Professionalism and faith: a case study of Salvation Army congregational social work in Norway

by

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Abstract

This article explores the role of faith in congregational social work. It investigates The Salvation Army (TSA), an international Christian church that provides social services in local communities. TSA's congregational social work represents a specific case, in which spiritual values dictated by faith and social work principles are explicitly intertwined. In this article, a community of practice (CoP) perspective is used to analyse empirical data from a multiple-case study of TSA congregations. The article concludes that faith can be part of a professional ethos, by adding important values to a holistic understanding of social work.

Keywords:

faith, community of practice, Salvation Army, faith-based organizations, social work

Introduction

Although secularization is a discussed concept, it represents an important topic as part of the discussion of the role of religion for public services or societal engagement (Furseth, 2017). Historical reasons for the secularization trend is the change from life in small communities to living in large societies, in which many of the initiatives that provided social services to the communities being taken over from the church by the state (Bruce, 2008; Haynes, 1997). Religious input on critical societal debates has become less important, as well as the involvement of religious values in public services since the 1980s in Norway (Furseth, 2017). This can be linked to religion becoming less important for the general population; interestingly, the same trend is also reflected among people of faith. This more restrictive attitude regarding the role of religion in society can be linked to Norway being a more multifaith society, and in general a more pluralistic society (Schmidt & Botvar, 2010).

Despite a general professionalization and adjustment to societal trends in TSA residential-and institutional-based social work, TSA corps (congregations) have kept a confessional faith expression as they provide support, and is a good case to explore faith as part of practice professionalization. William Booth, the founder of The Salvation Army (TSA), argued that 'religion was social work and social work was religion' (Pallant, 2012, p. 105). This perception would be seen as controversial for many today, as faith is sometimes perceived as contradictory to professional social work.

In this article, I seek to answer the question, *'How does faith contribute to professional attitudes and methods in TSA corps (congregational)-based social work?'*

This article is structured as follows: Part 1 gives an overview of theoretical and empirical approaches, while Part 2 describes the research context. Part 3 explains the methodical approaches, and Part 4 presents findings. The article continues with a discussion in Part 5, followed by a Conclusion.

1. Faith-based organizations and social work: Theoretical and empirical approaches

Social work is value-based at its core. The values described in social work's ethical frameworks are based on humanist values. Values based on religious faith, and the role of spirituality, are neglected topics in professional practice studies. The engagement of religious faith has traditionally been perceived as a violation of professional ethics (Ressler, 1998; Vetvik, 2016). However, looking at policy development within professional social work, values such as love and relational attitudes have gained ground, being included in the Norwegian Ministry of Children and Families Act §1-1(Familiedepartementet, 2021), as having a 'holistic approach' is becoming more prevalent in literature and social work discourses (Danbolt & Nordhelle, 2012). Educational material has references to values, and the faith-based foundation has been exchanged for a more humanistic value base today (FO, 2019). The education of social workers is predominantly done by secular universities, but ties to religion are not totally broken; however, it is still true to say that faith lingers on the periphery in a social work professionality and development discourse (Ben Asher, 2001).

Faith is a philosophical, utopian or religious concept, and can be described as an orientation towards a goal (Kvanvig, 2013). On an individual level, faith can be understood as an overall stance that governs important aspects of one's life (Howard-Snyder, 2016). It can be seen as relating to a spiritual reality experienced as powerful enough to change the world (Ammerman, 2020). TSA describes their faith and values as based on what is found in the Bible pointing towards God's kingdom, as described by Jesus. The kingdom's ethics are based, among other places in the Bible, on the 'Sermon on the Mount', described in the gospel according to Matthew Chapter 5, in which Jesus proclaimed how the Kingdom of God would be a place of justice and peace (Gushee & Stassen, 2016). The kingdom's ethics would include social justice (Micah 6:8) for the marginalized, narrating and living out inclusive non-racist attitudes (Galatians 3:28), loving God and loving our neighbour as ourselves (Matt 22:37-38)[1]. This encapsulates TSA's understanding of God's thinking on what

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[1] Bible references refer to the New International Version (NIV).

his people should strive to embrace as guiding principles for action for justice work done by the church (Venter & Semmelink, 2020).

Community of practice

A community of practice (CoP) is defined as 'groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly' (Wenger, 2011, p. 1). A CoP is an informal, pervasive, familiar network that needs no membership or formal adherence for navigating and understanding one's surroundings. Originally, CoP theory was a social learning theory focusing on the individual's journey from novice to expert, and how interaction and shared experiences assisted this transformation. Nevertheless, in later years the theory has evolved, and in the latest evolution the focus has been on how organizations can utilize CoPs as a tool to manage knowledge workers (Li et al., 2009). In a workplace or organization, a CoP is a smaller constellation of people learning together as they interact with each other. Learning between such smaller CoPs in an organizational structure forms the totality of the organization. However, in more recent times, the concept of CoPs has been implemented as a model for professional practices to collaborate (Mittendorff et al., 2006). I have used three central elements in the framework to explore how a faith-based community (TSA congregations) learns and collaborates to provide support to members in society experiencing marginalization. These elements are *domain, community and practice*.

