furthermore, the topic of domestic violence is very controversial in our Muslim context. I think, because we went on behalf of the Charity, we were at least listened to, and we were able to start building a dialogue. I hope that when a little more time has passed, maybe we can negotiate with our deputies about the opening of such a Shelter, I know for sure that if we went on behalf of the church, we would have been refused immediately and we would have to go through a lot of additional checks from the state.

## Is there ecumenical cooperation in diaconia? Cooperation with other social organisations?

Probably, without cooperation, we could not survive either as a church or as a charity. Currently, the number of believers and churches has decreased, because of the persecution and many churches went underground and became closed. We share a different vision - we do not see the point in the existence of an underground church, which has closed within itself and has no effect on this world. We believe that by uniting together we become a power, and then we can influence our government and poor people. Over the past 8 years, my husband and I have been actively involved in training Christian churches social ministry, we are trying to build a network and unite those churches that are moving in a similar direction.

Over the past 8 years, we have been able to engage 41 churches from various denominations - Baptists, Pentecostals, Seventh-day Adventists, charismatic churches, and independent Kyrgyz churches in this educational programme. Since our focus is not a theological worldview of each denomination, but diaconal ministry to poor people outside the walls of the church, our training is aimed at social work, strengthening the church's capacity for diaconia, building good relationships with local authorities and advocating for poor and marginalised people. We focus on the relationship of the local church with the community in which the church is located, and not on the internal structure of the church.

I remember the moment, 10 years ago when, as the Charity we took part in the work of the parliament and based on our experience, together with UNICEF, we developed a new law for our country on foster care, which was adopted by the government and began to be implemented throughout the country. At that time, we were fully engaged in charity work and began to push the church to the background. I remember how we prayed, and God spoke to us: "- But what about my people, but what about my church?" For us, it was a sign that we should begin training for churches around the country to carry out diaconal ministry. We expanded the boundaries of our vision and aim to unite the churches in social ministry. We try to create a network among the churches whom we trained and who participated in our training programmes. More often, we have a network among churches at the local level, which are located in the same city/village. For example, in our city of Balykchy, there is a network of 4 pastors of different denominations who jointly solve poverty issues at the city level. So far, we do not have such a network at the national level, since in rural areas churches are more open to unite due to the small number of parishioners, limited resources, and also because of persecution. It is safer for small churches, far from the capital city to unite and jointly solve poverty problems in their communities if they want to have influence over their communities. We started to do this and are currently involved in this ministry.

## Conclusion

Looking back at my diaconal ministry, for all these years of my experience in interacting with other churches, very often I think about whether it worth to register a charitable organisation separately from the church or is it better to stay working under the church itself? Working with partners from different countries, I often heard that the church should remain a church and should not be confused with charity! Below I would like to give my understanding of the pros and cons of this approach, based on the experience of 19 years of diaconal ministry and ministry in the church, 15 years of leadership of the two Charities and also 8 years of experience in training and interacting with churches from 6 regions of our country (in Kyrgyzstan there are 7 oblasts or regions and we were able to cover 6 of them)

## APPENDIX

### Benefits of registering as a separate Charity

- 1) in this case, diaconal ministry has a clear vision and mission and will not disappear against the background of other ministries in the church, as it is separately registered
- 2) a separate registration helps to receive additional financial support from different international agencies, through submitting projects and receiving funds from the outside. Many churches experience a lack of funds even to cover the church needs, and registration of the Charity helps a lot in raising funds even for church needs.
- 3) taking into account of Muslim context in the country, all churches are constantly closely monitored by state security services and any financial support from outside received on the church's account undergo additional multiple checks, which is not the case with charitable organisations, they also completely report to the state for each sum spent, but they are not subjected to repeated checks and harassment.
- 4) many small churches in rural areas cannot be officially registered due to a lack of membership (currently, according to religious law, a church must have at least 200 members in order for a church to be registered), because of this, many churches remain in form of home group churches. To register a charitable organisation, 3-5 people are enough, registration can be carried out within 30 days.
- 5) a registered Charity provides the opportunity for professional growth of employees, because it's easy to find additional resources for training, which is not easy in the church, as many donors are happy to support programmes to strengthen the potential of employees of Charity organisations.

### Downsides of registering as a separate Charity:

- 1) the church may lose its vision of diaconal ministry; when the Charity grows and becomes professional in its activities, it can outgrow the church and separate from it.
- 2) church members transfer all responsibility for the diaconal ministry to the Charity and do not play their role in this ministry since they believe that there are trained people who very often get paid for their work.
- 3) a strong professional Charity can become secular and completely lose its connection with the church.

Perhaps there are many more pros and cons, I think that a lot depends on the context of the country, on the vision of the church itself, how much the pastor of the church is involved in the diaconal ministry, whether he and church members share the vision of this ministry and whether they see how the church can play a key role in bringing changes to the community! It also depends on whether church members are actively involved in the activities of the Charity.

As we carry out training for many churches, we see that if the pastor is actively involved in the development of diaconia, then registering a separate organisation does not affect the church in a bad way, but rather helps in attracting new funds and brings the diaconal ministry to a more professional level. We also have churches where the pastor initially believes that it is good to have this ministry, but he himself does not have enough time or money to develop it, in such churches there is a high risk that the organisation will develop independently and over time the Charity will outgrow the church and to separate from the church and may even cause a split in the church, we have several such examples with churches.

As for us, our Charity is under the ministry of our church? And I would say that the Charity supports and forces the church to go on and move forward.

“Diaconal action, understood as integral to the Church’s mission in today’s world, is also conditioned and challenged by concrete contexts. In order to be relevant, Diaconia “requires prayerful discernment of the signs of the times and a faithful reading of the contexts.” (Diakonia in Context, LWF, 2009, p. 12)

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### 3.

## Diaconal attitudes and practice in congregations of the Reformed Church in Hungary

### Laszlo Dani

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### Introduction

The Reformed Church in Hungary (Hungarian: Magyarországi Református Egyház, MRE) is the largest Protestant church in Hungary and it also has parishes among the Hungarian diaspora abroad. Today, it is made up of 1,249 congregations in 27 Presbyteries and four Church districts and has a membership of 1.15 million. Of this 1.15 million, approximately 600,000 are active members of a Reformed congregation. RCH is the second largest denomination in Hungary after the Roman Catholic Church. The RCH has 14,400 employees, of which 1,559 are ministers. There are 14,800 elders/presbyters in the RCH. The RCH operates 129 educational institutions from kindergartens to university level, including 4 theological seminaries (Debrecen, Budapest, Sáropatak, Pápa) and a hospital.

Nowadays, in the 606 diaconal services of the Reformed Church in Hungary we are supporting approximately 41,680 individuals. Statistics show that the demand for these services is great, but the number of institutions providing help is very small at present.

There are different kinds of diaconal institutions according to who is maintaining the institution, that is to say the congregation, the presbyteries, the church district or the Reformed Church in Hungary (managed by the Diaconal office of the RCH). Most of the diaconal institutions are maintained by the local congregations. Therefore, there are obviously many links between the local congregation and institutions. For instance, volunteers, money and the pastoral work done by the local church.

### Organisation of the Church & Diaconia

The highest decision-making body for church legislation and the administration of the Reformed Church in Hungary is the General Synod.

The RCH (as a member of the worldwide Reformed Church family) is constructed in a representative way from below, from the congregational level. Members of governing bodies on all levels of the church are elected by the group of church members, and in all levels above the congregational, pastors and lay people are represented equally.

The church levels function independently, providing various kinds of service and using their own budget. A common church constitution, together with a set of specific rules and regulations, makes it

possible for different units of the church to create their own operational design. However, for certain transactions they depend on higher church bodies. These general rules allow for freedom and flexibility in the congregations' operation, but they also protect the integrity of the church.

As regards deacons: the RCH has deacons. They have different positions in the church. They can, as volunteers, be committed members of the local congregation or they can be full time employees paid by the local congregation. There are also deacons who are working in diaconal institutions that are maintained by the church. The deacons are not members of the church council and Synod. According to the Church Law on diaconia, very few of them are ordained. Though they are not ordained, they have a working contract and mandate from the elders in local congregations. In some congregations the ordination of elders and deacons are combined. Both happen at the same time, according to almost the same liturgical form. As regards the education of the deacons we see different possibilities. There are professional deacons with a university degree in social work and diaconia, there are deacons who are trained and have some other kind of social and/or health care degree. And there are deacons working in the local congregation as volunteers without special training and degree level competence.<sup>15</sup>

### Community-based Diaconia

The primary objective of the Diaconal Office of the Reformed Church in Hungary is to support and promote the diaconal services of Reformed congregations. The Diaconal Office of the Reformed Church in Hungary also aims to support the service of Reformed diaconal institutions, in order that they remain up to date on the most recent changes in managerial and financial environments. Being supported by the Diaconal Office, these institutions are able to continuously familiarise themselves with quality professional models and also participate in professional workshops. The Reformed diaconal institutions are constantly provided with the current information necessary for a productive and high-level operation.<sup>16</sup>

### Hungarian Reformed Church AID

Our church is not only engaged with diaconal institutions, but also with professional emergency aid. For this reason, in 2008 the church established the Hungarian Reformed Church Aid, which is a charity and development organisation based on Christian core-values.<sup>17</sup>

### The concept for this research

Following the guidelines of interdiac research project, I explored the forms and characteristics of different diaconal attitudes and practices in the congregations of the Reformed Church in Hungary. I examined the written materials from the different levels of the Church and their presence and effects in the ministry. I have chosen the topic of the research and the title of the study because I wanted to start a process that is still missing in the self-interpretation of ecclesiastical diaconia and in the reflection on it. I believe that the increasing number of institutions in the last decade requires that we examine our image of diaconia, that we raise our awareness of it and that we re-interpret it. Besides, we must not forget our Protestant-Reformed heritage: *"Ecclesia semper reformanda est"*. (The church must always be reformed). The church must continually re-examine herself in order to maintain the purity of its doctrine and practice.

*"Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." Romans 12, 2*

My plan was to make phone interviews with the members of the Diaconal Committee, with deans of the 27 dioceses/presbyteries, with responsible persons for diaconia in the dioceses, with some deacons, and with some pastors of congregations that maintain diaconal institutions. Depending

<sup>15</sup> For more information see the website: [www.reformatus.hu/english/](http://www.reformatus.hu/english/)

<sup>16</sup> For more information see the website: [www.diaconia.hu](http://www.diaconia.hu)

<sup>17</sup> For more information see the website: <http://jobbadni.hu/en/>

on their openness and willingness, I would then proceed with written questionnaires. I planned to collect source material through further personal contacts and personal interviews with the responding pastors. I wanted to complete the study by analysing the collected information and summarising the conclusions.

## The Basic Research Question

The basic question for the research was:

*How does the church understand diaconia as a defining characteristic? (As a mark or the essence of the church)?*

If we want to get closer to the answer to this question and to reality, we have to examine:

- a) the doctrines and papers of the church related to diaconia,
- b) the way of thinking and speaking of pastors about diaconia,
- c) the active and real life of congregations, from a diaconal point of view.

If we try to examine the church through these questions, we can see whether or not it fulfils its diaconal mission. Therefore, I used the questions in my phone calls and sent two other questionnaires to the target groups. I could not reach everyone I wanted, but all of those with whom I had the opportunity to speak on the phone were open and willing to answer my questions (43 persons). In the process of the research I tried to contact and involve more than 60 persons with written questionnaires. In the letter in which pastors received the questionnaires they were informed about the opportunity of delegating the task. 13 pastors (68%) did not delegate it. In the target group only 19 persons responded by filling the questionnaire. (Almost 30%) Here is the breakdown of the questionnaire responses

|               |    |                         |
|---------------|----|-------------------------|
| Pastor        | 13 | (68% of the 19 persons) |
| Elder         | 2  | (10,5%)                 |
| Deacon        | 2  | (10,5%)                 |
| Church Member | 2  | (10,5%)                 |

The target group was the deans of the 27 dioceses/presbyteries, with responsible persons for diaconia in the dioceses, and some deacons working in the strongest congregations. The answers do not mirror the average congregations but the 'elite' and biggest ones of the Reformed Church. Most of these congregations are located in bigger cities. Presbyteries usually contain approximately 30-40 congregations. In two cases there were overlapping answers, as I asked two persons from the same congregation - the minister and the deacon. From the point of view of understanding diaconia I wanted to filter - by including those responsible leaders of the church who are in the positions from where they can give the most support to and have influence on the smaller congregations.

## The Basic Documents of the Church Related to Diaconia

The doctrines and official papers of the church related to diaconia include the Law on Diaconia and Decisions of the Synod

There is a Church *'Law on Diaconia amended and adopted by the Synod of the Reformed Church in Hungary'* adopted in 2017(The previous Law on Diaconia was adopted in 2000.) Here is an extract:

### PREAMBLE

*"Diaconia is the sacrifice of thanksgiving (expressing of gratitude) of the Church and of the voluntary community of people who came to faith (Romans 12:1, 1 Peter 5:2-3). Diaconia is a helping service of which the subject is Jesus Christ and His church and the object is the suffering fellow human being*

*(Luke 10:25-37; Luke 16:19-31; Matthew 25:31-46). John Calvin and Theodore Beza took the teaching from the Word of God according to which there are four Marks of the true church: pure preaching of the Gospel, right administration of the sacraments, practicing Diaconia, and exercising church discipline. Thus, there are four permanent offices in the Church: pastors, doctors, elders, and deacons.*

*The second Helvetic Confession also recognizes Diaconia as the basic service of the Church.*

*Diaconia is carried out according to the instruction of the Word of God within the current valid legal framework. This law regulates the diaconal service of the Reformed Church in Hungary, including the tasks, fields, and management system of Diaconia; the education and introduction of diaconal workers into service; the establishment of the national diaconal centre; the financial resources, church and state support of Diaconia; the interdenominational and international relations of Diaconia - and the order of their operations and financial administration. Considering these teachings of the Bible and the Reformation, the Synod of the Reformed Church in Hungary formulates its law on Diaconia..."*

This preamble of the law on diaconia gives a very brief and basic biblical and theological view of the diaconia of the church. The Reformed Church in Hungary accepts the Bible as the word of God. Beyond the early creeds Athanasian Creed, Apostles Creed, Nicene Creed, it also accepts the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Second Helvetic Confession.

Besides the Law on Diaconia and the Creeds I would mention two other writings adopted by the Synod of RCH. which are not widely known within the church although both of them are very important to understand diaconia.

The Mission and Diaconal Office with their Committees of the Synod took the initiative to create the documents. It was teamwork with selected professionals from institutional diaconia and delegates from universities. Before they were adopted by the Synod, the drafts were widely discussed in the Synod.

In the case of the "Reconciliation - Health - Hope" document (Concept of the Reformed Church in Hungary's ministry among Roma) the Synod gave the mandate to the Committee for Mission. The operative work was done by the Mission Office. Professional scientific research was done by sociologists before the workshops started to work on the concept and action plan of the accepted document, in 2013.

## Reconciliation - Health - Hope Concept of the Reformed Church in Hungary's Ministry among Roma

### I. Mission - Ministry

*"Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Reformed Church in Hungary (RCH) as a sign and agent of God's Kingdom will be a church of personal and social transformation, a community where irrespectively of origin or race, people can experience the welcoming, reconciling and healing power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ." (1)*

### II. Theological and missiological principles

*"The basic attitude of the church's ministry among Roma (2) is determined by the value and dignity of the man as a creature. God created man to live in loving community (communio) with Him and each other, and the evolution for this community glorifies Him. All ethnical, economic, social-based distinction, hierarchical or patronizing relationships harm this relationship-system and is a sin before God. It follows that the Church considers values to be important, such as mutual respect, acceptance, understanding, discovering each other's values and enriching one another.*

*The Church is missional by its very nature. God shows His truth and redeeming grace to His chosen people. He blesses His people and in turn makes them blessings to all the nations. His selection is a privilege, which comes with responsibility: God called His people to be a presence and active participant of mission." ...*



The Synod of the RCH also adopted a very important Statement on the inclusion of our brothers and sisters living with disabilities. The statement „on the welcoming of people with disabilities into our church communities” was accepted on the 16<sup>th</sup> of November 2016:

**Christ is the future, and we follow Him together with our disabled brothers and sisters!**

*“ We believe that God has created every man in His own image (Genesis 1:2; Genesis 1:31). The Bible depicts man as a fragile, vulnerable and helpless creature, but also one that God deeply cares about. As creations of God, we are under His protection. In the eyes of God, our human state – despite all apparent differences – is the same inasmuch as we are all sinners (Romans 3:10-12). Our greatest failing and largest obstacle before God is the fact that we are sinners: we live with sins in our past and sins surrounding us threaten us daily; we are all deprived without God even if we happen to live in luxury. We all have our impairments, since our lips fail to speak to those suffering, our ears fail to hear the laments of our fellow human beings, and our eyes fail to see the misery of others. We also profess that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).*

*We have recognized that everyone – whether they are healthy, currently not disabled, or living with some sort of disability or impairment – is need of God’s grace. It is only through Jesus Christ that we become real human beings. This is our common denominator, and God continues to approach us, humans, with His redeeming love and gospel, because He loves each and every one of us – whether we live with a disability or not – and has a plan with our lives in order to make us live for the glory of His holy name, in a way that His only begotten Son is reflected in our lives.*

*We profess that “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). God carried out his plan of redemption for every human being – whether or not disabled – in Jesus Christ.*

*We recognized that we can now become the sign of the Kingdom of God through accepting unconditionally those who are sick, suffering, and disabled. The Christian congregations have to reflect God’s Kingdom, already revealed in Christ and to be fully realized in the perfection of salvation, where there is not a distinction between a healthy or disabled person, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore the Church of Christ shall provide a space for disabled people, where the congregation members view and value them and their lives not by their capabilities, but according to the imitation of Christ, which is realised in the unconditional acceptance of the neighbour, the selfless commitment to the sick, disabled and suffering people.*

*We profess: It is God’s will that our brothers and sisters living with disabilities should be integrated into the community of congregations (Matthew 25:35). And thus, every person, whether disabled or not, should form one body: the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27). Every person, whether disabled or not, should be made disciples (Matthew 28:19). There are no separate ways on the narrow road for healthy and disabled people. We were given singleness of heart and action by our Heavenly Father (Jeremiah 32:39). Every person, whether or not disabled, has spiritual gifts and natural abilities that they can use to praise and serve the Lord: “For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us...” (Romans 12:4-6). “No congregation can do without disabled people; if people with disabilities are missing from a congregation, then the congregation itself is disabled” (Zsófia Juhász).*

*We have recognized that a congregation is able to show its inclusive love by using all available methods (teaching, informing, raising awareness, providing technical tools and creating the appropriate technical conditions) to break down any internal or external barriers that hinder the access to the Word of God. This way, the congregation draws attention to the divine dimension of equality of opportunity and accessibility.*

*We believe and profess that the love of Jesus Christ that elevates human beings is the basis and source of real relationships which make life meaningful for both abled and disabled people. As a result, this way of following Christ becomes a blessing in this world.”*

The above-mentioned documents are accessible to everyone on the website of the church. Most of the pastors know that there is a Law on Diaconia, but only few people in the church know what is in

it. Most of the pastors have not heard about the two other documents. They didn’t even mention the documents in answering the question about adopted church documents/papers related to diaconia.

How diaconal services are organised in the local congregation, and at what level depends on the attitudes and charism of pastors and not only on the Law on Diaconia! For example, the Transcibiscan Reformed Church District accepted a statement or recommendation which is obligatory for all congregations maintaining a diaconal institution in the Church District. The goal of the act was to prevent professional mistakes in managing and maintaining the services.

**QUESTIONNAIRE 1  
The way of thinking and speaking of pastors about diaconia**

**Examination of pastors’ attitudes towards diaconia**

My premise is that personal contact brings more results. This was confirmed in the process of the research. That is why - as a first step - I chose to use the form of interview through phone-calls. Through calling the chosen persons I could easily start a personal contact with the target group. Below are the questions with the summary of the answers given.

**1. Where would you place diaconia in your congregation?**

Most of the pastors and the other persons interviewed, (43 persons) placed diaconia next to preaching and mission. Answers to his question showed that they see diaconia as an essential part of the function of the church. I think the question was interpreted rather theoretically than practically.

Diaconia is important. This shows the social sensitivity and responsibility of the congregation living and practising in personal relationships. - 24 persons see it in this way, but they do so without pointing to the concrete practical consequences of this statement.

