



The Diaconal plan for
The United Methodist Church
in Norway

THERE IS A LEGEND that Abraham one day saw through a door opening an old man walking along the road. The man appeared to be tired after having travelled a long way. His clothes were dusty and his feet were full of sores. Abraham was moved by compassion and invited the man first to share a meal with him, and then to spend the night in a comfortable room in the camp. The wanderer accepted the offer with thankfulness.

During the meal Abraham noticed that his guest had not blessed the food or thanked God for it, and he could not but ask why this had been the case. "I worship the god of fire and no other", was the answer. The answer made Abraham so angry that he immediately sent the man on his way even before he had finished his meal.

Later in the same evening God spoke to Abraham and asked what had happened to his guest, the tired wanderer. Abraham explained that he could not tolerate an atheist as a guest in his camp. God answered: "I have cared for this man for sixty years even though he has never worshiped me. Could not you have endured him for one evening and by so doing indicated my love for him?"

"You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt." (Exodus 22:21) All Biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version, copyright 1970

PREFACE BY THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE COUNCIL AND BISHOP

You now hold in your hands a resource document for the United Methodist Church's diaconal ministry. The Conference Council and Bishop hope that this may become an instrument that will inspire increased diaconal consciousness and work. It can be that you already have a well functioning diaconal program. If such is the case, this document may serve as an inspiration to continue and expand the development of this important work. If your congregation wishes to begin something new we believe this plan will be a helpful guide with which to start. The United Methodist Church understands that evangelistic work and diaconal engagement are two sides of the same call to service and that a good balance between them creates a healthy and dynamic church that can be God's instrument in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

"Diaconal engagement is a consequence of God's grace and our response to God's love expressed through our attitudes and actions for the benefit of people and all of creation." It is our hope that this definition may inspire and lead to mature and bold engagement, and that the descriptions of the various types of diaconal work here may give practical guidance for everyone who is involved in congregations and institutions, both nationally and globally.

This plan is provisionally not worth the paper upon which it is printed if it does not lead to engagement for and with persons, within the church as well as in the society. The Conference Council and Bishop recommend this plan for diaconal ministry to every congregation and institution within the Annual Conference. Read and discuss it! Use it freely as the basis for the congregation's diaconal plan for ministry. The Council will, in the course of 2012, invite those who are involved as leaders in diaconal ministry to a conference where we can share experiences with this plan and work together to further develop the engagement in our own settings. Creative, simple and effective plans that have been implemented can be collected and published as additional inspiration for others.

The Conference Council wishes to thank the working group who has developed this plan, including: Åsta Marie Olafsson, Kristin Hilde Nordby Bergland, Kari Sol Tveter, Kari Hay, Vette Karlsen Eide, Lars Erik Nordby and Liv Berit Carlsen.

Jan Erik Hansen, Chairperson of The United Methodist Conference Council and Christian Alsted, Bishop
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The plan is constructed so that the reader is first introduced to the theoretical understanding of diakonia, diaconal terms and diaconal actions. Examples and stories that can support and clarify this are placed in gold boxes.

If you are interested in understanding more of the way The United Methodist Church understands its role in today's society, you may begin with Part 1. On the other hand, if you wish to begin with practical work and planning in your own congregation, we recommend that you begin with Part 2. There you will find practical tools and methods for individual projects along with relevant action plans.



Introduction

The United Methodist Church is a world-wide denomination which began in England with John and Charles Wesley. The Church, as we know it in Norway today, began as a mission project from The United States. The United Methodist Church has historically received inspiration from the biblical record of the first congregations as it is written in The New Testament. Christianity began in a society where several cultures lived side by side. The Land was occupied. Some were privileged while others were poor. When there was a shortage of food for example, the apostles quickly realized that following the way of Christ included taking the actual human situation seriously. They began collecting resources and chose deacons who took responsibility for distributing the food. This was not only for Jewish Christians but also for non-Jewish converts. (Acts 4:32-36 and 6:1-6)

Diaconal care continued its life within the Church. Periodically the work was organized by the bishop who then cooperated with the deacon, and eventually the local ruler. Monasteries and convents played an important role in the Middle Ages. Travellers could receive food and shelter, while the sick also received care. Following the Reformation, when convents were no longer functioning, much of this service disappeared. No one took direct responsibility for diaconal care and the scattered attempts were not sufficient. A new focus on diaconal care and institutions arose under pietism. John Wesley instituted the distribution of food in the poor areas of London, along with lodging for workers and schools for those who had no education. He established fellowship groups with Bible studies and other forms of spiritual guidance. The first Methodists were concerned with social justice, and played an important role in the struggle against slavery. They combated the destructive abuse of alcohol and many forms of criminality, for example smuggling.

The central leadership within our branch of Methodism, The United Methodist Church, has encouraged serious reflection on the needs of our own time:

- Creative thinking on what it means to be a church today.
- How may we become a church with a thousand doors?

The story recorded on the next page is taken from a meeting with First United Methodist Church in Tacoma, Washington.

There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 4:34-35)

The First United Methodist Church in Tacoma had made no plans for diakonia before the summer of 2009. However, they were conscious of their Wesleyan tradition and were rethinking what it means to be a church. The Church is located near the center of the city and the windows encourage looking out as well as looking in. The altar vestment has been replaced with a thin veil which makes it easily possible to catch a glimpse of the immediate neighbourhood. They decided to build their new church precisely in this location, after it became necessary to sell the previous building. This new site has brought change to the congregation. New groups of people seek refuge there. There is a new witness on inclusion and acceptance which is a direct result of a grace-filled view of human beings which permeates the congregation's meeting with new persons and with each other. It is a congregation that is willing both to hear, to be and to do. For example they serve a large meal for people in the area on every fourteenth day. Fifty volunteers from various congregations work together to provide this service with homemade food, coffee and tea in traditional cups, proper steel ware, table prayer and fellowship around the Lord's table. One hundred and thirty people receive food, supplies for the week, as well as new clothes. Alcoholics Anonymous rent facilities in the church at significantly reduced prices. They hold their meetings here for mutual support.

Themes for worship services may be:

- **Let us celebrate human pride and dignity.**
- **Being a prophet has its price, but we are called to dare and venture when others are silent.**

The distinguishing mark of a diaconal church is precisely that it takes seriously the realities of which it is a part. Other plans shall not be a copy of that of First United Methodist Church of Tacoma; even though some Norwegian congregations will recognize parts of this story. Our reality will require another response and ethical change which grows out of the life situation where we are. Some Norwegian congregations and institutions already have a diaconal plan. Others do not; however, this does not mean that there is no good diaconal work going on in these churches. This plan is intended as an aid and inspiration for United Methodist congregations and institutions to further develop their diaconal identity, and to think creatively on what it means to be a church. This plan is also a part of the United Methodist Church's work to emphasize the diaconal tradition with links back to John Wesley – and to the early church. The life of faith can never be separated from our work and life in the community. Because of this, we have emphasized The Church's history and theology, our international identity, and our Social Principles in keeping with our Social Creed. (See resources under The United Methodist Church on the Internet.) We live in relation to God as well as to our fellow human beings. We become whole persons only in our meeting and work together with others. The South Africans call this mutual dependence UBUNTU. Together we can create a better world for those who are near and for those who are far away, because God has set His creative and sanctifying power in operation through us. Let us use them! Those who believe in the resurrection are vessels of hope and also believe in the possibility of positive change.

