

LIVED SPIRITUALITY - AN INTERDIAC APPROACH

by Oksana Prosvirina

Spirituality in the life of interdiac

For more than ten years, a variety of events held with interdiac partners have paved the way of on-going joint exploring and developing of Christian social action and diaconia in Central and Eastern Europe. In each event spiritual reflection and common prayers were shared by the participants of various denominations, who came across the region. Together we created a vibrant landscape of ecumenical diversity that was nourished by our vision to work together with vulnerable people towards convivial living in justice, peace and dignity. Each event brought together old friends and new acquaintances, who in the end of the event grew together with dedication in a spiritual community. One of the participants of interdiac learning programme describes her experience of learning with interdiac in such words:

interdiac wants, and is able to combine humanism, tolerance and respect together, and wants to teach how to serve others with Christian heart. The main aims, which I could see, are to grow spiritually, which will help you to grow socially and to use your knowledge practically. (Kateryna Khodak)

At some moment we found ourselves positively challenged to think how we give a value to each voice that we have heard? And how can we enable and support the interplay of relations built on mutual recognition, acceptance, and active listening within the learning community of interdiac? Meanwhile, it was equally important to think how the wealth of shared experience can be used to develop a

supportive resource for personal spiritual reflection on practice and for our walk with God.

Spirituality as Lived experience

All these years in our learning together with professionals and volunteers in diaconia, non-governmental and faith-based organisations we constantly explored the shared gift of spirituality as a resource and as the underlying value of and challenge to diaconal vocation, to committed, compassionate action with marginalised people. We could listen to the stories from our practice and comprehend how it is important that the gift of lived spirituality can be shared as an empowering spring in our actions with people. We can see it when we are seeking ways to restore just relations with and among people, reconnect broken communities, when we strive to see the image of God in every person we encounter and when support the restoration of their dignity. Seeing a person as the image of God implies seeing them in a holistic way, as human beings. Furthermore, we notice, that in itself, the act of seeing is very different from just looking. It requires the ability to question what is known, who constructed this knowledge within us and then further in a dialogue and personal reflection identify how we are changed by this encounter. Therefore, we concluded that spirituality belongs to being with people in a community where we learn about each other in a dialogue between equals. And it is on this way Christian social action and diaconia become a living engagement and it really changes the lives of people.

Ever since working with interdiac I am asking questions such as: is this approach/action/project grounded in community and its needs, will it be sustainable? Is it promoting dignity and justice? Am I am living with integrity, authenticity and full responsibility? And reminding myself not to forget to have fun! (Aiva Rozenberga)

Building our Self Understanding of Lived Spirituality

In interdiac we refer to our work as a journey, which we perceive as walking and talking together, sharing our vision for life in justice, dignity, and peace. We do not have a clear destination, nor we are anticipating some concrete stops or findings as we proceed. With our open hearts and minds we set on the journey as a venture of a mutual discovery of how we can live together in diversity. So instead of a particular destination, we set as a priority a quality of time spent together in active listening to each other.

I think that interdiac is operating exactly with the most important questions we now have to deal with: How to live together in this globe and share the common space – showing dignity and promoting equality. (Sari Hammar)

Over the years authentic steps of the journey have been marked by publications that, like footprints, grasp and disclose our mutual learning in conceptual terms. Therefore, as an introductory to another publication which marks this journey, I would like to refer you to some distinctive footprints that have been made so far. These publications may serve as a few windows to the *praxis* of 'lived spirituality' in interdiac.

➤ **Spirituality as shared gift of learning together**

In its' vision of the learning interdiac emphasizes the fact that all through grace, have gifts to share and the fruits of the spirit can be expressed in life and work. It implies that in learning with interdiac all participants come together to share their 'gifts' with each other in an open way. Therefore, essentially the learning process is shaped by understanding that there are no students or teachers, but everyone is a learner and expert by experience and together, as a learning community, we co-create our knowledge of the world where we seek to regain common humanity. Such 'emancipatory dialogical learning' is rooted in the in the concept of 'liberating pedagogy' pioneered by Brazilian philosopher and educator P.Freire.

