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DIAKONIA IN DENMARK 2015 – AT A GLANCE¹

Diaconia na Dinamarca 2015 – um relance

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Abstract: Diakonia in Denmark is primarily performed as organisational diakonia³ and to a lesser extent as parish diakonia which is contrary to the other Nordic countries. This implies that the grounds for and the organisation of diakonia in Denmark are completely different to diakonia in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland, including the complex of themes concerning diakonia. In Denmark, diakonia questions and discussions mainly focus on organisational and institutional approaches while the other Nordic countries are way ahead with regard to thoughts on and definition of the contents of diakonia in relation to church and theology. In this article I will describe the main tendencies of diakonia in Denmark in 2015. The article will show how diakonia is organised and how the relation between church and society influences the present diakonia working environment, the article will include theological ways of understanding diakonia and at last it will discuss the need to express diakonia in a new way – the need for diakonia as a professional practice, where the components ‘acting out Christianity’, ‘unconditional humanity’, ‘theory and practice’ and ‘context dependency’ will be introduced and commented.

Keywords: Diakonia. Denmark. Theory and Practice.

Resumo: Diaconia na Dinamarca é executada principalmente como uma diaconia organizacional e menos como uma diaconia de paróquia, contrário ao que acontece nos outros países nórdicos. Isso implica que os fundamentos para e a organização da diaconia na Dinamarca são completamente diferentes dos da diaconia na Noruega, Suécia, Finlândia e Islândia, incluindo o complexo de temas relacionados à diaconia. Na Dinamarca as questões e discussões sobre diaconia enfocam principalmente abordagens

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³ Organisational diakonia is usually distinct from parish diakonia. The former performs diakonia in or from the outlook of institutions or organisations whereas parish diakonia performs diakonia in or from the outlook of Folkekirken.

organizacionais e institucionais, enquanto os outros países nórdicos estão muito além em relação a pensamentos sobre e definição de conteúdos da diaconia em relação à igreja e à teologia. Neste artigo, descreverei as principais tendências da diaconia na Dinamarca em 2015. O artigo mostrará como a diaconia é organizada e como a relação entre igreja e sociedade influencia o atual ambiente de trabalho da diaconia. O artigo incluirá maneiras teológicas de entender a diaconia e, por fim, discutirá a necessidade de expressar a diaconia em uma nova maneira – a necessidade de uma diaconia como uma prática profissional na qual os componentes “praticando o cristianismo”, “humanidade incondicional”, “teoria e prática” e “dependência de contexto” serão introduzidos e comentados.

Palavras-chave: Diaconia. Dinamarca. Teoria e Prática.

Introduction

Diakonia in Denmark is primarily performed as organisational diakonia⁴ and to a lesser extent as parish diakonia which is contrary to the other Nordic countries. This implies that the grounds for and the organisation of diakonia in Denmark are completely different to diakonia in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland, including the complex of themes concerning diakonia. In Denmark, diakonia questions and discussions mainly focus on organisational and institutional approaches while the other Nordic countries are way ahead with regard to thoughts on and definition of the contents of diakonia in relation to church and theology.

In this article I will describe the main tendencies of diakonia in Denmark in 2015. The article will show how diakonia is organised and how the relation between church and society influences the present diakonia working environment, the article will include theological ways of understanding diakonia and at last it will discuss the need to express diakonia in a new way.

The organisation of diakonia in Denmark

The current working environment of diakonia

The current description of diakonia in Denmark includes two conditions:

First of all, diakonia is primarily performed by independent actors – NGOs, organisations, and institutions acting on behalf of the Folkekirken (Danish National Evangelical Lutheran Church), without, however, having a formal role appointed by the church.

⁴ Organisational diakonia is usually distinct from parish diakonia. The former performs diakonia in or from the outlook of institutions or organisations whereas parish diakonia performs diakonia in or from the outlook of Folkekirken.

This odd constellation is due to the specific structural organisation of Folkekirken. Folkekirke⁵ is not a synod church, which is why the Danish government and the Folketing (Parliament) decide everything concerning the church in public. In fact, they also formally observe the right to decide on church matters; however since 1849 when Grundloven (the Constitution) was passed they have refrained from exercising their right to interfere with church matters. This is put into the hands of the deciding church forum, a parish council, which includes electorates from members of Folkekirken. Every decision concerning the inner life of the church and its life in general is taken by the individual parish council in each church, except decisions concerning the pastor, which is taken by the dean and bishop.

