



# “Diaconia takes the pulpit to the market”

Mutual Empowerment: Advocacy, Charity, Spirituality



Documentation of the International Symposium on Diaconic Work  
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# Editors` Foreword

“Mutual Empowerment” – this title seems to suggest that empowerment is a status, which, once it has been reached, remains permanently. It can sound static. But this is not our experience. Empowerment is an ongoing and ever changing mutual process. Therefore, we would rather formulate “Empowering Mutually” – if only grammar rules would allow such a wording. Empowering each other is a dynamic giving and taking and walking together. This process is stronger, more intense and more challenging when it is done in internationally composed groups and in different cultural contexts.

**Advocacy, charity, spirituality** are the dimensions of Diaconia which make sense in joint, intertwined ways. Yet, diaconic work needs to be reminded of this. A soup kitchen in the township AND joint prayers in the Sunday Service. Prayers for healing AND negotiations for a more just governmental health care system. 100 Euro for a person in dire need AND information about the interconnectedness of environmental destruction and poverty.

In this documentation we present insights and experiences of mutual empowering processes, collected in three courses of the university program MA “Diaconic Management”, 2011-2018. Empowerment here takes place on different levels: Concerning different dimensions of diaconia itself and concerning individual attitudes and convictions which are challenged, widened and enriched through international encounter and community in academic competence building.

Learning jointly about the consequences of a “Theology of Struggle” in the Philippines. Getting to know soup kitchens led by volunteers in the townships of Cape Town/South Africa. Questioning each other about the individual attitudes of leadership in diaconia and the traditions which have shaped these attitudes in different contexts in Bethel Foundations, Germany. Fighting with texts, reaching an understanding together, after a joint and hard struggle with authors’ formulations about management and economics. Asking each other. Explaining to each other. Praying together. Consoling each other in times of challenge, giving each other encouragement, celebrating success. Cooking and eating together, Tanzanian Ugali, Indonesian rice, Cameroonian Fufu.

All these are dimensions which give ground to mutual empowerment.

With this documentation we invite you to share our experiences. The texts were presented during the international consultation “Empowering Mutually”, 12/13 May 2017 in Bielefeld-Bethel.

Empowering mutually is a process. It is never fully completed, but continues. If the texts arouse your curiosity, please contact us and find out where you can join in and share mutual empowering!

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## Words of Welcome:

### Innovation must go on!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ! On behalf of the Friedrich von Bodelschwingh Foundation Bethel, it is a great pleasure for me to welcome you and your conference here today.

This year 2017 is a very special year for the Protestant Church and for diaconia in Germany because we remember 500 years of Reformation. We celebrate the light that was shed from the small town of Wittenberg into the life of many Christians worldwide through the truth of the Gospel, which the reformers preached and taught, and also celebrated in worship and music.

It was not a new message, not a new gospel, but the gospel was newly preached and taught, in the firm belief that the truth of Jesus Christ is not beyond everyday life, but in the midst of our daily life. The Reformation was therefore a huge programme of innovation for the church: for its teaching, its organisation, and for addressing issues of education and social life.

The reformers did not succeed in achieving all their aims. Some of them, indeed, today we would not even agree with any longer. For example the expectation that through the true preaching of the gospel all of Israel and all Jews, would become believers in Jesus Christ as the Messiah of Israel. The fact that this did not and has not happened resulted in one of the dark sides of the Reformation. Nevertheless, the Reformation was a huge programme of in-

novation for the church, inspired by the worries of the confessor and pastor Martin Luther for his flock.

350 years after the Reformation began, another – less dramatic – innovation took place in protestant Germany. “Big new needs demand big new ideas”, this saying of Rev. Friedrich von Bodelschwingh the elder (1831-1910) marked the beginning of the Founding of Bethel in 1867. This year we also celebrate 150 years of Bethel. “Big new needs demand big new ideas”, this was also a programme of innovation, aiming at the social needs, less than the spiritual needs of this time.

Friedrich von Bodelschwingh therefore had a number of key concerns: medical assistance and spiritual care for people suffering from epilepsy; education and work for people with handicaps; care for the homeless, for young and elderly, and for the dying. And up to now, all these concerns remain lively in Bethel. But they only stay alive through big new ideas, through innovation.

Therefore, we are very glad to welcome you and your conference here. I look forward to your big ideas on the needs of today in a broad ecumenical context, since we do not get big ideas any longer just from being in Wittenberg or Bielefeld: we need the broad international perspective that you will provide in your conference today. So I wish you fruitful discussions and hope that we may share your big ideas. God bless!



**Rev. Dr Johanna Will-Armstrong** is a protestant theologian and a member of the Management Board of the v. Bodelschwingh Foundation Bethel. She previously worked as a member of the state ecclesiastical council of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia (EKvW) where she was responsible, among others, for theological training and college issues. She started her career as a congregation minister in the Ruhr Region and later became the personal assistant to two bishops of the EKvW. / Photo: Bettina v. Clausewitz/IUEM

## Perspectives from Brazil:

### Citizenship – for the wellbeing of others

As part of my seminary internship, I worked in a shantytown in Belém do Pará, at the fringes of the Amazon area in Brazil. Through an ecumenical partnership between the local Lutheran church and the Roman Catholic parish, I was asked to lead bible studies in a place called Vila da Barca, a very poor neighbourhood where the houses are built on stilts because of the rising tides. Narrow bridges, often decayed, connected one shack to the next and the village to the mainland. All the sewage was thrown in the water. Very few houses had electricity and there were only a few public water faucets, from where women and children carried buckets of water on their heads to supply their households. Children swam and played in the dirty water and men caught fish from it to feed their families. Since I was doing bible studies in this shantytown, I brought several copies of the bible to our first meeting. I was not surprised to find out that most people did not know how to read, although they disguised their illiteracy with the excuse that they needed new eye prescriptions or had forgotten their glasses at home. Telling biblical stories, enacting them, and relating them to everyday life made the bible studies a lively experience.

### Living water in the bible – polluted water around

During one particular meeting we talked about John 4, the encounter between the Samaritan woman and Jesus at the well. It did not take long for the women to talk about the “machista” culture in Brazil, especially because so many of them were heads of household and felt discriminated for not being legally married.<sup>1</sup> But the conversation became particularly animated when the subject of water came up. What was the living water Jesus was talking about? The water in the mangrove was polluted and the women had to carry buckets of water on their heads to cook, clean and drink. Could the water Jesus alluded to be found only in heaven? Or was that water available already on earth? After a few meetings, enough trust was established for those who were illiterate to acknowledge it. The par-

ticipants became interested in learning how to read as well, and the bible study branched out into a literacy programme using Paulo Freire’s method of alphabetisation. As a liberationist educator, Paulo Freire taught that the purpose of education is not only how to read and write words, but also to read and write reality through consciousness raising.<sup>2</sup> The bible study continued, but had now a new vitality. When talking about a text from the bible, people were also reflecting about their own situation and, following Jesus’ message, trying to discern what the implications of the Gospel meant for them. From the situation of dire poverty, they lived in, the Gospel opened up for the possibility to reflect also upon their reality.

One of the effects was the proposal to invite local politicians to see the living conditions of the people in the neighbourhood. They never came. Then, the group proposed that one of the women was to visit the city council and set an appointment with the political leaders to present their case. She was not received. Only when a large group of them went to the city hall, demanding to be heard, did the authorities take measures to install new water faucets, closer to the homes.

### Look out for the wellbeing of your neighbour

Recently, I had the opportunity to go back to this neighbourhood. More than 20 years had elapsed since my internship. Many of the stilt houses were still there, but I also saw significant changes. Among them was the creation of a neighbourhood association, which helps to make the plight of the shantytown dwellers more visible to public officers. It runs adult literacy and after school programmes for the children. The association has the direct support of different churches (including Lutheran) along with several other non-governmental organisations. Through the work of the association, affordable houses were built and 130 families had already moved into them. The houses are modest, but have running water and electricity. The families who moved into the new houses continue to be part of the association and advo-

cate for the families who have not had the same privilege yet. Recently, the conversation has also moved to include ecological concerns and how the community can reduce pollution in the mangrove.

This experience demonstrates the intersectionality between advocacy, care, and spirituality to engender mutuality. In my view, the point that connects them all is participatory citizenship. A limited understanding of citizenship as individual rights reduces the potential citizenship has in fostering civic responsibility, accountability, advocacy, and full participation in civil society. A Lutheran theology invites us to understand citizenship from a different angle: the Christian as a participant of the body politic, one who looks out not only for his or her own interests but for the wellbeing of all.

To a great extent, the activities carried out in Vila da Barca embody the ethics that Christians live not in themselves, but in Christ and in their neighbour.<sup>3</sup> They live in Christ through faith and in their neighbour through love. By faith Christians are caught up beyond themselves into God. By love they reach out to their neighbour. While Christians are citizens of heaven, they are also citizens on earth and in this capacity, they advocate for their neighbour and strive to promote the common good.

### Excursus: Luther's Two Kingdom Theory

When Lutheran theologians talk about public theology (or the role of theology in the political arena), they usually refer to Martin Luther's "Two Kingdom Theory". Luther describes two realms or reigns. One is the kingdom of the world, which is for those who are not Christians and therefore, are governed by the law. The other is the kingdom of God, for those who are true believers and subjects to Christ. Although Christians belong to both realms, Luther states that unbelievers belong only to the world, while the kingdom of God is reserved only for true believers.

This description can be misconstrued to enforce the notion that there are two mutually exclusive types of citizenship, one heavenly (for Christians) and the other one earthly (for unbelievers). Because Luther employs a dualistic language to describe his theory, it can create the false assumption that human beings are divided into two categories: Those who are concerned with heavenly matters and those who are concerned with worldly affairs. A misunderstanding of the Two Kingdom Theory might also lead to a hierarchical view of earth and heaven, with Christians paying little attention to the present reality as

they hurry toward eternal bliss. Nothing could be further from Luther's theology!

Luther says that the spiritual and earthly governments constitute two realms: One is guided by the law and the other is guided by the Gospel, but both belong to God. They are not in opposition to one another, since both contend against the devil. God rules over both kingdoms (heaven and earth) and instituted two kinds of government. One is spiritual, through which humans become devout and righteous. This authority acts through the Word and without the sword, and righteousness is given through the Gospel. The other is earthly government, through which humans are compelled to be righteous before the world. This transitory righteousness is accomplished through the sword, which makes sure that believers and unbelievers alike comply with the law, living in justice and peace.

These two realms, however, are interdependent. They testify that God rules over the whole world and does so in two ways. While the worldly kingdom is governed by secular authority and is made up of the law, lawmakers, and those who enforce the law, the spiritual kingdom is concerned with making true Christians. In his treatise "Secular authority: to what extent it should be obeyed", Luther states that every kingdom must have its own laws and regulations, but the worldly government has laws that extend no farther than to life and property and what is external upon earth.<sup>4</sup> The earthly government is supposed to regulate on issues that are secular, bodily, pertaining to the outer human being. Luther defends that "we must firmly establish secular law and the sword, and that no one may doubt that it is in the world by God's will and ordinance."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, secular authorities cannot coerce people's spiritual belief. The sword is used to punish, keep order, and protect those who are of the kingdom of God, but it can never be used to impose religion and regulate matters of faith.

Good governance is instituted by God as part of God's care for the entire creation. Of course, if the world were composed of real Christians, there would be no need for government or for the law because the righteous do more than all that the law demands. Since, however, such true Christians are hard to find, all citizens are subject to the sword because they need the law to instruct, constrain, and compel them to do what is good. In the earthly realm, the law is not only good and necessary, but it is also God-given.

### Critique to the Catholic Christendom model

Although not always evident, Luther's Two Kingdom Theory was a critique to the Christendom model prevalent during his day, when church and state were so entangled that there was almost no distinction of competences and attributes between them. The Christendom model held by European Catholicism followed the idea of *Corpus Christianum* – a society guided by Christian values in its social, political, and economic life. This notion united the Western Christian world under the Roman Catholic Church and its endeavours were supposed to lead to a religiously uniform community. In fact, however, it created a theocracy with Catholic clergy wielding political authority. The crusades, the fight against the Moors in Spain, the discovery of the Americas, and the Inquisition gave Christendom a new impetus.

The separation between church and State cannot be legitimately ascribed to Luther, but he draws a distinction of competences between the two. He does not, however, separate or define them as autonomous entities, since both are expressions of God's care and "neither is sufficient in the world without the other."<sup>6</sup> Luther establishes a comprehensive system which allocates specific roles and attributes to each realm. In doing so, he distinguishes each kingdom, its authority, and how they are to serve God. Luther claims that it is the responsibility of the political authorities to achieve economic, political, and social reforms that also affect the church; and it is the task of the church to confront the political authorities of God's will.<sup>7</sup> Both kingdoms have a common foundation (God is the Lord) and a common goal (human wellbeing).

