

## Talking Points, 2/2024

### Peacebuilding as integral component of diaconal practice

#### INTRODUCTION

Dear readers,

We are approaching the end of another turbulent year! Therefore, we would like to bring you an edition of the interdiac 'Talking Points' which includes reflections and prayers for peace from those people, who have been journeying with interdiac in mutual learning for peace building in diaconal work. Back in January 2022, when accomplishing the interdiac Learning Programme 'Peace building for convivial life together', the international group of diaconal practitioners from 7 countries across Europe and Asia could not imagine that soon the need for peace will multiply tenfold around them. Within and further beyond their living context, the lives of millions of people have been thrown into turmoil between life and death.

Ever since, the group has been meeting regularly to support each other while going through these hard times. The conversations expose fears and hopes, questions of how to remain an enriching source for those who are service users. Talking together reveals various political, social or personal challenges that arise from diverse contexts of each participant. In these talks, the role of peace as an ultimate condition for human flourishing continues. Peace is not understood as the absence of war, but as a prevailing state of human relations where people feel safe and free to reach out to each other as equals. It means they can recognise the unconditional worth of their dignity and benefit from being intrinsically connected to each other and to the Creation. In the darkest of hours, the hope for peace pairs with faith resources to strengthen personal commitment to be with those who are suffering in their everyday contexts, even if sometimes this is long distance engagement in thoughts and prayers.

When practicing diaconia on grass-root level, diaconal practitioners quickly realise that the mere provision for the needs of people, who are marginalised or who are going through the hardship of loss and uprootedness is insufficient. Practical provision fails to provoke within them a sense of hope and sufficient security, so that they find within themselves a desire to connect with other people. Diaconia, as Christian social action, aims to accompany people in an empowering way, so that they may look beyond their sorrows with a hope for a new day and regain a will and intention to change their lives. This makes us think how peace may be enacted, embodied and experienced through everyday practice acts. And, actually, we have found the important awareness that peace may be developed from 'below', within routinised practices which may not need any external expert knowledge or specialised skills. Through our group reflection, we have come to see that it is by fostering relations on an 'eye-to-eye' level, through active listening and compassion, by reaching out to people across divisions and seeking to restore broken trust and equality, that diaconia plants peace between people from the 'bottom-up'.

### **Reflection: Seeking Peace In Everyday Work with People**

*My first thought on the peace topic is **personal responsibility**. It matters what I put into my mind, what thoughts I am spending my time with, what I let grow in my head and later in my heart. Most of the actions come from the mind and thinking. The key Bible text for me that talks about this issue is Philippians 4:8.*

*Together with personal responsibility I was thinking about **being prepared to listen and respect**. Today's debates seem to be based more on emotions than on facts or critical thinking. Labelling happens so much. The labelling does not lead to peaceful communication. It would be much better if we are ready to listen and to show respect to another person as a human being. Doesn't necessarily mean we have to agree or to be in the same boat, to support the same ideas or opinions.*

**Martina Vilimová (Czechia)**

*Participant in the interdiac learning programme  
'Peace building for convivial life together'*

Peace as a vision is not outwardly beyond everyday life, but it is to be found among people in the commonality of their existence in the world. However, often peace seems to be too far away, buried under the complexities of human history, which cast a long shadow of injustice, broken relationships and persisting repressive forces. It may require undermining long-standing historical narratives as well as perpetual injustices in the outside world whilst at the same time, healing the inner brokenness of persons through restoring their relations with God. Diaconal presence affirms people, as *they are*, beyond any fixed or ascribed identity or culture. Going across divisions, through giving voice to those who are silenced and helping them to develop agency to challenge injustice, diaconia purposefully seeks the ways to enhance and pursue human flourishing and reconciliation. It stands in stark difference to the dividing, categorising reality of today.

