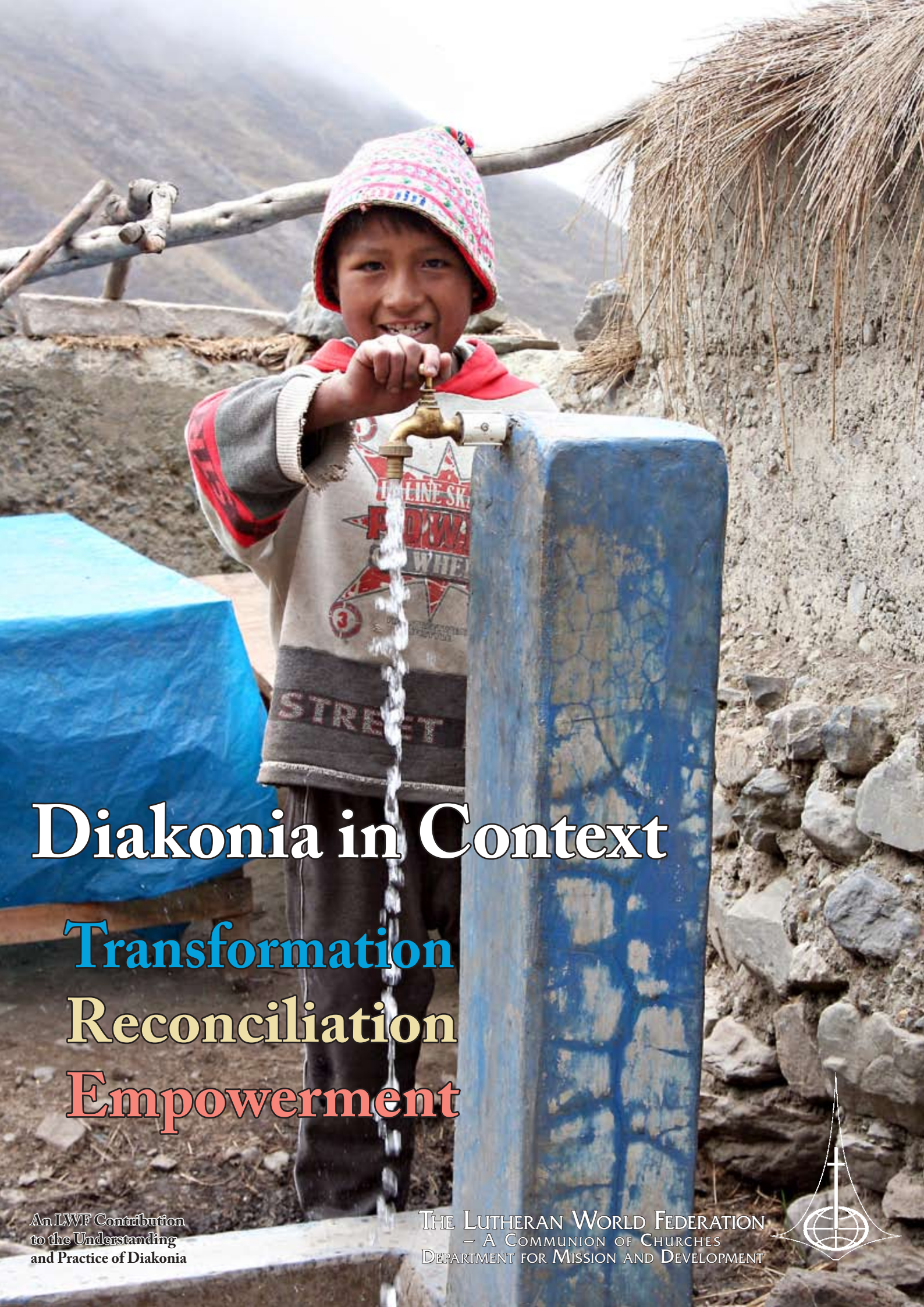

Diakonia in Context

Transformation
Reconciliation
Empowerment

An LWF Contribution
to the Understanding
and Practice of Diakonia

The Lutheran World Federation
– A Communion of Churches
Department for Mission and Development

DIAKONIA IN CONTEXT:

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Editorial assistance:
LWF/DMD Staff

Design and Layout:
LWF/OCS Staff

Cover:
LWF/OCS Staff
Photo: Karita Laisi/The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM)

Edited by
Rev. Dr Kjell Nordstokke
on behalf of the Lutheran World Federation

Photo research and design:
LWF Department for Mission and Development
LWF Office for Communication Services

Photo Credits:
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Hauptarchiv der v. Bodelschwinghschen Anstalten Bethel
Dieter Lorenz
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Eva Grollova
Jaap Schep
Eva-Sibylle Vogel-Mfato
Sally Lim
Jan Silar
Faith Longakit
K. Miller-Holland
Laury Rinker

Published by:
The Lutheran World Federation
150 route de Ferney
P.O. Box 2100
CH-1211 Geneva 2
Switzerland
E-mail: **info@lutheranworld.org**
Web: **www.lutheranworld.org**

ISBN 978-3-905676-96-9
Printed by Imprimerie Brailly, France

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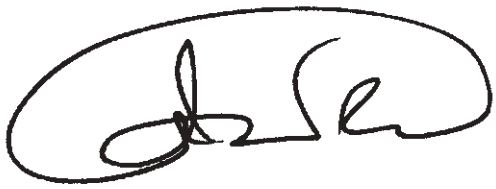
Foreword

Students of theology and missiology have spent countless hours discussing and, in most instances, producing volumes of documents on the subject of "*Diakonia*". A foreword to a document such as this one is not a place to rehearse or evaluate the various positions held by different schools of thought on this issue. Nonetheless, it is refreshing to be reminded when reading this publication "Diakonia in Context..." that indeed diakonia constitutes the *"DNA"* i.e. the very being of what it means to be Church and of the self-understanding of every congregation. Diakonia unites the Church, hence it cannot be outsourced to some specialized agency or group of professionals. Undoubtedly, the Church needs professionals with expertise and skills for its ministry. However, it should be stated that professionalism carries tendencies that easily lead to the "*e-NGO-fication*" of the self-understanding of the Church.

Therefore, this publication is offered to the churches as a Lutheran contribution to the ongoing ecumenical discussion regarding the understanding of *diakonia* and its relevant structures. From this perspective, diakonia is the embodiment, through human actions, of God's Love for the world. It is love graciously given to God's creation and the fundamental basis on which interfaith dialogue and diapraxis is rendered possible. Such dialogue is urgently needed in the context of complex debates related to climate change and its impact, and also as the Christian community reviews the role of caregivers in a world where caring for others is increasingly being commercialized.

I therefore commend this publication for use by pastors, students and ecumenical Bible study groups. It challenges every reader to question continuously the relevancy of the diaconal structures and practices in churches and congregations.



Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko
General Secretary

Acknowledgements

As stated in the Introduction to this document, many have participated in the process of producing it and merit acknowledgement for their contributions:

- The participants of the regional workshops and the global consultation on diakonia (Addis Ababa, October 2009)

- The members of the core group who steadily accompanied the writing of the document and provided important input

- Member churches and individuals who sent in responses when the document was on hearing before the final version was drafted

- DMD staff and other colleagues within the Ecumencial Center

- A special thanks to Stefan Niederberger who has assisted the DMD director at all stages of this process and brought the product through its many stages.

Financial support from DMD partner agencies has made it possible to finance the process of reflecting together on diakonia within the Lutheran Communion, as well as the production of this document and its translation into all LWF working languages. Special grants from Diakonhjemmet Foundation in Oslo, Norway, Church of Sweden, and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD) secured this process in times of financial difficulties. To all our partners, our sincere gratitude and appreciation.

We are very grateful for the photos that partner organizations and photographers shared with us free of charge. Without these generous gifts and the funds from partner organizations, this project would not have been possible.

INTRODUCTION

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Introduction

Rev. Dr Kjell Nordstokke

This document, *Diakonia in Context*, is the outcome of a process of bringing together experiences of how diakonia is practiced and understood in the life of the Lutheran Communion. The purpose of the process is to provide a shared platform for how diakonia is reflected in its identity and practice. Knowing that contexts are very different and that diaconal work is guided by a variety of traditions, it is hoped that such a platform can facilitate the communication between us and strengthen our working together as partners in God's mission. In this process, this document is meant to give some basic directions for a discussion that hopefully will continue within the different regions and contribute to an ongoing learning process that all of us can benefit from.

Acknowledging that we all are in such process of learning, a strict definition of diakonia is not given in this document. Nevertheless, some fundamental assumptions are maintained. One is that diakonia is a theological concept that points to the very identity and mission of the Church. Another is its practical implication in the sense that diakonia is a call to action, as a response to challenges of human suffering, injustice and care for creation. This rather open-ended understanding of diakonia is also due to the fact that the concept itself does not allow for a precise definition, not even when used in the Greek New Testament. The present use of the word has largely been shaped by how Christians have tried to be faithful to the biblical call to be a neighbor throughout the history of the Church.

This is also the case within the ecumenical movement where the term diakonia has gained importance during the last decades, with many sensing that it expresses an important dimension of the churches' call to respond to challenges in today's world. In this understanding, diakonia is seen to be an integral part of mission in its bold action to address the root causes of human suffering and injustice. *Diakonia in Context* reflects this process and intends to contribute to it from a Lutheran perspective and in light of how the Lutheran family is engaged in diakonia.

In this endeavor, it follows the position of the LWF mission document, *Mission in Context*[1] that presents mission in an holistic way, encompassing proclamation, service (diakonia) and advocacy. That document, published in 2004, did not provide a thorough presentation of how diakonia is practiced and understood, and it was determined that another publication focusing on this matter should be produced.

Diakonia in Context intends to respond to this need. It begins with a brief analysis of the context and points to some of the contemporary global trends and challenges to diakonia. The second part of the document gives a theological introduction to the understanding of diakonia. The third part describes how diakonia is carried out in its different expressions from individual engagement to well-organized activities, locally and internationally.

The concept of holistic mission as developed in *Mission in Context* is maintained. According to this understanding, diakonia is an integral part of mission. The discussion of how this is done, however, continues. One reason for this is the different contexts in which the Church lives with its cultural, religious and political environment. There is no single model for holistic mission that can be applied in all contexts, and this has consequences for how the different dimensions of mission are related to each other. It also has to do with the fact that for some, the word 'mission' is used in a sense where proclamation is the primary focus point. Others understand mission more comprehensively—in line with the mission document—to include both proclamation and service. A particular concern for many engaged in diaconal work is that its action has to be shaped according to the context and the nature of its work. These concerns should not allow for a separation between mission and diakonia, as has sometimes been the case, but should urge all of us to continue to reflect on how the different dimensions of mission are interconnected and mutually support each other.

The 2004 mission document introduced three concepts as hermeneutical keys for understanding mission today: transformation, reconciliation and empowerment. These terms are also very helpful for diakonia as they clearly point to the directions of diaconal work. They should not be interpreted as meaning that one comes first and leads to the other, but should be seen as parallel and interactive processes, all of which have their origin in God's gracious care for creation and salvific action in Jesus Christ. Nor should these three concepts be seen as exclusive, but rather in relation to other important concepts such as healing, guiding and sustaining.

This document is first of all addressed to church leaders and diaconal workers of different capacities. It is intended to strengthen their commitment to diakonia and equip them in their daily work. Regional consultations on diakonia have identified that training for diakonia is a major challenge in the churches and that training material is needed. Hopefully, *Diakonia in Context* can also be of help in theological institutions that consider including diakonia in their teaching programs.

The writing of this document has been guided by a process of regional and global consultations from Johannesburg 2002 and its focus on prophetic

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1 *Mission in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment. An LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Mission*. LWF, Geneva, 2004.

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diakonia, to Addis Ababa 2008 that brought together the principal elements of the shared learning process to date.[2] To all who have participated in these events, we express our appreciation and thanks for their contributions and insight. It has not been possible to portray all the rich variety of experiences in the churches; only some samples are given representing the multiform unfolding of profound commitment to diaconal service. It is hoped that the reception process of this document will give more justice to this variety of experiences and affirm the polycentric nature of the worldwide communion. It is also hoped that this process will strengthen our commitment to each other and help us to network better as partners in God's mission.

A core group of six persons from different regions was appointed to accompany the process of producing *Diakonia in Context*: Gustavo Driau from Argentina, Eva Grollová from the Czech Republic, Rebecca Larson from the USA, Dieter Lorenz from Germany, Selma Shejavali from Namibia and Jongkers Tampubolon from Indonesia. A final word of acknowledgment to them for their support and insight that strongly contributed to the outcome of this process.

Geneva, July 2009
Kjell Nordstokke
Director of the LWF Department for Mission and Development

[2] The report from the Addis Ababa consultation is published in *Serving the Whole Person. The Practice and Understanding of Diakonia Within the Lutheran Communion. Documentation 54/2009*. LWF, Geneva. It also contains reports from the regions, including findings and recommendations from regional workshops.

PART I: THE CONTEXT OF DIAKONIA

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Part I: The context of diakonia

1. Why is reading the context necessary?

All people live and act within specific historic contexts. The Bible announces God's action in the world within specific historic contexts and very often where there is human suffering. The Old Testament narrative of the Exodus relates God's intervention within concrete experiences of oppression: "*I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed I know their sufferings.*" (Exodus 3:7). In a similar way, God's incarnation in Jesus Christ happened in a particular social, economic, political, religious, and cultural context that shaped his ministry.

Diaconal action, understood as integral to the Church's mission in today's world, is also conditioned and challenged by concrete contexts. In order to be relevant, diakonia "requires prayerful discernment of the signs of the times and a faithful reading of the contexts."[1]

Such reading of the context is a complex endeavor due to the fact that all contexts are multifaceted and require an interdisciplinary approach. As an illustration, the challenge of the HIV and AIDS pandemic cannot only be dealt with from a

[1] *Mission in Context*, p. 10.

medical perspective; its social, economic, cultural and religious implications demand attention in order to be fully understood. Suffering relates to all dimensions, as do care and transformation.

The analysis of the context has to be critical, raising questions and revealing assumptions. It must particularly include voices that tend to be neglected, both in Church and society. It is especially important to pay attention to stories of marginalized and excluded people, and to their version of why things are the way they are, and where they see hope and possible change. In this process of knowing, analyzing and categorizing the context, it is especially important to protect space for the perspectives of women and young people.

Diakonia can only fulfill its call and play an active role in shaping a better future while initiating processes of transformation, when the unique giftedness, human dignity and daily experience of each person are respected. All people should have the opportunity to not only tell their stories, but have them heard and valued by others. Only then can all play an active role in shaping a better future and processes of transformation be initiated.

As faith-based action, diakonia connects the reading of the context to the reading of the Holy Scripture. Stories of suffering and oppression in today's reality may be enlightened and informed by similar stories in the Bible. But even more, the biblical witness reminds us of God's unconditional love and care for the suffering and marginalized, and God's promise of future and hope.

For diakonia, reading the context is never a goal in itself. Its purpose is to mobilize diaconal action and make sure that such action is well considered for the sake of people in need. It helps to set priorities and formulate objectives for shared action, and to identify work methods that are effective and based on diaconal values. It brings consciousness regarding available resources, awareness of potentials and limitations, and of possible alliance partners.

2. Global trends marking local contexts

Our time is one where the local context cannot shape its life in isolation. All local situations are impacted by broader economic, religious, social, cultural and political trends. In addition, the reality of globalization to a large degree determines ecological, economic, social, cultural and even religious life worldwide.

The LWF document, *Mission in Context,* lists "*The complex effects of globalization*" as the first issue among "*Changing global realities affecting global and local contexts.*" It points to the ambiguous nature of globalization. It is beyond the scope of this document to provide a full analysis of the complexities of globalization, its challenges and opportunities.

On the one hand, globalization has brought a number of benefits in different aspects of life, such as communication technology and scientific knowledge. It has also increased awareness of social issues and human suffering around the world, and one's ability to react and respond to crises. In fact, it is possible to point to achievements that have made life easier for millions of people. For instance, more children are given the opportunity for education, and more people have access to clean water than ever before. Initiatives to combat serious illnesses such as tuberculosis and malaria show encouraging results. Much of this has been possible due to global efforts such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) launched by the United Nations (UN) in 2001.

On the other hand, there are also negative impacts of globalization, many of which are severe. This is especially the case when we consider economic globalization as shaped by institutions and practices of international finance and business. "*Economic globalization is driven by the assumption that the 'invisible hand' of the market, if allowed relatively free reign, will assure the optimum good as each individual*

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pursues his or her economic gain. Human beings are viewed primarily as individuals with insatiable wants or desires, who are competitively seeking to acquire or 'have' more—rather than 'being' in community with others. The goals that dominate are unlimited economic growth, productivity, ownership and control[, they] are what matter, along with a willingness to use nearly any means for the sake of higher profits."[2]

Economic globalization has many effects. One of the most negative is that it has caused a growing gap between the richest and the poorest in the world. In addition, forces of economic globalization such as transnational corporations are exempted from political control and democratic decision-making. Nevertheless, they have power to determine the future of whole nations, especially when they act in alliance with large nations whose political and economic agendas are closely related, in line with the empires of the past.

Consumerism, pollution and the threatened, fragile ecosystem are other negative effects of economic globalization. Recent developments have focused attention on two additional issues that have caused new concerns and fear: the fragility of financial systems and the dramatic consequences of climate change, especially for the poorest and most vulnerable countries in the world.

These developments lift up poverty as an urgent challenge. According to UN figures, in countries where income differentials are widening, at least 80 % of humanity lives on less than 10 USD a day. UNICEF reports that up to 30,000 children die each day due to poverty.

In many societies, the feminization of poverty can be observed as impoverishment that is deeper in female-headed households and particularly among older women. Women also often have fewer economic and political opportunities to improve their well-being and the well-being of their families. Poverty traps women in multiple layers of discrimination and hinders their ability to claim their rights.

After listening to reports on dehumanizing conditions imposed by poverty, an LWF consultation held in Africa on Poverty and the Mission of the Church in September 2006, stated: "*In times like these, the sinful forces that perpetuate poverty must be denounced. Such forces continue to exploit our lands and rob millions of people of their God-given right to daily bread and a decent life. These forces include*

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2 Karen L. Bloomquist (ed.): *Communion, Responsibility, Accountability. Responding as a Lutheran Communion to Neoliberal Globalization.* Documentation No 50, LWF Geneva 2004, pp. 25-26.

unjust economic systems, the escalation of conflict and violence and the forced flight of people from their ancestral lands. The spread of HIV and AIDS is exacerbated by poverty. Human beings are compelled to live under bridges and forced to search in dumps for their daily bread. Men, women and children have no more tears and are robbed of their rights, gifts and potential. The number of young people who lack jobs and hope continues to increase alarmingly. In nearly every situation of impoverishment, the burden borne by women, who groan in constant travail, is overwhelming. Such crushing conditions are intolerable and sinful."[3]

Migration is one major expression of this reality. There are unprecedented numbers of refugees and displaced persons. In 2007, nearly 32 million refugees were registered worldwide in more than 70 countries. Of these, almost 14 million were internally displaced people. In addition, millions have left their home countries in search of a better future for themselves and their families, trying to escape poverty or situations of insecurity. As migrant workers, they do not always share the rights and access to facilities which longtime residents have. They are vulnerable to abuse, and are often also exposed to discrimination and xenophobia.

Human trafficking is another, and perhaps the most painful, experience of such human suffering. Considered to be the fastest-growing criminal business in the world, it forces hundreds of thousands of people, mainly women, into the modern forms of slavery of prostitution and domestic servitude.

"Social fluidity" has become an important term for describing the tendency in most societies to move from fixed structures often determined by class, ethnic composition and cultural heterogeneity, towards pluralistic forms of living together. Migration and urbanization are two important factors in this development. Social fluidity may break down traditional ethnic and cultural barriers. It may also cause erosion of collective identity and responsibility, and promote forms of individualism that leave each person alone in the struggles of life.

Another consequence of this "fluidity" is that ethical questions are considered relative, leaving it up to the individual to make decisions on such issues as abortion, euthanasia and genetic intervention. Modern technology and advanced science have made the questions of human life and death much more complex than was the case just a generation ago. Can such issues be dealt with on an individual basis? Do they instead need to be anchored in value systems that can take them beyond the immediate concern of action?

"Social cohesion," (understood as community that counts more than the sum of the individuals that compose it), has been lifted up as a necessary condition for forming society. How is such social cohesion constructed? It seems that it includes several different components: political ideas, ethical values, basic convictions and visions regarding what is good and worth fighting for. Faith relates to all these elements, and people of faith may play an important role in the process of constructing social cohesion. This is one of the potentials of

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3 *"So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts its mouth". Poverty and the Mission of the Church in Africa*. Geneva, LWF Studies, 01/2007, p. 16.

post-modernity's openness to religious and cultural plurality. The so-called "return of religion" has this promising dimension, but it also must be considered in relation to its frightening dimension, that of fostering reactionary and violent fundamentalism. For diakonia, this development opens new opportunities for integrating faith and action, for promoting hope, love and justice in the midst of human reality.

All these issues challenge churches to shape their diakonia to act boldly in favor of suffering and marginalized people and to be committed to the cause of lifting up justice, peace and the integrity of creation. They must influence the selection of priority areas for diaconal action, and shape decisions about why certain activities are given more attention than others. They also have methodological consequences for the way diaconal work is done. In all this, diakonia—in praxis and in its theory—must reflect its unavoidable relation to its environment with all its dimensions: social, political, religious, economic and cultural.

Awareness of the global situation should not take attention away from the local and its importance. Global trends can only be properly understood from the perspective of the local—interpreting and evaluating the effects they have on everyday life for ordinary people. The global picture helps to understand the local, but it also goes the other way round. The word "*glocal*" has been created for this interconnectedness between the global and the local, both in analysis and in action. However, reading the local context has to go beyond general pictures. It must be minutely connected to local conditions and challenges. Only then can the broader picture be understood which will enable diaconal actors to critically determine whether their work responds to the identified challenges, or whether there is a need for renewal, for reformulating objectives and strategies, and for establishing new alliances.

For the very same reason, the potential of the local context to resist, and even present alternatives to global trends, should not be underestimated. One encouraging example is fair trade initiatives that link local growers with local consumers in another part of the world. History holds incredible stories of unexpected renewal and change emerging from what has been considered the periphery. Nathanael's cynical remark in John 1:46: *"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"* proved to be wrong, and is a constant reminder when people express disrespect for local reality and its potential for transformation.