"The church must be a watchdog in the world, called to discern whether churchly and worldly orders support or neglect the divine intention of maintaining a good creation", writes Eric Gritsch in his "History of Lutheranism".<sup>8</sup> However, if one were to rule the world according to the Gospel, putting aside secular law because all are baptized and Christian, society would turn into savage beasts. Luther does not envision the possibility of a truly Christian society or nation: "Therefore, it is out of the question that there should be a common Christian government over the whole world, nay even over one land or company of people."<sup>9</sup> For Luther, the idea that human beings join together to promote the common good out of their own volition is absurd. The paradox of human existence – a reality of already and not yet, of being sinner and saint at the same time – prevents humanity from doing good works solely out of human concern. The good done to others is done by God, who acts in and through us. Because human affairs are tainted by selfish interests, there

is need for laws and government to assure the administration of justice. Ultimately, everything that belongs to the earthly realm, to our bodies, comes from the goodness of God, according to Luther: "Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be rejected by the believing and those who know the truth." Among "every creature of God" you must reckon not simply food and drink, clothes and shoes, but also government, citizenship, protection and administration of justice.<sup>10</sup>

### Citizenship as political participation and advocacy

Our conversations on citizenship most often focus on how individuals get to exercise their rights. Because a citizen is a native-born or naturalised person who owes allegiance to a particular country and is entitled to its protection, we concentrate on the privilege that citizenship confers. Historically, for instance, a citizen was somebody with the right to vote. Because women were not allowed to vote, they were deemed second class citizens. Rights are a vital part of citizenship and social movements have mobilised around them. However, the language of rights does not always fully translate the meaning of citizenship. Recent studies show that an emphasis on rights does not necessarily lead to greater equality and justice. New forms of inequality include the existence of super-citizens, marginal citizens, quasi-citizens, sub-citizens, and un-citizens, depending on their social, economic, or political access to rights.<sup>11</sup>

Citizenship also entails responsibilities and obligations. It describes the relationship between the State and individual citizens as well as the political relationship between the citizens themselves. Besides rights and the entitlement to the State's protection, citizenship also refers to the duties, actions, and virtues expected from each citizen.<sup>12</sup> For Aristotle, citizenship was primarily a duty. Citizens were obliged to take turn in public office and sacrifice part of their private life to do so.

The idea of citizenship as a duty contrasts sharply with our contemporary mindset. In Latin America, the *res publica* was never at the service of the common people or the common good. Government was used to keep the powerful and affluent in power and to defend their interests. The result is not democracy, but kleptocracy. Corruption has led to an overall disenchantment with political affairs. More recently, neo-liberal approaches have posited not only the right to participate in public life (whether by voting or holding public office) but also the privilege not to do so. It defends the right to place

private commitment over political involvement. Ironically, an increasing number of people see it as their right not to be politically involved.

This tension between rights and duties shows that citizenship is not only a legal status, but reflects a normative ideal, and to create such normative ideals requires participation in decision-making processes. Here, also religious identity plays a role, since this participation is informed by the values and traditions of particular communities. The language of rights and duties serves us to a great extent, but it does not explain what motivates people to seek for the greater good, to actively participate in social service and to advocate on behalf of others. This is where Lutheran theology can contribute to the ongoing debate on citizenship.

By focusing not solely on the rights and duties of citizens vis-à-vis the State, but addressing the principles that guide individuals and communities to be responsible, there is an epistemological shift. For instance, in comparing duty-based versus engaged citizenship, recent studies concluded that engaged citizens are more participatory, global, and committed to social justice than their duty-based counterparts.<sup>13</sup> Engagement and participation in the social and democratic processes stem from the perception individuals and communities have of their role in the world. Such perception is influenced by religious beliefs.

### Vocation: Called to serve the world

A Lutheran theology might have less to offer if the language of citizenship is reduced to rights and duties. Luther's views are shaped by a medieval mentality that did not contemplate civil liberties and rights. Luther's notion of justice benefitting oneself comes only in light of its effect on the neighbour, when advocating for the wellbeing of others:

"In what concerns you and yours, you govern yourself by the Gospel and suffer injustice for yourself as a true Christian; in what concerns others and belongs to them, you govern yourself according to love and suffer no injustice for your neighbor's sake; this the Gospel does not forbid, but rather commands in another place."<sup>14</sup>

The political vocation of a Christian is to pursue neighbourly love fashioned by relationships of justice. Christians are devout and righteous before the world not because they want to be rewarded with eternal life (they know that salvation can never be achieved this way). They do, however, fulfil their vocation and carry on with their responsibilities. Christians are not to escape this world

nor defer responsibility to others. To the contrary, Christians are called to serve the world, the earthly kingdom, in whichever capacity is needed. That calling, vocation (or German: Beruf) takes shape in different offices, ranging from the tasks of educator, public servant, or parent.

Our vocation locates us in our social relationships in family, work, church, country, and as global citizens, allowing us to spell out who the neighbour Jesus referred to actually is.<sup>15</sup> The place where God calls us (Latin: vocare) is the place where our deep gladness meets the world's greatest needs. As Frederick Buechner states, vocation is the encounter of "that you need most to do" and "that the world most needs to have done."<sup>16</sup> It is the meeting of our greatest joy and the world's deepest hunger. Vocation is how we play out our own call to be alive and flourish as we ensure the life and wellbeing of others.

Citizenship refers not only to the individual, but also how individuals live in community. Citizens are the inhabitants of the polis, the city, and this requires political participation. Citizenship cannot be reduced to casting a ballot every so often (which still can defer the responsibility of decision-making to others) or to be elected for public office. The question is: to which extent are we participants in the decision-making processes? A deeper understanding of political participation must name the strategies and levels of involvement that we encounter to further the rights of others, assure the wellbeing of those who are marginalised, and address the needs of those who are most vulnerable in society.

### Care for the neighbour means to assure dignity

In this sense, according to Luther, we are expected to exercise our citizenship without seeking personal gain or fame, but out of concern for the wellbeing of others. This move away from single-issue politics onto a broader agenda that contemplates particularly the displaced and less powerful in society has been articulated, in Latin America, with the work with landless peasants, indigenous communities, children living on the streets, and survivors of domestic violence or sexual abuse, among others.<sup>17</sup> Citizenship includes advocacy on behalf of social groups, communal causes, or collective efforts for the promotion of the common good. When advocacy is not carried out in the framework of citizenship, it can be reduced to charity. The role of the Christian is to advocate on behalf of others so that they too may find their voice and gain agency:

"Since, however, a true Christian lives and labors on earth not for himself but for his neighbor, therefore the

whole spirit of his life impels him to do even that which he needs not do, but which is profitable and necessary for his neighbor. Because the sword is a very great benefit and necessary to the whole world, to preserve peace, to punish sin and to prevent evil, he submits most willingly to the rule of the sword, pays tax, honors those in authority, serves, helps, and does all he can to further the government... Although he needs none of these things for himself and it is not necessary for him to do them, yet he considers what is for the good and profit of others..." , as Trygve Wyller says.<sup>18</sup>

The right of the citizen to be a citizen – not in terms of privileges but in terms of participation in the earthly realm and living out Christian responsibility – is enabled through the different spheres that bear God's promises. In the political sphere, God promises to govern with justice and calls leaders to serve in that capacity. In the economic sphere, God promises to care for the needs of all God's creatures and creates different instances, from household to marketplace, to assure wellbeing. In the ecclesial sphere, God promises to communicate God's Word to our hearts and minds and calls believers to life in community to witness and learn about their faith. This is a classic way of translating Luther's theology to convey what the role of the Christians ought to be in the world.

Christians are called to advocate on behalf of others and, in doing so, live out the love of the neighbour, as instilled by Christ, while also promoting changes in society at large. Citizenship involves a component of responsibility for and accountability to the neighbour who requires a response. When we spell out the consequences of neighbourly love, we establish that this love is more than a virtue one possesses (as moral excellence or goodness) or an obligation (as fulfilment of the law). It is a way of life, an ability to interact, engage, and genuinely care. This vocation is a responsibility, in the sense that we respond to God's call, voiced though the needs of our neighbour. "For, as we said, love of neighbor seeks not its own, considers not how great or how small, but how profitable and how needful for neighbor or community the works are (1 Cor. 13:5)." <sup>19</sup>

It is easier to join efforts to promote self-interests than it is to advocate for others. It is easier to be self-involved than it is to be attentive to the needs of the neighbour. And yet, that is the challenge of the Christian life, to advocate for others in their need. It takes intentionality to move beyond citizenship solely as individual rights and duties and willingly engage in sustained debates on how we organise ourselves as society, how we employ natural resources, how we care for the environment, what entails

fair wages, or how we educate our children. The desire for justice needs to be instilled. It is not a given reality. A Lutheran contribution to citizenship is to reclaim the role of service and calling, informing us about the needs of the neighbour and compelling us to think about our role in the world in light of the Gospel.

To care for the neighbour is to assure dignity and life in abundance, act for justice and peace, and enable that another may flourish as a full human being created in the image of God. It implies a genuine concern for the neighbour's needs and the willingness to promote the free and equal participation of all in the body politic. The neighbour is not a mere receiver of one's favour or charity. The neighbour is the other with whom I engage as an equal, the one who brings me closer to Christ, and the one I am Christ for.

Christians know that holiness is achieved not through good deeds, but through Christ, whom we follow. We are saved not because we serve, but we serve because we are saved. This model of social participation based on neighbourly love fosters citizenship not only as individual rights and responsibilities, but as active participation in civil society. Christians will seek the wellbeing of their neighbour not because it is the law, but because such good works are committed in freedom, out of love. This includes an active role in political affairs, in works of advocacy, and genuine concern for the wellbeing of others. Citizenship is not reduced to individual rights or obligation, but it is a Christian service, a vocation. By serving the other, the neighbour, we are also serving Christ.

### Endnotes

- 1 For a more elaborate account on machismo and its impact on the lives of women in Brazil, see Wanda Deifelt: "Beyond compulsory motherhood," in *Good Sex: Feminist Perspectives from the World's Religions*, ed. Jung, Patricia Beattie, Hunt, Mary E., Balakrishnan, Radhika (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001).
- 2 Paulo Freire: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury, 1974).
- 3 Martin Luther: "The freedom of a Christian," in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. Dillenberger, John (New York: Random House, 1962), 79.
- 4 Civil righteousness (*iustitia civilis*) is promoted by the law and pertains only to the earthly realm (does not lead to salvation). Righteousness in Christ (*iustitia christiana*) is a given righteousness, consists of the forgiveness of sins, and is enduring.

- 5 Martin Luther: "Secular authority: to what extent it should be obeyed," in Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings, ed. Dillenberger, John (New York: Random House, 1962), 366.
- 6 Ibid., 371.
- 7 Walter Altmann: Luther and Liberation: a Latin American Perspective (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).
- 8 Eric Gritsch: A history of Lutheranism (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002) 105.
- 9 Luther, "Secular authority," 371.
- 10 Ibid., 378.
- 11 Kate Nash: "Between citizenship and human rights," Sociology (Dec 2009, Vol. 43, Issue 6) 1067-1083.
- 12 Rian Voet: Feminism and Citizenship (London: Sage Publications, 1998) 9.
- 13 Mark K. McBeth, Donna Lybecker, Kacee A. Garner: "The story of good citizenship: framing public policy in the context of duty-based versus engaged citizenship," Politics & Policy (Feb 2010, Vol. 38, Issue 1) 1-23.
- 14 Luther: "Secular authority," 375.
- 15 Ibid., 378.
- 16 Frederick Buechner: Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC, 118-119.
- 17 A recent publication addressing the role of citizenship and its relationship to otherness is Trygve Wyller (ed.) Heterotopic Citizen: New Research on religious Work for the Disadvantaged (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009).
- 18 Ibid., 373.
- 19 Ibid., 381.



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Photo: Bettina v. Clausewitz/UEM

## Perspectives from Tanzania

### We need to grasp the roots of the problems

It is undeniable that diaconia stands at the heart of the church mission to the world. It is so because diaconia is a co-component to preaching in this great mission. It is a way of incarnating the preached word in the lives of the people. Given that understanding, diaconia will continue to be an active part of this great mission until Jesus returns. That being the case, diaconia will always be an open ended undertaking which will continue to unfold new achievements and face new challenges.

While the achievements will encourage the church to affirm that this mission is possible, the challenges will keep the church alert that the mission is neither an easy call and sending nor yet accomplished. In other words, the challenges will press for new understanding and new strategies of the mission for every future engagements. In this paper, I will try to discuss briefly the vital issues that keep the journey of diaconia alive, both as achievements and challenges. This is my perspective of reading the topic of this symposium namely: "Mutual Empowerment: Advocacy, Charity and Spirituality."

### Mapping our mission

We are living in a world which is facing numerous social challenges. These challenges are emerging every day and are taking us by surprise. Actually in every "new now" and "every today" we don't have adequate tools to address these emerging challenges and they make us strangers in the world we live in. Sometimes we despair and sometimes we simply get tired of what's going on. Sometimes after struggling with such challenges for a while we get used to them and hence accommodate them in our ordinary life. Obviously the challenges of our time, perhaps as it has been in all ages, overwhelm us. Actually it is in such context I understand Jesus' words that each day has enough troubles of its own (Matthew 6:34). We are living in such a world that we simply fail to cope with its challenges. Such being the case we need to appreciate all the efforts of all those who stand out to face the world and address the social challenges that emerge day after day.

