



Convivial Living

Odesa is a big city where many children and young people face poverty and exclusion. "Living Hope" has taken on the exciting and challenging task of working with them, starting in one neighborhood and now in working in two neighborhoods and a village outside the city.

"When I first heard about the concept of 'conviviality', I thought this is how we live together in our project in Odesa and the region, without having a special name for it. It is one of the key values of 'Living Hope' to live openly as a community, accepting and loving each other because Christ loved us. It means a life full of memorable moments, unpredictable situations, occasional disappointments – and continuous challenges. But conviviality is the only way that children and families can learn to live together, by recognizing each other's strengths and weaknesses."

Living Hope works long term with kids and their families as well as the wider community so in this way the work of the centers becomes a catalyst for the wider community. The process is continuous, for example the kids who use the center are challenged to take the initiative and become involved in volunteering and the kids from the first two centers contributed to building up the third center. As part of an international network the

centers also receive and send volunteers. In this way "Living Hope" is practicing convivial living and spreads it even across national borders.

Some of the most impressive experiences of conviviality are during the "Living Hope" summer camps. More than 130 kids and adults from different nations spend a wonderful week together. In the end most of them describe their most important experience as being part of a "family".

"Working and living in the way of conviviality motivates us for our future work! Simply by living transparently, teaching by personal example and implementing Christian ideas of common living we are impacting on present and future generations."



Convivial Congregation

Conviviality is about living our everyday lives together, wherever we come from, whatever language we speak, whoever we are, we desperately need to meet face by face and take part.

The place is Hällbo and about 8000 people live here, mostly in rented flats. Over 60% of the inhabitants were born abroad. During 2015 many refugees came to Sweden, and many of them chose to stay with relatives or friends in our area. All the pupils in Hällbo School speak another language than Swedish at home. The average income is much lower compared to Gothenburg as a whole, the education level is lower, unemployment is higher and many people are so overcrowded that it's hard for kids to get their own space where they can do their homework.

In the middle of Hällbo market square you will find our Church. You'll find a lot of color there! People come to the church and it's almost always open! They come to light candles, to pray to worship, to meet together. Trainees who study Swedish work in the café. Our mission is to find ways for people meet one another, Muslims and Christians from many traditions. The simplest ways are often the best. We

try to make it easy. Here are some examples:

Once a week we meet for a couple of hours to have a cup of coffee and practice Swedish. We also sing together, choosing children's songs that are easy to learn – and fun! *That's conviviality!*

We run a small second-hand shop where people can buy clothes for almost nothing. You can always get a cup of coffee in the café, which is a small place housing a lot of people talking all kinds of languages. *That's conviviality!*

At Christmas time we invite school kids to a performance called "Holy kids and tough luck." Old father Abraham, also called Ibrahim, tells the story about the Holy Family who became refugees. The actors sing in Swedish and Arabic. Muslim and Christian kids can recognize themselves in the story. *"Conviviality as the art and practice of living together..."*

Sunday school is a chance for kids from different Christian traditions to meet. Every second week we invite the kids to "Fun in Church" where all kids can come and play, Muslims or Christians, no one will ask which you are. We play together. *That's conviviality!* Sometimes it's hard to cross borders. It's not always easy to understand how people from other cultures behave and do things. One challenge is that people tend to stay together in their own groups. Somalis among Somalis, Iraqis among Iraqis, Christian Syrians among Christian Syrians, Muslim Syrians among Muslim Syrians. We try to cross the borders and *that's seeking conviviality!*

Conviviality
"the art and practice
of living together"

Convivial Economy

For Christians, the top questions of convivial economy are: Do people get fair jobs and a fair income? Is there co-determination and participation? Is there good living together? If not, we are forced to protest and to create positive projects connected with our social political engagement. That is what "protestant" means!

The Lutheran Church in Bavaria has started a project campaign against poverty. Parishes and diocesan organisations already started 60 initiatives for young people, older people in rural areas, people with a migration background and single parents. Secular projects such as urban gardening, food sharing, community bus or job initiatives founded anti-poverty projects too. Here is one example:

Leb-mit-Laden (Living together store)

In the small town of Neumarkt, near Nürnberg, there is a small store, which brings people together. They can get low cost food and clothes and serve in consulting to gain their social rights. It is more than the usual business operation! Consumers organize the store by themselves. One room is furnished as a cafeteria, where people sit together, talk and get good advice for daily life. The store is a vibrant part of the social and cultural life in the town. Volunteers and workers act together with respect and dignity. The project follows Luther's idea that 'daily bread' means not only

food, but also, for example, clothes, house, garden, health, peace, friends & good government.

A convivial economy implies that churches and welfare organizations should use their money, property and land not as 'theirs', but as a gift by God's grace. They should use it to enlarge the common good and the welfare of the surrounding society. This is the case, when they do not follow strategies of competition and maximum gain but work to bridge the gap between rich and poor and making convivial use of their gifts. Here is an example:

Soziale Wohnraumhilfe Hannover (Social Housing Aid, Hannover)

Diakonie Hannover, with a regional housing company has started the partnership 'Social Housing Aid, Hannover' company. It offers housing to homeless people and those at risk of becoming homeless as well as for those living in unacceptable housing conditions. So far they have developed 180 housing units and offer support and assistance to the tenants. This model is being adopted in other nearby cities.

Convivial Theology

"Convivial theology' changes the way of looking at diakonia in the local church away from 'my point of view' to 'our point of view'. The idea of open church, doing things together and sharing our gifts, opportunities and faith means working together in community and in church. Diacanal practice and its effectiveness is not dependent on material wealth, but on people's motivation and commitment, using their own skills."