And the one who was seated on the throne said: "See, I am making all things new." (Rev.21:5a)

The Commission

Jesus gave a commission to the church. The church is Jesus' hands and feet, his eyes and ears, his heart – his body. It is you and I who constitute this church, together with our fellow believers all over the world. As a Church, it is our commission to be a movement that implements and calls others to thoughtful and joint service for all peoples. We understand this service as a continuation of Christ's work in the world.

The final commission Jesus gave to Peter was concrete and specific: to lead, instruct and care for the church and its members (John 21:15-18). The starting point is God's unconditional love to us as Jesus showed it through his life and teaching. Jesus' challenge to the church was even more strongly specified in the parable of the day of judgement (Matt 25:34-41). The special diaconal task is to organise and lead the process of actualizing this love, first of all through the church's life and practice, and in cooperation with all people of good will. Within the ecumenical movement we speak about "liturgy after liturgy": the continual worship service.

Diakonia must not be confused with charity. Diaconal service is our response to God who has given us life: To serve God is to serve our fellows. People touch our lives, both personally and through the media. Perhaps we do not know them, but they come near us and we are touched.

It is the Church's commission to make diaconal service visible and concrete. This is done through congregations, institutions, international work and not least through single individuals. The roles of being the giver and the receiver may be exchanged from time to time.

Diaconal engagement has the special responsibility of holding open the connection between the altar and the street, shopping centre, disco, school, work and places where people suffer because of war, oppression, hunger, illness and loneliness.

— because he first loved us... (1 John 4:19)



Vision:

SHALOM!

peace and liberation

justice and dignity

fellowship for EVERYONE

wholeness and holiness

freedom from fear

the creation in balance

God's love active in everything and everyone

God's dream for the world is exactly this: SHALOM!

Goals for the United Methodist Church's diaconal ministry

A superior, visionary goal is to have a diaconal church characterised by a generous and vital fellowship where people support and advise each other so they can become mature actors in their own life and in the society.

It is the goal of the United Methodist church to have a diaconal focus that is expressed through:

- an increased diversity among those who share in the church's work
- worship services that are characterized by various cultures and expressions
- an awareness of whether the diaconal work meets the needs and questions that are found locally, nationally and internationally
- programmatic action plans to make each of us conscious that we have a stewardship obligation in relation to the whole of creation
- the establishment of five new diaconal positions (in Norway) by 2015
- an expanded cooperation between the United Methodist Church's congregations and institutions, as well as between the Church and other religious and official organisations

When you have read this plan you shall be able to

- identify and develop the Methodist identity as a diaconal church
- create enthusiasm and desire for work
- have practical tools for the church's focus on diaconal work locally, nationally and internationally
- inspire to increased diaconal work locally, nationally and internationally

Jesus asked: Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers? The man answered, "The one who showed mercy." Jesus said to him, "go and do likewise."

What is DIAKONIA.

Diaconal service is a consequence of God's grace and our response to His love expressed through attitudes and actions for the benefit of people and the created world.

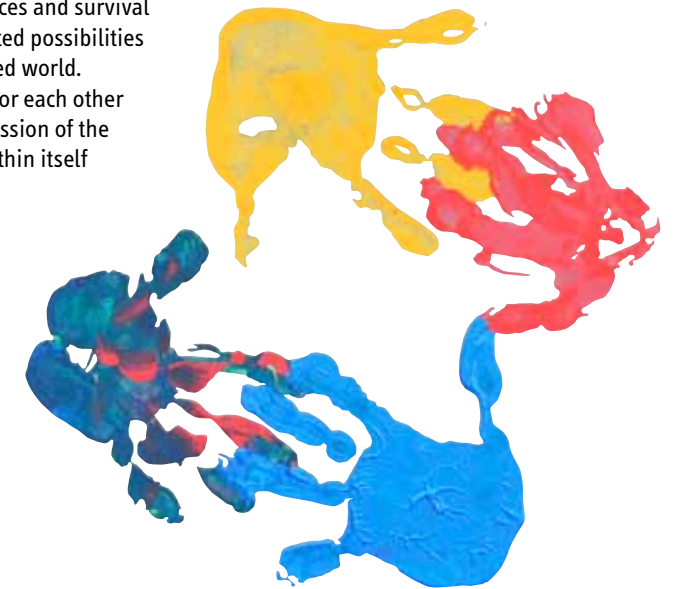
Diaconal concerns are expressed through:

- care for the neighbour
- inclusive fellowship
- work for peace and justice
- solidarity with the entire creation

Diakonia grows out of the congregation's worship and is a visible expression of the connection between the altar and daily life.

We mean by this that the ability for kindness and positive actions is placed deep within us by God.

Daily actions which promote mercy and compassion are diaconal actions. Working for peace, reconciliation, along with the struggle for equality and justice, are additional ways to show that persons are inviolable and unique. Nature and the environment are gifts to humanity, and work that advances the earth's constructive forces and survival are diaconal works. There are periods in life when we have limited possibilities to participate actively in actions for each other and for the created world. Intercessory prayer is a diaconal life attitude. Praying with and for each other is also a way of showing love and concern. All of this is an expression of the call to wholeness and holiness which Methodism has carried within itself from the beginning.



Let all that you do be done in love.
(1 Cor. 16:14)

John Wesley's theology and The United Methodist Church in a diaconal and historical perspective.

Using as a starting point the social conditions as they were in John Wesley's time – the 1700's in England, we can understand why care for others became so important for him. A special characteristic of the general society at that time was wide-spread poverty which also characterized the dawning Methodist revival. As many as 75% of the early Methodists were defined by the authorities as being poor. Another issue was England's slave trade which John Wesley understood as an injustice toward individuals and against the entire society. The struggle against slavery was not simply an issue of changing social structures. It was also understood in a salvational and end-of-time perspective. Setting slaves free made their salvation possible. However it was not simply an issue of the individual's salvation, but also that of the entire creation.

It was not only the nature of the English society that inspired Wesley's theology. He was also influenced by the character of the primitive church's diaconal tradition. This tradition became for him a vivid example of how care for everyone can and should become a reality. Wesley himself consecrated three nurses as deaconesses when he visited different Methodist groups during his travels in Georgia in 1735-38. These nurses were to assist him when he worked with the sick.

These understandings of God, society and the individual not only distinguished Wesley's theology, they also provide the context in which the world wide United Methodist Church comprehends its mission today. For John Wesley the love of God and neighbor were intimately bound together, and they cannot be understood as independent from each other. In the United Methodist Church today, care of others is a call and responsibility for all believers through their baptism and their faith in Christ. Diaconal service, in other words, is not to be seen as a duty, but as a foundation for the Church and the individual believer. Diaconal engagement is a defining characteristic by which the Church identifies itself as the Church.



Sanctification is present when we practice care of each other

The foundation stones for The United Methodist Church's diaconal work

• God's action in the world

The United Methodist Church believes that salvation has a spiritual, a personal and a societal dimension. Therefore political actions, legislation and work for justice are among the fruits of faith. God acts through us in that He gives us grace. Positive actions and the care of fellow human beings bear witness to God's presence before we pray and through that which happens within the fellowship. We understand this as prevenient grace. To do good, to graciously receive care, and to be a part of the fellowship are all responsibilities in which we share. We are dependent upon each other. Without compassion for and restoration of persons who have been violated, the Church will lack a sincere and visible sign of credibility.

