



LWF

CONVIVIALITY
diaconal life in diversity

Conviviality, Diakonia, and the Church

Seeking Conviviality
– A Core Concept for Diakonia

Number 3

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Preface

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

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



Photo: Nasik Lababan/Unsplash

the final stage of the process was called “People on the Move”.

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

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

“Seeking conviviality” means openness for new models of living together, which go beyond the frame-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ireneusz Lukas
LWF Regional Secretary for Europe

Introduction

Tony Addy

Conviviality, Diakonia, and the Church

As the European group began to explore local diakonia through the lens of seeking conviviality, one logical entry point was congregational (parish) diakonia. The question of how the church can support conviviality as the art and practice of living together was uppermost. However, from the very beginning, it was also clear that this is not only a question of strengthening relationships and affirming the dignity of all. Convivial life together also requires a foundation in public policy and political processes because, if the context is of deep inequality or the marginalization of some groups, this affects convivial life together. The marginalization of groups of people is not just a question of access to public services or an adequate income, it also affects the way people's lives are valued and respected. If the policies of the government and the ordering of the economy are based on injustice, this reflects on the people negatively affected. In turn, this affects the general view, especially of minority groups. We can also see the same process behind the inequality of wages and conditions of employment for women.

The Seeking Conviviality group came to see how these inequalities intersect in a particular person's life, for example, a black migrant woman has a double disadvantage. Therefore, as well as addressing what it means to be a convivial church and to seek convivial life together in a locality, one of the priorities

of the group was to explore what it means to speak of, and act for, a convivial economy. Therefore, the questions of economy, work, and employment became a central concern. In terms of public policy, access to health care, education, and welfare – and, in particular, housing – are also critical.

As we deepened this discussion through the experience of the members of the Solidarity Group, we began to explore the ways in which churches and organized diakonia may collaborate with, or reinforce, the common concern to promote convivial life together. The stories in this booklet relate to these experiences and focus on work and employment, housing, food poverty, and how such issues intersect in the lives of refugees and people with a migrant background. Another focus addressed was housing and homelessness and, in the last period of the group's work, the experience of working with refugees, immigrants, and people with a migrant background. In these stories, we focus especially on diaconal organizations and the collaboration with congregations and other actors. This raises some specific questions such as what kind of organization is needed to ensure that the practice of seeking conviviality is embedded in the structure. It also requires thought about the way diaconal services are organized and what service model for professional practice is required.

The stories and the settings

In this booklet, you will find four stories from different European contexts, which present different models. What they have in common is that they

do not start with the idea that diaconal organizations are producing services for certain categories of people and that they seek volunteers from the churches to support their work. In each case, the common action is built on working with the different organizations and churches as they face outwards towards people in their context. In this way, the boundaries between church, diakonia, and local people become blurred and new forms of service and social action are developed.

The first story comes from Sweden and is rooted in a context where many people face unemployment, even long-term unemployment, which affects their ability to manage everyday life. The traditional approach of diakonia to people facing such problems has been simply to offer personal support. The change of approach was based on a more careful listening to the stories and experiences of unemployed people. One aspect became very clear and that was the question of “agency” – the ability to do something, to make a contribution. Receiving financial and pastoral support on its own did not address one of the core issues. This may be related to the Swedish work culture, but conviviality is also based on “giving and receiving” and the recognition that we thrive when we are in mutual, and reciprocal, relationships. Furthermore, this makes a contribution to the wider society.

The St. Mary project is an example of how pastoral conversation can lead to social action with people affected, because the reflection led to working with people on the process of creating meaningful work that people could take pride in. Simply put, diakonia – working with unemployed people, the local churches, and other actors – decided to create

a social enterprise, which could be tested, branded, and replicated across the church. Three points that relate to convivial life together, and a convivial economy, are emphasized:

- ▶ putting the person’s dignity, self-esteem, and empowerment at the center
- ▶ being part of a movement to transform society by criticizing the exclusionary economy and promoting an inclusive economy with others, based on sustainable criteria
- ▶ putting diaconal activity in the midst of the congregation in a way, which addresses key socioeconomic issues, draws the church closer to marginalized people, and creates a counter force to a society that produces “outsiders.”

Staying in the North, the second story concerns cooperation between urban diakonia, local congregations, and the Vantaa municipality along with many other actors. Vantaa is the poorest of the three municipalities that make up the Helsinki region: there is a high rate of food poverty and loneliness. Traditionally churches and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have delivered food aid by means of distributing bread and food parcels, leading to the “bread queue” phenomenon. Local congregations and diakonia reflecting on this wanted to change this model of food assistance because it is demeaning and non-participatory. The basic idea is to develop a food sharing system based in localities (for example parishes) and to deliver food to the local spots where it can be shared, or prepared and shared, by local people. Thus, many people were involved, and mutuality was increased.

To achieve this, a large food distribution center was established with the support of the municipality: the warehousing and distribution system, which is professionally managed, creates employment in the shorter or longer term. The project is called Shared Table. The logistics center is also a resource center where the principle of using community-based food activities to increase empowerment and wellbeing is supported. In this way, Shared Table is an example of sustainable economic development through pooling the resources of different actors and using, or developing, people's skills and capabilities. This reciprocal economy of food, time, and capabilities requires the development of a complex network built on trust and a participatory approach. The whole process is based on an approach to community-based learning and community development. This supports an action culture, which not only increases well-being, but also creates a platform for discussing economic and political issues and working for transformative change.

Moving to Germany, the third project has a focus on homelessness, and was started by people involved as social workers in the welfare organizations Diakonie and Caritas. In Lower Saxony, homelessness was increasing for several reasons including the privatization of (publicly supported) social housing companies, which then started to use market criteria of success. A second reason was the rise in the number of immigrants around 2015. The typical response of diakonia is to offer food and provisional housing for homeless people. In these models of work, homeless people are put into the position of recipients of aid and are subject to codes of behavior. In this context, the publication of official reports

did not increase awareness or lead to a solution. Therefore, the workers, supported by Diakonie, started to bring homeless people together, not only locally but also nationally and even internationally, to discuss the issues and work on action for change. A self-help organization of homeless people was developed, governed by homeless, and formerly homeless, people.

Privatization means that that these housing companies, which were often owned by governmental bodies, unions, or churches, were sold to investors and turned from non-profit cooperatives into for-profit organizations. Once they were sold, housing became an object of speculation. Rents were rising and housing companies especially tended to serve the middle- and upper-class families, especially in the bigger cities.

Peter Szyuka

One of the actions of the group, with the diaconal workers, was to challenge the church to use its own land and buildings to provide housing for homeless people, either through self-build or converting old church buildings. Different strategies for working for change were used. One strategy was to persuade diaconal service providers to establish a "Foundation for a Home" which has been constructing flats for homeless people; another is to campaign for a change of policy by the regional government

towards supporting the provision of housing for homeless people. In this way, homeless people have become actors for a change of the housing situation affecting many people. In this project, the core ideas of conviviality – living in dignity and under just conditions – are the center of the struggles of homeless people. In the process, many people have found their vocation – the third characteristic of conviviality – in working for justice and the dignity of homeless people. The art and practice of living together crosses many borders and the story gives a range of examples of the steps towards change with homeless people in the center of the action.

The final story comes from Amsterdam and reflects a very different context and range of issues. In the area of Bijlmer in the west of Amsterdam, a new suburb was built up with high-density apartment blocks. In this area, many migrants, immigrants, and refugees settled, as well as traditionally Dutch citizens. The area gained media attention in 1992 because a cargo plane crashed into it and many people were killed and blocks of flats destroyed. In the area, there is a high percentage of people living in poverty and a huge diversity of population, of which nearly fifty percent belong to a religious group. The time came to rebuild the church, and seven congregations decided they would like to

work together, despite the many differences, to make a difference in the lives of people in the area and beyond. The new building, De Nieuwe Stad (The New City), is a welcoming structure with many rooms around a central meeting space, which is like an atrium. It means there is space for large and small groups to worship at the same time in different ways, and that all the churches can have their own small space. The central atrium is the heart of the building. There is a kitchen where different groups can prepare food to share; in the many spaces of the building, groups can meet and activities, as well as worship, be organized. In the story, you can read about the daily activities and the experience of the churches.

Diakonia comes into the picture because many of the churches and church members are involved in Stap Verder (A Step Further) which is a diaconal organization with a shopfront presence not far from De Nieuwe Stad. Stap Verder has professional workers but overlaps with the seven churches through working together. Church members are involved in the activities at the shopfront where all activities are based on an approach, which we could call “convivial.” Everyone can offer something or receive something. Stap Verder is for information, learning, and common activities.