18 persons responded that Diaconia exists mainly or rather in institutions or services.

5 persons said that diaconia is less important, it probably can be placed on 4th place among the functions of the congregation. Acting spontaneously, in a less organised way, and only occasionally is it seen as the norm.

5 persons think diaconia in the church appears more practical in deeds and it is rather marginalised.

4 persons responded that Diaconia should be more important, as it appears in deeds. It should be the central part of the life of the congregation. However, it is very weak.

**2. What is the role and function of diaconia, (and if you have a deacon) in your congregation?**

There is a deacon: in 7 congregations from 43 = 16% (Not all of them are professionals)

There is no deacon: in 36 congregations from 43 = 83%

**Role and Function of Diaconia**

To show the love and mercy of God in praxis

(e.g.: helping and caring for others in need): ..... 17

Diaconia (good works of faith), is the manifestation of faith: ..... 9

Visiting sick, old and lonely people (counselling): ..... 8

Maintain diaconal institution/services (professional diaconia): ..... 6

Making a diaconal map in order to be able to see and find people in need: ..... 5

Community building: ..... 5

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Diaconia is a way of God’s mission. Diaconia - the silent mission makes us credible: . . . . . | 5 |
| Preaching the Gospel in good works and deeds: . . . . .  | 3 |
| Diaconia requires volunteers – it helps to find and keep them: . . . . .                       | 2 |
| Leading and organising diaconal programmes: . . . . .  | 2 |
| Diaconia is not a goal, but a tool: . . . . .  | 1 |

**3. Why is the minister/pastor of a congregation in a privileged position in the work of diaconia?**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Because of the trust of people and the call of God. People expect it from the pastor: . . . . .   | 15 |
| It is privileged because of direct contact with people and facing the problems and needs.<br>The ability to make changes and experience the working grace of God: . . . . . | 11 |
| Because it is teamwork and an opportunity and at the same time a big responsibility.<br>The pastor has an overview and can coordinate and organise it: . . . . .            | 11 |
| This is the active role and duty of the pastor, which I would not call privileged: . . . . .  | 10 |
| In most cases it is a one-man attraction. It should change to plural and community work: . . . . .  | 4  |
| Rather a task and a burden: . . . . .   | 4  |
| The pastor is not active in diaconia, but he/she knows what happens in the congregation: . . . . .  | 2  |

**4. What kind of opportunities does the pastor have in doing and organizing diaconia in the congregation?**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Coordination, and organizing the services: . . . . .  | 17 |
| Teaching is diaconal preaching, counselling: . . . . .                                      | 11 |
| Delegation of diaconal tasks and responsibility: . . . . .                                  | 11 |
| Leading by example: . . . . .   | 10 |
| To involve and motivate people: . . . . .   | 9  |
| To call, prepare and equip the members of the congregation for diaconal services: . . . . . | 4  |
| Giving suggestions: . . . . .   | 4  |
| Expressing gratitude, giving feedback: . . . . .  | 3  |
| Administration: . . . . .   | 3  |
| Taking responsibility for diaconia, control: . . . . .                                      | 3  |
| To be accessible: . . . . .   | 3  |
| It depends on the attitude and consistence of the congregation: . . . . .                   | 2  |
| (It also depends on the financial opportunities)  |    |
| It depends on the pastor’s attitude and charisma: . . . . .                                 | 1  |
| Prayer: . . . . .   | 1  |
| No opportunity: . . . . .   | 1  |

**5. What responsibility does the pastor have in doing and organising diaconia in the congregation?**

|  |                                   |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| Definitive, existential (finally everything): . . . . .  | 19 (+ 1 together with the elders) |
| Credibility: . . . . .   | 12                                |
| Big in organising, leading: . . . . .  | 10                                |
| Delegating tasks: . . . . .  | 9                                 |
| Inform (invitation to donate diaconal services, raising awareness, giving feedback): . . . . . | 7                                 |
| Empowering support, counselling: . . . . .   | 5                                 |
| Consistency: . . . . .   | 4                                 |
| Administration: . . . . .  | 4                                 |
| Control: . . . . .   | 4                                 |
| To show gratitude, respect and honour towards those who are active in diaconia: . . . . .      | 3                                 |
| Making a diaconal map for services: . . . . .  | 3                                 |
| Follow-up, care: . . . . .   | 3                                 |
| Creating the condition and frame for diaconia: . . . . .                                       | 2                                 |
| To be accessible: . . . . .  | 2                                 |
| To be open-minded: . . . . .   | 1                                 |
| To be receptive to the diaconal ministry: . . . . .  | 1                                 |
| To be able and ready for self-transformation: . . . . .  | 1                                 |

**6. How do you think diaconia is shaping your church? What are the positive effects of diaconia? (Why is it “worthwhile” to deal with diaconia in the church?)**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| It has a community building effect: . . . . .                                   | 15 |
| It makes us more sensitive to each other and to people in need: . . . . .       | 7  |
| It gives the opportunity to experience the Body of Christ: . . . . .            | 5  |
| Diaconia brings closer the institution and congregation: . . . . .              | 5  |
| It makes us more responsible and involves us in active services: . . . . .      | 4  |
| It strengthens our faith and our Christian identity: . . . . .                  | 4  |
| It enables us to be able and ready for self-transformation: . . . . .           | 4  |
| Through diaconia we can have positive feedback: . . . . .                       | 3  |
| It gives motivation and inspiration: . . . . .                                  | 3  |
| Keeps the community alive: . . . . .  | 3  |
| It strengthens our relationships with each other in the congregation: . . . . . | 3  |
| It makes us to feel ourselves in unity and community: . . . . .                 | 2  |
| Opens our heart, our resources: . . . . .                                       | 2  |
| Positive effect on our prayer life: . . . . .                                   | 2  |
| It has bigger effect on the upcoming generations: . . . . .                     | 1  |
| I do not know: . . . . .  | 1  |



**7. What kind of levels can you identify in the doing and organizing of diaconia?  
How do you think diaconia appears in your congregation?**

The type of different answers started with “I do not know“ through to “at every level“.

The most characteristic levels were:

1. spontaneous
2. occasional
3. conscious
4. planned
5. organised
6. led by volunteers, led by pastor, - elder, -deacon
7. continuous
8. professional
9. institutional

**8. What are the conditions of doing and organising diaconia?**

The most important is the spiritual basis (prayer, love, faith, community, commitment, trust...)  
everything else comes from it: .....32

Human resources, committed volunteers: .....16

Financial basis: .....10

Frames, tools, buildings, infrastructure: .....9

Diaconal attitude, credibility: .....6

Awareness of our duty: .....6

Self-knowledge, spiritual gifts: .....3

Information, functioning network: .....2

Purpose driven attitude: .....1

Motivation:.....1

Jesus Christ: .....1

Delegation of tasks:.....1

Creating opportunities and frames for doing good works/diaconia: .....1

Time: .....1

**9. Does diaconia appear in church law and other church documents? If so, how well are they known to the pastors, elders, and members of congregations?**

This is what the answers to the questionnaire show:

The question was mostly understood as being about diaconal administration, reports, church bulletin board, church newspaper, poster, flyer, etc.

The law on diaconia and other related documents - accepted by the Synod - are less known and play hardly any role. In some cases, theory and praxis are divided.

Papers and documents of the local congregation for diaconia have a much bigger effect.

**10. What is the impact of shared and accepted decisions on church life?  
On the lives of those affected?**

If there is a common decision for diaconia in the congregation, it has obviously community building effect.

It depends on how seriously they are taken.

Very weak impact.

It helps the cohesion of the congregation.

It enriches the life of the church.

There is no impact. No effect.

These are the foundation stones, that is how we work.

We do not see the realisation of the decision.

**QUESTIONNAIRES 2 AND 3**

These are the questionnaires mentioned in the Research Concept section of the report on page 31. They were sent to the target group of 60 people who are deans of the 27 dioceses/presbyteries, with responsible persons for diaconia in the dioceses, and some deacons working in the strongest congregations. There were 19 responses.

**Questionnaire 2**

**Where and how would you place the congregation from the diaconal point of view?**

Note: After studying the options, the respondents were asked to indicate the number 1 most relevant to their church. Respondents were given the instruction that they may fill in more than one answer, if appropriate.

1. The focus of our church life is on the word of God, we are the Church of the preached Word, this is how we respond to our call and mission. Preserving our important traditions, obliges us to do so...

|                                 |                 |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| I. – most relevant              | 7 congregations |
| II. - relevant                  |                 |
| III. – not so strongly relevant |                 |
| IV. – less relevant             |                 |

2. Our church life is characterized by this phrase: “Church of God’s Word”; our most important activity is preaching, verbal explanation (bible study, etc.). At the same time, we have church members who have recognised the power/duty of “acting on the word” and - who voluntarily do diaconal work without much coordination...

|      |                  |
|------|------------------|
| I.   | 12 congregations |
| II.  | 1 congregation   |
| III. |                  |
| IV.  |                  |

3. Our Church is the Church of God’s Word .... We have discovered that diaconal work is an effective means of missionary activity. We help and morally support our members who are called to diaconal activity...

|      |                 |
|------|-----------------|
| I.   | 5 congregations |
| II.  | 2 congregations |
| III. | 1 congregation  |
| IV.  |                 |

4. The head of our church and congregation is the resurrected and living Jesus Christ. We consider diaconia important. It has become a part of our church life. With spiritual support diaconal services are coordinated by members of the congregation...

|      |                 |
|------|-----------------|
| I.   | 7 congregations |
| II.  |                 |
| III. |                 |
| IV.  |                 |

5. In our congregation, diaconia is present in an organised manner, supported by pastors and elders. This is reflected in the church order, with the person in charge, the Diaconal Committee, and the Church and in the form of a prayer community for deacon volunteers...

|      |                 |
|------|-----------------|
| I.   | 6 congregations |
| II.  | 2 congregations |
| III. |                 |
| IV.  | 1 congregation  |

6. In our congregation, a deacon with appropriate expertise (nurse, social worker, mental health professional, etc.) directs the congregational diaconia...

|      |                 |
|------|-----------------|
| I.   | 3 congregations |
| II.  |                 |
| III. | 1 congregation  |
| IV.  |                 |

7. Our church carries out its tasks through a group of volunteers with the help of competent professionals. Diaconia is organized and led by a deacon or/and an elder, supported by a prayer group regularly...

|      |                 |
|------|-----------------|
| I.   | 3 congregations |
| II.  | 1 congregation  |
| III. | 1 congregation  |
| IV.  |                 |

8. Diaconal activities are coordinated by a professional deacon in our congregation (see MRE Law on Diaconia Act 2000/01)...

|      |                 |
|------|-----------------|
| I.   | 1 congregations |
| II.  |                 |
| III. | 2 congregation  |
| IV.  | 1 congregation  |

9. Our church maintains a social institution (e.g. nursing home, elderly club, support service, home social care, etc.) supported by state standards; independently, with no particular church support...

|      |                 |
|------|-----------------|
| I.   | 4 congregations |
| II.  | 2 congregation  |
| III. |                 |
| IV.  | 1 congregation  |

10. We have integrated the social institutions of our congregation into the life of the congregation, and their operation is intertwined with the congregation, as part of our church diaconal work...

|      |                 |
|------|-----------------|
| I.   | 2 congregations |
| II.  |                 |
| III. | 2 congregations |
| IV.  | 1 congregation  |

**Questionnaire 3**

**Activities and characteristics of real life in congregations from diaconal point of view.**

Settlements and their location in Hungary from which I received answers to the questionnaire:

|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| capital                       | 1 |
| seat of the county government | 4 |
| city                          | 3 |
| - Over 20,000                 |   |
| - 10-20 thousand              | 3 |
| - Between 5 and 10 thousand   | 3 |
| village (1000-5000)           | 4 |
| small village (500-999)       | 1 |
| small village (under 500)     | - |
| 'dwarf' village (under 200)   | - |

**1. What target groups, what kind of people do you reach with the diaconal ministry of the church?**

|  |    |                           |   |
|--|----|---------------------------|---|
| Elderly . . . . .                                    | 18 | Youth . . . . .           | 9 |
| Sick people . . . . .                                | 18 | Addicts . . . . .         | 7 |
| People living alone . . . . .                        | 14 | Homeless people . . . . . | 6 |
| Socially disadvantaged people . . . . .              | 12 | Pregnant women. . . . .   | 5 |
| People with disabilities & their relatives . . . . . | 8  | I don't know . . . . .    | 4 |
|  |    | Other . . . . .           | 0 |

**2. What are the diaconal services you intend to start up in the future?**

|  |   |                           |              |
|--|---|---------------------------|--------------|
| Elderly . . . . .                                    | 3 | Youth. . . . .            | 0            |
| Sick people . . . . .                                | 2 | Addicts . . . . .         | 0            |
| People living alone . . . . .                        | 2 | Pregnant women. . . . .   | 3            |
| Socially disadvantaged people . . . . .              | 1 | Homeless people . . . . . | 0            |
| People with disabilities & their relatives . . . . . | 0 | I don't know . . . . .    | 7            |
|  |   | Other . . . . .           | 1 (refugees) |

**3. Is there a prayer group for services and staff in the church**

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| Yes, regularly. . . . .    | 9 |
| Yes, occasionally. . . . . | 5 |
| No . . . . .               | 5 |
| I don't know. . . . .      | 0 |

**4. Does the information about the existing social/diaconal needs of the congregation reach the church leader (pastor)?**

Yes ..... 14                      Partially ..... 5  
 No ..... 0                        I don't know ..... 0

**5. If so, who transmits the information?**

Head of the elders ..... 12                      Young church members ..... 5  
 Presbyters/elders ..... 15                      Others... ..... 4  
 Teachers of religion ..... 2                      (members of prayer group and the  
 Deacons ..... 6                                  diaconal committee)  
 Old church members ..... 12                      I don't know ..... 0  
 A deacon volunteer ..... 2

**6. Is there any diaconal training in the church? (training for volunteers, and further training)**

Yes ..... 1  
 There has been ..... 6  
 No ..... 12  
 I don't know ..... 0

**7. What communication tools does the congregation use?**

Homepage of the congregation ..... 15                      Flyers ..... 10  
 Church bulletin board ..... 16                      Media (regular / occasional opportunity to  
 Newspaper of the congregation ..... 12                      appear on local TV / radio programs) ..... 3  
 Posters ..... 11                                  Others (e.g. social media) ..... 5

**8. Does the congregation have tools for diaconal work? (multiple answers possible)**

| Tools and their use     | Yes | I don't know | For a fee | Free of charge | For an indefinite period | For a definite period |
|-------------------------|-----|--------------|-----------|----------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. car                  | 7   | 2            |           | 2              |                          | 2                     |
| 2. special hospital bed | 6   | 4            |           | 1              | 1                        |                       |
| 3. mattress             | 5   | 4            |           |                | 1                        |                       |
| 4. walking frame        | 6   | 3            |           |                |                          |                       |
| 5. walking stick        | 6   | 3            |           |                |                          |                       |
| 7. health equipment     | 8   | 3            |           | 1              |                          |                       |
| 8. wheelchair           | 7   | 3            |           | 1              |                          |                       |
| 9. bicycle              |     |              |           |                |                          |                       |
| 10. garden tools        | 6   | 1            |           | 1              |                          |                       |
| 11. induction loop      | 4   | 2            |           | 1              |                          |                       |
| 12. voice amplification | 8   | 1            |           | 1              |                          |                       |
| 13. mobile ramp & other | 5   | 2            |           | 1              |                          |                       |

**9. What are the non-material tools of church diaconal assistance? (multiple answers possible)**

Pastoral care/counselling ..... 15  
 Visit ..... 19  
 Expert advice ..... 2  
 Financial support ..... 8  
 Support group ..... 5  
 Others ..... 2

**10. Is there a diaconal ministry group, diaconal committee?**

Yes ..... 11  
 No ..... 7

**11. Do you keep a diaconal administration, work diary, and record in the church?**

Yes ..... 5  
 No ..... 13  
 I don't know ..... 1

**12. Are there organised diaconal events / programmes in the congregation?**

(diaconal soup kitchen in the congregation, worship service for mourning people, diaconal day, volunteer project etc...)

Yes ..... 18  
 No ..... 1  
 I don't know ..... 0

**13. How often?**

Weekly ..... 1  
 Several times a month ..... 1  
 Monthly ..... 5  
 Quarterly ..... 4  
 Every six months ..... 2  
 Annually ..... 5  
 Less frequently ..... 1  
 I don't know ..... 0

**14. What percentage of the church's annual budget is spent on diaconal services?**

No answer: 5 congregations and in 26% of the total examined, that is 19 congregations some of them did not know or did not want to give an answer.

In 14 congregations, on average 6% of the annual budget is spent on diaconia

In 8 congregations 0.1 – 3.0%

In 3 congregations 5.0 – 7.0%

In 3 congregations 8.0 – 13.0%

**15. Does the church plan ahead for the diaconal budget?**

Yes ..... 13  
 No ..... 5  
 I don't know ..... 1

**16. What are the financial sources for diaconia in the congregation?**

|                             |                                       |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Money box..... 11           | Diocesan donation ..... 1             |
| Church contribution..... 5  | Donation from church district ..... 0 |
| Targeted donation..... 13   | Foreign aid ..... 2                   |
| Deacon's money box ..... 10 | Normative state aid..... 4            |
| Application ..... 3         | Other..... 0                          |
| Church donations ..... 10   |                                       |

**17. Does the church have a short, medium, and long-term diaconal or mission work plan, strategy?**

Yes ..... 12  
 No ..... 3  
 I don't know ..... 2

|                       | Yes | No | short term (1 year) | medium (3-5 years) | long term (5-10 years) |
|-----------------------|-----|----|---------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Diaconal Work Plan | 2   | 9  | 3                   | 1                  | 1                      |
| 2. Mission Work Plan  | 11  | 2  | 10                  | 2                  |                        |
| 3. Diaconal Strategy  | 4   | 8  | 3                   | 4                  | 2                      |
| 4. Mission Strategy   | 3   | 6  | 1                   | 5                  | 1                      |

**18. On whom can you count in congregational diaconia?**

| Human resources                                | full time status | part-timework | volunteer work | occa-sionally | regularly |
|--|------------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|-----------|
| 1 Deacon                                       | 4                |               | 2              | 2             | 2         |
| 2 Social worker, social pedagogue              | 2                |               | 1              | 1             |           |
| 3 Counsellor                                   | 4                |               | 1              |               |           |
| 4 Mental Hygiene Specialist                    | 4                | 1             |                | 1             |           |
| 6 Health professional                          | 3                |               | 1              | 2             |           |
| 7 Teacher, special education teacher           | 1                |               | 1              | 2             | 1         |
| 8 Nurse  |                  |               |                |               |           |
| 9 Pastor, minister                             | 6                |               | 4              | 5             | 2         |
| 10 Pastor's wife                               | 1                |               | 5              | 2             | 1         |
| 11 Pastor's children                           |                  |               | 3              | 3             |           |
| 12 Elders                                      | 1                |               | 7              | 5             | 3         |
| 13 Members of the Reformed Women's Association |                  |               | 3              | 2             |           |
| 14 Congregation members                        | 1                |               | 8              | 5             | 2         |
| 15 Youth (confirmed in faith)                  | 1                |               | 1              |               |           |
| 16 Youngsters                                  | 1                |               | 3              | 1             |           |
| 17 Pupils of religious education               | 1                |               | 1              |               |           |
| 18 Volunteers                                  |                  |               | 3              | 2             | 1         |
| 19 Public employees                            | 1                |               | 1              | 2             | 1         |
| 20 Staff of diaconal institutions / services   | 3                |               | 1              | 1             | 1         |
| Other  |                  |               |                |               |           |

**19. Contact, support, cooperation with other organisations.**

|                                      | regular | random | occasional | other | specific |
|--------------------------------------|---------|--------|------------|-------|----------|
| Other denominations                  | 5       |        | 8          |       |          |
| Reformed Social Mission Services     | 1       |        | 6          |       |          |
| Diaconal institutions                | 3       |        | 6          | 1     |          |
| Cross-border organisations/ churches | 4       |        | 4          | 1     | 1        |
| NGOs                                 |         | 1      | 4          | 2     |          |
| City council                         | 1       |        | 7          | 1     |          |
| State                                | 2       | 1      | 1          |       |          |
| Other                                |         |        |            |       |          |



**20. Who is responsible for diaconal services in the congregation?**

|                                   |   |                              |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|------------------------------|---|
| No answer . . . . .               | 2 | Diaconal institute . . . . . | 3 |
| Deacon . . . . .                  | 3 | Pastor's wife . . . . .      | 1 |
| Pastor . . . . .                  | 5 | Hospital chaplain . . . . .  | 1 |
| Volunteers . . . . .              | 1 | Elders . . . . .             | 1 |
| Head of diaconal elders . . . . . | 1 | Diaconal committee . . . . . | 5 |

**21. Does the diaconal ministry have a thoughtful concept or is it spontaneous?**

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| Yes (Conceptual) . . . . . | 9 |
| Spontaneous . . . . .      | 5 |

**How does it work in the congregation?**

|                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| Clear . . . . .              | 7 |
| Clearly structured . . . . . | 6 |
| Unclear . . . . .            | 0 |
| Occasional . . . . .         | 3 |
| Disorganized . . . . .       | 5 |
| No system . . . . .          | 2 |
| Spontaneous . . . . .        | 5 |
| Continuous . . . . .         | 2 |

**How are the tasks divided/distributed?**

|                      |    |
|----------------------|----|
| Employees . . . . .  | 3  |
| Volunteers . . . . . | 12 |

**Is there a need to start new church projects or services?**

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| Yes . . . . .          | 6 |
| No . . . . .           | 9 |
| I don't know . . . . . | 1 |

**22. What other issues do you think are important in diaconia of the congregation?**

Comments:

- Importance of diaconal teaching also in the preaching.
- It is important to organise more diaconal training, workshops, community building, teach strategic thinking, concepts, and collect and share best practices... etc.
- Not only to organise occasional diaconal programmes.
- Spontaneous and occasional way of doing diaconia is not sufficient
- Changing diaconal attitude and vision.
- Balance between pure preaching of the Gospel, right administration of the sacraments, practicing Diaconia, and exercising church discipline.

