Empowering Diakonia:
A Model for Service and Transformation in the Ecumenical Movement and Local Congregations

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Chapter I. General Introduction

“Empowerment is at the heart of diaconal and justice-seeking activities and can be seen as an overarching characteristic or goal of much of the work of the churches and church-related organizations. Empowerment activities in a Christian framework address the dignity of humanity and reveal to each person and group their inherent gifts and abilities so that they may actively work towards transformation”.¹

Overview

As we will observe in the thesis, the ecumenical movement in general and the World Council of Churches (WCC)² in particular have dealt profusely both with the notions and practices of diakonia and empowerment throughout the years.³ Willem Adolf Visser ’t Hooft⁴ in 1938 made his acceptance of the position conditional upon the readiness of the Council to become active in the field of service, “for there could be no healthy ecumenical fellowship without practical solidarity”, ⁵ he said. In the ecumenical movement, for the past twenty to thirty years, there was even a stronger emphasis on the relationship between diakonia and koinonia.

On this regard, the WCC’s Constitution acknowledges: “The primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches is to call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship … through witness and service to the world … In seeking koinonia in faith and life, witness and service, the churches through the Council will … express their commitment to diakonia in serving human need …”⁶

Diakonia is faith in action; it has been understood traditionally as a sensible service implemented by the churches by word and deeds, inspired by the gospel of Jesus Christ and in response to the needs of people. I will claim that diakonia is an essential part of

¹ WCC, Diakonia: Creating Harmony, Seeking Justice and Practising Compassion, ed. by Diakonia and
² The WCC was founded in 1948 and brings together 345 churches, denominations and church fellowships in more than 110 countries and territories throughout the world, representing over 500 million Christians. It includes most of the world's Orthodox churches, as well as Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Reformed, United and Independent churches. For more information, cf. the WCC website, accessed on 15 September 2014, www.oikoumene.org/en/about-us
³ I have served as a pastor of the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba for more than thirty years and the ecumenical movement for more than forty. I worked as WCC staff in Geneva during 2001-2013 in the areas firstly of mission and evangelism and lately in the Latin America and Caribbean regions, as well as in the program of diakonia globally. Both my geographical identity and the experience at the WCC have facilitated the collecting of information and have been my point of departure for the interpretations and conclusions of this thesis.
⁴ Willem A. Visser ’t Hooft (1900 Haarlem, Netherlands; † 1985, Geneva, Switzerland), was the first WCC general secretary, serving during 1948-1966.
the mission of the church, which is “called and sent to serve.” On this note, Wesley Granberg-Michaelson comments on an important document produced by the WCC after its 8th Assembly held in Harare in 1998 expressing that the “… Common Understanding and Vision” process intended to focus its unique identity on the relationships between its member churches, empowering them in their mutual witness and service. Numerous documents of the ecumenical movement acknowledge, as well, the fact that this diaconal mission is rooted in the Holy Scriptures and therefore many will be quoted throughout the thesis.

In the flow of the church’s understanding of diakonia within the WCC, it has been underlined that it reaches out to all persons, particularly the impoverished, the “least of these” (Mt. 25:40) and oppressed, to comfort them and also to confront the root causes of injustice. Because the missio Dei (God’s mission) is holistic, diakonia is also deeply interrelated with kerygma (proclamation of the Word), didache (teaching), leitourgia (worship) and martyrria (witness), which lead to koinonia (community). Koinonia, beyond the narrow boundaries of the church, is the result and ultimate goal of these functions or activities, which mark the presence of the church in the world. Diakonia, therefore, is not an end in itself, but rather an instrument used by God, together with others, to build an inclusive and just community, an oikos, a household in which the entire creation is included, enjoying the fullness of life intended for all.

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7 In the ecumenical movement we find various definitions of church. In general terms, when I refer to the church or churches in this thesis, I am pointing to “The Church, as a community called into being through baptism and led by the Holy Spirit… As a diaconal community, the church is called to live out its Christian witness both at local and larger as well as personal and corporate levels. This is to be reflected in all the different expressions of being Church: in worship and proclamation, in practices of hospitality and visitation, in public witness and advocacy…” - WCC, “Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in the Twenty First Century. Document Adopted at the World Council of Churches Conference on Theology of Diakonia, 2012,” in Resource Book WCC 10th Assembly, Busan 2013 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), pp. 2-3.
11 David Bosch, points out that it was in the 1952 Willingen Conference of the International Mission Council where the idea (not the exact term) missio Dei surfaced clearly. “Mission was understood as being derived from the very nature of God”, he stressed - David Bosch, Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission, 16th. edn (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), p. 587.
12 This thought is based on the report of the WCC general secretary at the time, Philip A. Potter, to its 6th Assembly, held in Vancouver, Canada, in 1983. He said: “The ecumenical movement is, therefore, the means by which the churches which form the house, the oikos of God, are seeking so to live and witness
The history of the ecumenical movement in the 20th Century shows the multiple resources, particularly financial, that have been invested and allocated for the diaconal work. Nevertheless today, many churches and specialized ministries in the global North no longer have these means to support their partners in the global South. This scenario also affects the way the WCC accompanies the diaconal work, moving from a grant giving organization to one, which creates more spaces to further sustain, facilitate and encourage the empowerment of the churches in their reflections and actions on diakonia. In this research analysis will be made to observe how these processes unfold and evolve.