In practise, Folkekirken thereby does not speak with a united voice or cannot decide anything on behalf of the church. Therefore, Folkekirken cannot as a whole organise “Church diakonia” but has to “hand over” diaconal efforts and concerns to independent diaconal organisations⁶ and institutions.⁷

These diaconal actors perform diakonia *on behalf of* the Christian church but at the same time, they are *independent and self-contained units* with a budget, purpose, and rights of their own.

Secondly, diaconal institutions mainly run in cooperation with the state either due to a fixed budget or with a formal agreement of cooperation. Hereby the state guarantees the existence of the institution or the organisation, leading to a dependence on the state, and permitting it influence on as well as claim to the outcome of the job in practice. State claims and standards therefore take up a lot of attention on a daily basis, reducing diakonia to a second or third priority.

General society in Denmark is non-religious which calls for a neutral view on life by every professional actor. Diaconal actors therefore face a demand to keep professionally and religiously founded acting separate. This demand leads to other things such as initially, the need for institutions and organisations to come up with a certain neutral way of acting out diakonia on a daily basis. This may be difficult since it calls for a need to clarify the professional difference between diaconal care and care offered

⁵ Folkekirken is a state church. Legally, it was born with Grundloven (the Constitution) of 1849. The discussion of how to phrase this was fierce and has been ever since. Who were to decide and who would pay for the church were the topics of this discussion. But, the phrasing from 1849 was never changed which is why Folkekirken is still defined in the constitution as an evangelical-Lutheran church. And this is the church which the state supports. (As found 25.7.2015 on www.faktalink.dk/titelliste/grun/grunkirk) In practice, Folkekirken is run nationally by the Folketing and the Ministry of Church. The Folketing passes laws on how to run Folkekirken and the Ministry of Church implements these in practice. The Ministry of Church hires – and pays – the ministers of the church, its deans, and bishops. (As found 25.7.2015 on www.kristendom.dk/indf%C3%B8ring/s%C3%A5dan-fungerer-folkekirken).

In every church parish, a parish council is elected every fourth year among the members of the parish and this council is the deciding organ of the life and growth of the church in general in each parish. Therefore, church staff (except for the vicar) and all church activities are financially related to the parish council and not to the Ministry of Church.

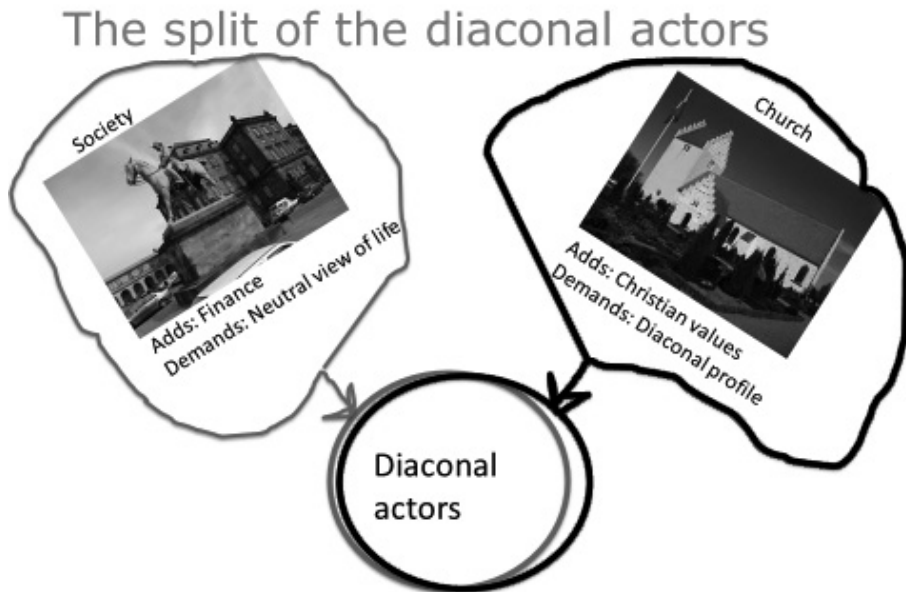
⁶ For instance: Kirkens Korshær, KFUMs Sociale Arbejde i Danmark, Blå Kors etc.

