



DIAKONIA IN A CONTEMPORARY SOCIO-DEMOCRATIC WELFARE  
SOCIETY.

A qualitative research on the role of the church to care for the weak,  
marginalized and suffering in the city of Stavanger, Norway.

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*“Finally, brothers and sister, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right whatever is pure, whatever is lovely whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” – Philippians 4,8-9*

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## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Theme

Diakonia has been an aspect of the nature of the Christian Church from its conception. The term diakonia comes from the Greek word *diakonein*<sup>1</sup>, meaning service. This is found in the gospel of Mark when Jesus refers to his messianic mission, as he says: “For the son of man did not come to be *served*, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”<sup>2</sup> (Mark 10,45) Here, Jesus proclaims diakonia as an integral dimension of his coming, as the in-breaking of God’s kingdom.<sup>3</sup> Diakonia serves as part of the history of the church, and although the grounds, content and organization have varied and developed from its beginning, a caring and serving ministry has stood its time. Theologically, it is a part of the mission God gave his church. To practice diakonia is to serve humanity, to serve the created world and through this, also serve God. The church has a mission to care for the people within their community, but also to care for the people outside. Therefore, one could argue that diakonia should be a central aspect of every church regardless of the form in which it takes in parish life.

As societies progress and new challenges in both church and society arise, the concept of diakonia has seen change. The plan for diakonia by the Norwegian Church has altered from 1988 to today’s plan that came into force from 2008. With influence from the ecumenical movement, there has been a paradigm shift which resulted in a new plan that is colored by the ecumenical understanding of diakonia, and has a depth in the form of ecclesiastic identity and context.<sup>4</sup> As diakonia was previously perceived as a work for the professional deacons or agencies, it is now widely believed that diakonia is inherent to the total mission of the church, and to the extent of *being* the church. Therefore, as the church is based on faith in God, it involves responsibility in caring for the whole of creation, just as God first loved his creation

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 10,45, The Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible: New American Standard Bible (La Habra, CA: AMG International, Inc., 2008).

<sup>2</sup> (emphasis mine) The Hebrew-Greek Key Work Study Bible

<sup>3</sup> Kjell Nordstokke (editor), *Diakonia In Context*, 1st Edition (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Stephanie Dietrich addresses his in his book, *Systematisk teologisk grunnlag for diakontjenesten i Diakonen kall og profesjon*, (Trondheim: Tapir akademiske forlag, 2011).

and showed this through the life and death of Jesus Christ. Christianity is therefore more than simply something you believe in, it is something you *are*. Hence, diakonia is more than something the church does, or doesn't do, it is at the core of what the church is; it is the gospel in action.

All diaconal work is both challenged and conditioned by concrete context, and all contexts are multifaceted and require an interdisciplinary approach.<sup>5</sup> Take my city for example; Stavanger Norway, an affluent city drenched into all that the welfare state represents. A welfare state that has an extensive social security system, a system that is supposed to cover everyone, regardless of social or economic status. In other nations where no such system exists, the diaconal work might be obvious because there is little-to-no system to care for the poor and marginalized. Many of the needs previously assigned to the church (such as caring for the poor) have, in a welfare state, become the responsibility of the state. At first glance, it may seem as though people of Stavanger are far from deprived, but when you get a closer look you'll find people living in economic, physical, spiritual and emotional need. Although the Norwegian welfare system provides broad opportunity for every inhabitant, it is safe to assume that systems fail, and one cannot rely solely on the government to help and care for all human needs. Within this pool of serving humanities needs, there must be thought of what role the church is to play. Space must be given to develop thought and practice to how diakonia is outworked within this welfare context. That is the theme of this thesis, diakonia outworked in the welfare context of Stavanger, Norway. With this as my backdrop I have formulated my research question as follows: ***“What role does the church play to care for the weak, marginalized and suffering in the city of Stavanger, Norway?”*** How this issue will be investigated and outworked, is described in more detail later in this chapter.

Furthermore, the over-arching issue has an ecclesiastical and missiological character, however, it will also be relevant to look at the sociology of religion, and more general sociological perspectives when the themes will be illustrated.

As aforementioned, the concept of diakonia is the concept of the church in action; therefore, ecclesiology and missiology work hand in hand. It is relevant to understand how churches in Stavanger perceive their diaconal role, and how both collectively and individually this is outworked.

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<sup>5</sup> Jordheim Kari, “Challenges for Diakonia in the Contemporary Norwegian Society”, *Estudo Teológico* 55 (2015): 243-259, 244.

Missiologically it is also relevant in the context of church planting, for new church plants to explore their diaconal role and see how they are to meet the needs of their community.

## 1.2 Research Overview

To put this research into context, in the following I will refer briefly to relevant research material previously done on the subject. Against this backdrop, I will show what challenges have been encountered and illuminate areas where there is still need for further research.

I find that Kari Jordheim's article, *Challenges for Diakonia in the Contemporary Norwegian Society*,<sup>6</sup> addresses some of the specific challenges facing diaconal institutions, organizations and churches. It is important that all diaconal work demonstrates respect, equality and mutuality. Diaconal activities have often been seen as charitable work, where there is a defined receiver and a giver, making the receiver the object and the giver the subject. This is a continuing challenge facing diakonia today, and one that serves of interest to my project. Jordheim's article presses the importance that all humans are subjects, subjects to her or his life, and subjects to the image of God.<sup>7</sup> The value placed upon human life is the same and true for all, and need to be central to all diaconal work.

Suffering individuals are the concern of the church whether they are living nearby or abroad. Therefore, globalization can be a challenge facing diakonia as cultural and ethnic diversity is reflected in parish life.<sup>8</sup> Because of globalization and the increase of information, there is more awareness on the condition of the world. In addition to this, migration has brought other challenges, and diaconal work has to find ways to build a bridge between different cultures, nationalities and religions. As Stavanger saw a large increase of migrants moving to the city in 2016, it is of interest to my project to see how and if churches in Stavanger make a specific effort towards their new neighbors.

Diakonia also faces a major challenge in the pluralistic society of today. There can be great difficulty in upholding specific diaconal identity in a pluralistic society as they operate in the sphere between religion and society, maneuvering the mandate from both the public sector and the church. The religiously affiliated operates in the sphere between profession and

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<sup>6</sup> Jordheim Kari, *Challenges for Diakonia in the Contemporary Norwegian Society*, " Estudio Teológico, Sao Leopoldo v.55, n.2, (2015) p243-259.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

faith, which can be a challenge in recruiting new volunteers for a religious diaconal activity that might require professional competency.<sup>9</sup> It will be of interest to my project to see if churches and a particular Christian organization in Stavanger have different experiences recruiting volunteers as their activities and projects although based on similar values may communicate a different message.

Specifically related to the Norwegian welfare system, I perceive different challenges. These challenges are among those often seen in the media and public debates. The challenges are related to a rapid growing number of people receiving disability pension, as well as early retirement and sickness leave. Poverty is another growing challenge. This is especially true for retirees with low pension and disadvantaged children, as well as work migrants who are unable to compete in the challenging labor market. As life expectancy increases, there is a challenge with the growing number of elderly.<sup>10</sup> The relationship between the church and the state has varied over time, but there are many ways in which voluntary organizations can contribute, and add to the public sector. Jordheim states, “The question for diakonia is always to find out what role diaconal activities as voluntary welfare agents may meaningfully have in the society.”<sup>11</sup> It would be of interest to see how churches respond to the “unseen needs” (such as emotional and spiritual needs) that the welfare system is unable to provide an answer for.

I would also like to bring a perspective by Einar Vetvik, from his study, *Poverty and Dignity in a rich welfare state - the case of Norway. Does diakonia matter?*<sup>12</sup> In his paper he brings up an interesting perspective on poverty in Norway. He gives three dimensions to poverty; the first is economic poverty, which is related to money. This is what is referred to as relative poverty, and entails total economic capacity, and the lack of financial resources for a normal life in society either for an individual or a household. The second and third dimension is about social exclusion and lack of dignity. Social exclusion is related to low participation and integration into society, and can lead to real isolation. This exclusion is the opposite of being included into a community. Lack of dignity refers to a lack of respect and value placed on an

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Vetvik, Einar. “Poverty and dignity in a rich welfare state- the case of Norway. Does diakonia matter?” Pages 95-124, in “Faith-Based Social Action in Combating Marginalization.” Diakonia-ammattikorkeakoulu. Edited by Esko Kähkönen & Teemy Pauha, Helsinki, 2011, 95-124.

individual.<sup>13</sup> In more detail it refers to equal rights, self-determination, respect and human value.<sup>14</sup> According to Vetvik's study, poverty is still persistent and so extensive that it cannot be labeled as not of immediate concern.<sup>15</sup> Poverty presents important challenges in social wellbeing and dignity in Norway. Vetvik says, it is not something that can be fixed through the use of money or material measures alone as poverty poses a fundamental problem concerning equality and dignity for all people in society.<sup>16</sup> It will be of interest to my research to see how churches in Stavanger have seen and experienced this often invisible/hidden need, as well as to see what their role is to combat such need.

Olav Helge Angell in his article *Church and Welfare state in Norway: Diaconia in the context of welfare pluralism*,<sup>17</sup> points out that the common trends in diakonia; which are the concern for the elderly, the bereaved, the sick and those in existential distress is at the heart of diakonia. Although this work is known and acknowledged by the public welfare sector, they have yet to engage in exploring what the church has to offer as a potential partner. Angell says it is up to the church to promote itself.<sup>18</sup> Further research needs to be done to see what churches in Stavanger do to promote their initiatives and activities. Our pluralistic society has developed a tension between the church and the public, between professional and faith; this poses a challenge when recruiting volunteers. It is of interest to my project to consider that resources; both in the form of finances and volunteers, are often a challenge mentioned by churches and organizations.

In a study on church-based agent CCM (Church City Mission) in Drammen, Angell found that the CCM engages in social work that benefits a category of people living in the margins of the local community.<sup>19</sup> He concludes that the CCM acts like a guardian of religious values in the public sphere, not by quantitative measures, but by the symbolic functions and values associated with the practice by the observers. What I am left with is the perceived consistency between actions and words, as the CCM does moral work, both in

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 123

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Olav Helge Angell, "Church and Welfare state in Norway: Diaconia in the context of welfare pluralism", *Diakonhjemmet*, 2005; available at <http://hdl.handle.net/11250/98733>; site accessed 20 September 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>19</sup> Olav Helge Angell, "Church-Based Welfare Agency and Public Religion", *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 20 (2007): 179-193, 189.

social actions and in words.<sup>20</sup> This work correlates to my own as it explores the role of the church in society.

In Knud Jørgensen's book, *Equipping for Service*,<sup>21</sup> he concedes that God's mission for the church is to witness, and an aspect of witness is diaconal action. He claims that it is foundational for a local congregation to live out diakonia, and to proclaim the Gospel through diakonia. In order that this might continue, the church needs to be equipped for service, both professionals and volunteers. As every individual believer is empowered for diakonia, the church has the potential for a large reservoir of experience and skills. He says, "Equipping for diakonia is a process of transformation, reconciliation and empowerment need not be a burden but rather an opportunity to set free the talents and abilities of humans created in the image of God."<sup>22</sup>

As we have seen, there has been little research done that is relevant to my project, especially when it comes to the role of the church in society, which shows clearly that there is need for further research on this field.

### 1.3 The problem

My aim is to contribute to the discussion of how churches see their diaconal role in a welfare state. The research question that I aim to answer is as mentioned earlier, "***What role does the church play to care for the weak, marginalized and suffering in the city of Stavanger, Norway?***" From this question derives more specific sub-questions that I think will help to answer the overarching problem:

- What are the challenges in doing diaconal work in a welfare state?
- What are the specific needs (the weak, marginalized and suffering) seen by the churches in Stavanger?
- Who does the diaconal work? And is the lack of volunteers a hindrance in diaconal work?

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Knut Jørgensen, "Equipping for Service: Diakonia and Capacity Building", in Stephanie Dietrich et al., *Diakonia As Christian Social Practice*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock: 2012): 89-106.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 105.

- Does the church and state work together on specific areas to better the care of the community?

### 1.3.1 *Delimitations*

As this is a master thesis, the research is restricted to the magnitude of the thesis. I have as mentioned, delimited my research geographically to the city of Stavanger. Within the city I have confined my research to three churches, in order that I would be able to go in-depth to what they do and think with the topic at hand. One of the largest humanitarian faith-based organizations in Norway that is present in Stavanger in the form of independent foundations serves as a host, where many churches in Stavanger contribute in diaconal work. Therefore, it serves this project to include them into this research. It is the research questions that delimit, and help to find significance in the data material. Within the data material there will therefore be findings that will not be used as it is outside the scope and focus area. In relation to the different churches, I have also concentrated focus and energy to what will be prioritized.

### 1.3.2 *Relevance*

Diakonia is a central part of the mission of the church, it is also an important aspect of the theology of the church; but is it central in praxis? In his book, *Liberating Diakonia*, Kjell Nordstokke claims that diakonia is trying to create an interdisciplinary discourse where the key questions are “what does it mean to be the church” and “what does it mean to live in the world”.<sup>23</sup> The challenge of the church, is to *be* the church in its given time and context. The question of what role the church plays in the twenty-first century in Stavanger is relevant to examine and discuss the churches diaconal role in society. This shows the relevance of my project, and my hope is that this research will reveal what diaconal work churches in Stavanger do, as well as the challenges they face. I also hope the research will contribute as a tool and a starting point to work out new strategies for diaconal work.

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<sup>23</sup> Kjell Nordstokke, *Liberating Diakonia*, 1st Edition (Trondheim: Tapir Akademisk Forlag, 2011), 19.

### 1.3.3 Motivation

My motivations for this research have been many.

*I) Academic:* There has been little-to-no research on this field previously, specifically in the city of Stavanger. There is a lack of research done in the field of diakonia across churches, and the public sector. My hope is that this research will add to the field, and reveal what diakonial work churches in Stavanger do, and what challenges they face. As mentioned previously this research will spread over several areas as the project takes height to illuminate something that is very complex.

*II) Practical theology:* The research will be of interest and significance for churches and congregations in Norway, but also in the rest of Scandinavia. My hope is that the research will be able to contribute as a tool and a starting point to work out new strategies. The research will also be of interest for diaconal institutions and organizations. Church pastors and leaders that I have been in contact with have said that this is a necessary topic that they will benefit and are anxiously awaiting the result.

*III) Personal interest:* I have personal interest in the topic, as an employee of a church this theme is both applicable to my job everyday, but also for the future of the church in which I belong. I have a deep desire to see *the* church (the global Christian church) be all and do all that it is called to. My interest in the city of Stavanger is of a personal nature as well, as it is the city in which I live and wish to build a/the church. My passion is to see a church not solely living *in* the city, but a church living *for* the city. I wish to see the church serving both people inside and outside the church with the same love God served humanity. There are questions around this subject that has interested me, and has therefore created the foundation for my research project.

## 1.4 Structure

In the introduction, I have explained that which makes the backdrop for my research. I have also specified elements I believe to be important to the research question. My thesis will further be structured around five main sections. *Chapter 2* will give an account of the theoretical perspective that underlies my analysis. I will present various concepts I believe to be important that give understanding in order to follow the rest of the thesis. Theoretical and theological perspectives to diakonia will be discussed, as well as how this could be linked as a source of Christian identity. In addition, I will describe how the theory will be applied in the



analysis. Towards the end of this chapter I will present some theological perspectives I believe are relevant to the research problem. In *Chapter 3*, I will present the method of this research, which is empirically done by using qualitative research interviews. I will observe the work done in light of the method, and within the context of my research problem. Finally, I will illuminate some questions about the quality of the research. *Chapter 4* presents data in light of the research question. Here I will present my results and findings from the fieldwork. There will be many quotes from interview situations, which I believe will substantiate the various factors that the project wishes to bring up. I will also see the findings in light of previous research in this field, as well as point out findings that may be new. *Chapter 5* contains analysis and discussion. Here I refer to chapter 4 in light of chapter 2 and tie my finding to the theory to see how this can answer the research question. In conclusion I will sum up and reflect on the important findings in *Chapter 6*. Here I will also convey thoughts and further research, as well propose strategies and further work for churches.

## Chapter two

### THEORETICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

This chapter will focus on the theoretical framework and perspectives, which will lay the foundation for analysis and be the starting point for discussion. In order to shed light upon the different relevant theoretical perspectives, I will refer to several scholars who have contributed different perspectives. I will enter this landscape by elucidating some different pre-established understandings that exist in the literature concerning the identity and responsibility of the church in the context of diakonia. I have tried to present these theories in an effective and informative way, with respect to the limit of this thesis. The purpose of these theoretical understandings is to establish an infrastructure for the discussion and analysis of my specific findings.