The Stories

St. Mary: An innovative model for change in work and employment,
Västerås Diocese, Sweden

Shared Table (Yhteisesta pöydästä): Space for a convivial economy (Vantaa, Finland)

Church and Diakonia tackle housing and homelessness:
The experience of the church in Hannover, Germany

Being a diaconal ecumenical church in a diverse neighborhood,
De Nieuwe Stad (The New City) and Stap Verder, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

St. Mary: An innovative model for change in work and employment, Västerås Diocese, Sweden

Anders Hagman and Katrin Holmstrand

Employment and Work in the Swedish Context

Unemployment undoubtedly has a negative economic influence on living conditions, even in a welfare society as in the Swedish context. Those who are without work often live with scarce finances. Nevertheless, I would maintain that the social and existential costs of being without work long-term are often perceived as even higher in a country where solidarity, identity, and having a reason for living are so much linked to professional roles and the work community. That insight could make us think that the problems that unemployment creates can be solved by talk – that the traditional approach to dealing with life crises and trauma in diaconal work through “self-care conversations” would suffice. If someone were to tell me that I am valuable, then I would indeed be valuable. However, it is not so.

At the same time, employment itself is not straightforwardly unproblematic. When Deacon Anna Andersson spoke with a group of women affected by work-related fatigue in a small municipality in Sweden, it soon became apparent that conversation was not enough. Women in Sweden are more severely



Anna-Sara Brännström outside the St. Mary shop, Piteå.
Photo: Anders Hagman

affected than men with chronic fatigue syndrome, sometimes called burnout. The condition is almost always work-related, but often the whole life situation has an influence. There is simply too much demand and stress so that finally the body says “stop.” The results are often a long sick leave, gradually shrinking social networks, lost confidence, and isolation.

Reflecting on the situation

The group the deacon worked with made it clear to her that conversations were good, but that this was not enough. Physical recovery, they thought, was linked to mental well-being, but it is also intimately linked with the perceived ability to achieve something, not only to be subjected to the care of others.

Out of the conversation, some keywords were crystallized, which the deacon and her pastor brought together and put in print. The words were:

Meaningfulness, Work Community, Rehabilitation, and Professional Pride.

These four concepts ring with the values that need to be found in a business that supports these women and other women and men in the same situation. The first letters of the words in Swedish form the word Mary. With the addition of Saint, a bridge was formed from the world to the church. St. Mary became the name of the activity that the congregation decided to start.

Into action with St. Mary

Operations began on a small scale with the congregation running a summer café on contract for the municipality. There, young people, and unemployed women were offered job-training positions. When winter came, they decided to start a creative workshop. In the workshop, long-term unemployed people began to cast new candles from recycled candle stumps collected from the churches. Soon a textile workshop also opened. The next step was for the group to open their own shop on the town's shopping street. After a few years, the congregation took over a nearby cafe. Baking for the café was done in the parish hall. Gradually, St. Mary also began to take care of the service that is offered for events in the parish hall.

Over the last five years, about 120 people have worked in St. Mary for twelve to eighteen months. Most people have then moved on to education, new internships, or work. A few have relapsed into unemployment or abuse. Five people have been employed permanently, either in the congregation or in St. Mary where they act as supervisors for new participants.



*Anna and Pernilla in the St. Mary shop and workshop, Lindesberg.
Photo: Magnus Aronson*

Perhaps St. Mary could become a model that is spread to other parishes? This was the question posed by employees at Västerås Diocese during the first year of activity. It has become increasingly obvious that there are large groups in Sweden that are at risk of being permanently excluded from the labor market. Many parishes, therefore, take care of one or more unemployed people for a short period of time, but there is often a lack of good method and good ideas of what to do.

This was the start of developing the concept of St. Mary. It is basically an idea to create a new brand for diakonia within the Swedish church, taking inspiration from work-integrated social enterprises and social franchising. It became clear early on that such activities have more purposes:

Providing a path towards personal empowerment and strengthened self-esteem for the person, whether or not it leads to what the political debate calls “real jobs”. Here, each person's worth and dignity are at the center.

To be part of a social movement that wants to transform society to be more inclusive. This means questioning a working life that produces exclusion and, at the same time, to contribute to building an inclusive economy together with social enterprises and other companies which invest in local, sustainable production and consumption.

To change the congregation by incorporating in its midst a diaconal activity that addresses key socio-economic and existential issues for many people of our time. The Nordic parish-linked deaconess represents a unique and relatively rich resource, but at the same time, it is tied to the parish community. Furthermore, a recurring pattern has been the outsourcing of diaconal activities that target the most vulnerable. One of the goals of St. Mary is not to run diaconal action through agents, but to draw the church itself closer to the living conditions of vulnerability and turn it into a counterforce in a society that produces outsiders.

Today, several of the parts required to disseminate, and ensure the quality of, a business such as St. Mary are in place. There is a manual, registered trademark, and a three-day training course, which is grounded on evidence-based methods, and there are some common products and a lot of informative material. St. Mary is found, in one form or another, in six parishes and thus is one of the most widely spread concepts of social enterprise in the country, although some of the activities are conducted in project form with uncertain continuation after project time.

Establishing St. Mary has not been easy and, like all businesses today, it lives an uncertain life. It can be difficult to understand why, because the

concept is easily understood and appreciated, the need is great, and the activities are in line with the diaconal mission of the congregation. It is, therefore, important not only to present St. Mary as a successful example, but also to highlight the difficulties faced by such a social enterprise. Here are important keys to open the door to show how the church in the Nordic context can be more relevant in its diakonia.

One way to elaborate this is to regard St. Mary as a social innovation. The mode of operation is not very innovative in itself, but since it has been translated into, and transformed into, a church context, and thus introduced into a whole new dimension of church diakonia, St. Mary still qualifies as social innovation according to most definitions. However, anyone who delves into the theory and practice of social innovation soon realizes that new ideas are just a small step on the road to creating social innovation. Social innovations are based on the needs of a defined group: an idea is an innovation only when it is put into operation and has an effect that benefits that group. Most barriers to social innovation, not only in the church, are about inflexible, or slow, structures of various kinds. Here, I highlight some which are internal to the church, except for one.

Tradition

Traditionally, the parish church in Sweden is mainly focused on individual conversations, community meetings, and individual financial support. There is no tradition of working with

community development, social mobilization and the like, and therefore, no training in a service model for a way of working, which is formed according to the structurally conditioned needs of vulnerable groups.

Theology

The Swedish church has for a long period of time been a part of the Swedish state and prevented from performing direct welfare services. In time, the state's division of labor between secular and religious bodies was linked, consciously or unconsciously, to theology. It has evolved into the notion that people's welfare, outside purely spiritual and existential issues, is the state's concern. This attitude lives on in both thought and practice, even though the church has now been separated from the state for twenty years.

The Swedish parishes were built up during the state period as small copies of the municipalities.



St. Mary's team, Lindesberg. Photo: Magnus Aronson

More and more specialists were employed who performed more and more functions to serve the church. The nature of the church as a popular movement was thus partly lost. The result was an organization with strong bureaucratic features where the congregation as an acting faith community easily slips into the background.

Marginalization of exposure

Taking the first two aspects together means that many of the issues that concern the most vulnerable people in society have difficulty getting onto the church's agenda. Business as usual raises constant obstacles in the form of filled agendas, in-house work methods, and local collaboration in a day-to-day life where the professionals often take care of themselves and continue their routine practices. This means there is lack of exposure to the wider society, and the external tension, which comes from this, is missing. This is compounded by a work culture, which does not support unconditional reflection together on the joint work of the congregation in its context.

At the same time, it is important to remember that it is not only the church that raises obstacles. Sweden is in the midst of a tumultuous transformation from the welfare state to the welfare society. In this transformation, civil society generally finds it difficult to move into action for welfare because the market and regulatory systems are skewed to benefit private companies. And in the diverse array of civil society organizations, the church is often seen as a foreign bird by the state.

At the local level, this is usually not a problem as personal knowledge is great and relationships are strong. But at the national level, religion has become a problem. In twenty years, the Swedish

church has gone from being part of the state to becoming part of a religious landscape that the state no longer understands.



