



CONVIVIALITY
diaconal life in diversity

Convivial Church and Radical Welcome

Seeking Conviviality
– A Core Concept for Diakonia

Number 4

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LWF

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Contents

Preface	4
Introduction	6
The Stories	9
The diaconal church as home for young people: The story of Bethel Church Center of Pastoral Care, Tallinn, Estonia	10
Under the rainbow you are not alone: Survival guide for queer kids who are Christian, Västerås, Sweden	18
How to manage the legacies of slavery in relation with diaconal conviviality? Lutheran Church in Amsterdam.....	23
A temporary home for guests: Steps towards convivial life together, Bavaria, Germany.....	28
Reflection on the Stories	34
Marks of Conviviality	38
Writers and Contacts	46
Resources and Links	47

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



Photo: Priscilla Du Preez/Unsplash

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

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

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

▶ Convivial Church and Radical Welcome

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

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

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

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

Ireneusz Lukas

LWF Regional Secretary for Europe

Introduction

Tony Addy

Discussions about Conviviality – the art and practice of living together – started from the question of how it is possible to live together in a Europe of increasing diversity and growing inequality. The second question soon arose: what does it mean for us to think of a convivial church and what would be the marks by which we would identify it? Given that the groups who first thought about this issue were involved in local diakonia, it is not surprising that the question of the contribution of diakonia to convivial life together was on the agenda. Over a period of time, “seeking conviviality” emerged as a new core concept for local diakonia. If we reflect for a moment on local situations and think about many local churches, and start to ask how the area around the church has changed in the past generation and how that change is reflected in the church, we might come up with some surprising answers. Migration has increased, and the numbers of asylum seekers and refugees have grown since the late 1940s until today. It is not only mobility and migration that contribute to diversity, it is also the fact that the reality of gender and sexuality are now areas where our understanding of identity is changing.

There has always been diversity, whether or not it was recognized: through seeking conviviality, we are invited to reflect on it in new ways and to develop new practice as a result. This is an area which sometimes produces heated conversations and polarization, but through the practice of seeking conviviality and working on life together, as

all are made in the image of God, we can come to a new awareness and understanding of the positive contribution this diversity can make to the richness of everyday life. The stories collected in this book highlight some of the most important issues. As you read the stories, you are invited to think about your own situation and how the lives of people are affected by the changes around.

The first story relates to the experience of children and young people because, among the groups affected by political and economic change, young people are among those most negatively affected. The setting for the story is Tallinn, the capital city of Estonia, where after the fall of the communist system and the gaining of independence, poverty and marginalization of some groups grew rather quickly as the legacy of communism. The story starts with a group of children who were living in abandoned buildings in a decayed neighborhood. It starts with an unplanned voluntary intervention by a lay person and a pastor who had just taken over a church which had been used as a film studio and storehouse in the communist times. The first step was to go, without a real agenda, to meet the children and try to communicate and build trust. This was not easy for many reasons – not only language, but also the sometimes violent street culture. Out of these early steps, a day center was opened and later, accommodation. So, the church was transformed, not only for worship, but also as a center for marginalized children and young people, and as accommodation in the former pastor’s house. Remarkably, older boys who wished to, played an important role in reconstructing the church, the day center, and the housing. Thinking about convivial

life together across many differences, this church (and let us say, “project”) crosses many boundaries. Children who were thought to be too damaged to be helped lived together, took part in a construction project, and got an education whilst living in a church building or attending the day center there. The project relies on the motivation of the children to change their lives – on their willingness to get an education and share in the common life.

The second story comes from a completely different background – a diocese in Sweden which has a big program of camps for young people, based on creating a safe space where they can express themselves and their faith. On one occasion, a group of young people found that what they had in common as LGBT+ persons was that their Christian faith was often put into question¹. It was as if they had to live with a divide between themselves and their faith or to choose, because they were very often told that the bible and Christianity condemned them. So, they felt they did not belong anywhere. The church should stand with vulnerable or marginalized people, so the question was how to respond to this situation, presented in the lives of the young people in the camp. It is a complex question because it would be rather easy to turn the young people into objects of the church’s concern and compassion. The churches are indeed responsible for using the Bible and the name of God to discriminate and oppress, but to work on this, it is important to give “voice” to the young people and to create safe meeting places where people are accepted and can de-

¹ LGBT+ or LGBTQ persons include people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, and people with gender expressions outside traditional norms.

velop their own program. Among other things, the young people have created a “guide for queer kids”: the aim is to empower them and work for change.

The third story, which comes from the Netherlands, concerns the fact that much of the wealth of Europe was built on the back of the slave trade and the work of slaves, especially in North America and the Caribbean. This is a key aspect of the European empires as they colonized the global South and, in this case, especially Africa. Two facts have to be borne in mind. One is that the churches, and many Christians, were complicit actors in, and beneficiaries of, the slave trade. The second is that there are many black people living in Europe who continue to suffer from racist abuse and economic exploitation. How can we build convivial life together without recognizing that millions were shackled, abused, and worked to death, and that black people in Europe still face abuse and insult in everyday life? If we believe in human rights and in the equality of people before God, then to live together we have to come to terms with the legacy of slavery and the long shadow it still casts over people’s lives. The story describes how this issue is being developed, both ecumenically and in the Lutheran Church, through a process of intentional listening, calling out racist practices, and being accountable for the legacy of slavery. It is an example of the fact that to seek convivial life together, we have to go beyond tolerance to the active pursuit of truth and reconciliation through the practice of justice.

The fourth story comes from Germany. It is a personal story from one member of the solidarity group. Seeking conviviality is an approach not only to professional work and not only to the development

of congregational life and the wider society, it also challenges personal and family life. This story is of the response of one person to the need for accommodation for a young refugee. It is a story of the arrival of someone with a very different life story and with a very different experience of family life. It is a story of the impact of offering hospitality, not in the public sphere but in the private sphere. As the writer says, “every day is...a fresh start with an

open end.” Out of this personal experience comes a critical look at the approach of the local, regional, and national government policies, plus practice regarding support for refugees. On the other hand, this experience, and others, point to the fact that very often the church and civil society are more willing to work constructively to accompany refugees and other immigrants than the general public appears to be – or the government!

The Stories

The diaconal church as home for young people:
The story of Bethel Church Center of Pastoral Care, Tallinn (Estonia)

Under the rainbow you are not alone:
Survival guide for queer kids who are Christian (Västerås, Sweden)

How to manage the legacies of slavery in relation with diaconal conviviality?
(Lutheran Church in Amsterdam)

A temporary home for guests: Steps towards convivial life together
(Bavaria, Germany)

The diaconal church as home for young people: The story of Bethel Church Center of Pastoral Care, Tallinn, Estonia

Avo Üprus and Mati Sinisaar

Introduction

The Bethel Church building was completed in 1938. However, the church was closed by the Soviet authorities in 1962 and given to Eesti Telefilm, which used the church as a film studio and a storage room. It was returned to the congregation in 1993 but was in an extremely poor state of repair. From 1996 until 2016, Rev. Avo Üprus was pastor of the congregation. He had a vision of the church as a social institution. According to this vision, a church that is socially sensitive, open and active, should become the integrator and healer in its community.

The Bethel Center of Pastoral Care was founded as a non-profit organization on 1 January 2000 by the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC), Tallinn Bethel Congregation, the EELC Center of Pastoral Care for Offenders (nowadays a part of Estonian Diakonia), and two non-profit organizations – the Social Rehabilitation Center and Victim Support. Since the beginning of 1997, Peeteli Kiriku Sotsiaalkeskus (The Bethel Center of Pastoral Care)

has been offering support for education and development to children and teenagers living in poverty and adverse circumstances. Here is the story of this development.

Starting out as a pastor

I was doing ministry training in the largest congregation of Tallinn: I can't say that I enjoyed it too much. It was a great experience to preach to hundreds of people, but too many of them remained strangers to me. At the same time, I was organizing church pastoral care for offenders and the victims of crime. In the first half of the 90s, I opened five social rehabilitation centers that housed more than 100 service users. I visited prisons and trained volunteers. At this time, I started developing chaplain services in prisons. Crime prevention and social work became my calling: I learned a lot about pastoral care. These persons and their stories got very close to me; they filled my life. I could see the faces of their pain and it was the face of Christ that called me with irresistible force. Paul has told us to find our calling and make a choice. I had done it, or rather it was the face that glowed behind the hundreds of other faces I had seen that did it. I had drowned in the eyes of the Christ. And I accepted the dual calling from God and the human face of suffering in a peculiar way: I stepped down from ministry work and put my focus on work in prisons. The calling that caught me still holds me tight.

