



A Bishops' Letter
about Diaconia

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Preface

THE CORE TASK of a parish is to hold services, provide religious instruction and to carry out diaconia and mission work. These four dimensions of the Christian life reflect and complement each other. In this Bishops' Letter, we are particularly examining diaconia, both as a special area of expertise and as a self-evident expression of Christian faith.

Members and non-members of the Church of Sweden often see the church's social welfare work, diaconia, as a yardstick of our credibility. Although the church is always more than the work that the people of God carry out together, this is justified to a certain extent. Jesus said "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:40).

Today the welfare system in our society is under great strain. The differences between the conditions of and the resources allocated to different groups are widening; gaps and polarisation in society are growing. Climate change, the refugee situation, terrorism and conflicts are giving rise to concern, but are also inspiring people to become involved and to take action.

Today, fifteen years after the formal ties between the Church of Sweden and the state were severed, our role in society is clearer than it has been in a long while. We are a conversation partner, a collaborative partner and an advocate. Sometimes we

perform this role by providing support and encouragement, sometimes by criticising and working for change. All of this is part of living in and with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Vulnerability has many faces. We take on our diaconal responsibility in the form of one-to-one meetings, as well as strategic social analysis, organising actual measures and influencing public opinion. Recently parish employees and volunteers have been deeply involved in welcoming refugees. This includes arranging rooms for temporary accommodation, support for unaccompanied child refugees and language cafés. There will continue to be a great need for expertise in ethical and existential questions, and the necessity of constantly finding forms of diaconal work that are sustainable in the longer term will remain strong.

Vulnerability also causes shifts in the forms that diaconia takes. What remains unchanged, however, is that diaconia is a dimension that runs through everything that the parish does, locally and as part of the world-wide church.

Diaconia is a self-evident part of the life of the church. For this reason, it is also important that we continue to talk about what diaconia means, what it looks like in our different contexts and how it can be developed further. We have written this Bishops' Letter to provide impetus and material for discussions of this kind.

Uppsala, December 2015

+ Antje Jackelén

Antje Jackelén, Archbishop of Uppsala

Introduction

THE WORD DIACONIA has only been used by the Church of Sweden for the past couple of centuries. However, what diaconia is about, Christian love for and caring for our fellow human beings, has been expressed in different ways throughout the church's history. The differences are attributable to the varying circumstances and needs of the periods in question, a point which gives us cause today to reflect on what the diaconia of the Church of Sweden means in 21st century society.

This is why we are writing this Bishops' Letter. It is primarily intended for parish councils, priests, deacons and other colleagues in parishes and dioceses, and for those training for posts in the Church of Sweden. Our mission is to clearly set out the background, motivation and visions for the diaconia of the Church of Sweden.

The first chapter addresses diaconia as a calling for all baptised people. This is about the consequences of faith in our lives, an approach which must run through every aspect of our lives, throughout our lives. The second chapter provides a theological background. Taking this as our starting point, the third chapter moves on to address diaconia in the shared life of the parish. We distinguish between two levels of meaning. Diaconia in the life of the parish firstly means that everything is imbued with an

atmosphere characterised by diaconia. Secondly, we talk about diaconia in the sense of the parish's diaconal activities, parish welfare work.

The Church of Sweden's deacons are an important and obvious resource in the church's parish welfare work, so our fourth chapter examines the church's ordained ministry and the caritative, i.e. charitable, mission of the diaconate. In this context we also point out that as far as the church's deacons are concerned, we can also talk about diaconia as a professional skill. The fifth chapter provides examples of some areas where we feel that Swedish society is in desperate need of the church's diaconia. We also reflect on the difference diaconia can make in people's lives – where life is threatened, diaconia empowers. To conclude, we emphasise the importance of generating knowledge and developing the diaconia of the Church of Sweden.

In this letter we aim to provide a coherent theological foundation and clearly set out the different levels of meaning that we use when talking about diaconia in the Church of Sweden. We want to provide a fundamental framework capable of serving as a starting point for further study, conversation, development and new initiatives in our church. We hope and pray that this letter will serve as inspiration for new initiatives and for joining forces as part of the church's diaconia, and encourage greater interaction between all the forces of good in our society.

I. Baptised into a life of diaconia

Diaconia expresses Christian faith through love, care and solidarity with our fellow human beings and with the whole of creation. Where life is threatened, diaconia empowers. The church's diaconia is always fundamentally a response to God's diaconia, both in the life of the individual Christian and in the church as a community.

We write this Bishops' Letter on the basis of an underlying understanding of diaconia as an approach which runs through our thoughts, words and actions. Our faith in Christ and the unconditional love he gives affects our whole life when we open ourselves to God. His love touches us in a world in which destructive and evil forces are painfully present. Nevertheless, it is a world that has not been abandoned by its Creator. God's diaconia is God's response to the distress that we could say that his damaged creation is crying out. It is God's good movement through the world.

In Jesus Christ, love becomes visible and tangible. In our response to God's steadfast love, our diaconia becomes part of God's diaconia. Our attitude to our fellow human beings and to

God's creation is interwoven with our relationship with God himself. God, the world, our fellow human beings and our own selves – all of them are interconnected and are, essentially, an expression of God's gift to us to love, care for and protect others, as we allow ourselves to be loved, cared for and protected by God. We are invited to become God's created co-creators.

It is baptism that is the threshold to diaconia. Baptism is baptism in Christ and into a community of other believers in Christ. At the same time, baptism is a baptism into the world, the ordinary world that is God's world, where the baptised are called to live and, together with all people of good will, stand on the side of good against all evil.¹ Baptism makes the individual personally participate in the church's calling to a life in diaconia, diaconia as an approach which runs through our entire lives.

CALLED TO BE A DIACONAL COMMUNITY

"The concept of the pilgrimage and the use of the word diakonia give a spiritual and theological dimension to service as care and advocacy for human dignity and sustainability of God's creation. [...] As the churches bring transformation and healing to all the people of God and to creation, diakonia must be prophetic. Therefore, service, accompaniment and advocacy cannot be separated."

Isabel Apawo Phiri and Kim Donsung, "Called to be a diaconal community through a pilgrimage of justice and peace", (The Ecumenical Review 66.3, October 2014) p. 263f.



Diaconia, in the underlying sense that we are talking about here, is an inescapable part of the Christian path through life. In our own time the pilgrimage movement has revitalised the insight that it is not just the goal that is important, it is also the journey. If pilgrimage is taken as an image of our lives as Christians, diaconia can be described as one dimension of that pilgrimage. Diaconia encompasses movement and dynamism. It incorporates constant changeability as well as care for our individual fellow human beings, and our responsibility within society to stand up for human value and human dignity remains constantly relevant. Diaconia urges civil courage. During our pilgrimage we must allow our lives to reflect our faith in God, as set out in the double commandment of love:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself (Luke 10:27, Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18)

Diaconia is always contextual. It arises as a response to the needs we encounter and is therefore expressed in different ways depending on the situation in question. With the ambition of providing a direction rather than a definition, we say that diaconia expresses Christian faith through love, care and solidarity with our fellow human beings and with the whole of creation. Where life is threatened, diaconia empowers.

Values – thought patterns – encounter – action

Reflecting on diaconia in Christian faith and Christian life also means reflecting on what is evil and what is good, on human value and human dignity and on what it means to profess a faith in God as the Creator, Deliverer and Giver of Life. This reflection should be characterised by a realisation of our own human frailty and the experience that Paul expresses when he writes “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” (Romans 7:19). We are all dependent on God’s grace and forgiveness and on redemption through Christ. With the power and help of the Spirit, we may, in our own frailty, be capable of bringing hope when we meet other people amid their own frailty. Without hope, the world we have been given to live in will wither and die.

When we talk about diaconia, our thoughts often turn to what we can do for people in different situations. It is true that doing something, or not doing something, can definitely be important expressions of diaconia. But even before anything at all is done or said, the way we see other people and intuitively interact with them will always be noticed, as will the way we see ourselves. Do we place ourselves outside or above, or do we meet as two fellow travellers? How we meet the other person’s gaze signals something about our attitude. More than any carefully thought-out decisions on how other people should be treated, the encounter will be steered by the values and ways of thinking that tend to be more unconscious.

Values, ways of thinking, how we interact with other people and how we act are summed up in the Christian lifestyle that can be termed diaconia. This is not something that anyone can come to a conclusion about on logical grounds or perform through sheer willpower. Our own good experiences are essential. A person who has experienced grace, love, respect, redemption and trust is marked by that experience and is able to share it with others. In our view, this kind of atmosphere should run throughout the life of all the parishes of the Church of Sweden.

The direction of diaconia – outwards and inwards

The consequence of what has been said is that the way in which we think about and live in diaconia is *tested and reflected in every encounter we have with other people*. Through history we can see that Christians have sometimes tended to mainly emphasise the importance of diaconia within the Christian community. At other times, contact and encounters outside the context of the church and the parish have been primary. In our time and in our church it is sometimes the case that the two are in conflict. However, it is important to keep these two perspectives together rather than setting them against each other. God's love is not impeded by these kinds of restrictions and the same should be true of our care for each other and for creation. If we express this dichotomy using the categories "inwards" and "outwards", the direction of diaconia thus needs to be both inwards, into the parish community, and outwards into the world in which we live

and for which we must take responsibility. A church that restricts love and care to those who have already found their way to a life in faith loses its credibility and risks excluding those whom God is seeking.

A life in diaconia turns our attention towards our fellow human beings. We encounter them on the streets, in the marketplace, in schools and at work, online and in social media. What we term international diaconia is also part of the church's diaconia. As with diaconia on our doorstep, international diaconia focuses its gaze on our fellow human beings. This is part of the church's world-wide, cross-border mandate and, through the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation and Act Alliance, the Church of Sweden is part of a global network of solidarity and mutual care. Close by and far away are indissolubly linked. It is about following in Jesus' footsteps by crossing borders – not just those between nations and continents but also borders set by ethnicity, religion, gender and economic status.