⁷ For instance: Filadelfia, Dianalund; Diakonissehuset Sankt Lukas Stiftelsen, Hellerup and Den danske Diakonissestiftelse, Frederiksberg.

by the state (Angell 1994:8-9). Secondly, diaconal organisations and institutions must also have a defined distinct diaconal profile, which in *itself* is difficult – and which is a completely different problem matter of its own. And finally, the phrasing must be fit to be communicated and operated in public in a context which has a neutral way of life view, i.e. without the use of Christian or theological phrasing.

Summing up, the current situation of diakonia in Denmark is marked by the split between the starting point of a Christian based set of values and the public demands for a neutral way of life view.

Please see below:



Thus, diakonia is faced with the dilemma of describing and phrasing diakonia in a way in which *does not* lose its affiliation with Christian values yet is explained and communicated in a public context.

Later, I will try to explain how this dilemma is faced and will discuss how diakonia is described as a profession using everyday language and is able to be part of professional discussions on par with other professions such as nursing or pedagogic. First, let me briefly explain the two theological approaches to diakonia in Denmark.

Various theological approaches to understanding diakonia

Present-day institutions and organisations of diakonia come from mid to late 19th century Germany where a diaconal movement was born which was to form the basis of institutional diakonia in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark. Its star-

ting point was the pietistic⁸ understanding of Christianity where theology is founded in Christology. Diakonia was seen as a result of teaching the gospels whereby each individual would be called to duty. As such, diakonia was not an independent preacher of the gospel but a deed formed by and from preaching about Christ as well as faith in Christ and his redemption, i.e. diakonia was consecutive (Nordstokke 2011:158-160). The word of Christ was preached in church and congregation and individual reception hereof was the prerequisite of acting out diakonia.

In later years, however, the theological starting point of diakonia in Denmark has shifted towards a Creational theological course in which diakonia is perceived as the autonomous communicator and preacher of the gospel of Christ. Diakonia is “acting the gospel” (Kirkerådet 2008:7, (Church Council)) and a way in which to be church, i. e. diakonia is constitutive (Nordstokke 2011:158). This means that diakonia links to understanding church as well as congregation, which is not defined from a fixed organisational mind-set but from a core point being Christ. In other words – church and congregation is where Christ is the key figure making the thought of “et dynamisk fellesskap” (“a dynamic fellowship”) (Nordstokke 2011:160) the starting point in contrast to previous views on fellowship which were mainly seen as a passive one and in which the idea was to receive preaching of the Christian word and the sacraments. This is a fellowship linked to God’s intention with man and as such a fellowship of holiness – because God makes holy – while at the same time everyday fellowship may seem very complex and appear to be less holy (Dietrich 2014: 54, 56, 59).

Where is diakonia today?

In general, Danish diaconal actors perform spiritually on behalf of *the church* without the church being given the formal right to or the ability to decide this while at the same time acting on behalf of the premises given and expected by secular *society*.

This leads to a split situation challenging the ability of diakonia to balance in this context. When spirituality was favoured, the institutions lost their on-going contracts with the state because the diakonia offered seemed to be too holy in order to be part of a public context. At other times, when the Christian touch was too weak, it was almost non-existent and as such, diakonia as a concept almost disappeared.

Diakonia in Denmark is faced today with a need to find a new form and expression in which it may still connect to Christian vocation, faith, and service while simultaneously operating in a public context on its secular conditions.

⁸ “Pietism is originally a word for a European pious movement in 17th and 18th century Lutheran Christianity. Theological pietism marks an interest of man’s inner self instead of the outer. The Church and the message of the Redemption are transferred to man’s heart, sentiment, and conscience. Man must decide whether he is reformed and has been reborn which psychologically calls for uncertainty. Faith is transformed so that faith for the believer is a constant property of man’s inner self. What is and what should exist outside is the world and thereby sin. This tradition of man’s inner self is found within a number of 19th century revival movements. Indre Mission (Inner Mission) is one of pietism’s heirs with regard to church” (My translation). Disponível em: <www.denstordanske.dk/Sprog,_religion_og_filosofi/Religion_og_mystik/Reformationen_og_lutherske_kirke/pietisme>. Acesso em: 28 jul. 2015.

Lately, one has started to verbalise a specific diaconal professionalism (subject) which *aims to* integrate the Christian foundation *as well as* seeming to act as a profession, which operates in public.

Below, I will present this concept.

Diakonia as a professional practice

Some people feel that the introduction of diakonia as a professional practice adds to weakening diakonia and that public demands “win over” diakonia since this is forced to conform to the norms of society. I have the complete opposite feeling. I see this extension of diakonia as a means to further the competence of diakonia and an opportunity in a Danish relation to still be a competent player in a public collective context.