On the other hand this thesis will be addressing the notions and practices of empowerment, acknowledging it as a dynamic process that enables and inspires, that enhances people’s skills and self-confidence; it is a movement by which persons liberate, take back and develop the power within, in order to unlock their immense potential and to boost their skills, self-confidence and self-assertion. This process aims at promoting collective resistance, challenge and mobilization against dominating power relationships and systemic forces that impoverish and exclude the vulnerable people, towards positive changes in the situations where they are living, by creating justice, inclusiveness and participation towards transformation and righteousness.


In this thesis the concept of global North-South divide, will be used as applied in political science and international relations, which arose after WWII, and was consolidated in what has been referred to as the Brandt Line, conceptualized by the former West German Chancellor Willy Brandt in 1980 as an imaginary line delineating the boundary between the industrial North and the poorer South, a political geography that had mostly eclipsed the divide between East and West, - N. Lees, The Dimensions of the Divide: Theorising Inequality and the Brandt Line in International Relations. Paper Presented at the IPSA-ECPR Joint Conference ’Whatever Happened to North-South’ (São Paulo, Brazil, 2011). With countries such as China and India, which were placed at the South of this divide, Lees argues that despite considerable growth in the economies of both these countries, the concept of a North-South divide still is relevant today when considering both economic inequalities within nation-states and political and military inequalities in international relations. http://terencejackson.net/2012/07/19/is-the-global-north-south-distinction-still-relevant-today-in-view-of-chinas-and-indias-rise-to-prominence-10/

On this regard, just to mention the example of the WCC, the Finance Committee reported to the 9th Assembly, which took place in Porto Alegre, Brazil, on February 2006, that since 1999, the year after the previous Assembly held in Harare, Zimbabwe, its total income had decreased by 30%, from CHF 61 million to a budget of CHF 41 million in 2006. To a great extent, this trend has diminished its grant giving capacity and has continued ever since. Website accessed on 18 May 2014, http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2006-porto-alegre/1-statements-documents-adopted/institutional-issues/report-of-the-finance-committee/report-of-the-finance-committee-as-adopted
One of the basic assumptions of the dissertation is that, from the perspective of the Judeo-Christian tradition, empowerment is encouraged to take place in mutuality, in partnership, in a spirit of power-sharing, a process of reaching out to the other with the love of the triune God and is, therefore intrinsically attached to diakonia, which affirms the power-service in Christ’s way. As it will be explained in further details, nowadays many local churches are being empowered for diaconal work as a result of their ecclesial condition and urged by the needs of the people. Consequently, empowerment and diakonia are integral parts of being a missional church; people are emerging self-empowered for action becoming, beyond being objects of aid and charity, being subjects of their own destiny and of their respective communities.

**The Empowering Diakonia Model**

Considering the relevance of this interconnectedness between diakonia and empowerment, the *Empowering Diakonia* model will be proposed, with a twofold meaning. On the one hand, diakonia is empowering (adjective) both for those serving and who are being served; and it points to the powers, which actually help to empower (verb) diakonia, on the other. Thus, we will be observing how diakonia empowers and at the same time is being empowered, in a recurrent process of mutual development, pursuing transformation towards the building of just and inclusive communities.

In this research a dissection will be made of two major conferences that took place in the 1980s, which were important milestones in this field; namely, the 1986 Global Consultation on Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service, *Diakonia 2000. Called to be Neighbors*, held in Larnaca (Cyprus) and the 1987 El Escorial (Spain) Consultation on *Koinonia*. These themes will be studied as well in the WCC’s 6th Assembly that took place in Vancouver, Canada in 1983, as a point of reference. In a sense, these events and processes represent the beginning of a paradigm shift in the ecumenical movement, for a number of reasons that will be explained in details, in the section of the thesis referring to this. Analysis will also be made of the 2012 Colombo (Sri Lanka) Conference on Theology of Diakonia in the 21st Century—where I also find a paradigm shift—and of the study process before and after, ending with the WCC 10th Assembly held in Busan (October-November 2013).

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15 While serving as a WCC staff executive I was responsible for coordinating this conference in Colombo.
Following this exploration made of global events; various researches have been made among local congregations and projects in Cuba, Colombia, South Africa and Armenia on the interrelationship between the understandings and practices of diakonia and empowerment. This exploration, which can be found in the subsequent chapter, will help to grasp in a more tangible manner the ways by which both take shape and are implemented at the grassroots level, particularly among these faith-based communities.

The ecumenical movement in general and the WCC in particular, as well as the local projects studied, have tackled the issues of empowerment and diakonia in various events, documents and in the daily implementation of the work. Nevertheless, the problem that is being addressed in this thesis is that there is no conceptual framework, i.e. a basic structure underlying a theoretical unit that merges both concepts together. In other words, what is being missed is a coherent reflection or a comprehensive way of thinking that binds together both empowerment and diakonia in a system that can provide a fresh and relevant vision for the diaconal endeavor.

I think that this is a critical issue in order to address creatively the need for the churches to become self-sustainable for diaconal engagement. The solution that is being suggested and the way of addressing resourcefully this requirement consists of designing, constructing and proposing the practical implementation of the Empowering Diakonia model, that synthesizes, combines and binds both concepts together, namely, a new and renewed method, using the steps and tools that are described in the thesis. Arguments are made that this model can become an effective way for diaconal engagement today, since it is being built on a concept and practice of diakonia that are both empowered and empowering.