A few words about the word “diaconia”

The word “diaconia” itself gives an indication of this wider, global context. Internationally it is used – primarily in northern Europe, for example German *Diakonie* – about activities founded on Christianity such as education, hospitals and social institutions. The word goes back to the Greek *diakonia*. In the English-speaking world there is instead talk about *Christian charity* with roughly the same content as the German *Diakonie*, while in



the Catholic church the Latin word *caritas* is used. In ecumenical texts and in the literature on diaconia, however, diakonia (or *diaconia*) is also often used in English as a theological term to avoid the linguistic confusion resulting from the differing usage of different countries.

“Diakoni” in Swedish is thus a Swedish version of the Greek *diakonia*, found in the texts of the New Testament. When the word entered the Swedish language as late as the nineteenth century, it referred to the work carried out in the new diaconal institutions. The first of these was Ersta in Stockholm, founded in 1851. Later the meaning of the term diaconia expanded and was increasingly seen as the parish welfare work of the church or the parishes. In line with this, the *Swedish National Encyclopedia* writes that diaconia is “the church’s social responsibility in different areas”. See Background facts at the end of this letter for more information about the term diaconia and deacons.

The word diaconia has thus only been used by the Church of Sweden for the past couple of centuries. However, what the word is about, Christian humanitarian love and caring, has been expressed in various ways throughout the church’s history, varying depending on the circumstances and needs of the period in question.

Christian faith is life, not a way of thinking

Christian faith means living in a relationship with God re-established through Jesus Christ. It is about life, not just a philosophy

of life. When we sometimes hear that Christian faith is a “way of thinking”, it can mark an intellectualised distance to faith which in the worst case leads to seeing works of love merely as one possible option. What the world instead needs is whole-hearted Christians in whose lives the confidence of faith is able to be part of a human voyage of discovery day by day – our pilgrimage.

The Gospels describe how Jesus teaches and acts, forgives and heals. In him doctrine and life are inextricably intertwined. This was also what the young church learned to practice when with the help of the Holy Spirit, churches and parishes began to be built. As James wrote in his letter about faith in Christ, “So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.” (James 2:17).

Nor can faith and life be separated in our century. The pilgrimage tradition teaches us that the journey itself is a spiritual path, in which we dig deep and find solid ground as people, as our faith matures and deepens. Diaconia is part of this pilgrimage of life.

II. Theological reflection

The church's diaconia rests in and is enveloped by God's diaconia, God's active love for his creation which is ultimately expressed through Jesus Christ. God's sending of Christ can continue in and through us, who are called to be Christ's church. Our calling is to follow in the footsteps of Christ, shaped by the Holy Spirit, letting God's love flow further in the social interactions for which we were created. This means that we stand ready to do our part in all work for that which is good and loving in the world and in the battle against evil and the powers of destruction.

The Trinity and the church's diaconia

The doctrine of the Christian creed on the Trinity of God is sometimes called, taking inspiration from Orthodox theology, the grammar of a faith. Grammar clearly sets out the internal structure of a language, giving context and meaning to individual words so that together they can convey a message. We do not need to understand the structure of the grammar itself, it is what it conveys and makes comprehensible that is important. The doctrine of the Trinity is in a similar way the internal structure of faith which expresses our combined experience of how God

has made and makes himself known to us. It is as Father, Son and Spirit that we have met and still meet God.

In that meeting we experience God himself as a relationship between Father, Son and Spirit. It is this experience, for example, which gives meaning to the statement in the first Epistle of St. John that “God is love” (1 John 4:8) because love presumes a relationship between an “I” and a “you”. What is even more expressed in the experience of the Trinity is that God’s love is not satisfied with itself but is overflowing and self-giving. It is in love that God creates. It is in love that God meets us in Jesus Christ: “God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him” (1 John 4:9).

The love that God is – and which is overflowing, self-giving and creative – becomes visible in Jesus Christ. “No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known” (John 1:18). It is only once we meet Jesus Christ that we see the face of God. When Christ forgives and heals, he shows us the true nature of God. Above all, the breadth and depth of the overflowing love of the Trinity is manifest when Jesus Christ opens the way, through death, to the life of resurrection. It is this love that Jesus is referring to and explains when he talks about himself as someone who came to serve and when he shows himself as an example to his disciples: “But I am among you as one who serves (the Greek *diakonos*)” (Luke 22:27). The overflowing love that characterises God

himself – the Trinity – and that we meet in Jesus Christ can be characterised as God’s loving diaconia.

There is one more place in the New Testament where we encounter the statement that no-one has ever seen God. In the first Epistle of St John, written to the young church, the statement that no-one has ever seen God is, however, followed by the statement that “if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit” (1 John 4:12-13). Now that Jesus of Nazareth is no longer walking among his disciples it is plainly the task of Christians to convey the image of God’s love through Christ.

Now, in the time of the church, our challenge is therefore to receive and pass on the overflowing and self-giving love that we receive from Christ. Through a life and works of love we are able to carry the image of God further. In the loving relationships we can build up, the Ineffable becomes tangible, if not comprehensible. Here we can move beyond “you” and “me” and discern the face of the living icon, Christ, who opens the windows of heaven amidst our earthly reality.²

Diaconia – God’s movement through creation

The church rests in God and not the other way round. Analogously, it can be said that the diaconia of the church rests in the diaconia of God. God’s active love for his creation is ultimately expressed through Jesus Christ: “For God so loved the world

that he gave his only Son” (John 3:16). In this liberating and joyful Gospel, we meet the love of God that overflows, that transforms and opens new horizons for our life in this beloved creation. God’s sending of Christ is able to continue in and through us, who are called to be Christ’s church. Thus, our diaconia becomes part of God’s diaconia as it expresses God’s love sweeping through creation. Our calling is to follow in the footsteps of Christ, shaped by the Holy Spirit, letting God’s love flow further in the social interactions for which we were created. This means that we stand ready to do our part in all work for what is good and loving in the world and in the battle against evil and the powers of destruction.

The gift of salvation in Christ places this responsibility upon us. Care for our vulnerable fellow human beings is of such vital importance that we understand that it is in them that we meet Christ and it is through them that our faith in Christ is ultimately tested (see Matthew 25:31–46). We pray that God’s kingdom shall come and his will be done, not merely in heaven but on earth too (Matt 6:10). As we pray, so will we work. We understand that the vision of the kingdom of God will not be fully completed on this earth but at the same time we have a mission to strive, as far as is humanly possible, to make the good will of God happen.

Diaconia is directly linked to what we pray and preach. It can be described as a fundamental manifestation of life for the church. This ecclesiological approach provides an important



theological background to the wording of the Church Ordinance, which states that diaconia is one of the dimensions of the core task of the parish. Diaconia stands for something more than purely special activities – it is one aspect of what it means to be a church. The church as a community (*koinonia*) becomes visible through prayer and the Eucharist (*leitourgia*), preaching and teaching (*kérygma*) and service (*diakonia*). These different dimensions are inevitably linked and interact; there is an organic connection but not a hierarchical order in which one is more important than the other. As *koinonia* in this sense the church fulfils its mission (*missio*) to the world.³

The starting point of diaconia – seeing through the eyes of the person in need

Previously we said that the diaconia of the church must rest in the diaconia of God, in God’s movement through creation. God’s love for his creation is not limited to those who are believers in Christ. It is total and inclusive. With this as our example, our diaconia and that of the church is able to be a single movement together with all people of good will. This insight gives us reason to seek to work together with all people of good will in different contexts, whatever their faith or the tradition in which they live. Interreligious diaconal cooperation has already been a reality in international contexts and is sure to become increasingly common in local Swedish contexts. Martin Luther pointed out that “good works have no name”, which in this case can be

interpreted as saying that diaconia does not justify salvation and nor may it take place out of some kind of self-interest on the part of the church. The motivation for the life of the church and of the Christian in diaconia is not to consolidate a brand but to meet the needs of our fellow human beings and to grow in love. Love cannot have any ulterior motive – if it does, it degenerates into manipulation, with our fellow human being reduced to a means to an end; the end being the helper serving their own purposes.

The Gospels give many examples of how Jesus treats and listens to despised, sick and suffering people with respect. He demonstrates an attitude that is not derived from the established viewpoint of society but enters into the position of the marginalised person or people. This needs to be highlighted as a corrective to the diaconia of the church, because there is always a risk that diaconal activities and individual initiatives will involve a power dynamic on the part of those who have resources in relation to the person or people who “are in need”. Jesus turns our power dynamics on their head, challenging us to deliberately seek the viewpoints and perspectives of the vulnerable and marginalised, to adopt the position “from the underside” (Luke 22:24-30).

God is close to the person who is struggling and suffering. Those who are in a safe and secure position with a wealth of resources need first and foremost to listen and take on board insights from their fellow human beings who need strength to

pick themselves up. With the worldwide church there is a vital lesson to be learned from “mission from the margins”.⁴

*Help that is given without listening is often ambiguous. It is of course true that the poor need those of us who have financial and other resources. But it is equally true, but often ignored, that those of us who are not poor lose the opportunity to take an ethical approach when we close our eyes to the reality of the poor.*⁵

This approach expresses the calling of the baptised to listen to and convey the need of the world and their fellow human beings to God and in return bring God’s healing blessing.⁶

Diaconia in the Bible

The description of Jesus reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah and his sermon in the synagogue of Nazareth serves as a programmatic fanfare introducing Jesus’ journeying with his disciples.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.

[---]

Then he began to say to them: Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

(Luke 4:18-19, 21).

During his journeying with his disciples and in his meetings with people, Jesus practises what he preaches: he forgives and he heals (Mark 2:1-12). Everything is an expression of God’s love sent out to us (John 3:16).

