CONVIVIALITY
diaconal life in diversity

Conviviality with People on the Move

Seeking Conviviality – A Core Concept for Diakonia

Number 2

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Preface

The term “conviviality” is usually associated with something pleasant, amiable, friendly, and festive. This is how the word is most often used in English or French. From an historical perspective, the Spanish word “la convivencia” refers to the “coexistence” of Christian, Muslim and Jewish communities in medieval Spain and thus to the cultural interaction and exchange that proximity promotes. In thinking about development, the concept of “conviviality” is known at least from the beginning of the 1970s, mainly due to Ivan Illich’s book *Tools for Conviviality* (published in 1973) which attracted worldwide attention. In recent years, the term has been gaining in popularity with regard to living with diversity and in education, social work and diakonia. In the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the notion of conviviality has become better known since 2011 with the launch of the European Diaconal Process. Since then, this term has become an integral part of the language used by the churches of the Lutheran communion when describing their diaconal mission.

When the participants in the European Diaconal Process met in Balatonszárszó, Hungary in 2017 to plan the next stage of cooperation, attention was drawn not only to the already existing differences in Europe, but also to the still diversifying situation. This was expressed in the theme of this meeting, “Seeking Conviviality - faithful living in diversifying Europe.” It was clear that we are all on the move, not only because of migration, but also because of the need to be mentally on the move and to seek new ways of living together peacefully. For this reason, the final stage of the process was called “People on the Move”.

Photo: Mihai Surdu/Unsplash

It is worth noting that from the very beginning of the diaconal process, the LWF has been talking about “seeking conviviality”. The verb “seeking” in combination with the noun “conviviality” indicates not only the dynamic ten-year process of defining the concept and its characteristic marks, but also the way in which it is practiced. Participants in the process, and in fact all LWF member churches in Europe, are theologically and practically in the process of seeking. One could say that participation in the European Diaconal Process with its focus on “seeking conviviality” was in its essence a convivial experience.

In trying to list some of the features of this seeking, it is important to emphasize the conviction that the experience and knowledge of each participant is equally valuable, important, and necessary. It was also the conviction that learning must be fully participatory; that the only way to learn about others is with and from others. During the process, participants attached great importance to the principle of reciprocity. Concepts of living together can only be developed together in an interaction in which everyone participates equally.

"Seeking conviviality" means openness for new models of living together, which go beyond the framework of well-known solutions that can be categorized and clearly described. That is why the "seeking conviviality" process referred to art. Living together is not just a theory, a set of rules and principles, but often true art, expressed in creative, unobvious, and often surprising ideas. Creativity and experimentation in shaping a life together among diversity requires mutual trust. Building trust is an essential condition of conviviality and it was very important during the process coordinated by the LWF. In an atmosphere of trust, one can openly share thoughts that may, at first sight, deviate from known standards, but which may be the source of something new, valuable, and beautiful, something that in its essence expresses the word conviviality. Stories from the three European LWF regions offer examples of such unobvious, creative solutions of living together in diversifying Europe. In most cases, they were written by participants in the European Diaconal Process who implement or participate in these projects themselves.

The stories – published in four booklets and grouped according to the topics they cover – are the fruit of the process that has been underway for almost ten years, and especially of its final stage called "People on the Move." Each booklet explores a different facet of local diakonia through stories of local engagement, includes a reflection, and points to "marks of conviviality" which the stories reveal. The booklet themes are:

- Conviviality and the Diaconal Church
- Conviviality with People on the Move
- Conviviality, Diakonia, and the Church
- Convivial Church and Radical Welcome

A fifth booklet brings together an overview of the various facets of convivial life and "seeking conviviality" not only as a concept for diaconal action but as an expression of "marks of conviviality" for a diaconal church in the present context.

The metaphor of journeying is firmly rooted in the history of Christianity, both in the lives of individuals and of larger groups. The Lutheran communion is also on the move. In theology, this thought is sometimes expressed in a Latin sentence *Ecclesia semper reformanda* meaning that the church must always be reformed and continually re-examine itself in order to maintain its doctrine and practice. The churches belonging to the LWF are linked not only by their Reformation roots and agreement on fundamental theological issues, but also by the conviction that God's mission on the ground is fulfilled in different ways according to needs and circumstances in different parts of the world. Sharing these experiences is one of the tasks of the LWF.

The stories from different places in Europe that illustrate conviviality and were described by the participants in the most recent stage of the European Diaconal Process have precisely this role. They are a testimony of how God acts among the member churches of the LWF and how the member churches respond to the challenges of fulfilling God's mission in the modern world.

I trust and pray that all stories are an encouragement and inspiration to be a creative diaconal community, constantly seeking the best forms and ways of living together.

Ireneusz Lukas
LWF Regional Secretary for Europe

Introduction

Tony Addy

The stories and the settings

The first steps of the process of re-forming community diakonia in Europe started with a reflection on the key challenges faced by local diakonia through the experience of people engaged in local churches and diaconal work. The conclusion reached was that the biggest question was: "How, in this rapidly diversifying situation, can we live together in peace with justice?" This was crystallized into the basic idea that diakonia should focus on seeking conviviality. This has become the central concept for community diakonia, taken up by the churches in the European regions of the LWF. The concept of conviviality is essentially relational, but it also provides a critical framework to evaluate which policies in church and society support convivial life together, and which make conviviality less likely. This can include questions of economy, work, and social policy, as well as human and civil rights, and the control of the movement of people. Looked at in this way, conviviality provides both a critical lens and elements of a future vision.

In this booklet, we focus on four stories from different corners of Europe. What they have in common is action by local congregations or diaconal organizations in the face of the growing diversity experienced across the region. They illustrate different types of response, but they are all contextually relevant in relation to the growth of diversity, and to political and cultural situations. The particular focus is on "uprooted people" – the experience of those who are forced to move out of their own country for a variety of reasons, and who come to Europe. All four stories come from the personal, day-to-day work of members of the LWF European project linked to the theme "Seeking conviviality, re-forming community diakonia in Europe." They were shared as part of the common learning and as a starting point for reflection. In this booklet, we are pleased to share these stories, which have a variety of perspectives, starting points, and strategies. They are not meant to be models to copy; rather they serve as a jumping-off point for reflection. As you read the stories and the reflection, you are, therefore, invited to reflect on them and to use them as a mirror in which to view your own context.

The first story comes from Oslo Church City Mission (CCM) and relates to a specific ongoing project in one neighborhood of the city. There are several interesting points of departure for this story. The most important fact is that Oslo has been a city of migration for several generations, not only migrants from rural Norway coming to the capital city, but also people coming to Norway for different reasons – some because they were fleeing oppression or war, and others because they were seeking work and a better life. The consequence of this is that Oslo has become a very diverse city, in fact one could say "super diverse," meaning that there are not only people from many different backgrounds and cultures, but that inside that diversity there is a growing diversification among different groups. This may be related to diverse languages, length of stay, socio-economic group, religion, or political

alignment, to name some differences. Furthermore, even though about one third of the population of Oslo is of migrant origin, the Norwegian part of the population is also diversifying. This is a novel situation for the country because the traditional experience – that the majority of Norwegians were members of the Lutheran Church – is changing. Therefore, there are new challenges to the majority in terms of its identity too. The CCM initiative seems rather simple because it involves building groups of three people – one new immigrant, refugee, or asylum seeker; one person with an immigrant background who has been in Oslo for a longer time; and one Norwegian who may, or may not, have deep roots in Oslo. The idea is that these groups will form relationships that can assist with inclusion on the level of building relationships, giving practical hints, and assisting with getting used to Norwegian language, culture, and institutions. One of the most important aspects of this model is that the project is rooted in a local volunteer center, which means that the trios easily link to many wider activities in the center, the community, and the wider civil society.

The second story, on the surface, seems simpler. It is located in Prague, in the Czech Republic, which has a very different history in terms of diversity. Under the Communist government, there were very few migrants or immigrants except for some "fraternal workers" or students from other socialist countries – for example, Vietnam and Angola. On top of this, members of the Christian church are a minority, and a minority of these are Protestant. The story is rooted in the life of a local Protestant congregation in an inner-city area of Prague. With this background, it is important to know that the numbers of immigrants from the global South, and the numbers of asylum seekers and recognized refugees, remain quite small. There is a lot of hostility to people with a different background who come to the Czech Republic (and towards the long-established Roma community). Most Czech people have little contact with the refugees, and it is very easy to play on the fears of people concerning people from Islamic countries, in particular. As with CCM, in a very different context, the Diakonia of the Czech Brethren Church and one local congregation decided that the most important work would be to build up relationships between Czechs and refugees and other migrants. The church created a café where people can meet. It also has a garden, which makes a space for informal contact in good weather. One of the most important things after relationship building is to organize discussions about faith, worldviews, and religion, searching for similarities and differences. This relationship building is very important in the Czech context, and research has shown that this deeper level of relationship building is very often a missing dimension in policies for integration.

The third story comes from a parish in Sweden. It is in a small town, quite a distance from the regional center, and although the area appears quite rural, there is a tradition of mining, metal processing, and engineering. The industries have declined, and many people have moved away. In light of this depopulation, asylum seekers and refugees have been moved there over time. As in Norway, the Lutheran Church is a majority church and, in this case, there is an employed deacon. The church's role in the social field is changing due to legal changes in the

provision of welfare and the new independence of the church from the state.

The Lutheran parish in Lindesberg had for a long time organized a meeting point for asylum seekers where they could meet local people, learn about Sweden, and practice the Swedish language. Eventually, there were so many coming that it was difficult to meet them all: The church was, up to this time, working alone. There followed two interesting developments. In this changing situation, and given the changed legal framework of the church, the church already had contact with many volunteers, but there was no supportive network. The church took the step to convene interested people and organizations to discuss how to go further in this work. Relational work revealed the need for a new structure, which eventually led to founding the so-called Café of the World supported by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the municipality, and a private company (IKEA). Through these close contacts, the specific problems faced by women asylum seekers came into focus. This was because, in the process, the voices of women had been heard in deciding about activities, and they had the confidence to speak about it. The project, based in an old school, ran for several years, but it closed recently due to the decline in the number of new refugee and asylum seekers. However, the networking continues.