The Main Research Questions

Therefore, following this flow and logic, my main research question is How to design, construct and implement a model for service and transformation in the ecumenical movement and congregations, which is both innovative and relevant? I am breaking-down this one into various research questions that will be addressed in the thesis in order to guide the investigation. The first one is How has the WCC contributed to the development of the concepts of diakonia and empowerment throughout its history?, which will be tackled in chapter III; and the second one, which will be addressed in chapter IV is What can we learn from local experiences and practices with regard to
diakonia and empowerment? Two final questions will be raised in chapter V, namely, How to respond to the need of bridging gaps between theory and practice, in relation to diakonia and empowerment, by designing the Empowering Diakonia model?; and How to implement this model in the ecumenical movement, but more intentionally in the local congregations? The whole process will be explained in more details under the section Description of the steps and procedures for the six chapters of the thesis, at the end of this general introduction.

**The Theoretical Point of Departure**

The main conceptual platform and methodology of the thesis will be built focusing on the book *A Fundamental Practical Theology. Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*, written by Don S. Browning.\(^\text{16}\) Due to its academic importance, this volume has been widely and extensively used in seminaries and universities, and has received, throughout the years, many interesting comments and reviews from scholars of several parts of the world.

Browning stated in his book that practical theology “is the mutually critical correlation of the interpreted theory and praxis of the Christian faith with the interpreted theory and praxis of the contemporary situation”.\(^\text{17}\) Furthermore for him fundamental practical theology would be the most inclusive understanding of theology, making emphasis on dialogue and conversation, influenced by practical philosophy. It is “a critical reflection on the church’s dialogue with Christian sources and other communities of experience and interpretation with the aim of guiding its action toward social and individual transformation”.\(^\text{18}\) Consequently, the author is providing a very useful conceptual toolbox, which I am working with, as I pursue this research on the theme ‘Empowering Diakonia: A Model for Service and Transformation in the Ecumenical Movement and Local Congregations’.

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\(^\text{16}\) Dr. Don S. Browning (1934-2010), an ordained minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the USA, was a long-time professor and theologian at the University of Chicago Divinity School, who brought *Ivory Tower* theological reflection to earth by bridging the study of religious thought with social sciences, in fields including psychology and law, specifically in the way theological ethics may employ sociology, psychology, and the social scientific study of religion. Therefore Dr. Browning made a substantial contribution to the area of Practical Theology. His ideas, descriptions and strategies were laid out in this book, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, one of his most widely known volumes, which was published for the first time in 1991.

\(^\text{17}\) Browning, p. 47.

\(^\text{18}\) Browning, p. 36.
Commenting on Jürgen Habermas and other scholars, Browning, reflects quite often in his book on the critical theory of validity claims and the idea that fundamental practical theology should support its moral and cognitive claims. He stresses, “I divide the validity claims of a fundamental practical theology into five types of claims … They are designed to enhance critical discourse in conflictive and pluralistic modern societies and are useful as guides to critical dialogues between communities of diverse traditions and faiths … These five validity claims or levels of meaning reflect the five levels or dimensions of all forms of practical thinking or practical reason, whether explicitly religious or avowedly secular”. These dimensions (or levels) will be: visional, obligational, tendency-need, environmental-social, and rule-role. This is how he explains the meaning of these dimensions:

1) The visional level raises metaphysical validity claims.
2) The obligational level raises normative and ethical claims or claims of rightness.
3) The tendency-need level or anthropological dimension raises claims about human nature, its basic human needs, and the kinds of premoral goods required to meet these needs.
4) An environmental-social dimension raises claims that deal primarily with social-systemic and ecological constraints on our tendencies and needs; and
5) The rule-role dimension raises claims about the concrete patterns we should enact in our actual praxis in the everyday world.

Browning recommends the use of these five dimensions both for describing the theory-laden practices found in contemporary situations and for describing and critically assessing the Christian witness. The model can be used as an internal diagnostic tool or to guide description and interpretation at both poles of the revised correlational conversation—the pole of contemporary experience and the pole of the central Christian witness. In the various descriptions developed in his book, he lets the five dimensions loosely guide his description, “because in real life we do not have time to follow any grid in a lock-step fashion, I will try not to do it here”, he argues. As we will see

19 Browning, p. 69.
20 Browning, p. 79.
21 Browning, p. 71.
22 Browning, p. 71.
23 Browning, p. 223.
further down, these five dimensions will prove to be a helpful resource to design the methodology for this thesis in order to pursue the research, dealing with the historical development of diakonia and empowerment, and its contemporary experience, in relation to what he calls “central Christian witness”, as mentioned above.

Again, the concept of practical reason is one of the main topics reaffirmed by Browning in his book. On this regard, he raises questions like this one: “In what way do religious communities exhibit reason or, more specifically, practical reason?” He argues, “Religious communities attract us; we may even participate in them; but we also wonder if they make sense”.24 In other words: “How can communities of memory and tradition also be communities of practical reason and practical wisdom?”25 This way, the author is urging us to both act and think about, or to reflect on our action, in other words, to be “reflective practitioners”.26 “We swing from one extreme to the other because we lack a clear idea of how practical reason and tradition relate to one other”, he notes.27 My intention, therefore, is to borrow the instruments of analysis of this author, by relating the principles of practical reason to the achievements in the ecumenical movement and in local projects, in the fields of empowerment and diakonia and observe how they relate to each other.

