

# Church in the Mission of Jesus Christ: Diaconal Action between Congregation, Community, and Social Enterprises<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This article introduces church theories currently being developed in German Protestant theology. The article deals with Lutheran diaconal perspectives on these church theories. Diaconal action becomes visible as a form of ecclesiastical activity in a socially differentiated society. Against the background of profound social transformation processes and an increasing decline of church membership in Protestant churches in Germany, questions of future development of the church will be discussed. Current practical theological theories argue that the Gospel needs to be communicated in plural organisations and diverse professions to reach people in different social situations and milieus. From this point of view diaconal enterprises and diaconal engagement can be seen as a special shape of Church, in which the Gospel of God's redeeming Grace is communicated as charity. Management methods and examples of diaconal education will be shown in this article, which intend to communicate the diaconal dimension of the Gospel in parochial forms but also in social enterprises, which work on behalf of a social welfare state.

## 1. Introduction: Church – contemporary church theories<sup>2</sup>

### 1.1 What is church?

Through the whole history of churches, ecclesiological concepts have transformed and actualised faith. German practical theologians assume that in the Bible the term 'church' is fluid, such as congregations as 'God's wandering people through the world' (Hebrews), or the 'pious band' of the elect (Luke's Gospel), or the 'Body of Christ' (Paul), or the 'disciples sent out to the world'

1 This article is based on an eight-year-long research activity, which included two sociological investigations. The text is mainly based on a lecture with the title 'Communicating the Gospel in Plural Places. Theology, Church Theory and the Sociological Aspects of Contemporary Church Practice', which I held in Melbourne 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> September 2016. The Australian conference, which was organised by John Flett, was a response of the United Church and United Care Conference. The Papers of the ROS-Conference (Recapturing our Soul) are not yet published but will be published in the future.

2 Annette NOLLER, *Diakonat und Kirchenreform. Empirische, historische und ekklesiologische Dimensionen einer diakonischen Kirche*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016; Annette NOLLER, *Diakonat und Kirchenreform. Beiträge der Diakonatsforschung zur Kirchentheorie und -praxis*, *Praktische Theologie* 4/2016, pp. 234–241.

(mission and mission orders).<sup>3</sup> In Protestant theology usually the Augsburg Confession is quoted with article VII (1530) to define church: in this definition, the Church is the ‘... gathering of all believers in which the gospel is preached pure, and the holy sacraments are delivered according to the Gospel.’<sup>4</sup> This conception of the Church is based on sermon and sacraments. From a Lutheran dogmatic perspective church is created by God’s Word, which promises redemption for sinners and comforts believers with God’s Grace. The congregation with its services is the main place where believers come together and practise their faith. Nevertheless, the Reformation was much more than a time of praying and preaching. It was also the beginning of religious education in schools, homes (catechism) and confirmation lessons. Through the centuries, Protestant churches have also spread through diaconal and educational activities.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century a new shape of congregation developed in Germany around congregation halls (Gemeindehaus). Now members of a church engaged themselves not only in listening to the Gospel but also in meeting in groups such as discussions of biblical texts, joining in youth groups, women’s breakfasts, asylum groups, children’s worship, parish parties, excursions, etc. New church professions like parish pedagogues (Gemeindepädagoge) and methods like experiential pedagogy (Erlebnispädagogik) developed. New theories of Church were reflected in German practical theologies. Former dogmatic conceptions of Church were reviewed by sociological methods. Thereby, the Protestant dogmatic view of church concepts was transformed.

In this context surveys and sociological investigations revealed data on the Protestant German Church (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland: EKD) and diakonia for over thirty years that are especially about meanings, personal engagements and church affiliation. These are collected from church members and non-members of the ‘Protestant Church in Germany’ and their local congregations.<sup>5</sup> Sociological theories such as system theories<sup>6</sup> have inspired practical theologians to think about church and diakonia in innovative ways. One of the results is the insight that churches develop in modern and differentiated societies not only in one social form but in a plurality of organisational forms.