### Mutual Empowerment

The complexity of social challenges we are facing, lends us in a diversity of understanding those situations we face. These challenges traditionally and generally categorized as social-economic, political and cultural still stay over our world like a heavy cloud that conceals light. These are the factors which determine our daily lives but also they are the same which are root causes of many evils.

In most cases when we talk about poverty among the majority in poor countries; when we talk about great migrations; when we talk about child labour; when we talk about slavery; when we talk about islamic radicalism and terrorism; when we talk about child pregnancy and early marriage among young girls; when we talk about women circumcision; when we talk about unfair trade and unfair investment contracts; when we talk about dictatorship and poor governance; when we talk about suppression of freedom of speech; the flourishing of radical right hand politics, and similar ones, all these are indicators that we are simply putting flesh to the bones of those traditional major factors. Through them we see prosperity and success and through them we see pains and suffering. They colour our world with various colours of life; they give our world both sweet and sour tastes. Indeed they determine our daily lives.

These challenges are scattered globally and sometimes we feel powerless to deal with them all. We even sometimes tell ourselves that we have enough of ours, so let others struggle with their own. However, the current happenings like migration of young people from the south to the north and the rise of islamic radicalism and modern slavery, just to mention few, both indicate a state of dissatisfaction, greed and poor understanding of human value. Something is not fine in our societies. The rules of the game of justice are not fair. The world needs to be told the truth about the unfairness of our social-economic, political and cultural structures. This is a big game to play which needs commitment. This is a big battle to fight which needs dedication and sacrifices. Are we really ready and willing to enter that battle field?



Indeed we need to empower one another but that empowerment has to be a multidimensional one. I believe that we see the realities of our world but that is not enough. If we want to work out for solutions instead of managing the current problems, then we need to agree on their root causes. That is the point of departure from where we can erect a strong foundation of mutual empowerment. If we want to move from talking about mutual empowerment to effective action we need to grasp the roots of the problems thereafter can we proceed to identifying the structure and pattern of empowerment. I believe the strategies of our diaconic work today require us to aim higher so as to get better results. It will be unfair to say that there have not been successes in fighting the evils I have mentioned above. However, we also have to agree that in most cases we just targeted to manage the symptoms for a while but not really curing the diseases.

Indeed it is high time for all good wishers to join forces in the world in order to offer the needed services so as to attend to and heal the social wounds caused by such social evils. No single person or organisation can do it all alone. It is always important to identify those who are committed to similar course of actions as ours. These are not just competitors rather they might be to us a power house of sharing knowledge and experiences as a way of empowerment.

In my advocacy and lobby work I have worked with organisations and individuals of whom I knew clearly that we didn't share the same system of values in our actions but we had similar objectives. The way forward had always been creating understanding, setting the boundaries, being tolerant to others and committed to the course of action. Diaconia as mission of the church indeed will always face similar challenges. When we talk about empowerment we have also to think about "the others" who are outside there struggling with similar challenges to attain good results for a better world. Such thinking and approach will be unfounded if we go out there and work with others without having clear set of values that guide us in managing our operations. Equally important is to be clear of what we want to achieve in our actions.

### Three examples for advocacy campaigns

The social challenges we are dealing with are diverse and complex. They require both: short term and long term plans and strategies. They vary from the challenges which require the service of dropping bread today for people to survive to those that require us to fight the unjust and oppressive systems that create those situations. For that reason, there is neither one theory alone which could guide

our action; nor one approach and actor(s) that suffices to serve and attend adequately to such social challenges.

We are in such a situation that while we are still struggling with today's challenges already tomorrow comes up with new and more complex ones. Yet we can fight different war fronts and yet fight together. In our diaconia work we have to think of short term services as well as of long term services. However, my experience in this field tells me that we are mostly interested in short term services rather than long term ones. Excuses are always the same: we don't have enough resources for this and that. We are more of charitable workers. Let me give a few examples from three advocacy and lobby work I actively participated in Tanzania.

### 1. Sebastian Kolowa Memorial University project

The Sebastian Kolowa Memorial University (SEKOMU) in Lushoto (Tanzania) was not just started as another university among others rather it was started for special reasons and purpose. First, basing on the knowledge and historical experience of the founder, the North Eastern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT), that social welfare service (diaconia) was an equally important arm to preaching in the great mission of the church to the world.

Secondly, having diaconal institutions the diocese discovered that there was a big shortage of experts who could handle people with special needs. Thus having diaconal institutions and not having a reliable source of supporting them particularly through qualified persons was to pre-empt the death of that noble work. In short it was from that perspective that the diocese decided to embark on that big project with the aim of focusing on and streamlining a perspective related to persons with special needs.

Thus the first programme to be offered at SEKOMU was on special needs education. Graduates from SEKOMU are now scattered all over the country and the university is starting a PHD programme this year. Apart from preparing experts, the project intended to campaign for people with disabilities so as to create awareness in the society that these are people with same value like others and deserve respect just like others. While on the other hand emphasizing that they need to be protected by laws. While the laws and policies speak on that direction, yet the administration of the same is not effective. The project was also encouraged by the government and as we speak today, some steps have been taken and there are changes on the ground.

### 2. Justice in the extractive sector

This is a campaign organised by the Interfaith Standing Committee in Tanzania. I call it "Justice Campaign" because it had a number of issues in it. These included unfairness in mining contracts which went together with assumed corruption; evacuation of people from their homes in order to give way to the mining companies; compensation issues; environmental destructions; unfair taxes paid by mining companies to the government; issues of corporate social responsibility etc.

This was a campaign not fully supported by neither the government nor the mining companies. However, faith based organisations and other civil societies worked together because we believed that this agenda is very much connected to issues of economic justice. We Tanzanians looked upon investments in the extractive industries as one way out of our poverty. Given the fact that once the extractives are taken out of the ground they are non-renewable and hence the revenues coming from such investments need greater care so that they could benefit the people and at the same time contribute to a future sustainable economy of the country.

### 3. Land justice campaign

Advocating for land was necessary and still is because of two reasons. First, the increase of investments on land which of course, among others had connection to the extractive sector. Secondly, endless conflicts between farmers and pastoralists. We came to realise that big amounts of land were being issued to investors but without clear plans. Land in Tanzania was not fully demarcated and still not yet. While on the same line of thought, the amount of arable land is not big enough for all groups of people with different life sustaining activities depend on it. And also the problem of population explosion adds pressure to the issue of availability of land. Above all the land laws cannot cope with such situations, either because they are weak or they are administered poorly, partly due to corruption. That being the case, there was a need to raise our voices and call for immediate action. The stage for discussing these issues was an international conference on land justice which brought together all key stakeholders to the table. The organisers of the conference were the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania together with Sebastian Kolowa Memorial University. I was honoured to be the chairperson of the organising committee. The resolutions of the conference have contributed much to how the government is dealing with land issues now.

### We need an "utopian vision" of the future society

These campaigns, together with others, made people feel the presence of the church and its service to the public. However, it wasn't easy to accomplish that mission. In both cases I came to learn that such campaigns were not received by many church partners as part of the mission of the church. I realised that to some partners it was easier to give material things to meet some of the immediate needs we encountered along the way rather than becoming part of empowerment force behind the bigger campaign. The kind of questions they often asked were: What does the church have to do with the extractive sector and land issues? And with your campaigns are you not jeopardising your good relationship with the government?

In fact even the majority of our pastors and some bishops in Tanzania were hesitant to join the campaigns because they thought that such activities are very unholy and have nothing to do with the church. Above all we were seen at that time as trouble makers. On campaigning for the rights of the people one has to have a vision of what is anticipated far ahead in the future. One might have what we call an "utopian vision" of future society. To invest much on good relationship with governments today, while we know that below such relationship things are not right, is to accept a future which is not well protected. While I understand the sentiments of such people, I also know that they are thinking about their own survival at the expense of the pains of others of today and future generations.

Additionally, it is such sentiments which always set boundaries to our diaconic work and reduce that great work into charitable club. Diaconia is much more than charity. Diaconia is a tool of transforming the world by confronting it so as to change its unjust social-economic, political and cultural systems which are victimising many and lend them in severe poverty and pains while privileging few.

Jesus said that he is life abundantly. Diaconia is a tool of giving that life back to those who are being denied of it. In diaconia we give bread for today while at the same time dealing with the structural systems that deny others from getting their daily bread in a sustainable way. Jesus taught us to pray: "Give us this day our daily bread." Bread as a symbol that fairly good life is the right of everybody. Through diaconia the church is sent into the world, among other things, to struggle with the people and empower them to achieve their fairly good life. Bread which is fairly good life is the right of all. At certain times and situations the churches engage in empowering the people to know their rights and to stand for them.

Sometimes our spirituality is very much related to internal and private life for our personal survival. That spirit of internalising things is even strongly being suffocated by misreading some of the scriptures. We revert from confronting worldly authorities by referring to scriptures, such as those for example which are saying: obey all things demanded by rulers because their authority is from God. It becomes even worse if someone holds to the belief that we should unquestionably submit ourselves to authorities. I think, it is Paul and Peter who were authors of those beliefs.

We all have experiences with such misuse of scriptures. Our friends from Germany are quite aware of how such scriptures were used during the National Socialism period. Similar scriptures were also used during colonialism in Africa and even worse by the apartheid system in South Africa. In practice I don't see that spirit, either in Jesus or in the prophets of the Old Testament. I am sure, those who hold to such beliefs on the basis of such scriptures have misread the authors. We have that kind of spirituality in Tanzania of people talking of living in a spiritual world (*ulimwengu wa roho*) but actually it is a way of being irresponsible and availing themselves from the call and commission to go unto the world to preach and heal the world.

Spirituality is a commitment to a belief or faith coded by a system of values as basis of individual identity but also as driving force towards achieving certain valuable goals for transforming the lives of the people around for the better. It is an internal force, not visible but its impact externally can be greater than what we can imagine. For the church we know and believe that Jesus Christ gives us this force through the Holy Spirit. We have the power and courage to go into the world with confidence, knowing that the world needs transformation towards the better.

### Concluding remarks

I have tried to encompass the topic in a very general way. Yet I still emphasise that beyond our diaconia work being like service of charity, we have to dig deeper on issues of political, social-economic and cultural challenges which are the sources of evils in our societies. Any instability in any of those factors results in pains and suffering among people. Whenever that happens we cannot avoid feeling the waves of the effects to such an extent that our faith and the basic ethical values which form the foundation of our service provision are shaken.

The very basic premise we have to accept is that the world is changing and that the old tools we used to address the challenges of the day are obsolete. That being the case, diaconia as one approach or trend among others offering services to the world needs to be revised for the sake sharpening its tools in order to cope with the cross-currents of the day.

As I used to tell my students, I say it again here: the word we preach will be visible and incarnate to the world only through diaconia. Through diaconia we take the pulpit out of the church to the market place where the whole world can see, not only us, but even more will see Jesus Christ who sends us. Through diaconia we show clearly that we are not ashamed of Christ and that we can serve the world together with others without losing ourselves to their values. Through diaconia we are empowered and can empower others to join forces in transforming the world for the better. Just as God became incarnated in Jesus Christ so that our humanity can be transformed for the better, so through our service of word and deed (diaconia) we can transform the world for a better life.



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## Academic Perspectives:

### Learning by living and studying together | International Master Program Diaconic Management (IMADM)

Our conference topic today is "Empowering Mutually" "Mutual Empowerment" in the diaconic work. But what do we understand by "mutually"? Mutually means to bring things together, or it might mean to do things together. In my presentation I will look at our International Master Programme Diaconic Management (IMADM) at the Institute for Diaconic Science and Diaconic Management (IDM) in Bethel and answer the question: what dimensions do we bring together and what do we do together in this programme? The question of the organisers is: how does North-South, Global-South to Global-North-cooperation develop and what is the future of these mutual challenges?

I have listed five elements for the overview of this presentation:

- mutuality in our academic programme
- how to develop such a programme?
- mutual personal learning for the students
- what context do we explore mutually?
- what challenges can we face mutually for the future?

#### 1. What is mutuality in the academic profile?

##### Relating disciplines

The first thing about the academic and normative profile of our programme – all students and alumni here know it by heart because they live it every day - but for those, who do not know it yet, I can say: it is a mutual programme because we bring elements together that normally are separated and not brought together for mutual enrichment. On one hand, we have theology and ethics, on the other hand, we have economics and management, a combination which is quite unusual for the academic education at faculties of theology or even for business schools or economics departments. On the one side, you have the theologians, and at the theological or ethics departments, you don't have the economists or the business administrators, the MBAs. Those dimensions we

have combined in 14 modules in our latest programme. Our IMADM students learn about strategy, innovation, personnel, finance, macroeconomic contexts, they learn about theology, ethics, values, history of diaconia and culture. They do field research, and they write a master thesis to bring all this together. This is the first step: mutual enrichment of disciplines and final integration.

#### 2. How to mutually develop such a MA-Programme? Conceptualising curricula and teaching mutually

How did we develop this programme? From the very beginning, we said: this is a mutual programme because our IDM-Institute received the offer, the authorisation, the demand from a church body, the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) in Wuppertal and its member churches. Thus, an international church association developed such a programme with us. It came from a need the churches had discovered themselves in their specific regions in Africa and Asia. Normally, you might have faculties doing their curriculum development all top down, mostly orientated on new academic insights. No, in this case, it was, in a certain sense, bottom up, orientated on demands from practical experience.