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3. Changing contexts for diaconal action

Diaconal action has changed from one generation to the next according to contextual conditions. This is partially due to challenges like the ones that have been referred to above; it partly depends on ideological conditions and the sort of interpretation that is given to diaconal intervention in society.

In most regions, global trends have significant consequences for diaconal work. They create new challenges and change the conditions for diaconal intervention. Some of these are referred to above.

But there are also local or regional realities that impact diaconal work. In many countries in the global South, the general impoverishment has consequences for the Church. In most contexts, it has become more difficult to maintain diaconal institutions such as hospitals. Financial support from partners in the North is diminishing. Some churches, for instance, may conclude that they are no longer able to continue the work and may hand hospitals over to government or to the private sector. It may be argued that these institutions are a heritage from the time when foreign missionaries brought sufficient resources from abroad with them, and that diaconal work today should be more mobile and community-oriented and less dependent on costly structures. On the other hand, it is painful if churches have to give up their health work, especially in a time of enormous challenges such as the AIDS pandemic.

In its local setting, poverty has distinct expressions and specific root causes. Weak governance, corruption, ethnic conflict and civil war are some of the factors that add suffering upon suffering for people living in poverty. At the same time, these also are factors that urge churches to renew their diaconal commitment and find new ways of caring for, and working with the poor and oppressed, lifting up their dignity and defending their rights.

Eastern Europe is a region that has experienced dramatic changes over recent decades. In the past, churches were involved in different kinds of diaconal work including many institutions. When the communists took power, all this work was stopped and many buildings were confiscated by the government. When Communism collapsed, churches felt challenged to revitalize their diaconal commitment. Especially in the first phase, they enjoyed strong support from diaconal partners in the West, which made it possible for them to initiate diaconal activities. But they soon learned that they could not depend on external

Hauptarchiv der v. Bodelschwinghschen Anstalten Bethel

resources, nor could they go back to the situation as it was before Communism and the position they as churches had held. There was a clear need to re-orient the diaconal engagement according to new challenges and new political conditions.

In Western Europe, significant changes have also taken place in the last decades. As a consequence of the establishment of the welfare state in the 1950s and 1960s, diaconal institutions were integrated into the system. This was experienced in different ways in different countries. The fundamental principle, however, was that access to health and social services was based on solidarity and justice, not on charity. Another important assumption was that these services should be performed by professionals and according to public standards.

Modern welfare work could no longer be built on religious motivation and values, but was instead based on political ideas and social concerns. This has had a strong impact on diaconal action, especially when it is financed by public money or is, in other ways, integrated into public health and social programs. It may be argued that in such situations, the secularization of society has led to a certain secularization of diaconal institutions and diaconal work.

While this continues to be a challenge, another has been added over the last decades. Welfare systems have come under pressure in some Western countries. Critics claim that they are not efficient, and that they are too expensive. Privatization and other market-oriented solutions are being introduced. Where do diaconal institutions place themselves in this discussion? As non-profit organizations, they are neither public nor private in the sense that they are not commercial; they often resist the demand of being cost effective, especially if this is at the cost of basic values and the quality of care.

How does the distinct ideological identity of diakonia respond to these different challenges? Does diaconal work provide added values and specific competence? Is there a risk that political and financial pressures can empty diaconal action of its identity?

The relation between diakonia and governmental authorities often reflects the relation between Church and state in a country. In some places, this means close cooperation in the understanding that diaconal work is performed on behalf of the government and financed fully by public money. In other places, an attitude of mutual suspicion hinders such relations. The question is whether cooperation between governmental authorities and diakonia presupposes the traditional "state-Church" alliance in order to be functional, or other forms of relations can be established as, for instance, within the framework of civil society.

4. Spirals of hopelessness and spirals of hope

The picture of the globalized world as presented here may be perceived as a spiral of hopelessness. Difficulties and suffering experienced at an individual level are connected to corresponding experiences at other levels such as social, political, and ideological. In that process, the sense of powerlessness and fear is not only affirmed, but even increased.

At the political level in some countries, people see that subsidies for staple foods are being reduced, often due to pressure from international financial authorities. In other countries, public welfare systems are being cut back or eliminated. In both cases, the poorest are the most affected. At the ideological level, this is explained by market-oriented neo-liberalism; others claim that public welfare is too expensive and eventually will erode the national economy.

In many countries, private wealth has increased at the same time as public institutions have become impoverished, which probably reflects a trend of individualization in post-modern culture.

Individualization is the lifestyle of autonomous human beings seeking individual opportunities, with each one solely responsible for his or her own future. But unfortunately, not all are able to create a good life on these terms. There may be personal, economic or cultural reasons, or even a combination of them, that bar people from having their share of what are considered common goods and rights. Instead, they are marginalized from access to such goods and rights. The spiral of hopelessness not only adds one negative experience onto another as it links one level to another; it also has a kind of centrifugal effect in the sense that it sends those who are caught within this system further out towards the margin.

Marginalization must therefore be seen as a multi-dimensional experience. It has a personal dimension of taking away people's self-esteem. People are stigmatized and silenced. On a social level, mechanisms of exclusion are established and ideologically justified.

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Describing reality in this way is of course, very one-sided and fortunately most people experience life much more richly than what is presented in this spiral of hopelessness. People experience love and goodness and relationships that

give reasons for hope and a future. Experience also shows that it is possible to break the spiral. The entry point can be any of the different levels: the individual, the social, the political, or the ideological. The struggle against apartheid is one important example where different actors found different entry points for engagement.

As human beings, each of us lives our life as an individual and as part of a community, as a family member, a neighbor, a colleague, a friend, a citizen. The well known African concept of *Ubuntu* conveys an understanding of the identity of a person as being in relation to others. Archbishop Desmond Tutu describes this as a person whose self-assurance comes from knowing that he or she belongs to a greater whole. Therefore, all are diminished when anyone is humiliated or diminished, tortured or oppressed.

This identity can be imagined as a spiral, where relations are linked in a way that always expands and includes others, as Nelson Mandela once described *Ubuntu*: *"A traveller through a country would stop at a village and he didn't have to ask for food or for water. Once he stops, the people give him food, entertain him. That is one aspect of Ubuntu but it will have various aspects. Ubuntu does not mean that people should not address themselves. The question therefore is: Are you going to do so in order to enable the community around you to be able to improve?"*[4]

Concepts like *Ubuntu* can, of course, be used in a romantic way that idealizes a tradition without acknowledging the harsh social reality and experiences of fragmentation in South African society. One of its strengths is that it includes care in an holistic manner. Nevertheless, it points to the importance and promise of being connected to others, in a way that continuously keeps hope alive. The following diagram of a spiral of hope may be one helpful way of illustrating this.

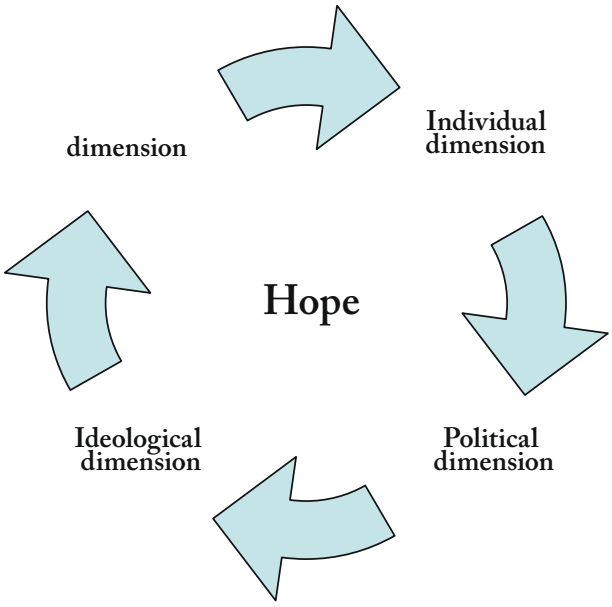

Fig. 1: The spiral of hope

The starting point here is the understanding that human dignity is expressed and affirmed in a variety of dimensions and in the relationships between them. This is what forms communion and is how the values of communion are experienced.

The *political dimension* refers to the fact that political life depends on citizens who express their hope and vision for the future. The multitude of social movements forming civil society, with their power to strengthen democracy and participatory political processes from below, exemplifies this.

This links to the *ideological dimension* which defines what is true, good and right, and where people bring their agendas promoting solidarity, justice, peace and care for creation, according to their worldview and values.

The *social dimension* is where it becomes clear whether or not each individual is given space for participation according to her or his own identity and engagement. If there is no space, ideology may become totalitarian, which is the case when only one truth is allowed, or only one understanding of hope is expressed. It is the potential of the social

[4] **http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubuntu_(philosophy)**

arena to establish mechanisms of inclusion and empowering for participation, and acknowledging that human differences are a potential, not a problem.

The many dimensions of reality, are of course much more complex than this illustration is able to account for. There are also contradictions within each of the dimensions that do not allow action for a better life as straightforwardly as one might hope.

In spite of this, roadmaps have always been important for people on the move. Hope also needs roadmaps. The real question is whether hope, as profound anxiety in every human being for something better to happen, is grounded in what we are as God's creation. Hope is not only an intrinsic dimension of being. We all have seen hope become reality, as witnessed in many stories—a family member recovers from a serious illness, a communal problem is solved through joint action, or oppressed people achieve freedom. In such instances, spirals of hope were expressed and brought strength to a broader reality in its political, ideological and social dimensions.

Diakonia is challenged by the spiral of hopelessness, and in its action, it seeks to support the spiral of hope. Diakonia takes initiatives of accompaniment when people move from one step to another, envisioning transformation, reconciliation and empowerment.

5. Existential challenges in all contexts

It is important to remember that some fundamental dimensions of human life are constant and independent of the many contexts. They reveal existential challenges that will always ask for diaconal response, namely the fact that we all are vulnerable to sickness, pain and suffering, and that we are mortal beings who cannot escape death. From this perspective, it becomes clear that diakonia is a task *and* a possibility in all human situations.

In addition, we all experience the destructive force of evil inside us and surrounding us, which tries to damage and destroy relations and responsibilities. Sometimes we act against our deepest convictions and fail to do what is expected of us. Good intentions can also be experienced as their opposite. From a theological point of view, this relates to the concept of original sin, the recognition that all human beings by their very nature are engaged in sinful action. This reality makes all of us victims of evil, even as it also makes us co-responsible for evildoing.

In 2003, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) began a project for children orphaned by AIDS. Most had been living alone for years and without any care or hope for their future. The church worked together with the community leaders to identify the 150 children most in need to be accepted into this project. The aim was not only to provide food and shelter, but to integrate them into new families. In every case, these children found homes with families in their former neighborhoods. Funds were made available to those families to provide food, beds and blankets, the necessary school equipment. Regular visits from church workers secured access to medical care and further education. After three years, these children were asked to name the greatest change this project had brought about in their lives. All answered in the same way: We now have a place to stay overnight, to get daily food, to visit the school, and we now have new parents and sisters and brothers to live with. The most wonderful change is that before, we were homeless and left alone, but now we belong and this gives us hope for our future.

But that is not the whole truth. In Christ we are "*a new creation*" (2 Corinthians 5:17), no longer bound by the power of sin. Therefore, diaconal action seeks to resist evil at all levels, in-

cluding the social and political level. Evil must be addressed and denounced. Diaconal action boldly announces alternative ways of being human in the perspective of faith, love and hope.

The context will of course influence how these existential challenges are met. Within a spiral of hopelessness, pain is often added to pain. This may be the case in an affluent society as well as in places of extreme poverty. In the same manner, suffering may be alleviated where spirals of hope create space for care, solidarity and commitment to justice, and for the love in Christ that "*never ends*" and "*bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*" (1 Corinthians 13:7-8).

Questions for Further Reflection

1. What are the most pressing issues in society that call for diaconal response from your church? Are they local, regional or global?
2. How is diaconal work being carried out in your church? How does it respond to the issues referred to in the previous question?
3. Is "the Spiral of Hope" (p. 20) relevant in your context? How would you use it to interpret the situation in which you live?

PART II: THE IDENTITY OF DIAKONIA

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Part II: The identity of diakonia

1. The faith we confess in the Triune God

Christians confess faith in the Triune God. It is this faith that constitutes the identity of the Church and therefore the identity of diakonia.

Faith in God the Creator confesses that "*the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.*" (Psalm 24:1). Faith in the Creator also implies admiration and praise, acknowledging the dignity and profound quality of what is created. This is consistent with the Creator's own conclusion at the end of every day's creation: "*God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.*" (Genesis 1).

Psalm 19 even announces a cosmic celebration of God as the Creator! "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork, day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." In a similar way, the author of Psalm 8 praises the Creator, "O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" And he continues pointing at the unexpected role and dignity of human beings: "When I look at your heavens, the

work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them. Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor."

Such faith contradicts worldviews that reduce creation to material things that human beings are free to consume and even to waste. The material is never just material, but an expression of God's good will, touched by God's endless love. God's good creation cannot be reduced to an object of human consumption, but deserves respect and care. All beings belong together in the ecosystem of mutual relationships and inter-dependency. Especially in times of dramatic ecological crisis, this systemic point of view becomes a very urgent priority.

The dignity of human beings has its deepest roots in their creation in the image of God. However, this does not justify any form of anthropocentrism whereby all other creations are seen to be only at the service of human beings. On the contrary, God gives a special responsibility to all humankind to care as stewards for God's creation.

Diaconal action affirms this vocation and seeks to provide opportunities for being partners in God's mission. Such action confesses God's continued presence in the world as Creator—every day and in every situation. It adds its voice to the cosmic proclamation of the Triune God's glory. This concept of continued creation is expressed in Luther's Small Catechism:

> I believe that God has created me and all that exists. He has given me and still preserves my body and soul with all their powers. He provides me with food and clothing, home and family, daily work, and all I need from day to day. God also protects me in time of danger and guards me from every evil. All this He does out of fatherly and divine goodness and mercy, though I do not deserve it. Therefore I surely ought to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.

This worldview motivates Christians for all kinds of diaconal action. It also motivates Christians to work together with all people of good will, acknowledging that every human being is created in God's image and thereby given a mandate to be God's co-worker in God's ongoing love and care for all of creation.

Even so, Christian faith admits that evil forces, injustice and death are trying to destroy life every day—both outside and inside the Church—and that there are situations when such forces seem to be victorious. Even then, hope does prevail based on the biblical message that God is the God of Life who gives future and hope, especially to the poor and the excluded ("*Hoping against hope...*" Romans 4:18; "*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*" Hebrews 1:1). Such faith motivates diakonia to resist evil and promote justice, to advocate with and for people in need, and to act boldly as transformative signs of hope.

Faith in Jesus Christ confesses him as the incarnate God who came "not to be served, but to serve and *give his life as a ransom for many.*" (Mark 10:45). Here Jesus refers to his messianic mission using the word "serve" (Greek: *diakonein*), in a way that makes proclamation and diakonia integral dimensions of his coming as the in-breaking of God's kingdom.

God loves all humanity. Because God loved us first, we ourselves are able to love and respect the dignity of any person. Diaconal thinking and acting focus in particular on those whose dignity has been offended. This presupposes a spiritual basis, rooted in God's work and in the service of Christ. Therefore, the Church has the mandate to testify for all mankind to God's love for the world in Jesus Christ. Diaconal activity is one form of this testimony.

Source: DIAKONIA CHARTER of The European Federation for Diakonia (Eurodiaconia), 2000

From the very beginning, the proclamation of Jesus affirms the wide-ranging nature of his mission. Jesus' diakonia has several dimensions. It is an act of liberation and reconciliation, of healing and lifting up all those who are "*like sheep without a shepherd*" (Matthew 9:36), especially siding with the suffering, the downtrodden and marginalized. Through Jesus' diakonia, human dignity is affirmed and defended. Relationships are established and affirmed,—relations that endure even during times of suffering and death. Thus diakonia witnesses prophetically to the values of God's Kingdom.

All this reveals another dimension of Jesus' diakonia: his authority to invite persons, even sinners, to be included in the messianic fellowship that he establishes, and to empower them to participate in his mission. This is referred to at the very moment of installing the Holy Communion: "*But I am among you as one who serves.*" (Luke 22:27). Thus Jesus' diakonia not only constitutes fellowship, but it also qualifies those who belong to it. It is a manifestation of God's grace that reconciles, transforms and empowers. This is also the core message in the story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet (John 13). Although not found in this chapter, the word diakonia portrays the service of Jesus as powerful action in the sense that the disciples "*have share*" with him (John 13:8). Thus, the washing of feet is not an ethical demonstration of humility in the first place; it announces the coming of a new era in human history and it demonstrates Jesus' diaconal authority by which the inclusiveness of the new community of disciples is proclaimed (John 1:12).

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Faith in the Holy Spirit asks God's life-giving breath to graciously awaken faith and to empower participation in the life and mission of the communion of believers. The story about the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 illustrates this, telling how the once frightened disciples were transformed as the Spirit fell upon them, and how they were empowered for the mission given to them.

On the day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter announced the coming of the Holy Spirit as fulfillment of the promise of the prophet Joel, that "*your sons and your daughters shall prophesy … even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit.*" (Acts 2:17-18). The special mention of young people, women and even slaves affirms the inclusive nature of the work of the Spirit, largely contradicting what is often considered the natural order of authority. This is totally in line with the way in which Jesus often inverted the social order of his day, giving voice to people who were expected to keep silent.

The Holy Spirit makes inclusion a fundamental value in the life of the Church and in diaconal practice. Baptism is a holy space in the life of the Church where inclusiveness is radically announced as even small children are embraced in the communion of believers. At the same time, baptism is the very moment of empowerment by the Holy Spirit for participation in God's mission. According to an old tradition in the Church, the baptized receive a lit candle, reminding the person and all the baptized of Jesus' words to the disciples: "*You are the light of the world! … Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*" (Matthew 5:14-15).

In Paul's teaching, this is related to the gifts (*charisma*) of the Spirit: "*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord*." (1 Corinthians 1:4). Such gifts equip the individual Christian for service, but also the community as a whole to represent the body of Christ. This affirms the value of varieties of gifts, in the same way that a body consists of different members. Paul warns against giving more importance to some gifts than to others and reminds that in the body, even the smallest members are vital and cannot be lost.

In the Lutheran tradition, this teaching of the equal value of gifts has led to what is understood as *the priesthood of all believers*. This can also be reformulated as the *diakonia of all believers* to which all baptized are called and equipped, regardless of their apparent status or social conditions. The basic condition for this reality is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the gift of communion with Christ. Because baptism gives us a share in Christ's death and resurrection, "*so we too might walk in newness of life,*" (Romans 6:4). In Christ, who is the Light of the world, his followers are transformed to be light of the world themselves.

This reflects Luther's explanation on the Holy Spirit in the Small Catechism:

> I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, and sanctified and kept me in true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it united with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian Church, day after day He fully forgives my sins and the sins of all believers. On the last day He will raise me and all the dead and give me and all believers in Christ, eternal life. This is most certainly true.

This is indeed a solid foundation for being included and also for being empowered for participating in God's mission.

> Diakonia is the caring ministry of the Church. It is the Gospel in action and is expressed through loving your neighbor, creating inclusive communities, caring for creation and struggling for justice.
>
> *Definition of diakonia, Church of Norway Plan for Diakonia*

2. Diakonia as integral part of being Church

From the very beginning, it became imperative for the Christian community to give continuity to Jesus' diaconal mission. The memory of his teaching certainly shaped the values and qualities of their lifestyle: "*For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you*." (John 13:15) and; "*As the Father has sent me, so I send you,*" (John 20:21).

Thus, diakonia became a fundamental concept in the life of the Christian congregations all over the Roman Empire. Diakonia also became the term for the designation of leadership positions in the Church (e.g., Romans 11:13; 2 Corinthians 4:1; Colossians 4:17). The story of the installation of the seven new leaders in the congregation in Jerusalem in Acts 6 shows how the marginalization of Greek widows challenged the church's inclusive nature. It was not only the dignity of those ignored in the daily diakonia that was at risk, but the very diaconal quality of the fellowship. To ignore this would be to ignore the devastating power of sin and its potential to destroy what God has reconciled in Christ. The installation of the seven, all of whom had Greek names and therefore probably represented the widows' cultural and social environment, was not merely a practical matter in

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order to have things done better. It was an act of securing the fundamental self-understanding of the Church, for the well-being of the whole fellowship and for public witness. The seven were all "*full of the Spirit,*" a reminder that the Holy Spirit, who is giving life to the Church, also is the blessing power for its diaconal lifestyle. The story concludes: "*The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem …*" (Acts 6:7).

Diakonia, therefore, is related to the congregation's ethos and structures. In other words, it is both an expression of what the Church is by its very nature, and what is manifested in its daily life, plans and projects. It is therefore natural to designate certain concrete actions as diakonia. One example already mentioned is the daily distribution of food and other needed things in Acts 6.

Another is the collection organized by Paul and his colleagues for the poor congregation in Jerusalem. This initiative is referred to in several places in the New Testament, and is simply called "*the diakonia*". The most extensive commentary is found in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. The way in which the Apostle Paul admonishes the congregation in Corinth to participate in the collection is interesting and instructive even today, for the development of a theology of diakonia.

To start with, it is worthwhile to notice that Paul does not explicitly refer to the poverty affecting the congregation in Jerusalem. It may be that their situation already was well known and that further words were unnecessary. But more probably, this is due to the basic understanding of diakonia as grounded in theological and ecclesiological principles, and not primarily in the various situations of human need.

For Paul, diakonia is an expression of *koinonia*, the new communion of God's people in Jesus Christ. Interestingly enough, Paul even uses the expression the *koinonia of diakonia* (2 Corinthians 8:4). The Christian congregations in Corinth, Macedonia, Jerusalem and elsewhere are united for diakonia and at the same time, united by diakonia, first and foremost by the diaconal mission of Jesus: "*For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich*" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

A key word here is grace. The way in which Paul uses this word leads us to the understanding that grace is more than an attitude; it manifests itself as active intervention, as revealed in the incarnate Jesus and his salvific work. Communion is created and sustained by God's grace revealed as work of love. To be in Christ implies being in his grace and participating in his continued and active work of love. The practice of

diakonia, its ethos of inclusiveness and the mutual sharing of resources, clearly imply ethical demands, but its basis is the experience of God's grace and the gift of belonging to the communion created by God's grace.