#### **2.1 Ecclesiology**

In this subchapter, I will examine different understandings and paradigms concerning the concept of the church. This is important because different interpretations of church, result in various forms of diakonia. In return, I will then show how this can influence diaconal work and its priorities. In order to comprehend diakonia, it is necessary to understand the concept of church, as the diaconal role is formed within the context of relationship to the church that is called for service. The question that arises is; what is the church? God's body, where two and three are gathered in His name, the local congregation, a fellowship of believers, God's people, an institution, an organization, a family, Christ's universal church on the earth? I believe the church is all this, and more; it is each aspect independently, simultaneously.

There are many approaches to understanding the concept of church, and it is beyond the scope in this context for an extensive presentation of the nature of the church and its mission. The focus is on the diaconal dimension of the church, yet some fundamental and basic truths to the nature of the church are necessary, and complementary to discuss in this context.

The Greek word for church is *ekklesia*, directly translated meaning ‘assembly/church’, and comes from the verb ‘to call’ (or to ‘call out’).<sup>24</sup> The church is not simply an assembly, but an assembly called to life by God. As it says in the New Testament:

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.  
Acts 20,28<sup>25</sup>

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 1 Peter 2,9<sup>26</sup>

God calls his people out of darkness, and into his light as a holy and chosen people. This is an important base as it establishes that the church is God’s creation. Alister E. McGrath presents five New Testament models for understanding the identity of the church.<sup>27</sup> The first model is ‘The church as the people of God’. Just as God *called* Israel in the past, the church has been called and chosen to be the people of God. The second model is ‘the church as a community of salvation’. The church is called into being, both in response to salvation, and as a means of proclaiming and extending that salvation to the world. The third model is ‘The church as the body of Christ’. We find this imagery almost exclusively in Pauline literature (1 Cor 12,12-31; Romans 6,3-5), by faith one is incorporated into the body of Christ. The fourth model, which serves of great interest to this paper, is ‘the church as a serving people’. This image links the old and the new covenant; as God chose and called Israel to serve him: God has chosen and called the church for service. We find this in the terminology of the early church for its leaders. There are two main Greek words for church leaders, *doulos* (‘servant’, or possibly even ‘slave’) and *diakonos* (‘someone who waits at a table’). The fifth model McGrath presents for understanding the theological identity of the church is, ‘The church as a community of the Spirit’. We read in the writings of the early church the importance of the presence of the Holy Spirit within the church. It was the presence of the Spirit that enabled the church to grow and to witness (Eph 4,30).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The Holy Bible, The Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible, 2155.

<sup>25</sup> The Holy Bible, Today’s New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 2006)

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 6th Edition (Newark: Wiley, 2017)

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 355-356.

Harald Hegstad in his book, *The Real church: An Ecclesiology of the Visible*,<sup>29</sup> show some important developments in recent ecclesiology, which I find relevant for this thesis. He says that ecclesiology has a larger ecumenical profile in recent times, and that there is a growing propensity on the emphasis on the church's character as *fellowship*.<sup>30</sup> The fellowship is here viewed as something *real*, and not merely something spiritual and mystical. Hegstad explains that this reorientation has to do with the major change in the social formation of European churches over the last two centuries. Churches have gone from being the religious dimension of society as a whole, to slowly losing much of their religious hegemony. He says, "This has led to internal consolidation where churches and congregations are increasingly being seen as distinct fellowships. One outcome of this development has been an increased awareness of the *local congregation's role*."<sup>31</sup> Another interesting aspect to address is that of Christian eschatology. The Christian existence in the now is comprehended in the light of the second coming of Jesus. Hegdal says, "The life of the church and of individual Christians is therefore, characterized by the tension between what is already given, and what is not yet realized."<sup>32</sup> Hegdal stresses that the consciousness of the people of God moving towards the final consummation, as well as acknowledging that the church has lost its majority position in society, has led to a new focus on the church's mission. He says, "Mission is not only one of many activities the church engages in, but is paramount to understand the church in its fullness. The church should not just do *mission*, but is by nature a *missional church*."<sup>33</sup> This relates directly to diakonia, as diakonia is a part of the mission God gave his church. The church is a fellowship, a community with Jesus at the center, it is a fellowship that is empowered and equipped by Him, to follow him. The church is both an empirical reality as well as it is a taste of God's kingdom among us, as it is stretched between what is already given, and what is still to come.

Here I have brought some fundamental theological perspectives on the concept of church, which will later be expanded upon as it relates to diakonia *within* the church.

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<sup>29</sup> Harald Hegstad, *The Real Church: An Ecclesiology of the Visible*, 1st Edition (Eugene: James Clarke & Co, 2013)

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

## 2.2 Diakonia

I will now present some key understandings on the concept of diakonia. I will first look at the theology of diakonia, the understanding of diakonia as *being* the church, diakonia as the gospel in action, and diakonia as *being* for every believer. I will also briefly bring in some perspective on diakonia within the church service. Furthermore I will look at Olav H. Angell and Anna S. Selbekk's mapping of diaconal health work within the Norwegian church. Along the same lines, I will look at Ronald Henrikssons 'six table of diakonia' from his book *Voluntary diaconal work*.

### 2.2.1 Theology of diakonia

When developing a theology of diakonia, there are many different perspectives one can follow. One can see that throughout Christian history, diaconal action has been a response to concrete situations of suffering, need, marginalization and injustice. Christians such as St. Francis of Assisi and Bartolomé de las Casas have inspired multitudes of Christians as they have mobilized to fight for people by taking new ground and bold actions; St. Francis for standing in solidarity with the outcast of his time, and Bartholomé for defending the indigenous people in the Americas.<sup>34</sup> Many more examples could be told of people who responded boldly to specific needs and situations that have shaped the church and its diakonia. The church should therefore always be sensitive to human reality, the challenges that threaten human life and dignity. We see this in the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand; people were without food, but the disciples only started acting when Jesus instructed them to give the people something to eat (Matthew 14:16). Jesus instructed his disciples to be aware and act on human need.<sup>35</sup> Martin Luther conveyed that there is no need for Christians to create good deeds, because it comes to us in the form of everyday challenges.<sup>36</sup> This is what is referred to as "spontaneous" diakonia. This is not to say that there is no need for organized diaconal actions, contrarily, the church must be aware that there are specific challenges and needs that require diaconal actions to be organized.

Although this approach is important in defining the complexity of a theology of diakonia, it is important to note that this approach cannot support alone the all-encompassing aspects of

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<sup>34</sup> Nordstokke, *Liberating Diakonia*, 15.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

diakonia given current contexts. In order to develop a more holistic theology of diakonia, we need broaden our perspective to other features. Kjell Nordstokke draws on two important aspects of the theology of diakonia, “*ecclesiological*” and “*praxeological*”.<sup>37</sup> Fundamentally, the ecclesiological nature of the church points to dimensions of *being* the church, with its roots in the New Testament. The praxeological aspect points to the concrete praxis of diakonia. These aspects will be addressed in more detail later in this chapter.

### 2.2.2 *Diakonia as being the church*

There is no easy, short or precise definition of what diakonia is, however, there are some fundamental assumptions. One of these is found in *Diakonia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment* is a document published by the Lutheran World Federation in 2009. Without giving a specific definition, it maintains some fundamental assumptions when understanding diakonia:

One is that *diakonia* is a theological concept that points to the very identity and mission of the Church. Another is its practical implication in the sense that diakonia is a call to action, as a response to challenges of human suffering, injustice and care for creation. This rather open-ended understanding of diakonia is also due to the fact that the concept itself does not allow for a precise definition, not even when used in the Greek New Testament. The present use of the word has largely been shaped by how Christians have tried to be faithful to the biblical call to be a neighbor throughout the history of the church.<sup>38</sup>

The concept of diakonia has matured over the last decades, especially within the ecumenical movement. There are three main attributes that characterize this change. First, let me point to the ecclesial dimension of diakonia. Diakonia has become a part of the nature and mission of the church and stepped away from where it stood earlier, as work for the professionals and agencies. Now, diakonia has become a part of *being* the church, and has strong focuses on the biblical dogmatic foundation of diakonia and is oftentimes is linked to missiology.<sup>39</sup> The second attribute that characterizes this change is that diaconal actions must be holistic. It takes physical, mental, social and spiritual dimensions into consideration, and dismisses practices that tend to departmentalize sectors of human reality.<sup>40</sup> The third is the prophetic, the bold

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>38</sup> *Diakonia in Context.*, 8.

<sup>39</sup> Stephanie Dietrich and others, *Diakonia As Christian Social Practice*, 1st edn (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2014), 2.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

diaconal action in solidarity with suffering and marginalized people.<sup>41</sup> This has moved diakonia from the traditional conceptualization of humble service for a limited few, to a central and highly influential aspect that commissions every believer

Kjell Nordstokke in his book, *Liberating Diakonia* has several approaches for a reflection on diakonia.<sup>42</sup> The first approach is that of individual piety, which was the case with the diaconal movement that started in Germany in the 1830s. This movement was strongly influenced by pietism and Christian life as discipleship. Here, diakonia was seen first as humble service in the form of charity for the sick and needy. People were inspired to open diaconal institutions and were pioneers in developing modern health and social care. In this tradition, diakonia was first and foremost something done by deacons and deaconesses. The individualistic, and institutional characteristic often led to the thought that diakonia was something that was separated from the congregation and the church. The first approach is a combination of social engagement and pietistic spirituality that is concerned with Christian life, as service to the deprived in society. The second has been an approach to understanding diakonia as a ministry of the church. This approach might tend to be more concerned with the understanding of liturgical spirituality and ecumenical engagement. The third approach is what the World Council of Churches simply calls “ecumenical diakonia”, and is based on a wide reflection on the meaning of *being* the church. When the WCC organized an international consultation on diakonia in Larnaca, Cyprus in 1986, diakonia was given the parameters of an active expression of Christian witness in response to the challenges and needs of the community where Christians, and churches live.<sup>43</sup> There are different factors that introduce diakonia as an ecumenical concept, Nordstokke points out what he considers to be the most important:

- The need of relating social work / action to the identity of church (we do what we are);
- The search for a holistic perspective in the mission of the church;
- The context of globalization;
- The rediscovery of diakonia as empowered service
- The prophetic dimension of diakonia<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Nordstokke, *Liberating Diakonia*, 17-19.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 19.

The concept of diakonia is rooted in the church's faith and identity, and has attempted to develop an interdisciplinary discourse. It does this by taking into consideration both the theological and secular language, reflecting on what it is to *be* the church, yet also what it means to *be* in the world.<sup>45</sup>

### 2.2.3 *Diakonia - gospel in action*

The Australian scholar, John N. Collins has done extensive research on the *diak*-words (*Diakonia*, *diakonein* and *diakonos*) used in Greek literature between 400 BC and 400 AD.<sup>46</sup> In his findings he concluded that the meaning of *diakonia* is an assignment or mission. In his research, the *diak*- words themselves have no implication with charitable services for the marginalized and the poor, in the form of humble and lowly service. Rather, it was used as an honorable task, or a mission given to a person; as a spokesperson, or a 'go-between', who is entrusted with an important task. It can also mean a mediator, a person that has been given a commission on behalf of someone in authority.<sup>47</sup> Many scholars support Collins reinterpretation of the term diakonia, which has led to the term being used as points of reference when elaborating a theology of diakonia. This we can see in the *Church of Norway Plan for Diakonia*, another document that appears as a frequent point of reference in this paper. Its definition of diakonia is:

Diakonia is the caring ministry of the Church. It is the Gospel in action and is expressed through loving your neighbor, creating inclusive communities, caring for creation and struggling for justice.<sup>48</sup>

In this broad definition we see the similarities between Collins reinterpretation of diakonia as well as the development of the ecumenical diakonia. It presents diakonia as the *Gospel in action*; as Jesus brought the Gospel in both words and deeds, his disciples were mandated to follow in his example. Diakonia is therefore an integral part of the gospel, and speaks to the dimension of *being* the church. This definition points to the traditional acts, (such as caring for your neighbor) but it also refers to creating inclusive communities, caring for creation and struggling for justice. Stephanie Dietrich, Knud Jørgensen, Kari Korslein and Kjell Nordstokke in their book, *Diakonia as Christian Social Practice*, say that this shows how

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> John N. Collins, *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources*. (New York/Oxford: OUP, 1990).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 194.

<sup>48</sup> Church of Norway National Council, *Plan for Diakonia*, (Oslo: Church of Norway National Council, 2008), 8.



diakonia is both faith-based and right-based.<sup>49</sup>

#### 2.2.4 *Diakonia as being for every believer*

We have seen that diakonia belongs to the mission of the church. Diakonia is not merely something the church *does*, but it is at the core of what the church *is*. Yet, as the church is made up of individual believers in a community, I find it beneficial to point to diakonia as something that includes every believer. Diakonia includes both the ‘ecclesiological’ and ‘praxeological’ aspects; it’s both the nature of being the church, and the nature of being a believer.

In the article about *Challenges for Diakonia in the Contemporary Norwegian Society*, Kari Jordheim underlines the same point when she writes; “Diakonia is being, as well as doing, and it is a concern for all believers.”<sup>50</sup> Diakonia is a mission, and a call for every believer, not just for the professionals or the people hired for the job within a church. Contrarily, every believer is empowered for diaconal work. Dietrich stresses the same point when she writes; “There has been a growing consciousness of the importance of Christian life as an integral part of being a Christian, not only a consequence.”<sup>51</sup> 1 John 3:16 says, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for one another.” In the Church of Norway *Plan for Diakonia* it says, “All Christians are called to live their daily life in service for others. This applies to all age groups. Diakonia should be a basic principle in all aspects of parish life, and should result in practical measures”<sup>52</sup>

I would here like to introduce the expression *Mission Dei*, or Gods mission. The underlying idea is that God is the initiator for mission, and therefore the church (made up of people) is a “sent” people, a people on God’s mission. To be the church is to be on mission, to be a believer is to be on mission, not a church or a believer that *does* mission, but that *is* mission in the world, in word or action. With *Mission Dei*, we are proclaiming a mission “in which God the Father is the only source of all mission, Jesus Christ the only Lord and Savior and the

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<sup>49</sup> Dietrich, *Diakonia As Christian Social Practice*, 4.

<sup>50</sup> Jordheim, *Challenges for Diakonia*, 247.

<sup>51</sup> Stephanie Dietrich, “Diaconia in the Nordic Regions Practice and Actors”, in: The Lutheran World Federation, *Serving the whole person: The practice and Understanding of Diakonia within the Lutheran Communion*. (The Lutheran World Federation, Documentation 54/2000, 2009), 67.

<sup>52</sup> Church of Norway, *Plan for Diakonia*, 5.

Holy Spirit the only divine life giver and power.”<sup>53</sup> Knud Jørgensen says, “Diakonia is not an optional expression of ‘being church’.”<sup>54</sup> Diakonia is being the church, it is mission and it is witness. Jørgensen says that diaconal action is one dimension of witness.<sup>55</sup> The aspect of witness (evangelism or diakonia) has often been expressed as a demand or commandment. Therefore when talking about mission, it can feel like someone reminding you to blink in order for your eyes to not dry out, although it’s true, it’s unnecessary. Jørgensen points out an interesting point on this topic when he talks about teaching congregations (collectively), and believers (individually), to see themselves as diaconal at their very being.<sup>56</sup> It will therefore be of great interest to this research to see how churches in Stavanger both equip and empower believers within their congregation for diaconal work.

I also want to comment on the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. Acts 1:8 says, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witness in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Within the New Testament context, it is the Holy Spirit that equips and empowers the believer for service. This empowerment includes a diaconal dimension as the personal empowerment of the believer draws concern and focus not just for the life to come, but this life; as it aims to make life better for the weak and marginalized in society.

### *2.2.5 The church service and diakonia*

Church is both an empirical reality, and a taste of God’s kingdom among us.<sup>57</sup> This understanding is crucially important, as the church often appears quite human, with its sociological structure as the source of conflict and frustration. There is no need to deny the church’s infirmity, as there is no perfect church on the premise that the church is (and consists of) people who are, in fact, imperfect. Despite its faults and shortcomings, there is still significance within the church and its mission. The treasure of the church is Jesus, and community gathered around him. Through the Word and the sacraments, people see Jesus as they experience the grace, love and mercy of God, and are raised to faith by the gospel of

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<sup>53</sup> Tormod Engelsen, “Missio Dei: The Understanding and Misunderstanding of a Theological Concept” in *European Churches and Missiology*, (International Review Of Mission, 92.367 (2003), 481-497), 494.