I had heard that a couple of dozen Christians had revived a congregation in North Tallinn which had been closed during the reign of communism. This

congregation had a special name – Peeteli. Those who have read the Old Testament know that this is a place described in Genesis 28 as a place where angels came down to humans by a ladder from heaven. It’s a charming story but not as charming as Matthew 25. I received an invitation to preach at their congregation and accepted with interest. The building had deteriorated, the heating was broken, and windows had been closed up with bricks. The pastor’s flat was used as a shop where car parts were sold. The tower cupola and cross had been removed; the bell stolen. Behind this pillage, some sort of beauty revealed itself – it was the same eyes I had drowned in. I asked to be the pastor of Peeteli. The decision was made in January 1996. Of course, I brought along my other children – the ex-prisoners and homeless men who needed help. This did not appeal to many, but we remained together and helped each other the best we could. I stayed in Peeteli for twenty years, but my main work was developing rehabilitation work and managing our center.

One day, I was visited at the social rehabilitation center by Mati Sinisaar. He wanted to turn a new page in life and offered me his help. At this point, neither of us knew what it was meant to be and what it could turn out to be. The calling was still to be understood but he had heard its voice. Since he owned a car, I asked him to drive me to southern Estonia to a special education school for girls. We bought a bunch of bananas, some pies, hygiene items, and clothes. On the road, we had a chance to talk more and pray together.

Mati left Kaarli congregation and joined Peeteli. He grew to be a leader and within a year he was the chairman on the board and manager of youth work.

Every child without parental care on the streets of Põhja-Tallinn knew him and respected him. And of course, they found the way to our church. Our team was joined by Nelli, Anu, Inge, Ain, Fea, Galina, Rainer, Liia, Mirjam, Olesja, Tiit, and Valeria. Each as important as the other, as members of a body.

Starting out as a volunteer: Seeing the reality of life in the street

On a cold night in March 1997, Mati and Avo met nine children on the streets of Kopli. They were cold, unwashed, in ripped clothing, and they were shy. We tried to start talking to them, but they ran away. We said that we are Christians and asked them if they were hungry. After these questions, they had a small meeting and then declared a unanimous, yes! Luckily, there was a store in the town that was open at all hours: during this night we had to visit



Kopli Lines 1998. The children in the photo (except the boy in the middle of the photo) came one year later to live in the Peeteli and started attending school. Photo: Center for Pastoral Care



*During 1998-2000, the children carried more than 230 m³ of building refuse out of the church and church basement.
Photo: Center for Pastoral Care*

it twice because the food ran out quickly. When we left, we felt happy with what we had done and were glad to leave the city area that was known for crime, violence, and homelessness. It was the day after when we realized that these children were going to be hungry today and tomorrow as well. We returned the same day and brought more food to the children.

These visits became a regular thing and, as some trust was built, we learned that the children lived together in a community of thirty children in abandoned buildings without water and electricity. They tried to survive by stealing and begging. Smoking, sniffing glue and, for older children, drinking alcohol, were normal parts of their everyday lives. This was a shock to us as we were certain such a thing could not be happening in Estonia. Since we didn't have livable rooms in our church, we had to do most of the work on the streets. Whenever we had a chance, we also took children on field trips to

beautiful nature and camps. With time came trust and also friendship.

Reflection

When we started helping children, we often worried what would happen if our resources ran out. We got encouragement from reading the Bible and praying. There are many passages that gave us strength, but I will add here some of the most important ones:

Matthew 25:35-40

35 for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' 37 Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38 And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39 And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' 40 And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

Isaiah 41:10

10 do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.

There were times when we thought that maybe we would want to do something elsewhere and that it didn't have to be us who were helping these children. However, during these complicated moments, while I was reading the Bible this passage gave strength and hope for continuing:

Luke 9:62

62 Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Conviviality: The art and practice of living together

We had no idea that somewhere there lived a priest called Ivan Illich who had written about conviviality as the art and practice of living together. We had to discover this art by ourselves, set rules, find possibilities to turn hate and anger into fruitful energy, learn to find food and cook it. Our door was always open, everyone was invited. Communism had bequeathed Estonia 5000 prisoners and children without homes. The children were mainly Russian-speaking or Armenians and "gypsies." We had to learn to get to know each other and build trust. This was not easy, and many gave up. The ones who stayed on the streets either died or ended up in prisons. Overdoses and violence were a part of the homeless lifestyle. But yet there was something charming in them, the face of God was still there and with every act of love, it showed itself more clearly. We understood that in order to survive you need to stop self-destruction and get an education. Around these pillars, our house rules were formed – the



Opening of the new Day Care Center and Night Shelter for Street Children in the basement of the Peeteli church. (01.04.2001).

Photo: Center for Pastoral Care

rules of living together. The most important one of them was respect, but we did not ask for it; we gave it. Living together meant going hiking together, going to camps, eating together, reading together, and praying before dinner. It meant stories around a fireplace and trusting each other on a kayak ride. Mati was irreplaceable.

Developing the action

In September 1997, Avo Üprus came up with the idea to renovate the rooms of the pastor's residence so the children could live there during the coming winter. There were some unemployed men in our working field and two of them had just been released from prison. With the help of these men and donations from many, the kitchen and three rooms were renovated within four months. On 23 December 1997, the rooms were blessed by Andres Põder, as the day care center for street children.

In June 1998, we held a month-long camp for children in the empty Tumala mansion. After returning to Tallinn, many children did not want to go back to the streets and asked us if they could live in the basement of the church – the basement that was cold, without windows, and with puddles of water and mud. We tried to agree on some rules and decided to hand them the keys of the church. During 1998 to 2001 there were five boys living in our church – they were also the ones who tore down the brick walls which blocked the windows and broke through the concrete floor of the basement to lower the floor by 60 cm. The same boys cleaned the corridors of the church and removed old oil color from the halls of the church with a small spade (0.5 square meters a day) and carried out more than 230 cubic meters of trash and materials from the building. The youngest of these boys was eleven years old. As Avo Üprus has said: “The boys built the church as a building but also inside themselves.” As it turned out, they also built a home for many children, but at that time neither they nor we quite knew it.

At the end of 1998, the congregation and youth workers decided that a day center would not suffice: every night we went to our homes and the children had to return to the streets. We offered the children a deal. Those who started going to school and followed our house rules could live in the second-floor rooms which up until then, had housed the day center. In January 1999, two girls came and said that they agreed and wanted to live in our church. This was the beginning of our children’s home. The number of children that wanted to come and live in the church kept growing; by autumn our rooms could not contain them. The only place we could



Summer camp in Saaremaa. Photo: Center for Pastoral Care



Adventure and work education have been an important tool to help children since the establishment of the social center. Summer camp in Saaremaa. Photo: Center for Pastoral Care

build more bedrooms was the choir balcony. So, in October 1999, we built two bedrooms and showers. By the end of the year, there were twelve children living in Peeteli.

During this time, we were still actively doing street work and the work of our day center was carried on in the whole church building. About twenty to twenty-five children visited our day center

regularly. We cooked the food in the kitchen of the children's home and built a new toilet and shower room right by the main door of the church. A big dream of ours was to rebuild the 400 square meter basement rooms for the day center and as a shelter for children without parental care. At the end of 1999, the bigger boys started digging up the floor and cleaning up old storage rooms. By the end of June 2000, the rooms had been cleaned and in July we signed an EEK 1.8 million (Estonian Kroon) building contract. The decision to sign was not easy as the company required EEK 200,000 as the first instalment, right away. It happened that this was the exact amount an organization that helped us had in their bank account and they decided to give it all to us as the first instalment. After signing the contract, we told all our friends about our plans and soon we started getting donations from Germany, Sweden, Norway, Finland, The Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark, Great Britain, Canada, New Zealand, USA, and Estonia. After nine months, the work was done and all the bills paid. On 1 April 2001, Bishop Einar Soone blessed the rooms of the day center and shelter house. On this important day, many good people from different countries visited us and the Bible was read in eight different languages. The renovation of the basement turned out to cost EEK 3.1 million. All these costs were paid with donations from private people and organizations. As soon as the rooms were ready, our work began and within a month the children were living in their new rooms.