Domain is the collected knowledge of the practice. The domain creates a foundation for actions and choices, and guides learning to create a joint enterprise for practice. To participate in the practice, there needs to be a commitment and shared competence that sets members apart from others. This dimension is helpful to establish the foundation for how practitioners relate to the wider organization, the faith base and the surrounding community.

Community is identified by how practitioners relate to each other, their tasks and the surrounding context. This dimension allows for an exploration of relational attitudes, and how members build trust to exchange knowledge and experiences.

The *practice* element is how practitioners use knowledge and learning to address certain issues, and build a shared repertoire (Wenger, 2011). I have used this dimension to understand how faith is used to develop methods to better support guests.

These elements, as well as complementing each other, also represent the tension between the individual and the collective, and are the foundation for understanding how value is created in practices by enabling an examination of the 'interrelationship between learning insights, practice and results that happen as a result of participation in social practices' (Wenger-Trayner, 2017, p. 3). Together, the three elements and their inherent capabilities and functions form a CoP. This theory was primarily used for the empirical analysis in this article.

2. Research context

In Norway, TSA has several organizational units. In this article, it is the 'programme department' in charge of corps (congregations) and TSA 'social services' providing residential care and social work projects, whether on behalf of the state or funded by external partners, that are relevant to explore. TSA social services, both internationally and in Norway, have developed in line with societal demands for professionality, and have adjusted their language to fit a more secularized context (Hill, 2017; Stanghelle, 2002). This has followed a demand for professional practices, resulting in highly trained and professional social services providing a large portion of the Norwegian population with both residential care and advisory services. On the other hand, corps (congregational)-based social work practices, which are the focus of this article, have an explicitly faith-based approach, and have not experienced the same professional development as the more institutionalized social services.

TSA identifies itself as a church. All organizational units are part of the overall church structure, which makes its faith-based ethos a prominent and indispensable element of the organization. The international mission statement illustrates how firmly faith is embedded in the organizational structures of TSA:

> The Salvation Army, an international movement, is an evangelical part of the universal Christian Church. Its message is based on the Bible. Its ministry is motivated by the love of God. Its mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in His name without discrimination.

TSA corps are local units serving their nearby communities, with activities such as Sunday worship and activities for youth, families and the elderly. Most corps in Norway have various types of social work initiatives.[2] Practitioners in TSA corps-based social work are mostly volunteers,[3] ranging from individuals with a long professional career with experience in various areas of social work, to individuals with recent user experience, or with a need for work or language training. Leading and coordinating the practices are a mix of individuals with professional social work or health education backgrounds, as well as individuals with a relevant work experience, though with no formal social work education. Many of the leaders are officers[4] in TSA, in addition to holding previous qualifications. The primary activity for corps-based social work in Norway is low-threshold work, providing for people's basic needs, such as food and clothing, often combined with providing other general products for personal hygiene or things necessary for school and work. Language classes and guidance on how to access help from authorities and other organizations are included at some locations. Some corps provide more specialized assistance by supporting targeted groups (e.g. parents) with educational activities, such as by offering financial guidance, helping access the work market, gaining access to various children's activities and referring people for specialized services.

To best explore the role of faith and the tension between faith and professionalism, it was important to access practices in which trained staff and volunteers worked alongside each other, supporting individuals with a wide range of social issues. Corps providing activities, in which people can access support without making an appointment, were selected, all in a medium-to-large town. Activities such as handing out food bags, providing a meal or other food provision, in combination with conversations, pastoral care and guidance, were the initial criteria for the corps activity.

TSA corps were selected in a participatory process involving relevant staff at TSA headquarters in Norway. Based on their recommendations of locations that provided

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[2] Information collected from TSA Norwegian website www.frelsesarmeen.no.
[3] Some volunteers are members of TSA, but most of the volunteers do not have any formal attachment to TSA.
[4] A TSA Officer has a two-year training focusing on theology, diaconia and leadership topics.

social work activities, as well as both staff and volunteers participating, four separate corps were selected.

Table 1 describes the main characteristics of the cases:

Activities specific to each location			
Corps 1	**Corps 2**	**Corps 3**	**Corps 4**
Serving 100+ people each week.	Serving 150+ people each week.	Serving 200 + people each week.	Serving 50+ per week.
Providing food several times per week. Educational activities for families and immigrant women.	Providing food and other services to all groups that ask for support. Providing help to people living in municipality-owned institutions.	Providing food and other services to all groups that ask for support. Support for people with drug addiction.	Provide food primarily via an open café for immigrant people, but support anyone who comes.
Provide guidance and support to access authorities' services.	Guidance and support to access authorities' and municipalities' services.	Limited support to help access authorities' and other external organizations' services.	Language classes, as well as individual support.

TSA is a relatively small organization in Norway, with several individual cases necessary to ensure adequate anonymity for the participants, as well as securing enough material to generalize findings.