### **Reflection On Peace As Shalom**

*As an older person living out the end days of his life I can only be grateful that I have not lived through a time of major international conflict as my parents did before me.*

*Now however I fear for my grandchildren as the world becomes more unstable.*

*Each evening, I walk my dog together we pass a house on the banks of the river Eden. The house is called Shalom. As we pass, I spare a moment to pray for Shalom in my life, my community, my country and the wider world.*

*When we pray for Shalom for what are we asking?*

*In the book, 'Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin', Christian author Cornelius Plantinga described the biblical concept of shalom:*

*'The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfilment, and delight is what the Hebrew prophets call shalom. We call it peace, but it means far more than mere peace of mind or a cease-fire between enemies. In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness and delight – a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied*

*and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be'.*

*The way things ought to be in Palestine, where in place of bombs Christian, Muslim and Jew might greet one another with peace, shalom, salaam.*

*The way things ought to be in Ukraine where in place of war, Russian and Ukrainian people might greet one another Я даю вам свой шалом, свой мир (покой) in peace rather than conflict.*

*I give thanks for peace. Recently in America I visited Shalom Shuk, The Market Place of Peace in Burlington, Vermont.*

*May we all be fed, watered, clothed in this marketplace. May we be enriched and encouraged. May we become peacemakers in our lives and in our communities.*

**Geoff Smith (UK)**

*Participant in the interdiac learning programme  
'Peace building towards convivial life together'*

Seeking to bring peace in their everyday practice with vulnerable people, diaconal workers do not possess any special expertise. They are also learners, who may be full of doubts and fears, often feeling that they cannot make it through another day. Peace is not a 'given' to them, and it may take time to grow and nurture inner feeling of peace, which is connected with interpersonal and wider social contexts.

In times of growing turbulence and ambiguity diaconal practitioner may need to become a critical researcher who is engaged with their own role and practice. They are called to a critical way of questioning normative solutions and protocols, to gain a new perspectives and creative insights from people. It will require practitioners to refuse such personal dispositions as blind optimism, positive thinking and overcoming challenges with individualistic resilience to favour a disposition of doubt, of not-knowing, of vulnerable openness to being touched by different 'other'.

Furthermore, a practitioner might seek to open their practice with people as a source of mutual learning towards the transformative restoration of human relations in fractured society. Hence, the learning will be prophetic. It blends reason and emotions to create a feeling of shared humanity which will be reached from the present point of human incompleteness. In doing so diaconia may become the space to build a sense of solidarity and thus reveal a flourishing side of human connection in joint action towards transformative social change. Diaconal practitioners are invited to turn from helplessness to curiosity, from ambiguity to promising complexity, from feeling paralysed to innovative solutions.

### ***Advent Prayer For Peace***

God the creator,                      *God, come to us,*  
God of pain and suffering,        *As we celebrate your birth, and*  
God of birth and death,            *As we restore relationships*  
We wait expectantly for your birth. *with each other and the planet.*

God the birth child,                *God, with us,*  
You come to our chaotic world,     *Help us to see and serve you in the least,*  
You come to our injustice and war, *Help us to work for peace with justice,*  
You come to our damaged planet. *Help us to heal our suffering world.*

*Amen*

***Tony Addy (UK – Austria)***

### **Conclusion**

In the new upcoming year, we would like to come to you with a message of hope. Hope which is not 'out there'! Hope which is here embedded in the everyday work of diaconal practitioners who are courageous and caring, daring to create communion beyond imposed borders, to transform relations and to plant peace through word and action, as they journey with people towards the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.



***Janna Kadyrova. Instrument, 2024.***

*Pipe organ, fragments of fired Russian shells. Lviv, Railways station. November 30.*

The Inspiration for this work emerged from the simple resemblance of an organ's pipes to the bodies of missiles launched by Russia into Ukraine – symbols of destruction and death. As *Instrument* demonstrates, art has the power to subvert, and to transform these metal shells in to symbols of resurrection and hope.

*Join interdiac learning platform 'On-line Space' for accessing supportive resources for learning about conflict on different levels from the interpersonal to the international here (one-step registration will be required for accessing the documents): <https://www.online-space.eu/peace-building>*

## **CONTACT**

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