Since 1997, more than 280 children have received long-term help from Peeteli Church Social Center and most of them came from North Tallinn. The children have brought their friends and, of course,



*Celebration of the anniversary of the Republic of Estonia.
Photo: Center for Pastoral Care*

there are some who have come by themselves and asked for help. We have learned that for many of these unfortunate children, the policy of open doors, mutual respect, and the power of making their own choice whether to live here and go to school or not, have played a crucial role in their lives. In many cases, the support received from our center or the chance of living here has ended their separation from their family. In a safe learning and living environment, children feel less rebellious: this has reduced school bullying and given teachers a bit more ease with their day-to-day work.

Many of the necessary skills in life are best learned through practice; for this reason, from the beginning of the center, an important part of our engagement has been work and adventure upbringing. We live by it and can't recommend it enough. Picking up a tool for the first time might seem scary, but after a few successful experiences and learning something new, the children are always delighted and ask us how they can help us more. It is a joy seeing the small

children growing into young adults who help us with younger children during camps and field trips.

When we first started the work twenty-three years ago, some people told us that these children were too damaged – there was no way to help them anymore. But God sent us good people who believed in these children, and in the power of good and love. Most of the children we helped came to live in our church and started going to school. Today, most of them live and work in Estonia, but many also in Norway, Great Britain, and other countries. Many of the children who grew up in our church have now started their own families and we are happy that their children are living in a safe and loving household. There were, of course, some children who could not abide by our house rules, who did not go to school, and decided to stay on the streets. Unfortunately, there are many stories with a very sad ending.

Today there are five main lines of work in Peete-li Church:

- ▶ Youth and student home, open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week
- ▶ Day center, open six days a week (Monday through Saturday)
- ▶ Study support program that offers children from underprivileged families support for getting an education
- ▶ Partnerships with summer and winter camps and organizing different sports or cultural events for the children
- ▶ Food and humanitarian help for underprivileged families, and social counselling

Children and teenagers are usually sent to the center by teachers, childcare workers, children's relatives, and caring and attentive town citizens.



It is a common practice to read the Bible before having lunch together. Photo: Center for Pastoral Care

The children have also brought their friends who are in trouble; there are also those who have come and asked for help themselves.

We are glad to share the news that most of the first children who came to live in Bethel from the streets are now grown up, responsible young people who are capable of living an independent life. Indeed, several of them have their own family to take care of. Most of them are living and working in Estonia, but there are some who work in Norway, Sweden, Germany and Great Britain. Yet, there are also children who didn't find the rules of life in Bethel suitable and who quit the school and their stories have unfortunately been often very sad.

Through all our working years, most of the children living in, or attending, Bethel have come from Russian-speaking families. By visiting Bethel, they have a great opportunity to learn and practice their Estonian language. We are glad that many of our children have the best skills in Estonian, and also in the English language, in their classes. We have experienced the reality that, for many children with



*Adventure and work education have been an important tool since establishment of the social center. Hike to the island of Vilsandi.
Photo: Center for Pastoral Care*

difficult backgrounds, Bethel's "open door" policy has worked very well. The basis of this policy is that to receive help from the center, the children must want to make a change themselves. In a safe study and living environment, children feel less rejected when with children of the same age. This also helps to reduce school bullying and makes it easier for teachers to organize the teaching and learning process. In many cases, the support from day care center, or living in Bethel, has prevented children from being separated from their families.

Since 1997, the center has helped more than 280 children (including those who get support today). Many of those children have been supported for five to fifteen years.

The Bethel Center of Pastoral Care is mostly funded by donations made by private individuals and companies. From 2000 to 2004, the local government purchased children's home services from the center. This covered about 50 percent of the operating costs. Since 2005, about 99 percent of the

operating costs of the center have been covered by donations and about 1 percent is received from the local government or the state via different projects.

The life and sustainability of Peeteli Church and Social center has always been a big blessing, through God's grace. We are very thankful for that. We are also very thankful to the people who have supported us, and to supportive organizations and companies. We give a big thanks to our team members who are by the side of our children every day and have grown to be very important people to them. We have had support from almost every branch of Christianity, and also from people and organizations that don't consider themselves a part of any religion.



Peeteli Church. Photo: Center for Pastoral Care

Under the rainbow you are not alone: Survival guide for queer kids who are Christian, Västerås, Sweden

Nils Åberg and Cecilia Redner

Introduction

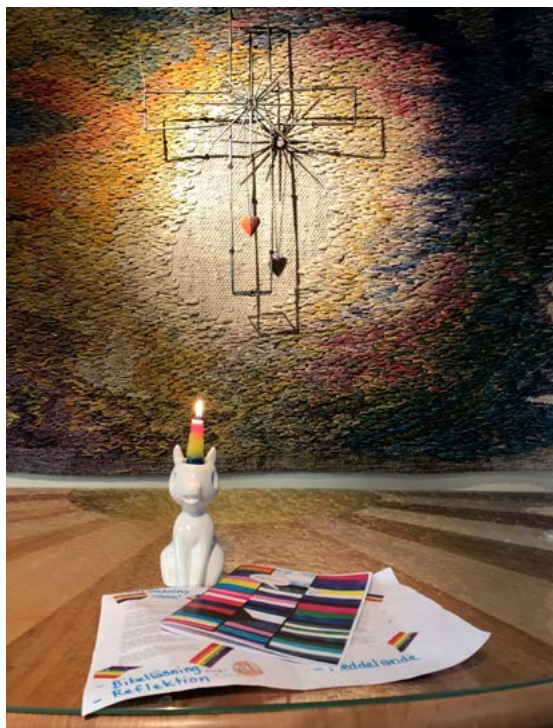
This story describes the development of a group of LGBT+ young people and how they came to write a guide by young people, for young people. The aim of the guide is to confirm that it is alright to define oneself as both a LGBT+ person and a Christian.

See – ‘The youths between the chairs’

“I do not belong anywhere.” This is a common experience among young people who define themselves as both an LGBT+ person and a Christian.

LGBT+ young people are more likely to experience mental health problems such as depression, suicidal thoughts, and self-harm than other young people. The higher prevalence of mental ill-health is related to a wide range of factors such as discrimination, isolation, bullying, and homophobia. Studies in Sweden by the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society confirm these facts.

Since the beginning of the nineties, the diocese of Västerås has organized large youth camps with



The chapel at Finnåker Diocesan Centre.
Photo: Cecilia Redner/Church of Sweden

a focus on role-playing and ‘Live Action Role-Playing’. At the beginning, this was seen as a suspicious activity that could result in crime and violence. The community of role-playing young people were often left alone without adults. When we started with our role-playing camps, we met many young people who were experiencing being different and being pushed away from society. Within that group, a new group of young LGBT+ persons emerged as they found a context where they could be themselves, but also create spaces for others. The young group

of Christian LGBT+ persons expressed clearly that in LGBT+ contexts, they are questioned for their Christian faith, and that in Christian contexts, they are questioned for their LGBT+ identity. They felt that they were forced to choose between two contexts even though both are so important for them. These young people did not have the same access to the bible as others. The majority of them have been told that the bible and the Christian God condemned them. We wanted to help them to create a safe place where they could explore Christianity and the Bible, and be both Christian and LGBT+.

In 2001, the young people, with our support, founded something they choose to call the Rainbow Guild (RBG) with our camp as a base. They wanted to work with LGBT+ issues and religion within the Swedish Church's youth organization. Their aim was to work towards their visions of a norm-critical and inclusive church.