- We would need many more deacons in congregations, but there is a lack of necessary finances.
- To make church grants for employing deacons in congregations.
- Bigger and stronger congregations should support more often small ones. Solidarity.
- We have to be aware of our spiritual and material resources and use them more for diaconia.
- Importance of the relation between diaconia and mission.
- Balance between the congregational diaconia - organising and doing by volunteers - and the institutional diaconia.
- In our ageing society and church, we should pay more attention on elderly people, families. We have to strengthen and support them.
- We have to be aware of the challenges we face e.g.: slowly decreasing numbers and influence of the church, secularisation, postmodern society, decreasing supports from people.
- We should call and prepare/train more active members of the congregation and empower them for diaconal services. We should take the courage to have more trust towards each other.

**Conclusions**

I think we cannot have a precise and perfect picture of diaconia existing in congregations. Church law and doctrines, theological truth and teaching can make the basis, create the frame, give directions and share values but they cannot reach the goal in themselves. In order to get closer to our goal, to be a diaconal church we have to face the reality, make deeper analysis and develop a solid biblical base, be open for change and willing to go for renewal.

According the answers received to the questionnaires I think that diaconia - especially in congregations - appears still to be partial and fragmented in the church. We have to be aware that the answers given by the participants were subjective. There were in some cases no concrete particular answers to the topic or to the point of the questions, they rather expressed some feelings, ideas and wishes. I wasn't always sure if the respondents had understood the questions correctly. (e.g. did they think about their own congregation only or did they speak about some other congregations or was it meant generally over the whole church.)

In most cases pastors are not aware of the fact that diaconia is an essential part of church life, or in other cases their statements are only theoretical opinions. Congregations are not always facing, reflecting and reacting to the challenges existing in their locality and/or in the wider environment.

In comparison with the statement in the Church Law, diaconia appears to be on a very low level in congregations. The Law states that "there are four Marks of the true church: pure preaching of the Gospel, right administration of the sacraments, **practicing Diaconia**, and exercising church discipline. Thus, there are four permanent offices in the Church: pastors, doctors, elders, and **deacons**." There is a difference between the equality of the theoretical approach and the practice of diaconia in the congregations.

We cannot find very many links between the two lines. The representatives of the intellectual academic knowledge and universities are rather theoretical, and they can hardly find their way to the field of diaconal practice and to the most challenging social and spiritual needs. They are not walking with their boots in the mud.

The church is surrounded with so many important social issues and challenges in the field of the local congregations, but they are not well enough prepared and equipped to face and handle it.

Teachers in the Diaconia and Social Work Department of Reformed University reported that in the past twenty years more than 200 students received their degree in social work and diaconia. About 10% of them could or wanted to find a job in the church and most of them are working in diaconal institutions managed and maintained by the church. Although diaconal workers in diaconal institutions (e.g.: Social worker, social pedagogue, counsellor, mental hygiene specialist, health staff, teacher, special education teacher, nurse...) in some places are involved in the life and services of the congregations.

Deacons have no special liturgical role in the congregation and in spite of the fact that they can be ordained only one of them was ordained in the church in the past decades. They can help by serving at the Lord's supper, they can preach on Sunday worship services, but this seldom happens.

Usually deacons are working as "spiritual social workers" and as helping professionals in the congregation - organising and completing or carrying out diaconal duties or services. They can assist and work for elderly, socially disadvantaged and marginalised needy people. They can lead Bible studies, prayer groups, take part in religious education and youth and child services. We can learn more about the roles and tasks of deacons if we examine the 2nd question of the phone interview and in the 9th questions of the questionnaire.

It is becoming a more widespread phenomenon that local congregations declare and bless their active volunteers as deacons for diaconal services. It is important to support and help them in organising their diaconal services and to prove themselves able to live as diaconal congregations.

I think the research helps to perceive and observe our status in the diaconia of the church. Our reflections and reactions, on the diaconal issues are just as important as our attitude and concrete activities in diaconia. These are an essential part of the process of our spiritual and practical journey. *Ecclesia semper reformanda debet est* – "The church must always be reformed"

I believe diaconia is one of the most effective ways to grow in self-knowledge, in faith and it will strengthen the congregation to fulfil her mission.

## part two

# CHURCH & ORGANISATIONAL DIACONIA

- 4.**  
The Serbian Orthodox Church and Social Practices
- 5.**  
Social Ministry in the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church
- 6.**  
The Code of Ethics of Silesian Diaconia in the Czech Republic  
– the Interpretation of Selected Formulations



## 4. The Serbian Orthodox Church and Social Practices

### Deacon Ilija Jovic, & Prof. Dalibor Petrovic

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### Introduction

Since Orthodox theology has been criticised because it aligns itself with the State, and it lacks significant social mission in its characteristics, recent studies are trying to challenge this view. A document published under the name "Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church"<sup>18</sup> was adopted at the Sacred Bishop's Council of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in 2000. This document represents a pioneering attempt at systematising social concerns and giving them a theoretical framework. Furthermore, conferences as they were addressed via pre-synodal meetings, which brought together all the Orthodox Churches at the Patriarchal Centre in Geneva as well in conciliar meetings of local autocephalous churches, have been instrumental in planning for the future of the Church because the third millennium after the birth of Christ raises new socio-political questions that Church has to face. One of the current and predominant social questions facing Orthodox theology today is the ecological situation on planet earth, the growing disparity in wealth distribution and living standards as well as the relativization of systems of values.

<sup>18</sup> <https://mospat.ru/en/documents/social-concepts/> (accessed 03.10.2019). Since its translation into Serbian language and publication in 2007, this official document of the ROC was included in the list of compulsory literature for the students of Faculty of Orthodox Theology at the University of Belgrade.

Another important aspect is the terminology used to describe the social engagement of the Orthodox Churches, likewise of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC). In the theological vocabulary concerning this matter there is a notable variety of terms and expressions which are used to describe social activities of the Church. Unlike the German Protestant milieu, where a term such *Diaconia* prevails or in the Roman-Catholic church, where *Caritas* carries the same meaning, in the theological considerations of SOC there is no fixed comprehensive term that is widespread. We encounter a wide variety of expressions such as: philanthropy, charity work, social care, alms-deeds, mercifulness, love, social work and public responsibility etc. These expressions may be used simultaneously, covering the same meaning of churches social activity. The lack of a conventional terminological expression in this matter indicates historical contextual settlement and theological trends that lie behind it.

The development of social services is strongly conditioned by historical and geographical circumstances. Belopopsky names four historical periods that preceded contemporary situation, which are: Byzantium, the Ottoman period, the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Communist regimes.<sup>19</sup> These historical periods can be taken as milestones that have determined direction and intensity of publicly expressed social engagement of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC).

In this long historical process, these periods did not transition from one into another through inner natural development. The shifts were abrupt and in each of the cases extremely violent. The end of Byzantine era was marked with fall of Constantinople that was followed with several centuries of Ottoman rule.<sup>20</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> century started with First Serbian Uprising that lead to foundation of modern State where SOC was the only surviving organised institution. The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought enormous material destruction and human losses. The Communist regime took power as consequence of and in the aftermath of the Second World War.

Another important aspect is that each of above-named periods, even though organically connected, have their clear distinctions. The SOC has played a national and political role explicitly in stateless times and in periods of national liberation, mainly by building state systems that therefore had different social concepts. The main developmental characteristic of the SOC is that its social concerns have not been connected with missionary activities, rather they have been pastoral answers and quests for solutions in each of the historic periods. During the Communist regime the SOC was expelled from public life, ridiculed and had no possibility of any public activity. The confiscation of property financially disabled not only the continuation and development of previous social actions, but also raised the question of its existence.

The post-communist society of ex-Yugoslavia is marked by its constant socio-political and economic changes. Recent socio-political changes indicate a new interest of the SOC in enhancing social work in order to provide a full church witness in contemporary societies. In these circumstances the SOC regained its freedom of public expression and immediately became publicly involved in social activities. Social work is enriched through combining pioneering social projects with the revival of pre-communist movements and church affiliated organisations. These projects are scarcely studied aspects of the Churches' activities in these new realities. Another lack is of studies concerning in which ways pre-communist movements and organisations have seen a resurgence and have been employed in addressing the new realities of contemporary societies.

### Theology

The Church fathers, and specially the Cappadocians remain the *locus classicus* in regard to elaborating the theological background of charitable activities. Their understanding of the Trinitarian faith is at the core of theological considerations in all the social undertakings of the SOC. As the Trinitarian faith has a holistic outreach, living in this faith is referred as Theosis. The process of Theosis, which is interchangeably referred to as deification, divinization, or sanctification, is understood as partaking in the divine life of the Triune God. This brings personal inter-communion into the centre, where values such as communities based on sharing instead of the individual accumulation of capital are more desired, hence monasteries are examples of such worldview.

<sup>19</sup> Alexander Belopopsky, *Orthodox and Social Witness*, Non-published text presented in *Orthodoxy and Social Witness*, Conference organised by the Institute for Christian Studies, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2005.

<sup>20</sup> In historiographic and church related circles this period is often referred as: "Ottoman Yoke" or "Ottoman Slavery", therefore the processes for the establishment of the modern Serbian state at the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century is called "Liberation".



One of the oldest charitable organisations is “Circle of Serbian Sisters” (“Коло Српских Сестара”). It is a female charitable organisation established 1903 in Belgrade, whose scope of activities varied from humanitarian to cultural and educational.<sup>21</sup> Its peculiarity is that organisation was founded by women and consisted only of women. The organisation was destroyed during the Second World War, when the Nazi occupational powers imprisoned the main activist, while their existence was later prohibited by law by the new Communist regime. During collapse of communism, at the very beginning of civil war, the organisation was revitalised by the SOC with its original purpose - humanitarian aid. Nowadays the Circle of Serbian Sisters exists and operates within most parishes through entire SOC and organises various charitable actions. Their activities can be compared to the works of diaconia, particularly of deaconesses in first century of the church. They assist those in need on voluntary basis and finances are gathered through personal donations, mainly from the members.

Another contributory factor is monasticism. Because monasteries and monastic communities - as understood in Orthodox tradition, are of high value in society, these communities are being supported by the faithful. A socially engaged and well-known community that works on monastic values is “Земља Живих” (“Land of the Living”). It is a non-profit organization of Diocese of Backa and Kovilj monastery which deals with psycho-social rehabilitation and the re-socialisation of young drug addicts.<sup>22</sup> “Land of the Living” is project where the theological concept of Theosis has it’s the most visible expression. The project is organised in connection with local government where values as communitarianism, monastic and family values are being emulated.

The “Religious Charity Guardianship” (“Верско Добротворно Старатељство- VDS”) is a humanitarian, charitable organisation operating within the SOC with the primary purpose of carrying out various activities, aimed at assisting all those in need. The whole of its work is divided into 7 sections. At the head of each department is an organiser, a leader in the work, each of which has their own assistants. The President is His Holiness Patriarch Irinej, who through the governance of the VDS supervises and personally evaluates the overall activity of this institution. He gives his approval and blessings for the implementation of decisions made at meetings of the management board, which is composed of twelve elected persons, who are, allocated according to certain criteria, for example, profession and affinity. The VDS Assembly is the highest body convened by His Holiness the Patriarch. In addition to His Holiness, members of the Assembly are: Vicar Bishops, Archpriest Deputies, church elders - priests who are senior supervisors of the parishes, and two other lay delegates who are specifically engaged in the work of the VDS and represent 7 sections of VDSs activities and therefore have a seat in the Assembly. The Assembly takes care of the basic needs of this institution, in organisational, material and developmental terms. Resources are gathered through contributions of parishes that are in the Archbishopric of Belgrade and Karlovci and by donations from the governmental office for religions.<sup>23</sup>

A theological reflection and background of the “Religious Charity Guardianship”<sup>24</sup> (VDS) can be found in a short text by Fr. John Mayendorf. The text is taken from his book “The Great Lent”. In this text Mayendorf he states that:

“Christian love is in this respect something contrary to the „social activity“ with which, today, Christianity is often identified (...)” Christianity cares little about that troubled future but puts the spotlight on the now - the only and sure time for love. This is an area of „social activism“ that completely belongs to „this world“. And Christian love transcends this world.”<sup>25</sup>

In making this distinction, SOC puts in first place the concern of Mayendorf and that is, “not to identify Christian love with political, economic, and social care and not become some kind of „social agency.”<sup>26</sup> A continuation of Mayendorf’s concern is to be found in a short introduction to the Orthodox Church and charitable work that starts with quote of St. John Chrysostomos “It is impossible, it is

21 See Jelena Savic, “Kolo Srpskih Sestara – odgovor elite na zensko pitanje”, Glasnik Etnografskog muzeja, sv. 73 , Beograd 2009. 115-132.

(Eng. Jelena Savic, „The Circle of the Serbian Sisters - The Answer of the Elite to the Woman's Question“, Journal of the Ethnographic Museum, sv. 73 , (2009): 115-132

22 <https://www.zemljazivih.info/zemlja-zivih-on-english.html> (accessed 03.10.2019)

23 For scope of activities see under <https://starateljstvo.rs/sta-je-vds/> (accessed 01.11.2019)

24 Serb.Верско Добротворно Старатељство

25 <https://starateljstvo.rs/protojerej-aleksandar-smeman-milosrdje-i-hriscanska-ljubav/>(accessed 01.11.2019)

26 <https://starateljstvo.rs/protojerej-aleksandar-smeman-milosrdje-i-hriscanska-ljubav/>(accessed 01.11.2019)

absolutely impossible, without mercy, to reach even the door of the Kingdom of Heaven.”<sup>27</sup> This is followed with examples of the mercy in the lives of the saints, with an appeal to contemporary, here and now moment.<sup>28</sup> Social engagement is not considered separate, but rather is seen as a part of the spirituality that flows out of the liturgical life of the Church, expressed in the concept of the “liturgy after the liturgy” (as a public and collective action), and the principle of “two altars” (one within the sanctuary and the other outside, in the public square).<sup>29</sup>

The diaconate, even though an apostolic office, has been devalued, moving away from its original meaning and scope of activities. Specifically, the role of the deacon in the SOC is mainly reduced to its liturgical function. In some cases, a deacon takes care of administration in local bishop’s office or more rarely, as a parish deacon alongside the liturgical function. The original function of a deacon, as the embodiment of the servanthood of the Church, mainly in assisting bishops in works of charity, has, over time, ceased to be practiced.

The little understood ministry of the deacon and its derivation from early church practices is one of the theological reasons for above mentioned lack of a unified terminological expression that would encompass the social activities of the church. This is one of the reasons why word diaconia is not commonly known or widespread.

Another interesting ministerial office that existed in the church is that of the deaconesses.<sup>30</sup> Even though church has discontinued ordaining women into the ministry as deaconesses, nowadays their duties are being taken by nuns and priests’ wives. However, a renewal of deaconess’ ministry according to the character that they had in early church and revitalisation of this office in contemporary theology is yet to be seen.

## Structural framework and scope of activities

The Serbian context is the jurisdictional territory of the SOC which means the ex-Yugoslavian countries. In addition to that there is Diaspora<sup>31</sup> that is tied to these countries and regions. The diaspora has not only its own specifics of development but has interdependence with dioceses in historically jurisdictional regions. Having an active role in several countries, dioceses of the Church face various challenges.

The Church organises her activities in this highly heterogeneous environment. Belgrade remains headquarters of the Patriarchate where at Synodical and Conciliar meetings of bishops, among other questions, social activities are brought from each respective diocese into a wider discussion. Each diocese has its own initiatives and organisations specialised for providing social services. Each of these organisations are either under direct procuration of diocesan office or they operate as a functional part of respective parishes. Organisations for charity almost exclusively follow line of interdependent functioning: parish, priest, bishop.

As an example of such a theological attitude, manifested in structural social activities we can clearly follow the examples of:

- a) Philanthropy (Човекољубље)- a charitable Foundation of the Serbian Orthodox Church dedicated to humanitarian and development programmes;

27 <https://starateljstvo.rs/pravoslavna-crkva-i-milosrdni-rad/>(accessed 01.11.2019)

28 <https://starateljstvo.rs/pravoslavna-crkva-i-milosrdni-rad/>(accessed 01.11.2019)

29 Ion Bria, *The Liturgy After the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective*. (Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications, 1996.

30 One of rare studies on this topic is work of Zoran Djurovic “Deaconesses in canon XV of the Chalcedon Council”, <https://djuroviczoran.wordpress.com/%D1%92%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%B5-%D1%83-%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%BD%D1%83-xv-%D1%85%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%BD%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B3-%D1%81%D0%B0%D0%B1%D0%BE%D1%80/> (accessed 28.02.2020)

31 Analysis of interdependence and development of SOC and her Diaspora see: Растко Јовић „Диаспора и границе- Православна Црква и Европа“, „Стареиновернице Европе: идентитетска истраживања“, Београд: МонсХемус, Институт за Литургику и Црквену уметност ПБФ, (2018). (Eng. Jovic Rastko, “Diaspora and Borders - Orthodox Church and Europe” in *Old and New Frontiers of Europe: Identity Research*, (Belgrade: Mons Hemus, Institute of Liturgical Studies and Church Arts, PBF 2018).



b) Diocese of Dusseldorf and Germany.

We will take these two case examples as a guide for understanding the wider organisational structure. The first one operates in the ex-Yugoslavian regions while second is operating in Western Europe.

### a) Philanthropy (Човекољубље)

Philanthropy was founded in 1991 as a response by the Serbian Orthodox Church to the humanitarian needs of the population. The Foundation itself was founded to provide humanitarian assistance to the vulnerable population in the face of the deteriorating socio-economic situation in the country in 1991, followed by the outbreak of armed conflict in the former Yugoslavia and the 1999 bombing. Shortly after emergence, the needs created by the plight of the former Yugoslavia imposed an extremely rapid pace of programmatic and financial growth. Until 2000, Philanthropy provided primarily humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable population groups.<sup>32</sup>

After 2000, Philanthropy began a new phase of development through the creation of development programmes and a more solid organisational structure. Since then, Philanthropy has been implementing a number of development projects aimed at marginalised and vulnerable groups in society: children, the elderly, people living with HIV/AIDS, terminally ill people and people with disabilities and their families, through psycho-social support programmes, courses for unemployed people, educational courses, programmes for economic empowerment, agricultural development and capacity building in local communities.

Even though Philanthropy operates as independent Church agency specialised for social work, local parishes in the particular regions - dioceses, are involved in its work. Their involvement is primarily in providing necessary logistics and information of current needs in the region. In the light of the scarcity of resources that prevents local parish to act according the necessity of its believers, Philanthropy - in agreement with respective diocese and in line with local parish, acts and implements projects. The local priest is present and liturgical celebrations represent the connecting tissue between the ongoing social project and the Church. Priest and community aid are often based on volunteer basis. In same spirit, funding of the Agency is mostly through donations and different State projects.