• Understanding of Persons

Diakonia rests on a graceful view of other persons. In God's eyes all persons have equal worth, and human beings are inviolable. This understanding of personal worth is basic to all diaconal practice and gives directions for our work. Human beings are created in God's image, and they can know that they are here because of God's love. Diaconal service brings this to reality by restoring and healing those who are broken, rejected or injured. Diaconal engagement empowers 'the other' by accepting all persons as equal regardless of their life situation. We have received a free will and the ability to discern and choose between right and wrong. This is the hallmark of the human being.

• Social Principles

The United Methodist Church's Social Principles are an important source and guide for our diaconal practice and action. These principles are permeated by respect for humanity – as we are all created by God. Another important source of inspiration is the Social Creed. The Social Principles are re-evaluated every four years. In this way, they reflect development in the society, including new knowledge and information that help us make the Gospel relevant in new and changing contexts.

The Social Principles clarify the consequences and implications of faith in actual areas of life. They are built upon three basic rules: Do no harm. Do good. Stay in love with God. Methodism rests upon the principle that we shall be present in the world and do what is good in all the ways we can. The purpose of these principles is that they shall be prophetically enlightening and convincing.

True faithfulness to the Bible requires the translation of the biblical message for new times and situations...God always speaks to living persons and in relation to their concrete life situations. (Tore Meistad)

GRACE AND THE COVENANT

John Wesley emphasised a theology of grace that was whole and relational. He understood grace as having four perspectives: God's prevenient, justifying, sanctifying and glorifying grace:

- God's prevenient grace is the foundational condition of the entire created world. Grace includes both nature and the individual person's existence. In accordance with this spacious, universal and complete grace, all persons stand equally before God. Grace makes it possible for all persons, believers and non-believers, to choose the good before evil.
- To be included in God's justifying grace, to be saved, one must be converted, and confess faith in Christ.
- Sanctifying grace, which gives us hope and strength to follow Christ, makes us more like him. Sanctification is not a separate spiritual practice, but a process as well as positive actions for the good of other persons. John Wesley used a strong expression for this: by relating to the need of others we actively relate to Christ himself.
- Glorifying grace connects the believer to eternal salvation when we become like Christ.

Solveig was dying. She was lying in a private room in the hospital. An additional bed was available so that her daughter could sleep beside her. The hospital also provided a watch beside her bed. Pictures from Solveig's life and cards from relatives and friends were hung on the walls. Soft music which both mother and daughter liked was played. Friends and relatives came and went. Great grandchildren came to visit almost as a heavenly gift. Coffee and cakes were available. When the grandchildren came, Solveig said: "Now I have begun my final journey". Her eyes shone with pleasure. Finally there was no longer breath. She died with her daughter embracing her. There was peace. Both were attended to by hospital personnel who also gave place for beauty and nearness.

Just as we today associate John Wesley with this theology of grace, so has also the world-wide United Methodist Church in large measure been associated with covenant theology. This does not mean that covenant theology was foreign to Wesley. Neither does it mean that the United Methodist Church's covenant theology is in contradiction with Wesley's thinking.

The United Methodist Church's covenant theology is grounded both in the Old and New Testament. Here we can read how God makes different covenants with people. For the church today, baptism is the visible sign of the new covenant of reconciliation which God entered into with His people when Christ died and was resurrected. As baptized persons we are positively challenged to serve the created world and our fellow human beings. Just as Christ himself came to serve and not to be served, so shall the individual believer seek to live by His example. The covenant becomes our response to grace. God creates and saves through grace, and persons respond through their faith and life.

The United Methodist Church's understanding of diakonia today therefore has its origin both in God's grace and in His covenant with persons. Diaconal service works in and through us for the benefit of the created world and our fellowmen.

Greetings, you favoured one! The Lord is with you. (Luke 1:28b)

Grünerlukka's (an area of Oslo) family center is a part of the diaconal work that is being led by The Betanien Foundation in Oslo. This ministry deals, among other things, with making immigrants feel accepted while also being helped to learn the language. Twice each week a group of 10 to 15 women with different immigrant backgrounds and various lengths of stay in Norway meet for fellowship and mutual support. One of the participants shared the following comments: We learn much about Norwegian culture, for example, fairytales. We converse about health issues and our children. We learn practical things, such as how to find the city busses which we must take from place to place. Communication is in Norwegian. Most of us have used little Norwegian before, but here it is all right'. One of the women shared that we can speak freely together without feeling embarrassed. Cooperation with the community is good and has developed over many years. We are now considering whether we shall begin a program for men in our neighbourhood who suffer with depression and other forms of trauma. This is a project for which city officials have asked our cooperation.

John Wesley's Covenant Service:

In the liturgy for the covenant service, the minister says:

Friends, let us claim the covenant God has made with his people, and accept the yoke of Christ. To accept the yoke of Christ means that we allow Christ to guide all that we do and are, and that Christ himself is our only reward. Christ has many services to be done; some are easy, others are difficult; some make others applaud us, others bring only reproach; some we desire to do because of our own interests; others seem unnatural. Sometimes we please Christ and meet our own needs, at other times we cannot please Christ unless we deny ourselves. Yet Christ strengthens us and gives us the power to do all these things. Therefore let us make this covenant of God our own. Let us give ourselves completely to God, trusting in his promises and relying on his grace.

I give myself completely to you, God. Assign me to my place in your creation. Let me suffer for you. Give me the work you would have me do. Give me many tasks or have me step aside while you call others. Put me forward or humble me. Give me riches or let me live in poverty. I freely give all that I am and all that I have to you. And now holy God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. So be it. May this covenant made on earth continue for all eternity. Amen.

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. (John 13:34)





SOURCES OF FAITH

There are four important sources for our faith:

- Revelation – The Bible
- Tradition – The entire church's experience
- Experience
- Reason

The Bible stands in a unique position as revelation, because in a special way it gives us access to the church's Originator and the eyewitnesses around Him. In addition, it tells us through the law and prophets, and especially through Jesus' parables, how persons shall relate to God and their neighbour. The Church understands the entire creation as natural revelation.

When Wesley speaks about tradition as source, he refers first and foremost to our common Christian heritage from the early church, as well as to the Anglican Church tradition of which he himself was a part. Fundamental elements are connected with fellowship and the administering of the sacraments, along with the other means of grace and the affirmations of faith from the historic church. In the Bible God speaks to persons in concrete life situations. Wesley also took seriously that which he understood as God's revelations in his own time. Therefore, the first Methodists became seriously engaged in those social issues which fought against inequality and for graceful views of human beings. This came to expression in the struggle against slavery, poverty and intoxication. Such was the beginning of the Methodist Church's practical theology. In other words, practical theology is a conviction that the church and individual believers can never turn away from their fellow human beings. Neither can the turn away from the present age and at the same time worship God in the church, because worship must have consequences for daily life in vigilant love of neighbour.

We believe that God still speaks to us and calls us to service. Experience, as a source of faith, is always in dialogue with revelation. Human beings experience God's call and presence in their lives in many different ways. It is God's work in us that gives life to the Word and leads to practical service. The United Methodist Church recognizes the individual's experience as an important source of the knowledge of God and His will. Therefore the Church places great weight on allowing personal experience come to expression through worship services, in addition to the minister's interpretation of the biblical texts. The congregation also has a lay leader (an elected member of the congregation) who is the minister's closest co-worker.