Reflecting on the experience

In the last ten years, it has become common for parishes in Church of Sweden to join Pride Parades, to organize special services for LGBT+ people with inclusive language, and to organize their own lectures. Some parishes have even been certified as a LGBT+ parishes by the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex Rights (RFSL). The key concept for RFSL's certification is sustainability and far-sightedness. With the LGBT+ certification you get tools to work systematically with equal treatment, reception, and human rights. Sometimes, the question "why?" arises



*Luther badges - a sign of diversity in church.
Photo: Cecilia Redner/Church of Sweden*

in the parishes: Is it really the task of the church to fight for LGBT+ people's rights?

The most common answer is that the church needs to stand on the side of the vulnerable to be a true church. Where any human being is in distress, where structures oppress individuals, that is the place for the church. It can be a satisfactory response. We seriously think that the church's mission is to protest when people suffer, and to include those treated as outcasts. The risk with this mission is that LGBT+ people are reduced and objectified: they become objects of the sympathy of the church.

We have learned two alternative responses from LGBT+ young people that we met:

- ▶ The church consists of people; some of us define ourselves as LGBT+. LGBT+ people are equally true as an image of God as any other person. We have as much right to represent the church as other people and our voices need to be listened to. We are as much “church” as are heterosexual persons. When churches get involved in LGBT+ rights, it is not just to help others and lift up their questions, but also to be church in a context that is also one’s own.
- ▶ The most important answer to the question of why the church should get involved with LGBT+ rights is an entirely different answer: The church needs to be there because it is the church’s question; not because it’s about people needing the church’s support, not because the church also consists of LGBT+ people, but because it is the church’s responsibility. Random bible verses are still used today to sanction violence and persecution against LGBT+ people. The Christian God’s name is used to justify discrimination and oppression. This view comes not only from the pulpits, but also from ordinary Swedish school playgrounds today. Even young non-believers have expressed clearly that they seriously believe that God, or the church, judges them as being wrong. The Christian churches carry an incredible responsibility for how LGBT+ people are treated today. This is a responsibility that is ours and it is, therefore, our question.

Churches that get involved in LGBT+ rights and work for more inclusive meeting places should not be regarded as progressive, but as organizations that take responsibility for the stone which they set rolling.

Creating safe spaces and meeting places for Christian LGBT+ persons.

“Now I have found a place where I can be myself and accepted as I am.”

During the eighteen years since the Rainbow Guild was founded in 2001, several different kinds of camps, meeting places, and learning material for LGBT+ young people have been created. Today, the Rainbow Guild operates together with Church of Sweden Youth. (Church of Sweden Youth is the organization for children and young people within Church of Sweden.) Together, we offer two different kinds of camps as well as several other venues for children and young people who define themselves as LGBT+. Our camps for the youngest are an important meeting place, and safe space, for young transgender people who today form one of the most vulnerable youth groups in Sweden. One out of every two young transgender people in the age range from fifteen to nineteen-years in Sweden have thought of, or even tried, suicide. To meet others who share your own experiences and to be accepted and loved as you are, even if it’s just for a few days in a camp, can make a big difference.

The work of young people trying to combine the LGBT+ identity with Christian identity has inspired several congregations in the diocese of Västerås to



*Religious symbols in the colors of diversity.
Photo: Cecilia Redner/Church of Sweden*

create their own meeting places for LGBT+ young people. In the diocese, this is seen as an important symbol in a world where the church often is associated with condemnations.

The survival guide, which was created by a group of fifteen-year-olds at one of our camps, is the result of a process where a group of people found time and space to explore and find their own solutions.

It is a survival guide for Christian queer kids. It is developed by young people, for young people who struggle to define themselves as Christians in a LGBT+ context and as LGBT+ people in a Christian context. It tells us that you have the right to define yourself as you want, that only you know who you are and what your pronouns are. The survival guide helps young people to navigate through the concept of both the Christian and the LGBT+ world, it helps them to find the bible stories that are important for LGBT+ people, but above all, it says that you are not alone. The meeting places created by the Rainbow Guild are a sign of tolerance and love where young people practice convivial life.

Through the work of creating safe meeting places for young LGBT+ people in the church in Västerås, we have learned three things which bring hope, even when cold and icy winds are blowing:

- ▶ Young people are taking responsibility. Even though the church does not always take responsibility for their part in the oppression of LGBT+ people, in any case, the young people do. The young church in Sweden is working actively, and explicitly, towards a more inclusive church with no discrimination.
- ▶ Young LGBT+ people are not victims. Young LGBT+ people are exposed more often to violence than others, according to reports in Sweden. It is true, but at the same time it is important to see the enormous power and confidence in the young people even though they live in structured oppression. More or less clearly, the mission of the church is not to suffer with them, but to give them space and opportunities to change and have influence – to give them power.
- ▶ Changes begin in the margins, very rarely in the center. The center – the norm – is not the place for the start of a change. When we, as human beings, are within the norm, we have very little willingness to change existing structures and arrangements. Those who question the norm are usually outside the norm. The power of the marginalized and the non-normative is large and can create great changes. This is hopeful to know in a world where walls are built between

people and some find themselves inside, and others, outside and marginalized.

“For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us” (Eph 2:14).

Ten Facts about the Survival Guide

- ▶ The survival guide aims to help young Christian people who, in the LGBTQ context, are questioned for their Christian faith, and who are questioned in Christian contexts for their LGBTQ identity.
 - ▶ The survival guide aims to contribute knowledge about concepts and definitions that are used when discussing questions about LGBTQ.
 - ▶ The survival guide aims to provide examples of cross-border people and relationships found in the biblical story.
 - ▶ The survival guide contains some theological interpretations that have been important to LGBTQ people who wanted to see themselves and their lives as part of the biblical story.
 - ▶ The survival guide does not claim that these interpretations are the only ones possible.
 - ▶ The survival guide says nothing about sex reassignment therapy.
 - ▶ The survival guide does not sexualize relationships.
 - ▶ The survival guide contains definitions and concepts that young people themselves thought important to explain.
- ▶ The survival guide is written by young people, for young people, supporting them in being who they are (at the moment).

Most of all, the guide aims to say that you are endlessly loved in a world that often puts boundaries on a limitless love.



*'Under the rainbow you are not alone – Survival guide for queer kids who are Christian'. Download: <https://bit.ly/3w4mAfj>
Graphic: Diocese of Västerås/Church of Sweden*

How to manage the legacies of slavery in relation with diaconal conviviality?

Lutheran Church in Amsterdam

Bianca Groen-Gallant

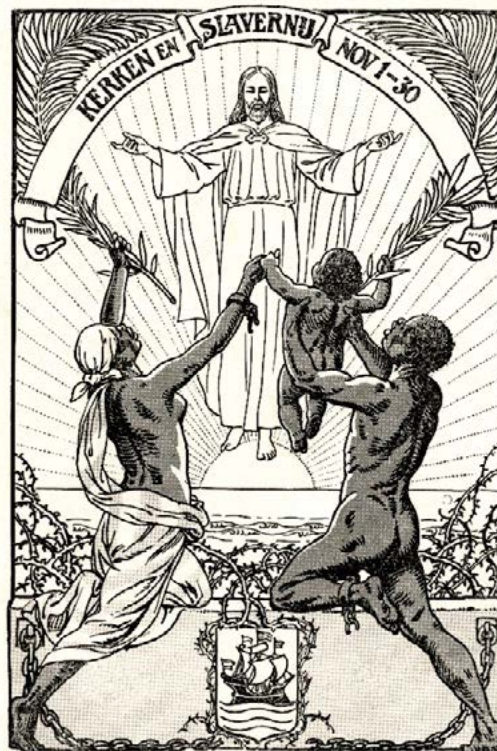
According to the book of Genesis, every human being is a creation of God – the one true God in whose image all of us were made, no matter what culture we live in. We are all “wired” by this God.

History is present now

The legacies of the transatlantic slave trade shape the experience of millions of people in the world today. It is expressed through the endemic, traumatic, and intentional persistence of racial injustice that is manifest in political, social, cultural, economic, and religious life. This legacy cannot be written off as a thing of the past, even though it took place in the past.

What was transatlantic slavery?