In this dissertation a hermeneutic process will be pursued, by reconstructing and analyzing experiences of empowerment and diakonia, observing empirically: records, history, accumulated knowledge, events, documents, etc., intending to discover, forward looking, the “practical reason” of the ecumenical movement in this field. Browning stresses, “By focusing on practical reason, I mean to point to the use of reason to answer these questions, what should we do? and how should we live? The tradition of practical reason or practical wisdom has its origins in Aristotle’s concept of phronesis. Jesus used the word phronesis (‘Phronimo’) in the Sermon of the Mount (Mt. 7:24) to refer to the wise persons28 who listen to the message of Jesus and build their lives upon it”. Browning goes on to say, “the overall dynamic of practical reason is the reconstruction

24 Browning, p. 1.
25 Browning, p. 2.
26 Browning, p. 3.
27 Browning, p. 4.
28 The word used by Jesus in Aramaic was translated into Koine as phronesis (φρονίμω), according to the Gospel of Mathew.
of experience”, as he puts it, “a broad-scale interpretative and reinterpretative process, a hermeneutic process”.

As the dissection, reconstruction and interpretation of the experiences at the various WCC events as well as in the local congregations and projects are being developed, this concept of practical reason, phronesis, ‘wisdom’, is very helpful since it will contribute to establish links between theory and praxis, between words and deeds, so critically needed in the ecumenical movement and the churches, particularly in the area of diakonia. It will disclose one of the very lacunae in a lot of what we will find in the documents: i.e. the intimate connection with empirical, practical examples of the transition from the volitive to the real-life level within local churches.

The Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia
According to Browning, when the five dimensions of practical reason are filled in with content from the Christian narrative, they are a useful tool for diagnosis and assessment. Groups and individuals can be described in terms of where they are at the five levels. Each of the five levels can be looked at historically and developmentally in the life of an individual or group. My purpose is to apply this method to a more specific area of ecclesial action, namely, diakonia, i.e. moving from practical theology in general to diaconal action in particular.

These levels are the methodological foundation that have been chosen to design the Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia, which will further help to construct the Empowering Diakonia model in chapter V. From now on, otherwise indicated, when the Five Dimensions are mentioned in the thesis, reference is being made to these, which include the following: visional, normative, need-oriented, contextual and transformative; and as we will see, they are interdisciplinary and interrelated. In the following section a summary of the meaning of each will be noted, while a longer description will be made in chapter V:

A. Visional – referring to the ability of envisioning future reality so as to consider action with imagination and wisdom. The vision motivates, like the

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29 Browning, pp. 10-11.
30 Browning, p. 281.
B. Normative – deriving from a standard or norm, particularly of behavior and therefore has ethical connotations. It is a commanding point of reference, of taking stances, which provides meaning for the actions of a particular group. It is expressed in human core values, principles, and standards of comportment, in the judgment of what is important in life. In the particular Judeo-Christian tradition, it is rooted in the authority of the biblical text, but at the same time it reflects professional effectiveness. As diaconal engagement is not an option, but part of the essence of being church, it is normative, essential for its mission, and therefore a faith-based empowered and empowering service.

C. Need-oriented – pointing both to material and spiritual necessities of the people requiring some course of action, focusing on the causes (asking not

31 This quote is from Eduardo Galeano (1940-2015), a Uruguayan journalist, writer and novelist, who expressed: “Utopia lies at the horizon. When I draw nearer by two steps, it retreats two steps. If I proceed ten steps forward, it swiftly slips ten steps ahead. No matter how far I go, I can never reach it. What, then, is the purpose of utopia? It is to cause us to advance”. Website accessed on 5 January 2014, http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/33846-utopia-lies-at-the-horizon-when-i-draw-nearer-by
only what the needs are, but also why they are present in the first place) and consequences of such needs. They identify processes of empowerment and require the churches’ social intervention, in order to comfort the people in need, and also to confront prophetically the powers that destroy the web of life. This dimension also considers the needs of the churches in order to address effectively and jointly the necessities of the communities, following the ministry of Jesus Christ, who was moved by the needs of the people. Hence, when his followers see the needs of others, their values are activated, from a perspective of solidarity and effective love.

D. Contextual – considering a theology and a praxis that are contextual, the churches’ diaconal involvement is concerned and empowered in a particular setting, committed to the community, society in general and the environment. The context provides the critical elements to assess more accurately the reality in order to exercise an interdisciplinary engagement, together with other actors and sciences. It helps to focus and fine-tune empowering action that regenerates the lives of the people.

E. Transformative – lifting a diaconal pro-action that aims at the ultimate goal of reaching koinonia through transformation, building inclusive communities of justice and peace that include all people. It is an open-ended creation process, where the church and other agents of change co-laborate with God, in order to incarnate the values of the Kingdom and provide fullness of life for all creation. Hence, from the theological point of view, it is seen as open-ended, since God is responsible for the ultimate outcome or result, providing newness of life. Therefore it is an expression of the church’s faith in God, and consequently it should be dealt with humility and confidence in God’s plan. For this, it is important to pursue the transformation of the churches themselves, experiencing first powerlessness, kenosis, by picking up the cross and following in the footsteps of the Suffering Servant, as an empowering process to reach koinonia.
Finally, it is important to acknowledge as well the fact that Browning’s book is a probe into an innovative way of thinking about theology and its relation to practical action. Browning states that, “the difference between this view of theology as practical and the Barthian view is apparent. “The view I propose goes from practice to theory and back to practice. Or more accurately, it goes from present theory-laden practice to a retrieval of normative theory-laden practice to the creation of more critically held theory-laden practices”, he stresses. Throughout the thesis confirmation and reaffirmation will be made time and again, of this flow applied to the Five Dimensions, which moves from a practical informed vision, taking normative stances to address effectively and prophetically the needs of the people, in their various contexts, towards transformation and justice.