Handmade candles from St. Mary's team in Lindesberg. Photo: Magnus Aronson

Shared Table (Yhteisesta pöydästä): Space for a convivial economy (Vantaa, Finland)

Katri Valve

Story

On the one hand, the need for food aid, poverty, and loneliness have all increased in Finland. On the other hand, in Finland, combined food wastage in the chain from primary production to consumers is estimated to be about 400 million kilos a year, which is about 15 percent of all food produced. Both food waste, as an ecological problem, and bread queues, as a social policy issue, have been the subject of public scrutiny: awareness is growing.

The starting point for Shared Table was simply the need to get rid of the outdoor bread queues in the City of Vantaa (one of the three municipalities that make up Helsinki region) and to develop food assistance, so that people are received holistically and with respect. The Shared Table approach combines the efficient utilization of surplus food within the food aid network, thus saving resources, and developing and sharing best practice. Food aid has been developed in a networked and community-based manner in order to increase the well-being of those in need as sustainably as possible. Over time, Shared Table has also developed as a meaningful economical actor.



'Shared Table' team. Photo: Jani Laukkanen

The Shared Table comprises a central waste food terminal plus around seventy different non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and cooperation networks with which civic activities are being built. There are more than 200 volunteers and thirty food retailers and wholesalers. The food terminal collects food from suppliers on a large scale and distributes it amongst the cooperating partners. The cooperation networks, NGOs, and churches create the essential local points for the preparing and sharing of food and local food distribution. The aim is to create a mutual system, which breaks down the traditional food queues and changes roles. The City of Vantaa and the churches of Vantaa, who are responsible for enabling the activities, are committed to the development of the Shared Table.

In the recent past, about 2 million kilos of food per year, which might have gone to waste, have passed through the food terminal while it has also given employment to about thirty people each year. Shared Table and the related networks directly benefit about 5,000 people each week.

The Shared Table and its networks have developed a Vantaa-based network with diverse community-based food aid activities that, in turn, increase the empowerment and well-being of the distributors and recipients of food aid. This extensive network is served by the centralized transport of wasted food via the food-handling terminal.

However, the Shared Table is not only the center for food distribution; it is also a resource center where everything is based on strengthening people's capacity. People coming to work at the food handling terminal have often been out of work for years, because of physical or mental illness, or because they have become unemployed through corporate bankruptcy or organizational changes. There are also some people who have missed their studies or have never started their studies.

Analysis

The Shared Table model is an example of both ecological and socially sustainable development due to its work, a base on which sustainable economic development can also be formed. Economically sustainable development in the Shared Table initiative is understood to mean the pooling of resources of different actors and organizations, but also the bringing together of a tremendous range of people's skills, capabilities, and ability. Volunteers, paid workers and trainees create a space for solidarity and a resource for economic processes.

Thus, the development of a Shared Table of economic activity which focuses on narrowing disparities in society, developing empowerment,



National Surplus week – Seminar at The Shared Table logistic center. Photo: Jani Laukkanen

and building trust between different actors, means working for a sustainable solidarity economy, the quality of which is measured by human well-being. The economy of reciprocity at the Shared Table has meant the creation of important resources for the public sector and the church.

The well-functioning facilities and permanent staff allow for a significantly expanding economic activity, at the heart of which is the building of holistic and respectful interaction. Strengthening inclusion, through empowering civic engagement, requires continuous work across the entire network. A shared, and similar, vision of the development of prosperity is one of the conditions for a reciprocal economy. The prerequisites for economic conviviality are a common process, continuous ethical discussion, meaningful work, and seeing and experiencing each person.

According to Christian tradition, one of the key terms underpinning conviviality – vocation – must be based on the quest for the common good and the primacy of human well-being. The challenge

is to create economic islands and systems where people's well-being is paramount. The activities of the Shared Table have shown how the development of such structures and activities requires participatory development work in which the public sector, the church, non-governmental organizations, and networks work together as partners for the development of an ethical business. In order to achieve economically sustainable development, it has been essential to create a debate that generates action to break dependencies. This has meant confronting people's experiences of marginalization and exclusion – producing processes that break the cycle of sacrifice and which can enable people to see themselves, and each other, through opportunities and abilities. Powerful action-based learning challenges all participants to experiential learning, regardless of social position or status.

Action

The ultimate goals of Shared Table are to develop new structures for creating and increasing well-being, to seek local solutions by expanding participation and sustainability, to create space to process and act for well-being and sustainability, and to stimulate discussion about social and societal disadvantages.

Ecological limits and the challenges of sustainability have become our resource and inspiration. While the food markets offer both a significant volume of resources as well as competition and business, we



Christmas Workshop. Photo: Jani Laukkanen

can turn these towards the direction of a convivial economy.

Katri Valve

Very often, as we have seen, the activities of the normal market affect the poorest part of the population negatively. The challenges of the circular economy – linking sustainability and social justice – have come to stay. For us it has become a huge resource just as it can be for many other economic sectors.

To create convivial economic processes, it has been important for us to start by engaging with important networks. We have had to identify key stakeholders and influencers, and build structures for participatory action in practice. An essential basis for development has been building respectful, community-level, and genuine dialogue among all participants (these include service users, non-profit organizations, the emergent fourth sector of innovative enterprises combining different elements,



Workday at The Shared Table logistic center – volunteer and coordinator. Photo: Jani Laukkanen

the church and the municipality). All Shared Table activities are built on action-based methods and transparent documentation that have ensured commitment, openness, and trust for all participants.

The next step was to discover how we learn from each other's development, and what kind of best practice we can find to develop action. Openness for all kinds of enterprise creates understanding for development. In our Shared Table development work, it was important to find a wide range of examples of the development of a circular economy. We looked for best practice and analyzed those activities – their pros and cons. We built a model based on these experiences and observations.

In the further development of Shared Table, we built a structure that brought together teams of people with content expertise, community development know-how, and logistics and food expertise. Development of the content, facilitating and coaching communities, as well as ensuring paths to working life, were based on the co-creation and cooperation of the whole system. This led to the possibility of building effective paths for people to working life, and to the building of an effective economic system.



Gathering at The Shared Table logistic center. Photo: Jani Laukkanen

It has been possible to see the linking of conviviality and economy in our context, the development of work based on shared ethics, and the development of people's abilities and capacities. In Shared Table, we have been working with such culturally diverse actors that we have had to develop a tool for ethical debate. This kind of development work has to be continuous.

We have built a system that is an effective business and is beneficial to people who are unemployed or who are in different employment relationships, for example low paid and precarious work. This has demanded good infrastructure and resources, open documentation, a large partnership network, and a flow of information, as well as processes that integrate smoothly across the chain. It has also demanded that we have enough regular staff to organize a multi-action enterprise among different sectors and business partners. Shared Table has developed over time as a complex system where many processes, actors, and realities are present at the same time.

Church and Diakonia tackle housing and homelessness: The experience of the church in Hannover, Germany

Peter Szynka

Homelessness is on the increase

In Germany, we face rising numbers of homeless people. The shortage of affordable housing results from the privatization of the housing market during the 1970s. Former so-called “Social Housing Companies,” which played an important role in rebuilding destroyed housing after World War II, were entitled to reduce their taxes if they invested their economic gains in the building of new housing. Privatization means that that these housing companies, which were often owned by governmental bodies, unions, or churches, were sold to investors, and turned from non-profit cooperatives into for-profit organizations. Once they were sold, housing became an object of speculation. Rents were rising and housing companies tended to serve middle- and upper-class families, especially in the bigger cities.

A rising number of people who could not afford those rent increases became homeless. They were left on the streets or referred to provisional housing facilities run by welfare organizations like Diaconia and Caritas. The total number of homeless people in Germany in 2018 was estimated at 678,000



New flats for homeless people. Photo: Peter Szynka/Soziale Wohnraumhilfe, Hannover

(Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Wohnungslosenhilfe e.V.). Therefore, poverty and homelessness became a key issue for political action within welfare organizations and churches.

How do we reflect on this?

Until recently, there has only been low public awareness of the problems facing homeless people. Politicians and official administrations were not

willing to tackle it. Politics should not interfere with the self-regulation of the markets. Now we see that the housing companies were interested in profits but did not show enough responsibility for homeless people. The sudden growth of immigration after 2015 sharpened the problems, but also raised new consciousness and the creativity needed to solve these issues.