While this may give us the impression that diakonia is something exclusively spiritual and remote from everyday life, the last section of 2 Corinthians 8 shows how practical diakonia has to be. Here, Paul raises questions of organization and accountability in dealing with collected money, thus pointing to the importance of responsibility and transparency when doing diakonia. But even here, we find references to communion. Honesty is a matter of relations, both with God and with fellow human beings. Dishonesty would mean breaking the communion. It is also significant that Titus, who is given a key role in organizing diakonia, is presented as "*co-worker*", ("*koinonos*" 2 Corinthians 8:23) which affirms partnership and commitment to the well-being of the communion.

In 2 Corinthians 9, the intimate connection to the Church's liturgy is another dimension added to the theology of diakonia: diakonia grows out of worship and aims at thanksgiving to God for God's indescribable gift (2 Corinthians 9:15). Diakonia is a response to concrete situations of suffering, need and injustice, the fulfillment of the commandment of love, and in all that is an expression of what the Church believes in and confesses: the grace of God—for the healing of the world.

Diakonia is thus an intrinsic element of being Church and cannot be reduced to an activity by certain committed persons or made necessary by external social conditions. Diakonia is deeply related to what the Church celebrates in its liturgy and announces in its preaching. In the same way, liturgy and proclamation relate to diakonia. The communion (*koinonia*) of the Church is made visible through its three main expressions.

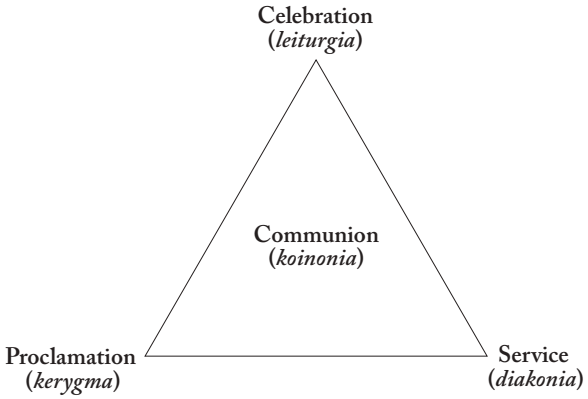

Fig. 2: The dimensions of being Church

The main purpose of this diagram is to illustrate that these three dimensions of celebration, proclamation and service are inter-related in a way that each one is rooted in the other two, and in fact would not exist without them. Diakonia cannot be separated from what the Church proclaims and celebrates. There is no hierarchy between them, and all are expressions of communion.

In a similar manner, it becomes clear that the Church's proclamation and celebration have to be rooted in diakonia. If not, proclamation may be perceived as proselytism, and celebration as spiritualism. All three dimensions orient and stimulate each other mutually. If one dimension is missing, the life and the mission of the communion cannot be fully unfolded. It remains a body suffering because a vital member has been amputated.

The key to diaconal identity is that its vertical and horizontal dimensions are inseparable. Without the vertical dimension, diakonia loses its spiritual worldview and its embedding in what the Church proclaims and celebrates. It runs the

> The Church is a congregation of persons assembled in Christ's word and Spirit to be one body, put together of various members, each with an office and work dedicated to bettering the whole body and all its members.
>
> *Martin Bucer, 1538*

risk of becoming mere social action, determined by secular interests and goals.

The horizontal dimension is equally fundamental for diakonia. Without it, diakonia would lose its rootedness in real life, and would no longer be a response to the challenges of society. If this happens, diakonia has become spiritualized and too limited by its theological and ecclesial framework.

Therefore, diakonia must be dialectical in a way that communicates both vertical and horizontal perspectives. That means that reflection on diakonia has to be inter-disciplinary, taking into account insight from both theological and social sciences.

The affirmation that the vertical and the horizontal dimensions in diakonia are inter-connected, does not mean uncritically mixing the two. In Part III of this document, the important question of how diakonia relates to proclamation is dealt with. One central issue of this question is how to distinguish the two dimensions without separating or mixing them. Good diaconal practice is oriented by its Christian identity and faith in a gracious God. The biblical view on human dignity is not respected if diaconal action is used as an opportunity to propagate moral or religious teaching, especially if this happens in situations where people are extra vulnerable and depend on help from others. Since the grace of God is a free gift, diaconal action must be generous and unconditional. Only then, does it reflect and give testimony to God's "*indescribable gift*" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

When the Church is understood according to the dimensions of celebration, proclamation and service, it also becomes clear that diakonia cannot be silent, but has to publicly raise its voice. As faith-based action, it will always give account of what motivates its action, and give witness to God's love that nurtures faith and gives hope. In the same manner, diakonia has to be faithful to its prophetic mandate and speak up against sinful practices and structures that cause suffering and degradation of human dignity, and speak out for a more human and just society. Often, diaconal workers have had a pioneering role in helping the Church to assume a role as Church for others, a serving community, and even more importantly, a Church with and of the poor.

The three dimensions of being Church as presented here imply an alternative worldview based on values such as equality and mutuality in human relations. Inclusiveness becomes a vital key to test whether the identity given by God's grace is expressed in the life of the Church. Assuming this role, diakonia may challenge the Church not to conform to the status quo, but to confront human constructs of power, not only in society but also within its own structures.

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Leadership models and practice are an important area for testing this. All leadership implies the exercise of authority and the use of power. However there is a significant difference between exercising power **over**

people and exercising it **for** people. Jesus exercised his Messianic authority (Greek: *exousia*), as power to lift up the sick and downtrodden, to include the sick and excluded in society and even more in the communion of his reign, and to empower them to participate in his mission to the world. This authority for people, in defenc+e of their dignity and for transformation, reconciliation, and empowerment is the sort of authority that Jesus commended the apostles to use in their leadership roles (Mark 10:42-45; John 13:15; 20:21). It is not power over, as often experienced in the world where the powerful use their authority to keep people down, to silence them and to be subject to their exclusive action.

Another area is related to gender. The access women have, or do not have to leadership and decision-making positions clearly indicates how churches practice inclusiveness as a fundamental value in the life of the Church. From this understanding, the ordination of women is first of all theologically grounded as a visible expression of the dignity of all God's people and their vocation to participate fully in God's mission.

The same can be observed in relation to young people and the elderly. When youth are encouraged to participate actively and assume leadership positions, it is not only for the sake of the youth, but for the well-being of the whole community that needs the perspective and engagement of young people. In a similar manner, the contribution of elderly people is lost when their experiences and wisdom are not honored.

In fact, the secret of inclusive and participatory patterns of being together is that all parts involved benefit from such practice. The theological understanding of being a communion affirms this, as it confesses that the communion itself is God's gift, and that this gift is fully experienced when we, as different members of one body, acknowledge each other and mutually share the gifts given to each of us.

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3. The diakonia of the table

Holy Communion is another important space in the life of the Church which includes and empowers for service. As we are served by the Lord of the table, we are also strengthened for our diaconal service. In the Orthodox tradition, diakonia is sometimes called the *liturgy after the liturgy*, indicating the mystery of transformation that is experienced at the table and equips the participants to be agents of transformation, empowerment and reconciliation as they return from the table to everyday life.

The celebration of Holy Communion announces God's unconditional love in Christ and the inclusive nature of God's diakonia. We all approach the table with empty hands, and with the acknowledgement that it is only by God's grace in Christ that we have access to the communion

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of the table. The fact that Christ himself hosts the Holy Communion encourages and mobilizes us for our participation in God's diakonia to the world. This understanding challenges churches that have the custom of celebrating Holy Communion a few times a year.

It happens, however, that because some churches administer this sacrament in a way that excludes from participation those who by certain behavior are considered "unworthy"[5] members of the congregation. Such moralistic use of Church discipline may obscure the diaconal dimension of Holy Communion and its power as transformative sacrament and "space of inclusion" in a world where so many experience exclusion.

To consider someone unworthy to participate in the celebration of Holy Communion may take different forms today, but it should always be a reason for self-examination in the Church. Not long ago, some churches denied people access to the Lord's Table because of the color of their skin. Today, some are stigmatized because they are living with HIV, or because their family situation is not considered morally acceptable. The vocation of inclusiveness will always be an important expression of the Church's diaconal nature.

In his letter to the congregation in Corinth, the Apostle Paul sharply criticized such ways of celebrating the Holy Communion (1 Corinthians 11). Instead of being a space of union, it had become a moment of manifesting division and self-centeredness. In asking them to wait for each other, Paul most likely referred to the poorest among them who had to work until the late evening because of their status as slaves or servants. If others started the meal, not allowing the poorest to be part of the celebration, the very diaconal dimension of the communion would be jeopardized.

In addition to inclusiveness, Holy Communion has other key diaconal dimensions. In different ways, all express the transforming power of God's grace in Jesus Christ, and contribute to the basic identity of diakonia.

Hospitality is another dimension of diakonia. The New Testament contains a number of narratives on hospitality (Luke 7:36-50; 14:7-24; 22:14-30). They reflect the ethos of the period of Antiquity according to which communion at the table means much more than just eating together; it implies friendship, mutual social acceptance and solidarity. That is why Jesus provoked so many when he ate with those whom the 'respected' people would not like to see at their tables. Invited to the table in the house of Simon the leper, he strongly defended the woman who anointed him. On that occasion, even his own disciples were angry that he gave that woman access to the table where he was sitting (Matthew 26:6-13).

In this way, Jesus revealed God's hospitality as a fundamental element of his Messianic mission, in the Spirit of what long before had been proclaimed by the Psalmist: "*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.*" (Psalm 23:5-6).

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5 Perhaps with reference to 1 Corinthians 11: 27. The issue here is, however, not unworthy persons, but unworthy manners.

In the diaconal tradition of the Church, such shelter is given to homeless, orphans and widows. Persecuted people are offered asylum. In doing so, the Church runs the risk of being persecuted, paying the price of sacrificing its own peaceful life within the society. But following the example of Jesus, it belongs to the mandate of prophetic diakonia to grant hospitality. That is affirmed by the apostolic exhortation: "*Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.*" (Romans 12:13). This form of hospitality also includes advocacy and protection.

Sharing is another profound diaconal dimension of table communion. Not only are words, stories and experiences shared at the table, but often also what is eaten and drunk. Here we are not talking about table as a kind of furniture, but more as a metaphor for that space where people sit together around a meal, sharing the gifts of belonging together.

The table is, above all, a privileged space for reconciliation. The table allows people to meet face to face, with names and identities, with their stories and anxieties. The spirit of sharing constitutes new relations that more easily permit forgiveness and new beginnings. Because Christians themselves experience reconciliation at the Lord's Table, it motivates them for the Church's ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18). It is worthwhile noticing that the Greek original reads "*diakonia*" of reconciliation, certainly modeled by the diakonia of Jesus and his holistic approach in dealing with suffering and injustice.

The mystery of transformation is the center of Holy Communion. Ordinary bread and wine are received as Christ's precious body and blood. Sins are forgiven and sinners transformed to be agents of transformation as they return to their everyday life.

Despondency is transformed into hope and readiness to serve with joy. That is what the disciples of Emmaus experienced as their companion on the road broke the bread in their house and revealed himself as the risen Lord at their table. In a mysterious way, the yet still unknown guest took the role of being the host, opening their eyes while he was sharing bread and wine with them. The gifts of the table strengthened their body, soul and spirit, and empowered them to hurry back to Jerusalem, eager to share with the other disciples what had happened to them.

Of course, there are also situations where it is difficult to register any sign of transformation, especially in light of what is experienced in everyday life. But nevertheless, confidence in the mystery of transformation continues to draw believers to the table, praying "come Lord, transform the world!" And they will again and again find new inspiration in stories of transformation, like the one about Zacchaeus, who invited Jesus to his table, but realized that he himself was the invited one. This experience transformed him and made him declare: "*Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.*" (Luke 19:8).

This story indicates that compassion and justice are visible signs of transformation, and therefore also signs of the Church being an agent of transformation.

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4. Good works

Doing good to others is an integral part of the new life given in Christ. Lutherans have always been suspicious when good works are lifted up as necessary demands. It is feared that too much attention on works (or deeds) might undermine the principle of justification by faith alone. For this reason, some Lutherans may even find diakonia in principle to be problematic, especially if diakonia is presented as part of what constitutes the Church.

Therefore, it is useful to remember how the *Confessio Augustana* (CA) presents the Lutheran teaching on good works:

> "Likewise, they teach that this faith is bound to yield good fruits and that it ought to do good works commanded by God on account of God's will and not so that we may trust in these works to merit justification before God. For forgiveness of sins and justification are taken hold of by faith, as the saying of Christ also testifies." (Luke 17:10): "When you have done all (things) … say, "We are worthless slaves." "The authors of the ancient Church teach the same. For Ambrose says: "It is established by God that whoever believes in Christ shall be saved without work, by faith alone, receiving the forgiveness of sins as a gift." (CA VI)

What is rejected is an understanding of good works as action with the intention to obtain merits before God and human beings. What is defended are good works as visible expressions of the new life in Christ given by faith, as it is written in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*:

"Grace as fellowship of the justified with God in faith, hope, and love is always received from the salvific and creative work of God. But it is nevertheless the responsibility of the justified not to waste this grace but to live in it. The

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exhortation to do good works is the exhortation to practice the faith…" [6]

For Luther, this is deeply connected to his understanding of God's love that is present in the world through Christ. All baptised are in Christ gifted by the same love, and their actions express God's good will for all creation. Therefore, Christian obedience is not obedience to moral or pious standards in an effort to become like Jesus, but obedience to what we are in Christ. It does not depend on commitment and strong will, but flows out of the new life in Christ and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

It is important to have this in mind if diakonia is ever presented as the grateful response of Christians to what they have received in faith. This may give the impression that diakonia becomes a sort of second act, whereas the justification by faith is the first act. Diakonia would then be understood as a consequence of faith, an obligation to produce good works in gratitude for the grace given in Christ, and not as an integral part of what constitutes faith.

Luther did not understand justification by faith in that way, as a drama of two different acts. The believer is justified in Christ and in Christ only, and this has two equally fundamental dimensions. On the one hand, it means to be one with Christ in his relation to God the Father and to become, in Christ, justified children of God. On the other hand, it implies to be one with Christ in his mission to the world, one with him in his diakonia.

Luther elaborates this understanding in his writing, *On the Freedom of a Christian*, where the following famous aphorism is found: "*A Christian is the freest lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to every one.*" This double identity as being simultaneously free lord and servant is modeled in Christ Jesus "*who, though he was in the form of God … emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.*" (Philippians 2:6-7).

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[6] *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,* The Lutheran World Federation/Catholic Church, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000, Annex 2D, p. 45.

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By baptism, the believer is given part in this identity. Luther affirms: "*We conclude therefore that a Christian does not live in himself, but in Christ, and in the neighbor, or else is no Christian; in Christ by faith, in the neighbor by love. By faith the person is carried upwards above himself to God, and by love he sinks back below himself to his neighbor …*"

All this may lead us to think that diakonia is easily explained and easily done. Reality is of course much more complex. As any other human action, diakonia also sometimes fails and misses its objectives. Theologically this is grounded in the concept of *simul justus et peccator* (simultaneously justified and sinner), which is the understanding that a Christian, although justified by grace, continues to be a sinner. Christian life is conditioned by the struggle between what we already are in Christ and what we continue to be as sinful humans. This reality should not cause us to be pessimistic, saying that doing well is not possible. Nor should it make us naive, believing that good persons are able to perform what is always good. It should give us a realistic understanding of our condition as human beings, our limitations and sinfulness, but also our dignity as created in God's image and our vocation as members of Christ's body.

There are still other theological terms that may be helpful to orient diakonia when dealing with the dialectic between what is new in Christ and what continues to be, according to the order of the past. In the New Testament, the term *aion* (age—Ephesians 2:7; Galatians 1:4; Colossians 1:26) is used to describe different periods of time toward the final fulfillment of God's plan of salvation, and also the tensions between them.

Theologians like Luther prefer to talk about the two kingdoms, one being the present world where we, as citizens, are subject to its limitations and suffering, the other being God's kingdom that Jesus announced was near, and in him has already come, and also where we anticipate the fulfillment of all its blessings. (Mark 1:15, Matthew 12:28)

Diaconal action is performed within this simultaneity of what is already and what is still to come. It bears witness to God's grace and care for creation as Christians are empowered to do good with and for others. But it also reflects human shortcomings and corruption. This reality should warn us against romantic and even triumphal concepts of diakonia. Diakonia must be self-critical and realistic, but even then never lose its conviction that by God's grace, fragile "*clay jars*" can contain treasures. (2 Corinthians 4:7).

5. Diaconal spirituality

"*Ora et labora*" (Latin for "pray and work"), the famous motto of St Benedict that later became a guiding formula for the life in monasteries and convents, points at the interrelation between spiritual life and diaconal work. The formula does not only say that both elements are important, but that they mutually depend on each other. True prayer is incarnated in the experiences of real life and in the struggle against the forces of death. In the same way, diaconal work is imbedded in that for which faith sees and hope longs.

Worship and diakonia nurture each other in the daily life of the Church. Most elements of the liturgy have a clear diaconal dimension. When the sacraments are administered correctly (*Confessio Augustana VI*), they are vehicles of grace and of diaconal identity, both in the life of the individual Christian and in the life of the communion. It was a well established practice in the early Church and a visible sign of this interconnection between worship and diakonia, that the deacons brought the bread that was left over after the Holy Communion to the poor. This diakonia was called the "*liturgy after the liturgy*", and it made visible the bridge between the two moments of transformative grace in favor of the poor.

> We do God's work not because God needs us to do so, but because our neighbor does. We do God's work in Christ's name for the life of the world.
>
> *Bishop Mark S. Hanson, President of the LWF 2003-2010*

The spirituality of diakonia is oriented by the mystery of transformation and of the significance of what apparently is insignificant. It is inspired by the promise of the Lord who identifies himself with the naked and the hungry. (Matthew 25). It sees visitation and hospitality as not only forms of diaconal activity, but as moments of spiritual encounter with "*angels without knowing it.*" (Hebrews 13:2).

Spirituality may be interpreted as a way of seeing things in a deeper sense. Diaconal spirituality sees the presence of God in everyday life and especially in situations where people struggle for life and dignity. It knows God as the One who proclaims: "*I have observed the misery of my people …I have heard their cry … I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them …*" (Exodus 3:7-8). This way of seeing God is closer to verbs that indicate salvific intervention that to nouns that express static being.

Diaconal spirituality sees human beings as created and gifted by God. In the same way, human communion is seen as the space where peace and justice may be experienced, promoted and interconnected. The fact that each of us is gifted differently allows us to perceive the richness of a community where gifts are shared. Diaconal spirituality seeks to discover and to affirm the richness of such belonging in Church and in society.

Finally, diaconal spirituality is shaped by the theology of the cross. This theology affirms that only God can put an end to evil. The cross of Jesus Christ is God's "No" to human self-confidence; it announces God's salvific victory over suffering, injustice and death. God's gracious compassion creates a spirituality sensitive to people who suffer and mobilizes for solidarity and bold action. This spirituality is nurtured by the

belief that in Jesus Christ the way has already been opened that leads from the cross (*via crucis*) to resurrection (*via resurrectionis*). In other words, it rejects easy ways and simplistic answers to complex challenges and is, in the very end, ready to pay the costs for such diaconal action of solidarity and commitment for a better world.

Consequently, diaconal spirituality not only shapes our doing, but also our being. It shapes the whole person and forms the heart of everyone involved. Diakonia becomes a way of life, a way of being in this world. Diaconal spirituality is a life-long holistic experience that empowers and forms the heart in such a way that diakonia becomes a certain *habitus* or disposition that orients and motivates how we live. This holistic understanding of diaconal spirituality comes out of an embodied spiritual praxis.

Diaconal spirituality is an important resource for people who are constantly attentive to other people's needs. It helps to acknowledge one's own needs and to bring them before God in worship, prayer and ritual. Volunteers and full-time diaconal workers with often demanding tasks are called to follow Jesus' invitation: "*Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.*" (Matthew 11:28). It is important to have space and time for spiritual nourishment. When overworked staff and volunteers realize that they experience burn-out, diaconal spirituality becomes an important part of their diaconal commitment.

Perhaps with a sense of humor, Jesus tells the story of the slaves who return to the house after a long day of work. But instead of getting rest, they are ordered by their master to prepare supper. "*So also you*", Jesus concluded, "*when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, "We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!*" (Luke 17:10).

At a first glimpse, this saying may give the impression of diakonia as untiring service, not recognized even by the Lord, and of people engaged in diakonia like worthless slaves. Diaconal spirituality, however, sees this in a different way: as absolute freedom to serve, independent of individual qualifications, reports of performance and eventually the applause of those surrounding us. This freedom, again and again is nurtured by God's grace as we experience that we are not left alone while working in the field, but accompanied by the Lord and by many others providing communion and sharing.

Questions for Further Reflection

1. How does the theological reflection presented in Part II correspond to teaching and proclamation in your church?
2. What are the connections between this theological understanding and the different expressions of diaconal work in your church? How could such connections be further developed?
3. In this section, some biblical entry points are given for a theological understanding of diakonia. Which other texts or concepts would you add or even give a stronger focus to?
4. In your experience, how is diakonia related to worship life and spirituality? How would you like to see these relationships developed?

PART III: THE ACTION OF DIAKONIA

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Part III: The action of diakonia

1. The purpose of diakonia

The *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* defines diakonia as "responsible service of the Gospel by deeds and by words performed by Christians in response to the needs of people."[7]

This definition contains several important elements. It is first of all clear that diakonia is action and cannot be limited to statements and good intentions. Diakonia contains deed and words, formed as "responsible service" which means action for which one is accountable.

Secondly, it affirms that diakonia is performed by Christians. This is not to be understood in an exclusive way, as if only Christians are able to do render "responsible service", but as an affirmation of the distinctive nature of diaconal work.

Thirdly, diaconal work has a focus, namely the needs of people. It is therefore not correct to use diakonia to designate all kinds of good work. Such a wide understanding of the term would make it lose its function. In the long tradition of the Church, diakonia has been linked to the situation of sick, poor and marginalized people, and

7 *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, WCC Publications Geneva 2002, p. 305

has been carried out to accompany, support and defend people who are vulnerable.

Thus, the most crucial question is: how does the Church respond to the needs of vulnerable people? This is a question that must be reflected upon well. Only then can diakonia be "responsible service".

1.1 Responding to individuals and groups

A first concern to address is whether it is the needs of individuals and/or the needs of groups which invite diaconal response. On the one hand, there is an ethical imperative that comes out of Christian anthropology to defend the dignity of each human being and her or his ability to be a subject, able to assume responsibility for her or his own life and civic participation. Too often, it happens that individuals are reduced to anonymous parts of a target group, or characterized as victims, clients, or recipients. It is therefore important to remember that each person carries individual experiences of suffering and of hope, and also capacities that are to be affirmed and strengthened in the process of transformation.