**Description of the Steps and Procedures of the Thesis**

Now, I will proceed to describe the methodology and epistemological approach to be used in the six chapters of the thesis. In synthesis it will consist essentially of addressing each one of the main research questions, in the respective chapters, using the *Five Dimensions*.

Chapter I is this general introduction. Chapter II will cover on the one hand, a brief impression of the theory of diakonia, citing a selected number of biblical texts; and on the other, a more extensive overview of the theory of empowerment, covering the origin, meaning and development of the term, as well as the ways in which it can be grounded biblically and theologically.

In chapter III, focusing on the analysis of the biblical–theological foundation and evaluating the identity of diakonia and empowerment in the ecumenical movement, I will be addressing the first research question, namely, to study how the WCC has contributed to the development of both notions throughout its history, observing to what

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34 Browning, p. x.
35 The author argues that theologians like David Tracy are likely to see theology as systematic reflection on the historical self-understanding of a particular religious tradition – Browning, p. 5. He goes on to say that Karl Barth saw theology as the systematic interpretation of God’s self-disclosure to the Christian church. For Browning “there was no role for human understanding, action, or practice in the construal of God’s self-disclosure. In this view, theology is practical only by applying God’s revelation as directly and purely as possible to the concrete situations of life. Barth moves from revelation to the human, from theory to practice, and from revealed knowledge to application” – Browning, p. 5.
36 Browning, p. 7.
extent have both served as a meaningful hermeneutical key, a theoretical point of reference and a strategic task for diaconal engagement of the WCC’s member churches.

Therefore, even when these *Five Dimensions* will be crosscutting the thesis, they will be more intentionally analyzed and interpreted, dealing with the empirical data collected both in chapter III and in chapter IV. Doing the research among local churches and other related diaconal projects, in this fourth chapter, I will be tackling the research question number two, i.e. to further learn from local experiences and practices with regard to diakonia and empowerment in the current world’s situation of increasing asymmetry and impoverishment. This research, moving from practice to theory will not be representative, but rather exploratory, more in terms of getting indications and useful data, which will be the other main source of material to design the model. This will be explained in details in the introduction of this chapter IV.

Moreover, the data discovered as a result of this research, both at the global stage and the local level has been synthesized as *building blocks* and organized according to the *Five Dimensions* listed above, which is the main raw material to build the *Empowering Diakonia* model.

Chapter V is the core section of the thesis. Its main purpose is to design the *Empowering Diakonia* model, as a new pragmatic and operational method for service and transformation in the ecumenical movement. Hence, it will try to address the dissertation’s third set of research questions, namely, what should a model look like that tries to bridge the gaps between theory and practice, in relation to diakonia and empowerment, and how could that model contribute to facilitate the implementation of diaconal projects in local congregations.

This fifth chapter will cover mainly two areas: firstly, by making a synthesis and analysis of the *building blocks* of the two previous chapters, in order to define both empowerment and diakonia, leading to design the *Empowering Diakonia* model. The final portion of the chapter will include some practical proposals for the application of the model at the local congregations, based mainly on a selection of recommendations made at the WCC global gatherings, analyzed in chapter III.
And finally, the chapter VI will bring some concluding remarks, where very briefly some final answers to the research questions will be shared implicitly and some reflections with regards to the assumptions made initially will be addressed. This will be an opportunity to contextualize this dissertation in a fresh way, forward looking.

The thesis will also include a section of appendices, the bibliography, as well as acknowledgements, an executive summary and a table of contents.
Chapter II. Diakonia and Empowerment – Theoretical Foundation

Introduction
Since this thesis will be dealing in general, more profusely with the practices and theories of diakonia, most of the content of this chapter will be devoted to the understanding of empowerment and linking it ultimately with diakonia, which is a fundamental purpose of this thesis, in order to ultimately design the Empowering Diakonia model.

After this introduction, the current chapter will cover the following sections: (1) a brief introduction to the theory of diakonia, citing a selected number biblical texts; (2) a more extensive introduction to the theory of empowerment, covering its origin, meaning and development of the term, as well as the ways in which it can be grounded bibliically and theologically; and (3) the conclusion.

More detailed references to power, empowerment and diakonia, and their interrelationship in the ecumenical movement will be made throughout this thesis.

A Brief Introduction to the Theory of Diakonia
According to Kjell Nordstokke there are two basic approaches to the study of diakonia. The starting point of the first one is the praxis, namely, the focus on actions or tasks that are named diakonia, performed by churches or related organizations. It is more pragmatic or reality-oriented and therefore “the theory of diakonia basically becomes a critical reflection on such diaconal praxis”, he says. The other one begins by studying the concept of diakonia focusing on its biblical and theological understanding. As Nordstokke underlines, “The mere fact that the diak-words (διακονία, διακονεῖν, διακόνος) are used around 100 times in the New Testament indicates their importance…”37

By dealing with diakonia both in global WCC events as well as in local projects, the main entry point of this thesis will be the first one, i.e. the practical approach.

Nevertheless, since, according to Nordstokke both approaches should be complementary, the second entry point will be cited as well throughout the thesis. This is indeed, the purpose of this first section, namely to introduce some elements, mainly biblical, but *the theory of diakonia*, in broader terms, will accompany the description and analysis of the churches’ social engagement throughout the entire thesis as well.