The founder of Philanthropy is the Holy Synod of Bishops of the SOC. The Philanthropy Board of Directors consists of SOC Bishops. The Director of the Foundation manages the work of six diocesan/regional offices, four of which are in the territory of the Republic of Serbia and one each in Banja Luka (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Podgorica (Republic of Montenegro). The Belgrade office, which is also the seat of the Foundation, coordinates the work of all offices.<sup>33</sup>

The theological framework of Philanthropy, as stated on their official web-site, is “based on basic Christian values and the highest standards of leading international humanitarian organisations.”<sup>34</sup> The official statement on the mission and vision of Philanthropy as a charitable Foundation is to: “respond to the spiritual and existential needs of man and community, contribute to reducing suffering, and to provide love, faith, and hope to fellow human beings, (...) help all those who need it, regardless of their racial, gender, national or religious orientation.”<sup>35</sup> Christian values are expressed through its administrative connectedness to the ecclesiological structure of Bishops’ cathedra. It is necessary to underline that usage of word mission in the vocabulary of charitable organisations means exclusively pastoral care for the members of the parish or wider social community where the respective parish is situated.

Philanthropy is the largest organisation of SOC that is specialised in social work through implementing various long term as well as short term projects. As such, Philanthropy also collaborates with numerous church and religious charities and has the direct support of and cooperates with state institutions and agencies: ministries, provincial and city secretariats, local governments, health and social care institutions, institutions for children deprived of parental care, as well as numerous civil society organizations. In addition to collaborating with local organizations, Philanthropy is a member

32 <https://www.covekoljublje.org/o-nama.html>(accessed 20.08.2019)

33 <https://www.covekoljublje.org/o-nama.html>(accessed 20.08.2019)

34 <https://www.covekoljublje.org/o-nama.html>(accessed 20.08.2019)

35 <https://www.covekoljublje.org/o-nama.html> (accessed 20.08.2019)

of ACT Alliance (Action by Churches Together) and has successful collaboration with numerous international agencies.<sup>36</sup> It is worth mentioning that at the national level, Philanthropy has participated in the development of the Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Sustainable Development Strategy.

### b) Diocese of Dusseldorf and Germany

The diocese is situated in Diaspora and has influenced the life of local communities for over 70 years. The first 20 years were marked by political and ideological interference, while past 30 years were marked by material aid. Members of the diocese – the faithful, are securing needed economic infusions into local charitable projects, through individual donations or through organised activities. They also ensure wider network of international cooperation, connecting local foundations with the global Christian social network.

Since 1991, the charitable services of the Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Central Europe<sup>37</sup> operates under the name “Serbian Orthodox Diaconia” (“Српска Православна Дијаконија”).<sup>38</sup> Serbian Orthodox Diaconia has completed many projects. These projects were carried out either independently or in cooperation with partner organisations. It is noticeable that the largest and most fruitful were the so-called “Ecumenical Projects.” The most fruitful cooperation was with the organisations: Diakonisches Werk, Caritas, Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund, Committee Cap Anamur and Renovabis. Assistance was also provided in the form of various goods and materials necessary for life in war-affected areas. Assistance to all sections of society in need was given: pensioners, refugees, children and pregnant women and to monasteries, schools, soup kitchens, built up a comprehensive social activity.

Besides this agency for diaconal activities, the diocese has facilitated the project “War Orphans”. As early as 1993, the diocese took care of about 2000 children who were orphans of the war. In 1995 the number of orphaned children whose care was carried through by the diocese was over 3000.<sup>39</sup> The finances came exclusively from voluntary contributions from the faithful. Some believers and their families directly assisted specific children.<sup>40</sup> It was a widespread practice, that Bishop Constantine (Djokic) cited this as an example of the response of the faithful from the Diocese entrusted to him: “Rare are the families of visiting workers who do not support or at least do not help one of their own in the Fatherland.”<sup>41</sup>

These examples which we have outlined: the agency Philanthropy and the Diocese in Germany, Church would, together with local communities led by their priest or bishop, coordinate and direct contributions and donations to those in need. All of the dioceses in SOC follow this pattern. This humanitarian activity best attests to the organic connection in the daily life of believers with the Church of different geographical regions. In its formation and development, each of these organisations are spiritually/theologically and administratively in connection with diocese that they belong to. None of them can operate independently and without ties to ecclesiastical body. In the foundation of these organisations it is clear that they do not intend to be turned into corporations or companies. Rather, they administratively they stay under the respective diocese which regulates their activities. However, it is inevitably noticeable that secular humanistic statements and terminology become a must in legal systems and the vocabulary of these agencies.

36 <https://www.covekoljublje.org/o-nama.html> (accessed 20.08.2019)

37 Today under the name bilingual name: Serbische Orthodoxe Diözese von Dusseldörf und ganz Deutschland/Српска православна епархија Диселдрофска и све Немачке. Eng. „Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Dusseldorf and Germany”

38 Serbian Orthodox Diocese for Central Europe. E. Nr. 320/92. Hl. Arch. Synod of SPC, Belgrade. Report on the work of the Diocese and the situation in the Diocese of Central Europe from September 1, 1991 to the present. May 17, 1992. Signed: Bishop of Central European Diocese, H.G. Constantine. Archives of Hl. Arch. Synod of SPC, Belgrade

39 Serbian Orthodox Diocese for Central Europe. E. Бр. 600/95. Hl. Arch. Synod of SPC, Belgrade. Report on the work of the Diocese and the situation in the Diocese of Central Europe between the last and this regular session of the Holy Bishops’ Council. May 10, 1995. Signed: Bishop of Central European Diocese, H.G. Constantine. Archives of Hl. Arch. Synod of SPC, Belgrade.

40 Also, in the Archives of the Central European Diocese, now Düsseldorf and Germany, which is housed in the monastery Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Himmelstür, there is a folder called „Serbian Orphans”. It records the names of the children, their status, the names of the benefactors, the amount of material assistance. In addition, other types of assistance are listed as well as the time during which assistance was provided.

41 Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Central Europe. E. Nr. 524/94. Hl. Arch. Synod of SPC, Belgrade. Report on Our Archdiocesan Work and Status in the Diocese of Central Europe in the Period from the Past to this Regular Session of the Holy Bishops’ Council. May 14, 1994. Signed: Bishop of Central European Diocese, H.G. Constantine. Archives of Hl. Arch. Synod of SPC, Belgrade.

## Summary

We can name two things that have conditioned structural development of social activities in SOC and her canonical jurisdictional region. Firstly, it is theology, where the ecclesiological organisation of the Orthodox Church conditions the structural development of charitable institutions, agencies and projects. Administratively, social work foundations are affiliated either directly with Patriarchate in Belgrade or with the local/regional diocese. The theological experience of Trinity, Triune God in which the concept of Theosis underpins the understanding of the purpose of social expressions.

Secondly, socio-political instability and the very scarce resources at their disposal, where even economic existence was in question, has prevented the SOC having any greater, decades-old projects with systematic and wide outreach. The cooperation on State level or international was not possible due to the ideology of the Communist regime.

Insufficient resources in an unstable political society is the biggest challenge for SOC charitable work. This lack of resources means narrow outreach and not enough visibility in public. Despite decades long absence of organisational forms and limited resources, activities on micro-diaconal level have always been practised. Parishes are the core, providing ground-level diaconal relief. The lives of the Saints are a constant preserving untiring source of inspiration, both for theological background and practical initiatives. Early Church fathers such as St. Basil the Great and St. Nicholas St. John of Kronstadt, are source of persistent inspiration.

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## 5. Social Ministry in the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church

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### Introduction to the Social Ministry

The Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church (UGC Church) is one of the branches of the Church of Kyiv, which in 1596 restored full communion with the Roman Apostolic See. Today, the UGC CHURCH is the largest autonomous Eastern Catholic Church in the world. It has over 5.5 million faithful, 3750 communities, over 3300 priests and over 1200 monks and nuns.

The UGC Church, while fulfilling the Saviour’s commandment and continuing the centuries-old tradition of charity of the Church, has actively pursued social ministry in monasteries and parishes alike. An especially rapid development and systematisation of such work began after the events of 1848, when Galicia faced problems in education and healthcare and witnessed an increase in social activity in the population. The Church has paid a special attention to the upbringing of children, especially through the establishment and maintenance of a network of children’s shelters (kindergartens), which are particularly widespread in rural areas, and orphanages. The ecclesiastical structures organised and maintained numerous shelters and places for social lodging. They also organised secondary and vocational schools up to higher education levels, where children and youth could receive a proper education, an occupation, and etiquette. The clergy supported the formation of various youth communities in the parishes and promoted the creation and spread of a network of Ukrainian educational organisations for youth such as Plast, Sokil, and Sich. The ability of the Church to organise and educate young people, especially in rural areas, was demonstrated by the Assembly of the Ukrainian Youth for Christ, which brought together more than 30,000 participants in 1933.

To this day, in many villages, there are memorial crosses with the inscription: “Freedom - Enlightenment - Sobriety - Love of Labour - Economy”, which remains a constant reminder of the events of the late 19th century, when, in 1870, the Church expanded its campaign against alcoholism in the villages and was able to rally farmers to abstain from drinking alcohol. This event has become one of the most significant specific social achievements of the Church. It is the active participation of the Greek-Catholic Church in Galicia that has greatly contributed to the development of civil society, with a whole system of cooperatives and educational organisations. Although the value of the Greek-Catholic Church as a social institution varied, until 1946 it remained the largest and most influential organised

Ukrainian structure in Galicia, playing a significant social role, implementing social programmes in education and health care, developing programmes for children and youth and programmes aimed at developing the local community. A whole range of institutions and organisations aimed at meeting people’s social needs were formed and developed on the initiative of and with the support of the Church in Galicia.

### Present Activities of the Social Ministry

Today, the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church understands the importance of social ministry and carries out its social ministry in different areas. The Church realises its social programmes through local religious communities; through the network of the International Charitable Foundation “Caritas Ukraine”, through monastic orders and congregations; as well as through the cooperation with non-governmental charitable foundations, organisations and movements.

In September 2011, the Bishops of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, gathered for their annual synod in Brazil, reflected upon the ministry of the Church in its parish communities and in society at large. And it began working together on a programme of parish renewal “The Vibrant Parish – a place to encounter the Living Christ”. These are the priorities or “elements” and characteristics of a “Vibrant Parish” of the UGC Church:

1. The Word of God and Catechesis/Kerygma
2. Liturgy and Prayer (and Eastern Christian Heritage)
3. Service to One’s Neighbour/Diakonia (and Focus on the Person)
4. Leadership – Stewardship (and Spirit of Renunciation for Christ’s sake/Kenosis)
5. Communion – Unity/Koinonia (and Witnessing and Serving Unity with the Successor of St. Peter)
6. Missionary Spirit (and Accessibility and Openness)

The UGC Church defines and understands the call to diakonia for all Christians in this way:

“An important element which expresses the inner nature of the Church and reveals the vitality of a parish is the diakonia, which means serving in love or performing charitable activity. This service to our neighbour comes from our being rooted in Christ. Active love of a neighbour is the vocation and task of each Christian without exception. It is only faith and acting in love that leads us to salvation (see Gal. 5:6). Faith without works is dead (James 2:26), and as the Lord Jesus says: “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mat. 25:40). When we look around, we see that: in this world there is so much tragedy and poverty, so much loneliness and sorrow, pain and suffering! All the challenging circumstances of our life on earth – for the UGC Church these are an invitation to active love, which is an expression of living faith. The Lord wants to open our eyes to the suffering world so that we might learn to truly love and to express God’s love of our neighbour, by our attention to them, by our sincere sympathy, by support and words of encouragement and good cheer, and above all through our acts of mercy. It is only under those conditions that we can be considered true Christians and our parishes can become places where care is given to the orphan, protection to the widow, help to the poor, and where the suffering of the sick is shared. Thus, we will reveal to the world the maternal face of the Church and will become the living sign of the presence of God among humankind”. (Pastoral Letter of His Beatitude Major Archbishop of UGC Church, Sviatoslav Shevchuk, “The Live Parish: a place to encounter the living Christ”).

We speak of the six elements of a “Vibrant Parish” mentioned above and of five characteristics of a parish of the UGC Church. For the purposes of pastoral planning, the first three elements have top priority, as they describe the overall mission of the Church. All other elements and characteristics can be considered as being at their service.

### THREE TOP PRIORITIES (Our Mission)

- 1) The Word of God & Catechesis
- 2) Liturgical Life and Prayer
- 3) Service to our Neighbour

### IN COMMUNION-UNITY OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST (With whom and in what spirit?)

- (A) In our parish community
- (B) In cooperation with other parishes – Eparchy – entire Church
- (C) In cooperation with other Christians: Ecumenism

### WITNESSING A LIFE IN CHRIST

- (D) Inviting others to participate in the life of the Church: Missionary Spirit

### UNDER SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP AND WITH A MULTITUDE OF GIFTS

- (E) Leadership/Stewardship

### MINDFUL OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A VIBRANT PARISH OF THE UGC CHURCH.

- Eastern Christian heritage
- Focus on the Person
- Spirit of Self-renunciation for Christ's sake (Kenosis)
- Witnessing and serving unity with the successor of St. Peter
- Accessibility and Openness

In the current problematic situation of war in Ukraine, the role of the Church is increasing. Churches and religious communities traditionally have one of the highest levels of trust, bringing the ideas of social responsibility, brotherhood, and justice. The Church in Ukraine is a clear proof of this rule. Therefore, the mission it pursues, especially in public service, is more than simply important. This mission is most often embodied in various initiatives – from the Christmas dinner for the poor to the patronage of orphaned children or support to families in critical situations.

### Strategic Development of the Social Ministry

In September 2016 Synod of Bishops adopted the UGC Church Strategy of Social Ministry. It is oriented on development of social ministry on community level and establishing obligation to have an eparchial vicars (synkels) responsible for social ministry. The main coordination is provided by the UGC Church Department for Social Ministry. The present strategy was formed with a view towards developing the capability of the UGC Church parishes to provide an adequate response to existing and future social challenges.

The Strategy for Social Ministry of the UGC Church has the three following priority goals:

1. Promotion of a spirit of sacrifice, charity and social responsibility;
2. Social ministry for people in need;
3. Institutional development and professionalisation of social ministry.

The priority goals of the Strategy should be implemented on the community level. It is clearly stated that a religious community in the field of social ministry should serve the entire territorial community with an inclusive approach strengthening the resilience toward social challenges.

The resolutions of the Synod of Bishops of Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church September 2016 confirmed the following strategy:

1. In order to evoke an interest in social ministry among faithful of the UGC Church and behave a virtue of sacrifice and mercy, to announce in UGC Church:
  - a) Sunday of the Prodigal Son – Day of the extreme care for prisoners;
  - b) Sunday of Meatfare – Day of Social service and charity;
  - c) Restoring a tradition of Social Days initiated by righteous Metropolitan Andrey Sheptyts; - to organise days between Sundays, mentioned at previous points as Social Days and be involved in intellectual and charitable activities at the parishes;
  - d) Suggest that recognised bishops could collect money for the social initiatives of parishes and eparchies at the appropriate time.
2. To adopt a strategy of social ministry of the UGC Church.
3. For better coordination and development of social ministry in the UGC Church:
  - a) create a Department for the UGC Church Social ministry in the Patriarchal Curia;
  - b) ask the Father and Head of the UGC Church to confirm the resolutions concerning this Department.
4. To charge the Department of the UGC Church Social Ministry with working out a programme for the development of social service in the UGC Church.
5. To charge the UGC Church Social Ministry Department, in cooperation with the Patriarchal Commission on Clergy, together with Commission for the Recruitment and Management of Church Educational Institutions, especially seminaries, to conduct the following activities:
  - a) To analyse the experience of teaching pastoral theology and the social doctrine of Church in the educational institutions of the UGC Church and take care for the improvement of programmes in these disciplines, in accordance with modern needs;
  - b) To provide students with an opportunity to undertake a practice placement on social service in local organisations of “Caritas” or other similar church institutions and organisations;
  - c) To use throughout the educational programme adapted and published by Patriarchal curia structures, methodological materials concerning different aspect of social service;
  - d) To adapt and set up educational programmes to increase the professional skills for those who are responsible for social service as well as for all priests;
  - e) To direct students in obtaining high education in a field of social sphere at the educational institutions of Catholic Church abroad.
6. To anticipate the consideration of specific questions relating to social service in the UGC Church by including them on the agenda of the synod.



Furthermore, the theological and Biblical understandings of Diakonia are included in the Post-synodal Pastoral Letter Synod of Bishops of the UGC Church to the Clergy, Religious and Laity:

“SERVING ONE’S NEIGHBOUR — DIAKONIA IN THE LIFE OF THE UGC CHURCH”.

The aims of diakonia are described in this letter as follows:

#### *Pedagogical role*

The role particularly reminds Christians of Jesus’ active love to people in all kinds of distress or awakes humanistic consciousness among non-believers. We must be open for everybody and need to animate all the community to witness Christian love. Without this dimension, all other work (like social assistance, distribution of humanitarian aid, research and similar) will lose their sense and purpose.

#### *Knowing the territory*

Staff or volunteers should not just know about general needs but should know each person in need in their own area. Co-workers are first and often the only ones who listen to people in need. We can create relationships with each individual person, and if we don’t do this, if those we work with are only numbers, we would be at risk of losing our mission.

#### *Social activities*

Caritas/diakonia cannot provide the answer for all the needs on their territory, but they must offer some social activities as an example for all the community. Each social activity must be the result of need within the territory – that is so that they are a concrete answer to the needs. Social activities have the objective not just to help people but also to animate the whole community to be involved in testifying to love.

#### *Coordination and collaboration*

Good ministry will create relationships with other social organisations in order to exchange experience, for mutual support and to coordinate similar activities. There should be a good relationship with NGO’s from one’s own territory as well as with local government.

### **The role of CARITAS Ukraine in Social Ministry**

Caritas Ukraine is an official charitable organisation which was established by the UGC Church. Caritas Ukraine is one of the biggest national NGOs in Ukraine and an umbrella organisation uniting the offices in L’viv and Kyiv as well as 20 regional organisations and numerous parochial centres, located in various regions of Ukraine. With its local offices, Caritas Ukraine has an existing network of operational local structures in most regions of the country – recent years showed the big expansion of activities to the East because of complicated humanitarian situation in Ukraine. Caritas Ukraine can be shortly described according to its mission and purpose:

- The Mission of Caritas Ukraine: Development of the traditions of charitable activity and realisation of social work, proceeding from Christian moral and ethical values.
- Purpose of Caritas Ukraine: Development and implementation of national programmes to provide social assistance and support to the most deprived population of Ukraine, regardless of nationality or religion.

In 1999 Caritas Ukraine became a fully-fledged member of Caritas Europa and Caritas Internationalis. The Ukrainian organisation adheres to the common mission of the international bodies and their activities and it implements jointly coordinated national programmes on providing social assistance to those in most need.

Today Caritas Ukraine consists of nearly 1000 employees and volunteers who are involved in its projects. In recent years the annual budget of Caritas Ukraine has amounted to €10-15 million. 94-97% of this money comes from foreign donors (Germany, Austria, USA). For nearly 20 years Caritas Ukraine has focused on four main areas:

- Assistance to children, youth and families
- Health care
- Social problems of migration
- Assistance in crisis situations

Thanks to the considerable experience existing within Caritas Ukraine and its wide network of regional offices, Caritas Ukraine covers the needs of several thousands of people across the country. It provides material and social aid, psychological support and counselling about and protection of people’s rights. It also assists in reintegration processes. Through this work, Caritas Ukraine contributes to the support of vital social and economic changes in modern Ukraine, including the development of civil society in the country. On the global level it contributes to Caritas’ worldwide mission of combating poverty.