When exploring the Biblical basis for the church’s diaconia, it is not the word “diaconia” in itself that is the guiding factor but – as in this text – what the word stands for. There is no directly equivalent term in the original Hebrew of the Old Testament. In the original Greek of the New Testament there are two words, the verb *diakoneo* and the noun *diakonia*, but their meaning is much broader than the term “diakoni” used in Swedish. Only some of the texts where they appear are relevant in our context.

However, there are many texts in both the Old and the New Testaments whose content is important in providing a Biblical background to what we mean by diaconia⁷. In the tenth chapter of the Gospel of Luke, Jesus addresses the meaning of the double commandment of love in more depth through the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). A study of Biblical theology brings out the following important features in the way the story sheds light on our love for our neighbour, or, if you will, the church’s diaconia.⁸



1. Loving our neighbour is practised in the parable without any religious motivation and even transcends religious boundaries.
2. The help does not lead to abnegation for the helper. The Samaritan initiates the help and engages others to help but then continues on his own journey. He sees and enables cooperation with other people involved.
3. The help that is given in the parable does not involve any exercise of power. A Samaritan, who due to his social and religious role is an outsider, helps another person who is also – due to his vulnerability – an outsider. In the episode in which the parable is told the meaning of “neighbour” also switches. The lawyer’s question is about the person to whom love is to be given. Who is it that he must love as himself? The person to whom love is to be shown in the parable is the beaten man. But Jesus’ question switches to ask who was the neighbour of the man who fell into the hands of the robbers. The Samaritan, who in this case is the subject of the love, is also a neighbour. Because both are seen as the other’s “neighbour” the help provided in the parable does not involve a power dynamic. They stand side by side. Both need the other.
4. Loving one’s neighbour as set out in the parable is not based on any of the protagonists having a particular status. Instead it is the help that defines their relationship. The answer to the

question “And who is my neighbour” is that it is not any person predetermined in advance but everyone who draws near when help is given. Giving and receiving love makes us “neighbours” to people who are interconnected.

5. A further interpretation can be that Jesus’ question about who is the *beaten man*’s neighbour is a correction of the lawyer and his question as to who *his* neighbour is. In this case the lawyer is asking the wrong question: don’t ask who you should love, ask whose neighbour you can become. The lawyer should identify himself with the beaten man in the story and the question becomes what love the beaten man/the lawyer needs. The exhortation is then accordingly: Go and do likewise.

The conclusion is that God’s love through Jesus Christ is a starting point and a condition for our love and service, for the *diakonia* of the church. We are all in need of love and all of us are capable of loving.

In St John’s Gospel Jesus sums this up: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” (John 13:34). The author of the Epistle to the Ephesians comments: “For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.” (Ephesians 2:10).

III. Diaconia in the shared life and work of the parish

In the two first chapters we wrote about diaconia in its fundamental sense. As we now move on to discuss diaconia in the shared life of the parish, we will distinguish between two different levels of meaning. The first is allowing a diaconal approach to run through the life of the parish, in all its forms of expression. This kind of atmosphere is characterised by respectful and caring relationships instead of each person primarily looking to their own interests and needs. The second is about the diaconal activities of the parish. This is the common responsibility of the entire parish which cannot be handed over to an employee, but we assert that it is a sensible aim for there to be at least one deacon employed in each group of parishes or independent parish.

Diaconia is a fundamental part of a Christian's pilgrimage through life. For this reason, it is important not only in the life of the individual but also in the shared lives of those baptised, as part of the parish community. The vicar and the parish council have a shared responsibility for ensuring that a strategy and resources are in place and that the parish's diaconia can take shape

and be reinforced (Church Ordinance, Chapter 5, § 2). When the Church Ordinance sets out the core task of the parish (Chapter 2, § 1), diaconia is one of the dimensions of this task. The Church Ordinance talks about “practising diaconia”. This can involve activities with a clear diaconal motivation but must also be read as meaning that everything that the parish becomes involved in must have a diaconal dimension.

Diaconia running through the life of the parish

Diaconia as an approach needs to run through the life and activities of the parish. The parish’s employees and those who take part in its activities, sporadically or regularly, need the security provided by spending time in an atmosphere characterised by diaconia. This kind of environment signals an openness to people’s situations and a sense of care, hand in hand with respect for the integrity of each individual. Every activity in the parish, whatever its focus, should involve consideration of whether this vision is being achieved. This naturally also includes celebrating worship. There should be a level of care and attention from those who, in various ways, have a leadership responsibility in the parish, so that they can recognise and support individuals within the larger group.

Encounters with others and fellowship with others in the context of the parish must never reduce anyone’s self-confidence and must always serve to build them up and to set them free. Every form of activity in the parish should be tested in relation

to this goal. This could be termed a diaconia impact analysis. Training and continuing professional development for the parish's employees also need to deliberately be given a form that supports this aim.

It is essential to create an atmosphere that revolves around paying attention to other people's needs instead of each person primarily looking to their own interests. This kind of environment lowers invisible thresholds and opens doors to conversation. A diaconal atmosphere is also an environment of pastoral care, characterised by Jesus' question to the blind beggar in St Mark's Gospel: "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mark 10:51).

Experience tells us that a new person entering an established context is often more sensitive to the prevailing atmosphere. It is therefore sensible to listen carefully to what unfamiliar participants feel uncomfortable with and – where necessary – attempt to change the culture of the parish, in a goal-oriented and sustainable way. This creates credibility in what the parish stands for and seeks to communicate. It is important to be an open community which also provides scope for integrity and self-chosen anonymity. If different communities in the parish *are* diaconia, the parish can also *function* diaconally.

Carrying out diaconia

Diaconal forms of operation, the diaconia that the parish carries out, need to be shaped as part of a dialogue with the local community about their circumstances and needs. When society and



people's living conditions change, diaconal forms of expression also need to be reassessed. Seventy-five years ago parish welfare work was often equivalent to care in the home. Since then many changes have taken place, in different phases, and must continue to take place. When new needs arise and parish diaconia embarks on new paths, they are often untrodden. The parishes have to find their own way by trial and error. Those responsible have to allow scope for taking risks, trying new things, allowing failure, making changes and trying again.

Reflection and planning are important. In many contexts it makes sense to prepare initiatives with the help of the three steps *see – analyse – act*. The importance of carrying out an analysis of local conditions when strategically planning the diaconal work of the parish is often emphasised. Experience shows, however, that too often the analysis stops at the point of merely being a description of local conditions. In such cases there is a leap from seeing to acting, without attempting to interpret what was seen. This means that in a parish's pastoral programme it can often be difficult to distinguish any links between the description of local conditions and the diaconal work that the parish wants to prioritise.

The analysis is the necessary step between what the parish leadership sees and what people then decide to do. An analysis of the local situation does not only mean drawing up statistical graphs but also applying a theological and pastoral filter to the picture that emerges of one's own local community. The work of

analysis also involves seeing things from the perspective of those who have become invisible, children as well as adults. What does their picture of reality look like? What can we learn from them? This can be done in different ways, but the most natural way is to find methods allowing those who otherwise would not be heard to participate and have a voice in the analysis phase of parish planning. We believe that working in this way can be effective and inspire renewal. This means really trying to listen contextually in what is the parish's local community. This can provoke accustomed approaches of the parish, get it out of a rut and lead to the discovery that more inclusive forms of working might open up new paths.⁹

THE CHURCH OF SWEDEN – PART OF SWEDISH CIVIL SOCIETY

It is often said that a democratic society can be divided into four different parts or contexts, where each individual has a place in all four contexts:

- *The state* with the public institutions linked to it
- *The market* with its institutions and stakeholders
- *Civil society* comprising a wealth of small and large, voluntary and independent links between individuals
- *The family* constituting the most private sphere

According to this division, the Church of Sweden, which up until the year 2000 was one of the public institutions of the state, is now part of Swedish civil society.

The opportunity for cooperation with different parties is of major importance in the diaconia that the local parish carries out. Since the relationship between the Church of Sweden and the state changed, in terms of this definition, the church has been counted as part of Swedish civil society, where it is by far the largest organisation. At the local level, collaboration with other civil society organisations currently takes place in many different areas. There is every reason to broaden and strengthen these contacts.

Furthermore, a parish needs a network of contacts in the public sector. This mainly involves different units in local government administration and agencies such as the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, the Swedish Public Employment Service and the Swedish Migration Board. The parishes of the Church of Sweden might sometimes be a potential platform for cross-border and coordinated initiatives for a particular target group. For people who for various reasons find it difficult to approach the Swedish authorities, the parish can be a resource that supplements the social services. In the first instance, however, the parish should provide information and guidance such that those who are entitled to support from the welfare system of our country also find means of gaining access to it.¹⁰

One particular form of cooperation is when a parish carries out an activity on behalf of the public sector. This can take place in different forms of mandate. For the parish, this means running operations, on the basis of its own diaconal motivation, using mainly external (public) financing, on terms set by the mandating body. According to the Church Ordinance, in terms of the



definition, this is a commercial activity. If such an activity has a natural link to the core task of the parish, it is permitted for a parish (Church Ordinance, Chapter 2, § 2). Here it is a requirement that the parish is able to justify why the activities are to be run, on the basis of its identity and its task. Were the motivation to be gaining a financial surplus to finance other parish activities, this would not be compatible with the provision in the Church Ordinance.

In the policy document *Svenska kyrkans roll och uppgift i den svenska välfärden – en plattform* (The role and task of the Church of Sweden in the Swedish welfare system – a platform) in 2013, the Church Board set out three possible roles for the Church of Sweden on welfare issues. The church can be:

- a mouthpiece and an advocate
- a collaborative partner
- a provider of welfare services

These roles need to be kept together and interact in the different duties in which a parish engages. Possibly the most common activity that parishes currently carry out in terms of providing welfare services is running independent pre-schools. Other examples are labour-market related initiatives, integration work, accommodation for refugees and group accommodation.