<sup>54</sup> Knud Jørgensen, “Equipping for Service: Diakonia and Capacity-Building”, in Stephanie Dietrich, *Diakonia As Christian Social Practice*, 96.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>57</sup> Kjell Nordstokke, *Det Dyrebare Mennesket: Diakonien grunnlag og praksis*, (Oslo: Verbum, 2002), 38.

Jesus Christ. Kjell Nordstokke points out that it is from the Word and the sacraments that diakonia receives its vitality. He argues an interesting point; that diakonia and the church service are closely connected. Diakonia without the life-giving power from the church service is in danger of lifelessness, and becoming ritualistic activism. At the same time, the individual's impact of the church service is at the risk of being reduced when/if it loses its connection to diaconal practice, both in word and in action.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, the church service and diakonia are interdependent on each other as the two are synonymously expressed in different dimensions.

There is a tendency in some churches to maintain primary focus on preaching and sacrament, as other concepts can be a distraction to the "main" thing. However, from this mindset, diakonia retains a secondary role. It is important to question this view, as it overrides the idea of the church as a living community, as a body. This picture illuminates the understanding of the church as a movement and as a living organism that "sends" (missionally) and that "serves" (diakonia). Nordstokke argues that there is a tendency for a divide here, first *this* and then *that*. This hierarchical approach and mindset is damaging to the holistic theme laid out in the reading of the bible.

#### *2.2.6 Five profiles of diakonia*

Olav H. Angell and Anne S. Selbekk did a mapping of diaconal health work within The Norwegian Church in 2005.<sup>59</sup> Through this mapping, parish diaconal understanding was explored through an extensive list of activities that the participants were referred. This content was previously considered relevant in an ecclesiastical context, either for diakonia, or in the context of the mission in general. The churches were then asked to decide how important they thought these activities were in diakonia or in a diaconal context. On the grounds of the distribution of answers, Angell and Selbekk constructed a set of diaconal profiles that mirrored the response patterns in the individual churches. These five profiles are as follows:

- The political and emergency oriented profile
- The cooperative profile
- The care-oriented profile

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 38-39.

<sup>59</sup> The questioner was sent out to 1190 churches in 2004, and they got a response rate at around 55%. They got answers from 648 churches.

Olav Helge Angell and Anne Schanche Selbekk, *Kirke og helse. Kartlegging av diakonalt helsearbeid innen Den norske kirke*. (Kirkerådet, Rapport nr.3/2005).

- The church oriented profile
- The institution oriented profile <sup>60</sup>

The first, '*Political and emergency oriented profile*', is characterized by two main dimensions. One crisis and emergency oriented dimension, and one political and international oriented dimension. Under the first, we find activities such as emergency phone services, work for refugees and asylum seekers and work with the social "outcast". Under the second dimension we find aid (and aid questions), work for human rights, social justice, and environment.

The second '*Cooperative profile*', is characterized by cooperation with the state (local cooperation groups, and local crisis teams), with institutions and humanitarian organizations in the local community. What separates this profile from others is primarily oriented toward the kind of work (relations) and not substance in the work (activities).

Third we have the '*Care-oriented profile*', this is connected to running visiting services, organizing grief groups, efforts related to people with drug problems and youth oriented activities. The activities connected with this profile are primarily local care-oriented.

The fourth, '*Church oriented profile*', is characterized by a variety of activities that in a small sense can be distinguished as religious, such as prayer meetings, Alfa course or other small groups, kids groups, choir and etc. This profile could therefore be interpreted as more related to the faith-dimension.

The fifth, '*Institution oriented profile*', belong together with establishments that operate childcare services and nursing homes for the elderly. <sup>61</sup>

With this, we can see that diakonia is not an unambiguous term for the church, but a term and a concept that has room for many dimensions that churches individually adapt and emphasize. This is not to say that a church will have one specific diaconal profile among the five, but can be characterized by having elements of several profiles.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 33-34.

### 2.2.7 *The six tables of diakonia*

Ronald Henriksson in his book *Frivilligt Diakonalt Arbete*<sup>62</sup> (Voluntary Diaconal Work), presents diakonia in the form of six tables in which the work serves through. We find similarities between Henriksson, Angell and Selbekk. Henrikssons six tables are as follows;

- Kitchen table
- Altar/communion table
- The cathedra
- Sofa table
- The desk
- Pulpit<sup>63</sup>

*The Kitchen table* illustrates the everyday meeting place, and also reflects the main function of diakonia: the charitable. A lot of the local diaconal activities can be placed here; home visitations, visit of the sick/imprisoned/institutionalized, and work amongst refugees, asylum seekers and drug addicts. At the kitchen table, the goal is to create a meeting place, a place to give a sense of belonging to the fellowship/community. Within this work, diakonia has a large and difficult task that includes recruiting volunteers, as well as organizing and equipping them for service. *The Altar/Communion table* represents the movement towards the altar where one receives power and the propulsion towards people. All diakonia emerges out from the altar as a symbol of the individuals meeting with God. We go from an invisible meeting (with God) to a visible interpersonal meeting (with people). *The cathedra* is an expression of the educational function of diakonia: teaching volunteers, kids, youth and others within the church. Within this category we also find associated literature such as articles in the parish magazine, local newspaper or trade journal. *The sofa table* describes the pastoral role within diakonia, to stop and listen. *The Desk* represents the administrative functions; it should organize, and lead the church's diaconal ministry. *The Pulpit* is the prophetic function that protests against and speaks up about iniquity and injustice that affects groups and individuals.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ronald Henriksson, *Frivilligt Diakonalt Arbete*, (Stokholm: Venum, 1994).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-40.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

## 2.3 Diakonia in society

In this subchapter I will examine some of the understandings of the diaconal role in society. I will then present some theoretical perspectives on the Norwegian welfare state, as well as welfare pluralism. I will show how this can influence diaconal work and its priorities.

### 2.3.1 *Diakonia in the Norwegian welfare state*

As the church is part of society, local, national and international diakonia is practiced in a social context. It is therefore worth discussing what diakonia means in a contemporary welfare society. Should it serve as an alternative for what is already being done in the public sector, or serve as a supplement to it? In order to better understand this, we must first look at the concept of the Norwegian Welfare state.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to give an exhaustive description of the total context of diakonia in Norway, but I will provide a brief outline of the Norwegian society as a welfare state in order to discuss what diakonia can mean in a contemporary society. In the *Church of Norway Plan for Diakonia* it says that the Church of Norway is both a community of believers and part of the public administration.<sup>65</sup>

The Norwegian welfare model is similar to what we find in other Scandinavian countries. What characterizes this model is its extensive social security system, institutionalized social rights that are characterized by solidarity and universality. The aim of the system is to be applicable to all, regardless of social and economic status.

What distinguished the Norwegian welfare state is the relationship between the public sector and the labor market with a large public sector, a system of ‘full employment’ and a higher labor market rate for women, a wide-embracing system of more or less universal rights, a residual system of social assistance and comparatively strong element of vertical re-distribution.<sup>66</sup>

The Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century influenced Norway by the state taking over the responsibility of citizen welfare, which the church had previously had. The close tie between state and church made it so that the role of the state was not conflicting, as it was in some other European countries, which held different religious traditions. The church, with some exceptions, did not challenge the central role of the state in the welfare system.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Church of Norway, *Plan for Diakonia*, 10.

<sup>66</sup> Olav Helge Angell, "The Norwegian Welfare State", in Eva Meager and Birte Simonsen, *Norway: Society and Culture*. (Kristiansand, Norway: Portal Books, 2005), 125.

<sup>67</sup> Bishop Berggrav in the time after the Second World War was skeptical to the welfare state, he believed the state should still care for the economic and legal aspects of the church, however the

Regarding the church's role as welfare provider in Norwegian society today, it is worth noting that the Norwegian Church, while not being a state church as of the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2017, still receives funding by the state, and is therefore not a voluntary organization on the same line as other faith communities. However, there is no public regulation of diakonia, or the welfare activities organized by the individual church. The regulations that do exist are the same for other agencies within the same field, in the same way. Therefore Angell and Selbekk say it is not unthinkable to place the diakonia of the church within the realms of the volunteer sector. This is also how diaconal work within the Norwegian Church is classified in Norwegian social research.<sup>68</sup>

Organized diakonia is practiced in different forms and levels within society. Some institutions are under the state level, and some under the municipal level. Angell and Selbakk say that cooperation with public authorities at various levels is important for diakonia.<sup>69</sup>

The state has many roles in relation to diakonia. The state might be the source of funding on one side, and normative regulator on the other. This means, that the state might approve a diaconal measure; such approval will usually be based on laws and regulations, and a set of different requirements for structure and processes. Diaconal hospitals for example, must meet general requirements laid out in the legislation for such a welfare institution. The same would go for kinder gardens, regardless if they receive public funding or not.<sup>70</sup>

The municipalities also have a role in regards to diakonia similar to the state. Angell and Selbekk say that in many ways the municipality is more important than the state because it's at the municipal level that citizens meet face to face with the welfare state.<sup>71</sup> It is also necessary to distinguish between the state and municipalities in terms of diakonia relevance to the public sector as a whole.

The church has an important role as actors on several welfare areas, particularly as Jordheim says, "when it comes to preventive work and the perspective of empowerment and life-quality."<sup>72</sup> Local diaconal plans and activities should flow naturally from local conditions. Jordheim says that, "In order to have a clear engagement in society, the diaconal work needs to change as society changes. One cannot linger on old methods and ways; we must develop

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responsibility for commission clergy and authorizing the prayer book should be left up to the church. Aud V. Tønnessen, "The Church And The Welfare State In Postwar Norway: Political Conflicts And Conceptual Ambiguities", *Journal Of Church And State*, 56.1 (2014): 13-35, 17.

<sup>68</sup> Angell and Selbekk, *Kirke og helse*, 21-22.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Jordheim, "Challenges for Diakonia", 256.

and innovate with the world in order to understand the world. A diaconal church must engage in global perspectives, such as environmental matters and demographic change. At the same time it must keep its core values in order to remain sustainable and trustworthy.”<sup>73</sup>

### 2.3.2 Welfare pluralism

Angell and Selbekk argue that diakonia has a greater legitimacy in the welfare state today than 20 years ago.<sup>74</sup> A reason for this might be welfare pluralism. This refers to an ideology and policy that allows for a broad range of welfare participants, including those with a visible values and beliefs. This change has happened over time, in a society where it also seems as though the interest for religion has grown.

When it comes to the church’s role in a welfare society, I believe it to be useful to utilize a typology for volunteer organizations and their function in a welfare state. Ralph Kramer, a professor of social welfare specified four main types of organizational roles of a voluntary agency.<sup>75</sup> They are as follows; ‘the vanguard role’, ‘the improver or advocate role’, ‘the service provider’ and ‘the value guardian role’. The vanguard role is often associated with diaconal and other volunteer organized agencies, and serves as the pioneer and the innovator. The improver or advocate is the critic or watchdog in regards to the state and its services. The value guardian role is the way “a value voluntary agency (among other things) is expected to promote citizen participation, to develop leadership, and to protect the special interest of social, religious, cultural and other minority groups.”<sup>76</sup>

Olav Angell says that, “The church as an institution is by definition a guardian of (religious) values, and a policy document like the Plan for *diakonia* in the Church of Norway provides examples of some way by which local agencies may take on a value guardian role as part of their diaconal mission”<sup>77</sup> In the *Plan for Diakonia*, it says “the church is particularly called to meet the spiritual and religious needs that are part of the pain and distress that people experience.”<sup>78</sup> Kari Jordheim says, “The question for diakonia is always to find out what role diaconal activities as voluntary welfare agents may meaningfully have in society.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>74</sup> Angell and Selbekk, *Kirke og helse*, 24.

<sup>75</sup> Ralph M. Kramer, *Voluntary Agencies in the Welfare State*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981)

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>77</sup> Olav Helge Angell, “Diakonia, Hospitality and Welfare”, in Dietrich, *Diakonia as Christian Social Practice*, 157-158.

<sup>78</sup> Church of Norway, *Plan for Diakonia*, 10.

<sup>79</sup> Kari Jordheim, “Challenges for Diakonia”, 255.



## Chapter Three

### METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I will present my choice of method. I will also reflect upon, and evaluate my choices and my work.

#### 3.1 Method

When the research question requires an understanding of process, events and relationships in the context of the cultural and social situation, qualitative research is the method of choice. I therefore chose to use a *qualitative research method* because I wanted to provide an in-depth description of procedures, beliefs and knowledge that explores the reason for certain behaviors, including the opinions of participants about the particular issue.

The qualitative method has an exploratory role, it goes in-depth and emphasizes the importance of that which is found. Within qualitative research, the researcher is ‘*inside*’ the field studied and has a close relationship with the subject studied.<sup>80</sup> Qualitative research is characterized by seeking to find an understanding of social phenomena.<sup>81</sup> The way in which this was done was by going in-depth, in the field, by performing interviews and observations. In a qualitative study, the analysis and the interpretations of the data can be seen as two sides to the same process, because one cannot describe and categorize events without also attributing the meanings behind them.<sup>82</sup> An interpretive-theoretical direction, is significant when one uses qualitative methods. To study something objectively, is almost impossible within social research because to study people is to study something you are personally apart of, something that social research has been criticized for overlooking. One must therefore include ones own role in the research.

My primary methods of qualitative research are, participant observation and in-depth interview. In research like this, where the material has to be created, a qualitative approach to the field is necessary. My decision to utilize participant observations and in-depth interviews was that it would create fresh data that would be difficult to gain any other way. It was natural

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<sup>80</sup> Alan Bryman, ”The Debate About Quantitative And Qualitative Research: A Question of Method or Epistemology?”, *The British Journal Of Sociology*, 35.1 (1984), 35-37.

<sup>81</sup> Tove Thagaard, *Systematikk og innlevelse. En innføring i kvalitativ metode*. (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2013),17.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

to choose interview as a method as it aims to understand the world from the interviewer's side. I choose to do observations as it gave me understanding and familiarity to the context of the field studied. Also, it provided data that served to check against participants' subjective reporting between their words and actions.

### **3.2 Settings and respondents**

The research question is aimed at churches in Norway. In order to answer this in the most holistic way possible, I strived to observe the subject from different aspects. The fieldwork was done in Stavanger, and the project was therefore naturally delimited to Stavanger. With that said, research will reveal factors that will apply to the rest of Norway, and in some cases, the whole of Scandinavia.

The selection of the setting is an important decision for the researcher; the number of settings determines how much time you can spend in each. Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson in their book *Ethnography*, say that the researcher therefore needs to make a decision between the depth and the breadth of the investigations.<sup>83</sup> For this reason I chose to confine my research to three churches in order that I would be able to go in-depth of what they do and think with the topic at hand. The churches that I chose are close to the city center, and as they are confined geographically to specific parameters, the given context would not be confused by a different set of parameters. As they are close geographically, they are prone to have similar experiences, they might even see the same "needs" in the city, however, their interpretation and actions towards those needs might be different. I believed that this would be an interesting perspective. Part of the reason I chose to research the specific churches that are given in this thesis was because of the experience that each of the churches had. Each church would be considered a seasoned church that has stood through different eras and seasons. My desire was to choose churches that had a variety of expression and organizational structure. Between the three churches, each have many similarities and many differences, yet dogmatically, all would subscribe to a similar foundation. This fact links together these churches, yet holds their differences in respect and provides a broad, yet congruent scope for my research. Another reason I chose the particular churches was that at each, there was a designated staff member responsible for diakonia. This meant that each of the churches valued and prioritized diakonia, which created another baseline for my research.

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<sup>83</sup> Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 1st edn (London: Tavistock, 1983), 31.

My interviews were conducted with the staff member responsible for diaconal work at their respected church. As my research seeks to investigate what role the church plays to care for the weak, marginalized and suffering in the city of Stavanger, it was an obvious choice to interview the deacons<sup>84</sup> of the church as they are responsible for the outworking and facilitating of diaconal work. At the beginning of my research, I also had an interview with the diaconal leader for the dioceses of Stavanger. This served me greatly as they contributed both literature and document. Many of the churches in Stavanger also do diaconal work through a faith-based organization. This organization is one of the largest humanitarian faith-based organizations in Norway and is present in Stavanger in the form of independent foundations. I therefore also interviewed one of the leaders for this organization in Stavanger.