The fourth story is rooted in a context where the Lutheran church is a tiny minority – Italy. However, Italy also has a long experience of internal migration (south to north), and migration into the country from Africa, Latin America, and other regions. The particular focus of the project is on asylum seekers who may have transited through Italy and tried to claim asylum in northern Europe. The European Union (EU) has a specific convention, which requires that asylum seekers have to claim asylum in the first EU country they enter. This is the so-called Dublin Agreement. Protestant churches (in some cases working with Catholic communities) have pioneered many initiatives with, and for, refugees. This chapter describes a small project working with people returned to Italy from other EU countries (the so-called *Dublinati*). Through the story of one woman, you can share the inside story of this policy and its impact on people. Therefore, to promote convivial life together the diakonia has to press for changes in the European Union (EU) border regime and related policies, which have a negative impact on people and families.

The Stories

“Guide” project with newly arrived immigrants and refugees:
Stovner Volunteer Centre, Oslo, Norway

Creating a safe and welcoming space: Café Obýváček
in a Prague neighborhood (Czech Republic)

Meeting Point “Café of the World”:
Lutheran Parish, Lindesberg, Sweden

Working with Dublinati (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Italy)

“Guide” project with newly arrived immigrants and refugees: Stovner Volunteer Centre, Oslo, Norway

Steinar Eraker

Transforming Oslo – What do we see?

Over the past fifty years, the city of Oslo has undergone a transformation from being a more or less ethnically homogenous society into a multi-ethnic and multicultural city where people are living together. Today more than 32 percent of its population have recent immigrant background. Slowly, the citizens of the city are internalizing the fact that to be Norwegian is indeed to be in a diverse society, full of varieties – the refugees from Hungary in the late fifties, first wave of labor immigrants from Pakistan in the late sixties, the refugees from Vietnam at the end of the seventies, the Yugoslav refugees in the nineties, and, later, the refugees from Somalia. Also, to be mentioned are the Polish labor migration and the arrival of people of other nationalities from Eastern Europe after the fall of communism. Since the new millennium, people from all over the world have come to the city, migrating for different reasons – war, hunger, natural catastrophe, economic endeavor. This process was fueled by the economic crisis of 2008 and the so-called migration crisis in 2015 and 2016.

Although most of the refugees in the world (about 65 million) stay in countries with low income and living standards, more refugees than usual managed to enter Europe in the years 2015 and 2016. This was then successfully blocked when the European states managed to reactivate border checkpoints. What we see is that the richest countries in the world take a small part of the “burden” of all the refugees in the world.

What we also see is that the churches in many countries have been – if not silent – then rather quiet about this fact, and also rather reluctant to name xenophobia, racism, hate, and nationalism in this context. The Church City Mission of Oslo (CCM) has for many decades now worked under the slogan and policy of “Room for All” which implies a convivial theology of inclusion – employing people of different creeds and cultures; working together with, and for, people of different religious and cultural backgrounds in the local communities; and seeking cooperation with the city’s organizations and stakeholders whose ideology and practice can be seen as convivial. The diaconal approach is based on mutual respect, care and justice, and on the belief that all people are created in the image of God. The CCM in Oslo has a policy that religious and cultural plurality among staff, volunteers, and beneficiaries is not only tolerated, but welcomed. We aim to mirror the population of the local communities and to reflect the idea of convivial living together. CCM is not actively trying to convert people to change their creed to the Lutheran faith. CCM believes that diakonia is indeed preaching the gospel in action.

Reflecting on living together in diversity

It is easier to talk about integration and inclusion than to practice it. This insight leads to the question of how we can create frames and support to individuals who want to practice inclusion and integration into society. Experience would show that it is not easy for people to just knock on the door of a new neighbor – especially when they are from a different cultural background and the language barrier is high. CCM sees a potential in challenging individuals on a voluntary basis – as neighbors – to assist in including newly arrived, and newly settled, refugees in their community. Loneliness and isolation have been unveiled as major challenges. We see that newly arrived refugees who manage to contribute in some way in their community are more likely to feel included in their new surroundings.

In CCM Oslo, we realized that at least two of our existing projects would be capable of taking the challenge of implementing practice where the inclusion of newly arrived refugees was the topic. They are located in parts of the city with an already high percentage of inhabitants with migrant background. One of these is Stovner Volunteer Centre, which has long experience with integration and inclusion of different migrant communities. With employees and volunteers from different creeds and convictions, it has been important to reflect together on issues of values and religious identity in staff meetings as well as in open meetings where people who want to participate are welcome. Stovner Volunteer Centre is located on the ground floor in Fossum church and has a staff supervisor who is a CCM Lutheran pastor.

At one point a few years back, the question came up among the young Muslim volunteers if they could be volunteers in a Christian organization and still stay Muslim. The project they were participating in was "Young Leaders" – aiming at training young people in leadership. To answer this question, both staff and volunteers were invited to reflect together: the facilitator was the previously mentioned pastor. It was interesting to observe the dialogue because the focus became common values that could be found in Islam, Christianity, and from a humanistic viewpoint - respect, dignity, justice, tolerance, and so on. This convivial approach has no hidden agenda of conversion. The pastor would bring in Biblical texts (e.g., Mt 25:35 and Lev 19:33) and challenge the other participants to bring in Muslim and humanistic texts that would support the convivial way of living.

Action: "Guide" project accompanying newly arrived refugees

In Norway, many people still have a reference to their forefathers and mothers who had to flee the German occupation to Sweden during the Second World War (1940-1945). This can help find the empathy for people today who are fleeing from war and atrocities. As the refugee crisis unfolded in 2015 and 2016, it showed that, surprisingly, many inhabitants in Oslo and elsewhere in Norway took part in the effort to welcome the refugees. In a way, the politicians were more reluctant than the population.

In response to the migration crisis, the CCM recognized the necessity to engage in the integration of people who, in some way, were recognized

as refugees and settled in Oslo and other parts of Norway. Thanks to the annual nationwide fundraising assisted by the national television-broadcasting network (NRK), in 2017 CCM was able to increase its effort in this field of work.

One of the projects that was planned and launched in 2019 is called "Guide" (Veiviser – literally "showing the way"). The project has the aim of integrating newly arrived refugees into their local community – helping them learn Norwegian and introducing Norwegian society and customs, and also helping them become a resource themselves in the local community. The idea of this practice started in CCM Bergen in 2016 (Empo Flerkulturelt Ressurssenter – Empo Multicultural Resource Center) and has now been followed by two projects in CCM Oslo.

The idea was to bring together three persons – one newly arrived and settled refugee or immigrant; one volunteer with migrant background who has been living in Norway for some years (these two would not necessarily be from the same country of origin, though we tried to make sure Norwegian would be the common language); and a volunteer with Norwegian upbringing and identity. These would meet two to four times a month for half a year to practice Norwegian, do social activities together, help with coping with the Norwegian "system" and authorities, etc. The recruitment, training, and supervision of these trios was taken care of by professional staff in the CCM.

Stovner Volunteer Centre is located in the municipality of Stovner in the north of Oslo where around 50 percent of the population have recent migrant background. Already several projects of inclusion of newly arrived migrants have been implemented in this volunteer center. Among other projects, there is one where cooperation with the municipality in an introduction program for newly settled asylum seekers is the focus.

The aim of the "Guide" project is to give the participants an experience of being included in a fellowship, practice and learn the Norwegian language; become familiar with Norwegian society and the labor environment; and experience being a resource person in the local community. It is expected that all three group members – not only the newly arrived participant – will benefit from this project. The project organizers believe that this will help inclusion into local communities and, thus, be a basis for a convivial living together at work, at school, through the children's participation in sport and cultural activities, etc. Since the project is based at the volunteer center, it makes it easier to participate in other activities at the center, such as social lunches, language courses, Home Start support, and so on. It is important to see this particular project as part of something bigger – a fellowship across differences.

Mohamed Dheeg Aagane, who is in charge of this project at Stovner Volunteer Centre, is himself originally from Somalia. His cultural and religious competence is of great importance in the implementation of this project, and for supervising the volunteers and participants.

Two stories from the Guide project

The Eritrean food experience

Participants:

- Thore – Volunteer, Ethnic Norwegian

- Mahinder – Volunteer, migrant background from India
- Tesfit – Newly arrived refugee from Eritrea

For some time, we had talked about trying out food from Eritrea. This time we finally managed to get it done. Tesfit invited us to the House of Africa, a restaurant in central Oslo specialized in food from Eritrea and Ethiopia. We met at 4 p.m. Mahinder came a little late, so Tesfit and I waited for him in the restaurant. As we were waiting, Tesfit told me a little about his life in Africa. He also showed me the different dishes on the menu and explained that there would be some, which would probably be too hot for me (which was probably true). When Mahinder came, we ordered different dishes. As we were waiting for the food to come, we talked about electric cars and Tesfit's driver's license. He is preparing for the driver's license exam, which is coming up soon. As the food was served, I was wondering why I did not get any cutlery. Tesfit had to explain to me that people in his country usually eat with their fingers. All the dishes came with something called teff (or injera), a soft bread – more like a pancake –, which is used to eat the meat, gravy, and salad. I had never heard about it but Tesfit and Mahinder knew exactly how to use the bread as cutlery (they eat in a similar way in India where Mahinder comes from). I had my problems even though both of them showed me the correct way of doing it. The food was delicious! At the end of the meal, the waiter came to our table and he explained that in Africa people normally share a big plate, rather than having a small plate each. What we didn't manage to eat we took home in a "doggy bag." All in all, an afternoon, which became a convivial, and learning, experience. *(Written by Thore)*

Eritrean Food Experience (Tesfit, Thore and Mahinder at the House of Africa in Oslo). Photo: Torstein Ihle/Church City Mission Oslo

Getting to know Oslo

Participants:

- Kari – Volunteer, Ethnic Norwegian
- Emmanuel – Volunteer, migrant background from Nigeria
- Ana Paula – Newly arrived refugee from Portugal

Paula, Emmanuel and I decided to spend our time together moving around in Oslo so that Paula could get more acquainted with Oslo.