It is important to pay great attention to the question of how the quality of an activity could be maintained when a parish prepares

or reflects on the opportunity to go in as a provider of some form of welfare service. When it comes to commitment and professionalism, in these cases it is not a question of either-or, but of a necessary both-and.

Diaconal institutions and city missions are independent operations that are close to the Church of Sweden. There are good reasons for parishes and dioceses to be open to cooperation with these, with the aim of developing the diaconal work of the church. This applies, not least, to the question of different welfare tasks. Diaconal institutions and city missions share the church's core values and, drawing on their high-quality operations, have in-depth knowledge of the context that is important for the church's diaconal initiatives. We see it as being important for our church that the diaconia that the diaconal institutions carry out is reinforced in order to serve as a source of knowledge and inspiration for parish diaconia. At the same time we recognise that diaconal institutions and city missions bring indispensable basic values to our society through the care and social care that they practice.

The "priest-on-call" reached on the emergency services number 112 (who can also be contacted via chat or e-mail) is also part of the church's diaconia. The service is run today as a mandate from the state to the Church of Sweden and is primarily a suicide prevention line. The priest-on-call service reminds us that pastoral care conversations can be part of the church's diaconia. Here one of the church's professionals is using their special expertise and absolute confidentiality to meet the needs of people in acute

existential crisis. In providing this service, parishes, dioceses and the Church of Sweden's national organisation work together to ensure that an individual who is wracked with anxiety during the night is able to contact a priest immediately. The priest-on-call service is a good example of a case where the organisation and activities in the church's diaconia are guided by a pastoral need.

Giving vulnerability a voice

The church's diaconia has an important task in understanding and meeting the needs of the individual and strengthening people's opportunities to take responsibility and speak for themselves. However, anyone who finds themselves at the bottom of our society often has difficulty in being heard in society. Therefore, identifying and putting into words structures that increase people's vulnerability or reduce their opportunity to change their situation is also an important diaconal task.

In this context it is important for us to draw attention to two complicating factors. The first is that when we meet someone who is in need of support, the starting point tends to be unequal: the person who needs support is in a subordinate position and the person to whom he or she turns is felt to have "power". It is important to be aware of this in order to adopt an intelligent approach to handling a situation that is most clearly felt by the person in the subordinate position. The second complication is about us as people always being inclined to see weakness as something outside ourselves. "We" tend to think of "them" who have ended

up in a vulnerable position. In actual fact, the underlying relationship should be characterised by mutuality and human solidarity on the basis of our common frailty. Experience says that in one situation one person is in a vulnerable situation, while the next time it will be the other way round. This insight can make it easier for us to cope with the unequal starting position. Today it is you, tomorrow it may be me. We are both beggars on the pilgrimage of life. This awareness does not reduce the professionalism, rather the reverse.

Sometimes the task of giving vulnerability a voice is called prophetic or political diaconia. This important aspect of the church's diaconal activity should be carried out exercising discretion and with consideration. In the parish's strategic planning it is important that there is an openness to this function in parish diaconia. This may involve making public statements in different contexts but it may also be a question of showing through action that there are alternative methods or forms of working.¹¹

Resources and employees

Planning what a parish wants to attain and carry out with its diaconal activity also includes the question of which methods the parish wishes to use and what this requires in terms of resources, particularly staff resources.

The Church of Sweden trains and ordains deacons. Deacons are ordained to a caritative mission with a particular focus on humanitarian care and social responsibility. The deacons are university

educated employees with special expertise in the social field. The ordination service states that they are to be a “sign of charity”, a visible sign of diaconia as a calling for all those baptised. The task of deacons includes inspiring and fitting the baptised members of the parish to take a diaconal approach with a diaconal readiness to act. Together with the parish’s deacon or deacons, the other employees, co-workers and volunteers must also be seen as diaconal resources.

Diaconal activity in a parish can be organised in different ways depending on local conditions. For this reason the Church Ordinance does not set any criteria regarding the number of posts for deacons. We see it, however, as a goal for there to be at least one deacon employed in each group of parishes or independent parish.

The parish leadership must not make the mistake of believing that responsibility for its diaconia can be taken by employing people. One central aim for parish deacons and others in employed posts should be to act as *facilitators* – thus to discover and mobilise the latent resources that exist in the parish. There are people with high-quality expertise, drive and energy who can be called on when the parish’s diaconal work is being planned and implemented. Theologically this is justified by the fact that the diaconal mission is also part of the “priesthood of the baptised and believers”.¹² All Christians are called and ordained to this service by baptism. It is important to see voluntary initiatives as an asset which can crucially give power to a parish’s diaconal work.



Leading all activities in the parish – including its diaconia

The vicar's responsibility to lead the parish's activities also includes leading specific diaconal initiatives. Overall strategies must be formulated in the pastoral programme in the parish instructions. These strategies are then applied in day to day work.

We have emphasised that as conditions and needs change, the diaconal activity that the parish operates must change with them. Adapting to the situation as necessary makes major demands on deacons and other employees. Because the mission is constantly changing, there needs to be clear interaction between the vicar and employees to formulate concrete priorities, frameworks and development opportunities. This support is important in ensuring that those who stand in the frontline of day to day work are not ground down by needs that are constantly greater than their ability to meet them.

In summary, the parish instruction and the strategies of the parish council take concrete form in the vicar's leadership, coordination and supervision of the diaconal work that the parish carries out. In taking up this responsibility and in shaping an effective process in the parish's working groups, the diaconal pastoral area on the Church of Sweden's intranet can be a useful tool.¹³

One important aim for the parish leadership and employees must be for diaconia as an approach to also characterise the parish as a workplace. This kind of attitude must run through every aspect of the way we interact both between elected representatives and within the working group. It is not credible for the parish as a

workplace and as an organisation to express different core values from those it seeks to demonstrate within the parish community. Here we are referring to a readiness to listen and attempt to understand each other's perspective, respect for the experiences of others, a healthy drawing of limits and an insight that my own role is part of a wider whole. This kind of attitude is also an important corrective to various "management" and leadership trends. From a diaconal perspective, leadership is always a service to the community.

IV. Ordained to serve

The church's ordained ministry is an office of the Spirit in the sense that it is exercised in and through the Spirit so as to revive and strengthen the gifts of grace in the parish.

The special profile of the deacon's ministry is defined in our church as caritative. The ministry includes "pointing to the reality of the kingdom of God in the heart of society and fighting for justice, participation and dignity for all".

With a direct link to the diaconal ministry a specific area of knowledge and competence grows that can be termed diaconia or diaconal science.

Faith and life are one and must take shape in the shared life of the parish and in the life of the individual Christian. This applies to an equal extent to all those baptised. Just as little as faith and life can be separated from each other, can they be reserved solely for ordained deacons, priests or bishops. Each and every person ordained to one of these ministries has a special lifelong responsibility to carry out their ministry, in fidelity to the faith, creed and doctrine of the Church of Sweden, such that the baptised are inspired and fitted for the shared task of the church. It is in the life of the baptised that faith must be practised and take shape and this is why deacons, priests and bishops take up their

ministry at an ordination ceremony within the church community. The church's ordained ministry is an office of the Spirit in the sense that it is exercised in and through the Spirit so as to revive and strengthen the gifts of grace in the parish.¹⁴ Jesus did not give his church any church ordinance nor any special system of offices. Over time the ordained ministry has been shaped in different ways in different parts of the church. In the light of medieval developments and the social order of the time, the leaders of the Reformation felt it right to integrate the diaconal ministry with the responsibility of the priest. Today the situation is different. The system that applies within the Church of Sweden is that the ordained ministry encompasses three roles: deacon, priest and bishop. Drawing distinct boundaries between these three roles is not a practicable means of clarifying this structure. The structure is better explained by describing what their respective centres or emphases are. The special profile of the role is found at their centre, while they also overlap each other in other areas.¹⁵

One example of difference and interaction between the various roles within the church's ordained ministry is the responsibility for exercising pastoral care. This responsibility is incumbent upon all the roles in the church's ordained ministry, while the obligation of confidentiality differs between the deacon on the one hand and the priest and bishop on the other. The difference depends on distinctions in the central point of emphasis of the various roles. The obligation of confidentiality of deacons is ordered in such a way



that information can be passed on with the agreement of the person confiding in the deacon, or in cases where a deacon is obliged to make a statement under oath. Deacons are also subject to the obligation to report which under the Social Services Act applies particularly where there is a suspicion of a child welfare issue. The absolute confidentiality of priests and bishops makes it possible for a person who confides in them to seek, in confession or in a private conversation, the forgiveness that can heal and pave the way for renewed responsibility. The priest listens on behalf of Christ; Christ is silent and therefore the priest must also be silent. The type of confidentiality is thus not something that an individual can choose according to the situation, but is linked to the specific role. This structure with a high-profile centre and overlapping areas of responsibility is also expressed in the three ordination services which all contain both similar sections for all the ministries and others for the aspects that distinguish the three.

The special profile for the ministry of the deacon is defined in our church as caritative.¹⁶ The ministry includes “pointing to the reality of the kingdom of God in the heart of society and fighting for justice, participation and dignity for all”.¹⁷ When the Church Synod approved the Church Ordinance in 2000 it was stated that “there is very strong support for a diaconate characterised by a caritative approach”¹⁸. What this means is signalled in one respect by the training requirements of a deacon where a special focus on care, welfare and social work stands out.