3. Methodological approach

A case study is 'an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units' (Gerring, 2004, p. 342). A case study format was chosen to explore the unique and inherent features of the case in question (Bryman, 2016). A case study can be described as 'an intensive study about a person, a group of people or a unit, which is aimed to generalise over several units' (Gustafsson, 2017, p. 2). Case studies are especially relevant when researching complex cases, in which boundary crossings are part of the nature of the practice (Yin, 2015). This multiple-case study allowed me close and informed insight into the workings of the selected practices. A case study also allows for the generalization of findings and the analysis of the results/data gathered (Gerring, 2004). Expanding the design to become a multiple-case study is helpful when studying the same phenomena—in this

case, faith—in several cases to replicate and confirm the findings from the study (Yin, 1981).
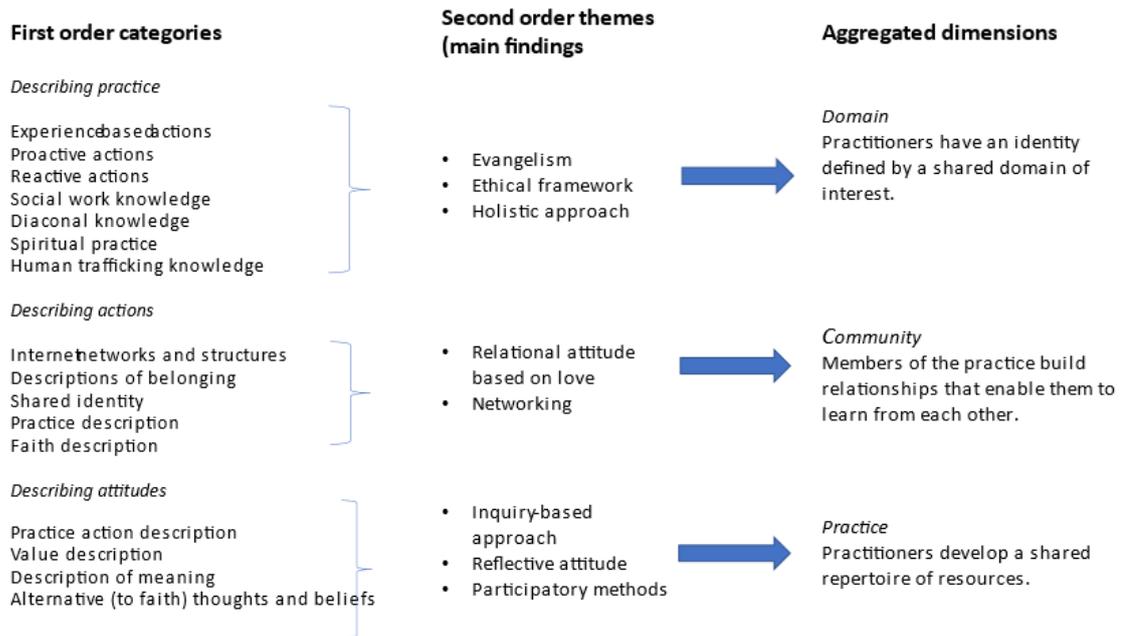
Sampling within the cases

Participants at the corps level were purposively sampled in collaboration with local leadership, and had to be actively engaged in social work. The sampling criteria used ensured gender balance, a representative selection of staff and volunteers and grassroots, as well as leadership, involvement. The research methods used were individual, semi-structured interviews, focus group reflections, participatory observation and document analysis. The interview guides for the individual interviews were structured to gather information regarding insights into the local community, training and experience, in addition to an in-depth knowledge of organizational and personal values. The first round of focus group reflections used constructed narratives, which were based on previous observations, aimed at provoking thoughts and reflections regarding practice actions and priorities. The second round of focus groups asked the participants to analyse and reflect on the early findings and gathered material. The document analysis provided contextual and organizational knowledge for further analysis.

Table 2 describes the methods, number of participants and the justification for these choices:

METHOD	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	CRITERIA FOR SELECTION - JUSTIFICATION
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS	Four officers	Officers provided insight into local priorities, organizations, plans, strategies, a local historical context and justification for the chosen activities
	Four lay staff	The lay staff provided an opportunity to investigate key elements, such as the role of faith, practice development and knowledge creation.
	One lead volunteer	The lead volunteer provided an opportunity to investigate key elements, such as the role of faith, practice development and knowledge creation.
	Four external partners	External partners provided an extended view on activities, and contributed with perceptions, reflections on relations, networking, attitudes toward faith and values, and practical collaborative experiences.
	Four TSA officers in leading positions on the organizational level in Norway.	People in key leadership positions for TSA Norway focused on organizational strategies, learning, values and accountability measures.
FOCUS GROUP REFLECTION GROUPS	6 times x 2 hours.	The practitioners collectively discussed key elements of how their practice can develop and incorporate knowledge to support vulnerable groups in different ways. These groups included officers, lay staff and volunteers
PARTICIPATORY OBSERVATIONS	Location 1- 4 hours Location 2- 5 hours Location 3- 6 hours	Observing practices contributed to contextual understanding and information structuring the following interviews.
DOCUMENT ANALYSIS	25 of 32 documents sources was analysed.	TSA core organizational documents to describe TSA theological foundation, as well as strategies for practical action: • Mission statement • Handbook of doctrine • Historical narratives and documents • MSHT (anti-modern slavery and human trafficking) strategies and handbooks • TSA Norwegian Strategy 2021 • Resources for corps-based social work in Norway Social work documents to describe value bases and professionalism. A selection of educational materials used at VID specialized universities for social work training was sampled: • Ethical guidelines • Educational materials and books (Norway) • Historical documentation Diaconal documents to explain TSA in a diaconal context, as well as the relational attitude between church and professional actors in society: • Core descriptive documents on diaconia and diaconal work from the Lutheran World Federation and ACT Alliance. • 'Plan for diakoni' – Strategic documents diaconia Norway.