The current situation raises several problems and challenges for Caritas which need to be considered in the next few years:

- Increased number of clients in all regions. This requires further geographical coverage with special emphasis on the regions not covered by humanitarian actors working in Ukraine, especially in small towns, where no community actions are registered.
- The necessity of providing combined services – taking a complex approach to the provision of social services and the necessity of increasing of the number of people able to provide services, serve as volunteers and as community activists to represent the interests of people in need all over Ukraine.
- The necessity of mapping of services as practice shows that there are regions/cities/towns overloaded by humanitarian/social assistance (especially in Eastern Ukraine) as well as there are regions not covered by such activities (for example services for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in regions with a low concentration of such people)

Caritas Ukraine has launched a programme to elaborate and promote the methodology of developing social ministry on the community level. It includes motivation, training in basic skills and offering the initial resources to strengthen community in working on social challenges. The methodology is based on the handbook on parish social ministry “Serve each other by love”. This handbook is designed as a practical tool for eparchial animators, parish priests or other persons that are promoting parish social ministry. The basic purpose of the manual is to be used as a tool for training sessions. Topics presented in this manual are the basic knowledge necessary for the effective working of parish caritas teams. The main goal is strengthening community resilience and improving the scope of social services provided in the local communities. The main areas covered are:

- Research component (mapping of provision of social services and level of expertise)
- Educational component (activities aimed at increasing the professional level of target group)
- Organisational component (support of organisational capability of existing parish Caritas representations and with the process of establishing of new organisations).
- Social service component (small grants for the development of social initiatives to address the needs of local communities).

### **Specific Focus 1: Assistance to Families and Children in Need**

Recent political, social, and economic changes in Ukraine have led to the worsening of the living standards of a considerable part of the local population, especially that of children. Due to the poor

financial situation, many families are unable to properly care for their children. The number of single-parent families has increased; families where one parent is abroad in search of work; where there is alcohol or drugs abuse; and where violence against children occurs.

Monasteries and charitable organizations operating under the supervision of the UGC Church act in a number of areas to address these issues.

The prevention of child neglect and homelessness through the support of vulnerable families in difficult life circumstances is a prime issue for the Church. Social creative day-care centres attended after school by children from impoverished families are successfully run by many parishes, monasteries, and almost all local Caritas organisations.

Alongside traditional types of assistance given to children, such as supplying clothes, shoes, and free lunches, the centres organise various activities including art workshops, clubs, sports, foreign language and computer training classes. Another type of assistance is social guidance for children; this entails both offering economic assistance and organising spiritual and cultural activities (attending concerts, theatres, museums, and going on trips and excursions). Children receive support from professional psychologists; families are assisted to establish constructive relationships between parents and children. This work is done by Caritas organisations as well as by the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary that maintains the “Bridge of Hope” (Mist Nadiyi) program ministering to 150 children in different regions of Ukraine.

Every year, the charitable “Schoolbag” initiative (Shkilniy Portfelyk) is organised before the start of the academic year, on the occasion of St. Michael’s Day, Christmas, and Easter, when orphans and children from impoverished families receive free school equipment. Summer holidays are organised for orphans and for children from large and poor families. Thanks to this, children are not left unattended and receive a proper vacation during the school holidays.

Priests and sisters of the Salesian Congregation have developed an interactive recreation programme that includes a two-week “Happy Vacation” camp (Veseli Kanikuly) and weekly meetings throughout the year. They organise children’s leisure time to prevent unethical and asocial behaviour, addressing the importance of proper childcare by introducing children to alternative ways of spending their free time and applying the talents, while developing positive behaviour. Another area of the Salesian ministry is maintaining the St. John Bosco Youth Education Centre. The aims of the Centre are to respond to social exclusion by helping to find ways out of the poverty trap, as well as by providing the possibility for moral and psychological rehabilitation and social adaptation.

The “Social Hotel” (Socialniy Hotel), a dormitory for orphans, half-orphans, and children deprived of parental care, opened its doors in 2010 in L’viv. This establishment aims to provide student housing and care for needy youth. All of the above-mentioned work is partially directed towards the prevention of child homelessness.

Another important aspect of ministry is a programme for children in state care facilities.

A large portion of social services for orphans is provided through parish youth communities by visiting state boarding schools and orphanages within the local religious community, rendering material support, and organising various activities for children (games, classes, excursions).

In cooperation with the local non-governmental organisations, parishes run multiple and diverse social programmes. One of the most effective programmes is “St. Nicholas for children in state care facilities”, an annual event which is organised with the blessing and support of the UGC Church in L’viv and Ivano-Frankivsk regions in cooperation with the Maltese Service for Social Assistance. As part of this initiative, orphans under state care parishes write about themselves in letters and request specific presents. These letters are collected by members of the local community who then prepare personalised presents for the children and sign greeting cards for them. As a result, good relations are established between parish communities and state care facilities. Over 30 parish communities of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church take part in this initiative serving over 4,000 children.

The L’viv Archeparchy of the UGC Church has established an “Orphan Centre” to provide spiritual and psychological assistance and social care to children in residential, educational, and rehabilitation facilities as well as to orphans and children from families in need. Employees and volunteers of the Centre conduct various spiritual, educational, social and patriotic activities by showing children love and care through communication and spending time together.

Success has been achieved in running family foster homes. Family foster homes establish real comfort and a homely atmosphere. Children live together with their brothers and sisters and always experience family relations. The main feature that distinguishes these houses from government boarding schools is the individual approach to the education of every child, mutual problem solving and the development of personal skills.

Many congregations of religious take care for children, for example:

- “St. Nicholas Mercy Town” near Ivano-Frankivsk is maintained by the Sisters Servants of the Lord and Our Lady of Matara of the Congregation of the Incarnate Word. Eight sisters look after 30 children. In addition, single mothers and single pensioners live in the shelter.
- In Solochiv, Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate look after the “Protection of Our Lady” home.
- The Congregation “Miles Iesu” takes care of two houses: a house for girls in the village of Birky near L’viv and a house for boys in the village of Bortnyky near L’viv.
- The Congregation of Sisters of the Holy Family take care of a children’s home in Bibrka in L’viv region. The Congregation of Sisters of the Holy Eucharist also has such a home in Sambir.
- The Congregation of Sisters of St. Joseph runs a foster home in Korolevo (Transcarpathia) and in the villages of Tsebliv and Potelych.
- The “Pokrova Family Home” founded in 2007 is a facility where 12 orphans live and are looked after under the direction of the monasteries of the Salesian Congregation.

### **Specific Focus 2: Assistance to People with Functional Disabilities**

According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 2.67 million citizens of Ukraine have special needs and this includes 88,000 with intellectual disabilities. In Ukraine, people with special needs and their families are often left feeling abandoned and rejected. For this reason, pastoral and social ministry to people with intellectual disabilities is a priority.

Faith and Light, the international movement of Christian communities that unites families where there is a person with an intellectual disability, has been active in Ukraine since 1992. Today there are over thirty communities in the UGC parishes all over Ukraine. Their function is to meet regularly, to converse, pray, celebrate, go on pilgrimages and summer camps. Emmaus, a centre of spiritual support for people with special needs, which promotes the development of programmes to integrate people with disabilities into the active life of the Church and society, has been operating in Ukraine since 2001. Day Programme Workshops for manual work and individual sessions for people with special needs, initiated by Emmaus, have been organised in L’viv, Drohobych, Novy Rozdol, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Ternopil. Some centres are run by Caritas and several ‘day programmes’ operate in cooperation with parishes. To date, more than 80 friends are members of the workshop programmes.

On the basis of the five-day Programme Workshops which have existed since March 2008, a new community was formed: The Community of L’Arche-Kovcheh, which is a member of the International Federation of L’Arche. In December 2011, the first L’Arche house in Ukraine opened in L’viv. We call persons with intellectual disabilities friends. We see them as teachers of friendship, love and simplicity of life. They manifest a special place to encounter God, who promised His presence with them and in them. Persons with disabilities are really the place of God’s revelation. The church community should help each person to find their place in it, to feel their dignity and find their gifts for service in the community. This also means a full participation of the person with special needs in the life of the Church.

As well as the focus on intellectual disabilities, the UGC Church is developing programmes for the pastoral care of persons with hearing impairments. For this reason, Hope, a centre of pastoral care for the hearing impaired, was established in March 2009. The centre has initiated an environment of communication, service, and support for the deaf as well as their families to fulfil their realisation in the Church. The Hope Centre has launched a pastoral training programme for persons with impaired hearing, to address the needs of pastoral care for the deaf in the Church. The curriculum is dynamic, and a wide range of modules prepare hearing and deaf individuals alike who are ready to work in different areas of the Church activity. The Centre’s staff also does pastoral work, serving the Divine Liturgy, praying in sign language, and administering the Sacraments.

### **Specific Focus 3: Assistance to Prisoners**

About 200 priests, seminarians, religious and lay people of the UGC Church take part in prison ministry. The main areas of ministry are preaching, catechesis, administering the Sacraments and assisting in maintaining ties with families of the imprisoned. Various events are also organised such as retreats, concerts and sporting events. One of the most interesting activities is to support the creativity of prisoners, including the organisation of exhibitions of fine and decorative arts of prisoners, the winners of which take part in international competitions. The Order of the Most Holy Redeemer (the Redemptorists) ministers to the imprisoned in seven different correctional facilities. They also issue a themed magazine called “Law and Mercy”. Parishioners of the UGC Church serve in female colonies in Chernihiv and Zbarazh. Ukrainian Greek Catholic chaplains serve in juvenile colonies in Pryluky, Berezhan, Sambir, and Dubno.

However, more is still to be done. First steps towards work on the re-socialisation of former prisoners are being made. Rehabilitation Centres, the first of which was created near Chernihiv, have significantly lessened repeated crimes and ensured a smooth transition to the society. When the prison doors finally close behind a person, new doors do not always open in the society. Many of those freed say “we are not wanted,” and they mean unwanted by family and friends, with whom they lost contact during their sentence.

### **Specific Focus 4: Assistance to People with Addictions**

Although it is always a personal choice to abandon an addiction, support from outside is a crucial element of this process. The UGC Church provides this support in its advisory centres by co-working with addiction therapy professionals who have undergone special training and have experience working with people who have addictions. Participation in mutual self-help communities such as AA (Alcoholics Anonymous), which hold their meetings in parishes, is also a useful part of the healing process. Such groups in parishes are aimed at offering a network of help for people with addictions in the community. Supporting an active group significantly requires fewer resources than creating a new one. The main forms of activity in this field are:

- Organising training seminars for priests, catechists, and teachers in order to familiarise them with the methodology and characteristics of social ministry to people with addictions;
- Conducting a series of meetings in parishes in order to initiate and support the creation of self-help groups for people with addictions and their families;
- Working with information and counselling centres;
- Working in the “Nazareth” rehabilitation centre.

### **Specific Focus 5: Social Ministry of the UGC Church in Health and Social Care**

The largest programme in the area of healthcare is Homecare, which has been run by Caritas in Ukraine since 1999. Its task is to organise assistance to people at home providing integrated health and social assistance to the elderly and others in need of social support and care. Assistance covers the physical, spiritual, psychological, social and material needs of residents.

The programmes aimed at organising spiritual and psychological care in the healthcare sphere are developed and coordinated by the Commission Towards Pastoral Support in Healthcare created by Synod in December 2004. Another social commission programme is the promotion of a healthy lifestyle. This work is done in the following areas: in training workshops for hospital chaplains, in seminars on bioethics for medical staff, and in preventive training groups for youth.

### **Specific Focus 6: Social Cohesion and Community Capacity**

Activities under this component are oriented on increasing of the capacity of church communities in the cities close to the zone of conflict in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts in order to organise community mobilisation to work on the solution of the most vital problems of the communities, including the renovation of social infrastructure.

The list of activities includes:

- Outreach activities to attract active local individuals and groups, linking them to self-organised interest groups or social/cultural clubs. Interested people are also recruited through intensive media campaigns, information provided through local stakeholders from the state and non-profit sector as well as church communities.
- Development of the potential of local church communities, community activists and self-organised groups through:
  - Provision of space and technical and material support for community activists and groups.
  - Conducting capacity building training for local communities and groups
  - Conducting methodology presentations for local church communities and groups

Associations of active citizens aim to solve the actual problems of the community, not alone, but through joint action. The emphasis of the activities is on creating a „knot of contacts“ in a certain territory and the formation of new social ties within the territorial community. Participants have far greater access to public administrative structures and fewer chances to remain unheard or ignored. The task is to overcome the feeling of impotence of disassociated individuals by creating connections between people. The aim is to establish strong partnerships with other community initiatives and local organs of self-government. This partnership allows different agencies to work together, providing better services and supporting each other. For a partnership, it is important to know who is responsible, to engage in joint action and to share resources and information. This helps to create favourable conditions for the development of the local community.

### **Specific Focus 7: Integration and Peacebuilding**

This activity has four main lines in order to address different aspects of the problem and the different issues faced by people and communities:

1. Provision of psychosocial counselling with individuals and groups.

In each location the team of a psychologist and social worker with the help of volunteers from among IDPs and local activists help individuals and groups to interact in positive ways and to deal with conflict-related problems. Experiences from other projects have shown that psychosocial counselling and group work, as well as interventions to promote empathy for others usually regarded as opponents, can lead to the dissolution of emotional blockages and to new options for action, even in the case of people having lost family members, friends or comrades. The flexibility in work is a core approach to make counselling really effective and to address the most pressing needs of beneficiaries. The activities include:

- Short-term crisis intervention to solve most urgent problems.
- Longer-term social accompaniment (up to 6 months) to tackle a complex problem situation (case management in case it is needed) aimed at the improvement of wellbeing and social and economic integration.
- Psychosocial support of target groups (work with individuals and groups)

2. Organisation of training on nonviolent communication and mediation including training on stress resilience, conflict resolution and the promotion of peacebuilding.

This helps people in resolving conflict situations, developing individual skills in mediation the avoidance of violent practices.

3. Conducting open events which address reconciliation and peacebuilding.

The activities are planned to overcome the existing contradictions experienced in local communities. The events held to strengthen the „social fabric“ of local communities and promote



connections across existing conflict lines. The recommended activities in this programme include 'living libraries', 'forum theatre', training, dialogue processes and street actions:

- “Living Library” events address issues of concern through the invitation of different people whose lives are related to a clearly defined theme that is being worked on to tell their story as an ‘open living book’. When they share their life stories or experiences with others during a public event this often leads to other participants discovering their own blind spot and a changing their interpretation of the subject in question.
- “Forum Theatre” also aims at promoting empathy and situational understanding. A specially trained group of actors, volunteers or members of staff present a played conflict situation and develop a solution with the enactment and active participation of the audience.
- Film club. Films are screened and live thematic discussions after allow people to share their own stories and find their understanding of complex topics.

#### 4. Organisation of week-long visits of families from the East of Ukraine to the west and vice versa.

The current activity is aimed on overcoming of stereotypes of perception of people from West in Eastern Ukraine and vice versa and thanks to its therapeutic effect, it is a long-term investment into peacebuilding and development of interpersonal relations. The organising of week-long visits of families from the East of Ukraine were very useful. Participants were satisfied and received valuable experience. According to the results of the focus groups conducted after the visits, more participants noted that these visits improve the relations between residents of different regions of Ukraine, promote their integration into their communities and gradually change stereotypes. Participants from different regions demonstrated the process of cohesion, regardless of place of residence and social status. This is a good experience in strengthening social cohesion and the process of peacebuilding, which will be continue in future.

### **Specific Focus 8: Livelihoods – Employment and Business Networking**

In the framework of this current objective Business Development Centres aimed at the improvement of employment opportunities for people out of work are being created. The list of activities will include:

- Provision of consultations on job career opportunities.
- Provision of regular meeting events for residents with employers, successful businessmen and representatives of governmental institutions. A special emphasis will be put on the possibilities of opening of new workplaces in the existing enterprises and the creation of favourable business climate for the new businesses of project participants
- Provision of business school sessions to train beneficiaries in entrepreneurship.
- An important aspect of the project is to foster feedback and connections. Success stories and lessons learned will be collected on a regular basis and widely presented through open media and via stakeholders.
- A specialised textbook focussed on career and self-employment guidance has been prepared with involvement of consultants. It includes international experience and experience of Caritas and other stakeholders working in the sphere of employment for IDPs.
- The employment website <http://careerfornewlife.com> is a social assistance portal for IDPs on employment issues. The goal of the site is to create in Ukraine a community of employers and IDPs, united in one communication space. Convenience, efficiency and ease of use of tools for employment are provided with knowledge of specialists in recruiting staff, which helps to improve the quality of life of those who want to find a job.

### **Conclusions**

Social ministry is an activity aimed at resolving social problems and ensuring social justice. It covers a whole range of social activity and includes providing volunteer support, charitable assistance and organised forms of providing social service to individuals and groups in need, in order to ensure their integral development.

In the Church social ministry is based on and flows from faith, and expresses the diaconal nature of the Church, being part of the three-fold mission of Church: to proclaim the Good News (Kerygma), to sanctify (Liturgical life) and to serve (Diakonia).

An important element which expresses the inner nature of the Church and reveals the vitality of a parish is the diakonia, which means serving in love or performing charitable activity. The Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church is called to engage in diakonia both at the level of her individual members, as well as at the level of those communities to which we belong: Christian families, fraternities, sisterhoods, parishes, monasteries and religious congregations, eparchies, metropolias, and Church as a whole.

Nowadays, the UGC Church understands the importance of social ministry, which is organised, systematic, professional, and accessible to everyone irrespective of their ethnic or religious identity. Special management units or commissions have been established to organise and coordinate this vocation. A structured social ministry promotes systematisation and ensures a more professional approach.

The UGC Church carries out its social ministry in the following areas: programmes aimed at developing the local community, working with children and young people; acting in healthcare and promotion of a healthier lifestyle; working with migrants; serving persons with functional disabilities; giving assistance to the lonely and elderly, to prisoners, homeless, and victims of natural disasters or catastrophes. The Church realises its social programs through local religious communities; through the network of the International Charitable Foundation “Caritas Ukraine”, which is the official charitable organisation of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church; through monastic orders and congregations; as well as through the cooperation with non-governmental charitable foundations, organisations and movements.

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## 6. The Code of Ethics of Silesian Diaconia in the Czech Republic – the Interpretation of Selected Formulations

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### Introduction

Slezská Diakonie (English: Silesian Diaconia)<sup>42</sup> is a private, non-profit organisation that provides services in the social field.<sup>43</sup> Silesian Diaconia focuses on people with disabilities, the elderly and homeless people, as well as all others who have run into some difficulties in life. Its activities are based on the practical realisation of the biblical principles of love and service to people in need and distress.<sup>44</sup>

The Silesian Diaconia was established on 20 August 1996 by resolution of the Church Council of the Silesian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession. Silesian Diaconia and its organisational units are part of the Silesian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (hereafter referred to as SCEAV, the acronym for the church's name in Czech). The existence of Silesian Diaconia is embedded in the following official documents of SCEAV:

1. The primary document of SCEAV, "Silesian Diaconia", item 6, paragraph c: The statutory body of Silesian Diaconia, which is the director, can be both appointed and removed by the SCEAV Church Council. The Director shall be appointed for an indefinite period. The aim of Silesian Diaconia is to carry out diaconal work.
2. Basic regulations of SCEAV, § 4 "Activity of the Church", point 2, paragraph e: The church carries out its mission mainly through diaconal care and charitable activities. Its legal personality is defined in § 7, which states that Silesian Diaconia is a legal entity separate from the church. The establishment, scope of legal personality and approval of the statutes of Silesian Diaconia, as well as other legal entities established by the church (e. g. its parochial schools), are the responsibility of the Church Council of SCEAV. The classification of the Statutes of Silesian Diaconia among church regulations is defined in § 9, point 3: Other religious regulations include, in particular, The Order of the Church Administration, The Rules of Procedure and Election, Staff Regulations, and The Economic Order of the Church.

<sup>42</sup> Link to the organisation: <http://www.slezskadiakonie.cz/en/about-us>.  
Link to the department for International Volunteering: <https://www.intervia.cz/en>

<sup>43</sup> Silesian Diaconia has been working in the Moravian-Silesian region since 1990 as a successor to former charitable activities of the Silesian Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession launched in the early twentieth century. In 2005, Silesian Diaconia (SD) extended its services into the South Moravian region and, later on, into the Olomouc region as well. Nowadays, SD runs more than sixty centres. As they are not independent legal entities, they are governed by the headquarters of SD in the town of Český Těšín (Czech Republic).

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.slezskadiakonie.cz/en/about-us/values>.

3. The Statutes of Silesian Diaconia, § 1 "Basic Provisions", point 3: Silesian Diaconia and its organisational units are part of SCEAV. As a separate ecclesiastical entity (and legal entity), it likewise acts independently in its legal relations and, within the limits of this statute, it can acquire rights and commit itself in various legal matters.