One Saturday before my summer vacation, we decided to go to Norsk Folkemuseum (Norwegian Museum of Cultural History) at Bygdøy. Paula and I took a crowded bus to Bygdøy where we had agreed to meet Emmanuel. Luckily, the discount card was accepted at this museum. We had a nice walk through the areas where old houses from former centuries where exhibited including a stave

church from the Viking period. We continued to the exhibition area where buildings from old Oslo from the nineteenth century were displayed with the nostalgic shops from that time. We ended the visit in the museum café, having a coffee and sharing the experience. Both Paula and Emmanuel said they could have walked around for days in this museum and the other museum on the peninsula of Bygdøy. I realized there would be more trips to this area!

The week after, we met to visit the National Theatre and went on to see the castle of Akershus in the middle of the city at the harbor. Unfortunately, we were late for a guided tour so we will have to try that some other time. Coming back to Oslo's City Hall, we jumped on a driverless electric bus that cruises along the harbor. This turned out to be a funny and convivial trip for all on board.

After the summer vacation, we decided to get to know the outskirts of the city. Emmanuel met Paula at her workplace one Friday afternoon in September and they went together to meet me at Frysja, which is in the north of Oslo where the recreational forest (Nordmarka) starts. From this point, going south along the river of Aker there is a wonderful walkway all the way down to the Opera. Along the river, a lot of local history is visible, so we enjoyed ourselves walking and talking about old factory buildings, modernized apartments in old buildings, and bathing spots along the river. At the end of our walk, we had a coffee at Hønse-Lovisas Hus (Chicken Louise's House) before we each departed for our homes. We decided to meet again the week after and take a walk around Sognsvann, which is a lake to the north of the city, if the weather turned nice. In fact, we went through with the plan and had a most wonderful walk around the lake. It was nice to see how much Paula is enjoying herself out in the nature surrounding Oslo. She is fascinated by the colors of the trees in autumn. She took a lot of pictures, which she wanted to use as an inspiration for her knitting and other activities. *(Written by Kari)*

Getting to know Oslo with another group (Jones – volunteer from Syria, Samrana – participant from Pakistan and Kari – volunteer from Norway). Photo: Torstein Ihle/Church City Mission Oslo

Creating a safe and welcoming space: Café Obýváček in a Prague neighborhood

Alena Fendrychová

Introduction

In this story, I would like to describe our regular meeting point called Café Obýváček (Living Room), which is visited by Czech people and people who have come from abroad, either recently or some time ago. The goal of the meetings is to help building relationships between local people and refugees or migrants who do not have many other possibilities to meet Czech people in informal meetings.

Who do we see?

Czech society is deeply divided on the issue of welcoming both refugees and migrants. As everywhere in Europe, many politicians across political parties misuse the topic and arouse public fears and hostility. However, the context in the Czech Republic is different from that of the other European Union states. The number of newly arriving refugees has been very low for many years. For example, 1700 asylum seekers arrived in 2018 and approximately 160 people were granted international protection. This means most Czech people do not have the

Garden party, immigrant explains his life story and values. Photo: Alena Fendrychová/Diakonie ČCE – SCPS

Garden party. Photo: Alena Fendrychová/Diakonie ČCE – SCPS

chance to meet refugees; but the same goes for other immigrants. Because they lack experience in meeting people of different cultures, languages, or religions, they are more willing to believe in a great deal of the misinformation and fake news, which circulates in the media. Distrust and hatred are most often directed towards Muslims, whilst the vast majority of Czechs have never knowingly met

a person who is a Muslim. On the other hand, social isolation and the lack of participation in community life is threatening for refugees and immigrants.

This situation led us to decide to offer open space where local people and "newcomers" could meet regularly. For these meetings, we have selected a space in a neighborhood in the center of Prague called Žižkov. It is one large room in the congregational house at street level, which is easily accessible from the outside.

Reflecting from the perspective of Christian faith

Our key to understanding each other is rooted in this text: "When God created humankind, he made them in the likeness of God." (Gen 5:1). The text means that every person is a creature of God, that no one should be discriminated against because of their religion or other differences. With my colleagues, we made the following reflection.

In our society, there is a lack of hospitality not only towards refugees who are successfully pictured by many politicians as a security threat, but also towards immigrants, who are generally perceived only to be a useful working force, which means that they should return home after their work is done. Driven by the biblical text mentioned above, we wanted to create a safe, hospitable place, where everyone is welcomed, regardless of language, religion, or political opinions. As our diaconal center is located in the congregational house, we also involved people from the house in visiting our Café Obýváček. We find it especially important to invite church members to the group where people with Muslim background are present as well.

From our experience in the congregation, we have learned that many church members, who are otherwise empathetic towards the needy and open to other people, tend to fear Muslims and avoid any contact with them. Café Obýváček then should be a good place where people with diverse faiths (or nonbelievers) can meet, have a good time, give and receive, and try to establish some kind of relationship. This experience of conviviality – sharing meals and drinks together, as well as thoughts and opinions – could help them perceive others as equal, regardless of the label given by nationality, social status, or religion. This experience could also be supportive in their everyday life, and in civil society, if they encounter diversity and difference.

Café Obýváček in action

In 2017, during our team visit to Switzerland, we were collecting examples of good practice for our work with refugees and migrants. We were inspired by a meeting point, Café Contact, where local people and refugees were meeting. We decided to organize a similar contact place here in Prague. We chose our street-level office. By making small changes in the furniture arrangement and buying more chairs, we created a cozy room, which we called Café Obýváček. Since November 2017, we have been meeting there every Wednesday from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. Czech participants who regularly visit the café include people from our diaconal center, people from the congregational house, and also

several people from other Prague congregations and from the public outside the church. For example, one man heard about Café Obýváček in a radio interview and, since then, he has been visiting the café. Alongside the Czech participants, people from approximately twelve countries visit the café: altogether, we are forty people.

Usually, ten to fifteen people come every Wednesday and we speak Czech together. We have often discussed a topic prepared by one of the participants, either Czech or a foreigner. The themes range from the social and educational system through to politics, special food dishes, and cultural diversity. On religious holidays (both Christian and Muslim), the participants have an opportunity to present their faith: we discuss the differences and similarities, and what we have in common. During the summer, we are able to spend our time in a wonderful garden, which belongs to the house. We also organize trips outside of Prague in cooperation with people from the local congregation. During the two years that the café has been opening its doors, many personal friendships have arisen both between Czechs and migrants, and between migrants themselves. That is one reason why, after the end of the first project period, we decided to continue organizing the café and that we try to get more volunteers from the local congregation to help us with organizing the meetings in the future.

Conclusion

After two years of meeting together, we came to the conclusion that the most important thing for living together is to talk to each other and to try to understand the view of other people – be it politics, religious attitude, or cultural habits. It is clear that we often disagree. There are many controversial things among us: our world is becoming more and more complex. But attempting to get out of our own "bubble" and reflecting on the perception of the other may be a recipe for living together in the wider society as well.

Meeting Point "Café of the World": Lutheran Parish, Lindesberg, Sweden

Katrin Holmstrand

Introduction – Lindesberg in context

In 2015 and 2016 there was a large increase in the number of asylum seekers arriving in Europe. They also came to the small town of Lindesberg in Sweden. Lindesberg has approximately 10,000 residents and is 75 kilometers from the city of Vasterås, in a straight line. It is a former mining town, but now is a center for small manufacturers and tourism. However, it is a place where there has been a long experience of hosting asylum seekers and refugees. One reason is that there are a lot of empty apartments and the office for migration has rented almost all of them. When the apartments were full, the total number of asylum seekers was 1500.

Developing the Café of the World

Even before 2015, the Lutheran parish was already meeting with asylum seekers. The work was not large in scale: we had a small meeting point where people could practice Swedish, and talk about Sweden and things that were similar, or different, to the way of living in their past. Many also asked for help with

Meeting point, Världens Café. Photo: Linde Bergslags Församling

their asylum papers and, of course, some needed clothes because of the Swedish climate.

But in this period, there was a rapid rise in the number of people coming. In fact, there were so many that the parish had difficulty meeting them all and we did not have the resources to open up more meeting points. We started to involve more and more voluntary workers: that helped, but it was not enough.

Another thing that we saw was that many other organizations were also making a big contribution, but there was no real communication and coordination of the things being done to help asylum seekers and refugees.

Therefore, we developed the idea of inviting all the people and organizations we could think of who were involved with the issue to a meeting to focus on the question: What can we do together to make people who come to Lindesberg feel welcome?

The list was long because we invited all those associations and organizations as well as different authorities – for example, the municipality, asylum health care, migration office, and the police. This helped us map what was going on and discover what

was missing. The first meeting took place at the end of 2016 and the group is still meeting. Around forty different participants came, and a network was started. In this complex situation, it is unusual to find a church taking such a lead in network building in the Swedish context. This initial meeting, therefore, led to many things such as the Meeting Point "Café of the World".

One of the small villages in the Lindesberg municipality, Stråssa, had about 300 local inhabitants, but it expanded when around 180 asylum seekers arrived in this period. It has no local store, and no school or day care. You have to go by car or bus to the town, but the bus does not go very often, only around three times a day. Many asylum seeker families live in the village. The parish had tried to offer a bus service so the families could come to our meeting point in the town, but only the men came.