The direction of the diaconate must thus be both inwards, into the internal life of the parish, and outwards into the social arena. This balance also applies to the role of the deacon. A parish deacon must not let him or herself be wholly absorbed by inward-looking parish work. At the same time, it is important for parish deacons, and other paid employees, to take a natural place in services of worship. The calling of those baptised to diaconia and the parish's shared diaconal service need to be firmly anchored and visible in the service. This can be conveyed, in particular, by the parish deacon participating in services.¹⁹ There is no single standard method for how the deacon's presence is to be made evident. The solution chosen should naturally be linked to the traditions of the local parish, while simultaneously providing scope for the congregation celebrating worship to participate in the liturgy.

One important diaconal responsibility in the parish is to clearly convey the need and vulnerability encountered and lived by people in the intercessions. Part of the deacon's ministry is therefore to inspire and instruct the baptised members of the congregation in intercessory prayer. This may take various forms in the way the service takes shape, as long as the purpose is clear. It is about making it clear that those who gather to celebrate the Eucharist with bread and wine are also bringing their own need and that of the whole world before God. Being sent out after communion is to carry with you the blessing of sharing in the communion table

to encounters with fellow human beings. The subject of the intercessions should be “we”, i.e. the shared prayer of the whole congregation attending the service.

We value and wish to strengthen the form that the ministry of deacons has taken in our church and which is expressed in the Church Ordinance and the service of ordination. With a direct connection to the diaconal ministry a specific area of knowledge and competence is developing that can be termed “diaconia”, or in some contexts “diaconal science”. The form that the deacon’s ministry takes, with its clearly caritative profile, enables interaction with the other forms of the ordained ministry and a natural grounding in the life of the parish. It equips the parish to mobilise the people of the church around existential and social focal points in modern times.

V. Focal points for the church's diaconia today

This chapter provides examples of some areas where we feel that Swedish society is in desperate need of the church's diaconia. These include individualism, economism and pulling apart of society. We also provide examples of the good that diaconia leaves in its wake, such as hope, truth, protest and an experience of the reality of grace. In a world where everything risks being seen as a market, consumption is set against communion in the encounter with Christian faith. Grace as a gift from God and a sign of the church's fellowship emphasises that the value of people does not depend on what they do and know but on what they are: human beings.

Seven examples

Earlier we emphasised the importance in the church's diaconia of starting from the local situation, that it must be contextual. There are major differences between the starting points of different parishes depending on issues such as population structure, industry, emigration or immigration, underlying history and

culture, etc. However, it is also possible in addition to these differing local conditions, to identify more general areas where we feel that there are serious challenges in Swedish society for the church's diaconia. We should constantly try to seek out these focal points, and to reflect on their cause and how they can most sensibly be tackled. In reflecting on this, it is important to remember that the church is not an outside observer of this society but is itself part of it. This thinking should therefore also incorporate critical self-reflection.

The issues we raise below must be seen as examples to inspire continued seeking and reflection. The list could have been much longer. It is a shared responsibility in the church to investigate, interpret and act: *see – analyse – act*.

Individualism: The World Values Survey, published on a recurring basis, shows that the values of Swedes stand out on two points compared with other countries. The first is individualism.²⁰ After the collective thinking of industrial society, the perception of reality of our age generally takes the single individual as its starting point. This needs to be viewed as a problem if it is to be tackled sensibly. The individualism in society involves diversity and requires the individual to make his or her own choices in an ever-increasing number of situations. This concerns everything from shopping to philosophy of life. When this is taken to extremes, the individual becomes the centre of their own universe. To a certain extent we can see that individualism

is a response to the multicultural society, with a greater freedom than before for the individual and the group in relation to the rest of society. However, this individualist society, which includes much that is good and liberating, has a dark side which can be characterised by rootlessness, uncertainty in terms of values and considerable loneliness.

Worldliness: The second characteristic in Swedish culture highlighted by the World Values Survey is a closed view of reality. Reality is generally seen as immanent – possible to measure and explore – without any openings towards a transcendent or “heavenly” reality. If there is an immanent view of reality, it is difficult to think of a personal God, a “someone”, but easier to talk about god as a feeling or “something” in existence. Possibly this is one reason why many people can feel alienated from religion. This applies both in relation to Christian churches and to other religious communities. Sometimes it goes so far that we can see a kind of anxiety about coming into contact with any religion at all in our society. This can lead to people nervously labelling even the Church of Sweden’s diaconal activities as the work of a “sect”. The risk is that people will lose their ability to tell the difference between a healthy practise of religion and religious fanaticism and thereby also lose access to religion as an opportunity for guidance and an ethical compass for human interaction in society.²¹

Economism: In our churches we regularly preach on the words of Jesus about choosing between God and Mammon. This encourages us to reflect on what is ultimately the origin of those thought patterns that shape our picture of reality. Today we are strikingly often using economic terms to express different contexts in our lives. As people we are increasingly described as “customers”, even at the doctor’s or within the parish. We “invest” in everything from time with our grandchildren, to preventive healthcare. We can ask whether it is “worth it” to go and visit the elderly tomorrow when what we actually are wondering is whether it is a good idea, and in a discussion someone might say: “I don’t buy that,” when what they mean is that the other party has not managed to persuade them. It is deeply worrying to think that this use of language reflects or is contributing towards a general view of reality in which the whole of life is seen as a business deal. Unconsciously, language is passing on this viewpoint and the whole of society – or the whole of existence – is transformed into a marketplace where what is rational and profitable takes priority. Sometimes this also happens in the context of the church. We should, for example, pay careful attention to how we argue in favour of baptism and membership of the church. The motivation must not be “because it’s worth it”, just as little as we can proclaim the death of Jesus on the cross as an economically motivated project.

We can hardly escape the contrast between what gives people value in God’s eyes and what is valued in an economically



rational calculation.²² In an existence that is seen as a market, consumption is what gives life meaning. In the encounter with Christian faith, consumption is set against communion.

Pulling apart: Another burning issue are the growing social and economic gaps in our society. Over many years now, surveys have shown that the distance between rich and poor is constantly increasing. Society is being pulled apart. There is talk of people being “on the edge of society”, which turns out to be a euphemism. It is more a case of social exclusion, in which people not only end up on the edge of important areas of society but completely outside them. Social exclusion is about non-participation in the labour market, politics, culture, leisure activities, education and housing, for example. It can lead to gradual marginalisation and result in social and economic exclusion.²³ This also leads to increased ill health.²⁴ There is a clear link between low income, low education and poorer health. In large cities, the growing social gaps in society are also expressed in housing segregation, which naturally also affects parish life in these areas. A vicar in one parish gives an impression of the situation:

*As dusk falls, people come together for a church service.
About twenty people gather for evening prayer that night.
On the surface we look different, you can see the diversity.
The sad thing about the picture is that the injustices of life
are so clearly present. Many live on the margins and never*

have anything left over. One needs to beg to get food for the day, others can travel home to their detached house with a lamb stew bubbling on the hob. One is living a life of exclusion because they never managed to learn the language; others travel abroad as often as they can. The contrasts and differences are hidden under smiles and hugs of peace. And we think – you could have been me, and I could have been you.²⁵

Another dimension to society's pulling apart is the urbanisation process and the acceleration of rural depopulation it brings with it. Empty houses, fields full of weeds, shops boarded up and closed schools are a common sight when you travel through many rural dioceses today. The change is rapid and often a difference can be marked from one year to the next. For those who are left, it is a depressing reality. In an introduction to a research report on the church and sparsely populated areas, the situation is described as follows:

Sparsely populated areas are a feature of many people's lives across Sweden. They are where public and private sector operations are being shut down. They are where jobs are few and schools and healthcare are often a long way away. Because the town is the norm and the reference model for social development and political





*decision-making, sparsely populated areas have fallen off the map or are only seen as a problem.*²⁶

It is not self-evident that the socially accepted “map” provides a fair picture of reality. One job for the church and its diaconia is to encourage the enthusiasm, vitality and faith in the future that exist when people want to remain living in small communities and in rural areas. We see good examples of how local parishes can support social enterprise or work together with other civil society organisations to take shared responsibility for ensuring that social services work for people in these areas.

The needs of the world: The social and economic gaps must be seen in a broader perspective than merely the national one. Europe and the world are a tangible presence in our day to day lives. Communication and the media bridge geographical distances and provide constant access to a global viewpoint. These rapid contacts have many positive consequences. Awareness of other cultures is growing, reducing the sense of alienation and increasing exchanges of experience. As a result, it has become possible to actively combat global poverty and improve health with tangible impacts.

The fact that the world has become more present is also marked where we ourselves live. Society in cities and in rural areas has become a daily meeting place between the permanent population and poor EU migrants living here under temporary

and uncertain conditions. Those fleeing war and conflicts in different parts of the world are seeking refuge in our country. As we write this Bishops' Letter, we are seeing unexpectedly high numbers of refugees reaching Europe and Sweden. The extent of this migration has not been seen in Europe since the end of the Second World War.

People react in different ways when the world around them and other people's distress and vulnerability become so present. The needle of the moral compass in the EU countries is swinging violently as so many people desperately seek refuge. The Biblical question once more becomes relevant: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9). Working with all the powers of good in encounters with individuals, countering fear and animosity and working structurally is a challenge for the church's diaconia. The message to love our neighbour is not limited by citizenship, language or religion.

Also it is only just over a hundred years since poor people left Sweden in their thousands in hope of a better life in North America. Today Sweden has a welfare system that makes it possible to welcome people seeking a future in peace for themselves and their children.

Assumptions threatened? Democracy stands for more than a formal system of government. If our democracy is reduced solely to a technical system, we are living in dangerous times. A cohesive glue in a democratic society is the conviction that, as people, we need each other. Compassion is not a given in society. It

is a value that needs to be won and applied anew by each generation. Here we are also expressing the view that what was once an obvious assumption for a democratic society might not obviously remain so. Living and applied fundamental values such as compassion, solidarity, personal autonomy and integrity form the basis of a functioning democracy, not the other way round. For this reason, the fundamental values of society and democracy need to be rooted in their contemporary culture, education and religion. Civil society has special opportunities and a special responsibility to defend and strengthen compassion as a social force. For the diaconia of the Church of Sweden, this is a social responsibility, a challenge to safeguard human value and human dignity by practising compassion and care.