These insights were accompanied by a paradigm shift of the definition of church in German Protestant practical theology. Adapting Ernst Langes’ famous formulation, the task of church is in current publications defined as ‘communication of the Gospel.’<sup>7</sup> The paradigm shift leads from preaching in congregations to a wider conception of church as communication of the Gospel ‘in

3 Friedrich WINTZER, *Praktische Theologie*, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1990, pp. 20–28; Eberhard HAUSCHILDT and Uta POHL-PATALONG, *Kirche: Lehrbuch Praktische Theologie 4*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlag, 2013, pp. 19–21; NOLLER, *Diakonat und Kirchenreform...*, pp. 86–89.

4 Original German text: ‘Versammlung aller Glaubigen, bei welchen das Evangelium rein gepredigt und die heiligen Sakraments lauts des Evangelii gereicht werden’ Confessio Augustana 1530, Art. VII, quoted from: *Bekenntnisschriften der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche*, hg.im Gedenkjahr der Augsburgischen Konfession 1930, <sup>10</sup>1986 (BSLK ), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, p. 61; Jan HERMELINK, *Kirchliche Organisation und das Jenseits des Glaubens: Eine praktisch-theologische Theorie der evangelischen Kirche*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlag, 2011, pp. 43–46.

5 EVANGELISCHE KIRCHE IN DEUTSCHLAND (ed.): *Engagement und Indifferenz. Kirchenmitgliedschaft als soziale Praxis*. V. EKD. *Erhebung über Kirchenmitgliedschaft*, Hannover, 2014; Heinrich BEDFORD-STROHM and Volker JUNG (eds.): *Vernetzte Vielfalt. Kirche angesichts von Individualisierung und Säkularisierung. Die fünfte Erhebung über Kirchenmitgliedschaft*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlag, 2015; Jan HERMELINK, *Praktische Theologie der Kirchenmitgliedschaft. Interdisziplinäre Untersuchungen zur Gestaltung kirchlicher Beteiligung (APT 38)*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 2000.

6 Niklas LUHMANN, *Einführung in die Systemtheorie*, ed. Dirk BAECKER, Heidelberg: Carl-Auer-Systeme Verlag, 2002/ <sup>6</sup>2011; Niklas LUHMANN, *Soziale Systeme. Grundriß einer allgemeinen Theorie*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1984/ <sup>1</sup>1987.

7 Ernst LANGE, *Zur Theorie und Praxis der Predigtarbeit*, in: Ernst LANGE, *Predigen als Beruf. Aufsätze zu Homiletik, Liturgie und Pfarramt*, ed. Rüdiger SCHLOZ, München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1982, pp. 9–52, p. 11; cf. Fritz LIENHARD, *Grundlegung der Praktischen Theologie. Ursprung, Gegenstand und Methoden (APrTh 49)*, Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2012, pp. 95–98 and pp. 106–181; Christian GRETHLEIN, *Praktische Theologie*, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2012, pp. 253–326; HAUSCHILDT and POHL-PATALONG, *Kirche...*, pp. 411–415; NOLLER, *Diakonat und Kirchenreform...*, pp. 92–95, 442–445.

plural places'.<sup>8</sup> To bond and gain church members, the Gospel has to be communicated to as many people as possible (Mk 16:15; Mt 28:18-20) in plural professions, institutions, and communicative forms. This paradigm shift has profound consequences for the priorities of church activities, for education of church professionals, and on the allocation of resources for further church development. As a consequence of this paradigm shift, this article will show how congregations *and* educational activities *and* diaconal agencies all together develop church in differentiated forms and engagements. It will be shown how each modus of communicating the Gospel is part of a perspective of a church that develops as a so-called 'hybrid'<sup>9</sup> organisation in 'plural places and differentiated vocations'.<sup>10</sup>

## 1.2 Church theory: theological and sociological descriptions of church

Since 1972 the 'Protestant Church in Germany' (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland: EKD), which is the biggest association of Lutheran and Reformed local churches in the whole of Germany, commissioned representative surveys on church membership. These surveys were based on sociological methods especially with the use of questionnaires and interviews. Members as well as non-members were questioned every ten years about their relation to, engagement with, bonding to, and expectations of belonging to the church.