The concept of diakonia, as the church appreciates it today, has been developed mainly in the past 200 years, but its roots, images, understanding and motivation goes back to the time when the Bible, especially the New Testament, was composed. Hence, even when this is not the main purpose of this dissertation, the current section will start by mentioning some of these texts by way of introduction.

Some scholars, like notably John N. Collins, Kari Latvus, Kjell Nordstokke, among others, have questioned the *classical paradigm* that for centuries has based its understanding of diakonia on the Bible, more specifically the New Testament, which pretty much focuses on a diaconal engagement that is centered on caritative action and consequently, a particular office or ministry within the church, carried-out by what is known as *deacons*. 38 E.g. Latvus argues that, particularly under the influence of Luther and Calvin’s interpretations of the Bible, and furthermore in the 19th century, this has been overstated, concluding that, “the social-caritative responsibility belongs first and foremost to the whole Christian community. On this view, the social-caritative call belongs equally to all ministries of the church as an elementary part of each call”. 39

Even when a lot of work has been done in the ecumenical movement (mainly in the WCC’s Faith and Order area) to highlight the prominent role of the *deacons*, this thesis fully embraces the understanding of diakonia as one implemented by the whole church.

Of course, the churches require *specialized ministries*, both of individuals and entities, to perform more effectively their duties and social engagement, but not as an exclusive function that is performed in a higher esteem or even at the expense of the churches as a whole. Therefore, the biblical texts cited here are mentioned precisely to support the

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churches’ role to address holistically and resourcefully the needs of the people, particularly of the most vulnerable and excluded in society. This is precisely why an important aspect of this dissertation deals with the role of local congregations as diaconal agents to serve in their respective communities. As it was defined at the WCC Colombo 2012 conference on *Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in the Twenty-First Century*:

> The Church, as a community called into being through baptism and led by the Holy Spirit, participates in [God’s] mission through its very being, proclamation and service. Commonly understood as service, diakonia is a way of living out faith and hope as a community, witnessing to what God has done in Jesus Christ.\(^{40}\)

There is a reaffirmation that “every Christian community in every geo-political and socio-economic context is called to be a diaconal community, witnessing to God’s transforming grace through acts of service that hold forth the promise of God’s kingdom…”\(^{41}\) Consequently, as we read the biblical message, the understanding of diakonia that is being projected is intrinsically related to the mission that was given to Jesus by the Father and that the Son entrusted to his disciples. This mission, the proclamation of the kingdom has exactly justice and peace as core components.

The Colombo statement goes on to express, “… empowered by what faith celebrates - diakonia involves actions of care, relief and service, but goes further and addresses the root causes of injustice embedded in oppressive systems and structures. Sustained action for justice is upheld by our faith in and allegiance to the God of life when faced with the death-dealing powers of Empire”.\(^{42}\) Following this quote and many others in the ecumenical movement in general and the WCC in particular, the concept of diakonia that is being opted for in this thesis is one committed to justice. This approach is an evident finding from the analyses of the practice as well, as the empirical material studied reveals both in global events and in local projects. The common denominator discovered in this research is the one of diakonia as promoting justice as well as peace. These two concepts are very frequently found related to this term.


Selected Biblical Texts Dealing with Diakonia

There are many biblical references to support this focus, but perhaps among the most helpful one is Ro. 14:17, where it is sentenced that God’s kingdom is justice, peace and joy in the Spirit and precisely, this joy in the Spirit is empowering. Consequently, this concept of the kingdom, which is crucial in the diakonia of Jesus, contains exactly justice, peace and proclamation of empowering joy in the Spirit.

Thus, the New Testament has been foundational in our understanding of diakonia today. As we will see throughout the thesis, it has a strong Christocentric approach, namely, putting Christ in the center, but not as an end in itself, rather pointing to the kingdom of justice that he proclaimed, lifting those in need. It has therefore, a solid Christo-logical grounding that guides and inspires the churches and the ecumenical movement in general towards the diaconal endeavor, since “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people” (Mt. 4:23).

There are various pivotal texts on diakonia like Mt. 25:44 called The Judgment of the Nations, where it can be found that taking care of “the least of these” by feeding the hungry, giving to drink to the thirsty, welcoming the strangers, providing clothing to the naked, helping the sick or visiting those in prison, is equated with doing it to the “Son of Man”. This logic is driven by the fact that serving the people in need is linked to the service to Christ himself as a condition sine qua non to carry-out God’s mission. Hence, in this endeavor of sharing the good news of God’s kingdom, the so-called Great Commission, of “making disciples of all nations” (Mt. 28:19) can be read as a complement of Mt. 25, meaning that words and deeds go together in the proclamation of the euangelion.

At the same time, this sharing of the good news of God’s kingdom is intimately related, again, to the struggle for justice (Mt. 6:33), as an important focus of diaconal action. Actually, in the Old Testament, perhaps one of the most recurring themes related to our understanding of diakonia is precisely the practice of justice. Particularly the prophetic literature is full of images and references to this, pointing to service, not only to those in

43 Some of these texts are a compilation made from the booklet: Chris Ferguson and Ofelia Ortega, “Ecumenical Diakonia” (WCC Regional Relations Team, 2002). The authors express that the publication “seeks to offer a biblical-theological framework for the work of Ecumenical Diakonia within the WCC”, p. 1. In this section I have reordered the texts, commented briefly on them and included other ones.
need but also addressing its root causes, known in today’s language as *prophetic diakonia*. E.g. the prophet Amos announces a justice that will “come abundantly, rolling down like the waters” (5:24); and Micah urges to do “justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God” (Mic. 6:8).