Analysis

The first step in the analysis of the collected material described above was to code the material into categories described in the empirical material from the case study. I used NVivo 12 to create codes that were as close to the material as possible. This first coding identified concepts in the data that could help me understand the inner workings, as well as why they chose the actions described (Step 1). This resulted in 125 codes describing practice on an overarching level, 108 relating to practice actions and 86 describing how the practitioners understood the practice. Grouping them into categories, I explored how the material illustrates the role of faith, as well as the aspects of professionality and how these elements coexist in TSA corps-based practices. Examples of these codes are a 'sense of belonging', 'value-based', 'faith-based' and 'professionality'. After this first coding, I sought relations between the existing codes, and how they could be placed into wider categories (Step 2). To help narrow these further, these codes were connected with social work frameworks (FO, 2019), in addition to faith-based frameworks (Gushee & Stassen, 2016). This allowed an inductive process of overarching themes to emerge, connecting not just the collected material, but also overarching concepts such as evangelism, holistic ministry and a methodological approach to their actions. To focus the material even more, literature focusing on practice learning theory (Wenger, 1998), TSA core documents (Salvation Army, 2016; Salvation Army International, Undated-b) and social work approaches to spirituality (Ben Asher, 2001) confirmed my main findings (Step 2).

First order categories

Describing practice

Experience-based actions
Proactive actions
Reactive actions
Social work knowledge
Diaconal knowledge
Spiritual practice
Human trafficking knowledge

Describing actions

Internet networks and structures
Descriptions of belonging
Shared identity
Practice description
Faith description

Describing attitudes

Practice action description
Value description
Description of meaning
Alternative (to faith) thoughts and beliefs

Second order themes (main findings

- Evangelism
- Ethical framework
- Holistic approach

- Relational attitude based on love
- Networking

- Inquiry-based approach
- Reflective attitude
- Participatory methods

Aggregated dimensions

Domain
Practitioners have an identity defined by a shared domain of interest.

Community
Members of the practice build relationships that enable them to learn from each other.

Practice
Practitioners develop a shared repertoire of resources.

The aggregated dimensions in Step 3 emerged as the material was seen in light of practice theory. Using core dimensions from the CoP helped me to finalize the coding and categorization.

4. Findings: Faith in TSA social work practices

This section is presented according to the three elements from the CoP theory: *domain, community and practice.*

The primary characteristics in the domain element constitute what they do, and within what framework they are practicing. It has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Membership implies a commitment to the domain and, therefore, a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people. According to the empirical material, there are two main characteristics of corps-based social work: evangelization and social work.

In pursuing their interests in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, assist each other and share information; in short, they build a *community*. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other. There are three core elements identified in the material that can describe a community

aspect in TSA corps-based social work: 1) the relationship to beneficiaries, 2) the local community, and 3) the professional network.

The *practice* element indicates what people do and how they do it. In TSA corps-based social work, the focus is on food, either food bags, sit-down meals or just coffee. The food provision makes interaction with people possible, generating material to understand the role of faith. There are primarily three, perhaps more, methods used as the practitioners approach individuals; they ask open questions, reflect individually or in a group, and include people to become participants if that seems to be a relevant way to empower the individual.

Domain

Evangelism is commonly understood as spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. Evangelizing can be seen as a problematic element put together with social work, and if understood as a condition for help, this would be a correct assumption. In the TSA, evangelizing and spreading the gospel are two parts of the international mission statement. Several of the participants in the study referred to the statement, illustrating that this is, for many, but not all, a big part of the practice:

> For me, what we do is proclaiming the gospel, and I mean that we do that in a broad perspective. It is about both words and deeds. We focus on our mission statement, and that is to spread the good news gospel'.

These practices are part of the church's mission, which is to spread the word of God. Illustrated by many participants, the TSA theological concept of 'holy life' seems central (International, 2010a). This concept describes a Salvationist (a member of the TSA) life as a sacrament, an offering to the world. Just like God gave his son to the world, a Salvationist life is offered in service to others. The same sacrificial attitude reflected in God's gift of Jesus to the world, a Christian attitude and a Salvationist calling, is to do the same for others. To 'serve a suffering humanity' (Salvation Army, 2015), as stated in TSA documents, indicates that sharing goods and fellowship, and being compassionate and hospitable, are natural parts of being a person of faith. Evangelism understood in this way would still include proclaiming the gospel, telling the story of Jesus, and hence evangelizing (Sherwood, 2002). Faith is the bearing structure for evangelism, and fuels the actions taken to spread the word of the Bible.