The leadership of Silesian Diaconia is represented in the Church Synod, or the supreme ecclesiastical committee, having two delegates (Basic Regulations of the SCEAV, §17 "Synod"). Other churches may participate in the work of Silesian Diaconia (Statutes of Silesian Diaconia, §1 "Basic Provisions"). Silesian Diaconia is led by a director and two deputies: the Deputy for Social Work and the Operational and Economic Deputy. The centres of Silesian Diaconia do not have an independent legal personality but are managed by the headquarters of Silesian Diaconia.

The Board of Directors of Silesian Diaconia addresses:

- 1) the key issues of the organisation's operations, particularly activity management;
- 2) concerns regarding personnel;
- 3) composition and activities of the Board of Directors.

Various regional boards act as an advisory body to the management and administration of the regions where Silesian Diaconia acts. The director of Silesian Diaconia is, as mentioned, appointed by the Church Council. The installation of the director is liturgical in nature, including rituals such as the laying on of hands by the bishop and taking a vow. The pastoral staff of Silesian Diaconia is generally comprised of people who have liturgically ministered to the church. This is typically either an ordained pastor or deacon. Currently, there are two ordained and one lay pastoral worker in Silesian Diaconia. Candidates for pastoral work must be approved by the Church Council.

The system of financing non-profit organisations that provide social services is based on multi-source financing, which consists of public sources (sources of state administration and self-governance, which are further divided into municipalities, municipal districts, statutory cities, and/or regional offices), private sources (churches, private organisations, sponsorship gifts, collections, and other similar sources), self-employment, and funding from the European Union. The main sponsor for Silesian Diaconia is the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, which provides funds from the public budget. Other important financial sources include regional authorities, towns and municipalities, foundations, and other funds. The Structural Funds of the European Union in particular support innovation and development projects of Silesian Diaconia.

In its work, Silesian Diaconia is governed by the legal regulations of SCEAV, the Statute of Silesian Diaconia, the Organisational Code of Silesian Diaconia, the Code of Ethics, and other acts of management.

### The Code of Ethics of Silesian Diaconia

The Code of Ethics of Silesian Diaconia defines and supports the desired principles of employee behaviour towards clients and colleagues. The director of Silesian Diaconia, together with the coordinator of spiritual services and other invited specialists, produce the Code of Ethics. Finally, the Code of Ethics is signed by all three statutory representatives: the director and two deputies.

The official document that elaborates on these matters, The Code of Ethics presents basic information concerning the mission and values of Silesian Diaconia.<sup>45</sup> The Code of Ethics is directed towards employees, volunteers and trainees of Silesian Diaconia. This paper describes the character of the organisation, makes fulfilling the mission of Silesian Diaconia simpler, provides the protection of clients' rights, sets work boundaries and notes the significance of creating a professional identity.<sup>46</sup>

The Code of Ethics contains eleven sections. Section 1 outlines the mission, vision and values of Silesian Diaconia that form the basis for the remainder of the Code of Ethics. Section 2 presents the founders of Silesian Diaconia. Sections 3-9 address additional, more specific considerations of

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Ethical Code of Slezská Diakonie, p. 79f in this volume; Online: [www.slezskadiakonie.cz/en/about-us/values](http://www.slezskadiakonie.cz/en/about-us/values)

professional responsibility. Commitment to ethical conduct is required of every employee. Section 10 covers principles involving compliance with the Ethical Code. The last section discusses procedural matters.

The central aim of this paper is to examine the theology—both explicitly stated and implied—of certain statements of the Code of Ethics of Silesian Diaconia. Of course, the Code of Ethics is not a compendium of dogmatics or pastoral theology. Nevertheless, the choice of theological terms and themes along with their logical structure and interdependence (furthermore being anchored in biblical literature or doctrinal tradition) will reveal many of the central motives of the diaconal work of the organisation studied.

Every community of faith that listens to the biblical challenge of caring for creation and loving one's neighbour does so in a unique way. However, it is not only about listening, but also about putting what is heard into action. Similarly, it is not only activism, but also a reflection of what has been done, including exploring the thought and motivational paths that have shaped this action from the beginning. We try to humbly accomplish this latter task in this paper.

The analysis of the Code of Ethics revealed differences between the original Czech text and its English translation. These are not only negligible language nuances; in some cases, the differences between both language variations affects the overall meaning of the text. The detailed analysis of these textual variations goes beyond the scope of this paper. We will draw attention only to some distinctions, especially those that have a significant influence on the overall meaning of the given statements.<sup>47</sup>

The English translation of the Code of Ethics, which can be downloaded from the Silesian Diaconia website in PDF format, is flawed in its structure to the point where reading it is considerably difficult. For this reason, the English translation has been attached to this document, which is located in the final section.

## An Analysis of The Code of Ethics's Stated Christian Values

The subject of our interest occurs in Section 1, titled 'Mission, Vision and Values of Slezská Diakonie.' The first sentence of the first paragraph, called 'Mission', states that it advocates 'social services based on the principles of **Christian values**.' The second paragraph, titled 'Vision', claims the same thing: 'We make our vision a reality in accordance with **Christian values** with an emphasis on our organisation's culture. 'What do the authors of the Code of Ethics precisely mean by using the term 'Christian values'? A narrower definition can be found in the fourth part of Section 1, titled 'The Basic Christian Values That We Build On.'<sup>48</sup> The list contains the following values:

1. Jesus Christ as the source of faith and an example of a life of service
2. Clients as creations of God
3. Help for anyone, and a personal attitude directed towards that
4. Loving relationships
5. Respect
6. Responsibility on all levels
7. Personal growth
8. Team organisation
9. Transparency

Although each of the values listed above has significant implications for an accurate meaning of the term 'Christian values', we will review only the first two.

47 The differences between the original text and its English equivalent are not only due to an imperfect translation. It seems that the Czech text is updated regularly, but the changes made to the Czech text are not automatically incorporated into the English translation. The last update of the Czech version happened on July 23rd, 2019, but the English version was originally published on September 13th, 2016. The author of this paper informed the personnel of Silesian Diaconia, who are responsible for this area, about the discovered shortcomings. They promised to revise and update the translation.

48 The Czech language version of the Ethical Code has a significant difference in the title of the fourth part. The title reports only to "basic values that we build on", without allusion to "Christian" values.

## 1) Jesus Christ as the Source of Faith

It is remarkably noteworthy to attribute to Jesus Christ the origin of faith, especially in the context of Lutheran theology.<sup>49</sup> The Third Article of the Apostles' Creed in Martin Luther's Small Catechism reads:

'I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.'<sup>50</sup>

In a biblical context, the King James Version of Hebrews 12:2 names Jesus as the author of our faith: 'Looking away unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down on the right hand of the throne of God.' In addition, 2 Peter 1:1 clarifies that we are not the source of our faith. It reads, 'Simon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have been allotted faith equally precious as ours.' Here, we see that faith is something allotted to believers, which means we do not naturally possess it.

A more extensive explanation of the assertion concerning Jesus Christ as the source of faith and an example of a life of service is in the Czech version of the Code of Ethics. It says, 'The source of inspiration for our work is the Bible and God's love revealed to man through Jesus Christ as our saviour.' The next paragraph is dedicated to an analysis of this affirmation.

### The Source of Inspiration for Our Work is the Bible and God's Love

The Code of Ethics of Silesian Diaconia contains the following statement relating to its inspiration for diaconal work: 'The source of inspiration for our work is the Bible and God's love revealed to man through Jesus Christ as our saviour.' This comment seems to indicate two sources: The Bible and God's love. The question that arises from this claim asks, 'Is there any possibility of coming to God's love, which is revealed to humankind through Jesus Christ, while leaving the Bible out of it?'

Most people have their own distinctive opinions about God. However, where do these impressions come from? Many are simply reflections of how people perceive God based on what they have heard from others as well as their own reasoning. As a consequence, the word 'God' has come to embody a range of meanings, many of them foreign to the Bible. With that being said, which meaning is the true one? How does God reveal Himself to humankind?

Different theological approaches offer answers depending on their dominant doctrines. For Luther, the sole, authentic focus of man's knowledge of God is to be found in the cross of Christ, in which God paradoxically reveals and hides Himself. Luther's response to the medieval Church, called 'The Theology of the Cross' (Latin *theologia crucis*), contains the heart and soul of his message. The *theologia crucis* is a theology of revelation, which stands in sharp contrast to speculation. For Luther, 'true theology and knowledge of God are found in Christ crucified'<sup>51</sup> The cross shatters the illusion that humans can use their own reasoning to discern and know God.

Lutherans hold the Bible—both the Old and New Testaments—to be the only divinely inspired work and divinely revealed knowledge regarding God. Scripture alone is the formal principle of the faith and the final authority for all matters of faith and morals because of its inspiration, authority, clarity, effectiveness and sufficiency. A true understanding of God comes from only one source: God's revelation to humankind, which is the Bible. God's love and the cross of Christ are best understood as parallel outcomes from the same epistemological fountainhead, that is Scripture.

49 Due to the fact, that the Founder of Silesian Diaconia is the Silesian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, the question about confessional specification appears. Do the theological statements of the Code of Ethics (EC) reveal any connections to the Lutheran confession? Or can we afford to designate the theological formulations of the EC to be more ecumenical than confessional? Can we find evidence of other theological traditions?

50 THE SMALL CATECHISM by Dr. Martin Luther. R. Preus states it very clearly: "All Lutheran theologians from the time of the Reformation through the period of orthodoxy taught that the Spirit was the efficient cause of conversion and of all spiritual activity in man and that the Word (and sacraments) was His instrument" Robert Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, (1970) 374-76.

51 Alister E. McGrath, "Luther's Theology of the Cross," Oxford, UK: and Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, (1990). 149-151.



In Lutheran theology, revelation has a precise structure and hierarchy. The highest authority is Scripture, which can be called the unique and infallible source of God's self-revelation. The central and interpretative principle of Scripture is the cross of Jesus Christ. In the message of the cross, one can only see God's love and grace through faith. Where the Word of God is not proclaimed, faith and knowledge of God's true nature, which is God's forgiving and saving love that is revealed in the cross of Christ, cannot materialise.

Based on this brief theological commentary, we can better understand the strengths and weaknesses of the Code of Ethics, which notes its source of inspiration for diaconal work: 'The source of inspiration for our work is the Bible and God's love revealed to man through Jesus Christ as our saviour.' The strong point of the aforementioned statement is the initial reference to the Bible. This argument corresponds with Lutheran theology and hermeneutics. Somewhat problematic is the conjunction 'and', which expresses a paratactic relationship that would indicate the existence of a second equivalent source. As shown above, this construction is erroneous in terms of Lutheran hermeneutics. God's love and the salvation of Jesus Christ can be accessed only through faith that emanates from hearing the Word of God proclaimed (cf. Romans 9:17).

### **The Character of Christ**

In the final portion of the first section of the Code of Ethics, which is devoted to Christian values, Jesus Christ is called the source of faith and an example for a life of service. Commenting on this statement, the Code of Ethics refers to John 3:16: 'We derive our work from the biblical verse: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."' In this quotation we also encounter a statement that concerns Christ's character: 'We want to let the character of Christ be visible in our work naturally – in our behaviour, service and life'. An elaboration of the main features of Christ's character is not explored further in the text of the Code of Ethics. The statement that refers to the Bible as an inspiration for diaconal work also lacks a more detailed explanation: '(...) the source of inspiration for our work is the Bible (...).' Without a more detailed specification, there is additionally a statement regarding the introduction of biblical truths to those who are interested in them: '(...) we organise regular meetings which are voluntary. There we introduce the character of Jesus and the biblical truth.'

We can only infer how the statements are understood by the authors of the Code of Ethics based indirectly on the concrete conclusion derived from the following statements. In particular, these include testimonies, which become evident through action, service and life: 'We want to let the character of Christ be visible in our work naturally – in our behaviour, service and life.' Furthermore, holding regular meetings is understood as an application of biblical principles. There is an interesting note stating that the participation in these meetings is voluntary: 'We apply these principles not only in theory – we organise regular meetings which are voluntary.' Special emphasis is put on prayer as another component of diaconal ministry: 'We emphasise praying during work meetings.' It is worth mentioning the explicit inclusion of prayer in work meetings. If it has been stated that the meetings, specifically those focused on spiritual content, are voluntary, then it can be concluded that the work meetings where people pray are involuntary. Prayer that expresses the personal relationship of workers with God becomes a missionary tool.

Applicants who wish to work for Silesian Diaconia participate in either a selection procedure or an interview. During this process, candidates are asked questions concerning their motivation as well as questions that would demonstrate their adherence to the values advocated by Silesian Diaconia. By signing an employment contract, the applicant expresses his or her respect for these spiritual principles. In practice, this means that a person who is not a member of a church can also work for Silesian Diaconia; the applicant may also express his or her church membership only in formal matters if he or she wishes to do so.

### **The Celebration of Christian Holidays**

The Christian character of Silesian Diaconia is also emphasized by the celebration of Christian holidays: 'we honour Christian festivals.' In the Czech Republic this mainly means Christmas and Easter. Pentecost has lost its original meaning, not only in society but also in the Church. In most

churches, the gift of the Holy Spirit that came on Pentecost is celebrated only on Pentecost Sunday. The day that follows this—Pentecost Monday—is a normal working day; in most churches there are no longer services on this day.

Both of these holidays are accompanied by traditional symbols and decorations that express some of their aspects. During Advent, the rooms are decorated with an Advent wreath and candles, and for Christmas, other decorations, such as Christmas trees, appear. People exchange gifts and pass on written or spoken wishes. Carols are the musical core of the Advent and Christmas season. Advent or Christmas concerts of a charitable nature are very common. An important part of these concerts is a message that serves as a reminder of the original meaning of these holidays. Easter is overlooked by most of the Czech population; the Christian meaning of these holidays connected to the cross and crucifixion are overshadowed by folklore and commercial content. That is why there is an even greater importance of passing on the spiritual meaning of these holidays in diaconal and church organizations.

### **The Cooperation of Silesian Diaconia Centres with Local Churches**

The relationship of Silesian Diaconia to the Church (or various churches) is most intensively expressed in the concluding paragraph: 'We support the cooperation of Silesian Diaconia centres with local churches.' The text does not specify what the expressed cooperation is, nor does it mention any specific church or denomination. Employees and clients who can participate in worship of a congregation and can engage in education, leisure or spiritual initiatives that are organised by these fellowships are surely blessed and encouraged in many areas of their lives.

One way in which members of local churches can participate in the work of Silesian Diaconate is through volunteering. People who are aware of, are looking for, or want to gain experience in social work can take advantage of volunteer opportunities. In various congregations, the activities and/or events of Silesian Diaconia are presented in church announcements on display boards, in periodicals published by Silesian Diaconia that are given out to church members, and in organising a Sunday that focuses on Silesian Diaconia.

Silesian Diaconia puts great emphasis on its pastoral personnel. They carefully examine their qualifications and hire only experienced and well-trained pastoral staff. The leadership of Silesian Diaconia strives to ensure that these pastoral workers are from a group of current and previous pastors of the Silesian Evangelical Church, that they participate in the educational courses and conferences that are organised for them by the Church, and that they enrich various pastoral communities with their experience and acquired competence.

## **2) We Consider Our Clients Creations of God**

In the introductory section of this study, we looked at statements that referred to God's love as an inspiration for diaconal work as well as Jesus Christ as the source of faith and an example of life and service. The subject of our interest in the final portion of this work will focus on the second point on which the Code of Ethics elaborates, in the section titled 'The Basic Christian Values That We Build On' it states, 'We consider our clients to be creations of God.'

### **The Unique Creation of God**

The Czech translation calls every human 'the unique creation of God', but the English translation narrows this down to only clients. The meaning of the claim regarding the equality and dignity of human beings, resulting from the fact that all humans were created by God, is not in the English translation and could have been lost during the translating process. A question therefore arises: who created the caregivers? However, this is not the only translation discrepancy.

In the explanatory notes on the aforementioned section, the original Czech text speaks of basic needs that a client is often unaware of. However, the English translation suggests that the caregivers do not always realise these needs: 'We are aware of the individuality of every client and we try to fulfil all of his basic needs (physical, social, spiritual – holistic approach), that we realize and even those we do not.' It seems that the original intention of the authors of the Code of Ethics was to point out the



needs of clients that lie beyond their own perception and reflection. However, the English text is not necessarily misleading. Are caregivers always aware of the details that would satisfy all the clients' basic needs? Probably not.

The uniqueness of each person is emphasized in both the Czech and English texts. In this context, the Czech translation mentions that this uniqueness is 'repeatedly explained.' However, it is not stated for what reason, by whom or to whom. In the English translation, this additional explanation does not appear at all. The mention of the need for repeated explanations could indicate that the reception of this biblical principle is neither obvious nor simple.

It cannot be overlooked that the Code of Ethics refers in its theological statements to only the first two persons of the Trinity: God the Father and God the Son, Jesus Christ. In terms of Lutheran dogma, this is recurrent. Many believe that the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, is somewhat neglected in Lutheran theology. The trinitarian dimension of diaconal work is supported by biblical texts, and its importance is also accentuated by the professional diaconal public.<sup>52</sup> The trinitarian understanding of God has laid the foundation for understanding the diaconal nature of the Church. Through God's sending of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, the Church is called into being and commanded to participate in God's mission to the world.

## Conclusion

The Code of Ethics of Silesian Diaconia is a relatively extensive document. In our research we dealt with only a few paragraphs. This selection corresponded to the assignment, which is chiefly expressed in the following questions: Are there any specific theological or biblical understandings of diaconia that are important to know? Are there any specific themes, such as dignity, mercy, or justice? We believe that the Code of Ethics contains a biblical explanation for diaconal work, and not only on a theoretical level. Biblical principles are applicable in everyday practices.

The analysis of the text led us to the following findings:

1. Diaconal work in the Code of Ethics is anchored biblically and is Christ-centred. Nevertheless, in some formulations, theological argumentation dangerously deviates from the reforming principle of sola scriptura, as it admits the possibility of knowing God's love beyond biblical revelation.
2. Diaconal work, as described by the Code of Ethics, reflects God and Christ's character. However, the person of the Holy Spirit is not mentioned at all in the Code of Ethics, which entails a weakening of trinitarian theology, and which furthermore is essential to justify diaconal work.
3. In statements that describe in detail the theology of diaconal work-in particular, 'Christ's character', 'biblical truth' or 'God's creation'- there is a lack of precise elaboration and more thorough biblical justification.
4. The emphasis placed on the uniqueness and dignity of each person reveals that intensive shaping takes place in this area.
5. Contrary to the unsystematic nature of the theological illustrations that the Code of Ethics gives, there is a visible effort regarding the missionary action of Silesian Diaconia to its employees and clients. The amount of attention to and the privileged status of prayer are surprising, emphasis is placed on the celebration of Christian holidays, and there is an effort to integrate all those involved in the church community, which professes Christ's sovereignty in matters of salvation.
6. The Code of Ethics is one of the official texts by which Silesian Diaconia presents its work to the general public. For this reason, significant differences in content of individual language variations are problematic. Those responsible for this in Silesian Diaconia were informed about the necessity for a more accurate translation and proof reading.

<sup>52</sup> The document titled "Called to Transformative Action: Ecumenical Diakonia" explains the trinitarian foundation of diaconal work, in reference to the event of Jesus' baptism in these words: "At this crucial moment of initiating his mission, his heavenly Father affirms the messianic sending of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit empowers him to walk the way of the cross. This indicates that the Triune God is at work in the sending of Jesus into the world. This opens up to an understanding that sees diakonia in a Trinitarian perspective, in the sense that roots it in the Christian faith in God the Father, the Creator, in Jesus Christ, the Savior and Liberator, and in the Holy Spirit, the Giver and Upholder of life." Isabel A. Phiri, I. "The Imperative of Diakonia for the Church and Theological Education." *The*, 71(4), 482-491. [cit. 23.10.2019]. Retrieved from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336167730\\_The\\_Imperative\\_of\\_Diakonia\\_for\\_the\\_Church\\_and\\_Theological\\_Education](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336167730_The_Imperative_of_Diakonia_for_the_Church_and_Theological_Education)

The Code of Ethics includes many other invigorating ideas, such as loving relationships, forgiveness, spiritual growth and responsibility towards the family or the environment. This paper should be seen as an introduction to that discussion. We are convinced that striving for an honest theological rationale for diaconal ministry can bring light to areas of ambiguity and confusion. Last but not least, it can be beneficial to those who need it, as the following passage in the Bible states: 'Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act' (Proverb 3:27).