There was a big need for some activities that include the whole family. Women and children were an especially exposed group. In Sweden at this time, there is no official language training if you have not finalized your asylum-seeking process and been accepted as an immigrant. This process takes a very long time – at least eighteen months, often much longer.

The network helped the parish to find collaborators for the Café of the World project, which started in the beginning of 2017. The main collaborators were the newly employed migration coordinator of the municipality, the local Red Cross, the regional athletics department, the asylum health care, the local state-funded association for popular education, and IKEA in the town of Örebro.

All the collaborating organizations contributed in some way with staff, and some could contribute

Meeting point, Världens Café. A special evening to share food from all over our world. Photo: Linde Bergslags Församling

financial support. However, together we made an application for government funding, and I, as a deacon, was nominated to be the coordinator for the project.

The Meeting Point in action

Through this meeting point, we aimed to make the time waiting for asylum easier and more productive, and to strengthen the refugees' knowledge of Swedish society. We did this by offering the possibility to learn Swedish, to help people with their

Meeting point, Världens Café. Photo: Linde Bergslags Församling

Meeting point, Världens Café. Photo: Linde Bergslags Församling

parenting role, as well as learning about health and self-care – such as learning about the importance of daily exercise in preventing depression. The participants could also get information about how Swedish society works, including the role of associations, and also, importantly, about work life.

We put an extra focus on women, and we tried to ensure their involvement in deciding about future activities. Children were welcome, and we had fun playing together. Actually, anyone was welcome: we offered coffee and socializing in one room; another room was for exercise and playing; and one room was only for women.

The location of this meeting point was in an old school building, so we had the space for approximately fifty to seventy-five people. It didn't take long to get established and we had at least fifty participants every time the meeting point was open.

It was a mixed group of employed people and volunteers that, together, made this meeting point possible, including, of course, the asylum seekers. Everyone contributed according to their own level.

Reflection on the experience

The Café of the World was a project and had to wrap up at the end of 2019. This was due to the much-reduced numbers of asylum seekers coming to Sweden, which in turn was caused by the political situation. However, we think this was a very useful experience, which fitted our priority of building understanding and acceptance between people and, in this way, improving living together. Breaking down fear is the first step towards creating the opportunities, which enable people to enjoy a good life together.

The management group, which was assembled with one person from every organization involved in the collaboration, had many interesting discussions

Meeting point, Världens Café. Photo: Linde Bergslags Församling

along the way. One reflection is that all of us wanted to make life better for those with the least financial and social resources, and whose lives were full of trauma. Everyone was convinced that together we could make more good things happen and reach our goal of involving more people.

In my profession as a deacon, it has always been a quest to do as many things as possible together with both my colleagues and volunteers in the parish, and also do as many things as possible with other actors in society. In our context, it is not usual for the church to take the lead in building a network and a project with other civil society organizations, but for us this was a very important step to take towards creating understanding, which leads to action.

One theological diaconal reflection is to see diakonia as an expression of being created in the image of God. The following line of reasoning is summarized from the 'Guidance for Diakonia' (Vägledning för diakoni) published by the Church of Sweden in 2020.

God has created the whole world, and all people, and works through God's creation. People are the co-rulers and stewards of God's creation. From a creation theology perspective, all the good that is done in the world has its origin in God, no matter who it is performed by. This applies to both a good social system and to care for each person. All people are created in the image of God with an inherent sense of what is right and wrong. Everyone, therefore, has the opportunity to participate and restore creation through care. Therefore, from the creation theology viewpoint, it is obvious that we should cooperate with all forces for good.

Let's work on, and take advantage of, the opportunities to do things together.

Working with *Dublinati*

Daniela Barbuscia

Introduction

In Italy, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, with the support of the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, has developed a diaconal project in favor of the so-called *Dublinati*. This project is aimed at welcoming those migrants who are returned to Italy under the European Union's Dublin Convention and at facilitating their integration and inclusion in the Italian social fabric. Given the latest Italian regulatory developments, this appears to be increasingly complicated and difficult. Among the many stories and dramas of people and families, I thought of the story of an Iranian woman and her two children.

Würde, Gleichberechtigung, Solidarität, Hoffnung, Brüderlichkeit, Aufnahme ...
das sind die Grundwerte, die die Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Italien (ELKI) angeregt haben, zugunsten der sogenannten „Dublinati"-Migranten tätig zu werden. Sie haben die ELKI dazu veranlasst, mit der F.C.E.I. zu kooperieren, um gemeinsam dieses Projekt voranzubringen.

Das Projekt wird finanziert:
- aus den 8-Promille-Mitteln, die der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Italien von den italienischen Steuerzahlern gewidmet wurden;
- mit den Mitteln aus dem deutsch-italienischen Netzwerk der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche.

Sie können uns mit Ihrer Spende helfen, das Projekt weiter zu unterstützen! Mit einer Spende auf das Konto der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Italien:
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Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Italien fcei

Die Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Italien
und der
Bund Evangelischer Kirchen in Italien (FCEI)

haben ein Projekt ins Leben gerufen, um Migranten, die auf Basis des Dublin III Abkommens nach Italien zurückgeschickt werden, zu unterstützen.

"The door of Europe" on Lampedusa island. Photo: Daniela Barbuscia/CELI. Leaflet: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Italy

The Reality for a Dublinati in Italy

Asal (not her real name) is an Iranian woman who, along with her two children, left her country to reach Germany. Her story is similar to that of many others who leave everything to get to the West.

Due to her strong sense of justice and her convictions in favor of fundamental human rights, she lost everything in Iran. Unable to remain silent in the face of harassment, abuse and violence against relatives and fellow citizens of all ages and genders, Asal decided to be a peace activist, went on a hunger strike and, consequently, opposed the powers that be, who accused her of being a subversive.

Asal has been beaten, suffered other forms of violence, and lost several family members. Different traumas have punctuated the life of this woman, now in her forties, who has resisted and fought (peacefully) for as long as she could but, having increased the risks for her life and for the life of her two children, she had to flee from Iran. Together with her two children, and having no alternatives, she used the small savings that she had managed to put aside and escaped from an unbearable situation, which had reached the limit. After having endured everything and having seen so many people die, she arrived in Rome on a tourist visa.

Thanks to the support of her uncles and cousins, she managed to reach them in Germany. Here she lived for nine months: she learned German, integrated herself, and the two children attended German schools with very good results. She knew and embraced the Lutheran church until, due to the

Dignità, eguaglianza, solidarietà, speranza, fraternità, accoglienza...
sono i valori fondanti che hanno stimolato la Chiesa Evangelica Luterana in Italia a intervenire in favore dei migranti cosiddetti "dublinati" e che l'hanno indotta a cooperare con la F.C.E.I. per portare avanti questo progetto insieme.

Progetto interamente finanziato:
- con i fondi dell'otto per mille dell'IRPEF destinati dai contribuenti italiani a favore della Chiesa Evangelica Luterana in Italia;
- con i fondi della rete italo-tedesca della Chiesa Evangelica Luterana.

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La Chiesa Evangelica Luterana in Italia
e la
Federazione delle Chiese Evangeliche in Italia

hanno lanciato un progetto per supportare i migranti che sono rimandati in Italia sulla base del Regolamento di Dublino

"The door of Europe" on Lampedusa island. Photo: Daniela Barbuscia/CELI. Leaflet: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Italy

Dublin Convention, she was sent back to Italy. Both Asal and the two children were referred to SPRAR in Lombardy (SPRAR is the protection system for refugees and unaccompanied minors). The situation was dramatic because Asal was in a precarious psychological situation: she was depressed, and the traumas suffered prompted her to think about ending her life.

The Dublinati Project in action

Asal was going through a very difficult time because she did not have the strength to continue to live and hope for the future, but she realized that her two children were too small, and she could not give up. Thanks to the support of the Lutheran church, she found a public organization in Lombardy that supports her psychologically and helps her to believe in a better future – to hope for a regular job and a normal life for herself and her children. In June 2019, after a few weeks of waiting, she obtained international protection with the possibility of working regularly.

Asal had taken the right path to overcome depression and her traumas but, unfortunately, her difficulties have not ended. The Lombardy SPRAR no longer has the possibility of hosting Asal and her two children and, therefore, the SPRAR Central Service ordered her transfer on 02 August 2019 to a SPRAR in Puglia in the south of Italy. Asal had to accept the transfer order so as not to lose the right to accommodation. However, her fears and despair have definitely increased. Asal is always in need of psychological support: she did not know anyone in Puglia and she was afraid to leave her Lutheran friends. The SPRAR Central Service was asked to re-evaluate the transfer decision and today, while we are telling this story, we are awaiting the decision.

The story of Asal is similar to that of many other people who undertake journeys of hope with the dream of a job and a home, or to escape situations of torture and oppression. These are people who are "guilty" of being born on the other side of the Mediterranean: they ask to be accorded the fundamental rights enshrined in various international conventions, which most European countries (including Italy) have signed, and which they formally undertook to promote.

We join with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to endorse the appeal presented to the border governments to find solutions so that the immigration control measures do not prevent access to international protection by those who need it.

Reflection on the Stories

Tony Addy

Conviviality is context-sensitive

If you read these stories together, you are immediately struck by the difference of local and national contexts. The challenges faced by a majority church, such as the Norwegian Lutheran Church, in a large city are very different in kind to those faced by a minority Protestant church in a country where Christians are also a minority, and where there are few refugees and asylum seekers, such as the Czech Republic. A similar contrast can be made between countries, and areas, with border refugee entrance points of so-called transit countries, and those of countries, which refugees would like to reach.