Social work ethics are meant to guarantee that all are treated equally and with respect, and that help is not dependent on any personal characteristics or ways of being (Banks, 2012; FO, 2019). They ensure that society is providing sufficient services for the inhabitants of communities based on rights and access to services. Corps-based social work does not provide a service on behalf of any authority, and it includes support for individuals who would not be included in a public support system. One partner organization expressed it this way:

> The person I work with in TSA. She is brave. She brings attention by using the media to sometimes controversial topics on behalf of very vulnerable groups. But I think that is how TSA should be, and it shows a true passion for what they do and who they meet.

Based on observations and empirical material, the participants are aware of, and dedicated to, delivering services that can be included in the social work code of ethics. The practices strive to not discriminate, including against those who are without formal rights, and they provide services that aim to empower individuals' self-help.

Making faith part of social work is done by relating to Biblical passages describing equity and fair treatment. TSA sees their social work as part of their evangelistic work, something that would break with social work ethics. Faith is relevant as a motivation for method development. However, it is not enough to develop a full social work domain, as expressed by one of the staff members:

> I think we need more training, especially those of us who have been in TSA for many years. TSA changes and society changes, so we need to develop what we do and how we do it.

Practitioners acknowledge that there are different views and relations to faith in the practitioner group and among guests, but being based in a church building is not perceived as an obstacle. The participants described clear expectations of respect for the faith expressions that are part of the practice from the users of their services, as they respect that others might not share those beliefs. However, a faith-based identity could present issues for the practices when collaborating with others.

A holistic approach is described as a core value in documents guiding these practices, such as in the international mission statement, the 'book of values' and the 'platform for corps-based social work'. Even though the material presented a desire

to achieve this, it also created tensions and challenges for the practices. A TSA leader vocalized this tension by saying:

> …so, this holistic approach is part of the TSA mission, and it is also perhaps the biggest challenge for practice development as I see it.

The reasons for this challenge could be the described lack of learning strategies for both social work and evangelistic work. In the empirical material, 'learning by doing' is the primary method for transferring knowledge:

> Our focus is on experience. We do not have any formal training arenas, so experience has taken over as the way we learn, and experience happens when we are together.

Community

In the material, relationships are perhaps the most important element for practitioners. Building relationships does not happen in just one way; staff and volunteers use the whole congregation to create an inclusive atmosphere. One officer explained how they included people:

> They can come for support in the middle of the week, but we can also meet them in very different situations, such as worship meetings and house groups, and then they are friends.

Practitioners refer to their faith by describing their relationships with guests. Being created to live in a relationship with God and others is a core message of the Bible. Providing food bags is second to the aspiration to get to know people, which relates to providing better support, and to better understanding the needs of the person. Building relationships is noted in TSA core documents and methods (International, Undated-a), but it is also how the practitioners seem to cross the boundary between having a professional relationship and a genuine friendly relationship with the guests. The term *friend* is often used by staff and volunteers to describe the relationship that has evolved after having supported someone through a crisis, or after a deep conversation. Befriending and building deep relationships not only just create an atmosphere of trust, they also generate knowledge about people's issues and social justice topics in the local community. Love is described as a reason for some individuals to transition from being beneficiaries to becoming practitioners/volunteers. As individuals make this transition, they are allowed to become members of the community. Love is deeply connected to evangelism and living a life that reflects the love of God. Love is described as being based on the love God has for his people, not personal feelings.

To build a community, both within the practice and between community groups, the participants described working with individuals by interacting with guests outside the formal support setting, including visiting people at home, as mentioned in the material. One participant told the story of a visitation:

> I am not a good cook, but I have sometimes invited people to my home, knowing they are good at making food, so a little bit self-serving. … and in that time, we had some really good conversations, and last week one of them referred to that and how that made such a difference for him.

Building a community with the people TSA supports is based on the Christian message of 'love of God' and 'love others'. Relationships happen on many levels, and in all the intersections between members of the practice, practitioners, guests and external partners. The relationships are all different and have different aims; however, there are two aspects that stand out in the material: the relation to guests and the road from guest to volunteer.

The material shows how the corps connect with the local community in various ways. Contact with guests and understanding their issues seemed to be prevalent in one location. This was particularly evident when staff acknowledged that the extended network of community social service providers allowed them to provide support and help, as they lacked formal knowledge themselves. In the other two locations, the staff mentioned using the local professional community, but they were more critical, as they experienced bad attitudes towards their guests and limited support when they approached the external social work network for help:

> Sometimes, when you are in the middle of helping someone, you feel that the local authorities do not do a very good job at all.

Although the pictures differ, all four locations described how dependence on both the local community and professional services to support their guests is important. Nevertheless, it is in the aspect of external relationships that faith seems to become an issue for practitioners. There is a hesitation, here expressed by one of the staff, towards working with external groups, as the faith identity has been experienced as a problem for others:

> … we are a bit hesitant to let others enter our arena. I think we are a bit afraid of knowledge coming in from outside, thinking that it will somehow expose us in a negative way

This seems to be overcome by limiting the external network and shielding themselves from possible scrutiny. However, the empirical material is divided regarding this, making it an interesting topic for further study.