The transatlantic slave trade, which spanned the period from the sixteenth century through to the



The liberation of the Surinamese slaves: in memory of the 1st of July 1863. Collection BUKU Bibliotheca Surinamica

nineteenth century, was the largest long-distance forced movement of people in history. From the late fifteenth century, the Atlantic Ocean became a commercial highway that integrated the histories of Africa, Europe, and the Americas. The majority of slaves transported to the New World were sold by Africans from Central and West Africa to European slave traders who transported them to North and South America. Before 1820, over eighty percent of

the people arriving in the New World were enslaved Africans. It is estimated that a total of twelve million enslaved Africans were transported. It was not until 1834 that slavery was abolished throughout the British Empire. The French colonies followed in 1848; the United States followed in 1865, after the end of the Civil War. The Netherlands was one of the last countries to abolish slavery, in 1863.

Here and now...

Freedom and equality are human rights. What is freedom? Freedom is being free from internal and external ties. It is breaking chains and structures that people are trapped in; it is *Keti koti* (literal translation for breaking the shackles). The effect of the transatlantic slave trade appears to be very strong today in the Netherlands. This is reflected in the polarization between black and white people. Racism and discrimination are issues that many black people face every day. In the Lutheran church in Amsterdam, as in other churches where there are many Surinamese or Caribbean people, we have been celebrating *Keti Koti* for years (around 1 July) to commemorate the abolition of slavery. But the question is: How can you celebrate something if its content is so painful and it is not being discussed further? It is especially of importance to Christians because the church at that time played such a big role in maintaining this terrible system. During the period of transatlantic slave trade and colonization, pastors and church members bought and kept slaves who then became part of their property.



*Slave Quarters on a Plantation (after Gerard Voorduyn), 1860-62.
Jacob Eduard Heemskerck van Beest (Rijksmuseum Amsterdam)*

As Lutheran Diakonie in Amsterdam, human rights is one of our focus themes.

This is why we believe it is important to commit ourselves to processing the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade. For us, this is a call for justice and the dismantling of centuries of colonialism that resulted in racism and xenophobia. The intention is to continue the important and impactful process of intentional listening to the voices, and lived experiences, of the descendants of diverse African groups whose history was interrupted by enslaving God's beloved creation in human flesh. It is very important to us as Christians to continue casting out the evil of racism that violates the gift of community, the meaning of church, and the integrity of creation.

Diakonia in action!

After one of our church members participated in two meetings of the Council for World Mission (CWM) called the “legacies of slavery hearing” – one in London and the other in Jamaica, we were brought into more action. The position paper clarifying the hearings stated: “Slavery (past and present) is an open wound, it is difficult to heal, it is complex, and it is a sin.” This made it very clear. The hearings were a part of the journey toward healing and wholeness in the face of the brokenness of silence and complicity – the brokenness of a world where manifestations of racism and racist attitudes are becoming more common. The project was a time of listening, storytelling, lamenting, and confessing to live into the authentic reality of Jesus’ call to love and full liberation for all God’s people.

Now, six years later, we have come to the conclusion that the statement offers a good explanation of taking responsibility, but that the actual implementation of this statement is still complicated. Cooperation with so-called migrant churches and fellow Christians is still in its infancy. This also applies to black and white discussions in secular society in the Netherlands.

Two years ago, when the Lutheran church, supported by Diakonia, sought cooperation with the Moravian church and the National Institute of Dutch Slavery and Heritage, which is the knowledge center of the Dutch transatlantic past, they became involved. The result of this cooperation was the beginning of a working group that aims to research how to develop a suitable approach to the history of slavery. The starting point chosen was



Theophilus Salomo Schumann, der Arawakken-Apostel
geb. 1719, gest. 1760
gefolgt von einem Arawakken-Gehilfen.
(Näheres s. Staehelin, Die Mission der Brüdergemeine in Suriname
und Berbice, Heft 3.)

*Postcard with an image of Theophilus Salomo Schumann (1719-1760), “The Arawak Apostle”.
Collection BUKU Bibliotheca Surinamica*

the statement of the Council of Churches of the Netherlands which is in the box below.

We are very grateful that the process has started here in our Lutheran community. What we see is that white and black church members look each other in the eye and feel comfortable talking about



*Early Herrnhuter (Moravian) Mission in North America, possibly the first image of black people in the New World.
Collection BUKU Bibliotheca Surinamica*

this theme. However, there is sometimes still an undertone of incomprehension. We still have a long way to go, but there is hope because we believe in a broken center where Jesus Christ preceded us and then died on the cross for the forgiveness of all our sins. We too will continue on a mutually beneficial path together. We now have an annual symposium to offer a platform for this theme as a church. We also organized an essay competition with the aim of collecting educational material that can lead to understanding this shared history, and we have offered three sermons around this theme in the run-up to 1 July.

There is still a long way to go. This lies in reaching other churches – especially “white” churches – to become involved in finding a suitable approach to help us process a shared past. Together, we can move towards beneficial processing. In our Lutheran church in Amsterdam, which is formed by members from Suriname together with white community members, this project gives us the opportunity to practice living with each other in a manner based on respect, equality, and understanding of each other’s background. For white church members, there is the possibility to hear the stories of this shared past in an accessible way and to hear the pain that is still there with their sister or brother church member.

As part of the diakonia policy plan which states, among other things, that we will be committed to people on the margins and to equality for everyone, we will continue to be committed, together with others, to this theme until everyone can experience convivial life together with justice and share the freedom and joyfulness that we stand for.

Galatians 3:28 reminds us: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

Statement of Accountability for Slavery in the Past Council of Churches in the Netherlands

We as churches in the Netherlands, united in the Council of Churches, attach importance to saying the following to the churches and descendants of the people who were once traded as slaves and had to work as slaves, and whose descendants live in different countries, including Suriname, Aruba, Curaçao, Saint Maarten, the Caribbean Netherlands and the Netherlands.

We know from the Bible that all people are created in God's image, but we have not done justice to people as image bearers; they have not been treated as would be desirable in accordance with the Charter of Human Rights, which was subsequently formulated.

We acknowledge our involvement in the past as individual church members and as church associations in maintaining and legitimizing the slave trade; Slavery took place for centuries until 1863, under the Dutch flag. There was no or insufficient respect for Biblical and human values. Hundreds of thousands of people were taken away from home and hearths and had to live in captivity for a lifetime, were exploited, had no chance to live their lives in freedom of belief, expression and work. Many died during transport. Millions of people were enslaved.

As churches, we know our share of this guilty past and we must note that theology has been misused in certain circumstances to justify slavery. As churches, we name this involvement, and we want to help do justice to the descendants of those who were enslaved and exploited, sometimes for generations; at the same time, we as churches realize that churches at the time differed in terms of possibilities and also that different voices could be heard within various churches.

Who can forgive the guilt and offer forgiveness in the name of people who can no longer speak and who have had to spend their lives in slavery until the end of their lives?

We realize that we speak too late, have had too little of the right insights at the right moment in time and have allowed ourselves to be led by misplaced pursuit of profit and abuse of power. It is a form of injustice that carries over into the present generation, where part of our society is built on the abuse of others and where discrimination is not sufficiently eradicated. There are many things that we can no longer change.

We acknowledge to descendants of the slaves that we have caused much suffering. We express the wish to work with them and with all those who want to serve justice and peace, to seek a society in which a decent life, freedom, responsibility, solidarity and respect are fundamental values.

We hope for a joint commitment to society, because we realize that even today, equality of people is by no means self-evident and will have to be discovered, acquired and defended time and again.

Statement by the Council of Churches in the
Netherlands.
June 2013, 150 years after Keti Koti (abolition day)

A temporary home for guests: Steps towards convivial life together, Bavaria, Germany

Fritz Blanz

Introduction

No real decision... At the end of our presbytery weekend, our deacon asked to speak: "I'm looking for a family where I can accommodate a young refugee." Before the first current reached my brain, my wife decided: "Yes, that's no problem. After all, the children's rooms are free and, in addition, family life would come back." We were informed that Amani had fled from his parents' house and that he would soon be homeless. Therefore, there was no alternative to our decision. So, Amani moved in one week later and became a member of the family. Before he arrived, I asked our children and they declared that they were 100 percent in agreement with the decision we made. Matthias, our son, offered his room.

When we met face to face with Amani, we saw a young man, still a little shy, who was doing everything he could to give a nice impression. His German was surprisingly good, in light of his short stay in Germany; he came in 2015, the year of challenge.