Moving into action

Social workers and the homeless services of Diaconia and Caritas responded to these challenges by getting the issue onto the political agenda again. In 2015, the “Report on Homelessness in Lower Saxony” was written by Diaconia and published by the working group of welfare organizations in Lower Saxony (Landesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege e.V.). These kinds of problem-oriented reports are a regular part of the bigger action-oriented poverty reports, which are published annually by the statistical department of the regional government in Lower Saxony (Handlungsorientierte Sozialberichterstattung in Niedersachsen, HSBN). They are an important opportunity for the welfare organizations to get problems onto the political agenda. The “Report on Homelessness in Lower Saxony” used the statistics of Diaconia and Caritas, and discussed the lack of political awareness and the problems of cooperation among national, regional, and local levels. Meanwhile, a national law has been prepared to improve statistics and to give advice to regional and local administrations about care for



Homeless men played against ‘Fanclub Hannover’.

Photo: Peter Szynka

homeless people. Social housing is on the political agenda again. National, regional, and local funds for housing increased.

In 2016, Diaconia Hannover helped fund and organize the first meeting of people who have experienced homelessness. It was launched by Diaconia “Bethel im Norden” in the diaconal village of Freistatt. Freistatt, as a part of Bethel, is one of the oldest diaconal institutions in Germany, founded in the eighteenth century by Friedrich von Bodelschwingh. More than 100 homeless people from all over Germany and other European countries met for a week in a so-called summer camp. The meeting was supported by the Poverty Network (Armutnetzwerk e.V.) which is a participatory structure acting on the national level that was supported by Diaconia Hannover until it was registered. The participants at the first meeting in Freistatt discussed a program, decided on the rules for communication, and started to develop a Homeless People’s Organization.

The meetings in Freistatt were repeated annually: the 2019 meeting was held in Herzogsägmühle, another diaconal village in Bavaria, and it had 120 participants. The next annual meetings will take place in different diaconal locations. Between the annual

meetings, core and organizing meetings were held. Meanwhile, the Homeless People's Organization has also been officially registered (Selbstvertretung wohnungsloser Menschen e.V.). This organization is run by former homeless people. Homeless people are on the board: social workers are only in a support structure. The annual meetings and the support structure are funded by Welfare Lotteries, the Government of Lower Saxony, and Diaconia Hannover. The travel costs of the homeless people are an important part of the funding.

In 2017, social workers from diaconal services in Lower Saxony met at a retreat at the Monastery of Loccum. They discussed the overall problems of housing and shared their experience and activities in creating housing through constructing new buildings on church-owned ground, reconstructing unused church buildings, or through cooperation with housing companies. Based on experiences of diaconal homeless services, Diaconia Hannover had talks with the Bishop of Hannover. The background to these talks was a case in the city of Hannover, where a local congregation promised to give a property to a diaconal service provider in order to build affordable housing. The diaconal service provider invested money to get the planning started. However, after the planning was done, the local congregation changed its mind and sold the property to an investor who was able to pay more money. The service provider lost money for a plan, which could no longer be realized. The bishop proposed to the synod that the church should not only use its property for the best rates of financial return but should follow conceptual considerations if an alternative use of church property becomes nec-



*Homeless people speaking in front of a large auditorium.
Photo: Peter Szyuka*

essary. These conceptual considerations should regard Diaconia and services for homeless people as expressions of a living church. Members of the synod argued that they prefer to “invest in heads instead of stones,” which means that they prefer events instead of housing. The synod established a consultancy service to help local congregations save the church's presence in a community, even if it is necessary to sell property. Diaconal use would be a good alternative – especially affordable housing. The Hannover church established a “tiny house” behind its administration building.

Out of these discussions, a new “Foundation for a Home” was established by diaconal service providers in Hannover (Stiftung Ein Zuhause). The first project has started with the financial support of the city of Hannover. There will be about sixteen new, simple flats, which will be given especially to homeless people. Despite this, there is a great difference between the number of flats that can be built by diaconal service providers and the number of flats that are needed in the city of Hannover. To overcome homelessness in the city, we would need more than 1,000 homes. On the one hand, the effect of this new foundation could be that more buildings



*Homeless person speaking in front of an auditorium.
Photo: Peter Szynka*

will be built, or put under the foundation's administration, to increase the number of flats that can be offered. On the other hand, there are examples, which show that an adequate supply of housing for special groups with special needs is possible, and reasonable, even considering the economic aspects. A sustainable solution would be better than a never-ending series of provisional answers to homelessness.

The Anti-Poverty League in Lower Saxony (Landesarmutskonferenz), an umbrella for welfare organizations and unions, is campaigning for housing projects in and around Hannover with creative actions. In 2019, they demanded publicly the creation of a new Housing Company to be owned by the regional government (Landeswohnungsbaugesellschaft). In a symbolic action, they presented a model to the politicians in front of the regional government building. But there are more creative campaigning examples. Meanwhile, the Social Democratic Party in Lower Saxony adopted this demand.

A football fan club of Hannover 96 (which has unfortunately descended into the second division of the National League) plays regularly against a football team of homeless people. The 2019 game was complemented with a music show and a platform discussion on social housing. A speaker from the Anti-Poverty League confronted a representative of a (cooperating) housing company with the idea of the expropriation of property, which is a legal possibility already foreseen in the German Basic Law and discussed among the far left in Berlin. The representative of the housing company was not amused but promised to help a little by sharing some flats under the condition that the former homeless renters fit into the neighborhood. After the discussion, the speaker of the football club called out the club's well-known slogan "Our City, our Club, our Passion" which is chanted like this every time Hannover 96 plays in the big stadium. But then he added, "Our Responsibility!" By doing so, he showed that public awareness of the problem of homelessness is rising.

Selbstvertretung wohnungsloser Menschen

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Invitation for a 'Convention of Homeless People'.
Photo: Peter Szyuka/Bethel im Norden

I come to the last example of how we tackle the problem of homelessness. The city of Hannover is a candidate to be a European Cultural Capital City in 2025. The Volkswagen Foundation supports the application and underlined the social dimension of the application with a conference in the well-known Herrenhausen Castle. The headline of the Hannover application is "Here. Now. All." Does this "all" include homeless people? Sometimes cities try

to clear out homeless people before such events. In this case, the city of Hannover included representatives of the Hannover street magazine *Asphalt* in the planning group. The Volkswagen Foundation also invited homeless people to discuss the application in the Herrenhausen Castle. Representatives of the Homeless People's Organization, which came out of the Freistatt meetings of homeless people (reported above) showed up and spoke freely and effectively in front of an audience of three hundred people. They welcomed the idea of the city of Hannover to apply to be the European Cultural Capital in 2025. But they also warned clearly against symbolic politics and demanded real progress in housing if the headline "Here. Now. All." is to become true.

Alongside the political aspect of this example, it is noteworthy that there is progress in the participation of homeless people in public affairs. Representatives from the Homeless People's Organization and the Poverty Network are increasingly included in hearings and roundtable discussions. Administrators, politicians, and research groups will not miss the perspective of people concerned with homelessness anymore. Public hearings are a good opportunity for homeless people to practice public speaking, and a good opportunity to regain respect. It changes the image of the homeless person and helps the public to understand the risks of life.

The story continues!

In January 2020, representatives of the Poverty Network were invited by the national government in Berlin (Bundestag) to participate in an expert

hearing to discuss a draft for a new law to improve the statistics on homelessness in Germany. The representative of the homeless people, Michael Stiefel, added the group's suggestions in a calm and clear way and impressed the politicians. Therefore, my hope is that representatives of homeless people become regular guests in hearings on homelessness, alongside the welfare organizations, and speak for themselves.

Homelessness and conviviality

At the end of this story, I will try to reflect on what these developments in a special area of diaconal social work could mean for our conviviality process and how this process nurtured these developments. In the conviviality process, we discussed the core elements of conviviality – justice, dignity, and vocation – as belonging together. In our everyday social work, we often have discussed the issues of justice

and dignity in separate discussions. A more political group within Diaconia and Church claim that the world is lacking justice and that the community and the state must give compensation and secure equal rights. A more pedagogical fraction was concerned with restoring the dignity of clients by feeding them, clothing them, and giving them a home, if needed. The idea of dignity also implies looking for the genius of the other and listening to her or him. Both justice and dignity belong together. So, let's talk about vocation. The examples show that a lot of people (politicians, experts, administrators, church people, football fans, social workers, and homeless people) discovered their vocation to work for the dignity of others and justice for all, including homeless people. This shows that conviviality – the art and practice of living together – crosses traditional borders of church life, diaconal practice, social work, football clubs, and the traditional way of being homeless. It is a step towards responsible citizenship.

The story continues!