Practice

There is a range of different social issues represented among guests seeking support from corps-based social work practices. As described earlier, there is a lack of formal professional qualifications and shared knowledge in the corps to meet the guests' needs. Even so, they assist all who come in by using *an inquiring attitude.* This open method of relating to guests is described in faith terms by one practitioner:

> I ask just like Jesus did: What can I do for you?

This question mirrors the way Jesus met people. To respond to such an open question, staff and volunteers reflect together and build the response with a combination of previous experience and formal knowledge. These reflections are usually not scheduled; they are spontaneous, and their goal is to solve an immediate problem, and they often include prayers.

Although some practitioners utilize this method more than others, they all described their approach to people and topics as building relationships, asking questions and relating to a wider professional network. In this way, they also discern what they can assist and what they need to refer to others.

As practitioners collect information about an issue or situation, they use *reflective methods*. These reflections point toward an awareness of the limitations and boundaries expressed by one of the staff:

> We do not offer conversations with the aim of treating any disorder; we are very careful with what we can and cannot do. We know what our strength is and what it is not.

Some practitioners reflect on using Bible stories or their own testimony. This is not always a conscious reflection; it seems to be the way practices/corps process and build resilience together. There is also an ethical imperative because of their faith; the help/assistance needs to be carried out unconditionally, and this again forces them to reflect on their actions.

The last category used to carry out the practice mission is *participation*. This all-inclusive, low-threshold way they relate to each other, and to learning, enables participation by all, including those who would traditionally not be able to participate in a social work practice. The requirement for participating is not based on a professional logic, where qualifications decide your role, but instead on a faith logic, in which the mission to do good comes from a spiritual and divine calling. One local leader expressed the foundation for how they promoted a participatory approach:

> The foundation is that we are created in the image of God, to be in relation with Him and with others. That must always be the base we build on as a working team and as TSA.

This form of participation also feeds into the individual and practice learning experiences to help comprehend the situations with which they are presented. Having practitioners and volunteers with similar experiences as the guests expand traditional learning pathways to becoming a social enterprise, and a way to act through situations and conversations, rather than evaluating the level of possible success or outcome. Being participatory allows for help being given without anything in return, as participation is not primarily for the other; it is on behalf of God.

5. Discussion: The role of faith

Exploring how faith is contributing to TSA corps-based social practices helps us understand how the professional and value-based ethos must coexist, without undermining any of the other's quality. The empirical material points towards TSA theology and the notion that humans are more than just spirits, and that people need to be saved not just for heaven, but also from suffering and pain here on Earth (International, 2010b), to be the main motivation for practitioners participating in the study. This relation between social work and evangelistic work is connected to values such as care, love, respect and equality, all mentioned by the informants, as well as being prevalent in many of the TSA core documents. It is this faith-informed basis for social action demonstrated by TSA practitioners at the corps level that is the focus of the following discussion.
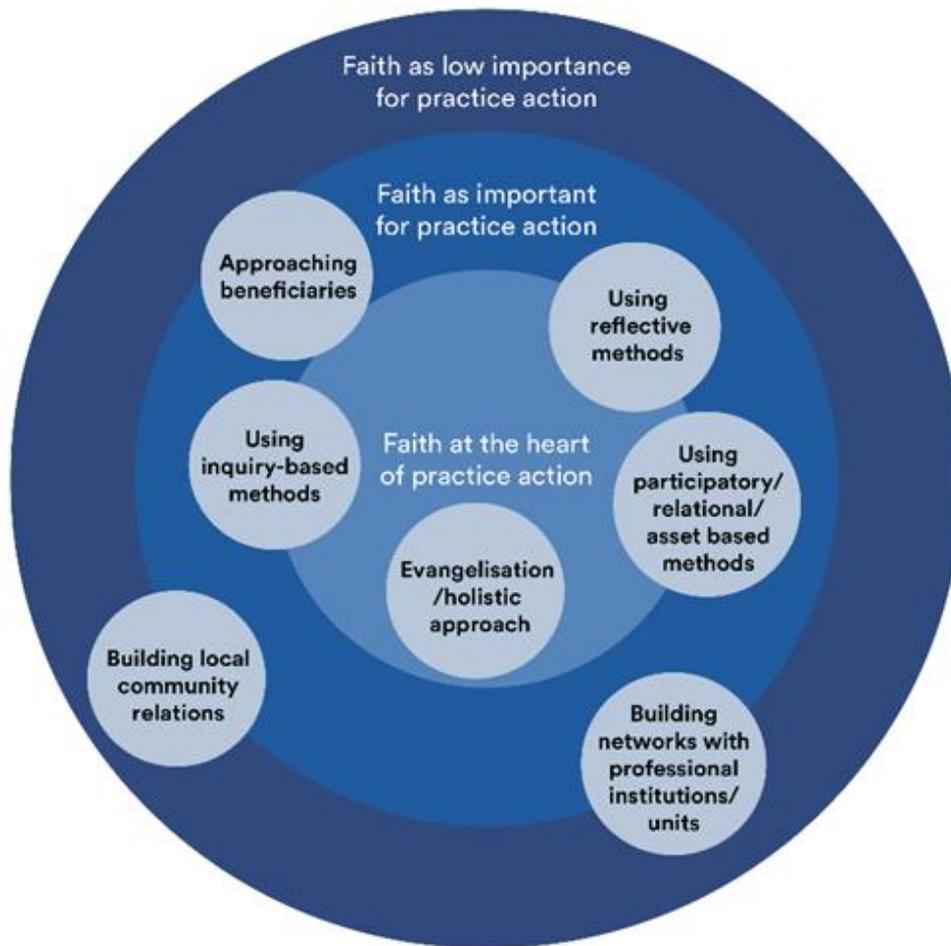
The illustration shows how TSA practitioners in corps-based social practices place faith as a central motivation for many of the core activities. The illustration further reveals some elements further away from having faith in the centre as they are acted out. Analysing the material creates a patten, as shown in the illustration below, which shows how the analysed elements are situated in relation to faith according to the collected empirical material. Organizing the material in this way shows how faith is instrumentalized in TSA corps-based social work

