

**"How is a good life for all in Europe possible?  
Diaconal and theological challenges".**



Short Report of an Encounter between colleagues from the diocese of Västerås and the diocese of Linz

15 members of staff and persons in charge of the social engagement of the Swedish diocese of Vasteras from 19 to 21 January were guests of the Cardijn-Verein and industrial mission in Upper Austria. In this field, the Cardijn Verein and the Industrial Mission have been in contact with responsible persons in various European countries, especially in Northern Europe, through the European network of the Verein.

The aim of the recent visit was to exchange experience on the theme, 'how can good life could be possible for everyone in Europe' - under the different labour market and social-state conditions. Above all, we wanted to find answers to the tendency towards the division and exclusion of more and more people from the social processes, such as unemployed people, young people, refugees and asylum seekers. How the churches and the society perceive the needs of "vulnerable and excluded groups" was a theme during excursions into the regions. The topic of how the churches engage with such groups was also a central theme

They visited a total of eight pastoral points of intersection (parishes, meeting places for the topic 'People and Work' unemployment centres and work with homeless people...) and they found the different answers in the various meeting places. A warm heart, a lot of voluntary commitment and a keen eye for the divisions in our society as well as a spontaneous reaction to the needs of the people were found.



Swedish guests visiting "ALOM" in Rohrbach.

**Poverty. Unemployment. Refugees**

The responses and measures for the great social challenge were clearly state-of-the-art in Sweden. The churches were confined to the celebration of worship services before the church became independent of the state a few years ago. Since the large numbers of refugees have also come to the north of Europe. The

situation has changed. The state has withdrawn from parts of its social responsibility. The churches became all the more aware: the poor are the core task of the church.

### Theological Impulse

Within the scope of the meeting there was a theological impulse by Prof. Dr. Hans-Joachim Sander (University of Salzburg). At the well-attended lecture at Kolpinghaus Linz, the theme of "the different places" played an important role: spaces with importance, the diaconal church as social avant-garde in "other places" was the theme. Diakonia begins in places where life becomes fragile. God is present in such "heterotopias." Whoever is exposed to these fractures (looking closely) can create a new space in which a "different life" has a chance, says Sander, the divine and the human being come together in these places.

When Diaconia goes this way, it is in a way "avant-garde" and ahead of the others and when we go as Christians, we are on the way in the tradition of Jesus Christ.

### Visits to regions

In Leonding the visit was about how young people can be heard in the youth centre or how asylum seekers and refugees can "shop" for free in the "Kauf-nix-Laden". They can also deal with difficulties, with alcohol, drugs and other problems. Asylum seekers and refugees operate the store together with volunteers.

In Rohrbach, a group visited ALOM, the "Verein arbeiten und Lernen im Oberen Mühlviertel" ("Working and learning in the Upper Mühlviertel") in order to exchange information on women's and youth work. The guests were very interested in the theatre performance, which Margit Scherrer used in the educational work. Bringing one's own experience to the stage helps to inspire thought-provoking processes.

Visitors were impressed by the memorial and memory work that the parish of St. Georgen/G. has undertaken for years with the municipality for years, remembering the 'Shoah'. Above all, they could experience how an art project highlights a "light design" like Johann Gruber, and how this also reveals the depths to which human behaviour can sink. Asylum seekers explained how they went through the asylum procedure in Austria.

The visitors were surprised by the large number of volunteers, as well as by the diversity of their commitment - from prisons to refugee and social work, to the care of the parish house and work in the community garden. In Sweden they mainly rely on paid workers. A special Austrian quality, which was appreciated by the visitors, is that it is also important to have a cozy meeting place. A bar, for example, would not be found in a Swedish parish house. The meeting included evaluation of the learning and sharing with local colleagues as well as a political/historical tour of Linz city centre.

Thank you! In Swedish: "Tack!"

Anna Wall Strasser/ English Tony Addy