The need for diakonia as a professional practice

Danish society is a well-fare society, meaning that the state is obligated to care for its people with regard to social support and general care. Therefore, a wide variety of public institutions offers almost the same care to the groups of people who are also targeted by diaconal organisations and institutions.

Yet most of diaconal and public offices widely agree that diakonia *is* different and *able* to perform differently from “ordinary” social work. Not in a sense that it is better than other social work – *only* different with a different *ability*. But it is difficult to define, formulate, and communicate the difference in an ordinary professional context. Most attempts are either so vague that diakonia as a profession is not clear, or theological terms or Christian terminology are used which are not clear to the general public.

How is diakonia as a profession defined?

A definition of diakonia as a profession must in general include all diaconal expressions, traditionally known as caritative, catechistic or prophetic while at the same time appear specific with a clear diaconal touch in any given situation.

When it comes to discussing diakonia as a profession, poles are often at stake. One pole views diakonia as a profession within a certain framework within which diakonia exists with specific diaconal institutions while the other pole views diakonia as “a certain way” of meeting other people: a way in which a personal Christian view of life or faith takes its starting point but which cannot be defined as such. Both poles are problematic. If diakonia is only seen as a profession it will call for specific jobs which only perform this profession. If, on the other hand, diakonia is only seen as “a certain way”, it seems relevant to ask who is entitled to define this way. And if this something or somebody – beyond one self, cannot define this “certain way”, diakonia

faces the danger of being individualised to such an extent that it is no longer visible to others than to the performer him/herself.

Later years' effort to define what is specific to diakonia has seen the concepts of 'added value' – and lately, "asset" (Nordstokke 2014:215) gaining grounds. One may ask, however, if diakonia really does have a certain benefit, which other professions do not or whether it is more likely that diakonia has access to the same values that everybody else has but that the Christian outlook in a particular way influences how the prioritised values are used. I want to presume the latter point of view. In this way diakonia as a profession is not better than other professions but is able to cooperate with other professions on the same level; it only embraces *its own* specific professional contents.

I believe that defining diakonia as a profession makes it an alternative way on how to talk about diakonia in public. By professionalising diaconal expressions, one avoids seeing diakonia as an individual Christian view of life or faith to be kept private, but one, which in a professional verbal form is readily accepted in a public context.

We now arrive at the components present in diaconal profession, including a definition.

Professional diakonia

Professional diakonia stands on the theological approach of the Creation and the Lutheran understanding of vocation and social estate. The world and society in general is viewed as "Guds arbetsfält, där han skapar även utan att kyrkan är på platsen" ("God's work area in which he creates even without the presence of church") (Wingren 1970:75), where general daily life as carried out by man in his or her's everyday life forms the basis of Christian love of thy neighbour to which we are called. When man performs this act towards others we are ourselves created, "efter Kristi bild, genom död och uppståndelse till evigt liv" ("as Christ through death and resurrection to eternal life") (Wingren 1970:70). According to Lutheran thinking, life in general – including in public – is where man serves God and his neighbour. Being in public is being in a secular environment just like the life and death of Christ (Wingren 1970:70), and where we are called to live and die.

In order to define professional diakonia, I have chosen the definition found through years of teaching diakonia where it has become clear to me that in a professional context diakonia can be defined like this: "Diakoniens faglighed hører hjemme i kristendommens handlingsdimension og har (alene) til opgave at bekræfte en ubetinget menneskelighed" ("Professional diakonia is found in acting out Christianity and is (only) meant to confirm unconditional humanity") (Hjelm 2007:4).

First component – acting out Christianity

First component in professional diakonia is the concept of "acting out Christianity", i.e. Christian values are the epitome of diakonia. First of all this means that professional diakonia includes faith and Christian spirituality and secondly the foun-

dition for professional diakonia is found beyond its profession and its professional actors – but in God’s love.

Professional diakonia is linked to the imperative of Christianity that *God loves* and *because* God has loved us first we are capable of love and of embracing another human being (1. The Epistle of John 4:19).

This definition also points to the fact that acting out Christianity is the outlook, which clarifies that professional diakonia is *not* words but deeds. In short, it is acting out Christianity, which means that the being and acting of the professional actors in itself is constitutive.

Second component – unconditional humanity

What is meant by *unconditional humanity*?