The same prophet Micah promises peace and security “sitting under the vine and fig tree” (4:4), and very poetically expressed by the Psalmist, “justice and peace will kiss each other” (85:10), interrelating justice with peace. There is also a sense of dignity, abundant grace and joy coming from God (61:7).

So, the example of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ is crucial for the church’s diaconal ministry, since he came to this world as a servant (Mk. 10:45), bringing justice and “fullness of life for all” (Jn. 10:10). Anointed by the Spirit he brought the “good news to the poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed, and proclaimed the year of the Lord’s favor” (Lk. 4:18-19). The love of God for the world was so great that God gave his only Son for eternal life for all believers (Jn. 3:16) and this promise has diaconal consequences for his disciples, since as he laid down his life for them, they ought to lay down their lives for one another (1Jn. 3:16).

Consequently, there are texts in the New Testament, other than the Gospels, that denote diaconal action as well, e.g. there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services (διακονιῶν, ministries), but the same Lord (1Co. 12:4-6); by God’s mercy the followers of Jesus Christ have a jubilant ministry (2Co. 4); working to heal the sick and restore people to right relations (Ac. 3:1-10); not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed (Ro. 12:2); by self-emptying love (Php. 2:1-11); realized by the whole church (1Pe. 4:10) and seeking to make all things new (Re. 21:5; Is. 42:19).

This diaconal mission was already installed in the early church, meaning in those early times, by “waiting tables”, where the apostles appointed persons with the special task to take care of the needs of the poor and vulnerable, including the daily distribution of bread to widows in Jerusalem’s Christian Community (Ac. 6:2-6). As time goes on,
the diaconal role is broadened to include many forms of direct service, and it takes on an importance of the order of prophet or teacher (cf. Ro. 12:7). The diaconal ministry of the churches has grown and developed further, throughout the centuries, as an essential aspect of Christian life and discipleship, as a core component of the missio Dei and the kingdom itself,\textsuperscript{45} as pointed out above.

In other words, this is what I will be seeking when I observe the texts and documents both globally and locally, namely, in what way is this coming of the kingdom with justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit being understood in the praxis. So then when I am working for transformation I am seeking these visions of the kingdom, a full koinonia, i.e. a just community where all are included. This holds together both the practical and theoretical approaches mentioned earlier, which is the main focus of this thesis.

\textbf{Introduction to the Theory of Empowerment}

There are various understandings and different practices of empowerment. In general terms, it is conceived in this thesis as the process by which people in situations of disadvantage and seemingly powerlessness, enhance their skills, confidence, vision, agency and leadership, both at a personal level and in the society as a whole, to promote positive changes in the situations where they are living. It is a multi-level concept that is presented as a dynamic process, involving cognitive, effective and behavioral aspects.

Consequently, the understanding of empowerment, as it will be unpacked in this thesis, specifically applied to diaconal action, provides the necessary tools and instruments for human beings to participate actively and to exercise as subjects, their rights and duties in a responsible and informed manner.

\textbf{Empowerment. Origin, Meaning and Development of the Term}

In this section, reference will be made basically to three moments that I have identified in the development of the study on empowerment:

work, in the struggle for civil rights in the black population, among women and other oppressed minorities, as well as groups that have struggled for survival in situations of dependency. In this case, professionals and researchers, focusing primarily on how they should work, developed initially this notion of empowerment.

A second moment identified is when, e.g. we come to Latin America, where the main concern is not so much professionalism, but rather how do we see, discover and affirm the power of the poor in the history, as the theologian of liberation Gustavo Gutiérrez highlighted. It clearly sets a contrast and an epistemological turn in relation to the previous moment, marked, among other reasons by the change of contexts, i.e. between the global North and the South, where the latter has contributed substantially to this debate, from this other perspective.

A particular expression of this is the philosophy of empowerment that has been considered rooted in the popular education approach, developed from the work in the 1960s of Paulo Freire, who saw critical literacy as a key component of empowerment. It was also closely linked to the so-called participatory approaches present in the field of development since the 1970s and later became better known in the 1980s, fundamentally in relation to women’s rights.

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47 Perhaps to illustrate this further, Kjell Nordstokke refers to an article written by Johannes Nissen in 2012 (Towards a transformation of power: New Testament perspectives on diaconia and empowerment, in: Diaconia, vol 3, 26-43). Nissen is concerned with the first moment asking, Can people really be empowered if they are empowered from above? He is concerned with the professionals in reference to diakonia. On the other hand, the answer from Nordstokke is that the problem in Latin America and in the South is not the role of the professionals, but rather the role of “the ordinary people”, those in the margins and from below – Nordstokke, ‘Empowerment in the Perspective of Ecumenical Diakonia.’


49 Paulo Freire, born in 1921 in Recife, Brazil, was an educator and philosopher, who gradually evolved a method of work with which the word conscientization has been associated. He was imprisoned following the 1964 coup d’état, next appeared working in exile in Chile and then went to the WCC in Geneva where, in 1970, he took up a post as special consultant in the Office of Education. Freire was able to return to Brazil by 1979, where he continued working on education. He died in 1997 in São Paulo, Brazil. Website accessed on 8 February 2015, http://www.freire.org/paulo-freire/paulo-freire-biography.

