

Stephanie Dietrich (SD)

Kari Karsrud Korslien (KKK)

# “We believe (...) in the community of saints”

## Theological reflections on community and Diakonia

### Critical reflection on the life and practice of Diakonia in Christian community



# Introduction

- The Apostles' Creed:
- “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, **the communion of saints**, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the flesh and the life everlasting”  
(latin: **communio sanctorum**, greek: **koinonia**)

# Inclusive communities- open and welcoming communities

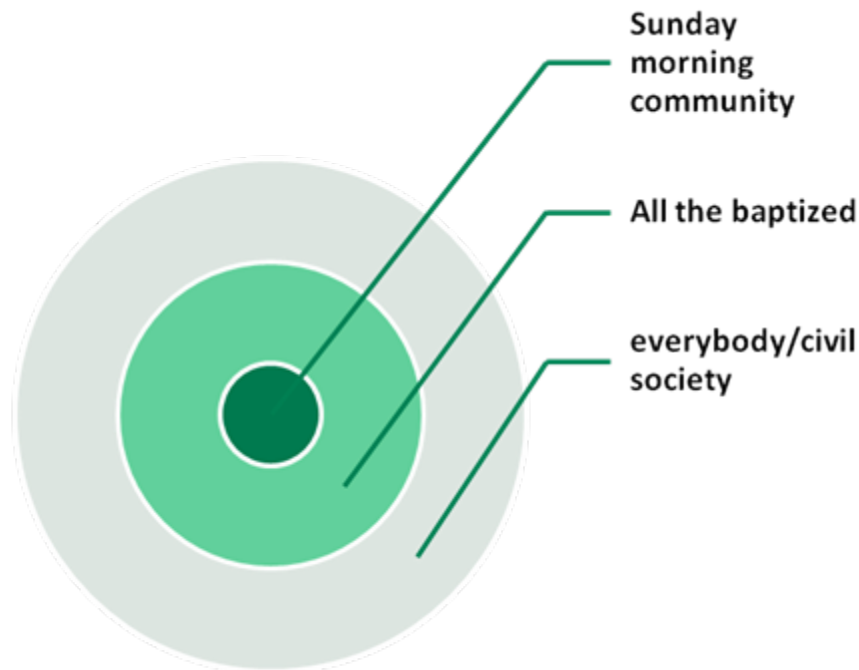
- Self understanding of the Church as “**inclusive community**”

Cf. Church of Norway, Plan for Diakonia (2007):

“Diakonia is the caring ministry of the church. It is the **Gospel in action** and is expressed through loving your neighbour, **creating inclusive communities**, caring for creation and struggling for justice”

# What is “the christian community”?

- *All the baptized?*
- *The congregation gathered on Sunday morning?*
- *Every citizen?*



***Different picture in different contexts!***  
***Norway:***  
***Lutheran majority church- 88% of population baptized members.***  
***Ca. 2-3 % attending worship***

**NB! The understanding of what constitutes community should not start at the centre, but at the borders!**

# Baptism constitutive for being part of the community: **the new life**

- Norwegian debate: core role of baptismal theology
- Underlining: Need for faith education
- *Romans 6*
- *<sup>1</sup> What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? <sup>2</sup> By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? <sup>3</sup> Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may **live a new life.***



# Diaconal approach to community: mutuality

- Need for belonging to community- at the same time tendency not to engage permanently in communities, neither christian communities/congregations nor other forms of community life
- Diakonia helping to create **inclusive communities**
- Problem: who is including, who is being included? Into what?
- Dichotomy between *we* and *them*? (better: open and welcoming communities)
- **Diakonia emphasizing reciprocity and mutuality in relations**



