

Multiculturalism, Multicultural work & Diaconia

Multicultural work of Lutheran parishes in Espoo

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ABSTRACT

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Diaconia University of Applied Sciences, Degree Programme in Social Services + Option in Diaconal Social Work, Bachelor of Social Services (UAS) + Qualification for the office of diaconia worker in the Church of Finland.

This elaborative chapter was complementing part of the former research thesis. Diaconal work in the Lutheran churches in Chile and El Salvador. Diaconia University of Applied Sciences, Diak-South, Järvenpää Unit. Degree Programme in Social Services. Degree: Bachelor of Social Services (UAS) 2009. The aim of the chapter was to describe the working phenomena of diaconia and multicultural work in the Lutheran parishes of Espoo.

The chosen theoretical frame provides the concepts to describe the meaning of the working methods used in diaconia and multicultural work in Lutheran parishes. The material was gathered and focused on the multiculturalism and diaconal practices. Documents and official webpages were studied highlighting the Lutheran Church view and position towards multicultural work. The description of multicultural work was based on professional workers' experiences, the pioneer working process done in Espoo Lutheran parishes and the importance gained by it.

The conclusion of multicultural work's methodology was the definition and practice of conviviality as core ideology. The diaconia and multicultural work practices were still developing the new working mode for the future parish work. The Lutheran Church was in changing process as part of the immigration and integration happening in the city of Espoo. The elaborative chapter opened new possibilities of future researches on this developing phenomena.

Key words: multiculturalism, multicultural work, diaconia, church, lutheran, parish, conviviality, Espoo, Finland.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This work was based on the earlier research thesis work “Diaconal work in the Lutheran churches in Chile and El Salvador”. This extra elaborative and descriptive chapter is focusing on the multicultural work and diaconia work at the Lutheran churches of Espoo, its planning, development and vision.

The chapter described the working process of the multicultural and diaconia practices of the current developing work at the Lutheran church of Espoo. Literature is focusing on multiculturalism, multicultural work, traditional diaconia and conviviality.

The interest of this academic work on the multicultural work at the parishes of Espoo was its relevance and difference of the traditional diaconal work among immigrants. The importance of this chapter was the exposure from the perspective of multiculturalism and conviviality to the diaconia in the Lutheran churches and the creation of new working methods.

The aforementioned research was conducted as part of the DSS degree programme thesis in 2009. It can be retrieved in www.theseus.fi as in printed form in Diak University of Applied Sciences.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Multiculturalism

The theoretical framework of this subchapter consists in the concept of multiculturalism and its interpretations as the foundation base theory of this study. Multiculturalism has been a phenomenon in different societies caused by the existence of populations with different cultural backgrounds. This phenomenon has grown through human history as a result of migration movements in the world. Different countries throughout the centuries have faced an evolutionary process of their own cultural identity, integrating along elements of other immigrating cultures becoming a new mixture of cultures.

The world was affected by different happenings such as imperial conquests, traffic of slaves, the First and Second World Wars, immigrant working masses, political persecution, poverty, and family ties among other factors. People immigrated to prosperous countries where the peace and life opportunities were more balanced during different periods of time and people settled down within ethnic communities in the world (Modood, 2007).

According to Modood, the societies experimented with social changes impacting their inhabitants. Immigrant groups were growing and people were more aware of their presence. The cultural habits, religious beliefs, activities, family values, celebrations and educational aspects met brought positive and negative reactions of all different levels in the society. The cultural encounters brought arguments about cultural misconceptions, interpersonal problems, beliefs, racism, discrimination and exclusion within the society. This phenomenon happened in all the continents of the world, in some countries or areas were more highlighted than others.

Multiculturalism is not about difference and identity per se but about those that are embedded in and sustained by culture; that is, a body of beliefs and practices in terms of which a group of people understand themselves and the world and organize their individual and collective lives.(Bhikhu, Parekh, 2006, 2)

2.2 Diaconia

The concept of Diaconia was referred to the earlier research thesis work “Diaconal work in the Lutheran churches in Chile and El Salvador”. The main concept of diaconia was discussed and analysed in the earlier research, although it is important cited the universal concept as such.

Diakonia is central to what it means to be the Church. As a core component of the gospel, Diakonia is not an option but an essential part of discipleship. Diakonia reaches out to all persons, who are created in God’s image. While Diakonia begins as unconditional service to the neighbor in need, it leads inevitably to social change that restores, reforms and transforms (Caceres, David 2009; Prophetic Diakonia: for healing the world, Lutheran World federation 2002.)