My grace is sufficient for you. (2. Cor.12: 9.)

We acknowledge human reason as a gift of God. Reason, as a source of faith, is a primary tool which we use in our work with experience, tradition and scripture. Reason makes learning and insight possible and creates the basis for all knowledge. It helps us understand our experiences and the challenges our world is facing in the light of revelation. Reason helps us interpret our own time. It helps us see what it means to do good and to deal justly in the social reality of which we are a part.

"The Bible reveals, experience gives life, tradition understands and illuminates, reason examines and affirms." (Tore Meistad)

A central illustrative text from The New Testament is the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke. 10:25-37). It contains some important guidelines for diaconal service.

- The victim is anonymous. Whoever, regardless of gender, nationality or sexual orientation deserves compassion and care.
- The aid giver was a Samaritan. The diaconal caregiver does not need to be "one of ours".
- Mercy is connected with the question concerning inheriting eternal life. The love of God comes to expression through love for him who had fallen among robbers. Salvation and diaconal service belong together.
- Jesus' answer to the lawyer is also challenging: Go and do likewise.

Jesus' ethical challenge calls for our empathy and our fantasy. The parables give guidance and help us identify the persons and conditions that in every age call for our mercy and attention. (Matt. 15:34-36)

There is no other gospel than a social gospel. (John Wesley)

Diaconal service and the deacon

The United Methodist Church's theology and understanding of the church has prepared the ground for ordained service as a deacon, which in principal is equal with the service as a minister.

Those who shall become deacons must, in addition to the congregation's recommendation, have an education as, for example, teacher, cantor, nurse or social worker. This education must be the equivalent of a bachelor degree. It is to be followed by a special master's degree in diaconate, which is a two year program. The education includes theology, ethics, philosophy, pastoral/ diaconal care, social studies, church history and the science of the diaconate. With a foundation in her or his basic education, the deacon develops competence which includes knowledge of human relations, organisation and leadership, theology and society. Deacons shall, through their service, lead and make visible the life and faith of the church in its meeting with the surrounding environment. This means that deacons have responsibility to teach as well as to encourage and support the church in the practice of Christian service. They shall also arrange for and lead the congregation's outreach activities. A deacon can strengthen the congregation's ability to find new and creative ways in which to be the church. The deacon shall be an example of diaconal attitudes and actions.

That which is special about the United Methodist Church's diaconal vision is that the ordained deacons are appointed to the congregation in which he/they are members. In addition, this appointment may include a secular or a congregational position.

Within the last ten years there has been a development toward strengthening diaconal service in congregations and institutions by calling, educating and appointing deacons in local church institutions as well as in international work.

The diaconate is an area of the church's work which in a special way creates the possibility for cooperation between denominations. An example of this is "The Fellowship of Grace", which is an agreement between the Lutheran Church of Norway and the Norway United Methodist Church that was signed in 1997. The agreement encourages cooperation, and has made possible pastoral and diaconal service across denominational lines.

I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done. (John 13:15)

EXAMINATION OF DEACONS

The bishop examines the diaconal candidates by saying:

A deacon

is called to share in Christ's ministry of servanthood,
to relate the life of the community to its service in the world,
to lead others into Christian discipleship,
to nurture disciples for witness and service,

Here a large Bible may be lifted by an assistant.

to lead in worship,
to teach and proclaim God's Word,
to assist elders at Holy Baptism and Holy Communion,

Here a towel and basin with pitcher may be lifted by an assistant.

to interpret to the church the world's hurts and hopes,
to serve all people, particularly the poor, the sick, and the
oppressed, and to lead Christ's people in ministries of compassion
and justice, liberation and reconciliation, even in the face of
hardship and personal sacrifice.

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well. (Rom. 16:1-3)

Various types of diakonia

We also use expressions such as:

Liturgical diakonia The earlier deacon was an assistant in the worship services and in intercessory prayer. We recognize this in that our ministers up until 1996 were first ordained deacons before they were ordained elders. The life of worship and the diaconate belong together.

Caring diakonia "Caritas" is Latin and means compassion. The term is used for that part of diaconal work which is especially concerned with the care of fellow human beings in different social contexts, within or outside institutions, and not least the work which is connected with international diakonia.

Prophetic diakonia is the to speak truthfully on injustice and to challenge both the liturgical and caring parts of the diaconate. This is closely related to the Old Testament tradition where the prophets were the intermediary of right and wrong. They were spokespersons for God's will and called the people and leaders to conversion and right actions. They had a special responsibility to speak directly and clearly when the rights of the poor and the stranger had been violated. This means that a part of diaconal work is to speak when others are silent, especially when groups of people who either are too sick, or for other reasons, are prevented from clarifying their own situation.

The congregation's members who were engaged by "green values" began to act. They had studied the philosophy behind 'Fair trade'. After having reviewed a documentary produced by the Swedish Christian Council, they were shocked by their insight concerning the poor treatment the workers received in commercial coffee plantations. Some farmers, however, formed a cooperative which secured a minimal income in the case of illness or crop failures. The "green" members worked hard and consistently to convince the congregation's leaders that it was important to purchase "Fair Trade" coffee for all the church's arrangements, even though it was more expensive. When we know, we are also responsible!

All diaconal engagement has its origin in God's love of the creation and our response. This love makes it possible for the individual to practice diaconal care for fellow human beings in institutions, in congregations as well as in the rest of the society. In the introduction of this document, we described a congregation in Tacoma that had an effective and wide-reaching diaconal service even without recognizing it themselves. Perhaps this is also true of your congregation?

Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.
(Lv. 10:35b)

For whom shall we practice diaconal care today?

An important question for the church and each individual is: who is my neighbour – and what does my neighbour wish that I should do for him? This is not a simple question. And the last – what do you wish that I should do for you – can only be answered individually. The question, who is my neighbour, was raised during a diaconal seminar at the United Methodist Church's summer festival in 2009. This seminar was attended by Methodists from the whole of Norway and practically all age groups were present.

Diaconal concern does not ask about identity, it asks: Who needs help? Who will go?

When the challenge to describe 'our neighbour' was raised at the seminar in 2009, it was exciting to see how all persons and all groups of people seem to be included within diaconal responsibility. It was also exciting to see that diaconal care was not to be understood as being only for those who belong to the church. It must be for the good of everyone. For the sake of giving some oversight into the answers received, we have presented them here as a challenge to the church and to individuals when the question is asked: who is my neighbour?

My neighbour is:

- The family – father and mother, children and grandchildren, aunt and uncle, grandmother and grandfather, great grandfather and great grandmother, great great grandfather and great great grandmother, mother-in-law and father-in-law
- Fellow workers and leaders at the work place
- Friends, fellow students and school friends, single and elderly persons
- Those that have the highest responsibility in the church and society – bishops, elders and deacons, local, national and international leaders
- Those whom I meet by chance in the course of the day - paper girl, mailman, store clerk, dentist, he who stands near me in waiting lines, bus driver, person beside me in public transportation vehicles, travel leader, physician
- All who bear the consequences of my behaviour – the beggar in the street, my enemy, the helpless child, colleagues, my students, those whom I don't like
- Those who are dependent on drugs to get through the day
- Persons in vulnerable situations
- The congregation, brothers and sisters in the Faith, visitors in church, scout leaders
- Patients and their families
- Our new citizens
- Persons in our immediate community, neighbours
- Persons who grieve, are lonely, divorced, abhor themselves, those who are mobbed
- Child soldiers
- Grandparents who have responsibility for children without parents
- Street children

The question remains: who is my neighbour?