When we think about this from the point of view of convivial life together, maybe we can search for, and find, some common themes on the level of theology and practice, but the crucial elements of seeing the context and taking concrete action will yield different results. Yet even within these differences, we can perceive some common themes and patterns. In this chapter, we will reflect on the issues raised by the stories in terms of seeing the "other" in context, reflecting theologically, and relating that to practice. In the final sections, we will look at action for convivial life together and working for change.

Photo: Sales Solutions/Unsplash

Seeing the "other" in context

The entry point to this issue is the common experience of the churches and diaconal organizations in the four contexts – they find themselves dealing with the "other" who is seen to be different to them, meaning their identity is other than the people of the locality or the church. This is a particular issue for the traditional Protestant churches because they are, in the main, made up of people who have lived a long time in one nation or region. At one time, the Lutheran Church may even have been an expression of the mainstream culture. In other cases, churches with a long tradition also act as an anchor for a traditional minority culture or language. Out of this experience, when confronted with a different "other" person or group, as a reflex, a person may mirror the ways in which their own culture traditionally pictures, or even stereotypes, the other. This kind of reaction in the wider society is not only related to responses to migrants, asylum seekers, or refugees. In some countries, for example, one could mention the attitude of the wider society to Roma people who have lived in the area for gener-

ations. Doubtless, in many other countries there are also minorities who have different identities to the imagined national society, and who are stereotyped and marginalized. Having said that, it is also widely recognized that, in many contexts, churches and civil society have been more open to receive and welcome people who have been forced to move than national governments. This also prompts reflection on the nature of public policy, which has tended to become less welcome and, in some cases, hostile to asylum seekers and migrants.

From the perspective of convivial life together, we should also be very wary of attempts to categorize other people as a group because this ascription comes from outside and is, in fact, an exercise of the power of definition. This is one of the issues, which has to be dealt with politically because political and administrative systems are also built on classifications, which override difference and diversity. It also affects the ways in which churches and other organizations work with people by assuming commonality where no experienced commonality exists. People coming from a specific different place may have as much diversity of education, culture, and religion as people living in the country they are moving to. Just because someone is a refugee, it does not mean they have the same life experience and expectation as another refugee. Blanket terms such as "black and ethnic minority groups" are widely used to cover a multitude of differences. The stories in this booklet reveal sensitivity to this issue in examples of opening safe spaces where people can explore difference on a deeper level. Summarizing, if we start with the assumption that most churches in the Lutheran family in Europe are mainly white, we have to take great care in relationships with the people who migrate, or flee, to Europe because of the long shadow of historical events and relationships. Convivial life together is based on reciprocity and mutuality, and this means being sensitive to the issue of power, including the power to name and define the "other" in advance, through one aspect of their identity.

However, to deepen the question of seeing, in large cities such as Oslo, which have also a large immigrant population, the situation is becoming even more complex and ambiguous. The patterns of migration and the arrival of asylum seekers have, over the years, created a much more diverse European context. Previously, there have been fairly specific groups of migrants, often coming from one national context to another and, apart from the so-called guest worker system, the expectation has been that the move would be 'for life'. Nowadays, the flows are much more diverse and fluid, and you find localities with a huge diversity of positions among people who are administratively grouped together on the grounds of culture. Two people from the same country may have arrived in Europe at different times and with different interests, or they may take different positions on events in the country from which they, or their families and friends, come. This can affect relationships in the locality where they live. Also, using blanket terms for religious identity can ignore differences between different groups who, from the outside, share the same nominal faith. Given the diversity of Christianity, that should come as no surprise. However, in Europe, the identifier "Muslim", for example, is often assumed to have the same meaning for whoever describes themselves

as a Muslim. As we can also read in the story from Sweden, the experiences of men and women who migrate, or who are uprooted and forced to move, are often very different.

Conviviality in theology and practice

Baselines

In the different stories, a specific baseline appears and that is that all people are made in the image of God. This understanding is based on an interpretation of the creation story. A second baseline is linked to a number of texts in the Hebrew Bible, which point to the demand to care for marginalized people among whom are usually numbered the "foreigner in your midst." The text is linked to the experience of the people of Israel as they were foreigners in Egypt, and this reinforces the imperative to treat all people as equal to the "native born." These two strands provide a kind of mandate for working with people who arrive, moving from one place to another for whatever reason. The people of Israel should be hospitable: there are other stories, such as the story of Ruth, which illuminate care for the person who is not part of the accepted community, not only in terms of providing food, but also in terms of security. This mandate is given further importance for Christians in the New Testament, especially in the narrative of the sheep and the goats in which the issue of care for the stranger is one of the criteria by which the nations are judged.

> The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.
>
> *Leviticus 19:33,34*

Jesus and the early church

The narrative of the sheep and the goats also reminds us of the importance of seeing: It repeats several times the question, "When did we see you Lord?" The surprising answer is, when the hungry are fed and the stranger is welcomed, among others. "Seeing" turns out to be a very important theme in the gospels, and so it is in seeking conviviality. Examples abound of Jesus crossing borders and boundaries, and especially seeing or recognizing people who were definitely out of the Jewish society because of their identity or behavior. Usually, he recognizes their presence and does not immediately offer them something, but starts a dialogue, often by asking a question. Some parables also have the idea of active seeing at their core. The most well-known example is the parable of the Good Samaritan. The people who passed by on the other side (for whatever reason) saw the wounded man, but it took an outsider to see and react without asking questions about the man's identity. Neighborliness is a form of active seeing. This can give us some clues about convivial life together: it demands that we actively cross boundaries, and that we actively see the other person in their own integrity, without first making demands.

Place and Dis-place

The issue of migration – of wandering, of place and "dis-place" – are themes, which run through the biblical narrative and the life of the early church. In fact, the story of the people of Israel really begins with the story of Abraham, of him and his household being challenged to migrate to another place. This is a story of displacement and, in fact, there seems to be some positive value given to being uprooted because the people of the Hebrew bible often thought of themselves as wanderers. For the Hebrews, the God Yahweh was a wandering God in the first place. After the exile in Egypt, and before the building of the temple, the people of Israel began to locate the presence of God in the Ark of the Covenant. The ark was an object that the people could carry with them. At a certain point, the ark was captured by the Philistines: this led the people to see that God and this moveable object were not connected directly. Yahweh was not a god of space, but of creation and time. Therefore, God travelled with the people everywhere – to the ends of the earth. Nevertheless, they tried to find the Promised Land and to reconnect place and identity. At the moment, we face deep problems in Europe because people are still trying to keep a specific identity tied to a particular place. Is it possible that we can learn something for convivial life together from the idea that our God is not a God of place, that our God is not a God of a specific identity, that God wanders with people, and even goes into exile with them? On the other hand, we see that in the Hebrew bible, people have a deep need to locate the place where their spirituality can be located. To go beyond this, we have to turn to the New Testament.

God has created the whole world, and all people, and works through God's creation. People are the co-rulers and stewards of God's creation. From a creation theology perspective, all the good that is done in the world has its origin in God, no matter who it is performed by. This applies to both a good social system and to care for each person. All people are created in the image of God with an inherent sense of what is right and wrong. Everyone, therefore, has the opportunity to participate and restore creation through care.

Café of the World, Lindesberg

In the New Testament, the question of place, and its connection to identity, comes up many times, partly related to the fact that the Jewish people lived under Roman occupation where, even though their religion was tolerated, they were definitely under outside rule. The contradictions of this situation are played out in the birth, ministry, and death of Jesus. In the gospel story, even though Jesus was a boundary crosser, he still had to be challenged to go beyond the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt 15:24). Nevertheless, the possibility to travel, and the Jewish diaspora, were reasons why the Gospel was able to spread rapidly. Still, in the early church, there was an inner struggle over the gentile mission and the question of the baptism of those who were not Jews. It was a question not only of God wan-

dering with the people of Israel, but of God being for all people.

It took time to work this out, and there were disputes even within the church between different groups. However, in relation to place and "dis-place", what is interesting for our discussion of migration and uprootedness, and how as Christians we should respond, is the notion that here on earth, Christians have "no lasting city." (Heb 13:14) This can be seen in a quiescent way, but there is a long tradition that Christians and Jews should seek the welfare of the city where they are at the moment (Jer 29:7). The early church, therefore, had a special concern for the poor and marginalized. Wandering and exposure were the consequences of faith for the Christians, as it was for the Jews. It is worth recalling the Epistle to Diognetus:

> "Christians are not distinguished from the rest of humanity either in locality, speech or customs [...] they do not dwell in cities of their own [...] they dwell in their own countries as sojourners [...] every foreign country is a fatherland to them and every fatherland a foreign country."

> The text goes on:
> "The true city of the saints is in heaven, though here on earth it produces citizens which wander as though on a pilgrimage through time looking for the kingdom of eternity."

This understanding of the pilgrimage of the people of God through time, as opposed to settling on one place, echoes Jesus' refusal to let the disciples erect a monument to him, and his promise of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. Thus, we can see there is displacement, pilgrimage, and wandering at the core of traditional Judeo-Christian culture.

What does this mean for us in our work of seeking conviviality with uprooted and displaced people when we also recognize that we follow a tradition of uprootedness? At least, we recognize the positive aspect that people with uprooted lives are equal human beings with vocation and resources, as well as people having the right to have rights. The early Christians, who were wandering through the world, were set free from blind participation and could make new choices, free from past prejudice and superstition, and be critical of the structures of Empire. At the same time, they cared for people – especially sick and marginalized people – as well as for the cities where they lived. In our time, there is a resurgence of what we might call the "truth claims of place" which have a high priority. Yet, in the tradition in which we are rooted, truths may be discovered more by being a wanderer or pilgrim, and by seeing our truths in the mirror of the "other" – the uprooted or migrant person. In this way, the asylum seeker or migrant may be a gift for our understanding and faithfulness.