On the other hand, it is also important to remember that an individualistic approach in diaconal work has many limitations. It is for instance clear that poverty, which has severe individual impact, is a reality of systems affecting large sections of populations. As Latin Americans became aware of the growing poverty in their continent in the 1960s, they concluded that poverty is not a **given** reality, but something very often "produced" by unjust historical processes of oppression. People are **made** poor ("empobrecidos"). Action to overcome poverty has to take this into consideration; poverty is a social and political reality, not just the unfortunate situation of an individual. Without this perspective, poverty could be interpreted as personal fate due to lack of education or even laziness, suggesting that the poor are the only ones responsible for their own situations of poverty.

According to Christian teaching, the greatest commandment is to love God "*with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" and "your neighbor as yourself.*" (Matthew 22: 37-39). Responding to the neighbor when the neighbor is a community or a group of affected people also has the advantage that many people, not just individuals, can be involved in diaconal processes of transformation. It is possible to establish networks of people, and stimulate organized initiatives and institutional responses. This is applicable in numerous situations: for people living with HIV and AIDS, for residents in a poor urban community, for family members of drug addicts etc.

1.2 Short-term and long-term action

Responsible diaconal service will contain both short-term and long-term objectives. The parable of the Good Samaritan illustrates this effectively when it describes the different steps of his action. The first consisted of "coming near" the seriously injured man on the road. This is a step that ex-

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presses solidarity and the overcoming of fear and apathy regarding the suffering of others. "Coming near" is also necessary in order to see what has happened and to know what is needed. The second step concentrates on responding to the immediate need of suffering, using existing resources—in this case bandages, oil and wine—in order to get the healing process started. The third step concerns rehabilitation and return to normal life, with preparation for continued support if necessary.

In a group discussion about this text, someone once asked: "Where did the Samaritan go after he had left the victim at the inn?" An interesting answer was proposed: "He went to the mayor's office in Jericho and reported the situation demanding action against violence and for the protection of the victims". Of course this is pure imagination, but it points to yet another step of advocacy which illustrates the intimate relation between compassion and justice, and the need to hold together different objectives in diaconal action.

Therefore, even when diaconal work takes the form of immediate action to alleviate human suffering, which always will remain a priority, the wider context of suffering and its root causes must be given due attention.

This attention to the long-term implications related to root causes has to be considered from the start in the way that diakonia is carried out. It should be reflected from the outset when objectives for diaconal work are formulated. Some of the most important elements include:

1. the dignity of people is affirmed and defended;

2. peoples' rights are uplifted and promoted;

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3. processes of empowering people are initiated;

4. space is created for giving people access to rights, participation and responsibility in society (building citizenship*);*

5. building-blocks towards societal transformation are laid.

When these elements are in place, there is good reason to hope that diaconal work may contribute to substantial change, not only in the life of individuals, but also in Church and in society. This may correspond to a concept which is also applied to development: a process of transformation of the human condition that envisions justice, peace and the integrity of creation.[8]

However, having pointed to this wider context for diaconal action and the need for many-faceted objectives, it must nevertheless be remembered that not all diaconal action will be able to fulfill this broad ambition. Even then, diaconal work continues to be an important and valuable task, for instance when a dying person is accompanied to final rest in care and prayer. In situations where change apparently is not possible, diaconal action has the mandate to offer signs of hope through its ministry of presence and accompaniment, even in the absence of signs of hope.

2. The basic directions of diaconal work

The LWF document *Mission in Context* points to transformation, reconciliation and empowerment

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as three dimensions of mission that "permeate all mission endeavors and provide criteria with which the Church judges its faithfulness in before Christ who has sent it into the world."[9] As an integral part of the Church's mission, these are also key concepts for diakonia: they show the basic directions of diaconal work, and at the same time transformation, reconciliation and empowerment indicate how the work is done and by which values it is oriented.

2.1 Transformation

Mission in Context describes transformation as "an ongoing process of total reorientation of life with all its aspirations, ideologies, structures, and values." It is "a continuous process of rejection of that which dehumanizes and desecrates life and adherence to that what affirms the sanctity of life and gifts in everyone and promotes peace and justice in society."[10] Transformation engages and changes all who are a part of it. In that manner, transformational diakonia helps to overcome so-called helpers' syndromes, practices and relations that separate "we"

8 In 1990, the WCC sponsored the World Convocation on Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation in Seoul, Korea. At the Canberra Assembly in 1991, the WCC strongly affirmed the JPIC process, and a Justice, Peace, and Creation Unit was formed.

9 *Mission in Context*, p. 32.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 32-33.

from "they". In the end, no person escapes vulnerability. We all need to be transformed, reconciled and empowered. For that reason, we are all in need of diakonia, first of all of God's diakonia as revealed in Jesus Christ, and then as mutual care and accompaniment of one another.

Transformation is clearly a process, but at the same time, transformation envisions the achievement of certain goals, arriving at a new situation where human dignity is more respected with peace and justice for more people. Thus, transformation is closely related to what also may be defined as social change, progress or development.

From a theological point of view, transformation is a reminder of God's constant renewal of creation (Latin: *creatio continua*), as every morning we experience that the darkness of night is transformed into the light of a new day breaking forth. As people of God, we see transformation as God's gracious gift for which we owe praise and service. It links diaconal work to the admonishment of St Paul who told the believers "*not to be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*" (Romans 12:2).

Thus, transformation rejects conformism. It expresses an alternative way for experiencing God's will. As the *Mission in Context* document reads, "*transformation, perceived in the light of Christ's resurrection, is the unfolding of the potential life-giving nature of all creation and an expression of the working of God's grace in nature. It is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit to effect transformation in and through the Church to the whole world.*"[11]

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2.2 Reconciliation

For Christians, reconciliation is God's merciful gift grounded in the message that God has reconciled the world in Jesus Christ. This gift is a promise for a broken world, and diakonia seeks to witness to this promise through initiatives of furthering peace and reconciliation. As people of God equipped for mission, the Church is called to participate in God's reconciling mission, beseeching people on behalf of Christ to be reconciled with God (2 Corinthians 5:19) and one another. Reconciliation first of all refers to God's action, through which human beings have their relation to God restored. At the same time, restoration implies being transformed and empowered for "the ministry (Greek: *diakonia*) of reconciliation" The concept of "diakonia" clearly reminds us that the diakonia of Jesus, his way of unconditional presence among the poor, his prophetic defence of the excluded, his acts of healing, and last but not least, his announcement of forgiveness and new life under the promise of a new age to come, is the way for the Church to follow in its mission of reconciliation.

According to Robert Schreiter, reconciliation opens a new narrative that overcomes "*the narrative of the lie.*"[12] In situations of violence and oppression, victims are not allowed to tell their stories, and real reconciliation can not happen if the truth about the past is not revealed. When amnesty was declared

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11 *Ibid.*, p.33.

12 Robert J. Schreiter: *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order.* Maryknoll 1992.

in El Salvador after the years of brutal violation of human rights, it was on the condition that those held responsible for torture should go free. Thus the oppressor's narrative was upheld as the official one, the one everybody is supposed to believe. How differently this was handled in South Africa after apartheid was abolished, and President Mandela appointed a *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* which was given the task of telling the true story of past years, for the sake for reconciliation and healing of wounds.[13]

Truth is not always allowed to be told; it requires an environment of safety and mutual respect. In some cases, confidentiality has to be a part of that environment, as it also may happen that the truth may be abused for the sake of increasing hate and violence. This has often been the case of women telling the truth. On the other hand, their stories as voices of the vulnerable and silenced must be given special attention. Their stories may turn out to be the most powerful energizing processes of reconciliation.

Reconciliation and justice are deeply interrelated. It has been noted that the work of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* indeed contributed to unmasking the truth regarding the time of apartheid in South Africa. But did it contribute substantially to restoring justice? Some felt that the general amnesty not only gave impunity to people responsible for committing atrocities, but that it also silently accepted injustices that continue to have a dramatic effect on poor people's lives.

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It is in line with the Christian concept of reconciliation that it never takes people back to where they were before. Reconciliation is more than the removal of suffering for the victim and conversion for the oppressor. Reconciliation takes people to a new place; it empowers them for renewed relations and responsibilities.

2.3 Empowerment

As a theological concept, empowerment refers to the biblical understanding of creation that every human being is created in the image of God, with capacities and abilities, independent of their apparent social situation.

Further, it relates to the promise of Pentecost, "*you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses … to the end of the earth.*" (Acts 1:8). The story of Pentecost tells how the disciples were transformed, how their fear was overcome, how their questions of the past were

[13] A theological analysis on reconciliation reflecting the experiences in South Africa is found in John W. de Gruchy: *Reconciliation. Restoring Justice*. Minneapolis 2002.

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replaced by words proclaiming "*the mighty works of God*," as their language was transformed according to the context that surrounded them. It is the conviction of the Church that God continues to empower people, not only the Apostles and others who have assumed leadership, but especially those who are rarely, if ever, given the opportunity to speak. This conviction should shape diaconal action, its methodology and its priority setting. Such action witnesses the faith in God who reveals his grace and power by choosing "*what is low and despised in the world*," (1 Corinthians 1:28). This has inspired diaconal workers in Latin America to add a parallel concept to empowerment, namely "*dignification*", which means establishing diaconal practices that lift up the dignity of people and give them their ability to be "subjects"—both in Church and society.

It should be remembered that empowerment always implies shifting of power, which means that imbalances of power must be dealt with critically. Diakonia should constantly raise this issue, not only in society and in the relations between helpers and those helped, but also with reference to diaconal praxis and how power is established and lived out in the life of the Church. Too often the question of power is silenced in the Church; in some cases it is even disguised behind service language.

The task of being a bridge-builder is integral to the very nature of diakonia. As noted earlier, the classical Greek use of the word diakonia points to the mission of a go-between, a messenger, or even an ambassador who has been mandated to restore relations, to heal and to reconcile.

In the Ancient Church, the deacon was called "the ear and the mouth of the bishop." It was the deacon who had the responsibility to bring the stories from the margin, from the lives

of the poor and the sick into the Church. The mission of go-between is successful if distances can be bridged. When this happens, diaconal action can contribute to transformation of the Church—both in its center and periphery.

All diaconal actions, including those addressing immediate needs, are embedded in a comprehensive mandate of building relationships. As a diaconal method, accompaniment seeks to overcome isolation and exclusion, and to identify pathways that may offer possibilities for broader sharing in mutual solidarity. A Latin American regional meeting on diakonia described this task as "migrant diakonia", in a context where people often are on the road, trying to escape poverty.

A go-between needs the capacity to listen to different versions of a story, and to see why such differences emerge. Then there is necessity of really going between, of building bridges of understanding and acceptance. Again, this is related to communion building, of identifying processes of reconciliation and of inclusion.

There are endless situations which call for the diaconal action of bridge-building, both inside and outside the Church. People living with HIV and AIDS are often stigmatized by the community. Migrant groups are discriminated against. Women suffer violence and their voices are not heard. Children of poor parents receive inferior education. In situations like these, diakonia cannot limit its responsibility to denouncing injustice—which of course is important—but needs to find ways of going-between. Concrete initiatives and projects are tools that may contribute to the process of constructing a more just and sustainable society.

The Church's role of go-between can also be required in complicated political conflicts. When Madagascar experienced a deep crisis in 2002 and again in 2009, national church leaders played an important role facilitating dialogue between the political leaders. The churches in the German Democratic Republic provided an open space for people to meet and express their hope for a new time, facilitating movement towards the collapse of the regime in 1989.

A go-between cannot be silent. Communication is a basic component of bridge-building. This communication often needs to be patient and diplomatic, but there are also situations when communication has to be prophetic and to lift up the voice of the silent and the suffering.

3. The different expressions of diaconal action

3.1 Individual diakonia – the diaconate of all believers

As noted in the previous chapter, all the baptized are empowered for diakonia. This brings us to the first and most basic expression of diaconal work, namely that of individual diakonia, which normally is spontaneous in everyday life and expressed through a wide variety of good works.

Individual diakonia may often be referred to as ordinary human behavior—actions that natural helpers are accustomed to performing, independent of faith and worldview. It has already been stated that diaconal work in the first place responds to people's concrete needs. An important biblical text that has shaped this understanding is found in Matthew 25: 31-46 where the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned are lifted up as being in need of care and attention. Again, it is clear that not only Christians are moved to act when confronted with such need. The specific diaconal dimension of this story, however, is the way in which Christian identity relates such action to Christ, and to his identification with those in need: *"… you did it to me!"*

The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) is another biblical text that has inspired Christians for diakonia throughout the centuries. The surprising element in the text is that an outsider, representing a despised and marginalized religious group, acts compassionately when seeing a fellow human being in need, while the priest and the Levite pass by. In a context of discussion about how to inherit eternal life, and provoked by the question *"Who is my neighbor?"* Jesus tells the story of one who showed mercy, and concludes, *"Go and do likewise."* But now the question has been inverted, from "*Who is my neighbor?*" to "*Who was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?*" In other words, it is not the definition of the other that qualifies for merciful action, but a God-given quality given to every human being, of being a neighbor to others.

Most often such actions do not need to be named, as they are in and of themselves considered natural and right. It might, however, be helpful to also affirm their importance by giving them a meaningful name. After a workshop on diakonia in Brazil, a woman said: "*Now I know that what I have always been doing has a name. It is diakonia*!" She told about her engagement with poor farmers who were poisoned by pesticides, her involvement in human rights activities, and her custom of visiting sick and lonely members of her congregation. *"I always felt that all this had to do with my faith," she said, "but I did not know that it has it proper name. Now I know!*" Such knowledge may not mean one would do other things or to do them differently, although it may also mean that. In any case, naming such work as diakonia affirms what is done, identifies it source, and motivates and empowers for further action.

3.2 Organized diakonia – the collective effort of the congregation

Very often the whole congregation responds to diaconal challenges. Act 6:1 tells us that the congregation in Jerusalem organized a *daily diakonia,* probably a system by which the poor received their daily food. However, it turned out that the organization had to be improved, and new leadership was identified and given authority for the work. Later Paul organized a collection of money—simply called *the diakonia*—among the Greek congregations in order to help the poor congregation in Jerusalem.

Research has documented the appalling living conditions in first century urban settings, with life expectancy less than 30 years, unsanitary living conditions, scarce drinking water, rampant disease, constant influx of immigrants, and ethnic conflicts. In this context, the Church began its mission and ministry, and its diaconal practice was experienced as something radically new and different. Rodney Stark has described how care for the sick and marginalized, the welcoming lifestyle of congregations and the firm belief in the power of resurrection attracted people from all social classes and created a Church that within a few centuries grew from being a small group of people to become the leading religious movement in the Roman Empire.[14]

Since then there are endless examples of initiatives that have been taken and organized in congregations and local churches all over the world. In times of plague, visitation to the sick was organized and the dead were taken care of. In times of war, refugees were hosted and given asylum. Times may change, but there has never been a time when needs ceased to exist or congregations ceased to respond. The commandment that Jesus gave to his disciples upon the news that people were hungry—"*You give them something to eat.*" (Matthew 14:16),—has been echoed in a variety of contexts and related to in many forms of response until this day.

Such diakonia however, must be organized and someone has to be given the responsibility of organizing. This is the reality of anything that

[14] Rodney Stark: *The Rise of Christianity. A Sociologist Reconsiders History*. 1996

is considered important. Because worship is important, time and space for worship services are organized and well prepared, with people given responsibility accordingly.

With diakonia, it is the same thing. In order to be done systematically and to be continuously part of the life of the Church, it needs structures and leadership. In the Church of Sweden, every congregation is obliged to present a plan to the bishop that includes diakonia, worship, education and mission. The plan helps the congregation to see all dimensions of their work together and to have this in mind when they define priorities, responsibilities and needed resources.

It can happen that diaconal work in the congregation comes to be understood as helping some poor people "out there." There is a growing recognition of the fact that diakonia is not "for" others, but "with" others. According to the biblical understanding, help is an expression of love (1 Corinthians 13) that takes place within a framework of mutuality and equality (2 Corinthians 8:13-15). Diaconal service blesses both the giver and the receiver. In addition, the one who receives help today may tomorrow be the one taking care of another. In societies where social differences allow some classes to be much more privileged than others, help may too often turn into charity, which means that the well fortuned in their benevolence provide some assistance to the poor. In this case, the provision of help may deepen differences and create a situation where some people always are "resourced helpers", while others always are "helpless receivers." It certainly is the case that much diakonia has been organized as charity work through the action of the rich and powerful towards the poor. Such practices should be profoundly questioned. Such help tends to be paternalistic and alienating, as it is organized according to what benefits and serves the needs of the helpers. In Latin America, this practice is often called "*asistencialismo,*" as its aim is to assist, and not to give space for equality and mutuality. Therefore, since such action perpetuates difference and separation, it is not likely that it will contribute to real change.

Building Stronger Families

Every Tuesday and Friday morning for the past three years, Nancy Krause has visited the Polk County Jail for one hour to teach inmates about parenting. It is part of Lutheran Services in Iowa's (USA) Mobile Parenting Program, which offers classes to Iowans who can't easily travel—immigrants, people living in jail or at homeless shelters. Many of the parents live or have lived in poverty. "Poverty limits your choices," said Krause about her inmate students. "You live in a world of limited choices, of limited possibilities."

These observations could give the impression that charity is something negative. On the contrary, it is a virtue that belongs to the tradition of the Church. South African theologian Molefe Tsele stated at the LWF consultation on prophetic diakonia: "We must resist the tendency to turn charity into a dirty word. God is charitable to his entire creation. Society as a whole needs to be made more charitable".[15]

True charity relates to community and justice. Community-based diakonia enhances inclusiveness and mutuality in dealing with challenges of suffering and injustice. It affirms the value of doing things together and the conviction that all persons are gifted and able to participate in working for what is good and right. It resembles the African saying: "If you want to hurry, walk alone. If you want to go far, walk together."

3.3 Institutionalized diakonia – when a more structured approach is needed

There are situations when diaconal challenges require efforts that go beyond what can be organized at a congregational level. Very early in the history of the Church it was recognized that diaconal work

[15] Johannesburg report, p 54.


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often demanded more solid structures. Hospitals and homes for orphans and the homeless were established. Strong links continued to exit between congregations and these institutions. Without these links and the continuous support of the church members, these institutions would not exist. There was also a conscious continuity of identity. The very name "hospital" reflected the Church's mandate to practice diaconal hospitality. The architecture of the oldest hospitals also points to the relationship between faith and care, as the rooms were often constructed in a way that allowed all patients to see the altar and thereby be reminded of the message that God is the healer of the sick.

The modern diaconal movement that began in Germany in the 1830s has led to the establishment of countless diaconal institutions, not only in that country, but across Europe and on other continents. Due to the fact that the official church at that time was closely related to the state, initiatives of mission and diakonia had to be organized as free associations, surely inside the church, but independent organizations in the relation to church authorities.

One of the pioneers of this diaconal movement was Theodor Fliedner, a pastor in Kaiserswerth, a small community not far from Düsseldorf in the western part of Germany. In September 1833, he and his wife Friederike opened a home for released female prisoners, followed by other initiatives such as a kindergarten and a hospital. They soon realized the need for trained workers, and three years later they founded a Motherhouse for deaconesses who were trained as nurses and kindergarten teachers. In the following decades, thousands of women were trained and consecrated as deaconesses. The Motherhouse resembled a Catholic convent in many ways, and the sisters, as they actually were called, were committed to the rules of the community which meant obedience, sharing of resources and celibacy.

Also in September 1833, Johann Hinrich Wichern opened a home for homeless children from a poor slum in Hamburg (Germany). He was motivated by the conviction that good education would save them from misery, especially if the education included training for a profession. This shows that education was an integral part of organized diaconal action, as an important instrument for overcoming poverty. For that reason, a large number of educational institutions have been established within the tradition of diakonia. Some of them target children from poor and socially disadvantaged families. Others give school opportunities to children who traditionally were excluded from public schools for reasons such as blindness, deafness, or mental illness.

This is very much in line with Luther's strong commitment to education. When the Reformation took place, he proposed that monasteries be turned into public schools. He reminded parents that they had received their children as gifts from God, and therefore were accountable to God for their well-being, and education was integral. He

wrote to political leaders in Germany and recommended schools for all children reminding them that *"a city's best and greatest welfare, safety and strength consists rather in its having many able, learned, wise, honorable, and well-educated citizens (...) than in mighty walls and magnificent buildings."*[16]

A broad presentation of the diaconal movement of the 19th century, and the many actors and the different forms these committed persons gave to diaconal engagement at that time is not possible here. It should be observed, however, that this movement revolutionized the role of women in Church and society. For the first time, unmarried women were given education and position. Through their work, modern health and social care was shaped, and models were developed that later were adopted by the state when welfare systems were introduced.

In many ways, the diaconal movement was inspired by pietism and its rather individualistic spirituality. The strength of this influence was its personal approach and individual vocation, focusing on personal relationships. It created space for initiatives and led to the establishment of institutions of education, health and social care As a result of this movement, there are today some 30,000 diaconal institutions in Germany. This was made possible thanks to a complex system of funding where strong links to the governmental authorities are well established.

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Although these institutions function as health and social institutions according to governmental norms and requirements, there are still strong links between diaconal institutions, national church bodies and local congregations. In many cases, they support professional diaconal work by providing financial resources, governance in boards and other leadership, volunteer participation and spiritual accompaniment.

In the USA, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has affiliated social ministry organizations that provide services across the country. There are approximately 280 health and human service organizations in thousands of communities, serving more than six million people each year, or one in 50 Americans. Five percent of these organizations are quite large and serve in multiple sites and across many states.

It must be recognized that many of these institutions give a unique witness of Christian care for people in need. They promote professional competence and civil responsibility. A home for young, un-

[16] "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools" (1524), English translation by A. Steinhaeuser in *Luther's Works*. Vol. 45 (Philadelphia: 1962), pp. 355-356

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married, pregnant women in Brazil becomes a space for defending human dignity and for preparing for the future. A project for rural community development in Madagascar allows small farmers to recognize their own resources and improve their food production in a sustainable way. A training center in India offers opportunities for young people who have been excluded from established education systems.

Many diaconal institutions in the global South were established by missionaries. However, many of these institutions were not sustainable when mission organizations reduced their financial support and personnel. There are also impressive examples of diaconal institutions that were brought into life by local initiatives, and have adapted to local conditions.