Then we thought: what are the competences the students need, who should be sent to us? So, we developed a "Needs Approach" together. We did that, of course, in a scientific context, which normally is not mutual. Famous schools like the Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) in Cambridge, Massachusetts (USA) say how enriching it is to work interculturally, to work internationally. Even the Harvard Divinity School says that we need projects, stories from the borderland, the integration of migrant problems in conceptual thinking at the university, considering the influences of life.

They, at least, value it, but they don't do it as extensively as we can do it. The comparable business schools or

faculties of economics, they do it the other way round, they don't do it mutually. They have their curricula like famous INSEAD Business School in Paris, they offer the programme there, they offer it in Abu Dhabi, in Singapore, in Sao Paolo, in Buenos Aires. So, they have an export of European-based, Western-based programmes. It is the same with the London School of Economics (LSE): They offer their programmes in New York, in Singapore, or Berlin. Top down, somehow colonial, I would say, not mutual.

But we do it differently. We have four universities that are involved: The Protestant University Wuppertal/ Bethel, resp. the Institute for Diaconic Science and Diaconic Management (IDM) in Germany, but we continue at three other universities where we didn't ask: can you give us your rooms please so that we can teach our students there? But we said: we need your lecturers, we need your academic excellence. That was the case also with Stellenbosch University in South Africa. Even there the Rector, Prof. Russel Botman, said: "Before you come to us, we didn't have the experience that lecturers from the business school, the economics department came to the faculty of theology for something new interrelated that you bring. This kind of mutuality, we could need more of it." And, maybe somebody is objecting, but there were really fascinating scholars you could listen to in South Africa.

It was the same at the Silliman University in Dumaguete City in the Philippines, with a colleague from the Divinity School. At the same time, we were cooperating there with the School of Public Affairs and Governance (SPAG). Their regional lecturers taught about strategies, about the political economy of Southeast Asia, about the theology of struggle, about Christian ethics. We had all those topics – but from regional lecturers. And it was the same at Sebastian Kolowa Memorial University (SEKOMU) in Lushoto in Northern-Tanzania, regional lecturers again, among them the former President of State. This gentleman, we had heard before, was also teaching our programme because we say that it's very, very interesting and necessary to combine academics, let's say pure academics from university, and leadership-experienced personalities like bishops, like heads of big organisations, who can teach our students. We have structured mutuality in the relation of theory and practise in leadership.

### 3. What is mutuality for students? Learning and living together

We believe and we realistically observe, we see that this programme contains three levels of mutual personal

learning of the students involved. The first thing is living together. You may imagine: men and women from Southeast Asia, from Africa, they have different mentalities, different cultures, different gender roles – and they were living together for nearly two years during five lecturing blocks in three continents. That's a learning community, just by living together, by sharing different kinds of settings, climates, temperatures, food: mutual learning by living together.

Then there is, of course, also mutual learning by studying together. If we talk, let's say, about relief work after a volcano eruption or if we talk about the responsibility of a hospital, our students can compare the situation in Rwanda to the situation in Namibia, to the situation in Hong Kong or the Philippines because we have students from different areas. And they ask: "What can we learn from each other? We have a similar problem. How do you do it, what is our stage of development?" It is mutual learning by living together, but, of course, it's organised, we have a lot of group work – just this kind of intercultural, international comparisons.

There are different nations from the South, but as we start in Germany the German experiences are a strong part of it. It's a learning community living together. Sometimes it is called a caravan moving all over the world.

Another very strong element of our common experiences is the morning devotion. Always at 8.00 in the morning we have a devotion, led by one of the students. And you may easily imagine who lively the spirituality is, if you have a liturgy from Tanzania and from Ghana and from mainland China. Meditation can be organised and be enriching by mutually preparing, leading and experiencing different forms of liturgy.

To sensually realise that we study and live in different contexts, we have organised a possibility to systematically experience and observe it. In each of the four sections and regions, we have one week of what we call "field research" – to discover for example Lutindi Hospital or Irente School for the Blind or a soup kitchen in Tanzania or a big hospital in Cape Town, compared to a small hospital, so that you know the area a little bit and understand the socio-economic context.

But we don't do it accidentally, it is not a touristic visit – there are observing methods. We apply a management model. It has become a big friend, the academic St. Gallen Management Model (SGMM). It is a model that considers the environment of society, economy and nature

(the socio-economic context) as well as management levels. We analyse both, what is done and the leadership experiences, the finance, the organisation, public relations, all of it. So, there is an organised way of making the mutual exploring vivid and accessible.

### 4. What contexts do we explore mutually? North-South encounters and spirituality

Some weeks ago, we, the international students, had a certain experience for the first time: we had invited German students, and we had an exchange of ideas for one and half hours. The result was that both sides discovered that their encounters were very enriching. For the German students the summary was: how small are our problems! What are we thinking about organising things better and talking about finance compared to the existential challenges of diaconia and looking at the broad picture of contexts of society. The horizons can be so universal and enriching because of personal encounters, not because of theory, but of encounters. And that, we believe, is a special element of enrichment by studying together.

Our conference today is addressing three levels: charity, advocacy and spirituality as the third level. The main focus of the Diaconic Management Master Program in Bethel is, of course, on organising charity and doing public advocacy, but at the same time we believe that there are incredible unlimited learning opportunities for the

Global North in the form of organising and experiencing spirituality. It is influential also considering its relevance for public life. We are used to separately thinking publicly and privately. We believe there is a lot of inspiration of mutual empowerment in our programme by focussing on this experience of being inspired by what you might call a public theology or public diaconia, or prophetic diaconia. The theological personal levels and the public levels of existence are brought together.

### 5. What challenges do we mutually face in the future? South-North studying

I am not saying that everything is nicely organised and mutual and we have reached a high standard. I think, we have reached a high standard, but still, if we ask about mutual empowerment and a global South-North- and North-South-perspective, we still discover that in this programme there are mainly, dominantly, students from the Global South. There are some criticisms: why are there no German students? We are in the process of organising this. According to UEM, a minimum of two European students should attend the next course. There are some diaconic organisations that say, yes, it's mutual learning, there should be German students who understand the richness and comparisons of diaconic challenges for our context.



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# Perspectives from the United Evangelical Mission (UEM)

## Holistic approach for all aspects of life

Empowering mutually, advocacy, care, spirituality – actually, this is what the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) is doing – in practice. We have five pillars in our work. One is called “advocacy”. Another one is “diaconia”. The three others are “evangelism”, “development” and “partnerships”. And all these five pillars together are mission. We say there is interdependency between these pillars, we cannot separate them because all five of them together form mission – as we understand it. Human rights, for instance, are always part of it. If there is an evangelism programme, we always will discuss whether this programme pays attention to the questions of advocacy. It is the same with diaconia, development, and partnerships.

And for advocacy – we ask whether advocacy is linked to the gospel. So, this is what we do as our core business. That means: what UEM is doing is empowering mutually and it could be something like the motto of UEM. Our Constitution of 2008 speaks of UEM as a “communion of churches” plus the v. Bodelschwingh Foundation Bethel. Paragraph 2 of our Constitution says: “In a world torn apart, they, the members of UEM, commit themselves to remain members of the one Body of Christ, and therefore to grow together into a worshipping, learning and serving community; share gifts, insights and responsibilities; call all people to repentance and new life; bear witness to the Kingdom of God in striving for justice, peace and the integrity of creation.”

## Learning through dialogue and ecumenical encounters

This is part of our Constitution and this is what we are doing. We understand UEM as a mission organisation of equal members. Within the organisation, all the members have the same rights and the same vote. There is no hierarchy between the UEM members. What does this mean exactly? We are part of the worldwide ecumenical move-

ment. We are various Protestant denominations, which enrich our communion. We are not only mainline churches, as we would say in German. We also have Methodists, Baptists, Anglicans, Lutherans, Reformed and United churches within the body of UEM. And we celebrate the Lord’s Supper together. Although that’s not always easy.

As you can imagine, if a very convinced Lutheran has to attend a Baptist service for Holy Communion, it is not easy for him. And it is vice versa: it is also a challenge for a Methodist or a Baptist to participate in a Communion service of the Lutheran church. But we do this because we think this is what we have to do – empowering each other, mutually, in our spiritual life. And we learn from each other at ecumenical encounters. That can be courses like the IDM is doing with this symposium on diaconia, it can be partnership meetings or a seminar on other issues. We accept the religious pro-existence by means of an interreligious dialogue. Dialogue with people of other faiths is substantial to UEM – even in situations where it becomes more and more critical.

Yesterday for example, in my office, I had a visit by a human rights activist from West Papua, Filep Karma. He was released from prison in 2015 and this was his very first trip to Europe. He told me, although he is a victim of the political system: “Please, do not give up with what you have already achieved in terms of a peace dialogue between Jakarta and West Papua.” You might have heard that the governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, by nickname called Ahok, was arrested for alleged blasphemy in Indonesia just a few days ago? We were also talking about this case and Filep Karma said: “If we as Christians turn back from dialogue now, we will do exactly what they want us to do. So, hold on to what you have learned from one another.” For us the idea of continuous dialogue comes from Asia.

## The fundament: worshipping, learning and serving

The “United in Mission Committee” which was one of the early structures of the UEM, formed in 1988, developed the concept of empowering mutually, which we still practice today. And, we heard it from the Constitution, it means worshipping, learning and serving. These dimensions are interlinked and inseparable. That has been the same for a very long time, actually from the very beginning. Sometimes, you have a strange discussion, especially in Germany, when the mission organisations are called by NGOs or development agencies to stay away from development work and do mission only. But mission is also development work, is advocacy, mission is diaconia. So how can we stay away from it if this is our core identity and we have to do this always together with our brothers and sisters all over the world? So, education and diaconia have been done internationally from the beginning of the mission onwards.

The very first Protestant missionary, Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg, was sent to South India in 1706 by the Danish king. And he became an advocate of the people in his area. Finally, the government sent him to prison because the Danish commander in Tranquebar said, and I am very happy to quote this: “This missionary is not like Martin Luther, this missionary is like Thomas Münzer, and we do not like Thomas Münzer”, (originally he even said: “I consider him to be a Thomas Münzer who wants to start a rebellion”). These missionaries became advocates of the people where they were sent to.

How did that happen? Because from the very beginning the idea was shared that mission, education and health service belong together. And Friedrich von Bodelschwingh also had the idea that mission belongs to diaconic work. For that reason, already in 1920, the Mission House Bethel – you still find the building here on the premises – was built in Bethel and the Bethel Mission Society worked together with the v. Bodelschwingh Foundation (previously v. Bodelschwingsche Anstalten Bethel, from 2009 on named v. Bodelschwingsche Stiftungen Bethel). More than any other mission societies, Bethel Mission underlined the integration of diaconia and mission. Pastors, nurses, sisters and deacons were sent out in mixed professional teams already in the beginning.

It is not a modern idea, it is already an old idea. And the congregation in Bethel, people with and without disabilities, was regarded as the “owner of the mission”. They were not the objects, they were subjects of the mission.

And the integration of diaconia and mission was also implemented into the theological education of pastors in Bethel (each student was supposed to do diaconic “service in the blue apron”). They had to do practical work in diaconia – a beautiful idea we still think is very valuable. Some historic pictures show the first mission station in the Usambara Mountains in Tanzania, they are looking a bit like a village in Southern Germany. And some others show the first missionaries: the families Johannsen and Wohlrab, who were sent out to East Africa in 1891. We will hear a quote from Johannsen in a minute.

## A young boy as a missionary’s teacher

Intercultural encounter and cooperation shaped the difference between what people in Germany might have thought at that time and what the missionaries learned when they were in the field. So, living together in the mission areas caused more changes in the thinking of both sides than expected. A lot of missionaries arrived with a superior feeling at the fields, but, living with the people changed their mind-sets. That had to do with understanding the difference between the languages and the cultures. Especially when they learned the language. There is a nice example in a letter one of the missionaries in East Africa wrote back to his organisation. He told the story how he was asking for the Swahili word for “bug”. And he got an answer from an eight-year-old boy. The next day, he asked the boy again: “So, this is a bug?” and he said the Swahili word. But the boy answered: “No, this is a ...” and he said another word. Then there was a third bug. And it was only then that the missionary figured out that each bug had a different name and the boy knew all the insects by name. And then he figured out that he did also know all the plants by name – whereas he, as a missionary, had a concept according to which those people in Africa only had one word for bug.

This is how they learned to appreciate that the culture they found within the language was a proof that those African people had a highly developed own system – in ethics, in language, even in justice. So, the missionaries had to change their minds and by adapting and also translating the gospel into the local languages, they figured out how difficult it was to understand some of the gospel terms.