Let us look at the significant results which inform our question about church and social engagement. From a survey in 2013, about 60% of all inhabitants of Germany are members of the two biggest Christian churches, paying taxes in a permanent membership. These two biggest institutional organised churches are the 'Protestant Church in Germany' (EKD) and the Roman Catholic Church. Each hold about 30% of membership of all inhabitants of Germany. There is a continuing declining membership in this institutional organised shape of Protestant and Catholic churches especially in former socialist areas. Nevertheless, sociological surveys show that the bonding of those who are members of the 'Protestant Church in Germany' (EKD) seems to have been in a constant structure for forty years. Most members feel a deep alliance to their church, while others do not feel very close in belief to the church. One of the key findings of these surveys on membership in the 'Protestant Church in Germany' (EKD) is that although only 10-15% of all church members continue to participate in local congregations and their worship services, nevertheless 73% answer that they exclude 'categorically' ('kategorisch')<sup>11</sup> the possibility of leaving their church as a (tax-paying) member. This figure corresponds to each of the four past surveys commissioned by the EKD. It leads to the insight that church bonding is not structured only by individual engagement to a local parish. Although pastors and parishes are the best known and most representative public persons and institutions in Protestant churches, there are other criteria of bonding and staying as a member in the church as well. This phenomenon is elucidated by other recurrent data over the last five surveys that were commissioned by the 'Protestant Church in Germany' (EKD).<sup>12</sup>

8 NOLLER, *Diakonat und Kirchenreform...*, pp. 84-86, 419-445 pp. 84, 419, et al.

9 Eberhard HAUSCHILDT, Hybrid evangelische Großkirche vor einem Schub an Organisationswerdung. Anmerkungen zum Impulspapier 'Kirche der Freiheit' des Rates der EKD und zur Zukunft der Evangelischen Kirche zwischen Kongregationalisierung, Filialisierung und Regionalisierung, in: *Pastoraltheologie* 1/2007, pp. 56-66, p. 56, the word 'hybrid' was introduced by Hauscholdt; NOLLER, *Diakonat und Kirchenreform...*, pp. 49-86.

10 Original German text: 'Kirche an pluralen Orten in diversen Beauftragungen' (NOLLER, *Diakonat und Kirchenreform...*, pp. 414; 49-86); Uta POHL-PATALONG, *Von der Ortskirche zu kirchlichen Orten. Ein Zukunftsmodell*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004/<sup>2</sup>2006; HAUSCHILDT and POHL-PATALONG, *Kirche...*; Uta POHL-PATALONG and Eberhard HAUSCHILDT (eds.), *Kirche verstehen*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlag, 2016.

11 *Einleitung*, in: EVANGELISCHE KIRCHE IN DEUTSCHLAND (ed.), *Engagement und Indifferenz*, p. 17.

12 NOLLER, *Diakonat und Kirchenreform...*, pp. 49-73.

Another significant figure in this context is the aspect on church expectation as presented in all surveys about diaconal engagement. In a 2012 survey, of which the results were published in 2015, the question was asked: 'How should the church engage herself in the following areas' ('Inwiefern sollte sich die Kirche in folgenden Bereichen engagieren?'<sup>13</sup>). Of the questioned members and non-members, 83% marked as first and second priorities those answers dealing with the church's social engagement. This includes 'the church should help people in need'.<sup>14</sup> Church services and praying followed only in the third and fourth position of priorities. The high importance of diaconal work can be found in each of the previous surveys conducted in the same way. It means that most of the members and non-members expect a corresponding diaconal engagement by their church. They expect that this diaconal offering is made even when they themselves have no need of it.