### **3.3 Interviews**

In qualitative research, interviews are one of the most common methods. What makes interviews a good method is that one gets data that would be difficult to collect in other ways. It was natural for me to choose interview as a method, as my desire was to analyze the conditions and have my thesis contribute to more than just a description.

#### *3.3.1 Interview guide*

A good interview is determined by the researchers capability to see the world from the point of view of the respondent.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, it was important to work thoroughly with the interview guide<sup>86</sup> before entering the field, as this created a starting point for my interviews. I performed open-ended, semi-structured interviews where open-ended questions were asked to all interviewees. Open-ended questions allow the interviewee to answer without presented or implied choices. This allows them to answer in their own words, giving room to voice their own values, views and experiences. This approach helps facilitate faster interviews and make it easier to analyze and compare.

A variety of different questions were asked within multiple topics as it related to my research question. My topics included; behavior, opinion/values, feelings, knowledge, sensory and background. Behavioral questions were asked to find out what a person has done or is doing,

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<sup>84</sup> A note can be made that not all staff members responsible for diakonal work have the education and title of *deacon*.

<sup>85</sup> Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2009), 21.

<sup>86</sup> Vedlegg 2.

and opinion and value questions were asked to see what a person thought about the topic. I also asked questions about what the person felt, as to try and comprehend the individuals emotions and not just what they thought. I asked questions of knowledge to extract facts about the topic, as well as sensory questions as to determine what the participant had seen, heard and experienced. I also asked standard background questions such as age and education. My decision for choosing the different themes and questions was to achieve the most comprehensive data possible.

In the beginning, I asked background questions about the particular interviewee and their workplace, such as, how long they had worked there, and what their main roles were. These were simple questions to answer, and I did this so that the interviewee would feel at ease. I then asked questions about the present before I started asking questions about the past and future. My final question was of the visionary nature, I wanted to leave the interviewee feeling both empowered and positively challenged, as well as put importance and value on the work that she/he does. At the end of the interview I also allowed the participant an opportunity to provide any other information they wanted to add.

### *3.3.2 The interview*

I did all my interviews at the participant's office; I did this so that the participant would feel both comfortable and safe, yet also out of respect for his/her time and work.

Each interview started with "small talk"; I presented myself, we had friendly greetings and then I went on to present my research. Although all participants had received an informational letter about the research, I thought it important to reiterate the purpose of my study. This was brief, but served both the interviewee and myself at the start of the interview. I also informed the interviewee that all personal content would be anonymous. I chose to record all interviews and later transcribed them, this allowed me to be more present during the interview and also helped to more thoroughly examine what the participants said. After the interview it also allowed me to repeat and re-examine the answers.

I wanted the interview to be more of a friendly conversation than strictly a question and answer exchange. Social skills such as empathy, attentiveness, warmth and humor (when appropriate) are important in conducting a good interview. During the interview I kept eye contact as much as possible, to listen and express interest in what they were saying, while at the same time remaining neutral.

Russell Bernard in his book *Social Research Methods*<sup>87</sup> says that, “the key to successful interviewing is learning how to probe effectively – that is, to stimulate a response to produce more information, without injecting yourself so much into the interaction that you only get reflection of yourself in the data.”<sup>88</sup> He also says that the most difficult type of probing is the silent one, to remain quiet and wait for the interviewee to continue. I tried to keep the conversation focused on the topic, while at the same time giving freedom to the interviewee to define the content of the discussion. As the topic is one that I myself am passionate about, it was important to not jump in and add content or another question, but rather wait until the respondents were finished, give them time to think and be comfortable with pauses. Bernard said as a golden rule, “Get an informant on to a topic of interest and get out of the way.”<sup>89</sup> This lets the respondent feel that what he or she is saying is important. I tried to encourage the respondents to give details and expand on their answers.

### 3.4 Observation

Participant observation is more than simply attending a meeting or showing up at a site and writing down notes. Participant observation is complex; therefore, I decided to do a moderate participation in hopes that I would then be able to maintain a balance between an “insider” and “outsider” role. This allowed me involvement while at the same time to remain objective. I will talk more about this later in this chapter under the heading *Reflexivity*.

My observation in the field included attending a church service at each church, the duration of the church service ranged from one- to two hours. In the Church of Norway’s plan for diakonia, it is stated that diakonia is not just in the form of actions and activities, but another dimension of diakonia is expressed in liturgy, preaching and curriculum.<sup>90</sup> I wanted to observe what language they use; how do they talk about diakonia and if they communicate what help is available through the church. I arrived early for the services and stayed after it was finished, as I wanted to see the interaction between members, as well as see what information they had available at their locations. In addition to observing their location, I observed their websites to see what information was available there.

I also attended a secondary meeting at one of the churches as a large part of their diaconal work is in regards to prayer and healing. I visited one of their initiatives (a healing

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<sup>87</sup> Russell H. Bernard, *Social Research Methods*, 1st Edition, (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2000), 211.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Church of Norway, *Plan For Diakonia*, 12.

room) that are specific to this topic.

I did all my observations after the interviews, this gave me insight into what initiatives and services would be appropriate to attend. All churches were open for me to attend their events, and negotiating my role was quite straightforward. During the observations I tried to keep in the background while at the same time integrate into what was taking place. For example during my visit to “The healing room” I participated in prayer (I received prayer), I couldn’t have observed the whole process unless I was personally involved.

While doing my observation I made careful notes; notes both on what I saw and heard, as well as interaction with members in the settings. Data collected in my participant observation served me to check against participants’ subjective reporting of what they believe and what they do. It also gave me an understanding of the context of the studied field; language used, ideas, norms and events, the relationship between the people; behavior and such. In other words it gives the researcher familiarity with the cultural environment, which is invaluable throughout the project.

### **3.5 Method for analysis**

After the interviews, as mentioned previously, I used time to transcribe and then categorize my findings. With creating a form, it was easy to fill in my findings from the different respondents and categorize findings by theme in regards to the research question. It was important to do a thorough job with this before starting the analysis of the material. I have done a thematic analysis of the findings from the themes presented earlier. The research question has been the steering source in this process.

My desire was to understand, in relation to the analysis, I therefore chose a hermeneutical approach to the material, as it was important to try and find the meaning behind what the respondents said. In this way, the role of the researcher is not only to analyze the data from the interview, but also to analyze the data in the context of the interview. In other words, the researcher is to read the interview in the context of the interview itself. Also, it was important for me, that the respondents would be able to recognize themselves in the presentation and analysis.

### **3.6 Reflexivity**

The role of the researcher is of crucial importance to the result of the research; this is especially true in research like this, where a qualitative method is used. Brinkmann and Kvale bring up an important aspect when they say that the integrity of the researcher increases in

connection to the interview, as the interviewer is the most important tool for acquiring knowledge.<sup>91</sup> This has been an important aspect for me to reflect over. No researcher is able to remain completely neutral and unaffected, and one needs to be conscious of situations where one's affectedness can both influence the interview situation and the analysis. One aspect that I had to be aware of is that I share the Christian faith with all my respondents, as this might both have positive and negative affects. Positive, as I am able to understand and relate to values, concepts, language and worldview. It might also have a negative affect, in that it might make me take answers for granted, and not ask in detail because I think I know what the respondents mean. Previous relationships or connections to the respondents are also worth thought in research. I had no previous relationship to any of the respondents personally, but I did have a small connection to one of the churches. This could potentially give me a bias to the particular church, and I therefore had to be conscious of my interactions, interpretations and analysis as my goal was to treat every respondent equal. The goal has been that the professional work will be the focus, and I think the reflections I have done around my own role have helped to care for this.

### **3.7 Ethical reflections**

In the process of this research, I have aimed to pay attention to ethical issues throughout. In studies including people, their work and their everyday life, this is of the utmost importance. Before all interviews, all respondents signed a “*Request for participation in a research project*”.<sup>92</sup> The document gave a short description of the project, with focus on the theme of the project. It was also made clear in the document that the respondents could pull out from the project as well as they were ensured about their anonymity. Since the theme of the project is of a highly personal and sensitive nature, it requires a high consciousness related to the respondents handling of the material and privacy. The project was reported to NSD, Norsk Samfunnsvitenskapelig Datatjeneste (Norwegian Center for Research Data), and the data collection office approved for the project to be accomplished. The ethical guidelines laid out by NSD are the starting point of this paper, and the individual respondents privacy is also considered.

In the research situation I needed to be critical of my own role and experiences. As a researcher, I served in some aspects both as an insider and an outsider. I was on the inside as I share the faith and values of the field studied. This gave me insight and understanding for the

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<sup>91</sup> Kvale and Brinkmann, *InterViews*, 92.

<sup>92</sup> Attachment 1.

field, but also had the ability to limit my studies if unable to remain objective. I was an outsider as I attend none of the churches, and identify with a different denomination. This gave another point of view of the field studied, but also requires the willingness and ability to understand the participant's traditions, norms and actions. Through the entire project, my aim was to remain objective, and not let my own personal values, feelings and experiences influence my study. However, no researcher is able to remain completely objective, neutral and unaffected, and so one needs to be aware in situations where one has been influenced and how this might effect the interview situation and the analysis. To get fully "pure" data is nearly impossible, therefore the goal must be to find the right way to interpret the collected data.

### **3.8 Research quality**

I have aimed to create a trustworthy presentation of my research through the material I have collected. One of the things that has been important for me, is to see things from different sides, to enter the study with an open attitude in regards to my own thoughts and opinions, as well as my contribution to the field in light of and in relations to previous study on the field.

Two ways in which one can assess the value of a qualitative or quantitative research is reliability and validity. Reliability has to do with the results being trustworthy and consistent.<sup>93</sup> When it comes to interview as a method, reliability is then especially connected to the respondent's answers, and to what degree they have been open with their answers. My experience is that all respondents have shared openheartedly their thoughts on the subject, and have tried to answer the questions to the best of their ability. As mentioned previously I tried asking good, open questions, that weren't leading. The respondents own descriptions and experiences have been in focus.

Validity has to do with how one interprets data, and if that interpretation aligns to the reality. Validity in social science has to do with whether or not a method investigates what it intended to investigate.<sup>94</sup> In chapter 5, I will analyze my findings in light of theory and previous research. Little research on the field of diakonia in Stavanger has been conducted previously. This means that my research stands somewhat alone in regards to this theme, and there will be a need for further research on the field.

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<sup>93</sup> Kvale and Brinkmann, *InterViews*, 245.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, 246.



## Chapter Four

### RESULTS

In this chapter I will present my findings from my interviews. My research questions will be governing my presentation, as it was the starting point, and foundation for my interviews. From my supplementary questions I will present my findings in five themes to make it effortless, and simple for the reader to follow. Under each theme I will bring in perspectives from all respondents, (contingent upon the particular respondent conveying something around the theme). Given that these themes can easily overlap, the respondents have thoughts that span across several fields at once, but I will try as far as possible to categorize this. The main perspectives that will be discussed are: The role of the church in society, challenges seen in doing diaconal work Stavanger, specific needs seen in Stavanger, the professional and the volunteer, and as the final theme; cooperation with state, church and other agencies. To provide a useful background image I will first give a description of the respondent's professional and religious background.

#### **4.1 Respondents professional and religious background**

All respondents are conscious of their own professional and religious background. Of the respondents, all identify as Christians and have a Lutheran Christian background. Of the four respondents, all but one has educations within the diaconal field. The professional background varies from nursing degree, priest, diakonia and leadership.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Sex, age<sup>95</sup></b>	<b>Role</b>
Respondent A	Female, 30s	Deacon (local church)
Respondent B	Female 50s	Responsible for deacon activities (local church)
Respondent C	Female 30s	Deacon (local church)
Respondent D	Female 40s	Priest (in diaconal organization)

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<sup>95</sup> In light of anonymity specific age is not given

## 4.2 Diaconal identity and responsibility

For all the respondents the role of the church in society in light of diaconal work is something they all are conscious about. All say that diakonia is important not only for the church, but for society. One respondent describes it like this:

Diakonia is not only important for the church, I believe diakonia is important overall; to care for each other; to include...this is not unknown things in relations to society, we often recognize this in politics and social debates...I believe if we have focus on diakonia and actually use it actively, I think it will influence other arenas in society.<sup>96</sup>

There is a consciousness in the respondents that the church's diaconal role has an important role in society, that diakonia actually can go so far as to change and impact parts of society. One respondent speaks of this role as an antithesis of bureaucracy<sup>97</sup>, the role of the church is to fight for the world of mankind; to go the extra mile, to be a voice for the voiceless and fight for the people that cannot fight for themselves. The respondent used an example of the paperless refugees, and describes:

It was obvious that the political and societal came up short in some areas, and because of rules and regulations, the police had the right to throw people out of the country. But this is where we as a church need to stand on the side of the weak, to fight for justice, fight for those who are in a desperate situation, until we cannot fight no more, because another authority comes in and say its over. Because we are not meant to break the law, however we are not to be politicians. No, we should fight for mankind. I don't know if I can say it in a different way, we should be the antithesis of bureaucracy.<sup>98</sup>

Respondent C has the same typology, and speaks of the diaconal role as an active "fighting" role. She talks about the importance of seeing people, to fight for the people that fall "outside" of society. As an example she talks about her local involvement with dementia patients at a local nursing home:

Traditionally speaking diakonia has maybe been a little self-effacing (hymns, tables, serving, serving serving), but there is a fight...we need to stand on the barricades, we need to fight for the people that have fallen outside. For example in regards to dementia, that's maybe one of those things people don't think is important. Work

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<sup>96</sup> Respondent A

<sup>97</sup> Respondent A

<sup>98</sup> Respondent A

amongst dementia patients that is important! I want quality there, it's about human value, to meet needs not only where it is popular.<sup>99</sup>

When speaking of what is “popular”, the respondent is addressing the work amongst drug addicts and elderly which has been an important and common aspect of diakonia. Although she doesn't diminish the importance of the work within these groups, she utters the importance of meeting every need, even the unseen and ‘unpopular’. In her case of dementia patients, she alludes that people have questioned the importance of such work, because the patients will forget she was even there.<sup>100</sup> She then talks about the *feeling*, the patients might forget what took place and who was there, but the feeling they sit left with will linger. She says it's about valuing the significance in the little things; it's about a moment. She says:

That's how I want to be, I don't know if I can do it, but I want to meet everyone in that way, especially where you feel like the average man in the street has withdrawn, that's where I need to go in. That is important for me.<sup>101</sup>

Along the same lines she says the churches role is to be a counterpoint to the rest of society. She believes the church has some value that is outside the norm of society. She describes the role of the church as looking beyond a person's past, where they come from or what they have done. The role of the church is to give people a new and a second chance, to believe in people. To see the value and the importance on what others have given up. She tells a story as an example:

We had someone that had fallen out of the working environment, outside everything really. The person got a little task (in the church), a small task (making coffee). It would have taken me two seconds to do myself, and it might actually been easier. Because now I needed to administrate and make sure everything was in order. Have conversations about making coffee etc. Yet then time goes; the person becomes safer, more confident in themselves, and then this coffee making turns into work training, and the person ends up back in employment. That's huge, and it awesome that it is possible. Two cans of coffee, once a week. We need to see the significance where other people have given up.<sup>102</sup>

Three of the four respondents talked about the role of the church in society as being role models.<sup>103</sup> One respondent says that she thinks of the diaconal role unlike theology (which in

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<sup>99</sup> Respondent C

<sup>100</sup> This because of their medical condition.

<sup>101</sup> Respondent C

<sup>102</sup> Respondent C

<sup>103</sup> Respondent A, B, and C.

her words is very theoretical) is about being the one who shows in practice what it is to *be* the church.<sup>104</sup> Respondent B has thoughts on the same topic, and describes this as living authentic lives, *living* what he (Jesus) has given us, as to delete the divide between what we *are* as a church and what we *live* as a church. She says the church's role is to represent Jesus.<sup>105</sup> She says:

Diakonia is doing what Jesus did; he saw people, he cared for people. The bible talks a lot about mercy, right, that he was present when life was good and when life was hard, and to care for the entire human when needed.<sup>106</sup>

In the same theme as being a role model two of the four respondents talked about the role of the church in society as being Jesus hands and feet.<sup>107</sup> Respondent A says, "the role of the church is to be visible in the world, the church is to be Jesus' hand and feet, and the church should preach who Jesus is."<sup>108</sup> She goes on to say that a diaconal aspect is the preaching of the word (the bible). Respondent C says diakonia is integrated in all that they do as a church. Yet when asked if they often talk about diakonia from the pulpit, the answer is no.