The modern missionary movement was often institutionalized as an independent structure within the Church. It is only after the WCC Assembly in Delhi in 1961, that mission was fully integrated in the ecumenical vision of being Church, and no longer viewed as an activity belonging to a few organizations mainly localized in the North. It is difficult to see a similar full integration of diakonia and especially of institutional diakonia in the life of the Church. This is due to the fact that some churches fail to recognize institutional diakonia as an integrated part of what the Church is and does, but also due to the tendency of some diaconal institutions to continue to organize their work independently from ordinary Church structures. This represents a challenge to the institutions and to the Church. This is not always the case. Other churches, in North America for example, have developed structures that guarantee the institutions professional leadership and institutional independence, while ensuring Church participation in governing boards, therefore shaping the mission the institutions have and in relation to the Church.

3.4 International diakonia – response to human need with and on behalf of the worldwide communion of churches

The very ecumenical[17] nature of the Church implies that diakonia in its action cannot be limited by geographic, ethnic, social or even religious borders. This understanding has strongly marked the Lutheran World Federation and its vocational identity.[18]

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17 Ecumenical is derived from Greek "Oikoumene" which means "the inhabited world" or "the whole world".

18 The following depends on Brian Neldner's presentation in "Development Education Forum", June 1997. A history of LWF World Service is also given in "Let Us Help One Another: Service in the LWF", in Jens Holger Schjørring, Prasanna Kumari, Norman A. Hjelm (Eds.): *From Federation to Communion. The History of the Lutheran World Federation*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1997, pp. 85-141.

One of the major factors which led to the 1947 founding of the Lutheran World Federation at its first assembly in Lund, Sweden, was the need to provide humanitarian aid to the people of Europe who were suffering as a result of the Second World War. There was a strong motivation of self-help in the original charter of the Lutheran World Federation Service to Refugees—to help the one in six Lutherans who was a post-World War II refugee or displaced person. This gave the Lutheran World Federation a strong refugee response orientation which continues today.

Of concern to the second Hanover assembly in 1952, however, was the risk that the LWF, like its predecessor the Lutheran World Convention, might dwindle once the immediate post-war needs of Lutherans had been met. In an historic decision, the Assembly affirmed the on-going nature of the member churches' commitment to help those in need, but with a new focus. Help was to be given irrespective of who they might be, as a call of the Gospel. Thus was established the work of the LWF in meeting human need, with a clear mandate to extend aid to people beyond the confines of the Lutheran community.

For the LWF Department for World Service (DWS), which holds the responsibility for carrying out this work on behalf of the LWF member churches, the point of departure is human need. Central to the terms of reference of DWS, adopted by the Hanover assembly, is the mandate to: "*conduct, administer (…) such services [which] shall be global in scope and for the benefit of people in need irrespective of race, sex, creed, nationality or political persuasion*."

This task of meeting human need through the work of DWS must be seen in relationship with the counterpart mandate of the Department for Mission and Development (DMD), whose task is to strengthen the witness of the churches through mission and development. This is partly done through programs that are coordinated by the secretariat in Geneva. Some programs are under the responsibility of one of the area desks and then related to concerns of a specific region, for example the issue of poverty in Africa, interfaith cooperation in Asia, illegitimate debt in Latin America, and state-church relationships in Europe. Other programs are run by global desks, focusing on HIV and AIDS, gender issues, youth participation, human resources development, and communication services. In addition DMD is coordinating support to some 230 projects that are designed and implemented by LWF member churches. Here the main task of DMD is to fund the projects and to accompany the project-holders in the process of implementation and reporting.

Throughout its history, LWF has maintained its confessional identity and fostered an ecumenical approach to providing humanitarian aid on an international basis.

Close cooperation began from the outset, with a ground-breaking ecumenical structure of aid to refugees in Africa in the early 1960s. The Tanganyika Christian Refugee Service was established by the LWF on behalf of the World Council of Churches and in cooperation with the Christian Council of Tanzania. Subsequently, a similar program was begun in Zambia.

At the same time, an LWF program for Chinese refugees in Hong Kong became a comprehensive social service program which was then handed over to the Hong Kong Christian Council.

The great droughts of Africa from the early 1970s saw coordinated church agency action involving LWF, WCC and the Catholic agencies through Caritas Internationalis and their national counterparts in the Churches Drought Action in Africa. This led to further joint approaches, not only on the international level but in newfound cooperation among local churches such as in Ethiopia and Eritrea. Currently, involvement of the LWF in Action by Churches Together affirms a continued ecumenical commitment.

In 1970, the human rights resolution at the Evian Assembly provided the framework and the

commitment of the LWF through its member churches to work in conflict areas. This led to wide-ranging aid to persons involved in or affected by the struggle for liberation, especially in Mozambique, Angola and Namibia. It included aid to exiles, refugees, repatriation operations, reconstruction, rehabilitation and development, as well as social and pastoral ministries to those in exile and engaged in liberation struggles. The pastoral ministry to Namibians in exile, organized in cooperation with the major churches in Namibia and the Christian councils in the countries of asylum, was carried out by the LWF through DWS.

The decision in 1974 of the Commission on World Service to begin work in the Islamic country of Mauritania was a significant action affirming the concept of a global commitment by DWS on behalf of all the LWF member churches. Such programs play an important bridge-building role with people in countries with other majority faiths. In 1997, the LWF Council affirmed that the LWF understands human rights as intrinsic to its involvement in humanitarian aid and development.

The operational capacity of DWS generates extensive resources from intergovernmental organizations and governmental back-donors through LWF-related agencies. Through the work of LWF World Service, these funds are channeled into programs that are an expression of Christian service to the neighbor in need.

DWS also works closely with the United Nations. At its very first assembly, the LWF addressed its concerns for refugees and displaced persons to the Secretary General of the United Nations. In that same year, LWF was accredited to the United Nations. This is the genesis of the longstanding DWS partnership with UN agencies, especially the United Nations High Commissioner for Ref-

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ugees (UNHCR). The LWF sees its work as complementary to that of the UN, providing a people-to-people approach which must continue to be the essence of partnership with all governmental and intergovernmental partnerships.

In the years ahead, the challenges to international humanitarian response will be driven by political decisions, economics and natural disasters. It will also be determined by culture, fundamentalism and religious divides. The LWF can be a go-between "diaconal bridge" across those divides as it, with and on behalf of the member churches of the LWF, responds to people in need.

Today, DWS (with its associated programs) operates in 36 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean. The vast majority of its annual USD 100 million budget is dedicated to humanitarian and development programs. Guided by the motto "Uphold the Rights of the Poor and Oppressed," DWS has identified six priorities for its work:

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1. responding to and preparing for disasters;
2. creating sustainable communities;
3. combating HIV and AIDS;
4. promoting peace, reconciliation and human rights;
5. transforming gender relations;
6. protecting the environment.

As already stated, Lutherans share this commitment with other Christians, and consequently, international diakonia has been an integral part of the ecumenical movement from its very beginning. In 1922, the *European Central Bureau for Inter-Church Aid* (Europäische Zentralstelle für kirchliche Hilfsaktionen – EZ) was founded in Zürich, Switzerland, under the auspices of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches, and later joined by other European churches. The office was moved to Geneva in 1928, and in 1945 it merged with the World Council of Churches (WCC).

In 1938, when Willem A. Visser 't Hooft was asked to become the first general secretary of the WCC, he set as condition that there would be a department for inter-church aid, because "there could be no healthy ecumenical fellowship without practical solidarity." In 1949, one year after the first WCC Assembly in Amsterdam, the Central Committee stated that interchurch aid is a permanent obligation of the WCC, and that it is rendered most effectively ecumenically. In 1971, this unit was named CICARWS (Commission on Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service).

CICARWS' mandate was to "*assist the churches to manifest their solidarity by sharing their human,*

material and spiritual resources and to facilitate such sharing so as to promote social justice, human development, and relief to human need." Towards the end of the 1980s, the unit started to be more proactive in trying to help churches and related groups in their reflections about the root causes of the problems, and to find methodologies which would allow them to respond more comprehensively to people's needs. As a result, CICARWS reduced its involvement in projects, but continued a system of drawing up priority projects to respond in very practical ways to the priorities and challenges of the ecumenical movement. In 1992, it was replaced by a new unit called *Sharing and Service*.

As pointed out, the misery after World War II prompted church leaders in many countries to set up structures for international humanitarian aid. Even before that, in 1922, *Folkekirkens Nødhjelp* (DanChurchAid) was founded in Denmark, responding to needs in Eastern Europe and with the special mandate to accompany minority churches in that region. At the same time, similar church-related organizations were being formed throughout the world and in response to the context of World War II. In fact, some of these organizations were formed to receive refugees coming from Europe after the war, and later expanded their work to global international diakonia.

By the end of the 1950s, many of these agencies had turned their attention to the emerging independent nations in the global South and their struggle to overcome poverty and patterns of colonialism. New initiatives were taken. Protestant churches in Germany started a program called *Bread for the World* in 1959. Today, this organization supports more than 1000 projects in cooperation with local churches and partner organizations in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe under the motto "*Justice for the poor.*"

The agencies, on the one hand, are instruments for individuals and congregations that see it as their Christian duty not limit to their diakonia to their immediate neighbor, but extend it to all who suffer. On the other hand, they are arms of local (or national) churches, mandated and directed by them with a clear aim of fighting poverty and injustice, and in assisting partners to do so. The agencies can therefore be seen as intermediaries, mandated by their constituencies, to diaconal action in cooperation with like-minded partners in other parts of the world

Since the 1960s, many of these agencies have received financial support from their respective governments, and they have become more and more involved in long-term development work. Advocacy initiatives have also become an important priority for their work. Over the last decades, this has led to some changes in the way the agencies understand their work. First and foremost, the agencies more clearly recognize their role as agents for transformation, both in their own context and in the global South. This is grounded in an improved

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understanding of the structural reasons for poverty, and that the root causes of human needs are most often related to systems of oppression and injustice. Secondly, recognizing this makes it clear that development work is not an easy endeavor and requires professional expertise.

When ecumenical diakonia was organized after World War II, it took the form of a multilateral operation. This recognized that the challenges of responding to post-war Europe were too large for one single church or agency. From the 1970s on, bilateral cooperation has grown to be the most common form of international diakonia, favored by many because of the direct contact between cooperating partners.

Bilateral cooperation is often preferred because it is considered to be faster and more effective than multilateral efforts. On the other hand, bilateralism also implies challenges. Some churches in Africa cooperate with many partners bilaterally which means a lot of work responding to each partner's strategic goals, requirements for reporting etc. A multilateral approach allows for better cooperation. There is also the problem of how to handle the imbalance of power in bilateral partnerships. Within multilateral cooperation, there are more partners involved and power can be better shared. Another advantage of multilateral cooperation is its potential of connecting more actors and of sharing knowledge and experiences within a broader network.

These developments have also provided motivation for stronger ecumenical cooperation. From the early 1990s, agencies from the global North met regularly as the *Heads of Agencies Network,* although over time there was growing concern that churches and church-related response mechanisms from the global South were not at this table. In 1995, *Action by Churches Together* (ACT International) was established to provide a global, coordinated response to emergencies. In 2000, the *Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance* (EAA) was formed to coordinate the global advocacy of churches and church-related organizations on particular issues (currently HIV/AIDS and food security). This was followed by initiatives for strengthening collaboration in the area of development, and the WCC was asked to host the process.

The 1982 Geneva Consultation on "Contemporary Understandings of Diakonia" characterized diakonia as an ecumenical resource-sharing system in terms of eight key phrases. Diakonia is:

- Essential for the life and well-being of the Church
- Concentrating on the local level
- Worldwide in international solidarity
- Preventive of the growth and sustenance of unjust structures
- Concerned with structural and political dimensions
- Humanitarian beyond the household of faith
- Mutual
- Liberating with stress on empowerment and promoting participation of the people

Source: From Inter-church Aid to Jubilee. A brief history of ecumenical diakonia in the World Council of Churches. *WCC, Geneva 2002, p. 13*

In February 2007, *ACT Development* was formed as "a global alliance of churches and related organizations who are mandated to work ecumenically in development and who choose to work together", with the goal to "promote and facilitate cooperation between participants to improve their effectiveness in transformational development". [19]

As of 2009, Act Development was composed of 70 organizations working in long-term development in more than 150 countries and with an annual budget of all the organizations together of approximately USD 1,400,000,000. It focuses on long-term development by strengthening the capacity of its participants and the cooperation between

[19] www.actdevelopment.org/pages-en/documents-en.html

There are nine biblical, theological affirmations for ecumenical diakonia in the midst of globalization. Ecumenical diakonia:

- Must respond to our context: global and local
- Is a call to participate in God's mission
- Is prophetic diakonia
- Is transformative and justice-seeking
- Is inseparable from koinonia
- Is global diakonia and is for all people and for all of creation
- Is about healing, reconciliation and reconstruction
- Is about building just relationships, mutuality and sharing

We are called to be united in God's mission, in compassionate, reconciling, transformative, justice-seeking, and prophetic diakonia.

Source: Chris Ferguson and Ofelia Ortega: Ecumenical Diakonia. Unpublished WCC Document, 2002, p. 3

them. Already at the start of ACT Development, it was clear that there should be a strong interrelation between humanitarian work, development work and advocacy, preferably being coordinated by one global alliance. For this reason, much work has been done to bring ACT International and ACT Development together. After a careful process including regional consultations, the two Assemblies of ACT International and ACT Development decided with overwhelming majorities to merge their activities and to start in January 2010 with the new unified ACT Alliance.

There is no doubt that there has been an urgent need to coordinate international diakonia, and that the establishment of these alliances presents important tools in that direction. At the same time, these initiatives have raised questions about the broader mutuality of diaconal response. One concern is in relation to the concentration of power and how to ensure that agencies from the global North will not have a dominating role in new structures. Another focuses on the understanding of development, and asks how the establishment of ACT Development relates to the churches and the understanding of holistic mission. A third concern relates to the nature of professional and effective work, and asks who has the power to determine when and how this is achieved. Although ACT International and ACT Development seek to be global instruments of diakonia, questions remain about whether the agendas, analysis and requirements from agencies in the global North may be imposed upon churches and organizations in the global South. These issues will certainly continue to be on the agenda of ecumenical discussions.

The LWF Addis Ababa global consultation on diakonia in October 2008 affirmed the rich tradition of agencies that continue to play an important role in international diakonia. But it also stated that "*there is an ongoing need to engage with one another in discussions about roles and approaches.*" The consultation recommended that "*new synergies and connectivity*" be sought "*to promote an honest dialogue between global South and North partners about new paradigms for cooperation in mission and diakonia which are mutually beneficial and complementary.*"

In this endeavor, asset-based and rights-based approaches are critical in that they assume that all individuals and the local community have important contributions to secure the integrity and sustainability of what is done.

4. Diaconal methodology

4.1 The importance of methodology

Emphasis has already been given to the importance of good planning in diaconal work. One key element of good planning is the formulation

of objectives and goals. Another is identifying methods. The word "method" comes from Greek (*meta* + *hodos*) and means travelling or following a road. Methodology pays attention to the *way* method is used in order to reach a specific goal.

For diaconal praxis, the question of methodology is crucial. No method is neutral, and all methods are value-laden. It is therefore a primary task to identify methods of work that favor participatory processes and empowerment, and that affirm the basic values of diaconal work.

The so-called "hermeneutics of suspicion" can be one important tool for bringing critical perspectives to diaconal action. Hermeneutics means "way of interpretation" and requires an inquisitive mind. This includes always asking: whose interests are behind what is said and done? The world and its problems look different from the perspective of the powerful than from the perspective of marginalized groups. Thoughtful diakonia has to be aware of this conflict and give space to voices which are ignored. Such practice belongs to good biblical tradition, pointing in the direction of prophetic diakonia.

4.2 See – reflect – act

The model of *see – reflect – act*, as used by Latin American theologians, has been widely accepted as a useful tool for connecting theory to praxis. It has also proven to be a very helpful method for planning and implementing diaconal activities.

To work with this method implies following three successive steps:

The first step is *to see*—which means to make a thorough analysis of what is being done, using the insight of social sciences and other relevant disciplines in order to get an authentic picture of the context in which the diaconal action takes place. Such analysis should, as its first step, pay attention to experiences and witnesses from the context. How is reality seen from the perspective of the poor and marginalized? What has been learned by ongoing diaconal practice and by others committed to transformative developments? What are the strengths and the weaknesses of such intervention? This gives space for what sometimes is called "*silent knowledge*," and for voices that do not always have access to disciplined reflection.

The second step is *to reflect*—which is the moment of bringing in concerns and impulses from Christian identity and faith when reflecting on praxis. While the first step is primarily analytical and related to secular knowledge, this second step is more hermeneutical, in the sense that it seeks to

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interpret what is seen and analyzed. How do we discern what is happening as signs of the time in the light of God's Word and the promise of the in-breaking reign of God in Christ?[20] How are we as Christians challenged to act, having in mind the mandate to participate in God's holistic mission? What diaconal action may be a relevant answer?

Such discernment will help the Church lift up its prophetic voice in denouncing injustice and sin, and to announce the good news of God's care for the poor and suffering in word and action.

In some situations, it may turn out to be helpful to wait for this second step before theological tools of interpretation are used. When starting only with theological reflection, the perspective may become too narrow. The dialectic interaction between analytical observation and theological reflection provides a sound interdisciplinary approach to diaconal action, and may give it added value as professional social intervention.

The third step is *to act*—and to bring the insight from the first two steps into the arena of diaconal activity. Hopefully, this will make action more analytical and disciplined, more focused and more effective.

Although this method is presented as a three-step procedure, it should be remembered that the first step starts from action, and the third step necessarily should lead to new reflection over praxis. The process is, therefore, circular. This does not mean that it is self-affirming, since critical perspectives and questions should accompany the process through all three steps.

4.3 Building citizenship

When discussing the purpose of diakonia (Part III: 1), the question was raised whether diaconal work should address individuals, groups or entire local

[20] *Mission in Context*, p. 23.

communities. While for many years the tendency has been to give preference to activities that would involve whole communities, new experiences point to the importance of also including an individual approach. In many cases, there is no need to differentiate between these options but rather to look for approaches that bring synergy between them.

One example of this synergic approach was developed in South Africa during the time of apartheid. Black South Africans, for instance, often suffered injustices because existing rights were denied or not applied by their white employers. This situation made some diaconal actors start programs to address policy and legal issues. Campaigns were started in the townships to raise awareness and empower people to claim their rights. At the same time, legal advice was offered to individuals who were in need of documents that would give them more protection as workers and citizens.

A similar experience occurred in Latin America related to the concept of building citizenship (Spanish "*construir cidadania*") as a communal effort motivated by a vision of a good society. Citizenship is understood as the set of rights that gives a person the possibility of participating actively in the life governance of his or her people. Lack of citizenship means being marginalized or excluded from social life, from decision-making, and being left in an inferior position within a social group. Building citizenship therefore means initiatives and processes by which individuals empower themselves to assume new roles in society, both in defence of their own rights, and as active participants in social and political movements.

This challenge is experienced in most parts of the world. Due to experiences during Communism, people in Eastern Europe acknowledge that they need to learn how to take initiatives together and become participatory and responsible citizens. Many Western countries experience that fewer people participate in organized political life and that traditional voluntary organizations are losing members.

The diaconal commitment to building citizenship is motivated by these social and political challenges. But it is also oriented by the old tradition of catechism that, in line with the Ten Commandments, will tell us how to live as citizens.

The method of building citizenship contains three main elements: advocacy, education and mobilization. All of them enhance a process of transformation which has many dimensions. On a personal level, people need to overcome attitudes of inferiority or the kind of fatalism which accepts destiny without raising questions. On a social level, there is the need to build knowledge and skills, and to be trained to participate in organized activities. A critical challenge in this process is to avoid manipulation, such as making people copy whatever mindset the trainers have. True empowerment allows people to create their own options, even if this may contradict some of the expectations that a project-holder may have.

It has been discovered that building citizenship is fundamental for strengthening democratic competence in society. Democracy needs to be built from below. Empowered citizens know how to address the needs of, and voice support for, the rights of ordinary people. This includes legal rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights. Empowered citizens know how to make an effort in order to influence important decisions and policies that affect their lives. They know ways of holding governments accountable, and they are committed to peaceful co-existence in multi-ethnic and pluralistic societies.

4.4 Constructing community

There is a strong mutual link between building citizenship and constructing community. Projects that are directed to the needs of a specific group, such as people living with certain physical challenges, will eventually contribute to the welfare of

the whole community. In some contexts, diakonia has the capacity to create space for political action which, for example, was the case in Central America during the time of military dictatorship in the 1980s. Therefore, no diaconal action can be seen in isolation from its societal and political context.

Community development has become an important activity in international diakonia. Its goal is that a whole community, and not only a privileged group, should participate in and benefit from the work being done. Its method is to include as many sectors as possible when working with the community: water, sanitation, food security, environment issues, education, gender issues etc. Whatever the entry point for diaconal action, whether emergency relief, rehabilitation, disaster preparedness or any form of development work, efforts should be intrinsically linked in a way that prepares for a participatory and integrated approach.

This integrated approach is oriented by the knowledge that all these different areas are mutually related to each other, and that sustainable development is only possible if all of them are addressed. Of course, this is normally too demanding a challenge, as no actor alone is able to deal with such a variety of tasks. For that reason, networking and working with local partners is of fundamental importance.

Over the last decades, it has been learned that sustainability requires strong local participation and ownership of processes of change. For that reason, community development seeks to empower individuals and groups of people by providing these groups with the skills they need to effect change in their own communities. These skills are often concentrated around building political power through the formation of large social groups working for a common agenda. Community developers must understand both how to work with individuals and how to affect the communities' positions within the context of larger social institutions.

For diaconal actors, it is always a demanding challenge to balance their own role and power in relation to the role and the power of a local community. Restraining, listening, and commitment to shared approaches and solutions must be a high priority. Solutions imposed from the outside do not work. They violate the integrity of individuals and the community, as well as the knowledge and decision-making that is part of their active citizenship. That is why today, agencies and other diaconal actors try to reduce their role in implementing complex projects, and instead seek local partners with good knowledge of local conditions.

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Another problem may appear when this work relates to sensitive issues, for instance land ownership, gender issues or cultural practices like female genital mutilation (FGM). How outspoken can diaconal actors be on such issues? Should they use their authority in order to raise questions of justice, or is this an abuse of their power? Would it, on the other hand, be

neglecting the prophetic dimension of diaconal work to keep silent?