The European context

Even recognizing the fact that Europe is extremely diverse, during the process of reflection, we have found there are certain common themes which relate to the question of place and identity, and which affect the possibilities for convivial life together. These themes are important because they shape thinking and practice in the different contexts and

inform social and political movements. Sometimes government policies, and social and political movements, draw on Christian symbols and language, and use them to create the opposite of convivial life together: in fact, they are used to divide people and create enmity and hostility.

In our society, there is a lack of hospitality not only towards refugees who are successfully pictured by many politicians as a security threat, but also towards immigrants, who are generally perceived only to be a useful working force, which means that they should return home after their work is done. Driven by the biblical text mentioned above, we wanted to create a safe, hospitable place, where everyone is welcomed, regardless of language, religion, or political opinions.

Café Obýváček, Prague

As we found in the experience of our group, in many contexts there are groups, movements, and political policies, which are based on the idea that there are irreconcilable differences between people – between "us", identified as white Europeans within a region or nation state, and "them." The combination of the idea that Europe is both secular and Christian is used to reject those of another religion – especially Islam. This feeds a fear of losing identity, and this fear is often received by people who have been marginalized within European societies. The idea of rejecting people of another faith flies in the face of the everyday conviviality that many people in super-diverse areas experience and it can also undermine efforts at a local level to create possibilities for convivial life together through relationship building. Through reflecting on conviviality in practice and experience, an inclusive view, which is represented by many churches, including the members of the European diaconal process group, supports the view that 'we share a common humanity'.

However, the experience of seeking conviviality reveals that we do not have to subscribe to the view that we are all the same or that, to live together in solidarity and peace, we all have to be the same. Rather, we have to recognize our differences and create a safe and trustful space where difference can be acknowledged and worked on. Conviviality does not assume sameness, total agreement, or even the lack of conflict, but relationships, reciprocity, and trust. There are examples of this in the stories gathered in this book and, if we look at different religions and cultures, we can find there are many similarities but also that we can learn from the gifts of others and from the gifts of understanding that we receive. This involves the recognition that integration (if it is a useful word) means that we all change, and that assimilation is a non-starter. It involves the recognition that learning about institutions, learning the language, and learning about expected behavior may be important, but is not the most important aspect that supports convivial life together. In fact, relationships are the most important element when they are built on openness and trust.

The second issue is the assumption that, in a given space, typically the nation, there has to be a common culture, which all share. This type of thinking relates to the movements referred to above and to all forms of identitarian politics. The idea that, even in the European space, there are nations with a culture that is so different from the culture of other nations that they cannot live together, does not bear scrutiny. The diversity, which is growing in every part of Europe among those with their roots in the region, belies this fact. Many nations, if not most, are actually quite recent creations, and national languages were often imposed by governmental edict and national educational systems. Still, there are strong linguistic and national minorities in many countries. On top of that, there are differentiations due to social class, occupation, and other factors, which make the idea of a common culture, which is so radically different from other European experiences that people cannot live together, untenable. The idea of a common culture on the state level is not achievable because of the differences mentioned and the differences that are growing. The experiences of totalitarian regimes imposing a common culture should make us suspicious of the ideas of cultural purity. Related to this, but taking a broader view, is the development of the idea of a common European culture, which is sometimes identified as the Christian West that should reject different people from outside. One can, however, see the attraction of these ideas when there are so many rapid changes and so much insecurity, especially when, at the same time, migration and refugee movements continue. However, the idea of "common culture" leads to an identitarian policy of exclusion and delegitimates the presence of the "other." This is the opposite of convivial life together.

Reflecting further on this, we find it very common for people to describe their own society in terms of the traditionally endorsed monoculture, which is built on a usually imagined past. This is a device, which is used to exclude people who do not fit into that monocultural picture – we would rather say, "who cannot fit into that picture." It includes indigenous people, national minorities, and people who may have what is called a migration background. Such people are more or less excluded from the start. It is important that, when we describe society, we use inclusive and realistic concepts, images, and symbols, and, as previously mentioned, we do not categorize people by some assumed dominant characteristic, as this denies personhood. Therefore, the concept of human rights can play an important role in counterposing the idea of excluding certain people from being part of the society as it is often narrowly described and defined. The idea of inclusion being based on an alleged common culture related to place should be replaced by inclusion based on the universal declaration of human rights. This means all people should be treated equally, in spite of their differences. This is reflected in the phrase "different but equal." If a person does not have the right to have rights, they can be excluded from any society or territory that denies these rights. This is closely related to the story related from Italy concerning the so-called Dublinati and, in general, in the treatment of asylum seekers who, if denied refugee status, may end up living on the streets or being

deported to countries where they may be abused, tortured, or even executed. The asylum seeker is often placed in a "state of exception" where normal rules do not apply, and may be subject to long-term imprisonment, sometimes with very bad conditions.

The third point relates to the question of tolerance, that the different "other" should be "tolerated." This is important and it is recognized in the right to religious freedom – even though that may be curtailed in some places in Europe. Toleration allows for the fact that people arriving in a place from other contexts may bring something new and of value into the society. But toleration can be a passive approach along the lines of "live and let live."

Conviviality goes beyond toleration and seeks an active dialogue between people, concerning difference. This dialogue may promote learning and it may expose some blind spots in each culture. It may also lead to common action as we saw in the story from Oslo. But the bedrock of this is the building of relationships, and this means a receptivity of what each person brings to the table. By speaking about convivial life together, we are not talking only about tolerance and reciprocity, but also about conflicting ideas and opinions. The question concerns the need for building trustful relationships where conflict can be handled and the horizon of possibility for common action, or a common practice, developed. Tolerance may abound, even in a context where there is no relationship between the people, especially the people who are perceived to be mainstream and the marginal, or migrant, persons or groups.

At one point a few years back the question came up among the young Muslim volunteers if they could be volunteers in a Christian organisation and still stay Muslim. The project they were participating in was "Young Leaders" – aiming at training young people in leadership. To answer this question, both staff and volunteers were invited to reflect together, the facilitator being the pastor previously mentioned. It was interesting to see and observe the dialogue because the focus became common values that could be found in Islam, Christianity, and from a humanistic viewpoint: respect, dignity, justice, tolerance, and so on. This convivial approach has no hidden agenda of conversion.

CCM Oslo

Room for all

These reflections are very important for underpinning a diaconal practice, which can create a space in society where communication and relationships between diverse people can be built up and experienced. A convivial theology of inclusion, based on mutual respect, care and the search for justice, can underpin the practice of encouraging relationships across diversities. One of the most difficult boundaries to handle is that between people who see themselves in some way as part of the mainstream in relation to, for example, people with a migration background. Very often, as previously mentioned,

churches are a space, which can only be shared by people with a common identity that may be related to the mainstream society of today or some previous era or other place. The people have a story, and, in terms of mainstream, they have formal and informal power. To create a safe space means not only trust, but a kind of vulnerability, which is ready to change. This demands a long-term openness to relationship building and to common action. It means that reliance on project funding may kick-start a process when there is a perceived emergency, but relationships that will make a change need a longer-term perspective to allow the intermingling to develop, widen, and deepen.

A common phrase at the moment among churches and civil society organizations facing the ever-tightening regimes governing immigration and refugee recognition is that there is "room for all." This rhetoric may express a truth as, in the period from 2015 onwards, the churches played, and continue to play, an important role. There may be room for all, but seeking conviviality represents the effort to go beyond hospitality towards the question of living together without assuming that difference should be eradicated, or that assimilation is the goal. In these stories, we catch a glimpse of what this might mean as churches create spaces for relationship building and dialogue, and as they fight for the rights of uprooted people.

Action for conviviality

Convivial life together

The practice represented in the stories shared in this booklet reveals attempts in different ways to go beyond the kind of mindset, which juxtaposes a mainstream group and other migrant or refugee groups. This may be one of the most important contributions they make. For example, the Stovner project is led by a person who is not Norwegian by background. The specific project is embedded in a center, which focuses on the development of civil society, and this means the partners in the specific project have a bridge to many other activities. On top of that, the center is in a church building and the Church City Mission is involved, so there are a series of overlapping relationships where the binary of Norwegian and "other" is broken down. In the two stories about a café, it is clear we are talking about more than refreshment and more than small talk. In both cases, the congregation is involved and maybe there is a chance that the guest and host division underlies the projects, but through the narrative, we see the complex and multifaceted relationships emerging.

The aim of the "Guide" project is to give the participants an experience of being included in a fellowship, practice and learn the Norwegian language; become familiar with Norwegian society and the labor environment; and experience being a resource person in the local community. It is expected that all three group members – not only the newly arrived participant – will benefit from this project. The project organizers believe that this will help inclusion into local communities and, thus, be a basis for a convivial living together at work,

at school, through the children's participation in sport and cultural activities, etc.

CCM, Oslo

In the secular world, integration was originally seen as being easily resolved if people learn the language, know about the history and culture of a country, enter gainful employment, and have access to education and healthcare. All this may be important, but what seems to be as important is the idea of belonging, which is an affective rather than an instrumental idea. A sense of belonging cannot be taught and cannot be enshrined in a policy because it depends on relationships. There are steps, which can be taken towards belonging, but it also depends on the vocation of the different actors. If belonging is a fundamental human need, there is a need for safe spaces where trustful relationships can be built up and where people are recognized in their difference. It means an openness to learn from each other and to develop common practices, shared stories, and "rituals." This means that the normal feeling and atmosphere of a place may change, the food served may differ, and there may be changes in the worship (if we are speaking of a church). In any case, the worship and everyday life of a congregation must be affected if the context changes. Belonging involves finding a space where there is respect for all, and where the boundaries between people are broken down. Belonging in a country or place means having the correct legal status, which is fundamental, but a deeper sense of belonging only comes through relationships. Research shows that belonging is essential for the well-being of people with a migration background.