Let us have another view of the results of the survey which was conducted by the German Protestant Church (EKD). One of the main results reveals that members of the EKD churches are connected to the churches in so-called 'distanced' (*distanzierte Kirchenmitgliedschaft*)<sup>15</sup> ways. Not all of them want to join parishes consistently and continuously. Most members structure their relation to the church through temporary contacts. Also, most members maintain contact with their church in the rites of passage or biographical turning points which are accompanied by occasional services (*Kasualien*). Baptism for babies, confirmation for the youth, weddings, and burials: all are still seen as important spiritual and celebratory events for families and individual biographies. Temporary contacts such as Christmas and Easter services are important as main celebrations of the church year.<sup>16</sup>

Theories about religious socialisation show that for believers in the Christian God, education that takes place in childhood within families, in kindergartens, and in schools is most important. Confirmation lessons as well as adult lessons offered by the church help to deepen belief. Church media and public information about the church are important. All of this information and educational offerings invite participation in religious communication. Therefore, all of these are part of communicating the Gospel. Communicating the Gospel in plural places is necessary to reach members and non-members within their different individual biographies and milieus. Following Protestant practical German theology, this plural type of Gospel communication in diverse 'communication modes'<sup>17</sup> is one of the main tasks of churches in socially differentiated modern societies. It challenges thinking about the church acting and developing in plural places not only in parishes, but also in areas such as those identified with the diaconal, casual, cultural, media, and educational areas.

These insights from different church theories have been collected and discussed as a body of theories that challenge the development of the 'church in plural places' ('Kirche an pluralen Orten')<sup>18</sup>. It was Uta Pohl-Patalong, a professor in practical theology, who first arrived at the reflection that in history and at present, parishes are quite important in the development of the church.

13 Gerhard WEGNER and Anja SCHÄDEL: *Diakonische Potenziale*, in: EVANGELISCHE KIRCHE IN DEUTSCHLAND (ed.), *Engagement und Indifferenz*, pp. 93–95, p. 93, Graphic 1; NOLLER, *Diakonat und Kirchenreform...*, pp. 69–71.

14 Original German text: 'sich um Menschen in sozialen Notlagen kümmern', *ibid.* p. 93.

15 EVANGELISCHE KIRCHE IN DEUTSCHLAND (eds.), *Engagement und Indifferenz*, p. 9; NOLLER, *Diakonat und Kirchenreform...*, pp. 61–71.

16 Michael MEYER-BLANK and Birgit WEYEL, *Studien- und Arbeitsbuch Praktische Theologie*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008, pp. 83–93; NOLLER, *Diakonat und Kirchenreform...*, pp. 75–80.

17 GRETHLEIN, *Praktische Theologie...*, p. 253; original German word: 'Kommunikationsmodi'.

18 NOLLER, *Diakonat und Kirchenreform...*, p. 414.



Nevertheless, Pohl-Patalong assessed that churches – as public institutions in societies – were *never* developed *only* in the shape of congregations.<sup>19</sup> Through the whole history of churches, the Christian faith was spread in plural forms within a wide focus of diaconal and religious education and informational offerings. Eberhard Hauschild, a Protestant German professor in practical theology, found a metaphor for church development in plural places. He titled the multi-perspective phenomena of church as ‘hybrid’.<sup>20</sup> Like modern cars, running on petrol and solar engines, the church has also to develop on the basis of different sources. Churches need flexible engines to run effectively. Eberhard Hauschildt quotes in this context the habilitation thesis of Gerald Kretzschmar, who worked out that ‘... the bonding to the church is a biographical formed product of individuals’ self-interpretation, in which the distance to the institution is the normal case and the organisational integration is the special case’.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, church theorists recommend not only to focus on a parochial shape of churches but also on plural forms.<sup>22</sup>