Respondent B brings about a different dimension than they other respondents, a spiritual one. She and the church, in which she belongs, have a big focus on prayer, healing and the prophetic. Hence a large part of their diaconal work is in the form of prayer and prophecy. The respondent utters the importance of using these spiritual gifts God has given, and says they act of Jesus words when he said put your hand of the sick and pray for them. This respondent is in charge of many of the prayer activities, and the different volunteers and teams that operate and administrate the different activities. She says they offer a specific prayer room in addition to prayer after each service of a Sunday. Both these prayer opportunities are open for the public. She shares some of what they have been witness to in the prayer room:

We have seen healing, we have seen people become Christians...and I often see many people get a different relationship to faith, and Gods presence. I often hear many say that there is something special about that room, a strong presence of God...so many people gathered...there is just something about the atmosphere in there.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Respondent A

<sup>105</sup> Respondent B

<sup>106</sup> Respondent B

<sup>107</sup> Respondent A, B

<sup>108</sup> Respondent A

<sup>109</sup> Respondent B

The quote explains some of the experiences the respondent have had with their prayer room. She also said, “in the healing room we are conscious that it is not our faith, but God can, and God wants to heal. The focus is not on the sickness, but on Jesus as the healer”.<sup>110</sup> Here the respondent stressed some of their theology on healing and prayer, on Jesus as the healer, that can and wants to heal, and on the people as receivers of that healing. The respondent’s church also offers prayer at their weekly church services. This prayer is not limited to healing, but offer prayer for whatever the need is. The prayer takes place inside the service room.

We don’t wish to hide it away, if you visit one of our services you will experience that we have build a culture of honesty and openness. It can be a bit challenging for new people, but because we think; Gods goodness, generosity and openness, we wish for our services to be a climate where people dare to show their prayer needs should some come up during our service.<sup>111</sup>

In this quote the respondent explains how they want to build a culture that is open for people to show and share their needs. The respondent says a big part of their role is to meet people’s needs through prayer and prophecy, and in that way they serve as Gods representatives, as His hands and feet.

Respondent A briefly shared the importance of caring for creation, and that diakonia also covers care for animals. Through their church and diaconal activities they have done several activities to show love and care for animals. She shared the story of how they served water and dog biscuits outside one church at the local food festival, and concluded the story to say, “that is diakonia”.<sup>112</sup>

Respondent D works for a diaconal institution in the city, which specifically does work with drugs and psychiatry. When asked what she believes the role of the church is to care for the weak and the marginalized in the city, she said:

It’s about seeing and tolerating people. The churches caring ministry has often been about the ‘resourcefully strong’ helping the ‘resourcefully weak’. Handing out and redistributing funds, but that also means that the person receiving the ‘gift’ become dutiful in paying back in some form of thankfulness because they are not on an equal level. What we have worked more and more with is that we are all equal... Because in the human encounter we must always respectful be equal.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Respondent B

<sup>111</sup> Respondent B

<sup>112</sup> Respondent A

<sup>113</sup> Respondent D

Respondent D goes on to talk about the theology of the gift, and draws the parallel to the Christian grace. Grace is a free gift given, without any strings attached. Good things come by being met, but grace is something different. The respondent says there should be no demand or claim from a gift, and concludes that diakonia and the churches role is to see and tolerate people. She says, “To see people and tolerate people that is the challenge, that is diakonias challenge to us, and that challenge I gladly send on to the churches.”<sup>114</sup> She says that the church has a significant role of giving people a community to belong to. “The church has all the reason, if you ask me, to include those who fall a little outside society.”<sup>115</sup> She believed the church could give people that normally fall outside the ‘normal society’ a chance to be part of one aspect of that ‘normal society’, an aspect they cannot offer.

All respondents speak of the importance of diakonia, and the impact it already has, yet also the opportunity, for further impact on the city. They see their role as caring for the individual person, and individual need. They see the role of the church as a role model, a caring community, as representatives of Jesus, and as his hands and feet in the city. The activities and services that are offered vary from church to church and have to do with demographics in their neighborhoods and the engagement of the diaconal leader.

#### **4.3 Challenges seen in doing diaconal work in Stavanger**

All respondents are aware of challenges they face in doing diaconal work in their city. Respondent A says the challenge is to fight, fight for the actual importance of diakonia. She said, “to claim that our ways of meeting people have value, when it feels like we come up short in some thing”.<sup>116</sup> This quote explains her view of needing to fight for the value of her work. A challenge is actually to claim the importance of diakonia. Another challenge she presents is the identity of the church. She explains that the church used to have a solid position in society, but that it no longer has the same status. She says, “it is a little bit like David and Goliath, we don’t automatically get the same acknowledgement and respect for what we convey than what we used to before.”<sup>117</sup> This is where her fight typology comes in; a challenge for doing diaconal work in Stavanger is to fight for the identity of the church and the importance of diakonia.

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<sup>114</sup> Respondent D

<sup>115</sup> Respondent D

<sup>116</sup> Respondent A

<sup>117</sup> Respondent A

Respondent B draws focus to the challenges of being apart of an individualistic society. She talks about the challenge of people wearing masks, not showing their true needs, and distancing themselves from other people. She explains:

We work to not bear masks, but there is many things that live on the inside of people that don't come out. However if we make it available and dare to talk true about life as it is...if that comes out, then I think we can be a supplement.<sup>118</sup>

Respondent B believes in building a culture within the church of openness and vulnerability, and believes one of the challenges of doing diaconal work in Stavanger is rooted in the sociopolitical makeup of the people.

Respondent C speaks of the challenge of meeting the needs as they are, and as they come. To achieve the width and depth so that they can meet all needs. "One can loose sleep over such things, but one cannot do that...that would be too tough. But there is much more we could do, so much more we could contribute with. So we kind of need to live with the fact that we can't do everything, and be happy with what we actually do."<sup>119</sup> She also stresses the importance of not letting this become about comfort, but to except what she can do, and push towards doing more.

Respondent A, B and C all talk about the challenges of living in a multicultural society. A society that is filled with different religions and cultures, where the challenge is to meet needs yet at the same time be respectful of others religion. Respondent A says her role is not to push things (beliefs) over peoples heads, yet at the same time she utters the importance of preaching the word and being true to her Christian calling. She says, "we cannot lose our identity, but at the same time we are not to hit people in the head with our bibles."<sup>120</sup>

Respondent C shared the difficulty she faced when the large amount of refugees arrived in Stavanger in 2016. She talks of the situation as being complex and overwhelming.

For the first part it was about what we were going to do, what we could contribute with, because we heard so many different things. And as a diaconal group (made up of deacons in Stavanger) we were keen to work out a joint statement: what we could tell our congregations, and that was hard; there is slowness in the system.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Respondent B

<sup>119</sup> Respondent C

<sup>120</sup> Respondent A

<sup>121</sup> Respondent C

In this quote respondent C is explaining some of the first acts deacons did in Stavanger as a response to the refugee crisis. The respondent is expressing her frustration with what she calls “slowness in the system”, and is referring to monthly meetings where the deacons worked to come up with a joint statement. She also talks about the disappointment of the church being “too late on the field”<sup>122</sup>, and says their church didn’t arrange any activity or common aid, but encouraged members to contribute with what they could on their own. The respondent shares that they have activities directed towards the international community, for example a knitting club. The respondent shares how this club serves both the international *members* and the *volunteers* in the group. She says that although language, culture, values and costume are a challenge, connections and friendships are developed. All of the respondents express a desire and a want to serve the international community, yet all lack basic information about the church and their activities in the English language. Marketing in general is a challenge seen by Respondent A, B and C. There is a general lack of marketing in all churches, and all respondents expressed that they fall short of advertising and marketing diaconal events and activities.

#### **4.4 Identifying and addressing the needs**

I will in this subchapter present the respondents observations and interpretations of the larger needs seen in the city. It needs to be taken into consideration that this is influenced by their demographic location and their own worldview.

Respondent A brought up the fight against busyness, that society runs at ‘high pace’, often limiting people to slow down and simply enjoy life. The respondent expands that this often is true for diaconal work as well. She speaks of the importance of slowing down and being present, present to people around you.<sup>123</sup> The respondent also said that in order to truly know what the needs are in the city, she would need to spend half a year on the street. The other respondents on the other hand, were rather quick to list of what they thought the larger needs of the city where. Respondent B talks about substance abuse, unemployment, and the number of people living alone. Other things that are mentioned are divorce rate, children growing up in unstable homes, and the lack of genuine community. She also talks about the pressure in society and the strife to meet some kind of unreachable standard. Respondent B speaks of what she has herself experienced and seen within her congregation and demographics, traits that is recognizable and common for a secular welfare society.

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<sup>122</sup> Respondent C

<sup>123</sup> Respondent A



Respondent C shares similar concerns and challenges. She talks about the big financial differences that Stavanger has, and even more specifically for the demographic where her church is located. Although her congregation is not big, she says they have a variety of old and young, natives and internationals, families and singles; and the needs vary accordingly.

One challenge that recurs in all respondents is the notion of loneliness. All respondents express loneliness as a large need in society.

The issue of loneliness is a large challenge really. So to build good relationships and help people dare to have relationships, dare to involve others, and oneself in others, is a thing I think is important. I think our culture is privatized.<sup>124</sup>

Respondent B talks about loneliness as a large problem in society, but offers up the church as a place where one can find community.

We know that there are many people that are lonely: that have moved away from their network, or that have lost their job. They might have many material goods, much money, but they don't have a network. Maybe their family is dysfunctional. So... we have refugees, immigrants, people that are unemployed, elderly. We have newly parents without an immediate family to help. There is so much need all over.<sup>125</sup>

Respondent C shares that loneliness reaches not one specific age or situation, but can be and is evident in all ages and seasons of life. One of the ways they try to battle with this challenge is by a dinner activity they host once a week, every week. The price for the dinner is cheap as to open it for all, and the hope is that it would create an arena for community. At their weekly dinners there is a mixture between immigrants, people that work in oil, some English speaking internationals without a network, some families, and some retirees. She says, "That's how I want it to be, we all gather to eat, because everyone needs food."<sup>126</sup> Respondent D also points to the issue of loneliness.

If you walk around the streets down town you don't see a lot of needy people sitting around. The city has over 200 housing opportunities; there is housing for everyone who needs it. But you have people sitting in those housing units, weak and stigmatized; healthcare is taken care of, a key is put in the door to a new apartment, but the loneliness is not met, the existentialism is not met.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Respondent B

<sup>125</sup> Respondent C

<sup>126</sup> Respondent C

<sup>127</sup> Respondent D

Respondent D works for a specialized unit working for and with people of substance abuse in the city. She points out that although a system might meet a person's physical need, there is still an emotional need that is unmet. Respondent D talks about the unseen and invisible needs of our society, such a loneliness. She speaks of society as developing an attitude of the individual's choice, but utters the importance of the people in society having a duty beyond themselves. Say says:

The welfare state is a good hindrance for people to not fall outside, but we need to make sure that it the middleclass many opportunities doesn't become a lack of responsibility for the weak.<sup>128</sup>

The respondent speaks well of the welfare state and all its possibilities, but also speaks of the deontology. Society encourages the individual choice, however people have a duty towards each other. She says:

We cannot forget the deontology in the welfare state. We cannot become so liberal that it is the individuals choice, although on the other side it is the individuals choice to perish...but that doesn't mean that we should not engage. Free will should never become societies excuse to not take action.<sup>129</sup>

#### **4.5 The professional and the volunteer**

All respondents stress their reliance on volunteers. However, the different respondents and churches have different practices when it comes to volunteers, this also is reflected in the size of their volunteer base. Respondent B has the largest group of volunteers<sup>130</sup>. They offer courses, classes and personality test for all volunteers. This is done in order to find the right place of service for each volunteer. She also says the largest part of her 80% work role goes to recruit, organize and follow up volunteers. Within their school, and bible school, students are also trained for diaconal work. Twice a year, the church also puts on several seminars that train for diaconal work, this is available for the entirety of the congregation as well as publicly for whoever would like to participate.

Respondents A and B both expresses the need for more volunteers, although they both express thankfulness and gratitude for everyone that contributes. Respondent A gives two different examples of activities and events that have been started and run by volunteers, although it is safe to assume that some might have been left out. Respondent B gives far more

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<sup>128</sup> Respondent D

<sup>129</sup> Respondent D

<sup>130</sup> A volunteer base over 100 people

examples of volunteers starting different types of community groups and diaconal activities. However Respondent B says the lack of volunteers has forced the church to also shut down some of their diaconal work. Both Respondent A and B stresses their need for a large volunteers base, yet when asked if there is a simple way to join a team or sign up for volunteer work, both respondents say there is no official place to join. Respondent B talks about the importance of finding the right place for a volunteer, and says that by getting to know a person one is able to find the right ‘shelf’ to put them on. She also talks about the importance of allowing people to just attend church, and that volunteer work should always be optional. She says:

It is important that it is allowed to be in a church without having to do something. There needs to be room in a congregation and in a church to be with your whole life, one is not always able to contribute for different reasons, and that need to be allowed. Because life is different.<sup>131</sup>

Respondent D on the other hand has a different experience. She says that have too many volunteers. She says, “volunteers come to us themselves, our problem with volunteers is actually that we have too many.”<sup>132</sup> In saying that they have too many volunteers, she is referring to the fact that each volunteer gets a large amount of follow up and they don’t want more volunteers than what they can oversee. “We are so heavily invested in our volunteers that we have a max capacity of how many we can meaningfully follow up.”<sup>133</sup> Respondent D and her organization seems to take their volunteers seriously, in the interview she says that they never connect a volunteer already volunteering for one activity with another activity, no matter how big the need for that activity is. When a person signs up to be a volunteer she thinks it is important that they know they wont get asked to do more than what they originally signed up to do.

Respondent C talked about another interesting aspect to diaconal work amongst volunteers. She said she often have members of the church doing diaconal work, without them knowing it. Examples that are uses are home visitations and driving people to and from doctor’s appointment. The respondent talks about the general lack of understanding the term diakonia with her members. Although she has a lack of volunteers, her experience is that members do diaconal work without necessarily being a volunteer. The same could be said for

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<sup>131</sup> Respondent C

<sup>132</sup> Respondent D

<sup>133</sup> Respondent D

respondent B, she says a lot of their diaconal work takes place within their community small groups. The groups become responsible for each other and serve one another diaconal without the use of the word.

#### **4.6 Cooperation with the state and other agencies**

All respondents have some sort of cooperation with other churches, the state and other agencies. Respondent A, C and D have a formal cooperation. They cooperate on certain activities taking place in the city, such as dinner/breakfast hosted for people suffering of substance abuse, as well as church services. Respondent A and C also cooperate with grief groups<sup>134</sup> as well as marriage courses. Respondent A also says they cooperate with nursing homes and institutions. They also worked together with child protective services in connection with a Christmas appeal to give gifts and food for families in need. Respondent C says they cooperate with different Christian and diaconal institutions in the city. She however says she has had little to no cooperation with the state and local authorities, and expresses that she would like to be more connected, and in cooperation with the local authorities.

The church of Respondent B has their own church network, which cooperates with different churches both locally and internationally. What started locally as a diaconal stunt in the city of Stavanger has over the last years spread over different churches and also other cities.<sup>135</sup> The respondent also says they have been in contact with the city administration and politicians to ask what the needs of the city are and in what way they can contribute. That have contributed with resources both financially and voluntary. Respondent B says about their contact with the state; “we have regular contact and wish to cooperate where we see we can contribute.”<sup>136</sup>

Respondent D expresses the importance of cooperation between her organization and the churches in the city, and she is open for more cooperation. She said that they at some point thought about becoming apart of the diakonia group with Respondent A and C<sup>137</sup>, but found out that the best thing was for Respondents A and B to cooperate on diakonia, and then cooperate with them on their specialty area. She does say they are available if the church would need them.

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<sup>134</sup> Groups offered for people that are grieving the loss of someone. These groups are specified for the type of grief, ie: loss of spouse, child or parent.

<sup>135</sup> Because of anonymity the specifics of the event is not mentioned

<sup>136</sup> Respondent B

<sup>137</sup> A cooperation group between deacons in the city (diakoni utvalget).

## Chapter Five

### ANALYSES AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I will analyze some of my findings in light of the theory presented in chapter two. The chapter is divided into four thematic parts; first, addressing the needs in Stavanger identified by the churches, and second; the churches identity and responsibility. The following two parts will address the outworking of the churches role through volunteers and cooperative work.