It has been made clear over the last years that diaconal work must be rights-based. LWF World Service has included the rights-based approach as one of its main strategic approaches:

> The Rights-Based Approach first and foremost involves building up rights awareness on all levels, both among the powerless and the powerful. Development objectives are also human rights objectives. An emphasis on human rights in the context of development helps to focus attention on the structural inequities that cause and maintain impoverishment and exclusion. Conscious reference to human rights standards and objectives helps to ensure that the root causes of poverty and exclusion receive proper attention in the formulation and implementation of development programs, and to guard against narrow technical objectives becoming the reference point for development activities. This approach also reduces the risk that the poor are seen as needy objects of charity.[21]

As it is clear that diaconal action can never veil its Christian identity, it is equally evident that it cannot deny its basic values and its commitment to justice and human dignity. How this is done however, may depend on the local context.

4.5 Networking with others

Over the last years, civil society has emerged as an important arena for promoting people's participation and social change. Civil society is sometimes referred to as the "third sector" when seen in relation state and market that may be considered as the other two basic sectors in society. To strengthen

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[21] *Uphold the Rights of the Poor. Global Strategy 2007-2012*. LWF World Service, Geneva 2007, p. 9.

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civil society means to balance the power of these other two, as the following definition indicates:

> Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organizations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organizations, community groups, women's organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, trades unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups.[22]

[22] Definition according to the London School of Economics and Political Sciences: www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/what_is_civil_society.htm.

The role of civil society in strengthening horizontal structures in society and thereby furthering democratic principles is commonly recognized as a primary function. Another observation is that good governance depends on the existence of independent informal networks.

Churches and faith-based organizations are important actors in civil society. This arena gives churches a new opportunity to play an active role in society, which was often not the case in the past—especially in Europe—when the church was a part of the state power. As an actor in civil society, the Church is no longer seeking power as part of a hegemonic model, but looking for opportunities to participate in important public issues and to serve for the sake of public well-being.

For diakonia, civil society represents a unique opportunity for influencing society as a whole. Diaconal initiatives may be seen as pioneering examples of public responsibility. This relates to the basic conviction that diakonia alone cannot take responsibility for all human and social challenges, but should build alliances with all people of good will. The internal freedom of each partner of the alliance should be respected and encouraged. Civil society offers a good arena for networking and communication, and it is important that diaconal actors explore this possibility and bring their work into this broader context of public engagement.

Civil society also represents opportunities for advocacy. In cases where diaconal action is not able to give adequate attention to issues of justice, links to other actors may be helpful. This may also be the case when establishing relations with governmental structures. In some countries, experiences

of the past have created a deep mistrust of political authorities, and in other countries churches have been very loyal to governments, perhaps even to the point of being submissive. Within such contexts, alliances, preferably with like minded actors, may be built. The dialogue with governmental authorities may thereby be given more weight, and in so doing the quality can also be enhanced and contribute to the general public debate in a country. At the same time, it also gives visibility to the concerns of churches and their diaconal work.

4.6 Accountability

Mutual accountability is often pointed at as a basic value in international diakonia. Accountability refers to the practice of being mutual responsible, as for instance in cooperation between two or more partners. Normally, accountability includes two key components: answerability and enforceability. The first refers to the obligation to justify decisions and actions, the second the ability to ensure that an agreed action is taken.

When accountability is mutual, it gives all partners an equal right to hold the other responsible for delivering on their commitments. In reality, this is not always the case as there will often be asymmetries in the relations between the partners. Traditional donor-recipient relations carry imbalances in power and decision-making with them and should be questioned, especially in diaconal work.

On the other hand, it needs to be strongly affirmed that management competence and effective work practice are crucial in diaconal work, with mutual accountability being an integral part of this. Without such competence, even the best of intentions will not translate into solid and responsible action.

Today, *Joint Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation* (PME) has become a useful tool for funding agencies in the global North and their partners in the global South for improving management competence and working practices. The motivation is "*to improve internal working methods, so that limited resources could be used optimally in the struggle against poverty and injustice*", and also "*to improve communication between Southern organizations and Northern funding agencies by harmonizing their management information systems, orienting them towards learning and not just accountability, and ensuring the timely exchange of relevant information at the key stages of a project between partners working together towards shared development goals.*"[23]

The Paris Declaration, an international agreement signed by political and organizational leaders in 2005 under the auspices of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), is a significant example at the highest political level of a joint commitment to improve the quality of aid and its impact on development. One of the key principles of this commitment is stronger mechanisms for accountability which hold donors and recipients of aid mutually accountable to each other and make sure that compliance in meeting the commitments will be publicly monitored.[24]

These concerns should not be interpreted to be demands from external partners. This is a risk, since they represent power and can cut their support if certain requirements they have formulated are not observed by the partners in the South. All actors should embrace the principles of planning and accountability as their own strengths, values and skills. Communication is important, and honesty about an imbalance of power should be a part of the dialogue.

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[23] *Building bridges in PME. Guidelines for good practice in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of community-based development projects implemented by Southern NGOs with support from European Ecumenical Agencies*. Published by ICCO, The Netherlands 2000. Idem p. 6.

[24] More information on the Paris Declaration and its implementation is found at **www.oecd.org**

Good management and working practices are needed for the sake of the work that needs to be done. Professional diaconal competence should be enhanced above all, for the sake of the people involved in the work and their dignity in struggling for a better life. There also is a need for more accountability within churches. It is not acceptable if some church leaders say that they are "accountable to God only", if they fail to present accounts for their financial resources. Church leaders should be in the lead and set examples of responsible and transparent stewardship.

A general problem in project work is that the project-holder is often eager to do much more than is possible, taking into consideration the available resources. Good planning is crucial. At this stage, it may be helpful to undertake a

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SWOT-analysis[25] or another kind of assessment, such as an asset assessment or appreciative inquiry. As a result, the comparative advantage of the project-holder will become clearer, as the activity should not be based solely on a needs assessment, but on a solid analysis including strengths and available resources. Most likely, this will make the project manageable and more sustainable.

It is not easy for churches to choose to do less but to do it better. It is, however, important to remember that there are many other organizations outside the Church, and that diakonia cannot take responsibility for all challenges in society. For that reason, alliance-building with other actors is important. It also becomes more urgent for churches to focus their action in areas where their diaconal effort may make the most significant contribution.

5. Diaconal actors

Diakonia has many actors; most of them are anonymous in that they do what they consider natural and right when challenged by suffering, need or injustice. This is especially the case in relation to what in the previous chapter was described as individual diakonia. But also within the other expressions of diaconal action, it is normal that many more people are involved than those who have direct responsibility. It should be considered a priority to give more visibility to persons who engage in such service, not only to honor their commitment, but also to encourage others to follow their example. Without any doubt, more people would like to be involved in diaconal work if they just were given the opportunity.

Women have always played a key role in diaconal work, and it is quite common that more women than men are engaged both as volunteers and employed. There may be many reasons for this, including historical reasons. It is a reality which should invite our thoughtful and critical reflection. Deaconesses played a very central role in the diaconal movement that started in Germany in the 1830s. This had to do with the fact that there were no job opportunities for women at that time, so from a historical perspective this movement significantly contributed to providing a space for women, both in church and society.

[25] SWOT-analysis is a process of identifying Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

At the same time, women were, and in some cases still are, normally excluded from leadership positions in society and in the churches. Even the Motherhouse would have a man, most often a pastor, as the highest leader. In many cases, this is still the situation today, where men occupy leadership positions and are the real decision-makers regarding diaconal activities. In other cases, women may be in leadership, but decision-making and budgeting is done by men. Another sad reality in most parts of the world is that men are better paid then women, even if they are holding the same job. This is an inherited injustice that clearly contradicts the identity and values of diakonia.

The assumption that diakonia first and foremost is a task for women may sometimes be referred to as the "feminization" of diaconal work. This may be based on the mistaken understanding that diakonia is of secondary importance in the life of the Church, and interpreted as care and humble service. Such "feminization" of diakonia is not in line with its theological basis since diakonia belongs to the whole body of Christ in which both men and women are called to participate.

A gender approach is therefore very much needed in diaconal work. This includes both practical and strategic dimensions. A gender analysis addresses the context of socialized practices, whether they are in family, Church or society. Gender roles in diaconal work can be critically discussed related to this analysis: should they just reflect what is practiced in the context, or could they present an alternative for equal participation by women and men? It is important to see such an approach rooted in the identity of diakonia and in its commitment for inclusiveness and a participatory society.

Analyzing gender roles in diakonia should be considered both faith-based and rights-based. It emphasizes that women and men are made in the image of God, with equal stewardship, and are baptized into equal communion and energized by the Holy Spirit to be equally responsible for the whole of God's creation. In this process, it may be helpful to reflect on how women and men can jointly take their share in diaconal work. Are their capacities and roles similar or different? Can it also be the case that engagement in diaconal work will change the roles of men and women, both in Church and society? Or is the opposite experienced, i.e., that churches delay processes in society to recognize and uplift the roles of women?

It is important that this approach be practical, in the sense that it offers concrete help to women and men through training and organizing. Empowerment implies a shift of power. In this case, it means deconstructing mindsets that give exclusive power to men, and putting environments and policies in place that secure equality in participation and leadership.

5.1 Volunteers

As a matter of fact, most diaconal work is done by ordinary people. This is also the case when diaconal work is organized; even then volunteers play a crucial role. The role of the volunteer is of course highly valued, and many churches launch programs of recruiting volunteers in their work. This is based on the firm conviction that Church life cannot depend on the work of those who receive salaries for what they are doing.

In some cases, volunteers are highly qualified persons who use their professional skills in diaconal activities without receiving a salary. A medical doctor or a dentist may give some hours of her or his free time every week to a diaconal clinic for poor people. Some regard this as a "goodwill service", as a chance of giving back to the community what they themselves have received from the society. In other cases, the volunteers are themselves in need, and may receive a small recognition for what they do, as for instance a free meal or some pocket money.


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In many countries, opportunities are organized for young people who are willing to spend one year as volunteers helping others. One exciting example is the so-called *Diakonisches Jahr* (*diaconal year*) in Germany, in which churches offer young people between the ages of 16 and 27 the possibility of serving in congregations or in diaconal institutions. Another is the international non-governmental youth movement *Changemaker*, originally formed by young people who volunteered with Norwegian Church Aid. They have mobilized young people to be involved in international advocacy, with the aim of attacking the fundamental causes of unequal distribution of resources between rich northern countries and the poor South. A third example is the Young Adults in Global Mission Program organized by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Having this in mind, the role of volunteers deserves a more thorough reflection than often is the case, especially when volunteers are expected simply to "fill in" with tasks determined by the hired staff. It is important to remember that a volunteer is not an assistant of a paid worker, but a person who, according to her or his gifts and capacities, is able to perform important tasks. Many churches have set up hotline services for persons struggling with different kinds of difficulties, allowing them to ask for help by telephone. Normally those services are staffed by volunteers with relevant professional training.

In diaconal work, especially at the congregational level, a prime task is to recruit, motivate, enable and accompany volunteers. It happens that volunteers feel they are asked to do too much and too often, or that they are left alone in their service. Some withdraw after a short period, sometimes with a bad conscience or a sense of being abused. It is therefore important that volunteers are recognized for what they do, that they are included in process of planning and evaluation and that they are respected as important partners in the work. Volunteers will normally feel more comfortable in what they are doing if they are offered training opportunities. And last but not least, most volunteers see a deep connection between their faith and their service, and this must be recognized and nurtured.

From a certain perspective, it may be said that the term "volunteer" is somewhat misleading, especially if it gives the impression that there is an essential division between volunteers and hired staff. This may naturally be the case in very specialized diaconal work, where specific responsibilities require certain competence, and where the work is organized accordingly. This fact does not justify any hierarchy between the professionals and the volunteers, and it should by no means become an argument for reserving diaconal ownership and responsibility for a professional elite.

As the term "volunteer" is based on the Latin word "voluntas" which means "will", it may be un-

derstood that volunteer work depends on personal will. From a human point of view, this makes sense. From a theological point of view, when talking about diaconal service, it is however possible to take one further step and talk of service as vocation, given to all baptized and as an expression of a new lifestyle empowered by God's Holy Spirit.

Martin Luther developed his teaching on the ethics of vocation based on this understanding, and pointed to the world as the place for living out Christian vocation. This meant, for example, that a farmer should see daily work as service given by God, as should also a shoemaker and a teacher. This means that secular work, and not only work within the Church, is understood as vocation, where everyday life an important arena for expressing God's care for creation. This teaching is of course important for diaconal action.

5.2 Professional workers

With this understanding regarding what may be called the "deaconhood of all believers", the role of professional, trained diaconal workers can be dealt with. One may ask what happens when "good work" is performed by professional workers who receive salary for what they do. Is it still "good work" in the theological understanding of that concept? Following the position of Luther that whatever is done "in good faith" is good, it can certainly be affirmed that professional competence or receiving a salary does not take away the value of good work. It may even add quality to what is done.

Professional training and competence is first of all a means for securing quality in organized diaconal work, either at the level of congregational diakonia or at the level of diaconal institutions. Traditionally, deacons and deaconesses have personalized such training in the life of the Church, but other professionals such as health workers, social workers, administrators, economists, also participate in the task of securing the professional quality of diaconal work. Quality here is understood in two senses, both as input including motivation, attitudes, skills etc., and as output to be found in how the work is done and in its outcome.

The professionalization of health care and social work took place mainly after World War II, and was in many cases linked to the development of welfare systems. Its objective was, on the one hand, to lift up the status of people working within this field, and to provide good training and working conditions. On the other hand, and even more importantly, professionalization was intended to improve the services offered to those in need of them. It would become a governmental requirement that a professional health or social worker should have the knowledge to intervene in complex situations of human suffering in order to improve the quality of life in a way that would respect the dignity of the person in need.

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The same process can be seen in the professionalization of diaconal work. As a matter of fact, diaconal educational institutions often played a pioneer role in the professionalization of health care and social work. In diakonia, the main objective of professionalization is to secure quality in work performance. Qualified diaconal work implies different dimensions. One is, of course, the management dimension, meaning that the work is well organized and accountable from planning to implementation, with proper use of resources and good reporting. More importantly, however, is the content dimension, referring to the outcome of what is done and whether defined goals are achieved according to identified objectives. For that, professional work includes analytical tools, knowledge of methods and reference to value systems. The most important is nevertheless the human dimension. The real quality of diaconal work is how human dignity is respected according to holistic worldviews, how patterns of exclusion are overcome, how people are empowered to be subjects of their own lives, and eventually how this contributes to the transformation of society. This quality also includes competence in dealing with the spiritual dimension of such processes concerning individual situations, the capacity to respond to spiritual needs in a professional way, and to include faith, spirituality and religion in the overall understanding of human life.

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All these concerns are very relevant for international diakonia. Emerging opportunities and challenges require professional knowledge and skills. The impression is sometimes given that this is primarily an issue raised by Western agencies, enforced by governmental back-donors and their increasing demands regarding performance and reporting. This may be important, but the real reason for diaconal work to be professional is commitment to quality in what is done and what it intends to achieve. To put it bluntly, the most valid reason to be professional is respect and the concern for those who are served by such work.

Critical discernment is a built-in component of professional training. It is crucial, however, that such discernment also becomes self-critical and raises questions regarding the risks and the limitations of professional work. It can, for instance, be performed in an elitist way that excludes the wisdom and participation of non-professionals. It also becomes a problem if it leads to a sort of elitism by which diaconal work is reserved for diaconal specialists, or if it is oriented by strict secularism in a way that leaves no space for spiritual values and practices. Confronted with these attitudes, ordinary people feel powerless and are often silenced. In such cases, the professional is

experienced as a "technocrat", as illustrated by a story from Madagascar. A project was visited by representatives from a partner agency that had been supporting it financially for many years. After the visit those implementing the project commented sadly that "They only asked for files and reports. They spent much time checking our accounting system, and only a little time meeting people involved in the project. And there were no questions on what impact the project had on everyday life."


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The Addis Ababa consultation asked for "a culture of listening" in diaconal work, and held it as fundamental, "that professional competence includes local expertise and commitment, and is open for mutual empowerment." Indeed, it is important to witness to the interconnectedness of all expressions of diakonia, and that each be mandated to support and strengthen the others, although in some circumstances one expression may take a leading role in organizing what needs to be done. This may be the case in an emergency situation that requires capacities far beyond what a local congregation or church may have at their disposal. But even then, it would be wrong to ignore the role of the local church and the distinctiveness in its diaconal capacity, especially in the long-term perspective.

Diaconal work aims at empowering people to participate in processes of change. The skill to achieve this goal must be an integral part of diaconal training and professional competence. Such skills are expressed in both approaches and in methodology. But they are also evidenced in an holistic understanding of human reality, and in the ability to mobilize faith, spirituality and value systems when engaged in activities in order to improve conditions of life.

5.3 Orders of ministry

Deacons and deaconesses who have been trained and employed for diaconal work represent an explicit form of professional diaconal work. Some Lutheran churches have established the diaconate as a part of the Church's ministry. In some churches, (Sweden and Brazil, for example), the deacon is recognized as an integral part of the ordained ministry, while other churches reserve the term "ordination" for pastors, and use the terms "commissioning" or "consecration" when deacons begin their official ministry. Another example is Indonesia where the HKBP Church has a training school for deaconesses, and in 1983 made the decision that deaconesses can be ordained.

There is, however, no consensus among Lutherans regarding the nature and role of diaconal

ministry. Luther abolished the Catholic tradition that before a person would be ordained as a priest, he should be part of the order of deacons for a time, normally a year. This so-called *transitory diaconate* continues to be the norm in churches that have a hierarchical understanding of the ministry, for instance the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches.

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I hear from time to time that counseling and diakonia must be separated. Diakonia is sometimes described as the Gospel in action. To sit down with another human being is one significant expression action that gives meaning. Therefore for me, counseling and diakonia are intrinsically connected.

Stigs Kerstin Olsson, Deacon in the Säffle congregation, Church of Sweden

In Luther's opinion, a deacon should not be a sort of mini-priest, but a person who assists the poor in their needs. He commented that the Church would need such deacons, but only a few concrete initiatives were taken to establish a new order of deacons in the Lutheran churches at the time of the Reformation. In fact, the pastor became the *only* expression of ministry, strongly oriented by Lutheran orthodoxy and its reading of *Confessio Augustana* which primarily defines the Church's ministry as one of preaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments. This would normally be interpreted as the ministry of the pastor.

The orders of deacons and deaconesses that were established later, as part of the diaconal movement in the 19th century, were not related to the Church's ministry, although some initiatives were taken in order to establish such links. Commissioned for diaconal work, very often in health and social institutions, their mandate would not include "preaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments" in the strict meaning of this expression. In other words, they would certainly be recognized as Church workers, but not belonging to the Church's ministry,

In recent years, a possible renewal of the diaconal ministry has often been discussed, both in ecumenical circles and within Lutheran churches. One important impulse was given by the WCC and its Commission on Faith and Order which in 1982 launched the so-called BEM document on the understanding of Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. Here, attention is given to the three-fold ministry of bishop, presbyter (pastor) and deacon, as was recognized in the early Church. Regarding the diaconal ministry, the BEM document states that "*today there is a strong tendency in many churches to restore the diaconate as an ordained ministry with its own dignity and meant to be exercised for life.* (...) *Deacons represent to the Church its calling as servant in the world. By struggling in Christ's name with myriad needs of societies and persons, deacons exem-*

plify the interdependence of worship and service in the Church's life. They exercise responsibility in the worship of the congregation: for example by reading the scriptures, preaching and leading the people in prayer. They help in the teaching of the congregation. They exercise the ministry of love within the community. They fulfill certain administrative tasks and may be elected to responsibilities for governance".[26]

Some Lutheran churches have shaped a diaconal ministry according to this broad tradition in the Church. Deacons normally carry a primary responsibility for organizing the diaconal work of the local congregation, and in addition, they are expected to have a role in the worship life. This can include specific liturgical tasks, for example leading the prayers for the sick and those in need, or ensuring that conditions exist for all people to participate in the Holy Communion, including those with physical challenges.

When discussing diaconal ministry, a general skepticism is often expressed regarding the three-fold ministry, especially if this is interpreted hierarchically, the deacon being the lowest order of the ministry after the bishop and the pastor. The Lutheran tradition only knows one "ministerium ecclesiasticum." On the other hand, most Lutherans acknowledge that there is a distinction between the bishop and the pastor.[27] If it can be said that these represent two expressions of the same ministry, the question is whether the diaconal ministry can be understood as another needed expression?

That discussion should not focus on the three-fold ministry, but on the understanding of what it means to be Church in today's world. The bishops of the Church of Norway, discussing this issue in 2004, concluded that reflections on the diaconal nature of being Church, together with contemporary challenges, give good reasons for including the deacon into the Church's ministry. It is then seen as a fundamental dimension of the Church's one ministry, as a theological principle that may be applied if the Church chooses to restructure its ministry in a way that includes the diaconate.

In this case, the deacon is not understood as a "mini-priest", but as a person with specific diaconal training that qualifies him or her to assume a leadership role in the Church. It is understood as an expression of the "*bene esse*" (well-being) of the Church, in service of its identity and mission, and not as a doctrinal position in a way that the ministry of the Church has to be organized like this.

The LWF Consultation on Prophetic Diakonia in Johannesburg in 2002 in its final message pointed to the importance of diaconal leadership and urged churches to initiate and strengthen education for diakonia. "*As a ministry, it should be fully integrated into the Church's ordained, consecrated and commissioned ministries, as a reflection of the fundamental significance of diakonia for the being of the Church*".[28]

Here also, the entry point is the understanding of being Church. If diakonia is an intrinsic dimension of being Church, this must also be reflected in the leadership of the Church. This concern was further elaborated during a LWF Consultation on the Diaconal Ministry in the Mission of the Church in São Leopoldo, Brazil, 2005. "*We are convinced that, for a number of reasons, the importance of diakonia within the Church's witness has grown in recent years. Most LWF member churches find themselves in diverse sociopolitical and multifaith contexts, and sometimes in minority situations. (…) Under these conditions, the diaconal ministry can be an especially effective way of expressing the love of God.*"[29]

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26 *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. World Council of Churches, Geneva 1982. § 31 and attached Commentary.

27 *Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of the Church. The Lund Statement 2007*. LWF Geneva 2008.

28 *Prophetic Diakonia: "For the Healing of the World"*. Report. Johannesburg, South Africa, November 2002. LWF Geneva, p. 9.

29 *The Diaconal Ministry in the Mission of the Church*. LWF Studies 01/2006. LWF Geneva, p. 82.