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. (Sal. 85:10)

What distinguishes a congregation in a Methodist understanding?

Arne was a man of few words, but in all the years he had his task as the collector and door watch at the church. This was before specific titles were given to various functions. It is quite possible that these tasks were also taken care of by others, but this is what I remember. His warm handshake and smile and the one word, “welcome”, was much more than just being a greeter at the door. When he brought forth the offering plates it was done with dignity – an important part of the worship service. He fulfilled his tasks with his entire self.

A diaconal church is dependent upon members who, each in her their own way participate in tasks which are defined as important in relation to the society of which the church is a part. They belong to the universal diakonia which is to live in response to God’s love, both in the congregation and at the workplace. It is expressed in the United Methodist Church’s teaching and church order, but perhaps especially in The Social Principles.

Within Methodism there has always been a challenge to keep the care of the soul together with care of the body. Therefore we speak about personal and social holiness. The church’s Social Principles can be seen as a part of our teachings about holiness. What kind of congregation will such an attitude create? Could we perhaps understand it in the following way?

Diaconal congregations strive to:

- be a place for radical hospitality
- hold life-related worship services which help persons recognize their own lives
- encourage and help persons live out their faith in their daily lives
- include all people in their life and activities
- have worship services for everyone
- be a place where it is possible to be vulnerable and show weaknesses and imperfection
- show care for the whole person
- be a place where persons can come with their lives when everything falls apart
- be a place where we pray with and for each other, and are open for the need of prayer
- stand up for those who suffer, and for exposed groups both in the immediate community and in the entire world
- include the care of creation in their ministry

On the first day of each week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn, so that collection need not be taken when I come. (1. Cor. 16:2)

God gave me a special vision where the words from Matt. 25:40 spoke to me in a special way that touched me. “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” This is the way our ministry “Heartroom” was started. “Heartroom” is a work that is directed toward families with children who struggle in Bergen. We know that some have fallen outside any support system in our city and that they have many difficulties in their lives. A group in Bergen Central Church opened a meeting place for these families. We have open house on Monday of each week where we invite these families to a kind of ‘pavement café’ which is a pleasant little location just below the Church. People come here directly from the sidewalk. The families receive a free meal. We also offer a bag with different kinds of groceries, fruits and vegetables. The ‘pavement café’ has become a gathering place where we provide concrete help.

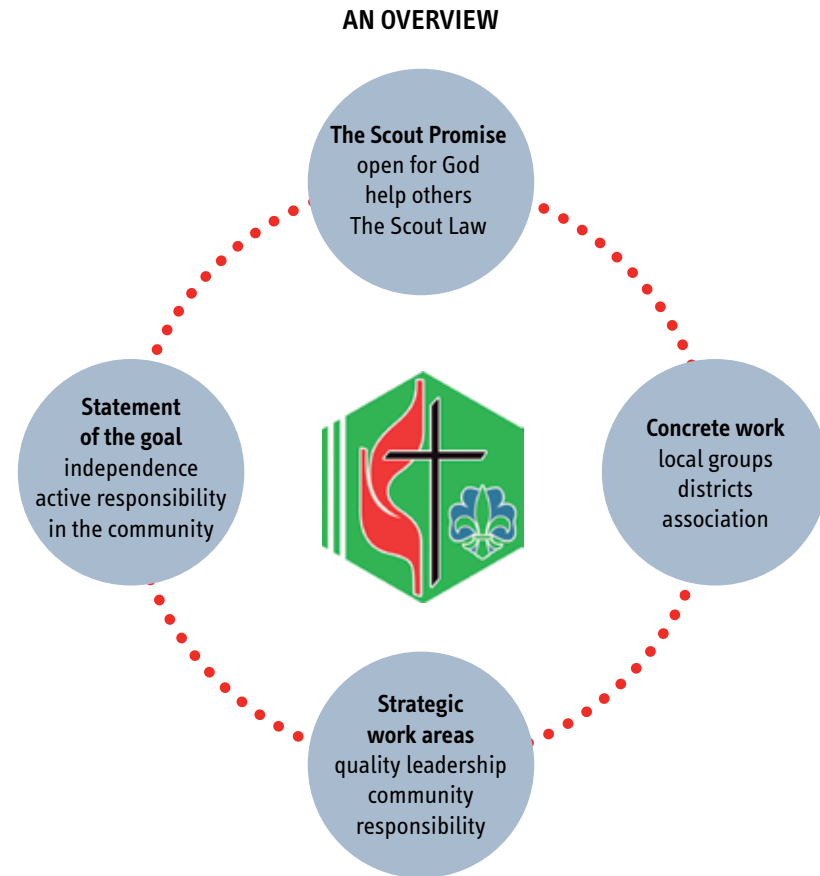
Some congregations have grief groups, visitation service, conversation groups and various engagements with young people. Others offer fellowship in connection with choirs and various musical activities. Some sponsor congregations in other lands and are active in solidarity work with a focus on practical help and cultural meetings. Some congregations are engaged in integrating refugees in multicultural worship services. Other congregations have focused on prophetic diaconal work through actions in relation to asylum seekers and environmental threats. It is not the kind of activity which is most important, but rather the willingness to respond to God’s love towards each individual and the creation.



The model is Christ. He is the image of the true human being. To be like Christ is, in other words, to come to yourself and find the way into your own reality. (Martin Lönnebo)

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH'S SCOUT WORK

Community engagement is chosen as a special strategic goal for scouts in the period 2006-2016. The key words are diversity, environment, global, local and helpfulness. "Diversity" indicates that everyone is able to participate in scout work. "Environment" denotes that we exercise good environmental responsibility, not only in our own activities, but also in our daily life situations. The term "Global" suggests engagement independent of national borders. Scouts are primary partners with our national refugee organisation. "Helpfulness" implies that we are active in responding to our own communities' needs.



In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. (John 14:2a)

RECOVERY

"Hi, my name is Karen and I am an alcoholic! Øståsen church has become a symbol for me, a reminder that the great is often hidden in the small. Blessings lie as treasures in the ordinary, the simple. In this church I have found the place where I belong. There is a saying that a home becomes a home because of the persons who live there. Here, in this church it is the congregation which gives me that good family feeling. I feel welcome here and I feel at home. However, unless I myself seek to find a safe haven where I also may contribute, it doesn't help. I myself am responsible. Thanks to the "serenity worship services", many people who otherwise might shun the church find their way. The minister connects biblical texts to the twelve step program: a text for every month in the year. I wish to thank the congregation that I can stand here and speak today. It is an honour to be invited to do so.

DIVERSITY

George is from Nigeria. He lives in a house for asylum seekers. On the first Sunday he inquired about a worship service. Of course he would go to church on the Lord's Day! It was some distance, but he walked. He discovered a locked door when he came to the church. The worship service was held in a smaller chapel in a suburban area on that day. A young girl came by with an electric car for handicapped persons and saw the "lost" figure. There was no place in her car, but her father's car had good place for passengers. He came and drove George to the right church. George knew nothing of the language, but he felt welcome in spite of that. Someone drove him back to the house where he was living. There is now transport service for him, and he is participating regularly in all the worship services as well as in small meetings in the homes.

Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. (Gal. 6:2)

What distinguishes a diaconal institution?

It is fall, and rain is hitting the windows in the Betanien kindergarten in Bergen. The annual fall festival is in process. We have just come in from an outdoor time for singing – wrapped in rainwear. It is delightful to enter the warm and well lighted kindergarten, especially when the walls and tables are decorated by the children's artwork. The older children have created their own family game with numbers and symbols, while the smallest have expressed themselves creatively with paper and paint. Everything is for sale, and parents, grandparents and teachers are buying. The money is easily spent. The larger children receive the payments. The oldest child remarks as she places the money in a cup: "It is going to children in Birzai in Lithuania". She continued: "This is a way for them to receive Christmas gifts. The adults don't have money to buy gifts for their children." The proceeds of the sale are large, and the children know very well who will receive the money; namely, "those who do not have as much as we enjoy."

Institutional diaconal engagement is wide spread within the United Methodist Church. The Betanien institutions in Bergen, Skien and Oslo render a rich and varied diaconal service including: hospitals, nursing homes, kindergartens, a nursing college, as well as rehabilitation and integration work. Soltun Folk High School is a diaconal institution with a special focus on the integration of diverse groups, along with work for peace and multi-cultural understanding. In cooperation with Blue-Cross, we are engaged in programs for alcohol- and drug abusers. These organizations are connecting links for a better understanding of the needs of the society. Their service is grounded in faith in God's love and care for the whole of creation. The engagement of these institutions rests upon professional and Christian values where everyone has equal rights to receive help and guidance. The care of persons is understood as an expression of God's continuing creation, and offers engagement opportunities for all persons of good will.

The Skien Diaconal Center (SDS) is an ecumenical cooperative program that includes 18 congregations. It has been active for 30 years. The Center receives financial support from the County and food from local grocery stores to the extent of approximately 12,000 meals each year. They also receive furniture and kitchen equipment. There are more than 50 volunteers from the entire spectrum of church life. The Center also operates a day care centre with possibilities for sleeping quarters. In the spring of 2009 SDS ended a project "On the way to one's own housing". The goal was to help victims of drug abuse establish their own place to live. Of the 14 who were involved in the project, a total of 12 now have their own dwellings. This was accomplished through the cooperation of banks, creditors, the County and SDS.

Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice'. (Matt. 9:12-13a)

Institutional diakonia is characterised by:

- Awareness of the physical, mental, social and spiritual environment
- A high qualitative professional environment
- Value based leadership and practice
- Strengthening of the staff's value consciousness
- Focus on the patient or student
- Each co-worker is seen and appreciated
- More focus on life than on planning
- Openness to life's questions
- Holistic view of persons

When Anders first came to school he was insecure, and his references indicated that he had a clear need for support. He had never had friends. In the course of the year he met young people who had greater difficulties than his own. He discovered that he could be a resource for the support for others. This became especially clear for him during the year's final school tour when he took responsibility for two companions and arranged an exciting tour of the city for the three of them. The best: He had discovered FRIENDS!



Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant. (Mk. 10:43b)

What are the hallmarks of international diakonia?

Tracy had AIDS. She had escaped from her country of origin in search of security in a neighbouring country. However she was not safe there either, except within the Church Center. There were only women there, and they were learning to sew. She found people with whom she could speak. Together they embroidered a large picture. She said: "We sew stitches and fasten our pain to the stitches. In addition, I learn to support myself and my child by sewing simple clothes."

The United Methodist Church is international. The international diakonia is active through our congregations, institutions and our Board of Mission.

Through the Methodist Church's Board of Mission we are a part of the diaconal engagement in our national churches in Africa, India and Europe.

International diaconal work encourages solidarity in life and action. All persons have the right to a life of worth and dignity. Health, safety and education are human rights, and persons who lack these are not objects of charity. Those who receive help do not belong to another category from those who help. In a Christian context the words "to share" and "to help" are closely related (2. Cor. 8:14-15). The United Methodist Church is joint owner in the ecumenical organisation, "Norwegian Church Aid" (similar to Church World Service), which enjoys a high profile in Norway when it comes to international diaconal work. Many local churches and individuals engage in support of people suffering from needs in other parts of the world. We set no local, national or religious boundaries for care and service. Diakonia can not accept that some people live in luxury while others live in extreme poverty, because it is not indifferent to human suffering. It responds as the Good Samaritan did. Our neighbours have come near, including those who live on the other side of the world, or in a nearby home for asylum seekers.

Much of the work in which the United Methodist Church's Board of Mission is engaged may be characterized as caring diakonia such as village development, schools and health support.

The United Methodist Church supports national churches in their struggle for a better society through the development of villages, agriculture, democracy, education, and work among child soldiers. A holistic understanding of human beings with emphasis on the rights of women and a healthy environment for the nurture of children is always in focus. We are engaged through "Global Health Initiatives" in the struggle against poverty and related illnesses such as malaria, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. We are also involved in the development of education for health, improved infrastructures and the struggle of freedom and justice.

There shall no longer be fear, prison, torture and death. None shall cry for help. Young children shall no longer die of malnourishment, and all persons shall have a worthy life. (Extract from Zephania Kameetas' meditation on Isaiah 65:17-25)

The prophetic side of diakonia fights beside those who suffer just as the Old Testament prophets did. It is about being advocates for the oppressed, and to dare to stand in conflict and opposition for the sake of justice and peace. Liturgical diakonia reminds us that diaconal ministry is a part of our worship and thus contributes to the strengthening of the awareness and consciousness of the church regarding social and personal issues. This is the way to develop and enrich the life of the congregation.

The activities in Beswan, India had ceased for a period, but the plan was to begin anew. A delegation led by the bishop arrived, and the chairman of the village committee who had held the keys for the past ten years opened the doors for the guests. Everything was in a state of decay. Some useless equipment lay in the dust, but an open book was lying on the table: The New Testament! The UMC Division on Young People in Norway began an action for rebuilding the church in Beswan. The church is now completed, the clinic is renewed and staff is assigned. The congregation in Notodden Norway had been dissolved some years earlier and the church's silver was packed away. Could it be used at another place? This question received an answer! When the new church in Beswan was consecrated at Easter in 2005, children and youth representatives from Norway participated in the service. Young people came into the new church in procession bearing the silver from the former church in Notodden. The silver was placed on the altar in Beswan and began to be used there. One of the young people remarked: "A strong and wonderful experience!" The day was another reminder that God's church is without boundaries.



Through international diaconal work, we both experience and proclaim that we are mutually dependent upon each other. (Tove Odland)

Summary of Part I

Diakonia has long and strong traditions in the United Methodist Church both in Norway and internationally. The fight against poverty, the relieving of needs and the denouncing of injustice are all motivated by our understanding of the Bible and our commission. This is why the United Methodist Church operates hospitals, nursing homes, schools and family centres. The congregations have concentrated on emphasizing the dignity and authority of the individual through preaching, systematic teaching and mutual guidance. The congregation has served as the door to a new life for many. Others have experienced that the fellowship within the local church has held them upright when life has ravaged at its worst with them.