#### **5.1 Recognizing and addressing the need**

The way churches confront the needs in Stavanger has to do with what needs they see and recognize as needs. My research question asks, “*What role does the church play to care for the weak, marginalized and suffering in the city of Stavanger.*” The “group” (weak/marginalized/suffering) was never defined, this was done intentionally as I thought it interesting to find out what group(s) the churches identified as the “weak, marginalized and suffering” in the city. As previously mentioned in chapter one, the common trends in diakonia, pointed out by Angell, is concern for the elderly, the bereaved, the sick and those in existential distress.<sup>138</sup> My findings show that this group, as well as containing the more familiar needs (such as elderly, drug/alcohol addicts) is also made up of regular people. Regular people that struggle with inner needs, such as loneliness and the general effects of an individualistic and pluralistic society.

##### *5.1.1 Loneliness*

According to my findings, loneliness is recognized as one of the largest challenges in Stavanger today. A culture of privatism has created a tendency to be concerned with issues and ideas that affect one’s self as an individual. Globalization has caused people to be more connected than ever before, yet at the same time people lack real, genuine relationships. All respondents express the common concern that loneliness is a serious and growing issue in today’s society, however, it is often invisible to the eye and unrecognizable to those who are not looking for it. This is connected to what Einar Vetvik addressed in his paper on poverty

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<sup>138</sup> See chapter 1.3

and dignity in a rich welfare state, where he addresses three dimensions of poverty.<sup>139</sup> Poverty is not only related to economic capacity, but also has to do with social exclusion and human dignity. These last two dimensions are relevant here, as it talks of low participation and integration in society, as well as lack of respect and value placed upon an individual. This dimension of poverty contains invisible/hidden needs; therefore loneliness could be described as one dimension of social exclusion, and in turn an aspect of poverty.

From my findings, I see that deacons in the city see great value in building communities where relationships can be formed and built. The issue of loneliness is not specific to one age group or gender, but found by all three churches to be true for all genders in all age groups. It's a difficult issue, yet at the same time the answer is easy, relationship. In this way churches have a significant opportunity to combat this need. Welfare states, no matter how small or big, successful or unsuccessful, would be hard-pressed to offer a solution to the problem of loneliness, and I don't know if they should. Yet, I believe that churches can offer a place where people find community, and relationships. It seems like this challenge is confronted differently for each church, however similar the challenge and context may be. One church meets separately from their Sunday service, and is divided into smaller community groups where people become apart of a smaller, more closely connected community (family). For people struggling with loneliness, a small group could be a more appropriate and practical place where relationships can be formed. The other two churches have smaller groups for activities and interests ranging from choir, to bible study groups, youth groups, kids groups etc. These smaller groups give people the opportunity to connect with someone else on the basis of an interest or activity.

Respondent D also brings up the issue of loneliness, and says:

If you walk around the streets downtown, you don't see a lot of needy people sitting around. The city has over 200 housing opportunities; there is housing for everyone who needs it. But you have people sitting in those housing units, weak and stigmatized; healthcare is taken care of, a key is put in the door to a new apartment, but the loneliness is not met, the existentialism is not met.<sup>140</sup>

Respondent D is associated with a specialized unit working for, and with people of substance abuse. These people are what we might traditionally think of as the *weak and suffering* groups. The state meets (for the most part) this group's everyday physical needs, however

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<sup>139</sup> See chapter 1.2

<sup>140</sup> Respondent D

there is an emotional and psychological need that is unmet. Here, the church has a great opportunity to build inclusive communities where people can find fellowship and relationship.

The same could be said for the international community in Stavanger, as the city has had a large increase in asylum seekers and refugees, as well as work migrants. This group might be more prone to experience social exclusion because of language barrier and cultural differences. This is again a great opportunity for the church to be inclusive, to create a fellowship and a community for every individual and household.

### *5.1.2 Busyness and strife*

Another theme that surfaced in my findings was busyness and strife. A pressure on people to measure up to whatever ideal they compare themselves to. Different respondents describe a tendency in their church and amongst people for busyness to disallow and restrict people the ability to simply enjoy life. One respondent speaks of the value and need to simply be present.<sup>141</sup> The same theme has been seen trending in the media over the last years with meditation, yoga and mindfulness, reminding people to be present in life here and now. Respondent A speaks of the importance of being present not only for the individual, but for others around you.<sup>142</sup> The same respondent also mentioned that in order to truly know what the “needs” in the city are, she would have to be present on the streets of the city for six months to know.<sup>143</sup> It might be that people become so preoccupied with their own life, which results in distance from other people. I don’t believe this deacon lacks an understanding of the needs that are present in the city, but I do believe an underlying theme in what she is saying is noteworthy. She expresses a need and a desire to be present, to pause and to observe what the city needs. I believe this is an important aspect for diaconal work. It is easy to get stuck in old ways and stagnant thinking where we naively believe that the emotional, psychological and relational needs are the same as they were ten years ago. Diaconal activities, initiatives and ideologies must change as society changes. I find Kari Jordheim’s quote relevant here, as she says, “In order to have clear engagement in society, the diaconal work needs to change as society changes. One cannot linger on old methods and ways; we must develop and innovate with the world in order to understand the world.”<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Respondent B

<sup>142</sup> Respondent A

<sup>143</sup> Respondent A

<sup>144</sup> Kari Jordheim, *Challenges for Diakonia*, 225.

The characteristics of diakonia are holistic, they take physical, mental, social and spiritual dimensions into consideration and involve the whole human reality. Issues such as loneliness and busyness are therefore the concern of diakonia. The work of diakonia needs to be tailored for the specific culture and time. Our society might have developed an attitude of the individual's choice. This idea says that it is the individual's choice if he/she chooses to fall outside society. Respondent D says, "The welfare state is a good hindrance for people to not fall outside, but we need to make sure that in the middleclass, many opportunities don't become a lack of responsibility for the weak."<sup>145</sup> We live in a society where the individuals choice is encouraged, yet it must not give us the illusion that we do not have a duty towards each other. Loneliness might be an issue that a person can fix herself/himself, but that does not mean the church should not offer help. Respondent D says, "Free will should never become societies excuse to not take action."<sup>146</sup>

I believe society has both a responsibility and an opportunity to meet the needs of loneliness. The church stands here at a great advantage to include and welcome people into a community and a fellowship.

## **5.2 Diaconal identity and responsibility**

In the five different profiles of diakonia that emerged from Angell and Selbekk's mapping of diaconal health work within the Norwegian church, all churches within my study seem to have characteristics of all five profiles.<sup>147</sup> There was however three profiles that all three churches had most in common with. The *political and emergency oriented profile*, the *care-oriented profile* and the *church oriented profile*. When expressing their view of the role of the church in Stavanger, all respondents talked about the fight for justice, human rights, and work for the social "outcast", which fall under the 'political and emergency profile'. Elements from the 'care-oriented profile' are home visits, grief groups and efforts related to people with drug problems. Interestingly, every element was found in all three churches. The last profile is the 'church oriented profile', which is characterized by a variety of activities that, in a small sense, can be distinguished as religious. Such activities are, but not limited to prayer meetings, small groups, kids/youth groups, choir, bible studies, etc. This profile is found and highly emphasized in all three churches, as every church offers bible studies, kids/youth groups and choir. The 'church oriented profile' could be interpreted to relate more to the

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<sup>145</sup> Respondent D

<sup>146</sup> Respondent

<sup>147</sup> See chapter 1.2.3



faith-dimensions of the church, I would however like to suggest that it relates to an important social aspect of the church as well. I also find this in Ronald Henriksson's *six tables of diakonia*,<sup>148</sup> and see his example of the kitchen table to be an accurate description of diakonia within the three churches in my study. The goal of the kitchen table is to create a meeting place, a place of belonging. This social aspect could be an important tool/profile/role in combatting what all respondents claim to be one of the larger needs in Stavanger, which I will address later in this chapter.

According to my findings, all respondents place a high value on diakonia. They emphasize a hope and a dream that diakonia will not only impact the church and its congregation, but that it will contribute to help and heal society. The challenge however, is finding what role the church plays in society in order to do just so. The role of the church in Stavanger is described with a variety of language, noting both differences and similarities by the respondents. The role of the church is expressed as a role that sees and tolerates people, gives second chances, a role that looks beyond someone's past. The church is to have a role that fights for the helpless, and is a voice for the voiceless. I have chosen to focus on two main aspects of this role that was expressed by all respondents, the church as: *a counterpoint to society*, and *role models in society*.

### *5.2.1 Church as counter point to society*

During my data collection, aspects of the churches diaconal identity and responsibility surfaced which is where I now bring the attention too. For the individual respondents, each had a different perspective that was unique to their own context and perspective that allowed them to approach, communicate and view the topic in their own way. Two of the respondents talk about the role of the church as a counter point to society, or as the antithesis of bureaucracy. The church has a role to fight for the people that fall "outside" society, or help the ones that others (the state) have given up. Different examples that are presented by the respondents range from work with refugees, elderly, dementia patients and people of extended unemployment. The respondents express a role that in some ways is a critic and/or a watchdog to the state and its services. I would here like to refer to Ralph Kramer's analysis of the functions of voluntary organizations in the welfare state. He specified four main types of organizational roles of a voluntary agency, which are *the vanguard role*, *the improver* or

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<sup>148</sup> See chapter 1.2.3

*advocate role, the service provider role and the value guardian role.*<sup>149</sup> The improver or advocate role is the critic or the watchdog vis à vis the state and its services, and can relate to what these respondents see the role of the church to be. The role of the church is to provide help to people, and maybe opposite/different of the state, the church is to see the person and the life, and not simply a number in a system. The church is to go the extra mile, to help the ones that have fallen “outside”, and to fight for the people that cannot fight for themselves. “We should fight for mankind. I don’t know if I can say it in a different way, we should be the antithesis of bureaucracy.”<sup>150</sup> Respondent C used the same typology, and spoke of the diaconal role as an active “fighting” role. Fighting and acting on behalf of other people, using the example of the dementia patients. The role of the church is to care for such people, for all people. The role of the church is to meet every need, impossible? Yes, however true!

#### *5.2.1.1 Spiritual role and dimension*

Another dimension that surfaces in my findings was the spiritual dimension and role of the church. Although all respondents acknowledged that there is a spiritual dimension to their work, one respondent and her church stuck out as to put extra focus and attention on this aspect. The church of this respondent has a large part of their diaconal work in the form of prayer and prophecy. The respondent uttered the importance of Christians using their spiritual gifts given by God, as well as acting on God’s word, the bible. For example, in the form of “laying on of hands”, and praying for the sick, this church offers prayer in all their services. Additionally, they also have a prayer room every Saturday that is open for the public. In the prayer room, attendees receive prayer upon request, as well as prophetic words from the volunteers in the room. In observation of said activity, I was met with respect, openness and understanding. For this church, prayer and prophecy seems like an important aspect for both the individual believer and the church. The church offers prayer at all their church services. The respondent says, “We don’t wish to hide it away, if you visit one of our services you will experience that we have build a culture of honesty and openness.”<sup>151</sup> Through my observations, I find this to be true, as they have built a culture of openness and of prayer. They believe that as God’s ambassadors, a way to meet needs in the city is through prayer and the prophetic. This aspect is not only for the believer (to build and empower the believer itself), but also for the believer to give to others. There is a higher spiritual aspect here that I

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<sup>149</sup> Ralph M. Kramer, *Voluntary agencies in the welfare state*. (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1981), 9.

<sup>150</sup> Respondent A

<sup>151</sup> Respondent B

see necessary to address. The church has a role to help and serve the needs of people, and can do so physically and emotionally, similarly to what the state and other agencies does. There is however a supernatural-spiritual aspect, Christians can do what they can in the here and now (physical), and God can do the rest. Prayer and prophecy is *an* (not the only) aspect of supernatural spirituality and it does offer something the state does not. If the church is to be a role model, an ambassador and the hands and feet of Jesus, the spiritual aspect needs to be apart of it. We cannot forget that the church is specifically called to meet people's spiritual and religious needs. I find a quote from The church of Norway, *Plan for Diakonia* fitting here, it says: "the church is particularly called to meet the spiritual and religious needs that are part of the pain and distress that people experience."<sup>152</sup> The churches role is to care for the needs of people, spiritually, emotionally and physically.

#### 5.2.1.2 Care for creation

Another interesting aspect of diakonia that was revealed in my findings was the concept of *care for creation*. I will not give this aspect much attention, yet I still find it relevant and valuable to address it as it was presented in an interview. Respondent A talks about an aspect of diakonia as *care for creation*, and was the only one that brought in this dimension. Neither of the other respondents talked about it as an aspect of diakonia in the interview or on their website. To care for, and steward creation is an aspect that according to my studies doesn't seem to get much attention. All my respondents use the typology of *role models* to describe the role of the church. This typology is to describe what the church and its members are to show/act, and according to my findings, these acts are particular directed towards people. It is directed towards *one aspect* of creation, excluding nature and animals. Further research on how this aspect of diakonia could be outworked within a congregation would be of great benefit.

All my findings point to the fact that churches in Stavanger see their role as an active caring role in the struggle to care for the weak, marginalized and suffering in their city. All churches believe they have a responsibility to care for people. How this role is outwork is different from church to church. The general idea is that the churches care for their own members, and people within their geographical location. I did however get an impression that it was more difficult for some churches to get an overview over the needs of their members. This because people's needs are often found in conversations, and one deacon cannot follow

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<sup>152</sup> Church of Norway, *Plan for Diakonia*, 10.

up a church of 200 people for example.<sup>153</sup> Respondent B and her church, have organized their church differently. They are the largest church in the group of respondents, and have smaller community groups that meet separate from the Sunday service, during midweek. Because of the size of the church it is impossible for everyone to be seen and properly included if the church is not organized in different smaller groups. In theory, these groups become your “church family”<sup>154</sup>, a group that look out for each other and help each other. She gave examples of groups helping each other with everything from kids birthday parties, to weddings, hospital visits and funerals. In theory, these types of community/bible groups serve their members subject to subject; everyone helps one another as they go through life. For members within the church, this seems to be a wonderful opportunity to not only be connected in community to a smaller group, but to also have a designated group to “serve/care for”. I think one of the challenges that might arise in such given situation is that members limit their diaconal service to only this group. There might become a tendency for diaconal activities to become organized and limited to one fixed group, and therefore if not purposeful, one might miss out on some of the *spontaneous diakonia* that comes in the form of everyday challenges. Respondent D says that the church has a significant role of giving people a community to belong to. “The church has all the reason, if you ask me, to include those who fall a little outside society.”<sup>155</sup> She believed the church could give people that normally fall outside the ‘normal society’, a chance to be part of one aspect of that ‘normal society’.

Small groups do seem to be a good option for making sure the members of the church are taken care of, however, another challenge with this is making sure the groups actually do take care of each other. From my findings, there seems to be no real system in place to properly follow up what the groups do. So in theory, the system seems good, but in praxis there is no proper way of knowing what is done and if people are taken care of. What would be interesting is to compare churches with these smaller community groups with churches without and see if there is a difference in how they feel they are taken care of diagonally.

There is significance to diakonia. Diaconal activity in Stavanger has a large and important impact on the city, and some of the local churches hope and dream of further impact. They all seem to want to be a church and community of influence within their city, yet the question is how does it look in praxis. They talk about the church as a role model in society, both corporately and individually. To serve and meet the needs of the city and its

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<sup>153</sup> Respondent A and B both mentioned that it is in conversations with people that you find out if they have a need.

<sup>154</sup> Respondent B

<sup>155</sup> Respondent D

people by every believer living diaconal, being the hands and feet of Jesus. It is obvious that one person cannot serve everyone, but if everyone serves someone, there is a larger possibility that everyone will be served. It sounds wonderful and quite easy in theory, but in order for every believer to live this in praxis, they need to be equipped for the service. I will address this challenge later in this chapter.