*Self-confidence training for young refugees.
Photo: Rummelsberger Diakonie*

The hard way to Germany

Amani has a long history of escape. First, the escape routes were in his own country, then an almost one-year stay in Turkey and, later, an arduous eight-month journey through Europe. In Syria, he had already a hard childhood, had gone to school infrequently, and had been sent to work as a child to contribute to his livelihood. You can still see it on his hands today. He also had to work hard in Turkey to get refugee travel money together. His father, mother, two sisters, and his older brother,



A German lesson. Photo: Rummelsberger Diakonie

fled. The oldest brother served in the army (forced recruitment) where he lost a leg in a grenade attack. From this perspective, I support the admission of war refugees and I am still angry about the inability of European politicians to make meaningful policy and receive people.

There is no 4.0 integration

Arriving in a foreign country is not a short-term event, but a long period of life. From the experience of previous immigration, we know that a real “arrival” – a feeling of being “at home” – usually requires a generation. German emigrants to Brazil or Ukraine needed an integration process of four, or more, generations.

“Yes, we can do it.” I still believe today that the vote of our chancellor, Angela Merkel, was right. Amidst all our commitment and goodwill, we overlooked one thing: integration is not just a question of willingness, good political framework conditions,

or the participation of a broad section of the population. Above all, integration takes a lot of time. The tasks that a young refugee has to deal with are too big: learning a language, arranging relationships within a new culture, solving interreligious conflicts, working on individual development tasks, finding a place to live and work, developing a concept of life in the new society, and many others. The social-pedagogical family support of the youth welfare office (limited to two hours per week) makes it clear that our state only offers half-hearted help and, thus, accepts a tightrope walk created between successful integration and failure.

The community is a home away from home

Amani maintains close contact with his Syrian friends. They provide security, enable him to resolve conflicts, convey a feeling of “home,” and provide an orientation in the jungle caused by flight. Friends are important to Amani because he is not a loner. Since he arrived with us, young men have been coming and going in our house; it is not uncommon for them to stay with us. We know them because he introduces them in a friendly manner, and they treat my wife and me with kindness. Sometimes, and this is probably due to adolescence, we have to draw boundaries because we too claim a private life. But that is accepted without problems.

There are situations in which the night turns into day. Amani sleeps badly and has to leave the light on at night. I know the phenomenon from my former work in the clearing house for unac-

accompanied refugee minors. These are the effects of the constant threat of war in one's home country, a months-long flight, and the daily challenges of life here in the country of refuge. Restlessness and inner agitation are often characteristics of people on the run. Community life gains more importance as a stabilizing element.

Between women, pork, alcohol, and the Quran

This confused state is particularly evident in the values and attitudes of our young guest. Old values no longer apply, and the new values seem rather confusing. Amani is Muslim, so he says. Pork is a no-go. Alcohol? ... Then he becomes more liberal. We discuss the Quran, but his knowledge is limited. I wish he would be more interested in his traditional book and then I could understand him more.

Interestingly, in addition to Arab men, German women also belong to Amani's friendship circle. The girls rave about him and he likes to go along with it because he feels incredible freedom in it. But he has to learn that freedom also includes responsibility, respect, and dignity – this is an ongoing topic in our discussions. And finally, in the Quran too, respect for women is a high value about which he still knows too little.

The long way to reconciliation

Amani has had such a conflict with his father, based on the way of life in our country, that the

local youth welfare office has had to be involved. Before moving in with us, he lived for a long time as a homeless person – sometimes with friends, sometimes with dubious figures, sometimes somewhere. One day, the conflict led to a heavy discussion with his older brother who was acting on behalf of his father. The conflict became violent and the police were called.

On the other hand, he has an intense relationship with his mother; the family ties have not broken off completely. Therefore, there is a slow rapprochement. In the meantime, he also is seeing his father again. He doesn't want to go home, but distance offers the chance of a slow approach. In addition to his biological family, we are a surrogate family. I still don't know whether I want to take on the role. Amani's stay in our family is a temporary initiative. I don't dare say how long it will take. How will he get along on the way to life in a complicated Germany? I still have no answer to that today. This means every day is an attempt, a fresh start with an open end.

To become independent is not to be integrated

After eleven months, we found an apartment for Amani. That was also not easy. As long as I pretended to be a tenant, homeowners were open. Appointments were made during which we visited the apartment. I would have been able to get two or three apartments every week. But after the revelation that the apartment was for a Syrian refugee who had already started training to become a hairdresser, the conversation changed. There was uncertainty: the

promise that we would be informed of the decision regularly ended in silence. After several attempts, I was able to create a flowchart and predict with great certainty what the result would look like. We found two apartments in the newspaper once again, a week or two later. However, it was only with the support of our deacon and very good relationships with parish members that finally we found a small apartment. Amani moved, got some home furnishings, crockery, and the essentials for everyday life. Will he get along? The question is still open to this day.

From time to time, Amani still appears. He longs for a fine meal and then he shows me a pile of papers from authorities, offices, and companies – summons to talks, forms to be filled in, contracts, reminders. Some dates have already expired, but we are still processing document by document. Amani is clearly overwhelmed, does not understand the texts and certainly not their meaning. It will stay that way in the near future. Integration has many facets; it is a long-term process. There is no quick integration. Mistakes lead to conflicts, conflicts to aggression, aggression to misunderstandings and misinterpretations. This will provide good food for the right-wing political parties.



*Media-based reading and language tutoring.
Photo: Rummelsberger Diakonie*

Refugee assistance is like daily bread² in the congregations

Our parish and others play an important role in the refugee care system. Hundreds of people, and many parishes, have declared willingness to accompany refugees. It is no new thing because, after World War II, we integrated 3,5 million people from Eastern Europe. In 1956, we welcomed Hungarian refugees. I read some almost enthusiastic reports in old newspapers from that time. In the 1990s, refugees from the Balkan region found asylum in our country. There is no period without the engagement of the two main churches in Bavaria – Catholic and Lutheran.

² See Martin Luther, *The Small Catechism*, Chapter 3: The Lord's Prayer, No 4: Our daily bread: "...what does it mean: Everything that is necessary for life and limb, such as food, drink, clothes, shoes, house, yard, fields, cattle, money, good, pious spouses, pious children, pious assistants, pious and loyal overlords, good government, good weather, Peace, health, breeding, honour, good friends, loyal neighbours and the like."

Therefore, when the crisis came in 2015, our parish decided to add refugee assistance to the job description of our deacon. He agreed because in the gospel of Matthew, being the host for foreign people is seen to be a core competence of Christians³. As well, there is a network of support for refugees in the congregation. Some work in administrative assistance, others in teaching German, others in health care, others accompany families, and some host young people.

Finally, there are two major questions of integration related to “people on the move” and, in my case, to refugees: Do we find enough possibilities for housing? Is there a place for them to work?

People in the parishes

Among the refugees in our country, as well as in our parish area, there are many homeless people. I don't speak about people on the street, but those who live illegally in refugee camps or who stay overnight with friends and relatives in their community. The first question could be focused on our churches and parishes. Do we have free flats? Is there ground we can offer to build low-cost houses? At the same time, we need interim solutions, as you can read in my story. It's not a complete or adequate solution, but helps us to win time.

Integration into a workplace is easier. Lots of companies and handcraft businesses welcome young refugees. They are engaged and willing to learn. In spite of the hard jobs which they have to do, and

³ Matthew 25:35: “I was a stranger, and you welcomed me.”

in spite of the hard learning processes to become professionals, most of them are successful. But even all the tolerance in our society cannot hide the fact that there is only fragmented support. I believe it is a personal challenge for each German, as well as for the local authorities. Our youth welfare system and the law are not well prepared for the movement of young people from other countries, and our congregations are just at the beginning of the discussion, so we are a long way from real sustainable solutions in our church strategies. Nevertheless, the church is genuinely willing to do something.

In the biblical context, hospitality is an important trait for a Christian. It is part of the Old Testament to treat foreigners in the same way as a citizen⁴. As previously mentioned, Matthew's gospel also emphasizes hospitality for strangers. It doesn't matter in which book, or in which historical context, hospitality accompanies us with the same meaning – it is like a red thread.