Another example: in West Papua, there is an ethnic group, the Yali people. In West Papua, at that time of the early mission, nobody knew sheep. The “Lamb of God” meant nothing to them because they had no idea what a sheep was. So, the missionary who was sent there won-

dered which word could be a substitute. But the problem was that in West Papua, where he was living with the Yali, the pig had the same function as a lamb had in ancient times – Yali people gave a pig as a sign of reconciliation to somebody else. So, finally this missionary translated the “Pig of God”. You can imagine what problems he got when he sent back his proposal for translation to the mission organisation in Germany. But it is an example of how they changed their attitude by learning from one another, by learning together, and that also means mutual empowerment.

So, in the very beginning, as I already said, education and health service always belonged together. You can see this also at the mission stations in China, or another example on the picture of a mission school at the end of the 19th century with mixed student groups of people from the Usambara region and the German missionary kids who were trained together in classes.

Johannsen, one of the first missionaries in the Usambara Mountains, wrote back home: “Yes, for also in the unconverted heathens I have seen something of the glory of God and have sensed in their traditions something of the spirit which points at Christ ... The evangelist among the heathens must love the people as such, pity is not sufficient ... The evangelist primarily wants to learn.”  
Health and healing belong together

Those missionaries in the past understood that they did not come with a superior intellect. They understood: we have the same level and we need to learn together and to empower each other mutually. And sometimes, as General Secretary of the UEM, I hope that the people we send as short-termers or long-termers today, will get back to the same attitude. When they have their trainings together with me before they leave, I always quote from the past and they are very astonished how 100 years back we already had those ideas.

I do not have to talk about diaconia in Germany, you learned about that in your courses. But I was asked to give a short input also on the practical aspects of the UEM work: UEM, in terms of diaconia supports what UEM members are applying for.

For instance, there is a programme in Jakarta (Indonesia), in one of the mega cities of this world, and we are supporting a programme there – but we are not sending people, not necessarily. We are supporting and empowering the people at the place where they are. Yesterday when I was driving in my car, I heard a report about a new development in Germany, it is called “Telemedizin”

– telemedicine. That means to get the diagnosis via a Skype conference – you do not have to go to the doctor. And I thought: well, this is new, this is interesting for Germany, but we have been doing this for a couple of years in North Kivu in Congo already.

The church hospital in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the UEM were far ahead of what is a new development in Germany. Because they needed to consult medical specialists in remote places, where not all specialists are available. The question was: how can we consult specialist doctors? Therefore, they utilised the ecumenical network for getting in contact with specialists in other places through internet. And the system worked. When I was in North Kivu in the hospital of Katwa, I asked the doctor if we can test it directly and he said, yes, for this patient we need an eye specialist and we will call our consultant in New Delhi, in India. He called and they had a discussion with the patient about his eye problem and what would be the right treatment. So, “Telemedizin” – telemedicine – is something we could have learned already a couple of years back from our expertise in Congo.

Mutual empowerment means to develop together the answer to the question: what are the challenges of our time? So, we see, due to the demographic change, ageing is a challenge, not only in European countries but also in Asian and African countries, and we are doing training courses and think tanks in order to develop strategies for the future because we think that there is a need of diaconic education as we do with IDM in a broader way. So, that is not only on university level but maybe strengthened also on other levels.

There are some other examples from HIV/AIDS programmes for working together, providing training and consultancy. For example, in China, – it was done together with the Amity Foundation and the interesting point here was: The Chinese said already in the very beginning: “Please, send us somebody from Africa who has experience. Do not send us somebody from Germany because AIDS and its treatment in Germany are quite different. We need somebody who comes directly from the place where the challenges are very big.” And they worked together and developed a plan that could be adjusted to the Chinese situation.

We think that mission always has a holistic approach. Therefore, health and healing belong together. We work together, but we also celebrate together, and the benefit of somebody working in the mission field is, at least for a German pastor or my person, that my personal faith becomes stronger because I can see miracles – of peo-

ple who are strongly believing, praying and receiving. This is something that also means mutual empowerment because it strengthens also my life and my faith here in Germany.

Learning mutually also means learning from people of other faiths. In the UEM, we try not to use the term religion, we say people of other faiths because they have a faith. This is also linked to their experience, to their personal existence, and to God. Dialogue was already a topic in 1963 in Zanzibar (Tanzania). They even produced a stamp on “Religious Tolerance” which shows different churches, temples and a mosque together. In Germany, we were not even talking about other religions at that time, or about other faiths. But they already had dialogue programmes and a stamp like this. In our UEM archive we also have a photo that shows Muslim people in Indonesia who give a blessing to a newly installed pastor. I have known only one case in Germany until now where a pastor was blessed by a Muslim person, and there is no picture because his church would not have appreciated that. This means, we learn together and there is a lot to learn – not in one direction only. This means mutual empowerment.



**Rev. Volker Martin Dally** is General Secretary of the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) in Wuppertal (Germany).  
Photo: Fotostudio Kepper / UEM

# Observations on the Symposium

## Johanna Will-Armstrong: Two sides of the same coin

I have been invited to give a few brief reflections from the notes I took during all the interesting presentations we have just heard this morning.

Let me start with the last presentation by Volker Martin Dally, General Secretary of the UEM. I am always impressed to see how the UEM has grown in the combination of church and diaconia and the issues of mission, of preaching in combination with diaconic service. And it is good to see that it is one mission and one structure and one concern you are dealing with. Especially because in our German situation there is usually quite a distance between church and diaconia. They are like two sides of a coin. If you take a coin out of your wallet, you can see that the two sides never look at each other. So, I think what we can learn from the UEM in terms of bringing the two sides together, church and diaconia, is very special. We heard that if you go back in history, right back to the beginning of diaconia, both mission and diaconia were combined, and that is very, very smart.

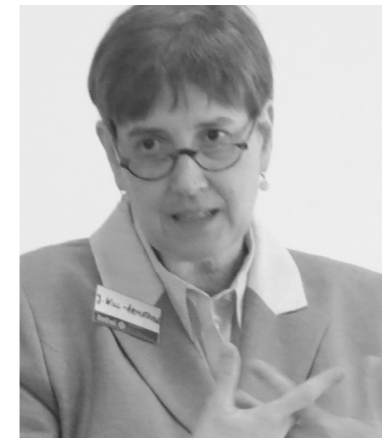
If you will allow me a little personal reference: I am very fond of the idea of the old Bethel fathers and mothers of the service with the blue apron. I am part of a women's activist group in the church. In our German churches, there is a big discussion about bishops and pastors wanting to be recognisable. It's always about bishops and pastors; it's never about the laity. And we women say: that's fine, but let's all wear the blue apron of service. Our bishop at that time was so annoyed that he didn't speak to me for four weeks. He didn't like the idea of wearing an apron and serving.

Also, Prof. Martin Büscher, thank you very much for your presentation and underlining how important education is for achieving our common aim. I think education will make all the difference for churches and diaconia in the future: to ensure our own identity, and our aims, but also to be able to conduct dialogue and to be present in our spirituality. People need education; we all need to en-

hance our education on a daily basis, because otherwise you can't conduct a dialogue. I will soon turn 60 but I know that I will never stop learning. It's always interesting to have a new achievement, because to learn also means to grow personally. One of my favourite sayings of Martin Luther is that every day you have to grow back into your baptism, into the grace of baptism, as a baptised child of God. So you can also grow into the external world and learning and education is a big part of that. I think with the International Master Programme you have put forward a brilliant programme. Thanks again to the UEM for supporting it. I know how much it means, also personally, to do all this travelling and organising and I would like to take the opportunity to thank you, Prof. Martin Büscher, and also Prof. Beate Hofmann for your very personal commitment to this programme. From Bishop Munga's talk, I wrote down the phrase: "the pulpit on the market square" – because that's very close to our situation here. It also reminds us, of course, of Acts 17, of Paul speaking in Athens at the Areopagus. And I am fully with you: I think we Christians must go out and be present on the market square with our mission, with our gospel but also with our social activities. In Germany there is a discussion on diaconia right now, but there seems to be something of a gap: diaconia as advocacy or diaconia as entrepreneurship?

Because Bethel is on the side of entrepreneurship, people say: "O, you cannot do advocacy – because you make money out of your diaconic enterprises." Well, we do not make money out of them. What we do is re-invest what we get – and we couldn't carry on as a diaconic enterprise if we didn't do that. But both should be seen together: it's service for the people and it's also advocacy for the people. And again, we must consider these two things jointly. I was very much taken with your reference to that image of the pulpit at the market square, which is an image also often used by Pastor Pohl here in Bethel. Thank you very much, Bishop Munga!

And also, Prof. Wanda Deifelt, thank you for your input from the Brazilian perspective. I have never been to Brazil. I was once supposed to go to Rio de Janeiro for a conference on the environment in 1992, but then I broke my arm, and since then I have never managed to go there. I really was taken with your words – I wrote down: "The Bible is the biggest advocate for us." That is one of the most important ideas I grabbed from your presentation: the Bible being the advocate for the development of mission programmes, of diaconia and getting people also to speak, even to speak out loudly. In Germany we have a saying that Christians should be "mündig". This word "mündig" is related to the word mouth. So people should be able to open their mouth also for themselves. And that's what Jesus asks people to do when he says:



**Rev. Dr Johanna Will-Armstrong** is a protestant theologian and a member of the Management Board of the v. Bodelschwingh Foundation Bethel. She previously worked as a member of the state ecclesiastical council of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia (EKvW) where she was responsible, among others, for theological training and college issues. She started her career as a congregation minister in the Ruhr Region and later became the personal assistant to two bishops of the EKvW. / Photo: Bettina v. Clausewitz/UEM

"What can I do for you?" He looks at people and asks: "What do you want, what do you need?" The Bible being the biggest advocate, that was very thrilling in the example you shared with us.

So, this is what I wrote down from the various presentations. You will have your own personal notes, and because you students are smart young people, you probably have much more elaborate notes than I do. But all these things I mentioned were important for me, and very encouraging: I will take them with me into my daily work. Dr Johanna Will-Armstrong is Deputy Chair of the Management Board of the v. Bodelschwingh Foundation, Bethel.

## Pafait Ekoume: More than soap and clothes

Thanks for the opportunity to share some of my understanding of the presentations with you. First concerning Brazil: In Africa, we know this country through football but today we also learned about the church and advocacy in Brazil. We hear that corruption is a big problem there and that this also concerns the former president Lula da Silva. So we ask ourselves: what is the role of the church concerning this issue? We also heard about football, World Cup, and Olympic Games. People advocate because the government spent a lot of money while people live in very poor conditions. What is the role of the church? We discover that Brazil is not too different

from our various situations in Africa where people live in poverty as well and need education. So, it was very important for us to hear that.

Concerning Bishop Stephen Munga's perspectives from Tanzania: during our last module we spent five weeks in Tanzania. In our field research we tried to compare diaconia in the Lutheran diocese there with the situation in Bethel. And we said: Bishop Munga's diocese is like a small Bethel because it takes care of orphans and people with mental disabilities. And when I compare it with my own country, Cameroon, we discover that in Cameroon,

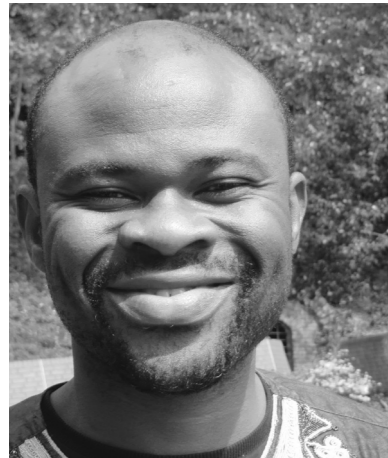
many missionary institutions have a lot of problems to deal with. But in Tanzania, we have learned that, after 100 years, they have many institutions there, for me, it was very, very important to see that.

I also learned: if you want to do advocacy, it is important to do advocacy by example. For instance, you can say: "Take care of orphans." And as a church, you take care of orphans. Or you say: "Don't forget people with disabilities," and as church you have institutions for people with disabilities. So the first advocacy action is by example – like Jesus told his disciples: "Give them food yourselves."

With regard to Prof. Martin Büscher: The International Master Program is our programme, so we know it by heart and I can give my own testimony. By this programme I have discovered myself: when I first came to follow it, I knew diaconia mainly as giving bread or giving soap. In our parish at home in Cameroon, when some-

one needs something, our pastor says: "O, our brother has a problem, please bring clothes, bring soap, bring rice" – and we give. But now we discovered that diaconia is going further: it means to defend human rights, diaconia is advocacy. And after one or two modules, I changed my thinking and thought about the big problem of my country – corruption. Now I say, for me, diaconia means fighting corruption.

From our General Secretary of UEM, Volker Martin Dal-ly, we learned that mission also means mutuality. If you want to be mutual, it is important to learn from each other. So, everybody has something to give and something to receive. You can give but it is important to be ready to receive and you can only be there to receive when you also have something to give. For African people this is very, very important because for a long time we thought that we were only the receivers, but, here we have learned now that we also have many things to give and we try to give all we have. Thank you.