### 5.2.2 Church as role model in society

Another aspect of the churches diaconal identity and responsibility that surfaced during my research was the idea of the church as a role model in society, as was an ideology that was expressed by all respondents. A “role model” could be interpreted to mean different things, but I believe in this aspect the respondents use it to describe practical aspects of diakonia. One respondent says, “Diakonia is doing what Jesus did; he saw people, he cared for people.”<sup>156</sup> The ultimate role model is Jesus, and the churches role is therefore to represent Him. This is connected with John Collins research on the *diak*-words, where he concluded that *diakonia* means an assignment or mission.<sup>157</sup> The person doing diakonia could therefore be described as a spokesperson or a ‘go-between’. I therefore believe that a role model could be viewed as being a representative or spokesperson of God, or an ambassador as 2 Corinthians 5, 20 says; “We are therefore Christ ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.”<sup>158</sup>

In the same theme of being a role model, another theme similar to this that I wanted to bring up was *being Jesus hands and feet*.<sup>159</sup> Jesus brought the gospel in both word and deed, his disciples were called to do the same, and so are his followers today. In the great commission Jesus told his followers,

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.”<sup>160</sup> (Matt 28,18-20)

The question that I believe needs to be answered, is who are these role models and ambassadors? In other words, who are the people that do diaconal work within the church? All respondents expressed a theology that diakonia is for the individual believer; it is an

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<sup>156</sup> Respondent B

<sup>157</sup> See chapter 2.2.3

<sup>158</sup> The Bible, TNIV.

<sup>159</sup> Respondent A and B

<sup>160</sup> The Bible, TNIV

aspect of *being* for every Christian. This is compatible with the Church of Norway *Plan for Diakonia* that says, “All Christians are called to live their life in service for others. This applies to all age groups. Diakonia should be a basic principle in all aspects of parish life, and should result in practical measures.”<sup>161</sup> This is connected, and reflects ecumenical diakonia; as *being* the church. Diakonia is connected to the mission of the church, it is not merely something the church *does*, but it is at the core what the church *is*. The expression *Mission Dei* (God’s mission) holds the idea that God is the initiator for mission, and the church (his people) are a *sent* people, a people and a church individually and corporately on mission.<sup>162</sup> Within this mission we find the concept of witness, and within witness we find diakonia. Knud Jørgensen says that diakonia is a part of the mission, and it is a viable and necessary expression of *being* the church.<sup>163</sup> Respondent A said, “the role of the church is to be visible in the world, the church is to be Jesus’ hand and feet, and the church should preach who Jesus is.”<sup>164</sup> Diakonia is one dimension of being a witness, and one could say that it is being the hand and feet of Jesus. By doing good deeds, others will see and glorify God, as the gospel of Matthew 5,16 says, “In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”<sup>165</sup>

As a Christian, one is called to live on mission, to live diaconal. One of the things I found interesting with this dimension was to see how churches teach and equip their congregation collectively and individually to live out this diaconal mission. One thing is to believe every Christian is called to live *on mission*, another is to teach them to do just so. I will address this in more detail late in the chapter under the subtitle, *the professional, the volunteer, and the believer*.

On the same lines as being Jesus’ hands and feet, another aspect I would like to address is the thought and idea that the church is meant to see and tolerate people. This was an idea brought into light by respondent D. The respondent works for a diaconal institution in the city, which works specifically with drugs and psychiatry. When asked what she believes the role of the church is to care for the weak and the marginalized in the city, she said:

It’s about seeing and tolerating people. The churches caring ministry has often been about the ‘resourcefully strong’ helping the ‘resourcefully weak’. Handing out and redistributing funds, but that also means that the person receiving the ‘gift’ become

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<sup>161</sup> Church of Norway National Council, *Plan for Diakonia*, 5.

<sup>162</sup> See chapter 2.2.4

<sup>163</sup> Knud Jørgensen, *Equipping for Service*, 96.

<sup>164</sup> Respondent A

<sup>165</sup> The Bible, TNIV.

dutiful in paying back in some form of thankfulness because they are not on an equal level. What we have worked more and more with is that we are all equal... Because in the human encounter we must always respectfully be equal.

I find this aspect of seeing and tolerating people interesting. The idea is so basic, yet at the same time, revolutionary. Of course, one should see and tolerate people, but in our society, this is not a given. Our society is pluralistic and diverse, where people believe a wide variety of different things and tolerate each other's beliefs although different from their own. Yet at the same time we have an individualistic culture, which is characterized by individualism not collectivism. The role of the church is to see people, people within ones own church, and people outside. As a believer, ones role is to see people, people within ones own family and friends, and people outside. However, I think there needs to be another aspect; to *see*, to *tolerate* and to *include*. When people are seen, tolerated and included, they feel accepted, empowered and connected. Accepted for who they are, empowered by love and acceptance to receive help, and connected to a community that can further their connection to God and each other.

Within this aspect, there is a point to how we meet people. Respondent D said the role of the church is to see and tolerate people. She gives attention to the relationship between the giver and the receiver, and the importance of equality, value and respect. I would here like to bring in Kari Jordheim article, *Challenges for Diakonia in the Contemporary Norwegian Society*, where she addresses the same issues.<sup>166</sup> She says that all diaconal work needs to demonstrate respect, equality and mutuality. Traditionally, diaconal activities have often been seen as charitable work with a distinguished receiver and giver, making the receiver the object and the giver the subject. From a Christian standpoint, no one should ever be an object for another person. This does not mean that everyone is the same, but the value of the human life is the same no matter the conditions he/she is living in. During the natural course of life, conditions and situations change for everyone. A person might be on the helping side at one point, and then at the receiver side at a different point, such is life. Therefore in these meetings, people ought to meet each other subject to subject, rather than subject to object.

### 5.2.3 Challenges for the church

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<sup>166</sup> See chapter 1.3

It is necessary to discuss the challenges the church stand in opposition to as it provides context to the realm of that we speak of. This sub-chapter will address these challenges in the hopes that churches and the wider society can grasp the role the church wishes to play.

There are a variety of challenges that the respondents and their churches are faced with when doing diaconal work in Stavanger. Respondent A says the challenge is to fight for the actual importance of diakonia. She said, “to claim that our ways of meeting people have value, when it feels like we come up short in some things”.<sup>167</sup> A challenge of identity is therefore at the core of what this respondent is talking about. She explains that the church used to have a solid position in society, but that it no longer has the same status. She says, “it is a little bit like David and Goliath, we don’t automatically get the same acknowledgement and respect for what we convey than we used to.”<sup>168</sup> Therefore, a challenge for doing diaconal work in Stavanger (as a viable and potential partner for the state) is to fight for the identity and the importance of the church and its diaconal services. This leads me to ask the question, what do the churches actually do to promote what they have to offer? And for this church in particular, if they feel the need to regain prominence in the city, how are they promoting their activities? The response was that this church in particular is not satisfied with their marketing. Interestingly, all churches seem to be lacking either the resources or the ability for proper marketing. Marketing is actually of great importance, especially if one of the main challenges is that the church and its diakonia is not recognized for having the same value as before. If it is not official and known, how will people even know that it is there? Olav Angell says in order for the public welfare sector to recognize the church as a potential partner, the church needs to promote oneself.<sup>169</sup> The responsibility is on the church to promote and market themselves. Within all the churches I have visited, this is a weak point and a challenge for all of them. Challenges range from outdated websites to a general lack of information about different activities. All churches are aware of their unique challenges within media and marketing. For all respondents, no plan was set in place to fix the problem. Yet the problem was on “the list” of things that needed to be done.

An individualistic society presents different challenges for diakonia. One of these challenges is recognized by one of the respondents as individuals operating in pretext. Not showing ones true color, or hiding behind a mask, not showing ones true needs, and in that way distancing themselves from other people. Respondent B expresses this:

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<sup>167</sup> Respondent A

<sup>168</sup> Respondent A

<sup>169</sup> Angell, *Church and Welfare State in Norway*, 15.



We work to not bear masks, but there are many things that live on the inside of people that doesn't come out. However, if we make it available and dare to talk true about life as it is... if that comes out, then I think we can be a supplement.<sup>170</sup>

Respondent B and her church works towards building a culture within the church of openness and vulnerability, as she believes one of the challenges within the city and society is rooted in the sociopolitical makeup of the people. Not only do they try to build and empower this culture in their weekend services, but they also have an opportunity to implement this culture at their smaller community groups, which I mentioned earlier.

Another challenge to our society is that it is multicultural. It is a society that is filled with different religions and cultures. There is a challenge here to meet needs, yet at the same time be respectful of others religion and culture. One respondent uttered a personal challenge of helping people of different religions without pushing her own beliefs. The tension here is in being respectful, yet at the same time having an inner conviction of sharing her faith. She says, “we cannot lose our identity, but at the same time we are not to hit people in the head with our bibles.”<sup>171</sup> I think much could be said about the relationship between diakonia and evangelism, although this is beyond the scope of this essay I would like to add a quote by St. Francis of Assisi who said: “Preach the gospel at all times, and if necessary use words”. One could argue that a diaconal action in and of itself is showing, and preaching the gospel.

In 2016 Stavanger saw a large amount of refugees arrive to the city. This was a difficult situation for many churches as the situation was overwhelming and complex. There is a frustration from some of the respondents both about the situation and the process. One respondent said:

For the first part it was about what we were going to do, what we could contribute with, because we heard so many different things. And as a diaconal group (made up of deacons in Stavanger) we were keen to work out a joint statement: what we could tell our congregations, and that was hard; there is slowness in the system.<sup>172</sup>

Respondent C is explaining some of the first acts deacons did in Stavanger as a response to the refugee crisis. The respondent is expressing her frustration with what she calls “slowness

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<sup>170</sup> Respondent B

<sup>171</sup> Respondent A

<sup>172</sup> Respondent C

in the system”, and is referring to monthly meetings where the deacons worked to come up with a joint statement. She also talks about the disappointment of the church being “too late on the field”<sup>173</sup>, and says their church didn’t arrange any activities or common aid, but encouraged members to contribute with what they could on their own. There is a common assessment from two of the respondents that their systems are slow, and do not easily allow for spontaneous new events or activities. Instead all new work needs to go through “the system”. Although I’m sure this is purposed to serve as a safeguard to guarantee proper and good activities, it seems to frustrate two of the deacons. They even made note that it was probably easier for independent churches to do new and innovative activities, for example for refugees.<sup>174</sup>

All of the respondents express a desire to serve the international community, yet all lack basic information about the church and their activities displayed in the English language. Marketing in general is a challenge seen by respondent A, B and C. There is a general lack of marketing in all churches, and all respondents expressed that they fall short of advertising and marketing diaconal events and activities.

#### *5.2.4 Big dreams and the daunting inadequacy*

There is always an uncomfortable pain in the space between big dreams and reality. All the churches I interviewed have a conviction about their role and responsibility for the weak, marginalized and suffering in their city. It is a large, if not impossible task to hold. In one hand they hold optimistically on the hope and dream to help, on the other hand, they hold a daunting reality of inadequacy.

This is an obvious obstacle seen by all respondents; the challenge of meeting the needs as they are, and as they come. There is a hope and a dream to achieve the width and depth to meet every person’s needs. One respondent says, “One can loose sleep over such things, but one cannot do that...that would be too tough. But there is much more we could do, so much more we could contribute with. So we kind of need to live with the fact that we can’t do everything, and be happy with what we actually do.”<sup>175</sup> There is a tension between what a church wants to do, and what a church is practically able to do. It is important to be aware of

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<sup>173</sup> Respondent C

<sup>174</sup> Respondent A and C

<sup>175</sup> Respondent C

limitations, to celebrate what one is able to do, and not simply disregard what one is not able to do. One can easily find a tension here; on one side comfort and reality, and pressure and dreams on the other. Their needs to be room to accept what one *can* do, yet at the same time push towards doing more.

### **5.3 The professional, the volunteer and the believer**

In an ecclesial dimension, diakonia has become a part of the nature and mission of the church, and stepped away from where it stood earlier, as work only for the professional. Diakonia is a part of *being* the church, and therefore also a part of *being* a believer. Stephanie Dietrich said this is often linked to missiology.<sup>176</sup> Every believer is *on* mission from God. This is a concept widely accepted by all respondents. They speak of diakonia as an aspect of being a Christian. I find Kari Jordheim quote fitting here, as she says: “Diakonia is being, as well as doing, and it is a concern for all believer.”<sup>177</sup> A believer is empowered for the work of diakonia, it is not something a believer *has* to do, but something a believer *gets* to do, this is what we call the Christian life. Dietrich stresses the same point when she says that there is a growing consciousness of the importance of this Christian life as an integral part of *being* a Christian, not just as a consequence. In the Church of Norway *Plan for Diakonia* it says, “All Christians are called to live their daily life in service for others. This applies to all age groups. Diakonia should be a basic principle in all aspects of parish life, and should result in practical measures.”<sup>178</sup> It was of great interest for my project to see how the churches empowered and equipped their congregation both collectively and individually for diaconal work.

I found that all churches stressed their reliance on volunteers. Out of all the respondents and their churches I can divide them into two groups: not enough- and enough volunteers. Two churches identified that they had a large lack of volunteers. The lack made it difficult to maintain activities held by the church, and nearly impossible to start new initiatives. Their lack of volunteers has been the primary cause for suspending initiatives. Respondents A and C are heavily involved in many of the diaconal activities, and use the rest of their work hours

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<sup>176</sup> Dietrich and others, *Diakonia as Christian Social Practice*, 2.

<sup>177</sup> Jordheim, *Challenges for diakonia*, 247.

<sup>178</sup> Church of Norway, *Plan for Diakonia*, 5.

for organizational work. They both express a need for a larger volunteer base. There is however no sign of a simple way to join a team or sign up for volunteer work, and both respondents said there was no official place to “join”. They both seem to take their volunteers seriously and desire to find the “right” place to serve for each person. They both say they find out where to place a volunteer based on getting to know them through conversations. The respondents are personally responsible for recruiting volunteers, getting to know each volunteer, and finding the right place for them. This leaves the deacon occupied with each individual volunteer on a micro level, and could potentially limit them from growing their volunteer base.

Respondent B has the largest group of volunteers<sup>179</sup>, and expressed that their volunteer base is large enough. Which means they are able to facilitate and accomplish their set activities and initiatives. This respondent’s primary role is to recruit, train, organize and follow up volunteers. She does not follow up every volunteer personally; instead she follows up leaders (for an activity or initiative) and the leaders follow up their own volunteers. The church offers courses and classes to train volunteers in different diaconal roles. Each volunteer also has the ability to take a personality test, which serves to find the right place for each volunteer. Respondent B has compared to Respondent A and C more of her work role designated to growing and up keeping on the volunteer base. This seems to free her up to focus on growing the volunteer base, compared to the other respondents that personally need to be involved in many of the activities and initiatives.

Respondent D, who works for a diaconal organization has a different experience than the other deacons. Her experience is that they have too many volunteers. She made a note that she doesn’t need to recruit volunteers, but that volunteers come to her. This is probably connected both to the cause of the organization, but also because of their follow up. This respondent seems to have the most extensive “follow up system” of volunteers. She says, “We are so heavily invested in our volunteers that we have a max capacity of how many we can meaningfully follow up.”<sup>180</sup> Volunteers already serving are never connected to another activity, no matter how big the need for that activity is. The respondent says she thinks its important that volunteers know they wont get asked to do more than what they originally signed up to do.

For the three churches there are two different experiences with their volunteers. Two churches see the lack of volunteers as a large challenge for their diaconal work, yet the other

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<sup>179</sup> A volunteer base over 100 people

<sup>180</sup> Respondent D

church has enough volunteers to accomplish all activities. A note needs to be made that respondent B uses most of her 80% job role for volunteer work. Respondent A has a 100% job role, but uses less time than respondent B on volunteers. Respondent C has a 50% job role, and most of her hours go to activities and follow up, but uses the least time with work related to recruiting and follow-up of volunteers. Interestingly, the time each respondent use on work towards volunteers has an effect on the health of the volunteer base.

It needs to be noted that diakonia is not only done by volunteering in cooperation with the church, but diakonia is for every believer and is not limited to an initiative or activity hosted by the church. Diakonia is found in different acts of a believer's life, such as befriending his neighbor, giving food to the homeless, and praying for someone who is hurting. As Harald Hegstad says, "every work done by a Christian in the name of Jesus is an expression of the diakonia of the church."<sup>181</sup> My findings show that many church members and believers do diaconal work without actually knowing it. There seems to be a general lack of knowledge in the churches of what diakonia actually is.

Diakonia is for every believer and can be done both corporately and individually. It is a natural aspect of the Christian faith and walk. There does however need to be room in churches and congregations that allow people to attend church without volunteering. For different reasons, volunteering can be difficult for individuals in different seasons in life, and there needs to be room for people to simply attend without additional pressure.