The diaconal work is the action of the gospel in serving your neighbour; this simple, but as well integral action, involves the Christian practices from top to bottom and it is the core of what the Christian’s orienteered life is about. The Christian faith, depending on their denomination, created the Caritas or Diaconal work as the “social Christian service” based on the Jesus’ teachings in the Evangelium. The current social Christian service was modified and specialized in our modern era and the problems the world and the people faced in it. Diaconia underwent changes through time as life evolved and people’s needs changed, hence the support and service from the church changed as well.

The Lutheran church in Finland had a diaconal work with a variety of methods, groups and resources based on the need of its clients. Diaconal work had different levels of service through time from being a Christian religious service

to professional expert in the social and spiritual fields. Deacon, as it was given the title to the diaconia employees, had the function as Christian social workers and had recognized academic studies and work places at the Lutheran church in Finland. In different regions of Finland the need is different and similarly is the work of diaconia, for this reason new working methods have been in the development and one of them is Multicultural work.

2.3 Multicultural work

Finland has experienced the phenomena of slowly becoming a “multicultural society” as being part of the European Union and acquiring a more important role for receiving refugees and immigrants into the country. The result of this phenomena brought changes to Finnish society and consequently to the Lutheran church.

Monikulttuurisuus seurakunnassa mahdollistuu siten, että eri puolilta maailmaa alueelle muuttaneet ja kansallisiin vähemmistöihin kuuluvat ihmiset pääsevät osalliseksi Seukuntayhteydestä ja seurakunnan erilaisista toimintamuodoista. (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland 2014.)

According to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, multiculturalism brought the need of what is called “multicultural work” (monikulttuurinen työ) adding this new work methodology to the diaconal and pastoral practices. The immigration has a big impact in the majority of urban areas, especially in the Helsinki capital area and its surroundings. Different factors had influence on the immigration phenomena such as higher education offers, employment, family ties and political conflicts (refugees). Also, the influence of being part of the European Union created facilities for other European citizens to work, study and settle down and make a life in Finland without much complication.

The multicultural work came into practice at the moment Lutheran parishes had contact with people with different backgrounds, immigrants, who may not speak the Finnish language and people without any knowledge about Finland. The Lutheran church faced situations where people with immigrant backgrounds required help, support, and consolation. Deacons and pastors supported immigrants with different problems and also invited them to different religious activities. (Evangelical Lutheran church of Finland 2014.)

The Lutheran Church of Finland provided different materials and tools for the integration of the immigrants and foreigners to the life of the parish. The membership of the Lutheran church was among the main goals for the multicultural work and the possibilities of growing the Christian community with the present and future generations of immigrants in Finland. Baptism, confirmation school for youth and adults, and youth work in general were the primary working areas of the multicultural work in process. Finnish language was taken in consideration inside of the multicultural work processes. Material resources were created and human resources were trained according to people's needs in the communities.

2.4 Conviviality

The earlier described concept was new and suitable for the multicultural work as a whole. Conviviality comes from the Spanish word "Convivencia" and originated from the period when Christians, Jews and Muslims communities lived together until the end of the 15th century in Spain (Seeking Conviviality, Lutheran World Federation, 2013, 19). The interaction and practice of living together is the key for being in harmony with each other. This is close to the concept of multiculturalism and the recognition of interdependency promoting companionship.

The involvement of diakonia in everyday life aims at fullness of life for all! This naturally leads to creating conviviality because it leads to building relationships between different groups and communities. (Seeking Conviviality, Lutheran World Federation, 2013, 17)

According to the document seeking conviviality, conviviality was an exact concept describing the main function of the multicultural work in the society. The tolerance and living together bring the elements for creating activities under a mutual dialog and understanding. The openness of the conviviality that society requires to live in was an example of the working methods for diaconal and multicultural work. It is essential to underline the process of creative relationships which result in new activities, new knowledge and new forms of living together.

Art and practice of living together' conviviality an approach to Diakonia grounded in everyday life. (Seeking Conviviality, Lutheran World Federation, 2013, 18)

As expressed above, the art and practice of living together is a complementing concept about the future of societies and the importance of its individuals. The changes in society needed a balance in the interaction of the people, the creation of a peaceful environment and the well being of everyone. This connects as a whole with diakonia and the multiculturalism concept offering a new integral perspective of positive mentality and spirituality.