# Appendix

## ETHICAL CODE OF SLEZSKÁ DIAKONIE



### Preamble

This ethical code is dedicated to workers, volunteers and trainees of Slezská Diakonie. It describes the character of the organisation, makes fulfilling its mission easier, provides protection of our clients' rights, sets boundaries of work and has significance in creating a professional identity.

Individual centres also operate under the Ethical Code of a social worker in the Czech Republic, professional ethical codes and respect the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms.

### 1. Mission, vision and values of Slezská Diakonie

#### The mission

The mission of Slezská Diakonie is to provide quality social services based on the principles of Christian values.

#### The vision

We wish to be a recognized organisation on a regional, national and international scale providing high-quality social, health, educational and pro-family services. We want to develop social businesses, social housing and other innovative activities. We make our vision a reality in accordance with Christian values with an emphasis on our organisation's culture.

#### The values of Slezská Diakonie

Slezská Diakonie is a Christian non-profit organisation which bases its activity around practical realisation of the biblical principles of love and service to the needy.

Slezská Diakonie provides help to all who need it regardless the age, gender, religion, health condition, handicap, social status or any other unfavourable life situations.

#### The basic Christian values that we build on:

1. Jesus Christ as a source of faith and an example of service and for life.<sup>53</sup>
2. We consider our clients creations of God.<sup>54</sup>
3. Help for anyone.<sup>55</sup>
4. Loving relationships.<sup>56</sup>
5. Respect.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>53</sup> The person of Jesus Christ – the source of inspiration for our work is the Bible and God's love revealed to man through Jesus Christ as our saviour. We derive our work from the biblical verse: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3,16) We want to let the character of Christ be visible in our work naturally – in our behaviour, service and life. We apply these principles not only in theory – we organise regular meetings which are voluntary. There we introduce the character of Jesus and the biblical truth, we emphasise praying during work meetings, we honour Christian festivals, we support the cooperation of the SD centres with local churches, we accept spiritual support of pastoral workers and pastors themselves.

<sup>54</sup> The client as a creation of God – we are aware of the individuality of every client and we try to fulfil all of his basic needs (physical, psychological, social, spiritual – holistic approach), that we realize and even those we do not. We use this biblical verse as our guideline: "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act." (Proverb 3,27) In reality we apply this by emphasizing the uniqueness of every human being. We respect everyone's right for decency and respect towards him.

<sup>55</sup> We offer help to anyone respecting the basic rules of help. In reality we apply this by telling our employees about the possibilities and limitations of the social networks.

<sup>56</sup> We strive to create healthy relations between people in the organisation including the relations with our clients. We consider forgiving and reconciliation to be very important when solving problems. In practice we apply this principle by being a living example, listening to each other's advice, clear and open communication, using clerics when solving problems, acknowledging our mistakes and forgiving each other.

<sup>57</sup> We respect the needs and specifics of individual regions. In practice we apply this by learning about the region where we operate. We do this by participating in local events and by discussing the region's specifics with the SD's leadership. We take the region's specific challenges actively as well.

- 6. Responsibility on all levels. <sup>58</sup>
- 7. Personal Growth. <sup>59</sup>
- 8. Team organisation. <sup>60</sup>
- 9. Transparency. <sup>61</sup>

## 2. The founder and Slezská Diakonie

2.1 Slezská Diakonie was founded on 20th August 1996 by the resolution of the Silesian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession from 19th August 1996 as a successor organisation to the Christian association “Slezská Diakonie” from 20th November 1990 and follows up with previous charitable activity in our church which began in Komorní Lhotka at the beginning of the 20th century.

## 3. Slezská Diakonie as an employer

### 3.1 Employees of Slezská Diakonie

- 3.1.1 The employees of Slezská Diakonie (SD) respect its principles and values and represent the organisation with their actions and behaviour in a manner that will not harm the good name of SD.
- 3.1.2 Under any circumstances, no matter how tense or unclear, the employee acts politely and correctly and acts within his authority
- 3.1.3 The employees of SD never give out information outside the organisation which could endanger the know-how of the organisation.
- 3.1.4 The employees of SD will not engage in any behaviour that would lead to a conflict of interests of SD and his personal ones.

### 3.2 Slezská Diakonie as an employer

- 3.2.1 SD creates decent working conditions for its workers
- 3.2.2 SD motivates its employees, acknowledges and appreciates the quality of their honest work
- 3.2.3 SD strengthens the professional growth of its employees and creates suitable conditions for their education through professional education and training.
- 3.2.4 SD does its best to help its employees in case of an unfavourable social situation within a so-called social programme

## 4. Slezská Diakonie towards its clients

- 4.1 The employees of SD do not bring up religious, philosophical or other views when working with clients that would be in contrary to the mission and values of SD. The employees of SD respect clients’ religious beliefs, values and opinions.
- 4.2 In case of support for the client in difficult life situations, the employee of SD informs the client about all known possible solutions and risks connected to them

<sup>58</sup> We demand responsibility in relation to the employer, among the employees and in relation to the users. We consider family, health and the environment to be our responsibilities as well.

<sup>59</sup> We create space and conditions for professional, personal and spiritual growth. We demand an active approach to education. In reality we apply this by offering a variety of seminars, we organise seminars for our centres with regard to its specifics. We also encourage our employees to share information among each other.

<sup>60</sup> We prefer an innovative and creative environment where everyone can contribute with his personal potential while also respecting a principle of loyalty. We believe that we can do more together rather than each on our own.

<sup>61</sup> We strive for sincerity – so that these values are in accordance with our personal and professional lives.

- 4.3 The employees of SD do not create a strong emotional bond with the client or any intimate relations
- 4.4 In areas such as the intimate life of clients, protection abuse, pregnancy, parenthood, contraception and abortions, pornography, deviation, occultism and relations to other religions, the employees of SD act according to the documentary “The recommendation of Slezská Diakonie on ethically difficult questions”
- 4.5 The employees of SD never tell any information about the organisation’s clients outside the organisation itself. (1. Tell information about the clients in suitable places in a suitable manner)
- 4.6 The employee does not solve their personal problems with the clients, nor does he drag them into his professional conflicts

## 5. Relations between employees

- 5.1 The employees of Slezská Diakonie value their co-workers, recognize their personality, practical approach and their view on matters. They express and solve their potentially different opinions in a suitable way
- 5.2 The employees of SD respect their co-workers and their opinions and their individuality. They do not demean them in the eyes of the clients or try to belittle their personality in front of their colleagues. With their personality and abilities, they contribute to a good climate in the work team of which they are part of
- 5.3 The employees of SD respect the authority of their superiors. The superiors always deal with their subordinates correctly so that they respect their individuality in accord with transparency and loving relations
- 5.4 The employees of SD approach their colleagues with respect for them and their privacy and refrain from any undesirable behaviour

## 6. Slezská Diakonie towards its trainees and volunteers

- 6.1 The employees of SD value and respect the trainees and volunteers, they introduce the trainees and volunteers to the course of the centre (service) and its quality
- 6.2 The employees of SD create suitable conditions for the trainees and volunteers so that they can perform their professional practice and volunteer work
- 6.3 The employees of SD consider the trainees and volunteers to be their equals when achieving the same goals
- 6.4 The employees of SD motivate and support the trainees and volunteers to be creative as long as it is not in conflict with the rules of the organisation. The employees deal with the trainees’ and volunteers’ suggestions and insights that could lead to a higher quality of the provided services

## 7. Slezská Diakonie towards its donors

- 7.1 Slezská Diakonie is aware of its responsibility towards the donors whose resources they dispose of
- 7.2 Donations are used in accordance with the purpose they were allocated for. In case of interest, we inform the donator about the way we used the donation. The wish not to mention the donator’s name is respected
- 7.3 SD fulfils arranged obligations towards the donators mentioned in the donation contract if it is signed
- 7.4 SD follows the rules of transparency and in doing so deepens mutual trust – informing the public by publishing the information in annual reports, on the website of SD or in other documents



## 8. Slezská Diakonie towards the public (society)

- 8.1 Slezská Diakonie informs the public helpfully, truly and transparently
- 8.2 SD reacts to public events in the society in accordance with its values
- 8.3 SD seeks to understand all groups of citizens with respect to their cultural and world-opinion distinction

## 9. Slezská Diakonie towards other organisations

Slezská Diakonie cooperates with a wide spectrum of organisations, be it private organisations or public institutions

Among partner organisations belong other providers of social services, assisting organisations, authorities, schools, educational institutions, churches and church institutions or already cooperating organisations involved in solving the situations of our clients

- 9.1 SD deals with other organisations with respect. It strives to be correct and open when negotiating
- 9.2 SD applies a combined approach when defending important mutual goals on the field of social work, passing changes in legislature and others
- 9.3 When advancing its own goals in relation to the development of its services SD proceeds with respect and in accordance with its values
- 9.4 SD cooperates with other organisations within umbrella organisations on a local, regional, national and international scale

## 10. Following the code and verifying in practice

- 10.1 Leading employees have responsibility for other employees of SD being introduced to the code and they understand it and follow it
- 10.2 The ethical code shall be updated once per year
- 10.3 This ethical code is obligatory on all of SD employees. It makes up the minimal set of rules which every employee complies with. This ethical code is thus obligatory on everyone working in SD.
- 10.4 Complying with this code is controlled by the respective executives of SD. Not complying can lead to sanctions in accordance with the labour laws of the Czech Republic. Violating the ethical code as an employee of SD can be seen as violating the conditions of his employment contract with SD.

## 11. Force and effect

The code of SD takes effect by approval of the leadership of SD and its legal effect begins on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2016.

Český Těšín, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2016

Mgr. Zuzana Filipková, Ph.D.  
Director

Ing. Bronislav Kostka  
Business and Economy Deputy

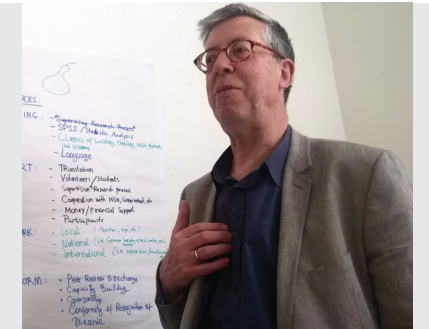
Mgr. et Ing. Romana Bělová  
Deputy for Social Work

# Diaconia and Ecclesiology: Analysis and Reflections

## Herman Noordegraaf

*'Remember the poor.'*

*Paul (Galatians 2: 10)*



## Introduction

In this concluding chapter we focus attention on some major topics that were dealt with in the articles. Through this, we can see how the knowledge of diaconia in different churches can enrich our views of diaconia and diaconal practice. I am aware that though I try to do justice to the articles I am 'biased' by my background: I am living in the Netherlands and am a member of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, a church that is much influenced by the protestant reformer John Calvin. I invite the readers also to reflect on their background to become aware of their own bias and so to get more openness and receptivity to other points of view.

First of all, we will address issues of a more fundamental theological kind in relation to diaconia and church. After that we will look in more detail into diaconal practice, including aims, activities, agents and organisation.

## The understanding of diaconia

Churches are or should be involved with people in need. Different words are used for this concern. There is no broad interchurch word for this. In the Roman Catholic Church, one speaks about 'caritas'. In the Serbian Orthodox Church, there is no fixed comprehensive term and a variety of terms are used such as philanthropy ('Filantropia'), charity work, social care, alms-deeds, mercifulness, love, social work and public responsibility. In the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church they speak about social ministry, but the word diaconia is also used and the official charitable organisation which was established by the church is called Caritas Ukraine. However, if we look at the content these terms refer to, we see a convergence:

Latvia: 'service to people in need' and 'Diaconia is the concern of the Church about man as a whole – for spirit, soul and body.'<sup>62</sup>

Kyrgyzstan: diaconal ministry is characterised as 'preaching by hands, through caring and fulfilling the basic needs of the poor.'

Hungary: 'Diaconia is a helping service of which the subject is Jesus Christ and His church, and the object is the suffering fellow human being.'

Serbia: The organisation Philanthropy has as its mission to 'respond to the spiritual and existential needs of man and community, contribute to reducing suffering, and to provide love, faith, and hope to fellow human beings.'

<sup>62</sup> In this chapter, we aim for inclusive language, however we have not modified official or recognised documents from particular churches.

Ukraine: ‘Serving in love or performing charitable activity’, ‘Service to our neighbour’ and ‘active love.’

The Czech Republic: ‘Its (Silesian Diaconia) activities are based on the practical realisation of the biblical principles of love and service to people in need and distress.’

It is clear, that there is a common element in these descriptions: the needs of people. Sometimes the range of needs is broad, also involving spiritual and existential needs. But as the diaconal activities that were described in the articles show, the first point of view is the material and social problems (see the section on diaconia in practice). Words such as diaconia, diakonos and diakonein can be found in the New Testament. There is a church office of diakonos. So, for the theology of the office the approach founded on the New Testament texts are of relevance. According to the article on Serbia the little understood ministry of the deacon (as a social task) and its derivation from early Christian practices is, in the present day, one of the theological reasons for the lack of a unified terminological expression that would encompass the social activities of the church.

Let us now look at the issue of theological reflection on diaconia. First a general remark about theological reflection on diaconia. We find different approaches that in our opinion do not exclude each other, but all belong to the fulness of the biblical message. We mention some of them without the pretension to be complete:

- a) Creation theology, for instance the concept of the human being as created in the image of God (Genesis 1: 27).
- b) The social ethics that we find in the social laws of the Hebrew Bible (in Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy), which aim to give full life to everyone (against poverty and social exclusion; for the sake of the widow, orphan and the alien) and which are grounded on the covenant God entered into with Israel. Keywords are justice and mercy. We also find the protests of the prophets against the offences of those who broke the rules of the covenant.
- c) The concept of liberation that we find in Exodus and that has to do with the liberation from oppression and exploitation.

(A remark for reflection ‘between the Testaments’: many introductions to diaconia start with the New Testament. That is incorrect as the first points mentioned above show that the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) is important for diaconal self-understanding).

- d) The life and work of Jesus is built on the approaches we find in the Hebrew Bible. He puts his life in the perspective of the Kingdom of God. He gives the double command: love the Lord and immediately after that: love your neighbour (Mark 12: 29-31; compare Luke 10:27. Where this is immediately followed by the parable of the Good Samaritan). Further, he formulates of what are later called the works of mercy (Matthew 25: 31-46).
- e) The practice of the first Christian community. From the beginning the care for the poor was an integral part of the life of the Christian communities that arose in the Roman empire after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There was the agape, the meals of love that were an essential for the common meal in remembrance of Jesus Christ. The Eucharist/Lords Supper stands in this tradition and for that reason this sacrament is strongly diaconal.
- f) A trinitarian approach. After his death Jesus returned to the Father, but sent his Spirit, which he called the witness (Joh. 15: 26 27), that will guide the disciples. It is a continuing divine presence. This ‘divine fellowship’ (the Father, the Son and the Spirit) invites us to put our life in the service of God.

The vision of the churches can be found in official church documents, church orders, mission statements of the church or congregation, the statutes of the organisation or the Code of Ethics for the employees, volunteers and trainees. Most churches have specific references to their own church tradition: Latvia and the Czech Republic to Lutheran documents that belong to the foundation documents of the church and writings of Luther and in Latvia to Bonhoeffer, Hungary to Calvin and Beza, in the

Orthodox Church to the church fathers and especially to the Cappadocians. It is remarkable that the trinitarian approach is for the most part limited to the Orthodox Church. There is a reference to a writing of Luther about the ‘Holy Ghost that works through faith’ (Latvia), however there is also a remark that the third person of the Trinity is somewhat neglected in Lutheran theology (Czech Republic).

In the articles we find more or less elaborated theological references to the human being as creation of God (Hungary, Czech Republic), the love of God for the world (Czech Republic), the social ethics of the Old Testament (Kyrgyzstan), Jesus and his life of love and service, the Kingdom of God (Latvia, Czech Republic), the early Christian community (Latvia, Kyrgyzstan Ukraine), Christian love (Serbia), active love/serving in love (Ukraine). Here we have used some few keywords, but these give an impression of the field of theological reflection. The references to the social ethics of the Old Testament and especially to liberation is hardly represented. Perhaps that for that reason the concept of justice is also infrequently used explicitly. This refers to the political and societal dimensions of diaconia. In practice there are examples that these are involved in the diaconal work (see the section about diaconia in practice). Having said this, one conclusion we can draw is that within all churches diaconia is officially seen as an integral part of being church. This cannot be otherwise because Bible and church traditions are full of attention to people in need.

### Relation with other work fields

In all the articles diaconia is seen as essential for being church. But then the question is what does this imply for the church? One important implication is that diaconia is not only a working field but is reflected in all the working fields of the church. As is stated in the contribution from Latvia, which speaks of a diaconal congregation, ‘that means that diaconia is an essential part of the congregation and is reflected in all work fields of the congregation.’ ‘We try to have the diaconal focus in mind in all activities.’ In the articles, examples from practice are mentioned where diaconia is connected with such activities as liturgy, church services, praying, preaching, the administration of the sacraments, bible groups, education, home groups, youth work, work for elderly people, pastoral care, missionary work. Diaconia is reflected in these fields, but diaconia on its own terms learns from and is inspired by these other activities. For instance, in the chapter on Serbia a link is made between the liturgical life of the church and diaconia:

‘Social engagement is not considered separate, but is rather seen as a part of the spirituality that flows out of the liturgical life of the Church, expressed in the concept of the ‘liturgy after the liturgy’ (as a public and collective action) and the principle of ‘two altars’ (one within the sanctuary and the other outside, in the public square).’

Specific attention also needs to be paid to the relation between missionary work and diaconia. The Gospel is proclaimed by words and deeds. But how are the relations between them seen? Are diaconia and evangelistic work activities alongside each other or should they be combined? This question was not included in the questions posed to the writers and so is not deeply elaborated in the articles. The activities that are described, however, make it clear that diaconal work is not used as a tool to evangelise. It has an end in itself. People in need should be helped also when they are not believers or if they may become believers in the Christian faith. It can be that people outside the church become inspired by the diaconal work and are attracted by this and become involved in activities of the church. This can be the case either for people who received assistance or for people who are active in diaconal work. So, for instance in Latvia:

‘Although we are not a deliberate missionary church, the diaconal work has opened the door to the church. Because most members of our congregation have joined us through our diaconal activities.’

The Hungarian contribution states that the church missional is by its very nature, because God called His people to be a presence and active participant of mission.

In the Serbian paper it is stated that social concerns have not been connected with missionary activities, rather they have been pastoral answers and quests in the different periods of history.

The Ukrainian contribution speaks about the three-fold mission of the Church: to proclaim the Good News (kerygma), to sanctify (liturgical life) and to serve (diaconia).

In the paper from Kyrgyzstan one of the stated aims of diaconia is to mobilise local churches to implement integral mission. This term is as used in the Micah Network:

‘Integral mission or holistic transformation is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ.’ (www.micahnetwork.org)

Here diaconia and evangelism are more closely related to each other. Therefore, taking an overall picture, we find different approaches to the relation between diaconia and mission. It is consequently relevant to discuss and reflect upon the question of the relation between diaconia and mission in each case.

## Inclusive church

In the articles we find implicitly and explicitly the model of an ‘inclusive church’.

In the Latvian contribution one of the stated aims for the congregation is to create a safe place where people feel accepted and can develop their gifts, serving each other.

The Hungarian paper speaks about the inclusion. of ‘our brothers and sisters living with disabilities.’ After a theological reflection that is formulated as a confession it is said:

‘We profess: it is God’s will that our brothers and sisters living with disabilities should be integrated into the community of congregations (Matthew 25:35). And thus, every person, whether disabled or not, should form one body: the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27)’.

Also as regards the Roma people, this statement is made. ‘All ethnic, economic, social-based distinction, hierarchical or patronising relationships harm this relation-system (of a loving community) and are a sin before God. It follows that the Church considers such values as mutual respect, acceptance, understanding, discovering each other’s values and enriching one another to be important.’ It is the calling of the church to break down any internal or external barriers that hinder access to the Word of God. Teaching, informing, raising awareness, providing technical tools and creating the appropriate technical conditions are mentioned as methods. ‘This way, the congregation draws attention to the divine dimension of equality of opportunity and accessibility.’ The Ukrainian contribution makes this statement about persons with intellectual disabilities, that also implies inclusion: ‘The church community should help each person to find their place in it, to feel their dignity and find their gifts for service in the community. This also means a full participation of the person with special needs in the life of the church.’