**WE**  
**ARE**  
**THEM**

## “The theology of the white line”

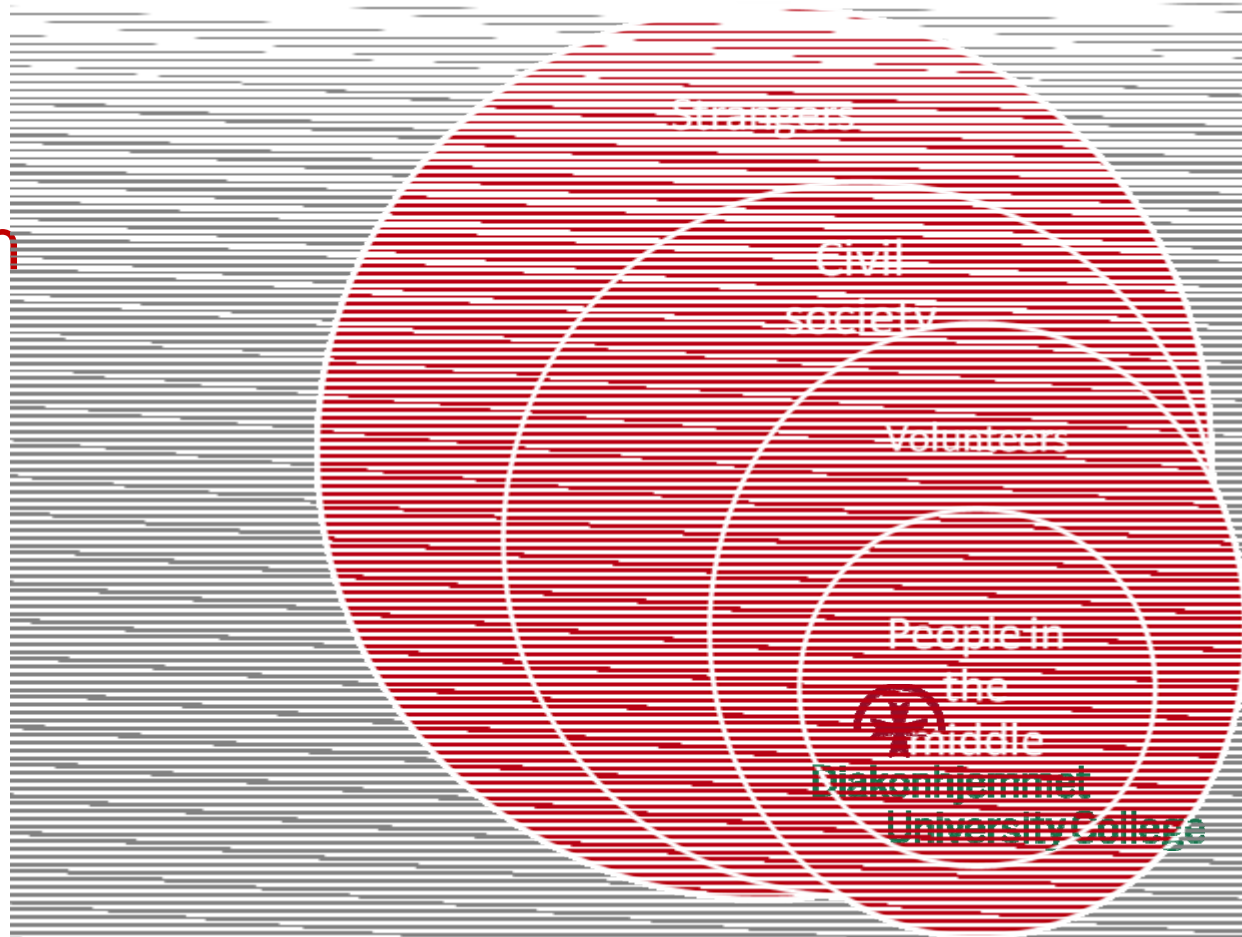
- **Where are the white lines in our communities? Who is inside/outside?**
- **Who defines the “white lines”?**
- **The task of Diakonia: To make the white lines visible and to fight against them; to create communities without white lines; to contribute to create healthy communities**



# The lack of people in congregations?

The well known stranger, the unknown stranger among us and the well known and unknown stranger inside us.

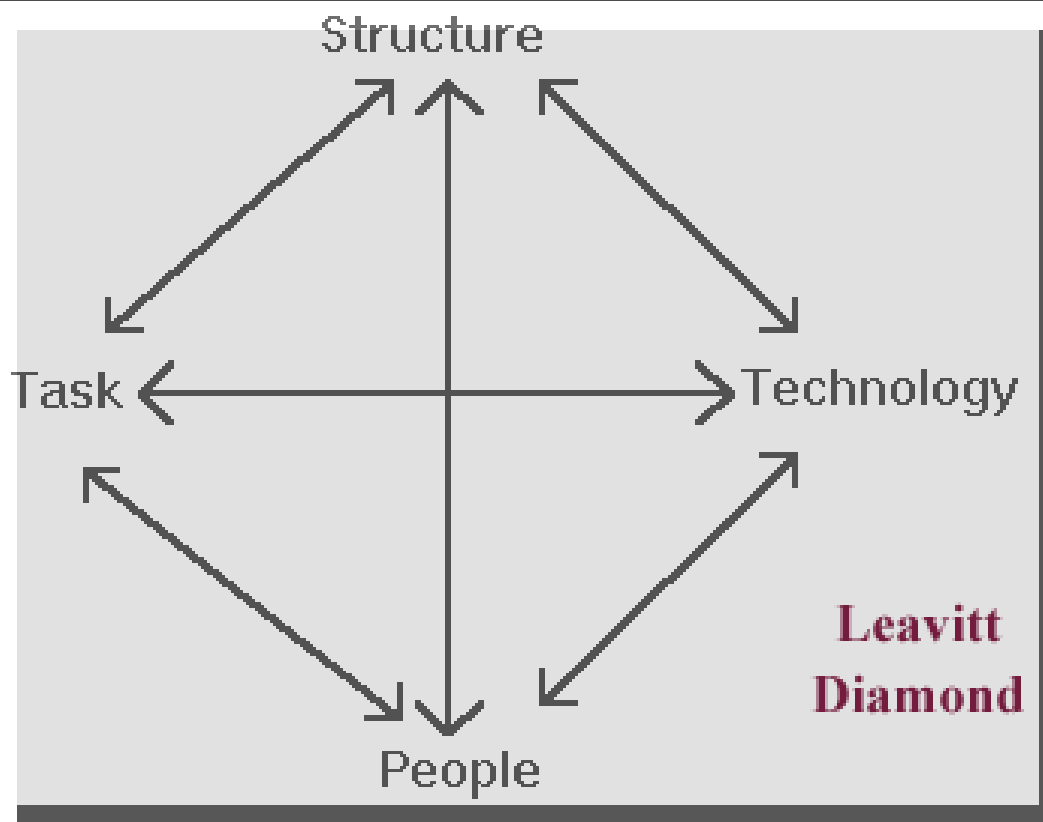
Reflect on  
your congregation  
What is the  
relationship  
between  
the groups?