#### **5.4 Cooperation**

In order to answer my research questions, I added a sub questions in order to help answer the overarching problem. My sub questions had to do with cooperation with the state, other churches and organizations. It is unrealistic to think that one church can address and help a city with all its needs; therefore it is important for churches to cooperate with the state, organizations and other churches. All the churches that participated in this study have some type of cooperation with the state and other churches. The challenge with cooperation with the state is that it could potentially restrict and influence values. For example, if a church receives financial support from the state for a diaconal event, there could be restrictions on the religious context of said event. An example of this might be that there is no religious preaching. Cooperation is good and important but not at the cost of loosing religious identity and values. I find Ralph Kramers four types of organizational roles of a voluntary agency

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<sup>181</sup> Hegstad, *The Real Church*, 91.

applicable here.<sup>182</sup> The churches serve first and foremost as value guardian role. Churches are by definition guardians of “religious” values, and are particularly called to meet spiritual and religious needs.<sup>183</sup>

Some churches cooperate more than others, this is mostly connected to what denomination they belong to. There is definitely room for improvement, and all churches express a want and need for further and more cooperation. The same could be said for the cooperation of church and state. The church does play an important role in several welfare areas.

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<sup>182</sup> See chapter 2.3.2

<sup>183</sup> Church of Norway, *Plan for Diakonia*, 10.

## Chapter Six

### CONCLUSION

The main research question of this thesis has been: “*What role does the church play to care for the weak, marginalized and suffering in the city of Stavanger, Norway?*” As mentioned in the introduction, I have worked with this question with the help of four sub questions. Through qualitative research interviews, participant observation, analysis of findings connected to previous research on the field and theory, I have attempted to answer this. I will in this chapter present the most important findings, yet at the same time present how churches in Stavanger can continue to work towards addressing the needs in their city. Moreover, I will show to further research on the field.

#### **6.1 Identifying the need**

In order to explore the churches diaconal role in the city, it was necessary to unveil what *needs* the churches themselves saw and recognized, as this would have an influence on how churches confronted said needs. My research has shown that there are two areas in particular that churches recognize as large and often unmet needs in Stavanger. One of these is loneliness and the lack of genuine relationships. The other is busyness and strife, and the tendency to be absent in life. Here, churches have a significant opportunity to provide something the public sector does not.

##### *6.1.1 Loneliness*

Globalization has caused people to be more connected than ever before, yet at the same time people lack real, genuine relationships. The western Scandinavian culture is often categorized as a culture of privatism, where there is a tendency for people to be concerned with issues and ideals affecting one’s self as an individual. My research presented the issue of loneliness as a

growing and serious issue of today's society. This issue is not specific to age or gender, and is found in all churches that participated in the research. It is an issue for people that fall "outside" the system (such as people of substance abuse), yet at the same time loneliness is an issue for the everyday "functioning" Norwegian. As I see it, the church has a significant role and opportunity to build inclusive communities where people can find meaningful fellowship and relationships.

### *6.1.2 Busyness and strife*

Busyness and strife was another theme that surfaced in my research. There is pressure on people to measure up to whatever ideal they compare themselves to, and a tendency is found in all churches that there are people that struggle with busyness that disallows and restricts people to simply enjoy and be present in life. This theme was something one of the respondents also recognized in her own work, that the busyness of her work can often be a hindrance to simply stop and see people. Something that presents itself as a contradiction, as the work is to serve people. In order for churches to meet the needs of their congregations and people in society, there needs to be room and space to see and recognize the individual. There seems to be a common trend in churches to organize and host initiatives, and although all initiatives serve a great purpose, the goal of connecting with the individual needs to remain central. Ivar Braut, the new bishop in Stavanger said, "It is a point that church members do not have to be too busy! We need time for our fellow humans, both our immediate and those who live in the congregation. The activity level can be too high, even if done in the best intention."<sup>184</sup>

This leads me to present my most important findings to what role the church in Stavanger plays on a diaconal level.

## **6.2 Diaconal identity and responsibility**

My research shows that there are three main themes that describe what role the church has to care for the needs of society. The first is as a counter point to society, or as the antithesis of bureaucracy. The church has a role to fight for the people that fall outside society, to look beyond an individual's past or present, and extend and invitation to all people, an invitation into a fellowship and a community both with God and people. My respondents expressed a

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<sup>184</sup> (Translation Norwegian to English by me) Den Norske Kyrkja, "Med hjertet i menighetene"; available at <https://kirken.no/nb-NO/bispedommer/stavanger/forsideoppslag/med-hjertet-i-menighetene/>; site accessed 05 May 2017.



desire for the church to help all people, to go the extra mile and to fight for the people that cannot fight for themselves. Fighting and acting on behalf of people was a central theme in the research, including elderly and people struggling with substance abuse, yet also normal functioning people in seasons of need. The role of the church is to care for such people, for all people.

My research shows that none of the churches aspire to overtake the responsibility the state already provides, but to supplement and contribute with what the state cannot. Yet at the same time, the role of the church is different than that of the state. This brings me to the second aspect of the church's role that I would like to present, the spiritual aspect. The church provides a spiritual dimension that is pivotal. The church has a role to help and serve the needs of people, both physically and emotionally, however there is a supernatural spiritual aspect that is specific to the church of Jesus Christ. The church has a specific role to meet the spiritual and religious needs that are present in the anguish that people experience. This brings me to my third and final theme; the church as role models in society. A *Role model* could be interpreted to mean different things, but in this particular dimension it was used to describe practical aspects of diakonia. The church is to be role models, mimicking the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, the ultimate role model. Diakonia is not confined here to a single person or initiative, it is not assigned to a staff member or a particularly *gifted* person for diaconal work. Diakonia here belongs to the individual believer, as diakonia is a mission or an assignment given to all who follow Christ. In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians he says, "We are therefore Christ ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us."<sup>185</sup> Or as the gospel of Matthew says, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."<sup>186</sup> The role of the church is therefore to equip and empower the believer to live out the Christian life, in which diakonia is a natural expression.

### **6.3 The diaconal potential for churches in Stavanger**

Questions that often surface after research like this is what churches can do, or should do to care for the needs of their community. From my findings and studies, I have made some suggestions for focuses for churches in Stavanger.

#### *6.3.1 Create inclusive communities*

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<sup>185</sup> 2 Cor 5,20 The Bible, TNIV.

<sup>186</sup> Matthew 5,16 The Bible, TNIV.

As I see it, churches have a unique opportunity to create a community and a home. Churches have a unique platform, as an open space that welcomes all, to facilitate people from various nationalities, needs and walks of life to a conversation that is inclusive and beneficial to all. These conversations are the starting point for friendships, where people can be apart of something larger than themselves and their individual life. Apart from specialized organizations that are focused around a particular function, activity or even particular group; the church should be the foremost place where community is not only natural and organic, but also celebrated. Understanding that the church was founded upon such ideals and principles leads me to believe that these values should be, yet again, at the center of every church, in every way possible.

Practically, this is possible in the way of prioritization of non-members in church functions. Tearing down the walls that once made it hard for non-members and/or people of different cultures and backgrounds to be apart of community is a starting point for welcoming them in. Ideology gives way to focus and clarity so that churches see the possibilities that lay ahead. From a friendly hello, to clear signage and a practical follow up is necessary if churches desire to be a church *for* the city, not simply *in* the city.

### *6.3.2 Visibility in the city*

One of the challenges found in all churches within this research is the general lack of being *known* in the city. Therefore, it would serve the churches to be more visible in the community. As all churches expressed a desire to include the international community, it would serve the churches well to have information such as flyers and websites in English, as well other languages. Plans and strategies around this would be a step in that direction.

A note can also be made, that churches have potential to inspire people already belonging, to participate in making it known. Individual ownership of the church is key here.

### *6.3.3 Cooperate with state, specialized organizations*

Churches would serve well in cooperating with both the public sector and specialized organizations. There are many great organizations that have both knowledge and competence when working with, for example, people of special needs and addictions. Churches would do well with cooperating with organizations in their city, to better the care for all people. Yet at the same time, not loose the sense of responsibility for the people that qualifies for help by these organizations. As mentioned earlier, churches have an opportunity to offer community and relationships. Cooperation with specialized organizations can be of great value to both

church and the specific individual, however the church can still take responsibility in their pivotal role to include all people in fellowship.

Cooperation with the state has both its disadvantages, and advantages. Advantages might be in the form of resources, such as competency and knowledge on a specific area, as well as financial support. Possible disadvantages are restrictions on the religious message and values. Traditionally, churches do not take lightly the act or thought of compromising their dogmatic values and beliefs. Therefore, I would recommend churches to cooperate with the state to the level that their own values and convictions are not compromised.

#### *6.3.4 Equip and empower volunteers and believers*

As my research has shown, all churches identified their reliance on volunteers in order to achieve the wanted/needed diaconal work. A lack of volunteers was also the major cause for the suspension and compromise of initiatives. Therefore, I would recommend that strategies and plans be put in place to how both recruit and follow-up volunteers, as well as encourage and inspire members to take ownership of the church and its ministries.

It has also been noted in this research that diaconal work is not only done by volunteering in cooperation with church initiatives, but diakonia is for every believer. It is not limited to an initiative or activity hosted by the church, but found in the life and acts of the believer. My research shows that many churches have members/believers<sup>187</sup> that do not have an understanding of the ecumenical perspective of diakonia. A church will have its largest impact, when all believers live out the diaconal aspect of the faith. It is therefore recommended that churches teach and empower their believers in diaconal work, as a natural aspect of the Christian faith and life.

### **6.4 Further research**

In chapter one, I showed that there is little research around the topic of my research question, revealing that there is need for further research on the field. As I have presented a road forward for churches in Stavanger, it is imperative for additional research, as my results in this regard stand somewhat alone. A note can also be made to the scope of this thesis, as it is not large enough to do a thorough deep-dive into this issue. Throughout this research, I have seen many areas that would be interesting and exciting to explore closer.

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<sup>187</sup> Not all churches have membership, and therefore they are described as believers.

Aforementioned in chapter 6.3, I believe it would be interesting to research the theme of creating inclusive communities as a diaconal aspect of the church. From this perspective, it is possible to look at churches that organize in smaller community groups to see how this has an effect on diakonia in community.

Additionally, when it comes to the potential for diaconal work of churches in Norway, it would be interesting to study over the course of time how churches empower and equip their members/believers for diaconal work. It is possible that a study like this would have to expand over multiple generations of people. Therefore, it would require a long-term mindset from the churches to get an answer to this question. Such a study could potentially bring to light the effect of diakonia in society.

My hope is that this research can inspire an interest and a focus on diakonia in churches in Norway. I will end with a quote from Ivar Braut, who says, “Diakonia reminds us that there is always something deeper, that there exist challenges in every human life, both in the local community and in the church. Diakonia is one of the churches characteristics and creates credibility for the whole faith.”<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> (Translation Norwegian to English by me) Den Norske Kyrkja, “Med hjertet i menighetene”.

## PRIMARY SOURCES

Respondent A: 2016. Interview by Marie S. Gray. Stavanger, 9. November

Respondent B: 2016. Interview by Marie S. Gray, Stavanger, 16. November

Respondent C: 2016. Interview by Marie S. Gray, Stavanger, 29. November

Respondent D: 2017. Interview by Marie S. Gray, Stavanger, 11. January

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## ATTACHMENT 1: INFORMATIONAL LETTER

### **Forespørsel om deltakelse i forskningsprosjektet**

”Diakonia in a contemporary socio-democratic welfare society.”

#### **Bakgrunn og formål**

Formålet med studien er å undersøke hvilke rolle diakoni har i en velferdsstat; mer spesifikt hvilken rolle kirken spiller for å ta vare på de svake og marginaliserte i Stavanger.

Prosjektet er en masteroppgave, med VID Vitenskapelige Høyskole (misjonshøyskolen) i Stavanger.

Noen kirker, og deres diakonale ledere i Stavanger blir spurt om å delta for å gi informasjon og kunnskap om feltet. Det vil bli undersøkt hvordan de ser sin diakonale rolle i Stavanger, og hvilke utfordringer de møter i en velferdsstat.

#### **Hva innebærer deltakelse i studien?**

Deltakelse i studie vil innebære et intervju på rundt en time. All personligeopplysninger vil være kryptert. Det vil også bli innhentet opplysninger om kirkens diakonale arbeid gjennom observasjon av kirkens gudstjeneste samt opplysninger gjennom hjemmeside.

Spørsmålene vil omhandle diakoni. Hva diakonalt arbeid som utføres av kirken, og hvilke utfordringer man ser i det å gjøre diakonal arbeid i en velferdsstat. Data vil bli registrert i notater og lydopptak.

#### **Hva skjer med informasjonen om deg?**

Alle personopplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt. Studenten vil være den eneste som har tilgang til personopplysninger. Personopplysninger/opptak vil lagres separat fra min forskning. Jeg vil bruke en koblingsnøkkel for å ivareta personlige opplysninger. Koblingsnøkkelen vil holdes atskilt fra forskningsdata, i et låst skap. Datamaskinen for forskningsdataen vil også være beskyttet med passord. All personopplysninger vil være kryptert.

Deltakere vil ikke kunne gjenkjennes i publikasjoner, ved at alle kirker og deltakere vil være anonymisert.

Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes 31. Juni 2017. All personopplysninger og opptak vil etter det bli slettet.

**Frivillig deltakelse**

Det er frivillig å delta i studien, og du kan når som helst trekke ditt samtykke uten å oppgi noen grunn. Dersom du trekker deg, vil alle opplysninger om deg bli anonymisert.

Dersom du ønsker å delta eller har spørsmål til studien, ta kontakt med Marie S. Gray 458 45 276. (Veileder for prosjektet: Kari Storstein Haug: 515 16 230)

Studien er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, NSD - Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS.

**Samtykke til deltakelse i studien**

Jeg har mottatt informasjon om studien, og er villig til å delta

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(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

## ATTACHMENT 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE

### **1. Hvor lenge har du jobber for kirken?**

### **2. Hva er din rolle i kirken?**

(Hvis ikke nevnt i forrige spørsmålen.)

- Kan du også si om noen av dine oppgaver i menigheten? Hva innebærer din rolle i kirken?

### **3. Hvordan vil du definere diakoni?**

### **4. Hvilken rolle spiller diakoni har i din menighet?**

- Kan du fortelle om noen konkrete aktiviteter og tiltak deres kirken gjør?
- Hvor finner disse aktivitetene sted?

### **5. Hvem gjør diakonial arbeid innenfor kirken?**

- Er det en jobb for de ansatte?
- Er det for medlemmer?
- Har du mange medlemmer er involvert i diakoni?

### **6. Er diakonalt arbeid viktig for kirken?**

### **7. Hvorfor er det viktig?**

### **8. Er diakonalt arbeid/hjelp tilgjengelig for medlemmer i din menighet?**

- Er det tilgjengelig for medlemmer utenfor kirken?

### **9. Hvordan er diakoni/hjelp tilgjengelig? (Hvor finner mennekser informasjon om hjelp)**

### **10. Ser du mange folk som tar kontakte med kirken for å få hjelp?**

### **11. Vil du si det er vanskelig for folk å be menigheten om hjelp?**

- Etter din mening hva er noen av de tingene som holder folk tilbake fra å komme til kirken for å få hjelp?

### **12. Hva er de mest vanlige tingene folk spør kirken om å hjelpe med?**

- Penger. Bønn. Samtale. Bryllup. Begravelse. Mat. Hus/hjem, og liknende

### **13. Tror du det er vanskelig for folk å be om hjelp?**

- Hvorfor?
- Hvem er mer tilbakeholdne med å be om hjelp?

- 14. Hva vil du si er rollen til diakoni i kirke? (ikke spesifikt din kirke, men kirken som helhet)**
- 15. I en velferdsstat som Norge, hvilken rolle tror du kirken har i å vise omsorg for de svake, fattige og marginaliserte?**
- 16. Hva er noen av utfordringene med å gjøre diakonalt arbeid i en velferdsstat?**
- 17. Hva er noen av utfordringene du/dere ser i Stavanger?**
- 18. Fra din erfaring, hva er noen av de større behovene du ser i Stavanger?**
- 19. Den store strømmen av flyktninger i 2016 brakte mange menigheter i Stavanger sammen. Hva var din erfaring fra den tiden?**
- 20. Har din menighet samarbeider med andre menigheter i byen om diakonale arbeidet?**
- Hva? Hvor? Hvem?
- 21. Har din menighet samarbeider med staten/det offentlige?**
- Er et samarbeid med staten noe du ønsker?
  - Hvorfor?
- 22. For mennesker i Stavanger, som trenger hjelp, som har falt ut av systemet eller mennesker som rett og slett “systemet” ikke fungerer for, hva vil du si til dem?**