Climate crisis: Once we comprehend the severity of the climate threat and do not see a force for action in the world to combat this threat, the climate issue also leads to existential anxiety. Global emissions of greenhouse gases are increasing despite knowledge of their harmful effects. Recent years have seen a trend towards a drop in emissions but in just a few years emissions will have to clearly turn in a downwards direction, which is not entirely impossible. Within the remit of the UN's climate negotiations common systems are being created to make this happen and to ensure that progress is monitored. However, the majority of young people in Sweden – 80% – are concerned as

to how this deficient ability to handle climate change affects their future and that of the world. How the world's climate crisis is handled is also a question of justice and solidarity with the world's poor, those who today are feeling the most palpable effects of the mismanagement of the earth's resources perpetrated by rich countries. The ethical and spiritual dimension of the climate issue is impossible to ignore. We have developed this thinking in more detail in our Bishops' Letter on climate.²⁷

The traces of diaconia

Diaconia is rooted in our Christian faith and bears fruit in the good gifts that God, through his church, seeks to give to the world and to the society of which the church is always a part. As people baptised into a life of fellowship, we live with the awareness that we, in our own human frailty, can both have to give to and receive from other people in their vulnerability. Diaconia as mutual giving and receiving leaves traces in its wake, good traces.²⁸

Hope. The Gospel of Christ opens new doors when it seemed every exit was closed. In our media-swamped society, happy, beautiful and successful people are held up as the yardstick to aspire to. There is pressure to live up to these ideals and it is difficult to cope with failure, the dark sides of life, illness and death. Christ shows us another pattern where he does not flinch in the face of the pain and losses of existence, but opens a path

through death to life. This is a pattern in which hope brings power.

Hope is one of the treasures of faith, one of the most important things we can pass on: Don't give up! Christian hope has often been described as hope of a heavenly life "to come", but it is just as important to realise that the heavenly reality is already invisibly here amongst us. In the tradition of the church we sometimes talk about sorrow and joy walking hand in hand, an expression of experience-based realism. Diaconia can mean being a presence in difficult times, such that this very presence conveys a hope that God is greater than all the destructive forces. In our society, the presence of this hope is also important in areas and contexts where people feel abandoned and immersed in hopelessness. When others draw back, it is a challenge to stay in Jesus' name.

Truth. In the face of the problems of the world, and our own area, we are urged to look at things from the "bottom up" instead of the usual "top down" approach. When the Gospels depict Jesus, they give us an example in his way of listening to, and so empowering the people he meets. He did not meet people as objects but as fellow human beings and gave them the opportunity of putting their reality into words. If we follow Jesus' approach and provide space for people to describe their own reality in their own words, we often get different stories from the accepted narrative. It is important to dare to question and not to



simply take for granted the judgments made of people and contexts that are publically accepted or put forward by the media.

Protest. There is a link between truth and protest. Listening to voices from marginalised people in society and taking them seriously also means being prepared to take the consequences of doing so. This can mean supporting people so that they can put uncomfortable truths into their own words. It can also mean taking on the task of putting into words and protesting against things that are destructive or against structures that exploit creation. This is particularly challenging because the church and the parish can also be part of these oppressive structures. In other words, diaconia encompasses self-criticism and a readiness to put things to the test, both in terms of the way we lead our own personal lives and the common actions and assumptions of the church.

Constructive role models. The prophetic side of diaconia also includes being brave enough to provide and put to the test positive examples of how compassion can be strengthened in our society. Experience tells us that good example is powerful. Experience also tells us that it is easier to stand on the side lines and point out everything that is wrong than to risk getting involved in working for goodness in society and church. As a church, being involved in shaping good examples gives credibility. A living diaconal commitment that results in good methods or

models spreads outwards, like the ripples from a stone dropped in a pond.

Liberate the capacity of individuals. One important element in diaconia is not to take the initiative away from another person who thereby becomes even more convinced of their lack of ability. The alternative is to stand alongside them, accompanying and guiding them in a way that ensures that their power and daring grow and their own resources are strengthened. The diaconia of the church is about liberating the intrinsic life force when life comes under threat. A method that builds on these ideas of how the church's diaconal work can operate is presented in the book *Rättighetsbaserat arbete i kyrkorna. Introduktion och metoder* (Rights-based work in the churches. Introduction and methods).²⁹

A new understanding of “others”. In a world and a society which is often characterised by division and a lack of understanding, diaconia has an important task in helping us to learn to appreciate each other's differences. This is a natural consequence of the gift of reconciliation through Christ whereby we in turn work for forgiveness and reconciliation between people and groups in our society.

When social tensions lead to different groups forming behind a religious facade, we as Christians face a particular challenge in building bridges to other religious communities. Inter-religious

work for greater mutual understanding and respect is this kind of concrete bridge-building. The ecumenical initiatives from the whole spectrum of churches within the National Christian Council of Sweden contribute to giving these issues greater weight. Together with other churches and denominations we in the Church of Sweden are also challenged to build bridges to secular institutions and agencies.

An appreciation of people's right to have their spiritual needs respected and of religion as a natural part of the life of society is fundamental to healthy social development. There are many good examples of cooperation between the Church of Sweden and different agents, both within the public sector and among organisations in civil society.

Experiencing grace as a reality in life. The Lutheran tradition points to overflowing grace as a characteristic of the church's fellowship. Grace is a gift from God that we are able to give to others, not only in encounters with individuals but also as a basic value in building society. The gift of grace emphasises that the value of people does not depend on what they do and know but on what they are: people. God's love is not dependent on our achievements.

VI. Conclusion

A recurring theme in this Bishops' Letter is that the forms of expression of diaconia depend on the needs of the time and context in question. This means that there is a need for knowledge and that continuing development of forms of work is required within the Church of Sweden's diaconia. To conclude, we would therefore like to emphasise that the Church of Sweden needs to develop its expertise, the forms activities take and the quality of its diaconal work on an on-going basis.

The Church of Sweden's surveys of its members consistently rate its diaconal activities very highly. Clearly there is confidence in the fact that the name of the Church of Sweden stands for quality. It is important that the church's diaconia lives up to the trust placed in it. Good will is always needed but is not always sufficient for demanding diaconal work. Clear frameworks and routines, as well as a transparent process of evaluation and improvement, are all things that naturally need to be built into different forms of diaconal activity.

Across the whole breadth of the church's diaconia, awareness of diaconia as an area of knowledge and skills is vital. The training of deacons is thus crucial. In the long term, it is also important to create opportunities for the further education of deacons within diaconia and diaconal science after basic training. This

opportunity is available in several of our neighbouring countries and could also be developed here. Even where the development of activities as such is concerned, models and methods could undoubtedly be spread more efficiently. Diaconal “craft fairs” to encourage the exchange of these kinds of experiences might be an interesting thought.

When it comes to measures to improve competence in the diaconal field, there is also much to draw on from outside the Church of Sweden’s own context. Ersta Sköndal University College, owned by three of our diaconal institutions, is an important resource for the church and for the whole of civil society. Uppsala University has been able to offer courses with a focus on diaconal science. Research in diaconal science relates our own development to an international and ecumenical context. In the ecumenical arena and in relation to the EU and questions of European social policy, Eurodiaconia is an important link. The branch organisation Famna can also be a resource for the diaconal work of parishes. It provides support in developing high quality work and activity-based networks.³⁰

A diaconal approach is all about bringing what we encounter of human need and vulnerability to God, who can do much more than our imagination can fathom.³¹ Intercession means that we are able to include God’s possibilities in the calculation, while also being realistic enough to recognise our own limitations. When the Orthodox tradition says that diaconia is “the liturgy after the liturgy”, it is highlighting this connection and

interaction between worship and everyday human life. We would like to emphasise this. We need to carry the needs and vulnerability we meet in daily life with us into the worship and intercession of the congregation. The service ends with the blessing – we are sent out to our service of God in our daily lives. We take the contact and blessing we receive in the liturgy out with us into the bustle of society and our day to day encounters with the people among whom we live.³²

In the water of baptism we are touched by God's transforming love. In faith and life we are able to give God our response. As Christians we are able to express our faith through love, care and solidarity with our fellow human beings and with the whole of creation. Where life is threatened, Christ empowers us.

*Open me to your love. The world needs me.
The world needs your love streaming through me.*

*Shape me for your kingdom. Awaken me, give me life.
Take me now into your obedience. Lord, transform me.*

*Now into your service, Oh Lord, I give my body and soul.
Let me rise from death. Christ, you are life.*

*Envelop me in your love. The world needs me.
The world needs your love streaming through me.*
(Swedish hymnbook 96, text by Arne H. Lindgren)

Background facts

1 Historical background of diaconia in the Church of Sweden today

The Swedish word “*diakoni*” (diaconia), now an established term, has a fairly short history. The first time it appears in writing is 1848 in conjunction with the preparations for establishing the deaconess institution Ersta Diakonissanstalt in Stockholm (now Ersta diakoni). A deaconess institution was a new idea at the time and was previously unknown in Sweden.³³ The inspiration for Ersta was mainly drawn from continental Europe.

European models

During the first half of the nineteenth century Europe was affected by the Napoleonic Wars and their consequences. Many people were suffering. Wounded soldiers, orphaned children and starving adults were a common sight on the roads. Many areas were hotbeds of political and social unrest. This widespread distress inspired social initiatives motivated by Christian faith with a particular emphasis on health and education.