Faith as proclamation of belief

As shown in the illustration, many of the actions taken in TSA corps-based social work practices place faith at the centre of the activity. Social work literature and professionals would describe ethical standards as endangered when faith is mixed with social work directed towards people in vulnerable situations (Leenderts, 2014). Most social work institutions and professional social workers would say that faith can corrupt a professional attitude in social work (Skjeggestad, 2012), due to faith-based

organizations and actors abusing their mandate and power, or that faith has an excluding element (Dinham, 2011). Also, social work education has not included religion and spirituality as an important part of social work education to create competence and understanding among social workers (Seitz Jr., 2014). The definition of social work strives to have a holistic instep, and does not explicitly exclude anyone or anything. However, the main scepticism towards faith in social work comes from the fear of imposing one's values on a client or a guest, something that violates the basic social work ethical code (O'leary et al., 2013). Because of this, evangelism can be problematic in both Christian and secular social work practices if it is defined as a proclamation with the aim of convincing the other of the truth. Yet, if evangelism is understood as demonstrating what God is and how he is described in the Bible, meaning actions showing love with forgiveness as well as a justice-filled respectful way to serve people who need help, it can be understood as part of a social work ethical framework. Evangelism understood as demonstrating the qualities of God, includes proclaiming the gospel and telling the story of Jesus, but it cannot be said to be imposing values on another (Sherwood, 2002). In the material, practitioners in TSA corps-based social practices seem to interpret evangelism in the latter way, and as a natural part of the practice. The same description is used to describe the participants' motivations for their engagement and work. If faith is exercised in the way described above, to illustrate how the Bible is teaching us to live convivially together (Addy, 2022), methods including enquiry, participation and reflection can be said to be dependent on faith (Nordstokke, 2021).

The role of faith

The illustration above shows how TSA corps-based social practices relate to external networks and collaborative partners, and that the role of faith seems to be less central in this part of the practices. In the study, the participating practices had different ways of relating to external networks; however, this only shows that there are possible ways to bridge the gap between being faith-based and being professional.

The empirical material reveals a hesitant relationship with state authorities. This hesitation was most often based on bad experiences, working with them on cases

that to which they were referred from the corps-based practice. Having a faith-infused holistic instep, and trying to see the whole person and their needs, collide with the sometimes more limited support offered by authorities, resulting in experiencing authorities as narrow-minded or unwilling to help. These issues become most evident, as corps-based practices support people with limited rights or complex issues, such as human trafficking or exploitation in the workplace. In the material, it is in these issues that participants relate more to rights than to faith. People's access to rights and support is based as much on faith, seeing the unique value of each person, as it is on human rights and the fair distribution of goods. This combination of rights-and faith-based perspectives creates what could be said to be the domain of the practice. Shared knowledge and competence, as well as acknowledging boundaries and limitations, create the domain in which practitioners function (Wenger, 2011). It is primarily in the actions connected to rights in the welfare system that practitioners navigate between a professional and faith-based ethos. In the material, practitioners argue that seeing people as created in the image of God, with all that entails the right to live a full life and be treated with respect, is difficult, as they encounter a professional environment focusing on limitations and professional distance before relational attitude. This tension often renders the practice of looking for support in the internal system before accessing local and other professional support. This strategy sometimes works, but for the individual it is often not sound, as rights are mostly connected to where you live and your local community. The material implies that many of the practitioners are afraid of, or expecting, scrutiny based on being a faith-based practice, leading them to try to solve the situation without external involvement. This does work, and the material does demonstrate remarkable efforts done on behalf of individuals, but limits their justice-seeking efforts, as their natural networks become smaller than they could be. The material also indicates that the expected scrutiny might not be as prevalent as some participants might believe. Having a more extensive focus on how a faith- and rights perspective can facilitate advocacy, not just on behalf of individuals, but also for the community, can be a way forward to narrow the gap between the practices and their local collaborative partners.

Faith as foundational for social work values

Practitioners depend on an *enquiry attitude*, as they provide help without requiring appointments, and are often not aware of needs before meeting the individual. This enquiry-based approach is reflected in the Bible, reflecting the attitude of Jesus as he meets people. It is not clear if all practitioners share the same openness towards all clients, as there is evidence of practitioners sometimes giving special treatment. Despite presenting an open attitude, the material also reflects that they expect food to be the primary need for most people. An open attitude facilitates a way to uncover other needs. The practitioners expressed having an articulated *value framework*. TSA values (Frelsesarmeen, 2019) can be said to be humanistic, in a way to be inclusive for all to participate, but they are founded on Christian faith and the overarching 'Kingdom values' of justice and peace (Gushee & Stassen, 2016). Working within this framework results in a reflective approach. Bible stories, to reflect on current situations, prayer to meditate and deep conversations between practitioners, are used to solve issues. This attitude is closely connected to enquiry.