Being a diaconal ecumenical church in a diverse neighborhood, De Nieuwe Stad (The New City) and Stap Verder in Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Elianne Schultz and Erika Feenstra

De Nieuwe Stad Church

Elianne Schultz

See

The church building, De Nieuwe Stad, is in the Amsterdam area called Bijlmer. This area was built in the 1960s as a new and upcoming neighborhood with a futuristic look due to its elevated metro-railways, tall buildings surrounded by green pastures, and long bicycle paths in car-free areas. Around the time that the builders finished their work, the former Dutch colony of Suriname gained independence and many people from this South American island decided to move to the Netherlands. The new neighborhood, Bijlmer, had housing available at just this time and, therefore, was rapidly filled with these new immigrants. In the years that followed, Bijlmer became the home of thousands of immigrants from across the world. On

the one hand, this made Bijlmer the most multicultural area of the Netherlands. On the other hand, it made Bijlmer an area with high rates of poverty, unemployment, and crime.

Today, the area in which De Nieuwe Stad was built (Bijlmer East) is made up of immigrants (70 percent). Most of them are from Suriname (34 percent), Ghana (12 percent) or one of the Caribbean countries (6 percent). One of the most remarkable statistics of this neighborhood shows that 37 percent of the children growing up in Bijlmer East live in poverty (according to the Dutch standard for poverty): 36 percent of the children have problems in school and

14 percent drop out of the school system as a teenager. Most of the families in Bijlmer East are single parent families: the unemployment rate is as high as 19 percent and up to 5 percent of the population has major financial debts. Rates for loneliness and social exclusion are higher than anywhere else in Amsterdam. Up to 15 percent of the people in Bijlmer East feel they have no control over their lives.

Bijlmer is known in the Netherlands as an area with many problems. At the same time, it is an amazing neighborhood where people from different cultures and backgrounds are used to living side by side. Almost half (46 percent) of the people are religious: Bijlmer East, therefore, has more than 300 (small



Captions and credits see p. 28

churches in a variety of languages and cultures. De Nieuwe Stad is built as a church center that can hold three or four church services at the same time, which means that mornings, afternoons, and evenings are filled with a variety of church celebrations.

Reflect

The churches in De Nieuwe Stad have found each other in a shared desire to serve their neighborhood. The churches, like the neighborhood, are made up of mostly immigrants. The people in the church know the importance of having a social network and the value of a church as such. In 2017, representatives of seven different churches sat together and decided that “Yes, we want to be God’s hands and feet. We want to give God’s love to others, because he has loved us first. Yes, we want to work together, despite our differences in theology and cultural differences in the way we worship. We want to work together in serving the neighborhood.” This was the starting point for opening up De Nieuwe Stad for the neighborhood.

A day in the life of De Nieuwe Stad

Every Monday, a variety of people comes to the church building De Nieuwe Stad (The New City). When the doors open at 2 p.m., some people are already sitting outside, waiting. They are old people who come to De Nieuwe Stad because, then at least, they have some company. At home, it can be so lonely. Inside De Nieuwe Stad, the coffee and tea are ready, and on several tables, there are board

games ready to be played. Volunteers from the church welcome the guests and take time to listen to their stories. Two of the elderly ladies that both came to De Nieuwe Stad because they were lonely, are now friends. They are sitting together making a plan for a trip to a museum together.

Soon after the elderly have had their tea, a new group arrives – the children. Students from primary schools in the neighborhood come to De Nieuwe Stad. While the elderly are all Dutch people, the children are all from African or Surinamese families. They always arrive with a lot of noise, bringing a wind of life into De Nieuwe Stad. They scatter around the room as they start playing games or Lego, doing crafts or reading books. The volunteers from the church know each child by name, provide the children with healthy food, and chat with them personally. A seven-year-old girl is learning to play the guitar in de Nieuwe Stad. She was allowed to take a guitar home for one week and now proudly shows that she can play “Yes, God is good.” One of the elderly women also knows how to play the guitar. Let’s make music together!

And then, as the afternoon proceeds, we see many others coming to De Nieuwe Stad. A Syrian refugee family comes to practice the Dutch language with one of the volunteers. A Finnish homeless man comes for a warm cup of soup because it’s cold outside. When his hands are warm, he takes the broom and starts sweeping the room to show his gratitude. A young man from Gambia comes to play football with the kids. He has so many worries in his life, but this hour with the kids brings him a little happiness.

De Nieuwe Stad has become a place where everyone is welcome and where no two people are the same. In one afternoon, there are young and old

people, rich and poor people, locals and foreigners. No one feels left out, because there is an openness that welcomes everyone.

Who are the people that organize such an open, welcoming environment in a church building? They are volunteers from seven different churches. Seven different churches have joined hands because they want their church building to be a significant place for the neighborhood. Those seven churches are the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Church (two culturally Dutch churches), the Lutheran Church (made up of Surinamese people), the Indonesian Protestant Church (PERKI), the Ghanaian Baptist and Presbyterian Church and the African Pentecostal Church Treasures. Of course, these seven churches have many differences, but they also have found they have something in common – they want to be the hands and feet of Jesus in serving this world. They want to help others because of what he has done for us.

Looking back over the past two years, the churches are now happy to see that many people have found their way to De Nieuwe Stad. It can be heart breaking to hear stories of what happens in the homes of the children or in the homes of the elderly, and, at the same time, these stories confirm to the church that it is so important to offer a safe place where young and old can come, be fed, be heard, and find rest.

The most amazing thing of all might be that seven churches decided to work together and that every Monday volunteers from these churches get together. They set aside their differences and work together for what they believe in. De Nieuwe Stad is a church building in a neighborhood with a wide variety of people – many cultures, many religions, and many languages. In De Nieuwe Stad, we have learned to work

together, to share our lives with one another, and to open our lives and our building to people from the neighborhood.

Conclusion

Our experience in De Nieuwe Stad has taught us that it is extremely valuable to get together with a variety of people from different backgrounds. Seeing people from different churches, different cultures, and different ages get together on an equal basis leads to seeing amazing results. Conviviality in our context means that the one needing help sometimes becomes the helper. The stranger can become the host. The student can be the teacher. No position is fixed because we work and live together. This breathes a warm welcome to anyone who joins us.



Captions and credits see below.

Small pictures on pages 26 and 28:

Impressions of 'conviviality' in De Nieuwe Stad: children and older people from the neighborhood, homeless people & volunteers.

P. 26:

Top: Handcrafting

Middle: Joy of music

Bottom: Singing together

P. 28:

Top: Having a meal

Middle: Support with 'papers'

Bottom: Conviviality

Photos: Lutheran Diaconie Amsterdam

Stap Verder

Erika Feenstra



Introduction

Stap Verder (Step Further) is an ecumenical diaconal initiative, which is linked to many of the churches involved in De Nieuwe Stad plus several other churches and organizations. Stap Verder is housed in a shopfront in the neighborhood and works with professionals, volunteers, and activists.

Stap Verder relies on volunteers and activists from the churches, both traditional Dutch citizens and those who have arrived from other countries. The services are similarly open to all. People who access the services of Stap Verder may later become volunteers or activists.

The goals of Stap Verder

The overall, goal of the center is for the inhabitants of Amsterdam South East to:

- ▶ have access to information and social amenities
- ▶ get access to their rights as written in the Declaration of Human Rights
- ▶ have a decent living in the Netherlands

The basic starting point for all actions is:

- ▶ We accept people.
- ▶ We build relationships.
- ▶ We do not place goals, targets, or demands on the people who come.

The focus is on listening attentively and then offering follow-up or support that is needed.

The concrete work of the center

The concrete work can be divided into different main lines of activity:

1. Stap Verder as a knowledge center

Search and find information

Stap Verder is a place where people can acquire knowledge and information about Dutch society. The mission of Stap Verder is that inhabitants of Amsterdam Zuidoost develop themselves. This means that people have access to the knowledge that they need to build a decent life. The Netherlands have signed the Declaration of Human Rights, but, in practice, it is not always easy to get these rights in the Netherlands. This applies both to inhabitants who were born and raised in the Netherlands, as well as to newcomers.

Stand up for your rights

Access to rights must be granted by other people: rules and bureaucracy sometimes prevent that access. In addition, ignorance and lack of knowledge about the many possibilities that Dutch society offers may hinder people from getting what they are entitled to. Sometimes people have lived for a long time in degrading circumstances and have become accustomed to not being granted rights. This may hamper them in claiming their rights.