This is the way we want it to continue. We believe it is the worship to which Isaiah refers in chapter 58: 6-7:

Is not this the fast that I choose:

To loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke,

to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,

and bring the homeless poor into your house;

when you see the naked, to cover them,

and not to hide yourself from you own kin?

In the final part of this plan we have made some templates and given some examples that can be of help in the concrete forming of the work. Plans and templates are working instruments. Diakonia can never be reduced to an activity or a plan. It is life and action. We need a church which is present in the world as an alert conscience and a beating heart. It includes both being and doing. Diakonia is an attitude toward life and it is expressed in our actions. The basis is Christ and his love in our lives. That which we cannot do alone, we can accomplish together.

This plan emphasizes the Methodist diaconal inheritance and theology. It also uses practical examples to show the diversity of services which are already being done through our Church. We are challenged to rethink what it means to be the church. Do we already see the contours of a different church? Can we talk about the United Methodist Church as a free diaconal, inclusive church? “Brobyggen” (The Bridge Builder) is the name of the church paper of the United Methodist Church in Norway. They who will build bridges must become acquainted with the landscape and construction techniques. Perhaps the final section of this document can be of help with this?

Jesus stood still and ordered the man to be brought to him; and when he came near, he asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” (Lk. 18:40-41a)

Blessing from Indonesia.

Author unknown. Sent to WCC from Indonesia after the tsunami disaster

**May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers,
half truths, superficial relationships,
so that you will live deep within your heart.**

**May God bless you with anger at injustice,
oppression and exploitation of people,
so that you will work for justice, equality and peace.**

**May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer
from pain,
rejection, starvation and war,
so that you will reach out your hand to comfort them
and change their pain into joy.**

**And may God bless you with the foolishness to think
that you can make a difference in the world,
so that you will do the things which others tell you cannot
be done.**

(Printed in WCC Assembly 2006 worship book “em tua graca”)

“Lord, when was it we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing. And when was it that saw you sick or in prison and visited you? And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ (Matt. 25:37b-40)

Part 2 - Introduction

When you have read Part 1 we hope that you have recognized activities and actions from your own experiences. Many congregations are engaged in a vital diakonia. The United Methodist Church's institutions have elevated consciousness of the quality and distinctness of professional diaconal activity.

In this part of the plan we invite you to engage in practical action. It begins by mapping local needs, planning, and then implementing projects or actions. We recommend that a working plan be created before concrete projects or enterprises are selected.

This is also an opportunity to survey what we are doing, evaluate what may be developed or eventually abandoned.

New diaconal projects begin when someone sees a need, starts a process of evaluating resources and possibilities, and finally planning specific and concrete actions. In many places there are enthusiasts that bring such projects to a reality. Deacons have a special education for leading such processes.

It will often be wise to cooperate with others. This can strengthen the ecumenical engagement and gather resources so that the work can become more viable. It may also be natural to cooperate with other volunteer organisations.

We recommend that ideas be anchored in the boards of the local church in order to certify the quality of the project. A project group may be established and supervision should be agreed upon.

The following is a type of workbox with recommendations as to methods that may be used in the beginning of projects.

Diaconal actions are a gift to those who have a need and to those who share their time and resources. Try to engage co-workers who have a sound mixture of realism and vision.

This is the way one may begin.



How to create a diaconal plan of action.

1. Surveying the needs

- a. present work being done
- b. the needs found in the local society
- c. resources (See models 1 and 2 on page 32, 33, 37 and 38)

2. Choose what you wish to accomplish and give the reasons for that

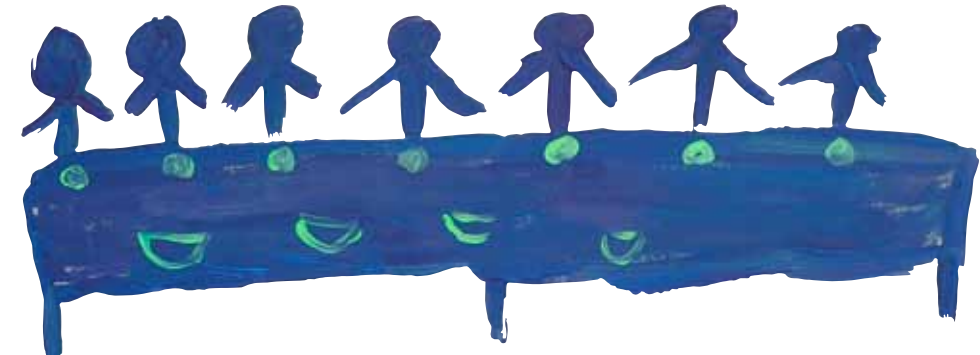
3. Make a priority list

4. Create a plan for the work

5. Implement and carry through what the group has agreed upon

6. Evaluate the results

Remarks about point 1b: In order to gain greater understanding of the actual needs in the city or another place where the church is located, it can be helpful to make contact with the social office, school, volunteer center or others who are active in the environment.



Methodology for diaconal work

Method and matrix

In meeting local diaconal challenges it is important to have various tools for finding the areas in which it is realistic to engage. In this connection we will present various methods of approach.

Duplicating originals – Model I: KSurveying the diaconal work in the United Methodist Church.

Mark the activities that now exist, or add others.

Activities	x	Who is involved	Evaluating needs
Visitation service			
Grief groups			
Senior meetings			
Children's groups			
Young families			
Youth work			
Pastoral care			
Conversation groups			
Integration work			
Environmental groups			
Mission groups			
Action groups			
Scouts			
Broad participation in worship			
Church coffee			
Diaconal themes for worship			
Other:			

Original for copying

Individual action plan connected to model 1

Plan for diakonia in

Period:

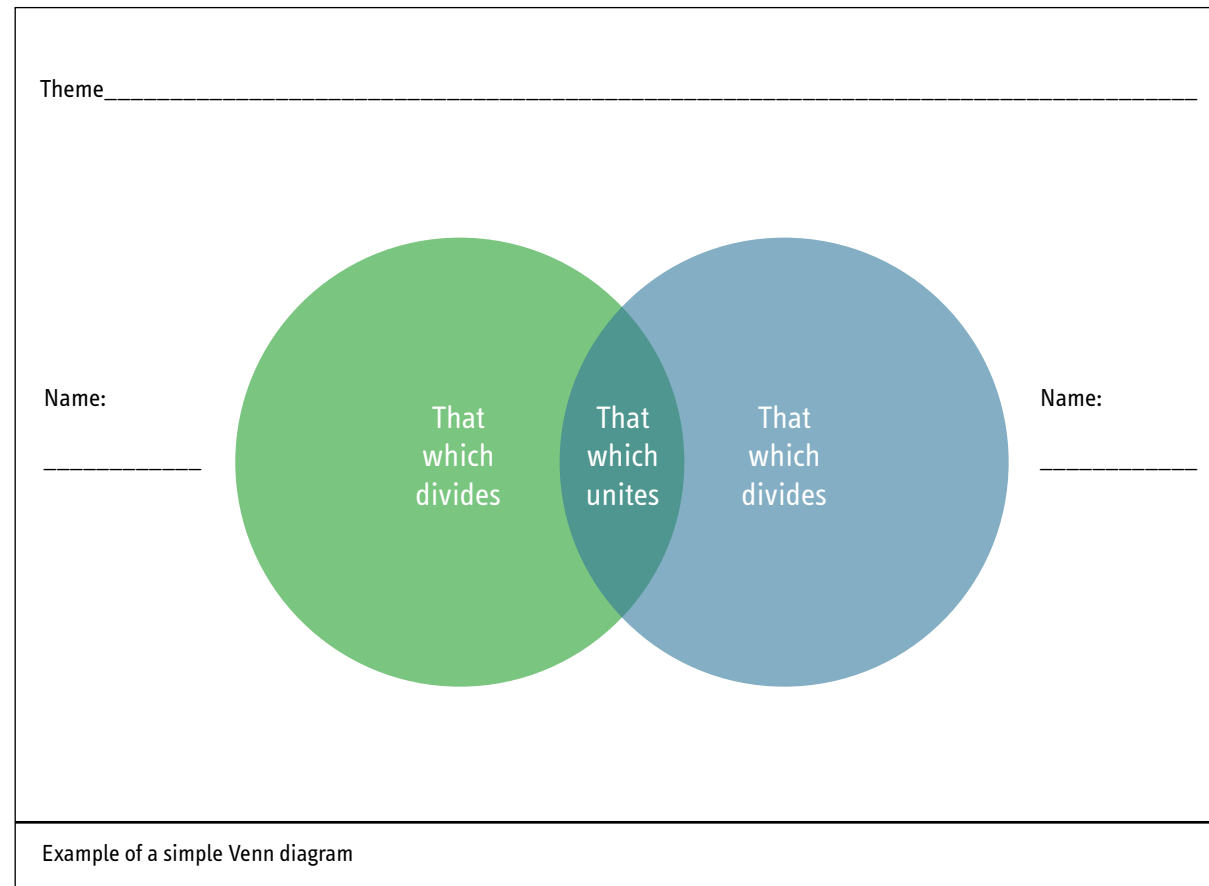
Action	Goal	Co-workers	Planning phase	Begin work	Evaluating

Responsible Signature: Date:

Model 2: Venn Diagram

A Venn diagram is a tool for studying similarities in order to learn. Such a diagram is often used to determine that which divides and that which unites. In connection with diaconal work, such diagrams may be used, among other things, in identifying similar thinking in the process of planning and may lead to expanded diaconal engagement.

A Venn diagram may also be used in reflecting over that which divides and that which unites in ways of thinking or acting.



Model for progress – an example

Resources

- a copy of the Venn diagram for each participants
- a pen for each
- a large copy of the Venn diagram, or something similar. This may, for example, be displayed on a blackboard

1. Divide the group so that two and two work together.
2. Let all group members write their names on their common paper – one on the right and one on the left.
3. Individual task: Give the participants 10 minutes for free reflection on a given theme, idea or phenomenon. An example for a theme could be “Who is my neighbour?” Each participant may record the ideas that come to mind on their half circle of the paper without conversing with the other. These should be written within the respective parts of the circles marked: “that which divides”.
4. Task two and two: Let the participants come together two and two in the groups established at the beginning of the practice.
 - Encourage the participants to share with each other the themes, ideas or phenomenon each has written under point three above. Give the participants two or three minutes.
 - Encourage the participants to focus on the themes, ideas or phenomenon under point three above where the circles overlap: “that which unites”. Give the participants two to three minutes.
5. Common task: Establish one large group for all participants. The leader of this exercise summarizes, along with the participants, the various ideas that have arisen under “that which unites” on a large copy of the “Venn diagram” on the blackboard. That which comes to expression are the themes, ideas and phenomena the group sees as their “neighbour”. Discuss that which has come forth.
6. Using this list as a starting point, the group may repeat the exercise under points one to five above, with a new focus on other issues, and with two new partners in the two and two groups. A possible example could be the use of the theme: “When I need a neighbour” - what approaches, activities and programs might I wish for the congregation to develop? In the large group conversation (point 5 above) all the members may discuss that which has come to expression.
7. Part three: By setting up a matrix where “who is my neighbour?” is placed on one side, and “various activities” are placed on the other, it may be possible to identify target groups and activities the congregation might institute in support of their members and others in the neighbourhood. Completing the model could inspire a more detailed understanding of specific actions that might be begun. (See the example of the model below.)

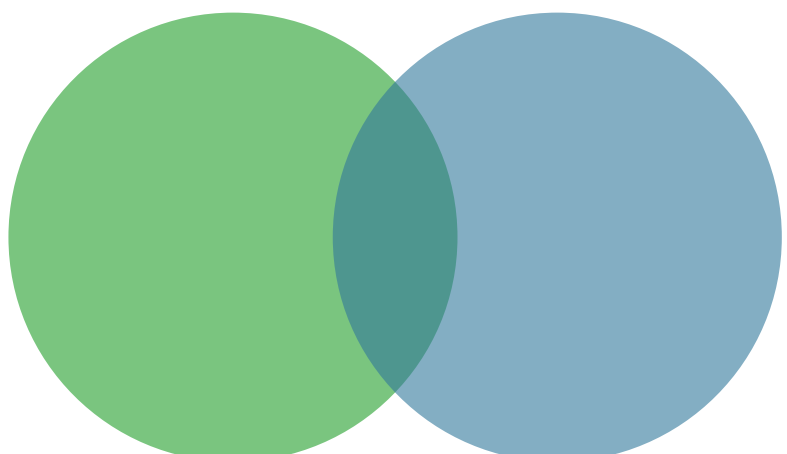
T A R G E T G R O U P S	“WHO ARE OUR NEIGHBOURS?” POSSIBLE ACTIONS				
		Worship services		Week day activities	Inexpensive meals in the church
	Family	Church coffee, soft drinks and biscuits. Sermons on the family in a modern society	Singing for children	Meetings for small children	Dinner on a weekday evening when there are other activities in the church
	Friends	That it shall be a positive and friendly fellowship. Printed materials describing the church's programs with an invitation to be a part of the fellowship.	Bible groups	Student meetings	Meal for students
	Immigrants to the Country	Worship services in their own language	“We cook food together” - an international food preparation group for all who wish to participate	“How do immigrants find their way in the new social and governmental system. “ Practical help in daily tasks.	Meals that include foods from the homelands of immigrants
	Persons in grief	Worship services that lessen the burden of grief	Grief group	Grief groups for divorced persons...the grieving who never receive flowers!	Dinner brought to the home because the grieving one does not dare go out and meet others.

Matrix for working with the Venn diagram with examples for action plans that may be actualized for the above mentioned target groups. These may be copied.

The following pages contain models for copying for use with point II above.

ORIGINAL FOR COPYING

Theme: _____



Name: _____

Name: _____

Original for copying: "WHO ARE OUR NEIGHBOURS?"

T A R G E T G R O U P S	ACTION PLANS				

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Lisa has not learned to write, but she knows her biblical history better than the majority. She is present at worship services as often as possible. Her attendance became less frequent after she moved to her own residence. There is now a solution for this after the diakonia organized a system for her transportation. She takes her turn as church hostess with great enthusiasm. However, she has problems in reading the biblical lessons in the worship services. Tone solved this problem. She and Lise go forward together. Tone reads after Lise has placed the Bible on the reading stand, and Lise ends the readings with the well-known words: “This is the Word of God”.