Conclusion: My vision for convivial life together?

We need a supportive network in the congregation, together with local initiatives between the congregations and in the wider church and finally among the federations and councils of churches (e.g., LWF, World Council of Churches). In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, we have three very interesting activities at the present time:

⁴ Leviticus 19:34: “The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”

- ▶ a project for housing refugees
- ▶ a network to support a refugee rescue boat for people in the Mediterranean Sea (Sea-Watch 4)
- ▶ a consulting system for parishes which offer church asylum

In addition, diakonia in Bavaria offers a consulting system for refugees through more than 300 social workers all over the country. That consulting system is financed by the Bavarian government and co-funded by the church. All the initiatives for the church and local organizations are important, but there remains the need to secure a change in the national framework conditions dealing with the issue of the welcome and integration of refugees.

Finally, our main challenge will be to build a community of living together with different nations, different cultures, and different ways to God our

creator, our savior, and our spirit, which serves convivial living together. For that, we need time, a sustainable process, and an atmosphere of meeting without preconditions and prejudice.

With the background of the Gospel and the prophetic message of the Old Testament, we have an excellent base for welcoming foreign people, as well as refugees. Furthermore, “Do not be afraid” is a saying that is repeated frequently in the Bible. That means we are free to handle the challenges, together with the people on the move. In that way, I’m really proud of my church. These are bright spots of a convivial community living together, and working together, for more justice and integrity of people. The LWF is the best example for convivial life together, as I experienced it in countless meetings of our group.

Reflection on the Stories

Tony Addy

Introduction – Radical welcome

When we started to build up the story books and looked at the four stories included in this book, we had to think out what was specific for these stories: we chose the idea of radical welcome. This was partly because they take us a step further in our understanding of convivial life together. Much of our discussion has used the language of inclusion – asking how we develop an inclusive approach to working with people and inclusion in the church. Of course, convivial life together is not based on assimilation, but on the idea of working with difference, and through understanding difference developing life – and indeed working together in new projects. But these stories create a different perspective which we could call “radical welcome.” Radical, because they raise very sharp questions about our perspective of church and about who the churches exclude, or what topics they exclude, from their discourse. The first story brings children living in abandoned buildings and storm drains into a church building in the city center to live, study, and work. The second story brings queer youth into the heart of the church and creates a space where they feel secure. The third story forces the church to think again about its complicity in the whole colonial project of empire and how that still shapes – consciously or unconsciously – attitudes between white and black people. If we want to have equality, we can’t sidestep

this issue because it concretely affects relationships between Europeans and people with a migration background from the global South – and maybe, also, Roma and other minorities, and people on the move. The final story crosses another boundary – between public and private space. It is a radical challenge to those who think that by supporting diakonia we can avoid bringing the “other” into our intimate sphere. Maybe this also signals a wider challenge to ask relatively secure people what personal or familial relationships they have with people on the margins. This is also a radical question.

Radical welcome, in terms of seeking conviviality, implies working on the historical, theological, and other barriers that prevent the emergence of a convivial church, and it implies looking at all aspects of church life and diakonia, including questions of power and participation in decision making. It is not directly about short-term welcoming or hospitality; it is about recognition and mutual learning. It asks people to bring themselves into a mutual relationship through which all are open to change and the narrative is open. Thinking about the churches, it means that the stories of the different groups weave into a narrative which is shared; in personal life, it means being open to sharing personal space and time with the different “other.” This is a special challenge for more or less monocultural churches with a strong and settled narrative and identity.

In terms of the stories, we can notice aspects of radical welcome in each of them. For the project of Bethel church, the starting point was far from being a planned initiative; as with many convivial initiatives, it began by getting as close as possible to the world of the young people. It involved going to their living

environment and taking some risks. Children on the street were the different “other” for the pastor and the new volunteer; they were Russian, Armenian, Roma... Over time, this risk-taking exposure to the “other” built up into a process of radical welcome into the church. Not the church as conventionally understood, but the church as home, constructed along with the young people. This service model is a radical challenge to all who work with marginalized young people.

Conversely, the work to create “under the rainbow” started inside a space belonging to the church which was safe for young people who had the feeling “I don’t belong anywhere.” In this space, the young people created a self-organized group and activity to support others in the same situation, and challenged the church to be welcoming of LGBT+ people and include their perspective and contribution as “made in the image of God.”

Thinking about the legacies of slavery is a radical approach to addressing racism because it is not possible for a white person in Western Europe to say they did not benefit from slavery and the trade in people. It is even not possible to say the church was not complicit in slavery because the evidence shows otherwise. Furthermore, the profits from slavery co-financed the church for a period. It is not possible to avoid this issue, which is a question of justice, not only of personal responsibility. One end result of the colonizing process and slavery is that all white Europeans have internalized attitudes which consciously, or unconsciously, are rooted in this history.

Crossing the boundary between public and church-diaconal space and private space is also a form of radical welcome that brings out rather complex

reactions to the different “other” because it impacts all aspects of everyday life and cannot be managed by so-called professional difference. It is radical in that it follows closely the teaching of the Bible and the practice of the early church. Through this story, it can be recognized that “asylum seeker” is not anyone’s identity because it speaks of a real person; there is reciprocity, as in all relationships in the family home, but also some rules and ideas about the use of space. Seeking conviviality in this case is about seeing and responding, but also using the experience to work for change in church and society, towards conviviality.

Reflecting on the situation

Each of these stories has its roots in personal experience, not in an abstract ethical commitment or a dogmatic statement. There are two dimensions to this – the first is to do with “call” and the second, with identity. In terms of call, it is interesting that the pastor in the first story, for different reasons, decided to work with prisoners and the criminal justice system. This could have been normal everyday diaconal professional business. However, in the encounter with the faces of the prisoners, he saw the face of Christ and felt the calling from the human who was suffering, and from God. It was on later reflection that he added the classical story of the sheep and the goats told in Matthew 25 and the reassurance that, if God is with us, there is nothing to fear (Is 41:10) and that, once having started, you should not look back but go forward to the kingdom of God (Lk 9:62). The springboard for the work was, however, not in these texts but an experience of being close to the suffering

in the lives of the prisoners. This was extended in the work with children who were seen to be so damaged that they were beyond help, but the face of God was still in them. An open door, shared food, and a few house rules were needed. The interesting remark is that the most important rule was respect.

We understood that in order to survive you need to stop self-destruction and get an education. Around these pillars, our house rules were formed – the rules of living together. The most important one of them was respect, but we did not ask for it; we gave it. Living together meant going hiking together, going to camps, eating together, reading together, and praying before dinner. It meant stories around a fireplace and trusting each other on a kayak ride.

Avo Üprus

In the story about the rainbow youth, the central point concerns identity; the young people no longer have to choose between their own identity and that of being a Christian, and they are part of a movement towards a more inclusive church. The guiding text for this comes from Ephesians and affirms that

...for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed

yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Gal 3:26-28

The work on slavery raises very profound questions for theology. From a contemporary perspective, it seems crystal clear that texts such as the letter to the Galatians, together with our understanding of a Jesus who crossed boundaries and reached out to the different “other,” point in the direction of a church which is inclusive. The Hebrew Bible contains strict injunctions about just treatment of workers. And yet, as we see in the triangular trade, slavery was an integral part of the colonial economy. It is important to acknowledge that Europeans engaged in the horrific exploitation, and even torture and murder, of people treated as property. As well, it is important to do justice for the people who are descendants of slaves, and also to struggle for justice in the present day, because the injustice meted out to black people is part of the legacy of slavery. As the statement by the Dutch churches says, there were theological arguments put forward against slavery, but it took long-term committed action to eradicate slavery in the form of the triangular trade. And even so, in the case of Britain, the slave traders were compensated for loss of income.

In a certain way, there is a link between the history of slavery and the arrival of refugees from the Middle East in Europe. The connection is not slavery but colonialism and neo-colonialism which had a decisive effect on the region over centuries.

It is not only the history of the crusades and of the artificial divisions between countries created after the so-called Great War; Western countries have continued to interfere in the region and foster regime change, enmity, and war. The refugee challenge, as it has been called, is largely a Western product. The theologically-grounded response to it follows the New Testament message, along with the prophetic message of the Hebrew Bible, in creating spaces of radical welcome in a society which is sometimes hostile, and working over the long term for justice and for a convivial life together.