Improve access to facilities

Stap Verder tries to work on access in various ways:

- ▶ Looking at individual situations in discussion with visitors and providing information or searching for solutions to problems or injustice.
- ▶ If several people seen during consultation hours are faced with the same obstacles, dialogue can be started with the authorities and the government to improve information quality or to initiate information activities.
- ▶ By compiling a social map of Amsterdam South East, Stap Verder gains insight into the many facilities that are available and maps their accessibility. The consultation coworkers can use this information, but also try to make this information accessible to visitors themselves.
- ▶ Where needed facilities do not exist or are not (yet) sufficient, Stap Verder will set up activities (in principle, on a temporary basis).

2. Dutch language lessons

Dutch language lessons are offered almost every day. Very often, they are provided by volunteers and by people who previously learned Dutch in the center or in other places. Learning can be personal or in groups and it doesn't matter if you normally do not read or write.

3. Social and legal consultation

Social consultation helps people find how things work and what the rules are, for example, in terms of getting a job, claiming social benefits, or paying

tax. The first step is to orientate people to the different organizations and act as a guide and signpost alongside people.

If there is a difficult or tricky problem, Stap Verder can also offer private and strictly confidential consultation to search for the best solution and accompany people until they have found the right way. This is not done from the perspective of government or other institutions, but from the perspective of the interests of the resident in the area.

If the problem requires technical legal support, then Stap Verder has several volunteer lawyers who are ready to help.

4. Women's empowerment

Step Verder offers special activities for women's empowerment based on women meeting women, learning new skills, and developing new activities. One aim is to help women become more economically independent and participate in social action.

5. Other actions

There are many other actions connected to the center – for example, practical services such as clothes washing, giving people an address, supporting computer literacy, medical support from Doctors without Borders, bible study groups, growing vegetables, developing new skills, organizing letter-writing to people in detention centers, and working to change things in the context that needs changing. Many people who are users of the center are also volunteers, contributing their own knowledge, skills, and interests (reciprocity).

Reflection on the Stories

Tony Addy

Conviviality and social analysis

In all four stories, there is a common thread, which is related to how diaconal organizations outside the local church and congregation can support convivial life together. We can identify several issues related to the understanding that convivial life together is not only a question of local relationships, but these relationships should be based on the understanding that all are made in the image of God. As the solidarity group developed its work, members quickly came to see the importance of wider social and economic structures for shaping positive conditions for living together.

As we see in the stories from Sweden and Finland, the concrete developments in work and economy impact directly on people and local communities in a negative way, creating growing poverty and injustice. These changes are supported by an increasingly coercive welfare system, which keeps people out of work and in poverty in a context where the employment structure does not offer classical employment. In the conviviality process, we have also seen how the formal labor market is becoming more unjust with harsh working conditions that do not recognize the dignity of the person. This, in fact, calls into question the idea that work as employment is a step to social integration, because working life itself becomes more fragmented, discontinuous, and over-regulated by

the employer who can oversee every move a worker makes. The story from Sweden illustrates how, based on a local parish, and with support from the wider church, new ways to work are being found and organized in such a way that they can be replicated more widely.

The second issue which the story from Finland, in particular, reflects is the fact that the present economy of food production creates an abundance of food at relatively low cost, so much so that the producers and retailers of food have waste food on their hands, and this is factored into the economics of food. At the same time, people buy too much food and, as we know, a large percentage of the food bought by households goes to waste. At the same time, many people do not have the resources to buy enough food for their daily basic needs and go hungry. This is a new situation in Europe because previously food was a relatively large part of peoples' regular budget and yet, with a regular job or basic social security, people largely did not go hungry. In the situation where work and welfare have been heavily restructured, a growing fraction of the population goes hungry and a nineteenth century approach to food poverty has returned – notably, soup kitchens and hunger lines where people queue for their food. The deconstruction of work life and the exclusion of people from work have led to mental health problems, which are exacerbated, by isolation and loneliness. In a convivial economy, food would be sustainably produced, and shared in a more equitable way. In the story, we read about the concrete involvement of diakonia and local churches with other actors, in order to address these issues.

Ecological limits and the challenges of sustainability have become our resource and inspiration. While the food markets offer both a significant volume of resources as well as competition and business, we can turn these towards the direction of a convivial economy.

Katri Valve

Similar economic drivers are affecting the provision of housing, just as they affect work and the sharing of food. In many contexts, housing provision has been privatized and left to market mechanisms. Even social housing companies have to compete in market conditions to make a profit and to finance new housing through interest-bearing loans. This means that the companies have to look at every piece of real estate with the aim of extracting the highest financial return. This has had a disastrous effect on the provision of housing for low-income families, whether working or unemployed, living with long-term illness or with a disability. The phenomenon of gentrification is partly driven by this process and, in some cities, planning authorities even designate areas for development for people in a particular income bracket, thus increasing the segmentation of city areas. These processes, combined with changes in the labor market, have led to a rapid growth of homelessness, even in economically successful countries such as Germany where the story in this booklet comes from. In theory, according to human rights, everyone has a right to housing, but this

right is not maintained, even in affluent societies. What is more concerning from the point of view of diakonia, which is seeking convivial life together, is that churches in some contexts have also begun to see their land and property in this profit-driven way: the story shows how, at a time when it seems that church income has to be protected, or even to grow, plans for inclusive housing may be overridden by the desire for the church to make a financial return. The story narrates the initiative of one diaconal organization to work directly with homeless people to address this issue, and to also challenge the churches to make a change.

One aspect of the changing economy of Europe – particularly, in the beginning, – has been the phenomenon of labor migration. This is a complex story but in general terms, in the period when Western economies were rebuilding (starting from the early 1950s), people were attracted from the actual, or former colonies, to work in Europe because there was a shortage of labor. Migrant labor flows into Europe have continued until today and there are many sectors, such as care and agriculture, which are highly dependent on people with an immigrant background. Looking across Europe, we also know that there were some workers from the global South who were invited to work in countries such as the former Czechoslovakia – fraternal workers from communist countries in the global South. Now there are many workers moving seasonally, or permanently, within Europe, especially from the east to the west. As well as migration, there have been periods when there have been many people coming to Europe as asylum seekers: some churches have become very engaged in work with

uprooted people. This has created an ever-growing diversity and a consequent plurality of churches and faith communities. The question is how the churches can respond in this situation: the story from the Netherlands is an example of creating an ecumenical, socially engaged church – actually seven churches in one building – which partners with a related diaconal center in the same neighborhood. This is an interesting way of approaching the fact that even people from the same faith have different ways of worshipping, and faith and worship are a part of life which is transportable, and which also has a connection to everyday life. The common space allows for dialogue and the development of common action to work with the diversity of the local community. The diaconal center and the churches take different parts of the task but are integrated because many church members are volunteers and activists.

Theology and practice

When reading these stories together, we catch a glimpse of the changing landscape in Europe and its impact on everyday life.

The group the deacon worked with made it clear to her that conversations were good, but that this was not enough. Physical recovery, they thought, was linked to mental well-being, but it is also intimately linked with the perceived ability to achieve something, not only to

be subjected to the care of others. Out of the conversation, some keywords were crystallized, which the deacon and her pastor summarized and put in print. The words were:

Meaningfulness, Work Community, Rehabilitation, and Professional Pride.

Anders Hagman and Katrin Holmstrand

There is one feature, which the stories have in common and that is that the church, or diakonia, was able to see the people in the situation with new eyes. They, of course, saw the problems people face in everyday life, but they realized through conversation and later analysis that the traditional answers or approaches were ineffective, inappropriate to the new context, and, in some cases, dehumanizing or degrading. In each story, there comes a moment of awareness, a new way of seeing – especially a new way of seeing the “other” – to recognize that people have problems and face concrete issues in their life, but they are not the problem; to see the resources and capabilities of the people; to recognize that to be human is to be in a reciprocal relationship; and that to give and receive is a turning point to be appreciated anew each time.

The concept of conviviality and the practice of convivial life together, have been worked out with three underlying theologically grounded components, not only in relation to analyzing work and economy, but also to convivial life together. These components are vocation, justice, and dignity.

... to be part of a social movement that wants to transform society to be more inclusive. This means questioning a working life that produces exclusion and, at the same time, to contribute to building an inclusive economy together with social enterprises and other companies which invest in local, sustainable production and consumption.