## 2. In the mission of Christ: diaconal theology and diaconal practice

Besides the sociological theories on church there are also some diaconal and theological theses that inspire the view of the phenomenon called ‘Church’. Diaconal engagement communicates the Gospel in word and in social action. The thesis I will follow is that diakonia is a specific way to communicate the Gospel in the social shape of the church. Let us therefore look first at our question from a theological and especially diaconal view.<sup>23</sup>

### 2.1 Diakonia and the Gospel

The Gospel tells how God’s love is revealed in Jesus Christ. The central theme of Christ’s incarnation is the message of God’s love for his fallible Creation. This love is visible in God’s redemption for all sinners. It is visible in the way that God intends to restore community and participation for His Creation. In Jesus Christ, God becomes human, God shares life with people in spiritual and social need, in illness and poverty. God provides community to those who are poor spiritually and socially. He is involved with those who are religiously and socially stigmatised and marginalised. This diaconal impact of the Gospel can be found in the narratives of Jesus Christ. It can be seen in the theological centre of redemption. In Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection, it is not only the salvation of individuals but it is also a proclamation of salvation for the whole Creation (Rom 8:8-22). Individual justification is embedded in visions of social justice and peace and the renewal of the whole Creation (Rev 21:1-5). In the Bible, Christ’s messiahship is interpreted in the tradition of liberating and comforting grace. It is told within a critical context in relation to domination and exploitation especially in the advocacy tradition of the exodus and prophetic traditions. The Bible’s vision of the ‘kingdom of God’ promises life in brother-sisterhood and solidarity. This is

19 Uta POHL-PATALONG, *Gemeinde in historischer Perspektive*, in: BUBMANN, Peter et al. (eds.), *Gemeindepädagogik*, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2012, pp. 37–60.

20 HAUSCHILD, *Hybrid evangelische ...*, p. 56.

21 HAUSCHILD, *Hybrid evangelische ...*, p. 62 (original German text: ‘... dass Kirchenbindung ein von Individuen biografisch erworbenes Produkt der Selbstdeutung ist, bei dem die Distanz zur Institution der Normalfall, die organisatorische Einbindung der Sonderfall ist.’); Gerald KRETZSCHMAR, *Kirchenbindung. Praktische Theologie der mediatisierten Kommunikation*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007; Gerald KRETZSCHMAR, *Eintritt und Wiedereintritt in die Kirche*, in: *Praktische Theologie* 4/2010, pp. 225–231.

22 NOLLER, *Diakonat und Kirchenreform...*, pp. 84–86, 428–445.

23 Heinz SCHMIDT, *Biblische Grundlagen der Diakonie*, in: Fritz LIENHARD and Heinz SCHMIDT (eds.), *Das Geschenk der Solidarität. Chancen und Herausforderungen der Diakonie in Frankreich und Deutschland* (VDWI 28), Heidelberg, 2006, pp. 112–133; NOLLER, *Diakonat und Kirchenreform...*, pp. 23–32.

why the famous German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that believers have to do both: to pray and to practice justice.<sup>24</sup>

Social engagement is therefore strongly at the centre of the Gospel. It is not something that can be occasionally added or left over. Charity (Nächstenliebe) and advocacy are not a second or third aspect after others such as preaching and praying, but they are in the midst of the Gospel which tells that 'you shall love God and love your neighbour as yourself' (Lk 10:27). All over Christian parishes is the belief and conviction that practising charity and diaconal engagement is a form of imitation of Christ. In the liturgies of early Christianity, the Eucharistic communion was connected with care for ill and poor members. Deacons were advised by their bishops to take donations from agape meals to those who were not able to come. Deacons in the early church were ordered to look after the suffering, the ill, and poor members. The charity of the early church was shared not only with members but also with needy neighbours in pagan surroundings. With this selfless attitude, charity supported the mission and growth of church. Charity pervaded the church's history. It was practised in the monastic tradition and was seen as the responsibility of all Christians, fathers and mothers, citizens, craftsmen, and leaders in the period of the Reformation. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century diaconal foundations were maintained in Germany during the industrial revolution. To educate and support children from socially disadvantaged families, theologians like Johann Hinrich Wichern built so-called 'rescue homes' (Rettungshäuser) and educated deacons (Diakone) to rescue starving and underprivileged children from physical and spiritual distress. Believers like Theodor Fliedner founded diaconal womens' refuges (Mutterhaus) and educated deaconesses (Diakonissen) to support the poor and nurture especially the ill amongst them.<sup>25</sup>