Deaconess mother houses were created during this period in Protestant circles on the northern European mainland. Unmarried women, deaconesses, were trained to provide care in the

institutions run by the mother house. Within this movement a tradition grew up whereby the work was carried out by independent societies, characterised by a pietistic spirituality. This tradition largely stemmed from the German deaconess mother house of Kaiserswerth, founded in 1836 by Pastor Theodor Fliedner and his wife Friederike Fliedner. A confessional Lutheran tradition also became established, with the aim of more clearly linking the work to the parishes. Here the first mother house usually mentioned is that of Neuendettelsau, also in Germany, founded by priest Wilhelm Löhe in 1854.

The deaconess institutions were usually run as a community. The deaconesses were sent out on various tasks from their home, the mother house, to which under the supervision of a male and female superintendent they remained attached for as long as they lived.

The home mission movement also evolved during the same period, partly linked to the emergence of deaconess institutions. Johann Hinrich Wichern was a key figure in the evangelical home mission movement. In 1833 he founded Rauhes Haus outside Hamburg which took in abandoned children and young people. Rauhes Haus offered them a home, an upbringing and an education. The work was led by laymen, men known as deacons.

In the British Isles too, similar forms of work began to emerge to meet social needs. Within English Methodism there were “urban missions” with a social responsibility for poor people in the slums.

Swedish initiatives – diaconal institutions and city missions

Germany and Sweden are not far apart. The new way that German Protestants were meeting humanitarian needs inspired Swedish initiatives. Ersta was founded taking the mother house at Kaiserswerth as its model. Almost fifty years later, in 1898, the foundation Stiftelsen Stora Sköndal was established as an institution for deacons in the tradition of Rauhes Haus in Hamburg. Stora Sköndal became the only Swedish institution for deacons, while a further three were founded for deaconesses: Samariterhemmet in Uppsala in 1882, Vårsta in Härnösand in 1912 and Bräcke in Gothenburg in 1927. Samariterhemmet clearly originally drew on impulses from English church life, unlike the other Swedish institutions which had looked towards Germany.

The Stockholm city mission, which started in 1856, is the oldest city mission in Sweden. It was followed by others. Today we would describe the work of the city missions as diaconia. However, this was not a word that was used to begin with. The city missions mainly took their inspiration from the English-speaking world, where the term diaconia was not used in the same way as by German-speaking Protestants.

From diaconal institutions to parish diaconia

The deaconesses trained at Sweden's deaconess institutions originally worked mainly in the institution's own hospitals and other such activities, or in independent associations. Gradually

deaconesses also started to work in the parishes of the Church of Sweden. This took place as new ways of organising the poor relief carried out by the parishes were sought at the turn of the century in 1900. Poor relief was the term at the time for what we would now call social services, and this new system in the parishes of the Church of Sweden is usually called the “parish movement”.

As social work developed to become a natural part of the life of Sweden’s parishes, it came to be called diaconia. From a historical point of view, it is thus not incorrect to translate *diakoni* in the Church of Sweden as the church’s social welfare work.³⁴ To sum up, the Swedish form of the term *diakoni* originally denoted the work of diaconal institutions but, following a gradual shift throughout the 20th century, today has mainly come to be associated with work in the parishes. This has also made it natural for the Church of Sweden to talk about diaconia as something central to the life of the church, and as part of the core task of the parish (Church Ordinance, Chapter 2, § 1).

Throughout the twentieth century, the training of deaconesses and deacons carried out by the diaconal institutions formed a link between the institutions and the Church of Sweden’s parishes. Since 2014, however, that link has been broken, with the Church of Sweden taking over the final year of training for deacons in its own training institute.

Hand in hand with this integration of diaconia as something central to Swedish parish life, we continue to talk, however, of

diaconia as also including independent institutions and organisations such as city missions and diaconal institutions.

Deaconess and deacon in the Church of Sweden

Unlike diaconia, the word deacon (*diakon*) has been used throughout the history of the Church of Sweden. In the Swedish Middle Ages the word meant an order reserved for men within the ordained ministry of the church. In the Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican tradition, the word deacon has been in use without interruption until the present day and the diaconate is a permanent part of holy orders, mainly linked to liturgical tasks. In these churches, ordination as a deacon has often been a step on the way towards ordination as a priest. After the Reformation, Reformed churches retained the diaconate as a caritative diaconate. In Lutheran churches, on the other hand, the diaconate ceased to exist during the Reformation period, partly due to criticism of the deacon's liturgical function.³⁵

Since deaconesses (women) and later deacons (men) were introduced into the life of the Swedish Lutheran church in later times, a link has subsequently evolved, seeing the diaconate as part of the church's ordained ministry. The first service for "induction into one's calling" was introduced in the Swedish church handbook in 1921. These services have gradually more clearly developed to become a service for the ordination of deacons, fully implemented in part II of the handbook of the Church of Sweden in 1987.

Today “deacon” (*diakon*) is the common term for both men and women. Through the Church Ordinance, from 2000 onwards deacons also became part of the church’s ordained ministry in terms of church law, answerable to the bishop and chapter. The ministry of deacons in the Church of Sweden stands clearly within the caritative tradition originating in nineteenth century Europe and integrated into Swedish parish life since the 1890s. The social focus is marked in that the Church of Sweden defines its diaconate as a *caritative diaconate* (from the Latin *caritas* meaning roughly love, care).

2. Brief introduction to contemporary research in diaconal science

In nineteenth century Protestant Germany it was thus social need that caused Christians to take responsibility and initiatives in the form of new ways of working. To clearly indicate the Christian calling in these activities, terminology began to be used which drew on the Old Testament. From the Greek *diakonia* and *diakonos* (deacon) it was possible to create German words which gave a Christian ideological profile to the new ways of working created. The Swedish terminology followed the German: *diakoni* (diaconia), *diakon* (deacon) and *diakonissa* (deaconess).

Because the diaconiarrelated words gain force from their New Testament origin, their background in the young Christian church has become an important area of research. The words in

the New Testament are two Greek nouns and also a verb, *diakonein*. Since the 1930s it has generally been assumed that the basic linguistic meaning of *diakonein* is to “serve at table”, of *diakonos* “server at table” and of *diakonia* “serving at table”.³⁶ From this basic meaning the emphasis has been placed on unselfishly and sacrificially serving one’s neighbour, and this etymology has often been used in interpreting the modern-day task of *diakonia*.

Several later studies, however, have led to a re-evaluation of previously held opinions.³⁷ In 1990 John N. Collins published a linguistic study in which he criticises the interpretation of the basic meaning of the term *diakonia* which he considers has been far too affected by the Protestant German *diakonia* movement in the nineteenth century. He considers that this pre-understanding has led to too narrow an interpretation of the original Greek terms. The texts of the New Testament have been read in the light of the emerging industrial society and the results conflict with the originally wide and varied content of the terms. In Collins’ view the basic meaning of *diakonos* is not “servant” but “middleman” or “go-between”.³⁸ The basic meaning of our “deacon” would thus be close to our “apostle”, a person who has been charged with completing a particular task. Later Anni Hentschel confirmed the results of Collins’ research, while adding certain nuances. In her view the basic meaning of *diakonia* is “task” or “carrying out a task”.³⁹

The linguistic re-examination of the word *diakonia* mainly means imbuing the term with a much wider range of meaning than was originally the case. The consequence of this is that we cannot simply apply a linguistic exegesis of the *diakonia* vocabulary to determine how diaconia today is to be seen. The questions of interpretation that we ask have to be worded differently.

The historical material concerning the diaconate of the early or ancient church has also been reassessed. Reference has previously often been made to the description in Acts 6:1-6 of how seven men were appointed to wait at tables as evidence that a caritative diaconate was introduced in the early church in Jerusalem. Today this is instead seen as clearly reading too much into the text.

Bible scholar Kari Latvus has examined the instances of deacon as a position or order that occur in the New Testament and in the writings of the ancient church. His unambiguous conclusion is that there is nothing to indicate that the deacons mentioned had any particular caritative task. Collins and Hentschel also support this conclusion. Instead the sources give the impression that deacons could be entrusted with preaching and/or administrative tasks such as finances and administration. Latvus considers that it is true that the early church showed great care for the poor, sick and needy but that deacons did not have any particular role in this respect. The assumption that the diaconate of the young church had a caritative ministry does not seem to hold water.⁴⁹

In ecumenical conversations and in the churches' self-understanding, the church's diaconia has become increasingly important. In actual fact it can probably be said that it is our contemporary situation in multi-religious and multi-cultural societies that challenge the ability of churches and Christians to live in diaconia. This has led both to greater attention being paid to diaconia in ecumenical conversations and in our own church's reflection over its identity and its mission. The fact that the exegetic basis for the *diaconia* terminology itself, a child of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, has been re-examined does not mean that the matter itself need be called into question. In diaconal science the challenges are now being formulated differently, in which the task becomes to create a broader and deeper theological basis for contemporary diaconia.

The International Society for the Research and Study of Diaconia and Christian Social Practice, abbreviated to ReDi, is an international network of researchers which arranges annual research conferences on diaconal science across Europe. It also publishes an academic journal which provides a useful orientation in current areas of research.⁴¹



Notes

- 1 *Leva i dopet*. (Living in baptism) Bishops' Letter Uppsala: Church of Sweden 2011, p. 13.
- 2 "He is the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15).
- 3 *Diakonia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment. An LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Diaconia*. Geneva: Lutheran World Federation 2009, p. 28f.
- 4 *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*. Geneva. World Council of Churches 2012.
- 5 Per Frostin, "Kristendomens kairós", in *De nedtystades Gud. Diakoni för livets skull*, ed. Sigurd Bergmann. Stockholm: Proprius 1992.
- 6 *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity*. The 1996 Hanover Report of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission. Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation 1996, point 51.
- 7 See also the section on information on contemporary research into diaconia in the final section of the Bishops' Letter, Background facts.
- 8 The following section on the interpretation of Luke 10:25-37 from Göran Agrell, "Bibeln och diakoni - motivering och exempel", in *Diakoni. Tolkning, historik, praktik*, eds. Erik Blennberger and Mats J. Hansson. Stockholm: Verbum 2008, p. 74-76.
- 9 See also *Theological Perspectives on Diaconia in the 21st Century*. Report from the World Council of Churches conference in Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2-6 June 2012.
- 10 Hanna Gerdes, Elisabeth Hjalmarsson and Carina Öjermo, *Rättighetsbaserat arbete i kyrkorna. Introduktion och metoder*. Varberg: Argument 2012.
- 11 *Theological Perspectives on Diaconia in the 21st Century* 2012. See note 9.