Anders Hagman and Katrin Holmstrand

Firstly, in Christian terms, vocation stands for the calling of Christians to work for the common good of all, and for people's well-being. It relates to the understanding that each person has gifts and talents with which to express their care for each other and creation. When we think about work, we usually think about paid employment, but the structure of paid employment is also changing, so much so that workplace conditions have become a major source of mental ill health. What we see from the stories is that there are many other kinds of work, which are useful, apart from paid employment. This work supports common life together: the formal economy actually depends on it but doesn't pay for it. We can think of work in the family, which traditionally has not been justly shared between men and women, but also all the associational life which supports convivial life together. Each story shows examples of this aspect of vocation. The third vocational strand could be called "activity" – socially useful activity we do because we enjoy it. This may be for personal development or fulfilment, or to create a better quality

of life together. It may be making music together or organizing and preparing a meal together. It may be following a hobby or sport. Activity may be useful and creative, but usually it is unpaid. It is part of giving and receiving which supports convivial life together. The dividing lines between employment, work, and activity are different in different societies and at different times. The pressure now is to turn much work and activity into paid employment or self-employment: in terms of a convivial economy, it can be counterproductive.

In terms of vocation, the pressure to turn work into employment should be diminished, and work should have a recognized place as important for the health of society, whether or not it is structured as employment. However, in terms of employment, this should result in a living wage without working excessive hours under bad conditions. Taking this into account, time would be released for reciprocal activities, culture, and associational work.

According to Christian tradition, one of the key terms underpinning conviviality – vocation – must be based on the quest for the common good and the primacy of human well-being. The challenge is to create economic islands and systems where people's well-being is paramount.

Katri Valve

Secondly, a convivial economy would be based on justice related to a more equal sharing of income and wealth. As we can see from the stories, the impact of competitive globalization and privatization, along with financial austerity, is making societies more radically unequal and the value of the social wage is reduced. A convivial economy would be based on a different financial and social model, taking into account the need to combat exclusion and marginalization. The development of a sustainable and circular economy would create sustainable food production and halt environmental destruction: these principles could be applied to other sectors. A convivial economy would enable people to have time for other work and activities, which are socially useful and support well-being.

The third aspect on which conviviality is based is dignity and, as the stories relate, an increasing number of people do not have the resources to support themselves and a family, or to afford even basic housing. So, a convivial economy would ensure that no one lacked the resources for meeting basic needs and that the social wage, including access to satisfactory housing, was ensured. This would require changes in social security – probably a form of citizens’ income or basic income, as well as a change in housing policy to focus on access not profitability. It would also require changes in health, education, and welfare so that services could be accessed as a right by all denizens, not on a market, profit-making basis. In terms of paid work, this should be organized under conditions, which support human dignity in terms of labor relations, what is produced and the impact on the environment.

Obstacles to action

The stories – especially the story on housing – reveal some of the obstacles to conviviality, which affect working with church structures. These are not present in the same way in each context of course, but they are factors, which have to be taken into account. The first is that convivial life together implies a participatory and reciprocal approach: typically, church structures are more geared to an executive approach. The connections between local communities and decision-making structures are mediated through people who do not usually represent the diversity of the situation – particularly the experience and world of marginalized people. The organized church is a kind of monoculture: even if there are differences of opinion, the procedures are culturally similar to those of other organizations. This brings to the fore another point, which is the issue of contextual pressure. As we have seen, the context has changed: there is much more diversity and growing marginalization, and this creates pressure to act on the local level. However, the context of leadership is very much influenced by the leading ideas in the world of the market economy and governance. We see a glimpse of this in the decision-making about land and property.

Business as usual raises constant obstacles in the form of filled agendas, in-house work methods, and local collaboration in a day-to-day life where the professionals often take care of themselves and continue their routine

practices. This means there is lack of exposure to the wider society, and the external tension, which comes from this, is missing. This is compounded by a work culture, which does not support unconditional reflection together on the joint work of the congregation in its context.

Anders Hagman and Katrin Holmstrand

Because the contextual pressure from the local and more marginalized groups' experience is attenuated, sometimes the decision-making process is too unwieldy and slow to respond: the habits of the heart are difficult to change. There is a need to develop new learning and decision-making processes, which will address this question of leadership culture. This is simply to say that all of us take for granted that what works for us in our life should work for others: we need clear processes to address this for the sake of convivial life together. The "change moments" in the stories come from encounters with people in the course of everyday pastoral and diaconal work, and from reflecting on the meaning of those encounters for practice in terms of seeking convivial life together.

Another facet of this issue is that when we act, we do so out of our biography and socialization, and so do all other people: if we reflect on this with a human ecology perspective, we see we are shaped by experience in our families and communities, but also in church and education. We are also affected by economic and social structures, and by events. It means that, over time, people's identity is shaped by

different structures and large-scale events, so how we see things, and how we see what is possible, is different, depending on our biography, socialization and age. It is important to reflect on this at all levels, including with local people in a marginal position, but also with leaders.

Conviviality in action

In the stories, we can recognize that an important common factor in seeking conviviality is that there is a need to start very close to the lifeworld of people, and to build trust and a process of coworking. It is important to take steps to break the helper-helped, donor-recipient binary, and to build up mutuality and coworking. People should not be viewed in terms of their deficits or their problems: it is important to reflect on conversations and to see the limitations of our own models of working from a convivial perspective. Our conversations can be the turning point through which change comes, whether this be in the St. Mary enterprise or the campaign of homeless people for the right to a decent house.

To change the congregation by incorporating, in its midst, a diaconal activity that addresses key socio-economic and existential issues for many people of our time.

Anders Hagman and Katrin Holmstrand

The second guideline is that diaconal tasks should not always be outsourced from the locality and local church. The church should draw closer to marginalized people and their world: action should be based on people's stories and the clarification of the issues, which are important for them. One of the problems with diaconal work, as with social work in general, is that it increasingly relies on a "protocolled approach" which prescribes what should be done with, or for, a particular client with a particular problem: it can be a disciplinary issue if a worker does not follow the protocol. A convivial approach is inductive and builds from the concrete situation of people in their diverse worlds. It may not be constructed in the form of a project to meet narrowly defined aims. To build convivial life together, there is a need to be open and to link action and learning by all, including workers. The capabilities of all people should be used, and co-production and co-working is necessary so that all can give and receive.

Thirdly, the use of resources and the care of creation are also part of seeking convivial life together. This can be expressed in the form of building a small-scale solidarity economy, as in St Mary, or in moving towards a circular economy shared table. A circular economy designs the whole process of production-distribution-consumption-waste handling in a way that has minimum environmental impact: literally nothing is wasted. In both these stories, we can see a clear link between economic activity and work and developing a system whereby convivial life together is supported. Shared Table, for example, requires the building up of participatory groups in each locality with volunteers and people who would formerly be seen as beneficiaries involved together in

learning and acting. The skills learnt through these processes are transferrable to other contexts. This could also be an impulse for the churches, not only to think about the environmental impact of their activities (green church label), but also to think how their land, property, resources, and people support convivial life together.

Finally, seeking conviviality involves debate in the public sphere: it demands work to defend and promote human rights, whether of homeless people or people with an immigrant background or refugees. This work is needed to prompt change and to break the dependency and sacrifice cycles, but it cannot be done without the people affected.

Convivial planning and management

... it is noteworthy that there is progress in the participation of homeless people in public affairs. Representatives from the Homeless People's Organization and the Poverty Network are increasingly included in hearings and roundtable discussions. Administrators, politicians, and research groups will not miss the perspective of people concerned with homelessness anymore.

Peter Szynka

We can see that conviviality cannot be planned. It is an art and practice, based on performance (we could say "incarnation"). It creates the space to trans-

form the mundane and is based on the continuing, unexpected, and unearned surprise of the “gift” (we could say “grace”). Conviviality offers a vision, yet it also underpins a critique. The absence of conviviality is not just to do with relationships, but also with structures, at the local and the national level – and even beyond. Conviviality may be supported by policies and practices of the local and national government, as well as by economic actors. What the stories clearly show is that conviviality can be encouraged, and that the infrastructure – broadly understood – can support the development of convivial life together. Structure and infrastructure turn out to be important factors in supporting conviviality in many cases. Understood in this way, space and place are also important factors. Creating the right space is a key part of creating the possibilities for conviviality. The space has to be public and barrier free, really open (a town square or park); in the case of a building, the threshold must be low. The concept of low threshold is not only a question of physical access, but is more about the supporting culture and ethos, as well as the identification of the church as an open space for all who want to work for the common good. Many churches declare “all are welcome” but the hidden sub-text is “so long as they are like us.” We see another approach in the story of De Nieuwe Stad and the design of that building and the diaconal shop.