Action towards convivial life together

The recognition of the diversity of people, as created in the image of God, is one springboard for action – more so when we see Jesus in the face of the “other”. The plurality of the early church can be an impetus towards building a convivial church in a convivial society. The first action steps are to be open to the “other” as a person with their own potential and their own integrity, and to work purposefully. This purposeful work has to start with meeting people on their own ground, literally or metaphorically. The start of the Bethel center was on the street where the children lived together. It took a process of building trust before they could live in the church together and develop their education. It was already a diverse community. As the writer puts it, “the boys built the church as a building, but they also built it inside themselves.” Action has to start with trusted communication and without fear.

The second aspect of practice is to create a safe space where honest communication can take place and where the very difficult issues can be faced up to. These are not issues of doctrinal formulation, but issues which deeply affect life together. This is the case with the work with LGBT+ young people where the church decided to stand with them as vulnerable people, and to support their efforts to reach out to their peers with information and invitation. It also meant standing with them when they were attacked by others. What you see in this action, as in other stories, is that change towards convivial life together, or towards a convivial church, rarely starts in the center of power. It starts with those who are on the margins and those who have a vocation to be with them and work for empowerment and transformation.

The third point is not to place people in the position of victims or as recipients of charity (beneficiaries), but as people who have their own gifts and capabilities. This is clear in the story about inviting a refugee into the private sphere; it also demands the responsibility of the refugee and sets up a dialogical and reciprocal relationship. We can see the same approach in working with LGBT+ young people and in the Bethel center. The primary actors, in terms of the legacy of slavery, are the people who are the descendants of slaves and of those who were colonized; they took the steps to make the issue public and to seek a response. Without this, the process would never have started. Support from bodies which benefited from slavery, such as Western churches and mission societies, is important, but the change has to come in the present-day white majority churches and people through their recognition of the legacy they created.

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
- ▶ Convivial Church and Radical Welcome

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
- ▶ Conviviality, Diakonia, and the Church

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

Conviviality as a Core Concept

Three Dimensions of Conviviality - Vocation, Dignity and Justice

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conviviality, Borders and Boundaries

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

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

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

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

Conviviality Overcoming Fear

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

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

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

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

Conviviality instead of Tolerance

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

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

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

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

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

cacy 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'

Convivial Church and Radical Welcome

Introduction

This book of stories has highlighted some specific issues which are reflected in the concept of 'Radical Welcome'. In particular, the issues of slavery and colonialism are highlighted, as well as the need for analysis and reflection on this in order to support convivial life together, through a deeper and more structural understanding of the position of European churches. This is important because the attitudes underpinning and supporting racism run deeply through European culture and still affect present-day attitudes and practice which prevent convivial life together in peace with justice. Another issue which challenges deeply held attitudes is that of identity and gender, and there is a need to seek convivial life together with diverse 'others'. Finally, there is the profoundly personal challenge to welcome the marginalized 'other' into our lives and into the life of the church and diaconal organization. This is a question of personal call and service, but it links to and underpins congregational and organized diakonia.

Conviviality and Radical Welcome - Overcoming Borders and Boundaries

Conviviality in practice is a step beyond tolerance of the 'different other'. It implies a recognition of, and work to overcome, the borders and boundaries that prevent the church and diakonia from being relational spaces of radical welcome. This is also an important step beyond hospitality because the invisible borders are bound up with personal background and church history and identity. For example, many churches have been complicit in

colonialism and slavery, and to become truly convivial there is a need for an honest recognition of this reality. In fact, a 'colonial mindset' is a reality which affects not only relations between the 'North' and the 'South': it very often shapes attitudes and practices within Europe.

'Convivial life together implies the need to address the past practices of the church as they affect current relationships and practices. People who have experienced the results of oppressive and excluding theology and practice are key actors in this transformational work.'

Conviviality and Radical Welcome - Resisting Structured Oppression

Convivial life together is prevented by the twin evils of racism and xenophobia. It is also prevented by other forms of identity-based oppression or exclusion, including gender identity and sexual orientation. Complicity has to be recognized and overcome, and this transformation has to be rooted in the understanding that oppression is structured and is not just a question of personal attitude or morality. The people affected are key actors in overcoming oppression, and furthermore the church and diakonia are called to support people when they are attacked on the basis of their identity.

'Convivial life together is based on working to overcome identity-based oppression and exclusion, and on the recognition that all are made in the image of God'

Radical Welcome and Identity

In the present situation of increasing intolerance, the definition of identity has become an important issue in dividing people. In any case, identity definition often involves a mixture of prejudice and power.

People should be able to define themselves as they are (e.g., ‘asylum seeker’ is not anyone’s identity).

‘Convivial life in diversity recognizes the right for people to define themselves as they are and not to be placed in categories which are imposed by authorities or by any church or organization’

Conviviality and Radical Welcome in Personal Experience

The roots of diaconal compassion and the struggle for justice are to be found in personal experience. Diapraxis is based on the understanding that in the marginalized ‘other’ we see the face of Christ and experience a call to service. This is an important step not only in diaconal engagement but also in faith reflection. It also has implications for a person who has previously felt that they have to choose between their experience and their faith because of the condemnation of other Christians. The misuse of the Bible and Christian tradition is sometimes a factor in this exclusion, and this should be overcome through trust-building and face-to-face meeting and sharing life together.

‘Conviviality is a relational concept and personal experience of building a culture of radical welcome and faith reflection on diversity and life together’

There is a personal dimension to seeking convivial life together, because it also affects the private sphere. For instance, it poses a problematic question to many people whose only relationship is with other people of the same background, culture and often age. If this is the case, it means relationships with the ‘different other’ are at a distance. Seeking conviviality also involves hearing the personal call of ‘the other’ and

changing plans and maybe opening up space for ‘the other’ in the private sphere. This is a foundation for church and diaconal conviviality and in seeking life together. The close personal relationship, alongside a changed church and diaconal culture, also links to the role of the church and diakonia in the public space. It is an important basis for advocacy with and on behalf of marginalized groups.

‘Convivial life together has a personal dimension in terms of recognizing the call of a particular ‘other’ or a group of marginalized people. However, in a convivial church, the personal response and action will be rooted in the culture of the congregation or diaconal organization which has consequences in the public sphere.’

Conviviality and Radical Welcome – Creating a Safe Space

The creation of a safe space is vital to seeking convivial life together. The boundary between people and the church or diaconal space should be easy to cross and the space should signify ‘welcome’, without fear of rejection or censure. It may mean the willingness to transform an existing space or adapt it to new functions or to create a new space, perhaps in collaboration with an identified group usually seen as ‘beneficiaries’.

‘Church and diakonia should create or co-create safe welcoming spaces which support convivial life together and signify the relational aspect of convivial life in diversity’

A safe space is not a self-enclosed space, although within it there may be different special places, for example to be in silence. A safe space should signal that it is open to public forums and deliberations

as well as the co-development of new initiatives. It should also signify the readiness to enter the public sphere and undertake advocacy or campaigning for change with and on behalf of people who are marginalized.

“To support convivial life together, the church and diaconia as a safe space will be open to dialogue about

important issues which may appear divisive. This implies a recognition of and the need to overcome implicit power relations and a willingness to bring these issues into the public sphere, if wider dialogue, advocacy or campaigning is necessary.’

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Resources and Links

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Links

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Convivial Church and Radical Welcome

There has always been diversity, whether or not it was recognized. Through the seeking conviviality process, we are invited to reflect on it in new ways and to develop new practice as a result. The four stories in this book reflect on the experience of Lutheran churches that have been challenged to think anew about diversity and relations across the borders of difference. This is an area which sometimes produces heated conversations and polarization, but these stories see diversity through the practice of seeking conviviality and working on life together, as all are made in the image of God. Through this approach, we can come to a new awareness and understanding of the positive contribution that diversity can make to the richness of everyday life. The stories collected in this book highlight some of the most important issues. As you read the stories, you are invited to think about your own situation and how the lives of people are affected by the changes around you.

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