**Parfait Ekoume**, Pastor of the *Eglise Evangélique du Cameroun (EEC)*, he holds a BA in Theology (2007) and a BA in Anthropology (2012), now he does his master on *Diaconic Management in Bethel*.  
Photo: Bettina v. Clausewitz/UEM

Inputs from four Workshops:

## Statement and Response



Photo: Ramona Hedtmann / UEM

## Diaconia in different contexts

### Students' Experiences

The centre of the afternoon programme of the symposium was taken by four workshops, led by students from Africa and Asia, who reflected on their experiences with diaconic work in their specific context. All workshops had the same pattern of an opening statement and a response in the beginning, followed by discussion. The three guiding questions were:

- **What is the role of human rights approaches in diaconic work?**
- **How are individuals, churches and communities empowered through diaconic work?**
- **What are the transformative aspects of diaconic work in different contexts?**

Below we document the opening papers for the workshops.

### S1 Tioria Sihombing (Indonesia)

## Statement: Empowerment means Awareness

Good afternoon everyone! My name is Tioria Sihombing. I am an ordained deaconess of the Huria Kristen Batak Protestant (HKBP) Church in Indonesia; previously I served as lecturer. I am supported by the United Evangelical Mission to do my PhD at the Institute for Diaconic Science and Diaconic Management (IDM) in Bethel. For today I was given three questions, which show that the issue of transformative diaconia is not an easy one.

Before I come to the questions, I think it is good to share some basic information about my country Indonesia. If you happened to ever live in Indonesia, you would understand that it is almost impossible to represent the whole of it. It is the 5th largest population in the world with more than 250 million people. It is the biggest Islamic country in the world because from these 250 million about 88 percent are Muslims. Yet it is not an Islamic country because it is not governed by the Shariah or Islamic law, but by a national constitution that assures

freedom of religion. Though we have more and more radical Muslims who want shariah law. Christianity and other religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism are a minority. Christianity – Catholic and Protestant together count about 8 percent of the population. Indonesia comprises 17,000 islands, rich in natural disaster, and rich in human diversity in terms of ethnic groups. The development is not prevalent all over the country.

Coming to the three questions, I want to answer:

### The role of human rights approaches

Human rights are the fundamental rights every human has by the fact of being human, they are neither created nor can they be abrogated. Whereas it is essential, so the UN Declaration of Human Rights states, if there is no other recourse, as a last resort, in case of rebellion against tyranny and oppression, human rights should be



protected by the rule of law. Human rights for example are: the right to life, to liberty and security of person, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the right to work, to have a free choice of employment, to have just and favourable working conditions and to be protected against unemployment, and so on.

So, what could be the role of an approach that is based on those basic human rights? For me diaconia plays a very important role. The diaconic work of the church or a faith based organisation should not see itself as subjects and the needy as objects because what they are supposed to get is their right and not only charity. If the person is not an object, it shows that diaconia must not create dependency but empower people. It has to be strengthened that the form of diaconia should not only be charitable but advocacy.

The human resource approach also strengthens our solidarity with our fellow human beings, because this approach addresses the rights of people regardless of their religious backgrounds, professions, skin colour, etc.

Yet, for us as churches in Indonesia the distinctions between the two – the human resource approach and diaconia – has to be clear: the motivation of diaconic work is God's love.

### Empowered through diaconic work

As stated before, as long as the church does not have the transformative element of diaconia, it will not empower people – not individuals, nor communities, nor itself. Therefore churches or faith based organisations which are involved into diaconic work should think about and put efforts into finding ministries or services that promote transformation: for example education, training for persons with different abilities, advocacy right of community members in mining area, etc.

### Transformative aspects

Empowerment: Empowerment can be defined in general as the capacity of individuals, groups and/or communities which gain control over their living conditions and achieve their own goals, thereby being able to work towards helping themselves and others to maximise the quality of their lives. In our context or at least in my church we do it

through education, training, financial empowerment etc. Sustainability: There are a lot of things that we should consider concerning sustainability. In this point I would like to focus on financial points because at least in my context I observed that almost all of our diaconic projects are dependent on donors. I don't want to say that we do not need it. We need it, but for how long? Are we actually also trapped in the hole of dependency? But how could we share responsibilities with our donors? How effective can we make use of the finances? How efficient can we plan our activities?

Advocacy: The problem is, there are many people who do not know about their rights. Therefore the church should speak for them and empower them to speak out for their rights. As example, in Indonesia we have many multinational mining companies. Not far from my place we have one of them. The people were offered so much money and so many opportunities to find jobs when they would sell their land to the company, so many of them did. These poor villagers were living on the land of their great-grandparents, living from farming, but they sold out the land. And now they have no rice fields anymore. They were not given jobs because they have low education. Those people easily believed what they were promised and did not think further about their decision. My church assists the community members several times and sensitized their awareness about their rights and the right of environment, it became like a watch dog concerning these mining companies.



**Tioria Sihombing** is a deaconess and belongs to the Huria Kristen Batak Protestant (HKBP) Church in Indonesia. / Photo: Bettina v. Clausewitz/UEM

## R1 Godwin Ampony (Ghana)

# Response: Stepping in for the Government

Ladies and Gentlemen, response in the context of Ghana: Human Rights are one of the many social intervention programmes carried out by civil society organisations, by individual human rights lawyers and by religious bodies like my church, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana (EPCG), referred to as EP Church.

The "Justice For All Programme" for example, initiated by the Judiciary Service under the leadership of the current Chief Justice of Ghana, is actively participated by the Ghana Prisons Ministry – an inter-denominational ministry working with the Ghana Prison Service. The initiative is to expeditiously deal with remand victims (prisoners) in prison who have been there between 5 to 30 years without sentencing! But Christ came "to set the prisoners free, to proclaim acceptable year of the Lord, to heal the broken hearted".

The whole idea of empowering individuals, churches or communities, is aimed at changing lives and transforming societies, with the church embedded. Empowering takes place in institutions of learning, in skills development training centres such as Church Universities for example the E.P. University College for tertiary education, the E.P. Technical and Institute for Vocational and Technical Skills acquisition and development and the E.P. Church Activity Centre, for training of young teenage mothers and girls – these are some of the established diaconic works. It is to empower and further self-reliance economically, financially, socially, culturally and sustainably.

By the ministry of diaconia, the identity and capacity of my church – the EPCG – has broadened and has

helped to maintain our culture and tradition because we are empowered. For example in one of our intervention communities in northern Ghana, the church was referred to by the community as the only "government" they have ever knew in terms of supporting their livelihoods. Transformative diaconia can be observed in employment such as training of domestic help by professionals and placement in decent families, microcredit projects and savings for solidarity groups, provision of bursaries and scholarships for education in critical work fields such as nursing, teaching, medicine, diaconia, theology etc. In addition a peaceful political environment through participation in election processes, environmental justice through the establishment of networks of religious bodies in climate change in Ghana are some more of the concrete transformative diaconic works of the church in Ghana.



**Godwin Ampony** is a pastor of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Ghana (EPCG). Photo: Maxie Kordes / UEM

## Statement: Being the voice of the voiceless

My name is Janine Van Wyk and I come from Namibia. I am an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN), and I have taken part in the International Master Diaconic Management Course at the Institute for Diaconic Science and Diaconic Management (IDM) in Bethel. Currently I am working as research assistant in the Chair of Economics and Business Ethics at the IDM, as well as writing my doctoral thesis.

I would like to start with a quote from our former Bishop Dr Zephania Kameeta: "In our pain and fight against injustice, we discover the value and beauty of unity, human relationships and humanity as a whole." In order to understand this statement in terms of the role of human rights approaches in diaconic work, the empowerment of individuals, churches and communities, as well as the transformative aspects in diaconic work in my context, I would like to give a brief background of my country: Namibia, situated in south western Africa, has about 2,5 million inhabitants. It has reached its 27th year of independence and is classified by the World Bank as a middle-income country.

Some of the biggest problem areas in Namibia include unemployment, a high level of inequality, poverty and gender based violence. As Namibia has been part of South Africa, the people suffered injustice and oppression during Apartheid. Already during this time there was a need to advocate for human rights, in order to restore dignity. Since the African tradition favours a collective approach rather than a focus on individual needs and actions, it was not surprising to find the church at the forefront, advocating for the liberation of the Namibian people. Through fighting together for the rights of others, lasting relationships were formed that are still evident in Namibia today.

### The role of human rights approaches

Human rights approaches are vital in and for the diaconic work; without such an approach diaconic work will not reach its full potential. A human rights approach enables our diaconic work to not only provide charity to individuals or our church members, but it will give a more focused and elaborate expression in terms of issues such as oppression, injustice and discrimination. It builds a bridge

by bringing different stakeholders together. It strengthens the church, which is the voice of the voiceless, as well as it enables the church to take a stand in unity, to remind and connect with the government in ensuring that the rights of people are recognised, and the dignity of people is restored and realised.

It is a powerful source of empowerment. When the rights of people are taken into account, it ensures and creates awareness, a change, a working together in order to realise and satisfy the needs of people as individuals, churches and communities.

### Empowered through diaconic work

Through diaconic work, human dignity is restored and an awareness of rights is ensured. In Namibia gender based violence is escalating. Hence, an ecumenical initiative of a shelter for battered women and children through providing love, care and protection was launched. Together with the Woman and Child Protection Unit of the Namibian Police, the Friendly Haven Shelter, established in 1996, provides women and children with counselling as well as a safe place to stay. In an effort to take a stand against gender based violence and to promote the rights of women and children, the shelter holds regular meetings with communities under the theme: "No one deserves to be abused." Through these meetings, as well as information sharing in different church congregations, awareness of rights is created and women are empowered to stand up against abuse and to report it.

On a national level the Namibian Government has joined hands with different churches in organising National Prayer Days and other activities. This is due to the fact that an increasing number of women is killed by their partners or spouses, often in front of their children. One of the reasons is that women are now more aware of their rights and in their effort to report abuse or end the relationship, pay with their lives.

Diaconic work done within congregations has taken up a more prominent role. So much so that the United Lutheran Theological Seminary in Namibia has included Diaconia in the curriculum last year. This creates an opportunity for students to share experiences in diaconic work as well as finding new avenues to enhance diaconic work in Namibia.

### Transformative aspects

In an effort to contribute to the eradication of poverty and to relieve the plight of the poor, the ELCRN has started the initiative for a Basic Income Grant (BIG). Discussions started in 2004 in order to investigate the possibilities of a universal grant to all Namibians. A cash grant of 100 Namibian dollars was to be given to everyone and together with ecumenical partners as well as NGOs, a BIG Coalition was established and in 2007, a two-year pilot project started in the village of Otjivero. The results of this pilot project show that the basic needs of people were met, school children could wear school uniforms, and women could start income generating projects, for example a bakery, selling bread to the community. The living standards of people in Otjivero changed and this caused people from other communities to move to Otjivero. Even though the Namibian Government has not responded favourably, the international BIG Coalition has continued its efforts to advocate for the eradication of poverty:

- This effort is one of the most powerful tools in advocacy and lobbying campaign in Namibia.
- It has put poverty and inequality to be a top priority on the national agenda of the government.
- It has contributed to the current focus of the Namibian president on poverty eradication. Through the Harambee prosperity plan, the Namibian people are seen now as one household and nobody should be left behind.
- Furthermore, a new Ministry of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare was established with the former Bishop of the ELCRN, Dr Zephania Kameeta as the minister thereof.

Through advocating for the rights of people, awareness of rights is created. This in turn causes a change in mindset and behaviour. A platform for discussion and dialogue between relevant stakeholders is created and individuals start to take ownership of their situation in order to move into a direction of self-reliance. Therefore we cannot keep silent. We should continue proclaiming this with a loud voice in order to ensure a better future for us and for our children.



**Rev. Janine van Wyk** is a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN).  
Photo: Private

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## R2 Kenneth Ku Hiu Fung (Hong Kong)

## Response: Gender justice in the Village

Thank you, Janine, for this inspiring statement. I would also like to share an experience concerning gender justice in a diaconic project. But I will not focus on what and how a certain organisation is working, I rather make the voices of some rural women from China heard in this conference. In rural China, in general sons are preferred

to daughters, baby boys to girls. It is estimated that every year around 80.000 female infants are "missing", mainly due to sex-selected abortion.

Please listen to the story of Ms. Guo, a rural women from Central China: "My firstborn was a daughter; my mother in law never liked her. Once my husband and I were

## Statement: Trapped in debt and poverty

Talking about human rights in the context of palm oil proliferation in Indonesia will bring us to different human rights issues and problems or abuses. At first, I want to explain briefly the conditions of the palm oil proliferation and why our government wants to maintain this field as one of the leading raw materials of the country. Currently the Indonesian palm oil industry produces around 21 million tons of crude palm oil (CPO) on over 9 million hectares. The government has set a production target of 40 million tons CPO by 2020. Yields from oil palm plantations in Indonesia dominate the supply to global markets. Presently, Indonesia is the largest CPO producer in the world.

But on the other hand, according to some researchers, the palm oil proliferation is leading to negative environmental consequences. Approximately 18 million hectares of tropical rainforests have been cleared and commercially logged in Indonesia. The forest fires are raging across over 4 million hectares and cause social and health impacts as well as they are creating enormous amounts of greenhouse gas emissions with far-reaching environmental and economic consequences. Biofuels in general have been associated with the food crisis and are accountable for 75 percent of the rise in food prices.