3 MULTICULTURAL WORK IN LUTHERAN PARISHES OF ESPOO

Maahanmuuttajatyössä on tarkoituksenmukaista toimia yhteistyössä muiden kirkkojen ja uskonnollisten yhteisöjen, kansalaisjärjestöjen, oppilaitosten sekä kuntien ja valtion viranomaisten kanssa. Yhteistyöverkostoissa seurakuntien ensisijainen tehtävä on maahanmuuttajien henkisen ja hengellisen hyvinvoinnin tukeminen. Verkostoyhteistyö mahdollistaa resurssien jakamisen ja alueen väestöntarpeisiin vastaamisen. (Kirkon keskushallinto 2011.)

The immigrant work is a common effort between different sectors of the society involved in forming positive and functional systems for the immigrants in Finland. Central government, municipalities, social organizations, migration authorities, social services, churches and schools were co-operating with the goal of integration and well being of immigrants in their living environment. The multicultural work arises from different aspects involving the immigration and the encounters of people with foreign cultural backgrounds in Finland. The change of society, tolerance, inclusion and acceptance were key concepts that brought the importance of multicultural work in the Lutheran church.

According to the city of Espoo in their webpage research and statistics, currently the second biggest city in Finland, in the year 2013 had 260,753 inhabitants, of which 8% are people of nationalities other than Finnish. The religious affiliation of January 2013 was 68.1% Lutherans, 1.2% Greek Orthodox, others 2.1% and no religious affiliation 28.6%. The statistics by language spoken in 2013 were Finnish speaking 80.8%, Swedish speaking 7.9% and other languages 11.3%. These official statistics showed the diversity of society changing rapidly in the Helsinki capital area. (Espoo city, Research and Statistics, 2014.)

The Lutheran church has considered changing its role in this process, preparing and creating the new working methods suitable for a multicultural society and its challenges. The Lutheran parishes in Espoo faced the impact of immigration in

their regular activities such as worship services, masses, confirmations, local communities, diaconal service and support among others. The need of creating a new concept of work and the openness of Lutheran church towards immigrants in Espoo was relevant. Pastors, deacons, youth workers and different leaders and volunteers have started specializing on the immigrant/multicultural aspects. The main goal was the service and understanding of immigrants facing changes in Finland.

3.1 Colourful Espoo multicultural activities

The description of this sub-chapter is focused on the multicultural work in the Lutheran churches of Espoo and its innovative Colourful Espoo organization co-operating with local organizations and authorities.

Colourful Espoo was created in the years 2010-2011 as a pilot project of multicultural work in the Lutheran parish of Olari in Espoo. The area of Olari, Matinkylä was highlighted as an “immigrant inhabited area” and took the attention of the local parish starting the development of the multicultural community outreach and finding the proper method. The parish organization created a team with the responsibility of “International and multicultural work” at the parish. The members of the team were the secretary of missionary work Markus Silvola, the pastor Anna Poutiainen and the international/multicultural worker David Caceres. The team planned the pioneering work at the Lutheran parish of Olari with motivation on opening the church to foreigners/immigrants. Although many questions and discussions arise related to Christian faith and to whom this multicultural work is meant to be. The decision came as “low profile” work, meaning not the traditional parish work directly to Christians and members of Lutheran church. This low profile work was the key factor of the multicultural activities and the invitation of everyone who wants to take part of the international and multicultural community.

In practice, Colourful Espoo's name was chosen for being an open and inviting name for the beginning of the activities which were not strictly Christian but multicultural. This step was new in the parish working life and had the support of the Vicar of Olari for the use of resources and time in planning.

Colourful Espoo is a series of multicultural activities for people of international background and Finns. You'll hear live music from different cultures and styles, meet interesting people, listen different organizations presenting themselves and their work and eat meals from different parts of the world. In general, you are creating a community with all of us together! The Colourful Espoo is organized by the Lutheran parish of Olari, its workers and volunteers. Come to meet new friends, everyone is welcome. (Colourful Espoo 2011.)

Since 2011, the Colourful Espoo organizes events monthly, weekend camps, trips, sports and music clubs and open chances for volunteers to organize themselves. The low profile of the religious aspect worked perfectly for bringing the people together and creating the multicultural community in Espoo, the new working method on reaching out to foreigners/immigrants was successful and it was developing since its beginning. The factor of being a Christian Lutheran parish organizing and doing this work was surprising for many people who attended the activities because of the religion background, but this brought positive feedback from passive Christians, non-Christians and others. The focus on the multicultural aspect was the key in opening the church to people according to the results of attendance in the events and popularity gained through internet social media.