… most Czech people do not have the chance to meet refugees; but the same goes for other immigrants. Because they lack experience in meeting people of different cultures, languages, or religions, they are more willing to believe in a great deal of the misinformation and fake news, which circulates in the media. Distrust and hatred are most often directed towards Muslims, whilst the vast majority of Czechs have never knowingly met a person who is a Muslim. On the other hand, social isolation and the lack of participation in community life is threatening for refugees and immigrants.

Café Obýváček, Prague

It is also interesting that these projects, together with the Dublinati project in different ways, hold up a critical mirror to the mainstream definition of society. They all embody a vision of common humanity, and that people can live together and find belonging and solidarity across diverse barriers and boundaries. Church-based organizations are sometimes critiqued for protecting their own interests, but, in concrete ways, these stories reveal a more inclusive and hopeful approach to that of the wider society, and so, in this case, they hold up a mirror to the negative attitudes and policies which have gradually come to a more dominant position in discourse and policy. The contradictory element is that they also are implicitly, and maybe

explicitly, critical of those who would use Christianity as a bulwark against immigrants and refugees coming, or as a counter to the idea that the "next" to whom Christians should act as a neighbor is restricted to those with the same identity. These projects exemplify practices, which contradict the idea that it is not possible for people of vastly different backgrounds, spanning geography, culture, religion, and spirituality as well as the diverse ages and motivations for 'moving', to live together.

Conviviality and working for change

Being in relationship with refugees, immigrants, and people with a migration background begins a process of change for everyone involved. It could be called an "integration process," if we understand integration as "all change." We get a few glimpses of this in the stories, for example in Lindesberg the church had a relationship with refugees coming to the locality over a longer term, but found they needed a change of structure, and also a new focus on the experience of women refugees and asylum seekers. The church did not have the resources and premises for such an expansion, so had to change its working model from doing things on its own to going out and making links with other people and organizations of civil society, public authority, and even a private firm. This led to a change not only for the people in the locality, but also for the local church. As a footnote to this project, it would be interesting to see how the relationships formed during the project developed once the café was closed. This is important because building relationships and reciprocal action is essentially a long-term business. The Dublinati project is another example where a close relationship with refugees, which started with refugee 'support', led to challenging government decisions and eventually the whole system for managing refugees in the country and the European Union.

> The story of Asal is similar to that of many other people who undertake journeys of hope with the dream of a job and a home, or to escape situations of torture and oppression. These are people who are "guilty" of being born on the other side of the Mediterranean: they ask to be accorded the fundamental rights enshrined in various international conventions, which most European countries (including Italy) have signed, and which they formally undertook to promote.
>
> *Working with Dublinati in Italy*

Conclusion

As we see in these four stories, seeking conviviality in local contexts has an impact on the understanding of working with people on the move. It puts the ideas of creating a safe space for trust and dialogue in the center of the picture. This turns out to be one of the most critical issues in the European context, faced with identitarian movements and the return to old ideas of identity as a fixed attribute linked to place, and reflected in religion and culture. Conviviality

turns attention away from identity and towards relationships and sees relationships as reciprocal and as an opportunity for learning from each other. This approach also challenges traditional ideas of integration as eventual assimilation, and creates a space where difference is affirmed and where ascribed "identity labels" are not required. In terms of traditional ideas of integration based in policy prescriptions, the approach through relationships and reciprocity is important for the feeling of belonging, which is essential for well-being and life together.

On the political level, the search for convivial life together recognizes human rights as a basis and the need for people on the move (especially for asylum seekers) to have assurance that they can live in the place where they are as well as access other rights (e.g., employment, health, social care, and education). Based on developed relationships, churches and diakonia involved in working with people on the move also have a solid foundation for working on changes in policy and political priorities with, and on behalf of, people on the move.

Photo: Priscilla Du Preez/Unsplash

Marks of Conviviality

Tony Addy

Introduction

After reading the stories and reflecting on them, we now want to gather together some of the key elements, which form the framework for the next, steps in the process towards 'conviviality – diaconal life in diversity'. The chapter brings together some of the more important 'headlines' that will form the basis of a new document which will be called 'Marks of Conviviality'. They are necessarily brief statements because the European Solidarity Group has worked on these ideas in detail. For those who want to dig further, the bibliography at the end of the book references the key sources.

The chapter is divided into:

- Conviviality as a Core Concept
- A Convivial Approach to Diaconal Practice
- Conviviality with People on the Move

Three other books in this series will elaborate on aspects of conviviality particularly related to:

- Conviviality and the Diaconal Church
- Conviviality, Diakonia, and the Church
- Convivial Church and Radical Welcome

The fifth volume will draw the whole concept together by integrating the thinking reflected in the European Diaconal Process and expressed in the various publications so far. The whole series is intended to be a learning resource, which can be used by different groups as they seek to implement conviviality as diaconal life in diversity.

Conviviality as a Core Concept

Three Dimensions of Conviviality - Vocation, Dignity and Justice

There are three dimensions of conviviality, which were identified as important elements in the process. The first can be summarized in this way:

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

This is an important foundation because it recognizes that the 'other' is the bearer of God's call whatever their situation. The core text is probably the story of the man who fell among thieves and was perceived in his need by a passing Samaritan. But this implies the second important foundational element, which is the recognition that the 'other' is made in the image of God and therefore has intrinsic dignity, regardless of performance or ability. This dignity can also be partially expressed in the notion of human rights. So, the second dimension is:

'Every person is made in the image of God and represents a challenge to our understanding of inclusivity'

However, there is a need for a third dimension, because a personal and relational approach is not adequate on its own. In so many cases, human dignity and flourishing are marred by the impact of social, economic, political and even church structures and policies. It is not enough to express personal care, because we are all situated in contexts shaped by powerful structures. Therefore, to promote convivial life together we have to focus on those structures, which shape and, in many cases, disfigure life together. It means a concern for economic

and political structures, for work and employment, welfare and other aspects of common life. It implies a commitment to equality and justice, and this should be linked to advocacy with the people affected. Summarizing this, we could say:

'Diakonia seeks convivial life together by working for justice, participation and equality'

Conviviality, Borders and Boundaries

Convivial life together implies working on the borders between people, whether they be political borders or cultural and religious borders, or borders connected to personal identity. Recalling that all are made in the image of God and that Jesus in his ministry was always crossing the important borders and boundaries of his day, we could summarize this attitude and practice as follows:

'Convivial life together means crossing the borders that divide us from other people'

This means going out of our own enclosed spaces, which is sometimes difficult for churches to achieve. It means giving up the idea that as Christians in each context we express a normative religious and cultural framework. This becomes clear when we consider the virtue of hospitality, which shapes a great deal of Christian social practice. We notice that the one who offers hospitality retains the power to define the relationship and the power to decide when it is time for the one offered hospitality to leave. A hospitable approach is certainly to be preferred to rejection, but conviviality pushes us to ask how we can live together and what the contribution of each to 'life together' in fullness could be. So, we could formulate it like this:

'Convivial life together implies that all have a contribution to make, and all may need the 'gift' of the other'

Conviviality Overcoming Fear

One of the factors, which destroys conviviality, is fear, and there are many fears in the present context. As well as fear of the 'different other', there is the fear of economic insecurity and even food insecurity, the fear of losing a place to live, of losing access to health care or education. Such fear is made worse by the feeling that the 'other' places one's identity in jeopardy. By building on relationships and conversation, convivial life together breaks down the boundaries and lessens the fear by encouraging trust and openness. Gradually we can learn to act without fear. We could therefore express this as follows:

'Convivial relationships based on open sharing and trust can overcome fear and empower people to act'

In order to overcome fear through such open sharing there is the necessity to construct safe and convivial spaces. Safety or 'safeguarding' is not only an attitude of respect and care related to dignity and equality, but can also be expressed in the design of a space, or in the design of a building which may encourage access and express safety and inclusion. It also means a space, which respects different moments in life – intense sharing in a group, small conversations and even silence and being alone. This implies that:

'Conviviality is nurtured by ensuring that spaces are accessible, open to sharing everyday life and profound thought, and also that they are relationally safe'

Conviviality instead of Tolerance

Tolerance is very often seen as a virtue, but even if we can agree on this, from the perspective of conviviality it has some limitations. In particular, it can be expressed in the form of disregard for what the 'other' does or thinks, so long as it doesn't affect 'me or my group' or even 'my church'. It can lead towards a closed communitarianism. Therefore, in our thinking and practice we have to go beyond tolerance. One approach, which moves thinking and practice in this direction, is Diapraxis, a concept that was developed by the Danish theologian Lissi Rasmussen. She proposed a living dialogical process, which accompanies or may lead to common praxis. Diapraxis implies talking together across diversities and seeking a 'horizon of possibilities' towards the transformation of the shared reality or wider context.

'Convivial life together involves people of diverse identities talking and acting together in order to work for change in their everyday reality and also in the wider context'

Mainstream cultures very often ascribe an identity to the 'different other' and start to relate to them on the basis of that identity. However, we know that 'naming' someone or some situation is an act of power – of taking power in defining the other. A convivial approach allows space for the other person to affirm and name their own identity. What we 'see' as the main identity (e.g., being female, being poor, being a person of color, living with a disability etc.) may not be the identity, which is chosen by the person, and it may in fact 'trap' them in that identity. The combination of different aspects of identity is specific to the person because different dimensions of identity intersect in each person with different consequences. This has consequences for the way in which the church and diakonia respond to diversity.

'Seeking conviviality overcomes the power of 'naming the other' by adopting an open attitude to receive the specific way the "other" describes themself'

Convivial Relationships

People relate to each other by being receptive to each other's particular story. In fact, when you meet another person it is habitual to make an unconscious assessment of 'who' the other person is, particularly if they seem to be different in some way. One's personal story is very important because our biography and socialization are the basis for practice, whether it be professional practice, the practice of volunteering or the practice of everyday life. People 'embody' their biography so when you meet another person it is a meeting of stories. These stories change over time and, through working together for empowerment and transformation, stories also change. It is important to create a space where stories can be safely shared.