Some social effects of palm oil proliferation highlight land conflicts, critical labour conditions and human rights abuses. Vulnerable groups such as women and children are particularly affected. Consequently, resentment and dissatisfaction have resulted in 3,500 land conflicts in palm plantations, of which 660 are closely monitored and documented, they are pertaining to abuses of human rights of indigenous people, local communities, smallholders and workers.

Smallholders are trapped in exploitative industrial relationships in partnership schemes and agreements. The common system of palm oil production in Indonesia is based on the nucleus plasma system, by which 80 percent of the land is allocated to the company as a nucleus estate and 20 percent is handed over to the society as plasma fields. Farmers give up their rubber areas, fields and traditional gardens and receive two hectares of oil palm in exchange. The reduction in the size of their land holdings and of multiple livelihood opportunities (i.e. from rice, rubber, gardens) makes them highly depend-

ent on the oil palm harvest of their plasma plot, while the income they receive is highly dependent on the CPO price fluctuations in the regional and global markets.

Changing the multicultural economic system into mono-cultural farming therefore drastically reduces the elasticity of the plasma farmer economy. It makes them trapped in debt and poverty. They do not have any reserve land areas to expand cultivation extensively, such as by opening a new oil palm plantation for their future generations. The family of plasma farmers can only pass on the poverty to their descendants. Poverty amongst the plasma farmers is structural because of the imbalance between the plasma farmers and the company in relation to the production.

All these conditions of injustice require the sensitivity of the church concerning its role and calling. The church should not turn a blind eye to all these issues of injustice including the experiences of smallholders in the midst of the huge palm oil business. The church has the mission to witness the good news of God to all people in word and deed. That is why faith and life, proclamation and practice should not be divided.

Some further impacts of the palm oil industry are environmental, cultural and social-economic impacts. Plantations are one of the main drivers of deforestation in Indonesia, destroying the habitat of endangered wildlife. Fires used to clear the land and peat bogs are drained for plantation, releasing hundreds of millions of tons of carbon dioxide, making Indonesia the third highest contributor of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the world.

The arrival of palm oil plantation has altered also the social life system of local communities and destroys their cultures and indigenous values. Tradition and rituals, which have become part of the local agricultural practices, are lost often due to the loss of sacred sites. As a result, local traditions and languages are also lost. Indigenous cultures are often not put in writing, thus if such culture dies, the whole important cultural components will also die along. Besides, that some traditional values like solidarity and working together are replaced by corruption and individualism.

The most vulnerable group as a result of palm oil prolifer-

working in the field, while my mother in law took care of my baby daughter. When we came back home, we heard our daughter's crying but we could not find where she was! At the end, we found that she was "buried" inside a thick blanket, her crying face was in dark purple – one minute more and she would have died. I was holding her tightly and cried aloud for so long. We dared not to stay in our village anymore. So we moved to the city with our daughter and worked as migrant workers."

Being a female in rural China can be dangerous and shameful. Being a mother of daughters only, is double shameful. This is the denial of equality of men and women, although both are created in the image of God. But empowerment makes things different. Later being a participant of the "Gender justice village rules amendment Project", Ms. Guo converted her stories into a drama and acted on the stage. Already in the first ten minutes, 80 percent of over thousand people in the audience were weeping, she recalled.

So, in the first step the project empowers women to advocate for themselves and builds awareness of gender equality among themselves. In the second step they again become agents of change in the community, building awareness among others in their own way, with drama, songs, embodiments or paintings.

To further awareness building even more, women also started to strive for a change in rules and laws. Hear the story of Ms. Jing: "In March 2009, I was a women representative attending the 'Village rules amendment Meetings'. I knew, I must speak for women, so I proposed: No matter men or women from other places marry to our village, they should entitle the same rights and welfare of villagers. This motion was adopted later in the revised village rules. This was the first time I can find my ownership in the village, I was so proud."

This was not just a brave speaking out of a rural woman. It was the kick-off of a "Gender justice village rule amendment Movement" across the country. Thousands of village heads and officials from other areas came to this village to learn how to promote and improve the status of women by village rules amendments.

So, I spoke about empowerment in two dimensions: One is the psychological dimension, the other one is the degree of self-control over your own live. Empowerment brings transformation, in the notion of renewing relationships between women and men in a just way, by renewal of individual awareness, community customs, and rules and laws.

Concerning mutual empowerment, I just want to say that not only oppressed women can be empowered and transformed. Interestingly, also the village head Mr. Jing, who paid bribe money to be elected as the village head, meanwhile is a crucial supporter of the project. Today he says: "I used to be a bad guy, but after joining this project, I was forced to be a good guy." In conclusion this means: Not only the oppressed can be empowered and transformed, but also the sinners, like tax collector Mark or like Mr. Jing.



**Kenneth Ku Hiu Fung** is a journalist by profession and a member of the Chinese Rhenish Church (CRC) in Hong Kong. / Photo: Maxie Kordes / UEM

ation are the indigenous communities whose land rights are defined by custom rather than by positive law. Indigenous peoples' right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) has been recognised by a number of inter-governmental organisations and international bodies, such as the United Nations (UN) and the European Commission. Nevertheless, plantations are being established through non-transparent means.

Research also shows the worsening situation of women, as their livelihoods, cultures and economic circumstances are transformed. The marginalisation of women has been cited as a cause of the increasing of prostitution in oil palm areas. Other social impacts include the seizure of labour rights on palm oil plantations. There is a minimum protection from work hazards, insufficient wages, working without contracts and vulnerability to various forms of abuse.

### Diaconia and Human Rights

Diaconia works to spread understanding about and achieve respect for universally acknowledged human rights. Diaconia tries to link its efforts to national and international advocacy. So, I can say that the human rights approach broadened the scope of our church services. But the problem is that some people do not yet see diaconia as a human rights issue. With this human rights approach, it highlights the complexities of issues we are facing. The complexities of people we are serving. This is another expression of diaconia. We are serving all people on the same level, not only Christians but also Muslims. We will also be open for the alignment with other advocacy groups which have the same interests.

Churches must have a clear role in public life. If the churches want to be witnesses of the Kingdom of God (Luke 17:21), they have to engage in the public debate, which leads to advocacy. For the church advocacy is at the heart of its prophetic function as well as of public mission.

According to Martin Luther, the summa of a Christian is to bear the burden of one's neighbour, a Christian does as Christ does, identifies with the suffering of his or her neighbour. Here lies the question: diaconia means serving, but how to place it into the middle of the world, which is dominated by power? How to show diaconia in the real social, economic and political life and bring about positive change? Is it possible to transform the power structure by the spirit of service? From these questions arises the awareness that the challenge of our diaconia today is to adequately deliver services to the people in need but also to challenge and transform systems and policies, which cause injustice.

Combining advocacy and diaconia is a challenge where the essence of practicing love in action to the neighbours, goes hand in hand with political strategies. The pessimist answer from the smallholders for the diaconia of the church must be transformed. The role of the church in diaconia and advocacy will help them to see their conditions, empowering them and also challenge the government and corporations, and policies that cause injustices and inequalities. There is a calling for advocacy and diaconia for the churches in Indonesia.



**Rev. Jenny Purba** is a pastor of the Simalungun Protestant Christian Church (GKPS) in North Sumatra, Indonesia. / Photo: Bettina v. Clausewitz / UEM

## Response: Make people independent

### The role of human rights approach

Human rights have a long history in South Africa. On 21 March 1960, 69 people died and 180 were wounded in Sharpeville when police fired on a peaceful crowd that had gathered in protest against the pass laws, one of the key laws of apartheid policy. This day marked an affirmation by ordinary people, rising in unison to proclaim their rights. But it seems that nothing much has changed in terms of human rights in South Africa since the end of apartheid 1994. Our country citizens are still suffering and their human rights are violated.

The statistics say that South Africa in 2015/2016:

- 18,673 murders occurred
- 42,596 rapes were reported (many cases are not reported for fear of victimisation)
- 710 drug related crimes were reported
- 54 percent of SA people lived below the poverty line (0.80 Euro per day)
- Unemployment has gone up
- some people still do not have running water, no drinking water
- many of our citizens don't live in homes and have to sleep on the street

Therefore, if you look at these figures and all the other social ills in our society, the diaconic work that we do as churches, has to focus on human rights. Every human being, irrespective of sex, race or social background has equal value and is created in the image and likeness of God. That's why we have to defend the dignity of all humans. Diaconia has to contribute to empower people to regain their dignity. Where ever we do diaconia, we have to transform people from being broken and make them whole again (or try to do it). Yes, through our advocacy work, we need to make the government aware of all these issues and remind them of their responsibilities. We have to influence political decisions or ecological issues. Yes, we have to lobby for all this so that policies will change, that they can better the lives of individuals and give them their dignity back.

### Empowered through diaconic work

I am a pastor for almost 12 years now. And before doing this course, I believed that charity works and welfare

relief was the answer to all our problems in society. As a church we handed out food parcels, we had soup kitchens and we gave out old clothes to people. There is nothing wrong with this kind of diaconic work. Situations such as these are part of human reality and there will always be individuals within any community whose circumstances necessarily demand some kind of welfare assistance.

But doing this course on Diaconic Management, and reading Toxic Charity by Robert Lupton and a few other books on diaconia, I realised that I have done injustice to the individuals we helped and to our community as well. Because it made them dependent on us. Lupton says, that if relief does not prepare transition to development in a timely way, compassion becomes toxic. And if I look in our community and the role the church played, I see that we did not in any way transform our community. We can only empower our communities if they do things for themselves. The church needs to hear, to listen to what the needs of the community are and not just assume what they need. It needs a participatory interaction. When people start doing things for themselves, that's when they start to empower themselves and not be dependent any more.

### Transformative aspects

Diaconia seeking transformation is a service that makes the celebration of life possible for all. Truly authentic and transformative diaconia invites both, comforting the victim and confronting the principalities and powers. It must heal the victim as well as the one who is the victimiser.



**Rev. Claudette Williams** is a pastor of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). Photo: Matthias Börner / UEM

## Statement: Journey towards Self-reliance

The theological foundation of diaconia may be found in both, the Old and the New Testament. According to the scriptures the diaconic work aims at preventing and/or correcting injustices in the society. Theresa Joan White, cited by the World Council of Churches (WCC), argues that the Old Testament law provided a variety of ways to alleviate the sufferings of the poor and the prophets spoke as advocates for widows and orphans. In the early church the first deacons were appointed – among other tasks – to serve the Gentiles, and why? Because they were forgotten or given less than Christians of Jewish origin. Such cases do exist also here and now in our society. Some groups and people like women, children, persons with disabilities and other marginal groups are left out in the mainstream programmes, policies and laws. So, in this statement I will discuss what is the role of the church in various contexts in ensuring the rights of those people at the margins. The case study of my presentation is on the project “Empowerment and Autonomy of Women: Ushirika wa Neema – Deaconess Centre in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania”.

### Human rights approaches in diaconic work

Historically the diaconia was a work of charity. Building hospitals, giving out food, water and clothes, helping the elderly and taking care of the sick and disabled. However, by this it is less likely to correct the injustice rather than to perpetrate it. Some of the weakness of this approach is that people who are to benefit from the diaconia (in most cases less privileged, silenced and oppressed) have less or no voice about the services and how they are provided. They are objects of the pity by the church or individuals and sometimes this type of help does more harm than good. It is dis-empowering rather than empowering, it enslaves more than it liberates, it dehumanises rather than uplifting the human dignity and finally it reinforces the cycle of vulnerability and dependence. Other critics say, such diaconic work does not address the root causes of injustice but in a way, it reinforces the injustice.

So, the role of the human rights approach, which aims at recognising the recipients as subjects and the real decision makers of the services they receive, is to correct the loopholes of the charity approach. It has its foundation in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and access to social services and other basic freedoms are also basic.

The new approach brings change in services provision by changing the rules of the game.

The job of the diaconic worker will no longer be to provide services but to facilitate and journey with the recipients towards self-reliance and independence through empowerment and advocacy for the change in structures and systems with the ultimate goal to deracinate the causes of vulnerability. In other words: the human rights approach to diaconic work seeks to remove barriers in the society that prevent equal participation and enjoyment of equal rights, basic freedoms and opportunities. And how? Through the empowerment of human rights holders and – from my perspective – Church and diaconic workers are also empowered and cared for in this process as they learn from living experiences and the resilience of the suffering groups.

### Empowered through diaconic work

According to Godrick Efraim Lyimo in “Empowerment and Autonomy of Women” (2016) the diaconic work will only be able to empower individuals, when the church shifts from the traditional diaconia or charitable diaconia to transformative diaconia. This is a more engaging approach, proactive with both, long and short-term outcomes, systematically and strategically constructed to uproot the causes of social inequities and inequalities.