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The report from the consultations further states: "*We understand diakonia as referring to a core component of the essence of the Church and its mission in the world. Diaconal witness is the manifestation of diakonia in the life of the Church in which every Christian is called to participate through baptism in daily life as an expression of the priesthood of all believers. Diaconal ministry is a specific expression of the one ministry of the Church (ministerium ecclesiasticum, Confessio Augustana V).* (…) *We assume that the potential of our Lutheran tradition has not yet been fully exhausted. The one (public) ministry of the Church (Confessio Augustana V and XIV) is divinely instituted. Nonetheless, in light of ever changing historical realities, the Church must address the task of ordering it anew. As we have seen, the biblical witness itself as well as the history of the Church, the Lutheran included, reveal that there is no uniform or universal patterns of ordering the public ministry.*"[30]

This reflection led to the following conclusion: "*We call upon the member churches to reexamine the ways in which they have ordered the ecclesial ministry and, in particular, to do so in such a way that the diaconal responsibility of their mission is adequately expressed*".[31]

6. Training for diakonia

Most often diaconal action occurs in direct response to the needs and vulnerabilities of others, and for the purpose of promoting their rights. It is a reaction to both external challenges of suffering and need, and internal impulses motivated by compassion, solidarity and even of indignation or protest when fellow human beings suffer injustice and are being excluded.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 82 and p 84-85.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 88.

It is probably correct to say that a person cannot be trained for spontaneous action. Nevertheless, it is also correct that no action is truly spontaneous in the sense that it will always express a person's basic attitudes, values and reflections. Research has shown that what is often described as intuition is formed by former experiences and quite often by training.

This indicates that spontaneous diakonia can also be prepared for and given added quality through training activities. This may be the case, for example, when a congregation located in a context where many live with HIV organizes a workshop in order to strengthen people's awareness of how to act in order to defend human dignity and promote care.

All training should incorporate the foundational principle that all diaconal work will incorporate action beyond charity, and not distinguish between "we—the helpers" and "they—the helpless." In addition it should be recognized that all communities have wisdom, gifts and abilities that contribute to diaconal response. For instance, in the case of HIV and AIDS, basic insight is added when people who live with HIV and AIDS are involved as trainers. Only then can the different dimensions of this challenge acquire a human perspective that may be transformed into actions of compassion, care and justice.

Training to invite growth and change in attitudes is an important dimension of this process. A school of diaconal education in Switzerland that also maintained an institution for people living with severe mental disabilities, used to require first-year students to share a room with one of the residents as a part of its program. Both roommates were expected to learn from this experience.

Education in diakonia becomes even more urgent when diaconal work is organized. Some congregations have realized that visitation to sick and lonely people requires preparation. Such preparedness will make the visitor, and probably also the person visited, more comfortable. In addition, since the visitation is done in the name of the congregation, it is important for all involved to know the objectives of such visitation programs. Experience shows that good structures of preparation, accompaniment and evaluation for what is being done invite full participation and bring better results.

Listening to experiences, analyzing the challenge in its broader social, cultural and political context—these are important elements in good training for diakonia. But since diaconal practice implies action, practical training is even more important. Role play is one favorite method of testing out how to do things—as for instance how to visit a prisoner. Another method is to form small teams that will act together, and in the process also evaluate one another's performance.

Institutionalized diakonia normally requires higher levels of professional training. When diaconal institutions were established in Europe 150 years ago, education immediately became an integral part of the work in those institutions. These schools still play an important role in lifting up diaconal concerns in Church and society, in education, and in research. From the very beginning, this education was interdisciplinary. Deaconesses were trained as nurses, but they also received solid theological training. In Germany, this is often referred to as "double qualification", having in mind the two distinct spaces—clinic and Church—for which the student is qualified to act. But such distinctness should not be interpreted as separation. On the contrary, this training should qualify the diaconal worker as a "go-between", being able to accompany the patient in relation to physical as well as spiritual need.

Interdisciplinary approaches are foundational to diaconal training. This is based on the fact that reality, by nature, is complex and requires interdisciplinary analysis and action. Professional intervention related to suffering must take into consideration that good professionals are expected to be able to deal with the physical, mental, spiritual and social dimensions of human life. In addition, good diaconal leaders must also often bring the best knowledge from the disciplines of

accounting, finance and administration to their work. The most sought-after leaders for diaconal institutions have combined training in theology and business or health care administration.

One of the assets of diaconal training should be that the faith dimension of social action is taken into consideration and reflected in a disciplined way, related to theology and other relevant disciplines, such as in the social sciences, for instance. In other words, it includes both faith as praxis and theology as disciplined and critical reflection.

The importance of this asset is not only evidenced in health work, in situations when the health worker is expected to be competent in dealing with the patient's spiritual needs. It is equally important when diaconal action takes the form of development work. Especially in a time when it has become common to talk about "the return of religion," the interconnectedness between religion and development has become evident. Since people's worldview normally is determined by religious convictions and value systems, this has consequences for their understanding of social reality and their commitment to change this situation. Diaconal development workers should be well trained to understand the role of religion, both its strength and its weaknesses, and also to mobilize religious mindsets and values for transformation toward a more just and sustainable society.

As already indicated, theology is an integral part of diaconal training. But this can also be expressed the other way round to imply that diakonia should be an integral part of theological education. Quite often pastoral training is lacking this element, the result being that church leadership at different levels does not possess the needed qualifications for understanding and organizing diaconal work effectively.

Ideally, diaconal learning should be a part of all Christian education. It should be a theme in Sunday school classes as well in the program of preparing for confirmation. As there is often a lack of teaching material on diakonia, churches could share experiences and resources in providing useful material.

7. Diakonia and development work

Post-colonialism created a distinction between developed and non-developed (later called developing) countries. The UN declared the 1960s as the first development decade, and all over the world, governments and NGOs were mobilized in initiatives of development aid. These efforts were motivated by a general mood of optimism and expectation that the transfer of knowledge, technology and money would quickly bring lasting change to the poor countries in the global South. Since then, development theories have changed according to the political mood of each decade. In the 1970s, radical voices claimed that poverty is not only because development is lacking, but is primarily a consequence of oppression and unjust international economic structures. Later, other issues were added. One was the relation between development and environment, which resulted in the quest for sustainable development. When we talk about sustainability today, we recognize that this concept relates to a broad range of dimensions, including cultural, social, economic, ecological, and even ideological and religious dimensions.

The most critical voices rejected the very concept of development, pointing to the fact that it is too embedded in Western rationality, formed by the ideology of the Enlightenment. From this perspective, development is understood to "lift up" a country, modeled by what has been achieved in developed countries, as if there was a sort of "hierarchy of development." Especially in the first phase of development aid, "helpers" and "experts" from the North were sent with the task of building up social, political and economic structures following Western (or Communist if they came from that political

bloc) models, in the conviction that this would guarantee the hoped-for development. As already indicated, the international structures of economic and political power do not allow such development. Secondly, it soon became clear that cultural and human factors are fundamental conditions in processes of overcoming poverty. What well intended development aid sought to build up could never work due to inappropriate cultural understandings or community models; or it could be easily or quickly destroyed as a result of bad governance and corruption.


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The relation between diakonia and development is an important topic to which much attention is given. One important question is how development is understood and, consequently, what role faith-based approaches can have in working for development. Related to this is the question of whether diaconal development work can been distinguished from ordinary development work or, in other words, whether the diaconal work of development is like similar work operated by secular NGOs, or if it is possible to identify distinctive qualities when diakonia is engaged in development work?

It has been clear for some time that development as a concept cannot be limited to economic and political initiatives. Nor can it be understood as project activity that aims at solving a specific problem, for instance getting clean water to a village, or building classrooms for children. Such initiatives can be very important contributions to development processes, but they have to be seen in a broader and more holistic perspective, in which the question of sustainability is given due attention.

In 2002, the LWF published a booklet called *Guiding Principles for Sustainable Development*. Here, sustainable development is defined as "*a process of change by which the basic needs and human rights of individuals and communities in any given society are realized while at the same time protecting the basic needs and human rights of other communities and future generations.*"

The document brings the understanding of development beyond a mere technical or political interpretation. Not only does it point to social and cultural perspectives, but also to how development may be interpreted from a Christian perspective, stating that the LWF concept of sustainable development "*is grounded in and shaped by the faith Christians confess in the Triune God.*"

15 General Principles are listed:

1. Sustainable development is an holistic and interconnected process.

2. Sustainable development is non-discriminatory and protects the dignity of each person.

3. The well-being of human persons is the priority of sustainable development.

4. Sustainable development is culturally and spiritually sensitive.

5. Sustainable development does not assume the superiority of any model of economic and social governance.

6. Sustainable development is participatory.

7. Capacity-building is a means as well as a goal of sustainable development.

8. Financial sustainability is necessary for the effective promotion of sustainable development.

9. Sustainable development depends on institutional sustainability.

10. Sustainable development focuses on community assets.

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11. Sustainable development is technologically appropriate.

12. Sustainable development is dependent on adequate conditions for health and education.

13. Sustainable development includes advocacy for socio-economic and political conditions for human well-being.

14. The promotion of peace and reconciliation is an essential function and precondition of sustainable development.

15. Sustainable development requires equitable and effective resource sharing.

In addition to these general principles, some other important dimensions are lifted up:

1. *The Human Rights Dimension*, stating that human rights principles are the legal expression of the God-given dignity of every human person, which the Church is called to protect and promote, and that the right to development involves the realization of all human rights—economic, social, cultural, as well as civil and political rights.

2. *The Gender Dimension*, stating that the protection and promotion of the human rights of women are fundamental to the sustainability of development, that sustainable development requires gender equality and the full leadership of women in all development process, and that all assessment, planning, monitoring and evaluation in development work requires a gender perspective and analysis which values the work and experience of women.

3. *The Environment Dimension*, stating that sustainable development is environmentally


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aware, preserving, maintaining and regenerating the natural resource base and that sustainable development involves incorporating concern for the environment in all development decisions and operations.

4. *The Communication Dimension*, stating that communication builds human communities and allows them to develop, and that sustainable development therefore depends upon effective communication and capacity-building in communications.

As development continues to be an important item on the world's agenda, churches are challenged to address this matter. The state of the world and the fact that millions are excluded from a dignified life of basic welfare and security urges the churches to act. This becomes even more challenging when some churches have to respond to situations where famine and deep poverty threaten the lives of their people and the communities where the church members live. Such action should be undertaken at all levels of Church life: the congregation, the national church, and international cooperation. For the sake of cohesion and effectiveness, action at different levels should be linked to one another.

Diakonia as development work may take many forms. It may be organized as small projects, or as comprehensive programs. It should always be aimed at empowering people. As clearly stated above, critical analysis of root causes and of the external environment should always be included in the work. This is not only in order to secure the anticipated outcome of what is being done, but also to maintain a critical consciousness that is required for advocacy.

What distinguishes diaconal development work? It should be clearly stated that church-based development work does not necessarily take forms different from ordinary and secular development work. Nevertheless, some potential elements can be identified:

1. Diaconal development work connects to churches and congregations at the grassroots. This makes popular participation possible, especially for women who are often well organized at this level. It also promises continuity of what is initiated, as the congregation will be there after a project is finished.

2. Diaconal development work is based on Christian faith and worldview. It is oriented in all its activities by the conviction that all human beings are created in God's image and thus given an incorruptible dignity, and that God is the defender of the poor and excluded.

3. Diaconal development work enriches our faith and contributes itself to a better understanding of our faith and our purpose in life.

4. Diaconal development work is able to relate to religious mindsets and value systems. Since it is faith-based, it recognizes the importance of faith and hope in processes of overcoming poverty and suffering. This opens up a more holistic approach to development work, and competence in relating the different dimensions of human life to each other.

5. Diaconal development work favors working methods that prioritize inclusiveness and processes of empowering people for participation. This is done based on the understanding that each person is endowed by the Creator to be a subject, with a given identity and that, as such, she or he belongs to the community that affirms and supports this identity.

6. Diaconal development work does not connect to churches only at the grassroots, but churches are also trusted at decision-making levels. Grassroots initiatives should be linked to church leadership engagement

with secular authorities on public policy issues ("grass-tops" advocacy).

These possible qualities of diaconal development work do not exempt churches from ordinary quality requirements when engaged, for instance, in project activities. Such action needs to be planned, reflected on and organized in order to achieve the intended outcome. Activities must be carried out according to identified goals and available resources. Finances must be handled with responsibility and in a transparent way. To build capacities and understandings of mutual accountability within this area has therefore become a priority.

8. Prophetic diakonia

The diaconal movement that started in Germany in the 1830s was motivated by pietistic spirituality and its focus on individualistic piety. This background made it natural to translate the biblical word "diakonia" as "humble service", to which deaconesses and deacons were commissioned. Whether serving in institutions or in congregations, diaconal workers were expected to be "humble servants." Humility is certainly an important attitude when working with poor people, and humble approaches allow diaconal workers to see their values and capacities. But sometimes the impression was created that diakonia in itself should be humble, silent, almost servile, and should not provoke anyone or get involved in complicated political issues.

Over the last decades this interpretation has been revised. Biblical scholars, such as the Australian John Collins,[32] have documented the view that the Greek word does not mean humble service, but rather an important task that is given to somebody by an important authority. In the New Testament, it most often refers to a ministry (leadership role) or, as we have seen related to Jesus, his Messianic mission. From this insight, the concept of prophetic diakonia has been developed. Over the last decades, this expression has become widely used in ecumenical circles, especially among Christians in the South.

This is also the case for the Lutheran communion. The LWF consultation on prophetic diakonia in Johannesburg in 2002, formulated the following statement:

> We acknowledge with gratitude the many kinds of diaconal work that the Church has carried out through the centuries and which necessarily continue in our own day. This work is now challenged to move toward more prophetic forms of diakonia. Inspired by Jesus and the prophets who confronted those in power and called for changes in unjust structures and practices, we pray that God may empower us to help transform all that leads to human greed, violence, injustice and exclusion.[33]

One important starting point for prophetic diakonia is to listen to voices of suffering and marginalized people. The LWF Assembly in Curitiba in 1990 met under the theme "I Have Heard the Cry of My People," inspired by the biblical witness of God's sensitivity to people in need. "*I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings*... (Exodus 3:7ff).

The Assembly Message from Curitiba states the importance of prophetic witness:

> Prophetic witness, in obedience to God's word, involves confrontation with certain societal values, especially those promoting new forms of idolatry of seeking human fulfillment apart from God.

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[32] John N. Collins, *Diakonia. Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources*. New York / Oxford 1990.

[33] *Prophetic Diakonia: "For the Healing of the World" Report*. Johannesburg, South Africa November 2002, LWF Geneva, p. 6.

> Any prophetic witness involves both careful listening to the cries of the people and the word of God. (...) The diaconal witness of the Church is often better understood than words. As the Church decides and acts together with the marginalized and displaced, young and old, women and men, it gives witness to God's all-embracing grace.[34]

So what do we understand by "prophetic diakonia?" Prophecy is a biblical term and should be understood and used from that background. Sometimes, political diakonia and prophetic diakonia have been referred to as being the same thing. They must be differentiated, although they are of course interrelated.

> The judgment of God is upon the Church as never before. If today's Church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early Church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century. Every day I meet young people whose disappointment with the Church has turned into outright disgust.
>
> *Martin Luther King, Letter from Birmingham Jail, 1963*

Political diakonia expresses the political dimension of diaconal work. Since diakonia takes place in the public sphere, it must be conscious of its sociopolitical role and be ready to speak out when necessary. There are many good examples of political diakonia. One example is the way in which churches in India participate in struggle of liberation of 250 million Dalits, formerly called "Untouchables," who, according to the caste system, are told that they are less than human. Another example is the involvement of Lutheran churches in Latin America in addressing the illegitimacy of foreign debt, and of building alliances with other actors in civil society in order to make politicians take action. A third example is the Lutheran Office for World Community established at UN Headquarters in New York in order to express LWF concerns and interests. Lobbying can be an important element in political diakonia. As a rule, however, such lobbying should promote the interests of the poor and marginalized rather than defend one's own interests.

Prophetic diakonia, on the other hand, has another accent. It relates to the intrinsic nature of diakonia, affirming that the prophetic task is part of the mandate and authority that God has given the Church and its diakonia.

In the biblical tradition, prophecy appears as the response to divine revelation and a God-given mandate given to the prophet. "*The word of the Lord came to me, saying…*" This word always manifests God's lordship and power, as in Amos 4:13, "*For behold, He who forms mountains, and creates the wind, who declares to man what his thought is, and makes the morning darkness, who treads the high places of the earth—the Lord God of hosts is his name.*" But it also expresses God's concern for creation, especially for all people, reminding them that God is judge and redeemer, now and in times to come.

Christians sense the relevance of such wording. In a time of globalization when the market and a few powerful nations pretend to be given the right to set the ultimate conditions for human existence, the prophetic word reminds us that God is the Lord of history.

What is the relation between prophecy and diakonia?

Both have the task of finding ways and of building bridges in the direction of renewal (repentance) and transformation. The task of diakonia is that of *being* a pathfinder and *acting* as a pathfinder. Diakonia is never just words, but rather, actions looking for ways by which transformation may take place.

It is important to note that the prophets were strong defenders of justice. They reacted, especially when the God-given law of service to the neigh-

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[34] *I have heard the cry of my people. Curitiba 1990. Proceedings of the Eight Assembly*. LWF Report 28/29, Geneva 1990, p. 85.

bor was broken. This so-called apodictic law was established at Mount Sinai as a part of the covenant between God and his people. The Ten Commandments are central expressions of this law, and it should be noted how Luther uses the commandment in his catechisms, not only to constrain our action, but to bind us to actions which serve our neighbor and protect from harm. The apodictic law is different from the casuistic law made by the elders who met at the gates of the city. The first one is unquestionable. It belongs to the covenant and its promise of shalom and well-being. That is why breaking that law had such dramatic consequences.

To be prophetic means to defend justice. Diaconal action therefore by its very nature includes the task of unmasking especially systemic forms of injustice and of promoting justice—or better: being a pathfinder serving that cause.

On the other hand, the prophetic voice cannot be institutionalized in the Church, as this is a voice through the Church, and not by the Church. The prophetic mind has to be open to what the Spirit says; it is carried by a spirituality that constantly opens for new perspectives, for dreams of renewal and for hope of salvation. Related to this is the observation that the prophets often addressed their message to the religious leadership, as it was often involved in corruption and oppressing the poor. They also addressed the rich, the mighty, even the king, for abusing power.

Advocacy often is related to resisting the power of the mighty and their ideology. Resistance may imply the risk of suffering and even martyrdom, which was the case of many Christians in the first centuries, and since has been a part of Church history. Known martyrs from recent times are Milada Horáková who survived Nazi concentration camp but was sentenced to death by the Communist regime in 1950, and Gudina Tumsa who was killed in Ethiopia in 1979.

Even today it is the task of prophetic diakonia to address the church establishment, in order to question how we are being "*conformed to this world*" (Romans 12:2) in dealing with burning issues of our time. Is it fair to say that the Church has sometimes imitated structures of domination and exclusion, or focuses too much on structures of the past and traditional ways of dealing with diaconal challenges? Has the Church adopted a lifestyle of religious consumerism and ethical indifference instead of being profoundly provoked by the signs of growing poverty and injustice in the world?

Without critical prophetic questions, the Church and its diakonia is easily trapped by triumphalism, ecclesio-centrism and other variants of the theology of glory. This links to the tradition of *reformatio continua*, or the need of constant reformation in the life of the Church—so that we are liberated, renewed and reminded of our God-given mandate and to be on the way—even when this is a way of the cross.

9. Diakonia and proclamation

St Francis of Assisi once said: "*Preach the Gospel always, and when necessary use words.*" This saying

Milada Horáková, lawyer and politician, represents the fight for freedom, democracy and civil rights in Czechoslovakia. She became the first woman executed by the Communist Regime. Her trial and that of her twelve colleagues was a show trial arranged for the propaganda reasons. Despite months of brutal interrogation and torture, Milada Horáková stood firm and defended herself and her ideals even though she knew that such a fight would only worsen her conditions and the final result. She was executed on June 27, 1950 at the age of 48. Milada Horáková was a member of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milada_Horakova

tells us that the Gospel is event and action, God's love incarnated amidst human beings. But it also points to the fact that all action communicates a message and witnesses one's identity and motivation, which eventually may be affirmed by words.

Nevertheless, one of the greatest challenges in diaconal work is how to establish a sound and responsible relation between diaconal work and proclamation. In the message from the Addis Ababa Consultation on Diakonia 2008, the participants *"acknowledge difficulties in clearly defining the interrelationship between proclamation and diakonia. Both are expressions of the Gospel and both are core elements of the mission of the Church. We commit ourselves to continue to work on this and to discuss how this had to be applied in our many contexts."*

The first observation here concerns the variety of contexts that do not allow a fixed definition of how diakonia and proclamation are related. It is evident, for instance, that in some Muslim countries diaconal work has to desist from proclamation in order to be accepted by the local population and avoid accusations of proselytism. It is equally evident that in other parts of the world, people see an immediate link between faith and action. They expect prayers to be said before an important meeting starts, and they see care for people as something that also has a spiritual dimension.

Neither of these contexts should take us to a quick conclusion. Even in the first case, the diaconal action gives witness to Christian love and care for others, although there is no open proclamation. The second case, that may seem to present no problem, also requires critical discernment as religious practice may become a tool for manipulating people, especially in situations of weakness and suffering. We are dealing here with unequal power relationships, whether we like it or not.

So there are many reasons for continuing to work on the relation between diakonia and proclamation. Experiences from past and present diaconal practice can help us to see better the dilemmas that have to be dealt with in a responsible manner. With this in mind, some guiding principles can be articulated based on theological reflection.

One leading principle was formulated by Martin Luther. He vehemently rejected the practice of charity in his time, and specially the understanding that people would be rewarded by God if they gave alms to the poor. You cannot use the poor to justify yourself; only God has the power to justify sinners. The fact that God has graciously justified us by faith in Jesus Christ, sets us free to serve the poor and be freed from the bondage of poverty. For Luther, this service is on the one hand intimately connected to God, and therefore service of God, and on the other is entirely directed towards the person in need. "*Now there is no greater service of God (*German*: Gottesdienst) than Christian love which helps and serves the needy.*"[35]

It is therefore impossible to reduce diaconal action to an instrument for another purpose than what it basically is: service to the neighbor in need. It cannot be an instrument which serves the needs of the one helping, not can it become an instrument for evangelizing people. Diaconal action would then wrongly become a strategy, in a conscious effort to combine human-care activities and proclamation so that people might be converted. A result might even be that the diaconal activities would be chosen according to whether they would be effective in recruiting new church members.