'Convivial life together is supported by having a safe context where stories can be shared and the consequences for practice worked on personally and collectively'

Creating the 'space' where conviviality can flourish requires an openness to the 'other', which is non-judgmental, and without the patronizing attitude, which closes off the possibilities for common action and reflection among equals. This is a critical question for diakonia and for the church because very often, generalized negative attitudes towards certain 'other' people or groups in society affect,

consciously or sub-consciously, the attitudes and practice of diakonia, whether diaconal practice is carried out by volunteers or paid workers.

'Conviviality is possible when there is open communication between people in all their diversity and when there is open reflection on socially constructed negative attitudes towards different "others" '

A Convivial Approach to Diaconal Practice

A Convivial Approach to Time

In modern society, the approach to time is mediated by money and the search for efficiency and a higher rate of return on investments. This is very often a form of oppression. When people are unemployed or receive social assistance, it is also the case that the use of time is defined by the authorities and breaking this agreement leads to loss of benefit. This is also oppressive. Many diaconal projects are constructed within a similar framework and this brings about many difficulties in reality. If outcomes are defined quantitatively and time is limited to the 'project time', this can also be damaging to the effectiveness of the project or process. Therefore, diaconal work by a church or diaconal organization should reflect critically on time frames so that the time needed for work with people respects their time concept and changing needs and issues.

'Building life in conviviality takes time and must not be a pre-planned or linear process, and therefore diaconal work towards convivial life together should be based on long-term relationships where people have the time to 'own the process' and implement common praxis which is sustainable'

A Convivial Approach to Diaconal Work

Diaconal work is very often based on a so-called needs analysis and very often, this analysis misses a couple of important points. To start with needs implies the basis on a kind of 'deficit' model of the person or situation, and such a negative approach places people and groups in a position where they can simply be the recipients of a service to meet those needs. This deficit-based viewpoint often neglects the implicit knowledge, skills and experience of the people affected and situates diaconal work as possessing the 'answer'.

'Convivial life in diversity is built on the knowledge, skills and gifts of people, including those usually defined as 'beneficiaries'! Reciprocity is the key and sharing stories is the approach'.

The development of diaconal work involves collaboration, which is inclusive in its approach. It aims for co-creation and co-responsibility. Partnership is too often considered at an institutional level, but the primary partnership and accountability is with and to those who are participants, normally thought of as 'service users'. This requires an understanding of the fundamental equality of people as made in the image of God and a resistance to stereotyped labelling.

'Conviviality is based on a partnership between all actors and the promotion of co-production, co-responsibility and mutual accountability'

A Convivial Approach to Practice

The basic starting point towards building convivial life together is what has been termed the 'going out model', which implies that diaconal work is strongly related to the diverse life worlds of people

and recognizes that systems are very often excluding factors because of the diversity of values, norms and standards as well as different cultures of communication.

'Seeking convivial life together implies a willingness to 'go out' concretely and figuratively to be with people in their everyday-life world reality and not to create barriers which prevent sharing life together'

Because of the commitment to being close to everyday life and not arriving with pre-formed 'answers', diaconal work involves dealing with power gaps and perceptions and the creation of space, where compassion and socially sensitive listening express empathy. This implies an inductive approach, which starts with people's everyday life and the issues they confront and builds trust, innovation and accountability.

'Conviviality as a basis for diaconal work recognizes that pre-formed models of work with people may express imposed ideas and it should therefore be based on a reciprocal and inductive approach to working for change'

A Convivial Approach to Advocacy & Campaigning

Advocacy is a central aspect of building convivial life together. As the process of work develops, the issues people face with existing power holders and present policies become clear and are expressed in the language of the people affected. Because diaconal work is close to people and is based on trust, advocacy also has to be built on a partnership. It is not a question of becoming 'the voice of marginalized people' but of people expressing their own views on the basis of reflected experience. This is a process of empowerment and transformation. Conviviality may result in alternatives, but it may also support the work for much needed changes in politics, policy and practice.

'Conviviality may be impeded by the actions of decision-makers, and diaconal work and the diaconal church working for convivial life together support advocacy with and sometimes on behalf of marginalized groups'

In some situations where there is a need for political change in order to support convivial life together, it is important to organize with people - those affected and others - to press for changes. This is a different approach to advocacy because it recognizes that the changes needed will not just be related to present policies and practices but require a more fundamental shift in the systemic approach. This may be on the local level, or more widely. It may be in order to remedy an injustice or to prevent action, which would further disadvantage people.

'Convivial life together cannot be built on injustice and the maltreatment of particular groups of marginalized people. Therefore, based on praxis with people and working towards conviviality, diaconal actors will work with people to protest an unjust situation at present or to stop a negative development'

Conviviality with People on the Move

Introduction

There are some features of conviviality, which relate especially to diaconal work with 'people on the move'. In particular, in the stories we have focused on uprooted people who are fleeing from war or

persecution or from a place, which has experienced an environmental catastrophe. It can equally refer to people who have moved because their life and economy had become unsustainable for a variety of reasons. In the general discussion above, we mentioned the concept of 'hospitality', which is often used in relation to work with people on the move, and we pointed to the limitations of that word. Here we would like to suggest a number of aspects of conviviality, which come to the fore in relation to people on the move.

Conviviality, Relationships, Recognition and Justice

As we can learn from many stories shared in the 'Seeking Conviviality' process, relationships are fundamental to the development of a sense of belonging. There are many factors involved here, but this basic understanding has also been shown to be the case in a number of research projects. The quality of relationships is seen to be essential, and this means taking care to avoid any stereotyped views or the assumption that all people on the move have similar needs and experiences. Even people from the same country or having the same faith or confessional background will express their diversity. One element, which is very important, is to build up trusting, differentiated relationships. This leads to the recognition of people in their specificity and avoids putting people into categories.

'Conviviality in practice avoids generalizing people's experience and creates trusted space for people to share their story and build up their relationships, which leads to recognition and a sense of 'belonging', which is fundamental to well-being'

On the other hand, people on the move are often victims of injustice and suffer continuing injustice in everyday life. This is because in most contexts, policies are geared towards diminishing the freedom of certain people to move and towards creating a harsh climate, which affects everyday life and well-being. Whilst people who have fled violence may need a great deal of support, it is often not available and the system of 'official recognition' excludes many people who then enter a world of invisible existence as far as the authorities are concerned. This is a great threat in everyday life and, as well as offering support, health care etc., there is a need for political action in relation to the situation of people and families and to change the policies towards people on the move.

'The policies and practices of governments and municipalities as well as the attitudes in the wider society often undermine the possibility of a convivial life together in peace with justice. Therefore, political action is called for and churches and civil society should support people and work to change the political decisions which prevent conviviality'

In working with people on the move, it is very important to address the question of power because usually people's identity and status are determined by secular powers. But power can also be expressed in subtle ways by churches, which open their doors and welcome people on the move, relate to them. People who have migrated for whatever reason have a great deal of resourcefulness, skills, knowledge and resilience, and relationships should be based on mutuality.

'Convivial life in diversity recognizes the power which can be expressed in relationships between those who, whether as paid workers or volunteers, support people on the move. Convivial life together is based on mutuality and working together with people on the move and not simply providing services'.

Conviviality and Integration

The first observation is the general one that much of the work with people on the move is focused on the 'integration' of people into the society and economy to which they have recently moved. Very often, there are assumptions behind 'integration', which remain unexamined. For example, people often use 'integration' as a synonym for 'assimilation', which is an unrealistic and damaging concept for most people who have moved from one place to another, especially if they are forced to move. Conviviality implies a more reciprocal approach to working with people than integration, and certainly more reciprocal than assimilation. To live together in conviviality does not presuppose that people become alike, and integration rightly understood implies that both 'parties' change. It is important to recognize that people on the move often reveal realities of the receiving community, which need changing.

'Convivial life together with people on the move implies a mutual learning process which may also lead to changes in the so-called 'host' society and its policies and practices'

Secondly, convivial life together with people on the move challenges the church in its everyday life and diaconal practice to continue the ministry of Jesus in crossing borders and relating to people in relation to their concrete situation, regardless of their background. This was very disturbing for the Jews of Jesus' day who saw themselves as the unique chosen people of God. It was also challenging for the early church, which was also continually challenged to overcome its limits in terms of the new identity in Christ – in Christ all are one. This tendency continues down to our own day, where churches may take on a specific natural cultural heritage from one tradition and therefore have difficulties when they encounter people on the move. Even those from the same confession but from another context and life experience may have a different understanding of faith and its meaning for everyday life. It is even more so the case if people come from a different faith tradition or worldview. In the same way, it is important to recognize that each faith tradition has diverse expressions and also that, for people on the move, faith may be an important 'portable' aspect of identity.

'Seeking conviviality with people from diverse backgrounds implies openness and a readiness for a change of perspective on faith and the practice of life together'

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Resources and Links

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Links

LWF Website: www.lutheranworld.org
interdiac on-line space: www.online-space.eu

Conviviality with People on the Move

This book focuses on four stories from different corners of Europe. What they have in common is action by local congregations or diaconal organizations in the face of the growing diversity experienced across the region. They illustrate different types of response, but they are all contextually relevant in relation to the growth of diversity and the political and cultural situations. The particular focus is on "uprooted people" – the experience of those who are forced to move out of their own country for a variety of reasons and who come to Europe. All four stories come from the personal, day-to-day work of members of the LWF European Diaconal Process, linked to the theme "Seeking Conviviality: Re-forming Community Diakonia in Europe."

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