What has to be changed in your congregation?

# The congregation as a part of the civil society



# Sociological reflections

- Grace Davie
- **Vicarious religion**
- “the notion of religion performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number, who (implicitly at least) not only understand, but approve of what the minority is doing”
- **Believing without belonging**

SD

- dedicated to people

## Ecclesiological perspective on Diakonia and Christian social service

- Community as gift, challenge/mission and vision
- Relation between **what constitutes community and the concrete reality of community**
- Need for individuality *and* sociality; church needs to respect both as part of people's integrity

# “holy” !?!

- A **holy** community: **everybody** is holy.
- Emphasis on priesthood and **deaconhood of all believers** within **Lutheran tradition**
- Holiness is gift from God; **Holy** people gather around the **holy** things (Word and sacrament) to worship the **holy** God in order to be empowered to live a **holy** life in and for the world
- Luther underlines the holiness of **all** Christians. Holiness is expressed in every day life by everyday people. Example: “Gemeiner Kasten”



# The biblical understanding of community

- Human beings are created for community with each other and with God
- Human community reflecting the divine community in God, the trinity (“Being in communion”)
- **God *has* community and *is* community in godself**
- Community in New Testament: 1.Cor. 10,16: *“Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation (**koinonia**) in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation (**koinonia**) in the body of Christ? <sup>17</sup> Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.”*
- NT: Koinonia in the NT includes liturgical *and* diaconal community (cf. Rom 15: 26-27; Acts 2: 43-47)

# Theological aspects of community

- **Dynamic** understanding of God and community
- Community as “**communio viatorum**”, not a static and unchangeable reality
- Community as an *ideal* and as a *reality*: Theology and science of Diakonia has to recognize both
- The ideal church, and the visible and concrete reality of the Church. Need for honesty to avoid triumphalist tendencies
- Lutheran theology:
- Luther uses **congregatio** instead of **communio** in Large Catechism: To be a member of the congregation includes gifts and duties, in the same way as the member of a society has gifts and duties

# Pilegrimage: an example



- dedicated to people

- The deacon cooperates with psychiatric institutions and recruits people to pilgrimage. Both employers and suffering people join the group and go one or more stages of the road. This year the deacon who is the leader of the pilgrimage had 19 pilgrims at the starting point and 50 at the end.
- A suffering man`s fellowship with other people, even strangers and unknown people, may have been an important source to feel recognized and also good enough and valuable for others. This can inspire change, but on the other hand, daily life has in many cases been unchanged when the pilgrim return.
- How could this case be understood as inclusive community?
- What can the congregation and diakonia do to give the pilgrim a hand when he return to daily life?



# The model of see, reflect and act

- How do we become aware of everyday life in diakonia?
- How do we develop our understanding of diakonia in context?





# Community as gift and challenge

- Plan for Diakonia, Church of Norway:
- **“To transform faith into action means to ask time and again, “Who is my neighbour?” (Luke 10:29-37; the Parable of the Good Samaritan). It is also to place oneself at the disposal of others, as a community and as individuals, to ask: “What do you want me to do for you?” (Luke 18:41). It means visiting the marginalised, the sick, the hungry, the thirsty and the strangers (Matthew 25: 35-46).**

# The diaconal community: Gospel in action

- **Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “Christus als Gemeinde existierend”**
- **Christ existing as congregation**
- **There is only *one* world; we cannot divide God’s world from the human world (against dichotomy and unrealistic understanding of congregation)**
  
- **Nobody should be defined into the community (included into the community against one’s will), nor excluded from it**
- **Community must be concrete, real experience- and at the same time uphold its specific identity as *christian* community**

## Group work: proposal

- What is the specific contribution of the *christian* community to our societies when it comes to community building?
- What are the main challenges in your communities/in your congregation when it comes to the “white lines”?
- What can we contribute to create communities without “white lines”?
- What is the task, both from an individual and a communal and institutional point of view?
- How will you describe the culture in your congregation?
- Describe one specific diaconal project on a congregational level and discuss why it is successful or not.