These 19<sup>th</sup> century foundations still exist in Germany. They were founded as tax-free associations (gemeinnützige Vereine) and are so far organised alongside churches as religious institutions. Today Catholic Caritas and Protestant Diakonie are the biggest social associations in Germany with about one million employees (each sharing about 500,000) and an equal number of volunteers. In subsidiary cooperation with state actors and municipal providers, they operate within the German welfare state.<sup>26</sup> They are mainly supported by taxes, contributions (Entgelte) from insurance (especially health-care, Kranken- und Pflegeversicherung), other public resources, and private donations. There is also a large diaconal engagement for international social work by German diaconal agencies such as 'Brot für die Welt' ('Bread for the World'). Besides these large and powerful agencies there are charity activities by congregations and church districts in Germany which are also financed by public resources and public taxes. Part of these diaconal engagements are financed by church taxes and sponsoring. Many church members and non-members engage themselves in diaconal activities. In the last years, some critical discussions have come up in Germany whether these large associations are still able to act along with the tradition of the Christian faith. This question is raised when employees of large diaconal enterprises with about a thousand employees are no longer convinced Christians. Furthermore, it is the system of social welfare legislation which could control and

24 Original German text: 'Unser Christsein wird heute nur in zweierlei bestehen: im Beten und im Tun des Gerechten unter den Menschen. Alles Denken, Reden und Organisieren in den Dingen des Christentums muß neu geboren werden aus diesem Beten und diesem Tun.' Dietrich BONHOEFFER, *Widerstand und Ergebung Briefe und Aufzeichnungen aus der Haft* (Werkausgabe, Bd. 8), eds. Christian GREMMELS, Eberhard BETHGE and Renate BETHGE in Zusammenarbeit mit Ilse TÖDT, München: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998, p. 435f.

25 NOLLER, *Diakonat und Kirchenreform...*, pp. 209–366; Annette NOLLER, *Der Diakonat – historische Entwicklungen und gegenwärtige Herausforderungen*, in: Annette NOLLER et al. (eds.), *Diakonat – theologische und sozialwissenschaftliche Perspektiven auf ein kirchliches Amt*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 2013, pp. 42–84.

26 Thomas OLK, *Freie Träger in der Sozialen Arbeit*, in: Hans-Uwe OTTO and Hans THIERSCH (eds.), *Handbuch Soziale Arbeit. Grundlagen der Sozialarbeit und Sozialpädagogik*, München/ Basel, 2015, pp. 459–471; Ulli ARNOLD, Klaus GRUNWALD and Bernd MAELICKE (eds.), *Lehrbuch Sozialwirtschaft*, Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 2014; Johannes EURICH and Wolfgang MAASER, *Diakonie in der Sozialökonomie. Studien zu Folgen der neuen Wohlfahrtspolitik* (VDWI 47), Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2013.

regulate the content of their work. In German diaconal work, the diaconal frame and content can become invisible to cooperation partners and clients. Lack of money and current struggles for resources in a so-called social market economy have strengthened the discussion about the diaconal profile of actual diaconal work.

## 2.2 Diaconal profile for diaconal enterprises: diaconal corporate culture and mission statements (Leitbilder)

How can we talk about diaconal engagement as a special shape of church if clients and cooperation partners don't recognise the Christian content any longer? How can diaconal engagement be visible as a form of Christian belief? In German diaconal sciences (Diakoniewissenschaft) some solutions have been elaborated on how the diaconal 'proprium' or so-called 'Protestant profile' can be moulded. I want to describe a few of them here.