The friendship-based attitude of the practice is related to a *relational attitude* guided by TSAs understanding of the way God wants a relationship with his children. Connecting dignity and restoration to participation can be found in both theological and diaconal TSA documents (Salvation Army, 2016; Salvation Army International, 2018). The participatory approach can be said to be linked to faith, as it is closely connected to how practitioners 'befriend' their guests. These friendships are genuine, and they create an intimacy and trust that allow for correction and guidance. But these friendships are based on illustrating the way God seeks to befriend humans. This kind of friendship facilitates the participatory approach, as a person's resources and abilities serve as a starting point, rather than an activity or programme. The caring reflected in this attitude is based on Christians' friendship with God through faith (Perkins, 2019). Befriending also correlates with TSAs theological principles of recognizing and suffering with those they help. In social work, this would break professional boundaries, and the relationship aspect of friendship is often neglected as important in a professional context. Creating professional boundaries, often not in keeping with the values of social work, has been a result of strongly advocating for power balances and the prevention of exploitation in relationships with clients. These

boundaries have not been questioned much (Furman et al., 2009; O'leary et al., 2013). Social work is meant to facilitate people's social context to strengthen their personal resilience, so there might be lessons to learn from TSA corps-based social work on befriending and building lasting and strong relationships as a foundation for help and support.

Participation, and the invitation for guests to become empowered, are closely linked with the diaconal element of empowerment and an attitude of love. Practitioners' argument for how they include faith in their daily activities is based on love, aspects not necessarily unfamiliar in social work ethics, with love being included in the Norwegian Child Service Act (Barne- og Familiedepartementet, 2021). Love is a word often used by the practitioners in this study to describe not just an atmosphere or a goal, but also as a way to establish relationships with guests. Referring to guests as friends, and inviting them to join activities where the practitioners themselves are participating and visiting with them in their home to share a meal, indicate that the relationship aspect in these practices has been taken further than a 'professional' relationship might allow. Building deep relationships is said to be the core of the practice—why they do it to start with. The description of these relationships closely resembles the concept of 'love ethics' (Godden, 2017). Motivation is based on love, not their own need to love others, but instead a need to show the love of God through their actions. This love does not mean that there are no boundaries; on the contrary, there are clear and expressed expectations included in this love. This love attitude creates the foundation for the links and relationships found in the practice, reflecting the CoP element of community. A CoP is characterized by coherence and mutual engagement. These relationships are sustained not only because of similarity or equal tasks, but also because of inclusion and the creation of belonging (Wenger, 1998) and recognition (Korslien, 2019). This sometimes results in the rapid movement of people from being guests to becoming participants. Although the practices partaking in this study did not problematize this, it is necessary to question whether this practice is sustainable or defensible if it only builds on Christian love and charity. The reactive action pattern needs longer-term and proactive elements to help frame this relational attitude to avoid false hope and disappointment. Having faith, and dealing with people suffering from severe mental and social issues, will always require more than love, something of which the practitioners in the study seem

aware. The lack of structured training and relevant knowledge input could be said to hinder the development from reactive to proactive. The foundation for practice development towards a proactive attitude must be said to be present, but trusting faith alone is at best a hopeful assumption to make. Building on the enquiry and reflective attitude demonstrated in the material, adding to the faith base they refer to could make a valuable difference to practitioners, as they support people in vulnerable situations.

Conclusion and further research

Faith is a foundational factor in TSA corps-based social work. Faith is expressed as spoken words, though devotion and prayer, and as social action, by supporting practically. Not all participants in TSA social work would say that the Christian faith is the primary motivator for helping, but a majority of the participants in this study related to the divine calling to serve others. This calling is often complemented with the wish to make a difference, and see change and development for individuals, as well as more personal motivations such as having experienced being helped by TSA themselves.

The article is arguing that a tension between the professional and value-based practices can be found in the "why" question. A professional practice will often ask the question "how", but perhaps less the question "why". Asking "why" is in the centre of all learning, and if not asked, the practice might risk goal displacement. A hesitant focus towards exploring the reasons why the practice is doing what it is doing is contrary to a society, in which values, despite previous predictions, are becoming more and more important for people and societies (Beck, 2021). TSA theological understanding of God forms an essential part of how corps-based social work must be understood. An omnipresent God affects all areas of life, personal, relational, professional and emotional. Because of that, separating faith from practice or a professional attitude is not possible. It is the way the practitioners relate to, understand and navigate how faith best facilitates a respectful, reflected and integrated practice that is of importance. Faith impacts practitioners ethical thinking and acting (Kruger, 2020), and guided by faith-based values, the relationship

between a professional social work practice and a faith-based social work practice is not just possible, but can be fruitful and beneficial to both.

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