- 12 *Biskop, präst och diakon i Svenska kyrkan. Ett biskopsbrev om kyrkans ämbete.* (Bishop, priest and deacon in the Church of Sweden) Bishops' Letter, Uppsala: Church of Sweden 1990, p. 10–12. The priesthood of the baptised and believers has traditionally also been known as “the general priesthood” or “the priesthood of all believers”. This thus incorporates what is sometimes metaphorically referred to as “a general deaconate”.
- 13 See: internwww.svenskakyrkan.se/diakoni/diakonipastoral.
- 14 *Biskop, präst och diakon i Svenska kyrkan*, p. 14.
- 15 *Kallad till diakon och präst i Svenska kyrkan* (Called to be a deacon and priest in the Church of Sweden). Bishops' Letter Uppsala: Church of Sweden 2014
- 16 “The mission has a caritative focus that can also be expressed, for example, in teaching.” Introduction to section seven of the Church Ordinance.
- 17 *Biskop, präst och diakon i Svenska kyrkan*, p. 27.
- 18 General synod 1999, report of the Commission on the Church Act 1999:1
- 19 *Biskop, präst och diakon i Svenska kyrkan*, p.16
- 20 World Values Survey 2015, se: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org>.
- 21 See also Pekka Møllergård, “Religionen i morgondagens svenska samhälle”; in *Framtidsutmaningar. Det nya Sverige*, ed. Jesper Strömbäck. Stockholm: 8tto, p. 87ff
- 22 See also Per Frostin, “Kristendomens kairos”, in *De nedtystades Gud. Diakoni för livets skull* 1992, especially p. 27ff.
- 23 See for example the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare’s annual social reports; Bo Rothstein, *De som inte har, inte älskar och inte är*; in *Framtidsutmaningar. Det nya Sverige* 2013, p. 57ff.
- 24 *Skillnader i livsvillkor och hälsa i Göteborg*. Rapport från Göteborgs stad 2014.
- 25 Vicar Annika Vindare in a brochure issued by the network *Framtiden bor hos oss, Tankar och teologi om att vara kyrka i ny kontext*.

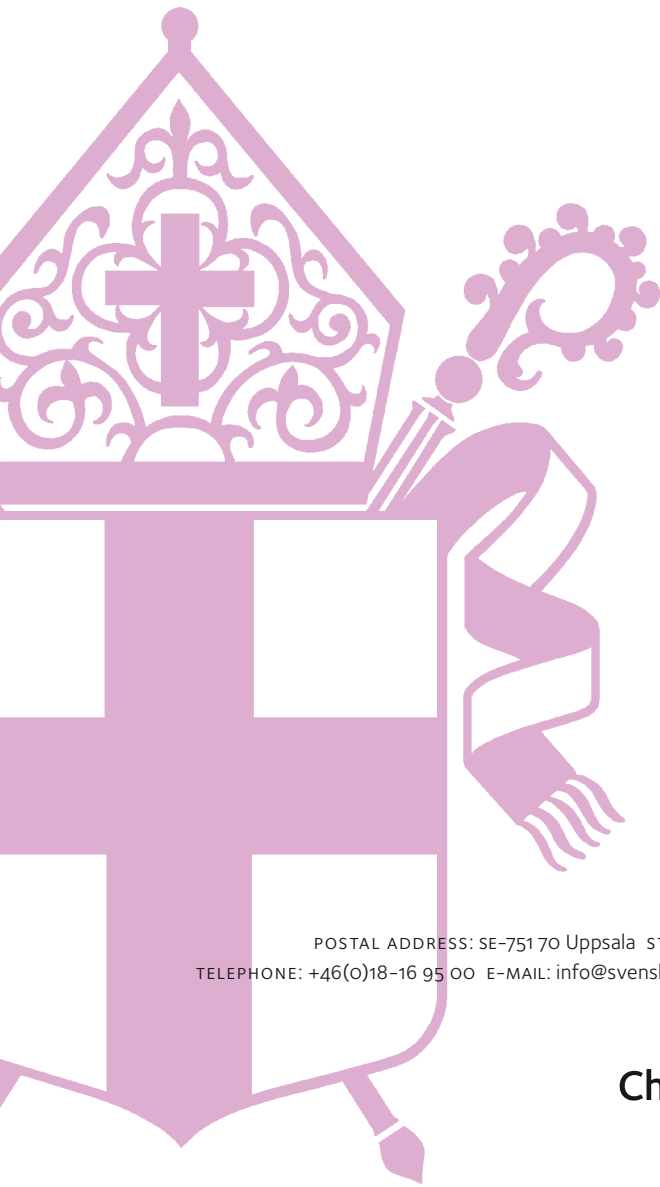
- 26 Jonas Idestrom, *Spåren I snön. Att vara kyrka i norrländska glesbygder*. Skellefteå: Artos 2015. Text from the back cover.
- 27 *Ett biskopsbrev om klimatet*. (A Bishops' Letter about the Climate) Uppsala: Church of Sweden 2014
- 28 *To Love and Serve the Lord. Diakonia in the Life of the Church. The Jerusalem Report of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission (ALIC III)*. Geneva: Lutheran World Federation 2011, p. 15–18.
- 29 Gerdes, Hjalmarsson & Öjermo, *Rättighetsbaserat arbete i kyrkorna 2012* (see note 10 above).
- 30 Ersta Sköndal University College: www.esh.se. Famna – national organisation for voluntary care: www.famna.org. Eurodiaconia: www.eurodiaconia.org.
- 31 Compare the tale of the man who carried his paralysed friend to Jesus, Mark 2:1–5.
- 32 Sigurd Bergmann, “Kyrkans diakoni i ortodox belysning - en utmaning till ekumenisk nyreflektion”, in *Svensk teologisk kvartalskrift* vol. 66/1990, s. 116ff; Ion Bria, *The Liturgy after the Liturgy. Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective*. Geneva: World Council of Churches 1996.
- 33 It is stated that it was first discussed whether Ersta's “sisters” should be called sisters of charity because deaconess was too unfamiliar a word in Swedish. The decision, however, was that those accepted for training would be called deaconesses and Ersta thus became a “deaconess institution” as it was then termed. Iverson, Y, *Tro verksam i kärlek*, 1988, p 27.
- 34 Göran Gellerstam, *Från fattigvård till församlingsvård. Utvecklingslinjer inom fattigvård och diakoni i Sverige 1871 – omkring 1895*. Lund: Lunds University 1971.
- 35 Åke André, *Diakonaten i världens kyrkor idag. Kyrkornas svar på BEM-dokumentets ämbetsstruktur och den fortsatta utvecklingen*. Uppsala: The Church of Sweden 1994
- 36 Hermann Beyer, art. “Diakoneo, diakonia, diakonos”, in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament II*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 1935.

- 37 A good introduction to current research up to 2008 (in Swedish) is found in *Diakoni. Tolkning, historik, praktik 2008* (see note 8 above).
- 38 John N. Collins, *Diakonia. Reinterpreting the Ancient Sources*. New York/Oxford 1990. Collins gives “go-between” and “middleman” as the basic meaning in the original English.
- 39 Anni Hentschel, *Diakonia im Neuen Testament*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2007.
- 40 Kari Latvus, “Diakonämbetet - en ny tolkning av dess ursprung”, in *Där nöden är störst*, Skrifter utgivna av kyrkostyrelsen vid evangelisk-lutherska kyrkan i Finland 2009:1, Åbo 2009. Latvus considers that the cause of the “myth” of an originally caritative deaconate builds on misinterpretations by Luther and Calvin of Acts 6. See also Kari Latvus, “The Conventional Theory about the Origin of Diaconia. An Analysis of Arguments”, *Diaconia. Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice* 2011:2, p. 194ff.
- 41 See: www.diaconiaresearch.org.



Pictures

- page 10 Photo: Alex & Martin/IKON
- page 15 Photo: Alex & Martin/IKON
- page 22 Photo: Magnus Aronson/IKON
- Page 27 Photo: Paul Jeffrey/ACT Hundreds of people have fled countries including Syria and Iraq in 2015. At a refugee camp in Presevo in Serbia, the children are able to play and relax for a moment.
- page 33 Photo: Magnus Aronson/IKON
- page 37 Photo: Magnus Aronson/IKON. A volunteer from Sankta Clara church in Stockholm pulls a trolley laden with thermos flasks of coffee to Sergels Torg to offer some warmth to those in need.
- page 43 Photo: Henrik Sandsjö, Bräcke diakoni. Care of the elderly.
- page 48 Photo: Linda Mickelsson/IKON
- page 56 Photo: Alex & Martin/IKON
- page 59 Photo: Offerdal/Wikipedia. Offerdal Ede church.
- page 60 Photo: Paul Jeffrey A volunteer takes in a shaking refugee child who has just survived the journey across the Aegean from Turkey to Greece.
- page 66 Photo: Åsa Johansson Hakim/IKON. Mentor mother Nkambule Kumbuzile is visiting Sipihiwe Dlamini and her four-day-old son Masande Sithole.
- page 82 Photo: Louise Hedberg/IKON
- page 87 Photo: Magnus Aronson/IKON.



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