Our experience in De Nieuwe Stad has taught us that it is extremely valuable to get together with a variety of people from different backgrounds. Seeing

people from different churches, different cultures, and different ages get together on an equal basis leads to seeing amazing results. Conviviality in our context means that the one needing help sometimes becomes the helper. The stranger can become the host. The student can be the teacher. No position is fixed, because we work and live together. This breathes a warm welcome to anyone who joins us.

Elianne Schultz

Convivial life together implies an involvement of people in co-design and co-production of activities and space. For example, the decoration and symbolism inside a church building reflect certain ideas and not others. But all the stories emphasize a form of leadership of a process so that action emerges and develops through dialogue. It is important to reflect on this because, in many contexts, processes supporting convivial life together rely on personal envisioning which gradually expands the scope of involvement. This also requires a focus on the question of the processes of decision-making and power sharing in the process. As in a one-to-one relationship between a diaconal worker (or social worker) and a person usually seen as a client, the question of power is important.

It has been possible to see the linking of conviviality and economy in our context, the development of work based on

shared ethics, and the development of people's abilities and capacities. In Shared Table, we have been working with such culturally diverse actors that we have had to develop a tool for ethical debate. This kind of development work has to be continuous.

Katri Valve

A further question, which has to be addressed, is the fact that complex projects depend on relationships to many structures outside the project. Furthermore, the project may also aim to influence those structures, not only to secure finance. Alongside convivial life together, developing the infrastructure and the economy in a way, which supports the fluid activity of convivial life together, and the response to new needs, is an important task.

This points to the complex economy of conviviality – conviviality cannot be bought or sold, and it cannot be coerced. It requires active agency and has an economic basis. Therefore, a leadership presence and the service model of this leadership needs further elaboration. The leadership has a key role in supporting participation and building trust, as well as creating the space within which the gift-sharing of conviviality can be fostered.

Reflecting on this turns our attention to the conventional views of project envisioning, planning, implementation, and evaluation. There is a need for wide involvement – such a process requires a long-term perspective. It therefore invites a re-evaluation of the constraining view of “project time” and the narrow focus on project aims, especially when the context is becoming more complex and diverse. In this situation, an inductive and participatory approach is required. Seeking conviviality cannot be narrowly focused on problem solving, but on processes, which can create the energy where the problems and issues can be addressed in new and creative ways.

Conclusion

Seeking conviviality focuses on hearing the vocational call from people outside the existing church. We could even say that, through people in need outside the church, the call of God to faithful living can be heard. These stories document the impact of groups of people who take this approach and who seek to use the resources at their disposal to support convivial life together.

Marks of Conviviality

Tony Addy

Introduction

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

The chapter is divided into:

- ▶ Conviviality as a Core Concept
- ▶ A Convivial Approach to Diaconal Practice
- ▶ Conviviality, Diakonia, and the Church

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

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

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

Conviviality as a Core Concept

Three Dimensions of Conviviality - Vocation, Dignity and Justice

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

‘Diakonia is the faithful response to God’s call through the other’

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

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

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

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

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

Conviviality, Borders and Boundaries

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

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

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

each to ‘life together’ in fullness could be. So, we could formulate it like this:

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

Conviviality Overcoming Fear

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

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

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

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

Conviviality instead of Tolerance

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

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

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

of identity intersect in each person with different consequences. This has consequences for the way in which the church and diakonia respond to diversity.

‘Seeking conviviality overcomes the power of ‘naming the other’ by adopting an open attitude to receive the specific way the “other” describes themselves’

Convivial Relationships

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

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

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

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

‘Conviviality is possible when there is open communication between people in all their diversity and when there is open reflection on socially constructed negative attitudes towards different “others”’

A Convivial Approach to Diaconal Practice

A Convivial Approach to Time

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

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

A Convivial Approach to Diaconal Work

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

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

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

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

A Convivial Approach to Practice

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

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

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

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

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

A Convivial Approach to Advocacy & Campaigning

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

may result in alternatives, but it may also support the work for much needed changes in politics, policy and practice.

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

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

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

Conviviality, Diakonia, and the Church

Introduction

The ‘marks of conviviality’ apply equally to organizational diakonia and to issues of the management and leadership of diaconal projects and organizations. However, there are also some specific aspects,

which relate to work with economic issues. In the second phase of the Seeking Conviviality process, there was a strong focus on economic issues and work, because almost all the local diaconal actors found these to be important factors shaping the quality of life in local communities.

Conviviality in the Context of Work and Economy

The present economic model and the values, which underpin it, affect the everyday life of people and communities in every country. The well-documented growing inequality of income and wealth between poor people, even those in work, and the very rich is a direct threat to convivial life together. This is made worse by reforms to social service and social security systems, which impoverish people and control many aspects of their life. The reduction of resources for social service creates pressure on the workers and on the service users who are unable to access the support they need.

‘Convivial life together requires a paradigm shift in economic thinking towards an economy of the common good and creation care. Diaconal organizations and the church should evaluate their own economy and also work towards a paradigm shift in economic policy and practice.’

Conviviality, Poverty and Food Insecurity

The present system pushes people into poverty, and the result is food insecurity as well as energy poverty and increasing homelessness. The policies of austerity and the idea that people will be more motivated to seek paid employment if their income is unsustainable is inhuman and degrading, as is the removal or lack of financial support for people with

special needs, such as disability. These policies create divisions and increase antagonism between people and result in conflict, which is inimical to convivial life together in peace and justice.

‘Convivial life together in peace and with justice requires policies which support people’s everyday life on a decent level and a just and fair distribution of resources’

Conviviality, Employment, Work and Activity

A sustainable society needs the recognition that not all work has to be shaped as employment. Paid employment is appropriate for some types of work, but there is a great deal of work, which is not at the moment in the category of paid employment. This is not only in the field of caring but can also be in other fields which we normally think of as ‘voluntary work’. These tasks are essential for a healthy society and also for the activities of civil society and, in fact, the church and diakonia! The third kind of work can be called ‘activity’ which is work done purely for pleasure, but which may also bring pleasure to others. An example might be playing a musical instrument as a leisure activity!

‘Convivial life together requires work, employment and activity so that financial distribution can enable all people who ‘work’ to receive an income which is sustainable. There should not be any pressure to turn all work into employment!’

Conviviality, Innovation and Alternatives

One way to respond to the challenges facing different groups and localities is to develop alternatives which may use resources in more environmentally sensitive ways, meet specific needs such as for food

security or create new services. Such innovations which may mix different kinds of work and use existing resources, for instance of buildings or land, are a contribution to building a circular sustainable economy. Churches and diaconal organizations are in a good position to support such innovations in support of civil society.

'A convivial local economy builds on local resources to produce needed resources, products and services and at the same time builds relationships which cross different boundaries and support life together'

Conviviality and Organizing for Change

In situations where there is a need to press for changes in the policies and practices of local, regional or national government or the practices of a private enterprise, churches and diakonia have long-term resources which can support marginalized groups in pressing for the resolution of issues affecting their life.

'Convivial life together is based on relationships between people and the institutions which affect their life. This means that when there is an issue which prevents convivial life together, organizations of people affected should be helped to work for change.'

Conviviality and Advocacy for Change

Churches and diaconal organizations have the capacity to create public forums and to carry forward advocacy work. This should be based on the experience of working close to the everyday life of marginalized people and building an alliance with them on the principle of 'nothing about us without us'.

'Conviviality may require policy changes which can be advocated by churches and diaconal organizations, along with people affected and diverse faith and civil society groups'

Conviviality, Process and Project

Diaconal support for convivial life together requires an appropriate 'economy', but conviviality cannot strictly speaking be planned. A different approach is therefore needed to leadership, management and decision-making so that there is involvement with people from the start. Care must be taken in defining issues and time frames because issue definition is often deeply connected to policy frameworks, which already label people and problems and define outputs and outcomes. The time frame is important because there is often a conflict between project time and time for everyday life. In general, conviviality is the result of a process not constrained by 'project time'.

'To work for convivial life together, churches and diaconal organizations have to be involved in a process of co-design and co-production; furthermore, accountability has to be built into the design of the action, and this requires an innovative leadership and management style'

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Resources and Links

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Links

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

Conviviality, Diakonia, and the Church

In this book, you will find four stories from different European contexts, which present different models. What they have in common is that they do not start with the idea that diaconal organizations are producing services for certain categories of people and that they seek volunteers from the churches to support their work. In each case, the common action is built on working with the different organizations and churches as they face outwards towards people in their context. In this way, the boundaries between church, diakonia, and local people become blurred, and new forms of service and social action are developed.

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