This means that no matter how a person looks and acts, professional diakonia implies that when meeting your neighbour it is the Christian way of humanity with which one meets another human being: as a whole person with everything this person holds. Unconditional humanity from a professional diaconal perspective implies that one does not meet a client, a citizen, a patient, a beggar, a drug addict, etc. but one meets another human being. A human being who may be related with prostitution, begging, etc. and this unconditional meeting between human beings rather than a meeting of different roles or etiquette *is* professional diakonia.

Understanding humanity in a Christian context includes the realisation that we are split between forces of good, leading to God, and forces leading to evil, the Devil (Nordstokke/Stubkjær 2005:25-26). As man and as human we find ourselves in this split – not *either* in the good *or* in the evil. Life in this split is challenging and is not always found to be at all human. In the midst of split between, “kærlighed-had, tro-tvivl, mening-meningsløshed, lys-mørke”, “love-hatred, faith-doubt, meaning-meaninglessness, light-dark” (Olivius 2003:40) we are utterly human (beings) and fact is that this is a human condition even though we do not enjoy the life we find here. “Man kan sige at diakoniens faglighed har til opgave at bekræfte mennesket stående dér, midt mellem kræfter der fører til døden og kræfter, der fører til livet. Og med baggrund i denne ubetingede bekræftelse af, at sådan ér det at være menneske(lig), er det diakoniens faglige handling at hjælpe medmennesket til at tage del i kampen” (“One might say that the role of professional diakonia is to confirm man’s existence right here torn between forces leading to death and forces leading to life. Knowing how this unconditional confirmation is what means by (being) human, it is the professional performance of diakonia to empower one’s neighbour to fight these forces”) (Hjelm 2007:4).

I believe that confirmation of unconditional humanity is not aimed at changing/improving our fellow man. It aims at how one may confirm humanity within one’s neighbour by making this person see him or herself as a human being and not as a case, a client, a citizen, a patient, a drug addict, an old age pensioner, etc. By doing this, magic often happens and life is changed or improved.

Having confidence in a spiritual dimension is particular to professional diakonia and implies that, “at den tør følge mennesket i dets længsel, uden at bortforklare eller mætte den. Diakonien er i stand til at udholde det svære og næsten ubærlige i længslen, fordi den kender den menneskelige grundlængsel” (“it dares find man in his longing without reducing or satisfying it. Diakonia bears the hardest and almost unbearable in longing because it knows how man longs”) (Hjelm 2007:12).

Confirming unconditional humanity, i.e. man’s longing for reciprocity, affection and unconditional love, also gives acted out professional diakonia the ability to walk along your neighbour towards a longing for God and a closer search for God. This longing must in professional diakonia not be seen as a church or “liturgisk ramme, men må inngå i den faglige diskurs” (“liturgical framework but must be part of professional discourse”) (Fanuelson 2009:153), which is why professional diakonia must relate to faith as professional knowledge and resources.

The concept of “unconditional humanity” points to the difference between humanity from a state liberal point of view and from a diaconal point of view. The state demands that one creates a life of one’s own and contributes to the benefit of society. A conditional humanity rules with a “what’s in it for me” point of view. Facing this is the diaconal point of view that man should not create his own life as he already has life and dignity no matter how he contributes to society or not. One may say that the point of view that unconditional humanity is ‘nåde for alle’ (“grace for all”) rules here. One does not talk about the benefit of society but about a joint fellowship: a fellowship which is a joy as well as an ordeal, a fellowship of people who are in progress and thereby always changing. Just as colourful and diverse as the fellowship between God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit while simultaneously a local and global unity. In reality this challenges our individuality since we are faced with the demand to dare depend on others. The fellowship of diakonia is not just a fellowship of strength but a fellowship for life in which we share and take part of life lived, be it fierce or weak.

Third component – theory and practice

A basic factor in professional diakonia is the relation between theory and practice since diakonia *is* practice.

The starting point in diakonia is eternal practice and any effort is from practice to theory and not vice versa. The theological reason is found in the biblical principle of inversion which turns the understanding of what is important upside down. In the Bible, what is important always starts at the bottom, at a tangible starting point, at the periphery and not at the ideological or theoretic starting point – such as the incarnation in Luke 2.