One proposal is to focus on a diaconal profile by elaborating on a diaconal corporate culture. Today, analysts of global concerns as well as diaconal theorists look seriously at the so-called 'soft factors' of an enterprise, which are present in corporate culture. These include factors such as mission statements, behaviours, attitudes, shared ethics, corporate design, and the working atmosphere. Culture in this context means all instruments and factors that form the specific appearance and atmosphere of an organisation. This culture is shared consciously or unconsciously by the staff of a diaconal enterprise. Some aspects of the enterprise's culture are visible and worked out in papers that reflect their traditions and ordered structure. Beate Hofmann showed that the main roots of a culture are usually invisible.<sup>27</sup> It is shared unconsciously through the behaviour and habits of the staff and the leaders of an organisation. Cultural habits and their values can be reinforced through management strategies such as a culture of remembrance for diaconal founding fathers and mothers and celebratory cultures with spiritual offerings in the form of prayers and devotions. Diaconal culture can be strengthened by a humane working atmosphere that provides possibilities for interaction and the expression of complaints. It can be formed by team discussions about ethics or in counselling sessions especially among health care areas.

A common instrument of diaconal culture in Germany is the elucidation of a mission statement (Leitbild). In these statements, diaconal providers (Anbieter) formulate their main values and strategic aims in key sentences. These sentences are usually elaborated in an integrative process between the leaders and staff of a diaconal enterprise or agency. It involves the entire staff in a process of thinking about the main values and visions of their work. The process assures professionals and volunteers about the aims and values of their working place. The mission statement shows the culture and values of a diaconal enterprise on the homepage. Clients and cooperative partners can thereby access information about the organisational identity and operative aims of a diaconal provider.

In order to develop a diaconal culture in this way, staff members and leaders have to communicate about their diaconal ethics, attitudes, and traditions. One of the most important options in developing diaconal culture, habits, and actions in agencies is to think about the further education of employees, staff, and leaders to deepen their ethical and theological knowledge.<sup>28</sup>

27 Beate HOFMANN, *Diakonische Unternehmenskultur*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008; Cornelia COENEN-MARX, *Die Seele des Sozialen. Diakonische Energien für den sozialen Zusammenhalt*, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 2013; Georg SCHREYÖGG and Daniel GEIGER, *Organisation. Grundlagen moderner Organisationsgestaltung*, Wiesbaden: Springer; Gabler, 2016.

28 NOLLER, *Diakonat und Kirchenreform...*, 168–173; Jochen-Christoph KAISER, *Sozialer Protestantismus als 'kirchliche Zweitstruktur'* [2001], in: Volker HERRMANN and Martin HORSTMANN (eds.), *Studienbuch Diakonik*, Bd. 2: Diakonisches Handeln, diakonisches Profil, diakonische Kirche, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 2006, pp. 259–279, especially p. 278.

### 2.3 Diaconal education, diaconal professionals, and ministries for diaconal hybrid activities in congregations and society

To create plural ways of communicating the Gospel in congregations as well as in diaconal agencies, there is a need for volunteers and professionals who are educated in diaconal practice. Many German agencies provide further education for their employees. A part of this further education deals with Christian beliefs, diaconal traditions, and ethics. Most employees in German diaconal agencies are members of Christian churches. However, an increasing number of them are not. Knowledge applying to Gospel content, church confessions, and diaconal traditions is on the decrease. Therefore, further education, conferences, and lectures are important instruments that bring colleagues into discourse about Protestant attitudes, ethics, and belief.

Aside from these options we have a long and profound tradition of diaconal professionals in Germany known as deaconesses and deacons (Christian social workers and nurses). These professional traditions, which were founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Johann Hinrich Wichern, Theodor Fliedner, and their colleagues, still exist in modern educational forms in Protestant German churches. In the German tradition, these (male and female) deacons are predominantly engaged in social work and health care. They are seen in the Protestant tradition as church professionals who proclaim the Gospel in God's mission, not so much through the Word but mostly through social engagement.