"Convivial theology' has invited me to look more closely at the results for people involved, and not so much focus on theological correctness. Conviviality has given me confidence in an ecumenical, interreligious approach to our diacanal work. This is liberating! Being Lutheran is not about having the right opinions about different topics, but to believe we can take part in the struggle for human dignity in our neighborhoods."

"Convivial theology' relates to local contexts and concrete local actions. In Cross Congregation in Lepaja, Latvia there is a group called 'Talks about Bible and Life'. In the last two years it dealt with Jesus' commandment of loving your

enemies. We started it in the context of the immediate threat of a possible war in the Baltic countries. First we looked on our own questions, doubts, and the perceptions of conflicts in our lives. Then we looked at different Bible texts about how to deal with violence. Thirdly, we came to our practical activity. We prepared prayers for our enemies, presented them in a service and afterwards had a discussion in small groups about how to develop an attitude of love, not hate, against our personal and common enemies. Love against enemies is not a cosmetic operation after which you smile against every kind of injustice. It's only possible if we acknowledge our pain, our anger and our fear."

"Conviviality is love of the other and seeking for peace with justice in action. Cross congregation decided to leave the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church because the Church voted to deny women's ordination. We have joined the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad and there is the possibility that we will lose our church building and diacanal centre. For us it's important to be free in our decisions, without getting into a co-dependent relationship. It can cost us much, on the other hand, freedom is a necessity if you want to love somebody. Again and again we have to ask ourselves how we can live conviviality, even with those who are opposed to us and to love people and institutions, who in our view misuse their power and do harm to us and other people. There are no easy answers."





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Diakonia Creates Conviviality

... the art and practice of living together...

Re-forming Community Diakonia in Europe

European Solidarity Group for Community Diakonia



The Programme

Facing the major changes and challenges in European society in recent years, there is a need to rethink diaconal approaches in different contexts. The whole church is called to be diaconal and the roots of diakonia are at the local and congregational level. The LWF member churches nominated a group of local diaconal workers to participate in a process of "re-forming community diakonia." The process, which is linked to the Reformation Anniversary, took the name, "Seeking Conviviality." The first results are presented in this leaflet. The full reports of the project are available from the LWF.

Next Steps

"Seeking Conviviality" has been supported by the LWF and interdiac (International Academy for Diaconia and Social Action, Central and Eastern Europe). The partners are committed to continuing the process in the coming years. If you are interested, you are invited to contact the partners to find out more about developments. We would also be pleased to hear your reactions and ideas!

Published reports

- *Seeking Conviviality – Re-forming Community Diakonia in Europe* (2014)
- *Convivial Life Together: Bible studies on Vocation, Dignity and Justice* (2015)
- *Towards a Convivial Economy* (2017)

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Conviviality & Justice

Diakonia, seeking conviviality, focuses on people and communities that suffer from injustice and exploitation. Working for conviviality involves direct engagement with people who are economically marginalized. The rights of immigrant and minority groups, people with disabilities and the rights of people who are not legally recognized are priority justice issues for convivial diakonia. The focus on justice is based on understanding that all are made in the image of God and are valued equally. Therefore no one can be denied the basics for a life in dignity. Meeting needs has to be done in a way that enhances people's dignity. Social justice implies that people should be able to participate in political, economic and cultural life, but financially and resource poor people lack time and resources for civil participation. In a convivial society political and economic policies ensure that the resources of society serve the common good of all and that creation care is a priority.

Conviviality & Dignity

Dignity in Christian terms is grounded in the fact that each person is created in the image of God and the love of God extends to all. God's inclusive love stands in sharp contradiction to the definition of dignity focused on the individual capacity for autonomous decision-making. In neo-liberal thinking, dignity is focused individual capacity to take self-interested decisions about finance, consumption and welfare. In Christian terms, dignity is a relational concept, which recognizes the interpersonal grounding of decision making as well as personal responsibility. This implies that systems should not damage the inherent dignity of people, whether they are systems of care or of employment or financial systems. The focus of the diaconal & convivial understanding of the person is on relationships and creation care. Putting markets (especially financial markets & markets which speculate in products like food) ahead of human need is a form of idolatry that undermines dignity.

Convivial Life Together

The biggest challenge we face in local diakonia is to find ways in which people with diverse backgrounds can live together in peace with justice. The danger is that groups separate and conflicts deepen. We have to develop the "art and practice of living together" and for this we chose the word "conviviality." It comes from the period of Spanish history when Christians, Moslems and Jews lived together in peace. If, in all our diversity, we are created in God's image, then the process of seeking conviviality is a process of entering into the fullness of what God creatively offers in all humankind. By having an open, curious and receptive attitude we are all enriched. By working with people, by sharing and learning together in common actions, borders are gradually broken down. Conviviality is a relational concept and it implies that we should share everyday life with people, seeking to overcome exclusion and segregation.

Conviviality & Vocation

From the perspective of conviviality, vocation is related the diverse forms of work we need to live together. We are not especially focused on 'vocation' to pastoral ministry or to a profession. Christians are called to work together for the common good of all. Each person has gifts and talents that can be used to express their love of the other, the struggle for justice and peace and the care for creation. A convivial economy needs not only paid work, but also work which is unpaid but essential, as well as work which is purely for pleasure. In fact more and more paid work is being organized with flexible and low paid insecure conditions that undermine dignity and the sense of vocation. Furthermore, the unpaid work is unfairly divided, so that women do more of it than men. Work and paid work are essential and much unpaid work contribute to well-being and security. Activities, which are for pleasure, are also important for building a convivial society. A convivial economy cannot be based on precarious work, bad working conditions or an unjust distribution of income.