Yes, it is participation, full participation, inclusion and parity; all views are listened to and considered. The concept and work of interdiac is close to contexts, is taking into consideration needs of communities, creating and developing networks of professionals and consolidating people from different countries (cultural, political religious backgrounds) with the same values and approaches. (Nana Agapishvili)

To learn more, download our book 'interdiac Pedagogy. An Introduction and Guide' here: <https://www.interdiac.eu/resources/interdiac-pedagogy-an-introduction-and-guide>

➤ **Spirituality with marginalised people**

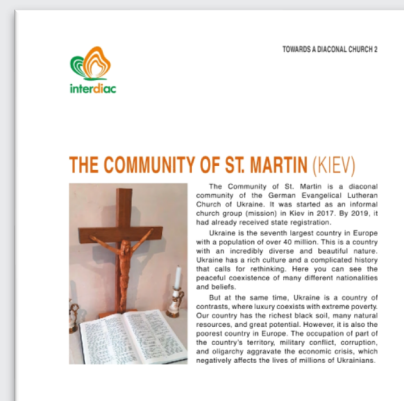
A series of interdiac publications tell the stories of a churches and communities who respond to present day challenges by seeing themselves at the heart of the community and by being responsive to the everyday needs of people. The underlying idea is that the church should be with people in their whole life and evolve an appropriate approach to faith and spirituality, closely linked to the needs of people.

Our church became more efficient in helping our community. The goal changed, we didn't help for the sake of helping anymore, but kept the desires of those in need in view. (Zuzana Onasoga)

To learn more, download two booklets from the series 'Towards the diaconal church' here:

Harkujärve Parish, Estonia

<https://www.interdiac.eu/resources/towards-a-diaconal-church>



The Community of St. Martin, Kiev, Ukraine
<https://www.interdiac.eu/resources/towards-a-diaconal-church-2>



➤ Conviviality – Diaconal Life in Diversity

The rapidly changing situation in the present-day world forces us to ask, 'How is it possible to know and learn to understand another person's 'life-world'? and 'How is it possible to live together in peace and with justice?'

There are invisible walls between people and in some cases physical walls! We are concerned with the role of the church and diaconia in this situation! Do we also need a change in our culture and practice, perhaps also in our theological approach? It may not only be a question of doing things differently but also of thinking differently! The European Diaconal Process, launched by the Lutheran World Federation, in which interdiac is a partner, has been rethinking the role of church and diaconia for almost ten years. The working group introduced the vision of diaconal life in diversity - concept of conviviality which can become a focus for diaconal and church life locally and indeed worldwide.

Conviviality has led us to rethink Christian presence in the light of Christ's presence among people, in passion and compassion. It has given new missional perspectives for life in neighborhoods. Despite all differences of church culture and money, we have so much to receive from one another." This experience breaks down walls of power dynamics in unequal, often financially defined relationships. The action-reflection approach has made us grow into relationships on an 'eye to eye level' and with reciprocal dignity. (Eva-Sibylle Vogel)

Please, check the link to download the latest 4 story books from this process 'Conviviality – Stories of diaconal life in diversity from LWF's European regions' in English here:

<https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-conviviality-stories-diaconal-life-diversity-lwfs-european-regions?fbclid=IwAR2OGKOr6BelGSUjCNBLR2DjnDmJWCXM9I9dmtS-jlCSHAFjbGhuzmhQfX4>



➤ Upcoming New Publication! Walking and Dancing Together – An invitation to lived spirituality

The idea for another publication took shape after long discussions in the context of the learning events. To sum up the main reflections, we saw this new publication as a Spiritual Guide that would support:

- an exploration of spirituality as praxis in everyday work and in presence with people,
- the formation of an ecumenical community, where differences enrich each other,
- preliminary steps to shaping our common learning about actual challenges of changing world today, informed by a living spirituality,
- personal or small group reflection on dialogue with the 'other' and with God through re-examining Christian traditional practices, such as reading the Bible or praying together.

The long search for the person, who would be willing to take on the journey across ecumenical traditions, share personal expertise and develop the book presented us with the possibility to continue and deepen our co-working with Rev. Dr. Eva Sybille Vogel and Rev. Mārtiņš Urdze. The creative writing, discussions, reflections which followed the process of writing the book were a highlight for us in 2020 when the Covid-19 pandemic spread and set us on the edge of extreme anxiety. Early in 2021, we were joyous at the easing of the of pandemic. But at the same time, we were grieving because our colleague Mārtiņš Urdze, passed after a short but painful cancer. We were both doubting and inspired again and again! Therefore, the term 'lived spirituality' has been chosen in the title of the Guide to underline that spirituality is a dynamic multifaceted dimension that resonates personally and yet, it is a gift of grace received when being together 'here and now' in communion.

By networking with organizations in Central and Eastern Europe interdiac strengthens this diaconal dimension of being church. This makes it possible to learn from each other, to inspire each other, to get more perspective on what

the Gospel is asking of us in our context and to exchange experiences, visions and knowledge. Being church implies being a member of the boarder crossing body of Christ and making this fundamental vision concrete in relationships with each other. (Herman Noordegraaf)

So, please, expect our new publication 'Walking and Dancing Together. An Invitation to Lived Spirituality' in the beginning of 2022. We would like to extend an invitation to read this book individually or with your group in the local congregation or professional colleagues. We invite your feedback and reflections to our stories and shared experiences.

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