Therefore, it might be promising to think about a specific Christian education for social workers, nurses, and community educators (Gemeindepädagogen) that enables them as social, nursing, and pedagogical professionals to communicate Christian ethics, belief, and attitudes in their work places. They could preach and pray in their working area, if possible, in respect of the institutional background.<sup>29</sup> To think about communicating the Gospel through differentiated church professionals offers perspectives for church development. Diaconical approaches provide possibilities for close contact to everyday life, for communication with people at social risk, and they open doors into socially differentiated milieus. Social engagement can also lead to ethical conflicts and controversies caused by the intervention of social legislation and competitive market economies. In these fractured and controversial forms of action, the diaconal entrepreneurs, who are ruled by state legislation, could still be criticised by other believers. However, the Gospel continues to communicate within the fallibility of Creation through active advocacy in the political areas of society. To give up diaconal engagement in its various forms, in agencies and enterprises, could thereby mean giving up a form of communicating the Gospel in a wide area of society and daily life and giving up responsibilities for social and health needs. Therefore, it seems more promising not to give up the diaconal engagement in social enterprises, but to enable the staff to communicate the Gospel in them and through them.

### 3. Conclusion: diaconal activities in plural places for communicating the Gospel in a widespread range in congregations, communities, and diaconal enterprises

As a result, we can summarise that – according to contemporary German Protestant Church theories<sup>30</sup> – the communication of the Gospel is the main purpose of churches. This communication

29 NOLLER, *Diakonat und Kirchenreform*, pp. 99–132; Annette NOLLER, Ausbildungsfragen und Dienstaufträge, in: BAUR, Werner et al. (eds.), *Diakonat für die Kirche der Zukunft*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 2016, pp. 131–141; Annette NOLLER, Diakonat und theologische Kompetenz, in: Ellen EIDT and Claudia SCHULZ (eds.), *Evaluation im Diakonat. Sozialwissenschaftliche Vermessung diakonischer Praxis*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 2013, pp. 406–431.

30 GRETHLEIN, *Praktische Theologie...*, pp. 253–326; HAUSCHILDT and POHL-PATALONG, *Kirche...*, 411–415; LIENHARD, *Grundlegung der Praktischen Theologie...*, pp. 95–98 and pp. 106–181; NOLLER, *Diakonat und Kirchenreform...*, pp. 92–95, 442–445.



happens in differentiated societies in plural places and plural organisational forms. While the Gospel has to be proclaimed in parishes mainly by pastors, it can also be simultaneously communicated in plural places in the form of education and diaconal action by various ministries, professions, and volunteers. It needs to be communicated through social and public media.

At the centre of all strategies for a church that is spread over plural places, such as congregations, communities, and society, is a theologically inspired view on church. This is based on the reference to God's redeeming grace and the mission to preach hope to the suffering Creation (Rom 8:18-25). This can be done through worship, preaching, and receiving sacraments, as well as in diaconal engagements. The Apostle Paul emphasised that Christ's body has many different limbs (1 Cor 12:12ff.; Rom 12:3ff.). The church when seen – from a diaconal view – as the body of Christ needs eyes, ears, mouths, hands, feet, brain, and head, and so on. All limbs, even those that are despised and marginalised, are important for the functioning of Christ's body. 'We cover with honour those limbs which seem to be less valued' (1 Cor 12:23), Paul said. Paul's ecclesiological conception is orientated on the participation of diverse charisma and talents. It is an inclusive concept as the Apostle assessed: 'if one limb is suffering all limbs are suffering...' (1 Cor 12:26). This embodiment of Christ happens in the whole Creation. It unfolds in a church that acts and communicates in plural places, in diverse organisational forms and diverse social milieus, and thereby in differentiated social systems as a religious and socially responsible actor in modern society.

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