It is a threefold package with three main elements:

- The individuals are educated their voices are strengthened to demand their rights and influence the duty bearers who are reluctant to deliver according to the local and global standards and commitments. It is like facing the strongholds, however, the suffering does not prevent the people to still dream bigger and hope for a fairer world.
- How are communities empowered? The church is also a community, however, for the methodological purposes in this paper, I will try to explore how the mainstream communities are empowered through diaconic work. The communities are empowered through sensitisation and social mobilisation to become agents of change. This is a holistic approach that empowers the communities to understand that the causes of inequalities lie in the socio-economic structures. They identify the issues, plan, act and evaluate whether the change is reached

and the cycle may start again with new objectives in terms of change aimed at. The community becomes the subjects and determinants of their destiny and that of the poor, marginalised and vulnerable. That understanding is redemptive and takes time. But it is worthy investing because it is only when the communities join the minority in the quest for justice that the change will happen and can be sustained. On the other hand, the communities discover the person from periphery and only what they learn through our interactions can lead to actions.

- When the church engages in transformative diaconia, which is a continuous process, against the dehumanising and desecrating ?? factors of poverty and vulnerability it gets more empowered through this engagement and partnership themselves. That endeavour will require multidisciplinary teams and a multi-stakeholder partnership. So, the church will need to be empowered to take up the challenge. Such churches are or should be skilled in communication, advocacy, lobbying and networking. When the church prefers doing public policy advocacy rather than services delivery, it needs to be well equipped and those new skills may be imparted through trainings and courses such as diaconic management, public theology and community development. Of course, the theoretical trainings should be backed up and accompanied by the practical experiences gained through living with and listening to the right holders in their contexts – again another mutual learning. We give and we receive from one another.

### Transformative aspects in diaconic work

The Lutheran Church Federation described the transformation already in 2009 as “an ongoing process of total reorientation of life with all its aspirations, ideologies, structures, and values”. As such here are some of the aspects:

- Continuity: It is “a continuous process of rejection of that which dehumanises and desecrates life and adher-

ence to that what affirms the sanctity of life and gifts in everyone and promotes peace and justice in society”.

- Multi-stakeholder engagement: Transformation engages and changes all those who are part of it. In that manner, transformational diaconia helps to overcome so-called helpers’ syndromes, practices and relations that separate “we” from “they”. In the end, no person escapes vulnerability.
- Process: well-motivated, realistically formulated and planned, implemented and evaluated and the lessons learnt from previous programmes are incorporated into the new planning.

**Conclusion:** Human rights informed and should inform the diaconic work furthermore in the 21st century. Through rights-based approaches individuals, communities and churches are empowered to anchor the change and sustain it. Hence the process, though long and challenging, is worth taking to affirm the human dignity and celebrate the beauty of human diversity. We give and we receive, so we win together. We are empowered and we learn mutually from each other.



**Mathilde Umuraza** is a social scientist, a public health scientist at master level and graduated in 2015 as Master of Arts in Diaconic Management; she is a member of the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda (EPR).  
Photo: Private

## Response: Change of priorities

When the French first announced the Declaration of Human Rights in 1789, China was still ruled by the emperor Qianlong with Confucianist culture. Women back then still were required to wrap their feet to only 6 inches when they were children to get married later. Today, when I look at the guiding question of this conference: “What’s the role of human rights approach in diaconic work?”, unfortunately, I have to say that words like: “human rights” and “diaconia” are very strange to our Chinese culture. It is not inbuilt in our culture. We seem to have a totally different definition of human rights, and we know nothing about the word diaconia. In our 5,000 years long history, most of the Chinese never believed human beings were created by God (the western God) and were expelled from Eden garden due to sin that they had committed. Our culture doesn’t recognise the original idea of human rights, which goes back to the understanding that human beings were created in God’s image and therefore each individual is empowered with human dignity.

But it is interesting to see that, when the concept of human rights was introduced to China, after years of development, according to the statistic conducted by the World Values Survey ([worldvaluessurvey.org](http://worldvaluessurvey.org)) between 2005-2009, in comparison to countries like Germany, Italy, Sweden or Poland, the result was that the Chinese actually scored highest in the category “a lot of respect for individual human rights” with 26,6 percent. Even more interesting is, that we also scored highest in the category of “don’t know”, with 18.5 percent. Apparently, it further proves that we Chinese have a totally different definition of human rights, compared to the western countries.

For the western culture, which is recognised as the leading culture in the world, when people talk about human rights, they are referring mostly to political rights and citizen rights. But when the Chinese talk about human rights, not forgetting the scale of poverty China used to have, human rights seem to start with survival rights and social rights. And that’s the reason why China has obtained such a big progress in economy growth. In our context, central government has decided to put the priority in eliminating the poverty of the nation as our main task in human rights. Now, one of the impacts of this great economic progress that it has brought to China,

is the development in other social aspects. Now society and government pay more attention to social welfare and human rights as well. And you may also have noticed that most of the Chinese churches have been focusing now on preaching and building more churches. There is remarkably less awareness of diaconia and social service in the Chinese churches than elsewhere.

To further respond to the leading questions of “How are individuals, churches and communities empowered through diaconic work?” and “What are the transformative aspects in diaconic work in different contexts?” I will use the example of the HIV/AIDS programme in China, which was also mentioned this morning in the presentation by Volker Martin Dally. It happens to be the programme held by my organisation, the Amity Foundation. Amity Foundation is a faith-based organisation, which works closely with the churches in China to prompt them to do social service. In the early 1990s, hundreds of thousands of poor Chinese farmers in Henan Province contracted HIV. Chinese officials have been reluctant to openly discuss HIV/AIDS because they feared to be blamed for the epidemic.

More than 1,200 people in the area “regularly” sold their blood for 50 Yuan per visit. It was the local church pastor of the community who approached Amity for help. When the Amity staff went into the village, they saw a woman sitting in front of her house weeping. We asked why she was crying, and she told us, her husband had died due to HIV/AIDS; she herself was also an HIV/AIDS patient. Her daughter had tried to hang herself the week before due to the desperation. And her son had run away from home, away from this hopeless situation. When we asked her: “What have you done with the money you earned?” She told us, she had used the money for three things: the first thing she did was to pay for her younger brother’s wedding; secondly, she built a house for her family and then lastly, she paid the penalty for giving birth to the second child (at that time, China was still practicing one child policy).

So, shelter, getting married and giving birth, these are the three most basic things in a human’s life, and yet she had paid such a heavy price to get them. With the fund and aid from overseas, Amity designed an aiding programme for these people in Henan Province. Not just

Amity is helping the villagers, but also local churches are involved, they make regular visits and provide long-term support to the patients. With all these efforts done by Amity and local churches, the government has also changed its attitude. The central government started to promote “taking targeted measures to help people lift themselves out of poverty”, which has contributed greatly to eliminate poverty in China.

Lastly, I would like to add one more point: diaconia actually gives the goal and mission to a faith-based organisation like the Amity Foundation, so that it distinguishes itself from other non-profit organisations. The word “diaconia” focuses on the individual first. It starts with someone who is known by God as individual, and further it leads to have faith in God, therefore he or she will serve the community as the fruit of this faith. When I was a student in primary school, our education and culture used to tell us, that we have to be useful to the society after we grow up. However, unfortunately, after I had grown up, I looked around and realised that most of us were still fighting only for our own interests. Therefore, I joined the Amity Foundation. I thought, I could be someone useful

for the society. But now, when I look back, I realise that my intention to join Amity Foundation back then, was still based on self-interest and seeking for self-satisfaction. In fact, only when you have the real understanding of the word “diaconia”, you would be able to understand, WHY we are doing this. Therefore, HOW we could do it.



**Xiaoxuan (Shine) Xie** works for the Amity Foundation in China, she holds a Bachelor in Business and a Diploma in Hospitality and Tourism Management. Photo: Maxie Kordes / UEM

# Conclusions: Churches should be “Watchdogs”

Beate Hofmann:

## Between Charity and Advocacy

Today, we talked a lot about the relationship between advocacy and charity. It seems that the challenge is, to find the right balance between advocacy and charity. There are situations like natural disasters that need immediate help. The task is to find the point where this help needs to be stopped in support for sustainable development. Mutual empowerment includes a good balance between give and receive. And it needs clarity about where we face common challenges and where we have to challenge each other.

What are common challenges? There is a struggle for understanding diaconia in an appropriate way. All our churches are called to advocate for justice; in all churches there are voices that are reluctant about getting involved in socio-political issues and prefer concentration on spiritual issues. The awareness that churches are part of civil society is not yet a common notion. Being a diaconic church means to be the watchdog for justice in regard to politics. This role is not always easy. In order to support and empower us in this struggle, it is important to share stories about success in advocacy as well as stories about difficulties that we are facing in our struggles. By sharing these stories, we encourage each other.

Regarding human rights, this international symposium shows the challenge to connect an approach to human rights of the individual with an approach to human rights of the community. It is necessary to define rights, needs and responsibilities in both directions. Advocating human rights is neither only individualistic nor only communi-

ty-oriented. There needs to be space for the individual to grow as well as for the community to develop.

### What do we learn in Europe from diaconia in Africa, Asia or Latin America?

Two dimensions: Listening to the lectures and the presentations in the workshops stresses the need to understand diaconia not only as caring for those who need support and assistance, but also as advocating for human rights. In the German system, these two dimensions of diaconic work are sometimes separated.

Fundraising: By looking into international diaconia we learn to be more creative in regard to money and resources. In Germany we sometimes rely very much on public funding. There is a tendency to provide only services that are refunded. Looking into international diaconia can encourage us to analyse clearly our calling in God's mission in regard to justice, peace and integrity of creation and dare to start new initiatives to meet urgent needs or deal with serious problems creating new ways of raising funds.

Interreligious challenges: Interfaith cooperation seems to be a challenge for diaconia in many contexts. I find it helpful to listen to each other to learn how diaconia deals with interreligious or intercultural challenges in other countries. So, we can learn from each other in order to establish peaceful relationships among religious communities, deal with conflicts that are nurtured by religion, and

engage in dialogue without negating our identity. There also seems to be mutual learning regarding the importance of spirituality and a holistic approach to diaconia.

Continue the journey: This symposium intended to provide a space where people from German diaconia could meet people from other parts of the world. The idea did not find much resonance in German diaconia, due to different reasons (time, language etc.) So, it needs to be carried on in order to nurture mutual empowerment regarding advocacy, charity, spirituality. I hope we will continue our journey of mutual empowerment.



**Prof. Dr Beate Hofmann** holds the Chair for Diaconic Science and Diaconic Management (IDM) at the Protestant University Wuppertal/Bethel in Germany. Photo: Private

Juliet Solis-Aguilar:

## Continuing Challenges

“Mutual Empowerment: Advocacy, Charity and Spirituality” is a relevant and important topic for us in a critical situation today. For me, this symposium is both: an achievement and a continuing challenge for each one of us, as Bishop Munga put it. For the whole day, we heard stories, individual and institutional practical experiences on how we can put our spirituality into concrete diaconic expression – putting in action and flesh the loving and liberating gospel of Jesus Christ in our Christian life, care and advocacy work.

For example, using the biblical stories as starting point to empower people in the communities that eventually they can advocate for their own rights and welfare. I see that importance to come up with a common understanding of what spirituality is. Wanda Deifelt pointed out that we need a kind of spirituality that is not looking only for our own personal gain, concerns in life and our struggles to survive but is a commitment to our Christian belief in caring, empowering and transforming people's lives. There is a challenge for us to be true and faithful to our calling to care and address the needs of the people as well as confronting the evil structures and systems – the root causes of the people's problems through our advocacy work. And of course, the importance of the international

academic learning experience, which is inter-cultural and inter-disciplinary in its approach, where I am part of.

In the workshops, we were able to discuss about empowering and transforming people's lives according to the kind of diaconic work that our churches undertake, like providing the basic needs for people thru different diaconic approaches like doing soup kitchens and giving food parcels, protecting women's rights and welfare of the people, climate justice, human rights issues among others and how to make the government accountable to the people, which for me is one of the most difficult tasks.

I came from a context in the Philippines where people are suffering every day from different aspects of socio-economic and political injustice. People are in deep poverty and human rights violations getting worse day by day. So bad that even pastors and bishops are not protected. Yesterday, May 11, 2017, Bishop Carlo Morales from an Independent Church in the Philippines (NCCP member church), was arrested, detained and is now facing a fabricated charge together with his wife Darling and his driver, for providing sanctuary and protecting a person who is in distress or politically persecuted. He was treated like

a criminal, handcuffed and interrogated. Independent churches in the Philippines are now calling for his immediate release and dismissal of his criminal case for he was just performing his pastoral duty as a bishop.

Doing advocacy work in the Philippines is a dangerous task if you put your whole heart and commitment into it. Advocates for rights-based advocacies in most cases encounter harassment, death threats, arrests, illegal detention, faces trumped-up charges and even extra-judicial killings. To date, since 2004, my church, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) documented 28 cases of extra-judicial killings, victimising our pastors and lay leaders, for protecting the rights of the people and their communities.

Therefore, the challenge for us today is: how can we mutually empower one another, as diaconic institutions, as Communion of Churches in the UEM, to do solidarity work and to strengthen those churches whose lives are threatened and human rights are violated by the government forces, in performing their prophetic and pastoral duties.

Thus, I would like to conclude, that this activity is indeed an achievement and a good start for a future mutual empowerment, engagement and participation. Thank you!



**Rev. Juliet Solis-Aguilar** is a pastor of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP).

Photo: Maxie Kordes / UEM



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