This relation between theory and practice challenges the question and understanding of professional competence. Hjelm believes that personal competence in the sense of “evnen til nærvær og indføling” (“the ability to relate and empathise”) (Hjelm 2007:5) is essential when acting out professional diakonia. If the professional diaconal actor cannot relate to the person next to him or her, the conditions for professional diakonia are not present. The technical competence, in the sense of “evne til etisk han-

dling” (“the ability to etic action”) (Hjelm 2007:5), and knowledge competence in the sense of “evne til refleksion over erfarings- og vidensgrundlag” (“the ability to reflect over the foundation of experience and knowledge”) (Hjelm 2007:5), cannot happen until the ability to relate to or meet another person is established. This line of competence in which the personal competence rules over the technical and knowledge based competence follows the biblical principle of inversion while at the same time pointing out that diakonia is person related by the person who greets. Thereby professional diakonia becomes person related rather than role related (Sløk og la Cour 2005:40).

Fourth component – context dependency

Harald Grimens⁹ thinking on profession and professional diakonia is – like other care taking and relation borne professions – a heterogeneous profession which includes elements from various disciplines and areas (Grimen 2008:73). Other disciplines such as physics, chemistry, theology, are homogenous professions with one base of knowledge in which every element belonging to the profession comes from the same discipline or professional area.

The heterogeneous disciplines are typical practice professions, which make the discipline theoretically fragmented because it consists of various elements and theories from different areas. Therefore, it may be difficult to define the exact profession (Grimen 2008:72-73).

One usually finds that disciplines come from one particular theory and from this theory, the profession is founded. However, professions may also be founded in a different way which is the cause of professional diakonia. Practical syntheses form the basis of professional and solid relations. Grimen explains this by saying that “forskjellige brokker av kunnskap er satt sammen på en bestemt måte fordi de utgjør meningsfulle deler i yrkesutøvelsen forstått som en praktisk helhet eller enhet”, “different blocs of knowledge are put together in a certain way because they share solid ways of how to perform a task such as a practical unity or entity” (Grimen 2008:74). His point being that solid tasks are not governed by a theoretic starting point but governed by the aim which the profession seeks to fulfil. The profession is – so to speak – “i visse verdiers tjeneste”, “in the service of certain values” and implies aims beyond itself and by fulfilling *these* aims, it governs the way in which the knowledge of the profession is put to use (Grimen 2008:72 og 74). The aim of professional diakonia thereby defines its profession.¹⁰ In professional terms, this is called heterotelic (Gri-

⁹ Harald Grimen (1955-2011) was professor of professional ethics at Senter for profesjonsstudier, Høgskolen in Oslo and professor II at Senter for vitenskapsteori, University of Bergen.

¹⁰ The aim of professional diakonia according to its definition is “at bekrefte en ubetinget menneskelighet”, “to confirm unconditional humanity”. Since situations and people are different there is no fixed recipe or set of rules on how this will happen. Every situation is unique which is why one cannot just copy and paste in any given situation. Thus, professional diakonia is not a set of fixed definitions in professional terms but rather a way of fulfilling the aim no matter which professional term one might use – and this is how the profession is created.

men 2008:72 og 74) which implies that contextual dependency is the basic condition of professional diakonia.

Diakonia in Denmark 2015 – final remarks

Much more can be said about diakonia in Denmark and about diakonia as a profession. I have not even mentioned the diacons and the diaconal educational institutions. However, my limit is up so as my final remarks I would like to outline the current challenges faced by diakonia in Denmark. I point to two challenges in particular. One is linked to the diaconal institutions and the organisations' internal relation and the other is the relation with Folkekirken.

I believe that the organisations and the institutions need to reinvent their diaconal foundation, to brush up their looks in order not only to come across as a reminiscence of values but also to come across in an active diaconal jargon, documented and based on research, both in theory and in theology. More research is needed here.

Today, Folkekirken is faced with an increased interest in diakonia and the word "diakonia" is widely used. In Denmark, due to the way Folkekirken is organised, there is no tradition of *mutual* theological discussion which may result in joint results. Theological discussion is characterised by a personal nature in which the individual pastor or member of Folkekirken puts forward *his* or *her* points of view. In my view, it would be refreshing if we had a thorough and open debate about diakonia in the church from an ecclesiological angle in which we discuss which kind of church we want. This would be an opportunity for diakonia to have a voice and to voice itself within the framework of Folkekirken.

It is always interesting to describe conditions and relations in one's own country and society while at the same time it is also difficult, as one takes so many aspects for granted; one is blind to certain aspects and other aspects one leaves out. Yet, it has been exciting for me to write this article on diakonia in Denmark 2015, and I sincerely thank you for the opportunity.

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