Currently, Colourful Espoo functions with a core group of volunteers who communicate in English or Finnish. The biggest groups are Europeans, Asians and Russians. The parishes of Espoo paid attention of Colourful Espoo and its methods. The cooperation with different parishes and organizations started and the recognition of this pioneer work was for its innovation and impact in the parish life. Colourful Espoo opened the discussion of the language barrier at the Lutheran parishes and the importance of immigrants in learning the Finnish language, as well the importance of integrating people slowly to the parish life and society.

3.2 Parish activities

The different Lutheran parishes in Espoo organized their regular activities and multicultural activities as a result of the need. Parishes had children clubs, youth clubs, and young adults, families and elderly people as members; the multicultural activities were included in all these different groups as part of the strategy and the developing of the work itself.

Worship services started in two different languages, bringing the multicultural aspect of the community and integration into the parish. In Olari, the international teamwork started the traditional “Matinmessu” monthly worship service in Matinkylä with the objective of reaching out to more immigrants/foreigners in the Christian parish life. The need for this kind of Christian service is important for the awareness of parish members and the international community living in Espoo. The Lutheran parishes are in need of active members in their churches and the multicultural and international community of Espoo is the target group for this missionary work in Finland. (Espoon seurakunnat 2014.)

The other parishes of Espoo have done an effort at keeping the multicultural work in the different areas where the need was present; unfortunately the lack of resources limited the service and the support. Different workers and parishes faced this reality at the time of planning and implementing the multicultural work. The support for these working methods is anticipated and the churches have been aware of the need. The process of multicultural work continues developing in Espoo.

4. CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this elaborative chapter was the description of the multicultural work practices in the parishes of Espoo. The theoretical framework enabled the analysis of the practice and the process of multicultural work. The growth of immigration in Espoo had an impact in Lutheran church's role, activities and contribution to the integration of immigrants into Finnish society.

The multicultural work "Colourful Espoo" was clearly related to the conviviality concept as a whole. The new working method still developing is the "Conviviality" as part of the diaconal work and multicultural work. The multicultural work done without boundaries, limitations and exclusions for whom church serves and the importance of acting for changing the society for better is Church's contribution. The conviviality was the combination of openness and Christian social service with the objective of bringing positive mentality and spirituality to people.

The Lutheran Church of Espoo changed the traditional church work in practice and promoting the integration of immigrants. This was the beginning of multicultural work and its mission to serve in Espoo still continues growing within the Lutheran Church of Finland. The multiculturalism became part of everyday life activities, friendships and families. The multicultural work was effort for making a better society for immigrants and locals.

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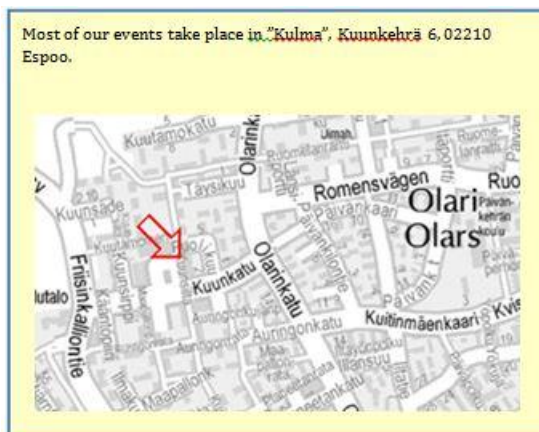
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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Colourful Espoo Flyer 2014



Colourful Espoo



WHAT IS IT?

WHAT IS COLOURFUL ESPOO?

Colourful Espoo is group of varied activities that take place in the capital area, mainly in Espoo. We organize events, daytrips, camps and small group activities.

WHO IS IT FOR?

Everyone is welcome to **Colourful Espoo**, regardless of nationality, age, sex and religion. We speak at least English and Finnish at the events.

WHO IS ORGANIZING COLOURFUL ESPOO?

Colourful Espoo is organized by the **Olari** Lutheran parish with other parishes and cooperators in the capital area. Also, volunteers play a very important role in arranging our events.

WHY?

The aim of **Colourful Espoo** is to create a friendly community where both immigrants and native Finnish people can get to know each other and together make a multicultural and respectful environment to all who take part.

HOW TO JOIN?

We depend upon our many volunteers. Everybody who is willing to join will have something fun to do! Don't hesitate to contact Markus, David or Anna (contact info on the last page). Join us in making even more **Colourful Espoo**!

COOPERATION - HOW?

We cooperate with many different kinds organizations. Also, **Colourful Espoo** is a good way for other organizations to reach people of foreign background and people who are interested in multicultural issues. Contact us if you want to know more. Let's get to know each other!