This mission-focused method contradicts the biblical imperative of assisting people in need as a God-given mandate and an important action in itself, as clearly exemplified in the diaconal practice of Jesus. In addition, it becomes ethically questionable to use people's needs as an occasion for evangelizing because when this happens, the dignity and the integrity of the person are not properly respected. In the 19th century, the concept of "rice

[35] From *Ordinance of a Common Chest*, in *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann. Fortress Press, 1958 (1972), Volume 45, p. 172; WA (Weimarer Ausgabe) 12, p. 13.

Christians" described the situation in China when poor people joined the church in order to receive daily food rations from the missionaries. Today, most responsible mission organizations work in partnership with local churches, and reject practices that set up conditions for receiving help, such as demanding that children attend Sunday school or adults come to church regularly.

It also is very disturbing when a mission method becomes a reflection of the division between the rich and the poor in the world, in the sense that missionaries from affluent countries exploit the unjust division between rich and poor, and see poor people's situations as an opportunity for getting new converts. Instead, churches in mission should to lift up their prophetic voices and denounce this situation. They also should be self-critical about their own involvement in power structures. In any case, it must be strongly affirmed that as God's love is unconditional, the Church also is called to be unconditional in its service to people in need.

The difficulties referred to above may have led some to move to the opposite extreme and claim that there can be no links between diaconal action and the proclamation of the Gospel. For instance, it is sometimes said that international diakonia should concentrate on humanitarian aid and development. This is then normally understood as a consequence of a division of labor within the Church, where some agencies are given the mandate to evangelize, while others have the task of promoting justice and overcoming poverty.

It may be that this position has been oriented by a very critical understanding of mission work, and of seeing proselytism as an integral part of what mission agencies are doing, for instance. But this is not a correct description of mission work, as proselytism normally is understood as the practice of attracting Christians to one's own denomination, and most mission agencies would dissociate themselves from such practices. It should also be remembered that the work of most mission agencies normally contains diaconal activity that is done unconditionally and not for the sake of recruiting new church members.

The principle of setting a sharp division line between diaconal work and evangelism may also be justified by the fact that the work is financed by public funds. As governmental money is secular, it may be expected that the activities it supports should be secular as well. This is often the case when Western, church-based agencies are involved in international diakonia and must comply with requirements of governmental back-donors.

Behind this position is the understanding that the delivery of development aid must not interfere in a religious realm, often because religion has been considered by some as a private matter. In fact, no intervention can be neutral but is always imbedded in existential and moral assumptions, which therefore will—consciously or unconsciously—impact people's religious convictions and practice. That is the case of any development work, whether secular or faith-based.

There is now a growing awareness among governmental back-donors that religion is important in development work. Churches are being recognized because of their role as grass-root movements and as actors in civil society. When church-based agencies are funded by governmental bodies, it is due to their

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identity and ability to work with related networks in the global South. It gives them an added value as agents of transformation that should be actively embraced and made part of their strategic work.

The real task for churches is to find a way of relating diaconal work and proclamation that acknowledges both the distinctness of diakonia and its embeddedness in the holistic mission of the Church. Diakonia and proclamation belong together in Church life, but in the same way as some organizations within the Church focus on proclamation, other organizations specialize in diaconal work.

The LWF Consultation on Churches in Mission, held in Nairobi in 1998, stated that "*mission encompasses proclamation, service and advocacy for justice.*"[36] This understanding echoes the affirmation of the 1988 LWF mission document, *Together in God's Mission:*

> The wholeness of mission needs to be manifested by the unity of word and deed in all of the Church's outreach. Both are vehicles of the unconditional love of God who accepts persons while they are yet sinners and without any regard to their social, racial or cultural background. Word without deed falsifies the very word itself as it makes the gospel abstract and denies God's transforming power in creation and in incarnation. The failure to accompany witness through word, by witness through life may close the door to the gospel. On the other hand, the deed without the word is in danger of degenerating into sheer humanitarianism and conformity with the context and of failing to convey the fullness of salvation as God's gift. The credibility of the witness is ultimately grounded not in deeds, which are bound to remain imperfect, but in the gospel itself.[37]

The point here is not only that word and deed belong together, but that in fact all action carries with it a witness that requires interpretation. It is only natural to expect coherence between living and speaking. Diaconal action can never be silent and should not pretend to be so. This implies that a person belonging to another religion or an atheist that works in a diaconal institution, for instance a hospital, also contributes to the realization of what the Church is called to do. All involved should be expected to be honest about the Christian identity of the institution as well as of its value system and guiding principles.

On the one hand, this identity includes belonging to a Church that proclaims the Gospel. Consequently, diaconal action cannot pretend that proclamation is not part of the Church's mission to the world. On the other hand, the different dimensions of mission should be held together in a way that the distinct character of each of them is affirmed. Even if word and deed cannot be separated, they should

[36] Report p. 20.

[37] *Together in God's Mission: An LWF Contribution to the Understanding of Mission.* LWF Documentation, No. 27, 1988, ch. 4.1.4.

not be mixed in a manner in which one of them is reduced to being an instrument of the other.

What this means in practice may differ from one context to another. Professional diaconal work requires critical reflection on this, in order to steer away from any abuse by using the suffering of others to propagate the Christian message. But this reflection also includes the awareness of the spiritual dimension of all suffering, and of the power of the Gospel in processes of transformation, reconciliation and empowerment.

Summing this up, some general principles can be formulated:

1. Diaconal action is meaningful in itself. It does not need to be justified by other reasons; it should never be reduced to becoming an instrument for other purposes.

2. Diaconal action must be unconditional. It cannot allow conditions to be a prerequisite for receiving help, as for instance participating in religious activities.

3. Diaconal action must respect the integrity of each person and their freedom to express their faith according to their own convictions and traditions.

4. Diaconal action must ensure that persons in vulnerable situations are not influenced or pressured toward religious practices and choices.

5. Diaconal action must acknowledge the spiritual dimension of human life, and especially of human suffering, and therefore be ready to assist people who ask for assistance, including counseling when this is asked for.

6. Diaconal action must be able to interpret reality and processes of social change in an holistic manner.

7. Diaconal action must be ready to account for its faith-based identity.

8. Diaconal action must take responsibility for the witness it is giving to the message of the Church.

It belongs to the core nature of diakonia that its vertical and horizontal dimensions are inseparable, and the real test of diaconal action is how these two dimensions are held together in a dialectic manner, neither separating nor mixing them. If they are separated, diakonia can easily become secularized. This means that it may still be good and necessary action, but limited to secular interests and goals. Another result of such a separation would be that diakonia becomes spiritualized and too limited by its theological and ecclesial framework.

In the end, our confidence in the power of God's Spirit to move the spirit of human beings towards faith, hope and love gives us freedom to serve and to trust in God and in people's ability to express their choices with dignity.

10. Diakonia and diapraxis

Diaconal action has always brought people together from different denominations and faiths, as well as atheists, to jointly work with suffering and for marginalized people. Through this joint commitment for justice in the immediate neighborhood as well as in the wider society, diakonia has helped to overcome religious prejudices and motivated dialogue. This strong tradition of building bridges between people made the diaconal movement one of the foundations of the ecumenical movement. An important example is the urban mission that was initiated in Northern Europe in the middle of the 19th century. Here, Christians from different

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denominations joined efforts to accompany people in need caused by the many social problems that followed the industrialization and urbanization of that period.

Similar experiences occur when people of different faiths work side by side, supporting emergency and development efforts aimed at improving the quality of life of fellow human beings. In 1988, Danish theologian Lissi Rasmussen proposed the term **diapraxis** in relation to inter-faith cooperation, stating:

> Against the background of my experience in Africa and Europe, I see dialogue as a living process, a way of living in co-existence and pro-existence. Therefore I want to introduce the term "diapraxis". While dialogue indicates a relationship in which talking together is central, diapraxis indicates a relationship in which common praxis is essential.[38]

[38] Lissi Rasmussen, "From Diapraxis to Dialogue. Christian-Muslim Relations," in Lars Thunberg and ally (eds.) *Dialogue in Action*, New Dehli: Prajna Publications 1988, p. 282.

The LWF *Mission in Context* document refers to diapraxis experiences in India where people of different faith traditions come together for "action together in solidarity that engages in the promotion of justice, a better quality of life, and the alleviation of human suffering."[39]

In June 2006, the LWF organized a consultation in Medan, Indonesia, bringing together Christians and Muslims to share the experience of the devastating tsunami, and the concrete expressions of solidarity and help across religious boundaries in the days that followed. For most participants, this consultation was the first opportunity to have a dialogue on faith issues between Muslims and Christians. Some of them found it difficult to listen to what the others said. Their experiences of suffering together and of helping each other and constructing a new future together led them, however, to continue the dialogue.[40]

Thus diakonia—also in the form of diapraxis—opens people for transformation, empowerment and reconciliation, even in contexts of religious tensions, as is the case in many South Asian countries. In Europe, experiences are made of linking diapraxis to citizenship training with the goal of empowering people to participate freely, equally and democratically in society.[41]

[39] P. 52.

[40] *LWF Seminar on Dialogue in Life*, Report published by the LWF Department of Mission and Development, Geneva.

[41] Lissi Rasmussen (Editor): *Bridges Instead of Walls. Christian-Muslim Interaction in Denmark, Indonesia and Nigeria*. LWF, Geneva 2007 p. 208-209.

The LWF has strongly supported the formation of the Inter-Faith Action for Peace in Africa (IFAPA) that has facilitated inter-faith encounters, discussion and consultations in various parts of Africa in order to promote respect for each other's religious traditions, and also development work initiatives such as securing clean water.

Diapraxis gives witness to the Christian understanding that all human beings share the Creator's vocation of loving one's neighbor, and of being a neighbor to the one in need. There may be good theological reasons to interpret the story about the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 as a parable about "*loving your neighbor as yourself*," thus referring to any person irrespective of faith. The fact that the Samaritan was an outsider who did not belong to the faith community seems to support this view. It also helps us to see care and action of love beyond what Christians organize and do through diaconal work.

That same understanding affirms the importance of faith, spirituality and religion in development work, as it gives expression to the fact that all religions have an important role in forming people's value systems and horizons of interpreting reality. Religion can not therefore be ignored in social action and development work.

Diakonia as diapraxis implies a fundamental respect for other denominations, faiths and worldviews. Such an attitude does not make all beliefs relative, in the sense that they all "lead to God" as popular religion often insinuates. Nor does it mean that diaconal work should search for "religious neutrality," or that expressions of what the Church confesses and celebrates should be silenced. The important point is diakonia's fundamental respect for the other's dignity and in his or her way of being different, together with a strong conviction that God has endowed all human beings with the capacity for doing good work.

Etymologically, respect (Latin: *re-spectare*) means to look again, to persevere in seeing beyond one's own immediate assumptions and stereotypes, to look beyond the first impression or one's own immediate reaction when being confronted with another person. The one who may initially appear to be helpless, will, after truly being seen, be recognized as a person with history, capacities and faith.

The Cry from a Wounded Planet

Sons and daughters of the Earth,
you who know good and evil:
Life is in danger! Show that you care!

DISCOVER THE WHOLENESS

The Earth is a tapestry woven without seams.
No-one has the right to tear it apart.

SENSE THE HOLINESS

A holy fragrance hovers over all that exists.
Life must be valued, protected and loved.

REJOICE IN THE BEAUTY

Creation has a wealth of its own.
Nothing is merely raw materials.
The gifts the earth gives must be handled
with devotion and gratitude.

REMEMBER THE CONTEXT

Your life is woven into the pattern of all life on earth.
All that you have is given to you as a loan.
You must pass it all on to those who come after you.

STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE

Mother earth has enough to meet the needs of all,
but not satisfy their greed.
The gap between poor and rich
is contempt for human dignity.

LIVE IN RECONCILIATION

Sons and daughters of the earth, you who
have the power to tear up her tapestry:
You are called to a life of reconciliation!

Finn Wagle, Bishop of Trondheim (Norway)

This respect for the other and his or her integrity, especially in situations of suffering and injustice, excludes the possibility of making diakonia an instrument for evangelization, for recruiting people as church members. It is important to affirm that diaconal action has meaning in itself, being such a fundamental dimension of the Church's mission. The respect for the other however, also includes respecting the other if she or he freely decides to approach and participate in what the Church confesses and celebrates.

Another important aspect of diapraxis is that diaconal work should not be done in isolation, but in good cooperation with "other people of good will." The challenges and tasks go far beyond what the Church and its diakonia are able to respond to. Creating alliances with other partners means building civil society and strengthening the local community when dealing with issues of human need and injustice.

11. Values guiding a diaconal code of conduct

In diaconal work, what counts is not only what you do, but also how it is done. What attitudes are reflected? How is the behavior of diaconal workers perceived? This is a concern that people involved in diakonia share with health and social workers, and a concern that international diakonia has in common with international emergency and development work. In encounters between powerful and powerless people there is a constant risk of using power in inappropriate ways, and even of misuse.

For various professions, codes of conduct have been established. They will normally contain principles, values, standards or rules of behavior that guide professionals belonging to an organization in their daily work. The code of conduct should contribute to the welfare of all people involved in the work, and especially see that their rights are respected.

One prominent example is the Code of Conduct for The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief from 1994. Its 10 Principle Commitments are:

1. The Humanitarian imperative comes first.

2. Aid is given regardless of the race, creed or nationality of the recipients and without adverse distinction of any kind. Aid priorities are calculated on the basis of need alone.

3. Aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint.

4. We shall endeavor not to act as instruments of government foreign policy.

5. We shall respect culture and custom.

6. We shall attempt to build disaster response on local capacities.

7. Ways shall be found to involve program beneficiaries in the management of relief aid.

8. Relief aid must strive to reduce future vulnerabilities to disaster as well as meeting basic needs.

9. We hold ourselves accountable to both those we seek to assist and those from whom we accept resources.

10. In our information, publicity and advertising activities, we shall recognize disaster victims as dignified human beings, not hopeless objects. [42]

[42] **www.ifrc.org/publicat/conduct**

Diaconal work should pursue the same level of quality and therefore subscribe to such codes of conduct. The values expressed here are shared by a broad network of diaconal workers all around the world.


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The Addis Ababa consultation on diakonia discussed this issue and also asked for a dialogue in order to establish codes of conduct for diakonia. This was concretely related to international cooperation in diakonia and how the different partners should work together. But it is also a relevant matter in other forms of diaconal work, at the level of a local congregation or at the level of institutions. What was meant was not to replace other codes of conduct. Rather, it would be to add perspectives and guidelines based on the basic values that belong to diaconal work. Such guidelines would of course have to adapt to local contexts and conditions.

The following is how the Addis Ababa consultation put together elements that were considered vital for a common understanding of diakonia, and therefore should guide our diaconal code of conduct:

Theologically, diakonia:

1. is based on grace and an expression of our Christian faith;
2. is modeled by Christ's life and service;
3. is a move from God through us to meet human beings suffering (physically, mentally, spiritually and socially) and in need, in whom Christ is visible;
4. seeks to reflect and witness God's unconditional love and care for creation;
5. is embedded in the holistic mission of the Church.

In its objectives, diakonia:

1. seeks to uphold human dignity;
2. seeks to restore broken relationships and to promote healing and reconciliation to communities;
3. cares for the integrity of creation;
4. denounces injustice and advocates for peace and justice in line with its prophetic vocation;
5. provides services to people in need;
6. seeks transformation for everybody involved.

In its action, diakonia:

1. incorporates compassion, inclusiveness, mutuality, respect and accountability as basic values;

2. expresses solidarity and mutual responsibility across borders and seeks opportunities for sharing resources;

3. seeks alliances ecumenically, with people of other faiths and with other actors in civil society;

4. has participation, accompaniment and empowerment as its primary methods;

5. is contextual and therefore uses different methods;

6. is aware of its limitations, conscious of the risk of creating dependency.

Diakonia as a concept should be reserved for what Christians do—spontaneously or in an organized way, in the form of diaconal initiatives—as partners in God's mission "for the healing of the world." But God's gracious presence in the world for peace, justice and reconciliation cannot be limited to what is realized through diaconal action, to what Christians say and do. That is why diakonia cannot be exclusive either in its theological self-understanding, or in its practical exercise. Diaconal action needs to be nurtured by the confession of "*the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God*" from, through, and to whom all things are, and to whom belongs eternal glory. (Romans 11:33ff).

Questions for Further Reflection

1. In your experience, how are the different expressions of diakonia connected? What are the strengths and the weaknesses of the relationships between them? How do you see the role of professional trained persons in diaconal work? Would you consider an order of diaconal ministry in the Church useful?
2. What do you see as the role and function of proclamation as part of the mission of the Church? What do you see as role and function of diakonia as part of the mission ot the Church? What do you see as the relationship between the two?
3. Diakonia is called to be prophetic and to lift up the voice of the marginalized. How do you see this call related to your context, and can it be responded to through diaconal action?
4. Networking is identified as an important method in diaconal work. How is your diaconal work linked with others (groups, organizations, other churches, governmental structures etc)?
5. How is training for diakonia handled in your church? What improvements are needed, and how could this be realized?

GLOSSARY

Glossary

Key terms used in this document:

Accountability – The practice of being mutually responsible; often considered a basic value in international diakonia.

Accompaniment – Walking with others with shared mutuality and respect, especially in demanding situations; grows out of the relationships that Christ modeled in his interaction with others.

Advocacy – Strategic public witness together with, and on behalf of, those who are marginalized, vulnerable or whose voices have been silenced.

Agency – Within international diaconal work, this term is used for an organization with a mandate focused on emergency response, humanitarian aid and development.

Agenda – The set of purposes and objectives that orient diaconal action within a particular time period.

Back-donor – The original donor, when money passes from one organization to another, for instance from governments to church-based development agencies.

Capacity – The inherent potential of individuals, groups and organizations to impact and transform their environment, and the training which brings that about.

Charity – From Latin "caritas" (love). The practice of benevolent giving, by individuals or organized as charity work.

Citizenship – The public civic role of all people which carries with it rights and duties in local, national and global contexts.

Civil Society – The network of voluntary and civic movements, organizations and institutions functioning as a third sector in society together with public structures and the market.

Context – The surrounding environment including its social, political, cultural, religious, economic and ecological dimensions.

Deacon – An orderly ministry of the Church. In the ancient tradition the deacon, together with the bishop and the elder (presbyter – priest), formed the leadership of the Church. In the Protestant tradition, the deacon is often trained to lead diaconal work in congregations or institutions.

Dignity – From Latin "dignitas." Basic element in Christian understanding of human beings: that every person is created in God's image and given unrestricted dignity that requires recognition, respect and affirmation.

Ecclesiology – The theological understanding of the Church.

Empowerment – The process by which marginalized people assume roles as agents of their own lives and in society.

Faith-based – Social and diaconal action that is motivated and oriented by religious faith.

Gender – Term used for analyzing roles of, and differences between, men and women extending from the biological to the social.

Holistic – In social and diaconal intervention, an holistic approach seeks to interconnect physi-

cal, mental, spiritual and social aspects of life as equally important.

Incarnation – From Latin "in carnis" meaning "in the flesh." In Christian theology, the doctrine that Jesus Christ is God revealed as true human being. Diaconal work is often motivated by the aim to "incarnate" Christian faith and service in people's real life.

Inclusiveness – The attitude and practice of including all, especially persons or groups that tend to be excluded.

Koinonia – Greek word for communion, used in the New Testament for the Church (Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 1:9). In the ecumenical movement, a key concept for expressing the divine nature of the Church, its communion with the Triune God and of all baptized.

Mission – From Latin "missio" which means "sending." In Christian theology, the term for the Church's sending to the world. Today, mission is understood as participation in God's mission. It is also conceived as holistic mission encompassing proclamation, service (diakonia), and advocacy

Millennium Development Goals (MDG) – eight goals set by the United Nations to be achieved by 2015 that respond to the world's main development challenges. They are drawn from the actions and targets contained in the **Millennium Declaration** that was adopted by 189 nations and signed by 147 heads of state and governments during the UN Millennium Summit in September, 2000.

Mutuality – Relationships that are reciprocal; those related have the same relation to each others both as givers and receivers.

Neo-liberalism – An ideological and political movement emerging in the 1980s which was marked by the fundamental confidence that the mechanisms of a free market economy with a minimum of political regulations would lead to political and economic liberty.

Participation – The practice of working together, of sharing rights, responsibilities and decisions towards common goals.

Partnership – The relationship of mutual cooperation and accountability between people or groups working together in the effort of achieving common goals.

Paternalistic – From Latin "*pater*" which means "father". Treatment of people that reflects an authoritarian attitude, under the guise of caring for others, using power in denying them access to rights, responsibilities and decisions.

Political diakonia – Diaconal action that consciously reflects political issues and seeks expression in the public sphere.

Praxis – In social and diaconal work the term for planned, responsible and accountable intervention.

Professional – Describes a person who has completed training, and receives salary for the work done. **Professional diakonia** normally refers to ways in which diaconal work is organized and implemented according to recognized standards and quality work—for instance in the implementation of planning, monitoring and evaluation (PME) systems.

Prophetic – In the biblical tradition, to be prophet means the vocation in God's name to lift up one's voice against injustice and in defence of the poor and oppressed.

Rights-based – Term used for designating social and diaconal action that is motivated and ori-

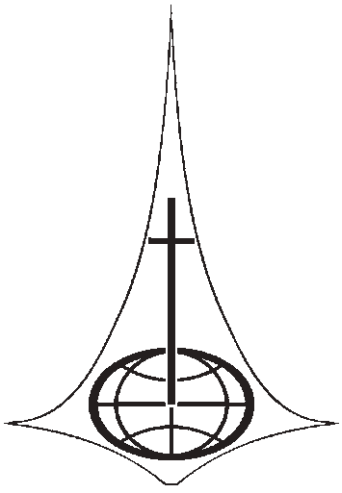
ented by people's civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

Secular – From Latin "*saeculum*" (the present world). Used to describe what does not belong to the domain of religion. As historical process **secularization** refers to the reduced power of religion in society through the emancipation of politics, science and culture.

Solidarity – From Latin "*solidum*" (the whole sum). Originally the practice of mutual support among members of a group. Today given a wider scope and interpreted as support for the cause of others, especially the poor and marginalized, as an expression of belonging to one global family.

Transparency – The practice of openness, communication, and accountability especially in decision-making and financial management.

Welfare state – Political model that was developed mainly in Western countries in the aftermath of World War II. It aims at combining democracy, regulated capitalism and welfare legislation that publicly organizes and finances welfare services providing health care, social security and education to all citizens.



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