The concept of an inclusive church is diaconally relevant because churches in their diaconia are related to people who often deviate from the dominating norms and views in either society or church and sometimes both. The marginalised or disadvantaged people themselves should be involved in forming the way to an inclusive church in order to prevent the dominating norms and views determining what is done, even with the best intentions. The question is how the principle of equal worth can be combined with diversity. If a church succeeds more or less to be an inclusive community then it can also function as an example for society, a kind of light for the world. This is of diaconal relevance.

## Theology and empirical reality

We should be aware that many times there are cleavages between the theological statements about the essence of the church and inclusion and the empirical reality. For instance, in the inquiry among pastors in Hungary it was found that the relevance that was given to diaconia did not match with the practice. Nevertheless, theological reflection gives an orientation and guidelines for church life and should be used to stimulate this. Reflection on the issue of the position of diaconia, both as theologically described and as it is in practice involves reflection on the reasons why there is a cleavage. Here we mention some possibilities:

- a) There can be an obstacle in theology. For instance, the main emphasis in church confessions can be placed on preaching and the administration of the sacraments without a full place for diaconia.
- b) In some cases, the view is taken that faith has specially to do with spiritual life and less with the material and social aspects of life.
- c) The main persons in churches are pastors and they are mostly either not, or only for a small part of their work, involved in diaconia. Church services, preaching, pastoral care and catechesis are their main tasks.
- d) Because the theological education is directed to the tasks mentioned above, diaconia is not, or is only a small part of theological education.
- e) For those churches which are middle class: there is the risk that they only partly realise the situation and needs of poor and marginalised people.

The recognition of diaconia as being an essential part of the church would, as a consequence, lead to an upgrade and revaluation of diaconia. Diaconia should mark the whole of church life. It should also be reflected in the church bodies: church members who have responsibility for diaconia should also participate in the decision-making bodies. Furthermore, the people who are normally considered the ‘beneficiaries’ of diaconia should also be included in planning and developing diaconal action, as we see it in the case of Latvia, for example.

## Diaconia in practice

It is the aim of diaconia in all its plurality to work with people in need to better their living conditions (in terms of faith, mercy and justice). The question then arises: who is putting this in practice, which people are concerned and with which activities? And how is this all organised in relation to the church?

## Agents

In the articles we can find a many different agents in the diaconal work of the churches. This varies with the different confessional traditions and specific circumstances in which the activities take shape. Diaconia can be connected with the local church and be seen as a calling and task of the congregation. The congregation is responsible for this. Within the congregation, diaconia can be seen as the task of every church member, as in the case of the Latvian example or of specific groups and persons. It also can be the case that ‘specialised’ people have the primary task to stimulate, organise and coordinate the involvement of church members and of the local church and to promote diaconal learning. Another possibility is that activities are carried out by religious orders (monasteries and convents) or by diaconal institutions. Some of these originated in the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century (as in Germany and Scandinavia) or they can be from a later time and take the form of non-governmental organisations.

Diaconia is carried out in practice on the local level (mostly the local church) and approaches range from the idea of creating an inclusive diaconal congregation, the employment of diaconal workers and very often to each person taking ad hoc responsibility at the individual level. There are also diaconal organisations active on the regional and national level. This is mostly the task of religious orders and diaconal institutions. Churches and institutions may also have their own national offices or organisations which have the task of supporting local and regional work, study and reflection, training and taking care of the ‘interests’ of diaconal work with advocacy, representation and negotiation with, among others, the government. Sometimes they may organise or design diaconal actions that are carried out by local churches. Among these activities can be support for people in need and churches elsewhere in the world.

None of the articles deal with international diaconia, or diaconal bodies or networks of international church organisations as the World Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation, Caritas Europe/ Caritas Internationalis, World Communion of Reformed Churches, ACT Alliance (Action by Churches Together, a coalition of protestant and orthodox churches and church-related organisations which focuses on poor and marginalised people), except as a source of finance.



Of course, the question that arises is, what are or should be the relations between all these agents? We will come back to this question with a special concern for the relations between (local) churches and organisations/institutions.

A further important point is that the agents of diaconia can be volunteers or professionals and probably in the congregation most work is done by volunteers. Yet another point is that the agent (either a paid worker or a volunteer) can be ordained or be a 'lay' person. In the different chapters we can find the following diverse list of the agents of diaconal action:

- every Christian
- local churches (congregations, parishes)
- regional church bodies, eparchy
- international church bodies
- religious orders, monasteries and convents, monastic communities, fraternities, sisters
- the wife of the pastor or of the priest
- bishops
- pastors
- diaconal centre
- diaconal institutions
- non-governmental organisations
- professional workers in the field of care and welfare
- diaconal workers
- deacons and deaconesses

The office of deacon is not found in every church. If it is there, mostly it is an office that is the lowest one in the hierarchy of church offices (bishops, presbyter, deacons). Moreover, the task of deacons can differ: liturgical, administrative, social, pastoral, education, community building, assistant of the bishop). Deacons can be ordained or not, a professional or a volunteer. So, there is a lack of clarity about this office. Even though there have been many discussions and reports, more theological reflection and discussion is needed on this issue. The main point is that the service of mercy and justice is so fundamental for Christian faith and being church, that this should find its expression in an office of full value and that this direct work on social and material problems be connected with church services and liturgy. In this way *leitourgia* and diaconia can inspire and strengthen each other and 'the world' can be brought into the context of the worship of the church.

### **With which people is diaconia concerned?**

There is a broad agreement among the articles that diaconia should be directed to people in need inside and outside the church. As stated in the contribution from Kyrgyzstan:

'...poverty has no nationality, has no religious affiliation and no gender. We did not want to become a small diaconal ministry that could operate only inside its own walls.'

The Ukrainian study describes social ministry as 'accessible to everyone irrespective of their ethnic or religious identity.'

Crossing boundaries is a characteristic of Jesus' way of acting and searching for the Kingdom of God. We are invited to look at the work of God in the world. There is also a focus on the notion of the church as an inclusive body of Christ (Latvia). In this case, diaconia involves the whole life of the congregation and in the world. This is an important point of view because it determines the direction of diaconal work.<sup>63</sup> In the articles a lot of groups are mentioned, which can overlap with each other. These show the broad field of diaconal work. Without being exhaustive we can mention: elderly people,

<sup>63</sup> interdiac has a focus on the diaconal (local) church, which is collectively diaconal, and which includes those who are usually thought to be the 'beneficiaries' of diaconia in its life and decision making. A series of booklets about the concrete experience of being a diaconal church is being published

people with disabilities (physically and/or intellectual) and their families, homeless people, socially disadvantaged people, children of disadvantaged people, street children, (half) orphans, war orphans, vulnerable families, single parent families, women and children from situations of domestic violence, pregnant women, ill people, lonely people, people with an addiction, prisoners, people with hearing impairments, Roma, (im)migrants, unemployed people, people with HIV/AIDS, terminally ill patients, victims of disasters or catastrophes.

However, one remarkable feature is that none of the contributions recognises and elaborates the growth of the numbers of asylum seekers and refugees as a high priority for local work and (im)migrants are hardly mentioned. The issue of people living in Europe without the legal right to be in their country of residence is not mentioned in any of the reports. It would need further research to uncover why this is so. It could be because the issue is divisive in both church and society or because migrants and asylum seekers may come from countries with a perceived different religion or ethnicity. It might be because churches are constructed on the basis of national identity, but it might also be racism or xenophobia. Nevertheless, when we look at the Biblical roots of diaconia we see how often 'the stranger' is a person of concern, hospitality towards the different other is important and that Jesus and the early church frequently crossed different boundaries.

It is important, as is stated in various articles, (Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine) to have insights into the needs of people. This implies that you have knowledge as church and diaconal organisation about which groups are in need or are marginalised (do we overlook some groups?) and that we have knowledge about the specific needs of groups and individuals and families. In the contribution from Kyrgyzstan we find the following categories of need: physical (lack of material resources), spiritual, emotional, social and political (powerlessness, lacking access to provisions, lacking freedom and power to change to change the circumstances.) Of course, there are connections between these different types of needs. The diaconal activities then connect with these types of needs.

Schematically put we can distinguish different types of activities, that are however in many cases interwoven with each other.

- Being with people on the individual level, but in many cases also in community building and groupwork. Often it is mentioned that people are invited and stimulated to take responsibility themselves. They are facilitated in this by training, psychological support, psycho-social rehabilitation, existential and spiritual support, in offering a room for meeting each other, family foster homes, an orphan centre, a house for boys and for girls, a L'Arche house where people with intellectual disabilities live together with other people. In some cases, it is clear that people who use diaconal services have a say about the activities. Story telling is also mentioned an important element in the processes of communication.
- Empowerment as an important aim in diaconal work. This can be on an individual level (promoting self-help is an example of this), but also on group level, for instance the organisation of interest groups of poor people or disabled people. Also, economic empowerment is included in the work of diaconia as we see in the studies from Serbia and the Ukraine.
- Giving support, both material (money, food, housing, school equipment and the like) and immaterial (for instance holidays, praying for people in need, education and training).
- Supporting people so that they can promote their life possibilities, in contact with governments on the local and national level or with other organisations. For instance, in Latvia, wheelchair users' campaign for accessible streets and buildings and demand that they are involved in decisions about city planning. In this case, it is mentioned that there was a meeting with representatives of municipality. This is also related to empowerment: 'We understand this to be a way of empowerment as we create spaces where people can meet with politicians and other responsible persons and talk to them about the things that really matter in their lives.'
- Promoting social cohesion and community capacity in zones of conflict, integration and peacebuilding, development of non-violent communication. This has to do with working for reconciliation (Ukraine).

– As well as these types of action that are directly connected with the people themselves, there are also indirect types of action, such as:

- capacity building to strengthen diaconia for congregations or churches (see for instance Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine),
- promoting diaconal commitment within congregations, using diaconal Sundays and social days (Ukraine), giving information (Hungary),
- training of pastors, seminarians and other groups, and
- raising awareness among non-poor people within and outside churches.

This implies diaconal learning in which people reflect on their experiences and what they have seen and heard from people in need and connect this with their faith. Such reflection leads to a revision of opinions, feelings and attitudes and their way of living and acting.

## Church and state

Explicitly and implicitly the relation between church and state and with that, the relationship between diaconia and the state is a key issue raised by the chapters. As regards the relationships between state and church much depends on context: the historical background, the position of churches (also the relations between churches: is there a dominating church connected with the history of the nation, is it a minority church?), the position of other religions (as in the case Kyrgyzstan, a majority Muslim country), the character of the state (democratic or less democratic, dictatorial), the development of a civil society, the involvement of the population in churches (the degree of secularisation). Also, the self-understanding of churches themselves is of relevance: do they see themselves as agents in the public domain or do they see themselves as separated from the world and focused on their own believers? All the churches in this study have, through diaconia, made the choice for direct engagement in the public domain. From their point of view on diaconia, this could not be otherwise for every church and diaconal organisation is principally directed to all human beings in need, not only those who are church members. In history and also nowadays, we can identify different models of the relationship between church and state:

- a) Church above the state. The church has the highest authority because of her knowledge of Truth. The danger is that the church becomes an institute of power that uses power for its own interests and does not give freedom and equal rights to people from other churches and religions.
- b) State above the church. In this case the church can become an instrument used by the state.
- c) Church and state work together and have ‘advantages’ through this cooperation. For instance, the church can promote the loyalty to the nation and the state, and the church can get privileges and financial support from the state.
- d) Separation between church and state. The state respects the internal organisation of the churches and churches do not have a formal say in public decision making. In this model you can also find the vision of a church that should restrict itself to its own internal life and organisation. The church as church should not speak or act in the public domain. However, another possibility is that churches and other religious organisations can operate in the public domain with its activities and also have the right to express its voice.

In most of the case studies we see the concept of the separation between church and state with the right of churches to participate in the public life. In Kyrgyzstan it is said that churches should ‘stay within their walls’, but there is the possibility by the roundabout way of a non-governmental organisation to reach the aim of participating in the public domain. This recognition of doing diaconia in the public domain comes to the fore in two ways. In all case studies we find that diaconal activities or the organisation get money from the state. That can be at the local, regional, national or even supranational (the European Union) level. Secondly in most case studies there is mentioned that there are relationships with policy and politics especially on the municipal level. These possibilities to participate in the public domain should be welcomed by churches. They offer the opportunity to work with people in need to improve their conditions of life. But churches should do this in a critical way:

listening to the people in need with whom they work together they can help them put forward their needs and issues themselves, as in Latvia, or act as advocates with and on behalf of them. We could call this critical participation. Examples are the participation of the association Children of Tien-Shan in Kyrgyzstan in the secular Association for the Protection of Children’s Rights, that made it possible to lobby for amendments to the then current legislation of the country in support of increased benefits for poor people. Also, an example from Kyrgyzstan is the defending of the rights of women subjected to domestic violence. This started with educating the women themselves about their rights and what they can do to protect their children and themselves and this was followed up with contacts to the deputies of the city.

In Serbia the church agency Philanthropy has participated at the national level in the development of the Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Sustainable Development Strategy.

## Relations between churches and diaconal organisations and institutions

In all case studies we find diaconal organisations, which are not part of the congregations. The reason why this type of organisation arises depends on the context and practical or political considerations. In the nineteenth century diaconal organisations came into being, as mentioned earlier, in Germany and Scandinavia because churches themselves neglected diaconia at a time of growing need and rapid change. Pioneers of diaconal work wanted to realise diaconia in this way. It offered the possibility to focus on diaconal work without being dependent on a middle-class church.

In Kyrgyzstan, by contrast, the reason for founding a charitable organisation was the restrictive religious law that forbade churches to share the Gospel outside the walls of their buildings. By creating this organisation, it was possible to operate in the public domain, to build good relationships with local authorities and to take part in the work of the government on different issues. Another consideration that is mentioned in the chapters is that the barrier for non-Christian people who wish to make use of the diaconal service or to be active as a volunteer or professional is lower than if it was an official church activity. Another important reason is also that there are more possibilities to get funds for an independent organisation than for a church.

A main issue for diaconia is how churches and diaconal organisations or institutions can be kept in relation to each other. The risk is that churches do not get an impulse to be involved in diaconal activities and have no vision of their diaconal ministry and responsibility. It is up to the individual Christian to do what they see fit. The main strategic responsibility is delegated to the diaconal professionals, organisations and institutions. The other side of the coin is that organisations and institutions can outgrow the churches. The diaconal organisation has to follow professional standards in its work and in order to receive funding, has to adapt to secular language. As the Serbian chapter states: ‘...it is inevitably noticeable that secular humanistic statements and terminology become a must in legal systems and the vocabulary of these agencies.’

In the chapters we see various ways how the double structure of church and organisation or institution is handled. There is the official level of statutes, regulations and, as in the Czech Republic, an Ethical Code for employees, volunteers and trainees. The composition of the board and the way of accountability to the church (Synod, bishop, pastor, church council) are also of relevance. In all cases in this publication the church is represented in the board of the organisation and there is an accountability to the church. Another issue is the requirements placed on the employees and volunteers in diaconal organisations. For example, in the context of the Czech Republic case study, strategic positions such as the director require appointment by the Synod. Employees do not need to be a member of the church but by signing an employment contract the applicant expresses his or her respect for the principles of (in this case) Silesian Diaconia. In meetings and training courses for employees and volunteers, attention can be paid to the Bible, there is prayer and the celebration of Christian holidays.

Furthermore, another issue is the cooperation between local churches and organisations or institutes: participating volunteers from the church are involved in the work of the organisation or institute, making the activities of the diaconal organisation known within the church by publishing announcements and the like. The organisation can organise training for church members, pastors, seminars and participate in church conferences. Employees can participate in the worship of the local church and engage in education, leisure or spiritual initiatives (for example in the case study from the Czech Republic). The

chapters from Serbia and The Ukraine show the importance of involving the work of the organisations in the networks of the parish. The church can provide pastoral care in diaconal institutions (Hungary). There can also be financial ties. As we can see from this study, there are many ways to connect (local) churches and diaconal organisations.

## Finances

As regards the financing of diaconal work and diaconal organisations and institutions we see overall the same pattern of 'mixed financing'. There are contributions from churches (national and local), money from collections, gifts by individuals, foreign donor organisations, governments (municipalities, national, international, the EU), and from churches and church related organisations in other countries. Of course, because of their scale and the size of their workforce, diaconal organisations and institutions usually need more money than the diaconal activities of local churches.

## Cooperation with others

Here the key word is networking. To strengthen your activities, you have to develop relations with others. This can be with:

- Other churches on the local and regional level (this is not only pragmatic but also because of principal faith-based arguments of ecumenical cooperation of churches),
- Sister or partner churches in other countries,
- Other non-governmental organisations and
- The state (local, regional and national, European).

In the case studies we see there is an openness to work together with others in a flexible structure, whilst keeping an eye on the diaconal identity and aims.

## Towards a diaconal church and congregation

In my opinion a main issue should be how we can realise a diaconal church and congregation? If diaconia is essential for being church the expression 'diaconal church/congregation' is a tautology. If readers take the issues mentioned in this concluding chapter, they can construct an ideal type of this kind of church (and more issues can be included). But here we see the cleavage between theology and empirical reality. We should analyse this cleavage (we mentioned some possible reasons) and develop theological insights further on this concept and explore the ways along which we can reach a more diaconal church and congregation. In the articles some methods are mentioned such as capacity building and training, involving people in need in the work of the congregation and people of the congregation in diaconal work with poor or marginalised people themselves. Also, the concept of an 'inclusive church', if used under the right conditions, can be fruitful. In this direction, interdiac is using the concept of conviviality which has implications for 'how we live together' in the church. It expresses this in a way which enables the church to work with people, across the boundaries of diversity in the wider society. The focus is not only on diaconal practice but also for the life of the church itself as a diverse community.<sup>64</sup>

But let us not underestimate this calling to be a diaconal and convivial church! It has deep repercussions for how our life together as a congregation and church! It is not something that realises itself but needs hard work and perseverance. It is something to be practiced on the local level (congregation) and on the national level and it also should find its expression in the organisational structure. This, of course, touches upon the discussions about the offices of ministry in the church. Is the diaconal dimension in the church represented in the official bodies like church councils, synods and bishop conferences? It has also to do with relationships between diaconal institutions and organisations on the one side

and churches/congregations on the other side. Do they enrich each other? Are diaconal institutions and organisations acting as an excuse for the abdication of the responsibility for diaconal work of the congregation? Therefore, a lot of homework has to be done to create an inclusive, convivial and diaconal church!

## Last remark: encouraging

The case studies that are presented in this publication produced a rich harvest. They have an encouraging effect: across confessional borders there is deep rooted diaconal involvement, that cannot be removed. How can it be otherwise? The commitment to be with the poor and other people in need is an intrinsic part of the Bible and church history, however many times it may also be betrayed by churches themselves. As Paul stated, 'Remember the poor' (Galatians 2: 10) and he saw this as an integral part of his mission. Diaconia in smaller and greater works is done to combat the scandal of poverty, oppression and humiliation. With that action, diaconia is glorifying God.

<sup>64</sup> Literature on conviviality can be found on the interdiac web site. The introductory text can be downloaded here: <https://www.interdiac.eu/resources/seeking-conviviality>





## **Ecclesiology and the Theology of Diaconia and Christian Social Practice**

### ***Case Studies from Central and Eastern Europe & Central Asia***

Every church has its own understanding of Diaconia and Christian social practice! This book invites you to explore the way different churches describe and understand their social engagement.

All the case studies in this book come from different countries and churches of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. They reveal how the churches in the region aspire to give an answer to the call of those who are in need, with integrated love and compassion

The rich variety of these understandings are signalled by a diversity of names. In many churches, the main term is diaconia, but the terminology in this field also includes Caritas and Filantropia as well as quite secular terms – for example simply church or Christian social work. The context of the work of interdiac spans this diversity and this publication gives the reader a first-hand look at a cross section from different churches and national contexts.

You can use this book to become acquainted with different understandings of diaconia and how it relates to the church and society. However, we would also like to invite you to let it provoke your own curiosity about how diaconia is and could be understood and practiced in your church or organisation. We wish to promote a 'receptive' attitude which seeks to learn from diversity rather than just reinforcing one previously held position! You might like to start a dialogue with your colleagues on some of the points in order to reflect on your diaconal vocation, evaluate joint work or enrich your expertise...