50 His classic book was: Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (London: Harmondsworth, 1972), but he deals for the first time with the concept of empowerment in the book ‘Fear and Daring’ published together with Ira Shor in 1986.

51 In their article ‘Empoderamiento’, the authors point out that “empowerment has reached its highest development in gender-related studies. It has been a process of change in which women are increasing their access to power and which results in the transformation of unequal gender relations, as women acquire and exercise their rights to meet their practical and strategic interests”. From this perspective, empowerment of women, and the same could be said for other sectors, involves: (a) the awareness of their subordination and increased confidence in themselves (power-within); their independent or
The following quote from Pedrinho Guareschi helps us understand Freire’s concept of this term. He points out, “Empowerment for Freire is a process that emerges from social interactions by which, we, as human beings, are constructed, to the extent that we, critically, problematize a reality, become aware (conscientizando), discovering gaps and ideologies; such conscientization that grants us ‘power’ to transform the social relations of domination, a power which leads to liberty and liberation”.

In other words, Freire’s understanding of empowerment can help to observe critically some seemingly misconceptions of the term, at least in three aspects, which I find helpful for the development of this thesis, particularly when it implicitly relates to diakonia. Firstly, for him, empowerment is not about giving power to a powerless person from a paternalistic and individualist point of view, rather it consists of helping to activate the potential creativity of the persons; secondly, and related to the first, empowerment is a social and political act, in relation to the other, to the community; and finally, it binds together conscience with the notion of freedom, enabling dignity and capacity to transform situations of injustice; since for him, it is impossible to be free without going through a process of conscientization.

The concept of empowerment derives from the verb empower. This verb has been defined as to “give (someone) the authority or power to do something” or to “make (someone) stronger and more confident, especially in controlling their life and claiming their rights”. From the point of view of Freire, both notions cited here can be interpreted in a rather paternalistic, vertical, ‘top-down’ way, even the second one which, in spite of the fact that its final purpose is to achieve the participation of people to control their lives, it seemingly assumes that this power comes from someone else who has the authority to do so.

Nevertheless, Freire’s perspective is not about social work, rather it is social pedagogics. So the danger or a risk with his approach is that it might be limited to

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53 This is a commented summary of the quote of Freire and of Guareschi’s article on him, cited above.

theory and not to practice, to knowledge and not to action, and this is precisely where
the Theology of Liberation is also bringing in a language of praxis, which is the
liberating praxis, even though this language does not refer explicitly to diakonia.

Hence, in the first moment, about empowerment as social work, there is no reference to
diakonia, in the second, the perspective is from below, from the power of the poor, but
there is still no open allusion to diakonia. Then, there is a third moment, which is the
position assumed by this thesis, bringing in and affirming the perspective, the
methodology and the insights of the Theology of Liberation, but understanding this as
ecclesial and diaconal praxis.

There are here many examples that can be quoted. Just to mention one, taken from the
book *The Gospel of Power-Service*, written by Clodovis Boff, there is an interesting
approach on how the understanding of power relates to service (diakonia). He notes
that, “For Jesus, the power is, in its concrete reality, lost. It needs to be evangelized;
converted and saved … the proposal of Jesus is the metanoia of power. It has to be
rescued. It must be converted from power-domination into power-service. In one word,
the power needs to be transformed, revolutionized internally, and this not only within
the Church, but also at the level of society. All power (religious and political) should
become service. It really is the ‘revolution of power’”.

As I understand Boff’s logic, a so called *empowerment* that is misused or manipulated
to control and to dictate—both by the church and the society—must be transformed into
an authentic empowerment to serve. The latter provides the necessary *dynamis* to
transform systems that precisely abuse power, generating injustices and at the same time
needs among the people that further require the social intervention of the church. Martin
Luther King, Jr. defined power as “the ability to achieve a purpose. Whether or not it is
good or bad depends on the purpose”. Again, applying this logic to the notion of
empowerment in the line of this thesis, the purpose of empowerment is called to be one
that builds capacity to serve.

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55 Clodovis Boff, *El Evangelio Del Poder-Servicio* (Bogotá, Colombia: Confederación Latinoamericana
56 Grassroots Policy Project. Website accessed on 2 September 2014,
www.grassrootspolicy.org/power.htm
There is a more recent example that illustrates this third moment, which is the 2012 WCC Seminar on Empowerment for Diakonia in Central America and the Spanish-Speaking Caribbean, held in Matanzas, Cuba. In the final statement the participants noted:

Diakonia must be based on ethical, social, political, environmental, legal and inter-cultural values, be faithful to the churches’ overall mission, and be inclusive in its activities, bringing together young people, children and women. Also diaconal service must promote processes enabling individuals to be capable of changing their situation and of promoting the principles of an economy that is inclusive, in the form of cooperatives and associations.57

Reading this quote, I can highlight the following observations in relation to this modality, namely, (1) first and foremost, this diaconal endeavor is performed by the churches as part of God’s mission; (2) it is interdisciplinary, involving various sciences and partners; (3) that it is inclusive, embracing all sectors of the community, not only of the congregations; and finally (4) it is empowering, enabling participation and agency for change, since, as the Statement goes on to say: “Diakonia is not conducted from a stance of absolute power, but out of power devoted to the common good. ‘Serving’, as an act of convenience or of absolute power, is contrasted with the meaning of service in the biblical sense”.58

Therefore, as it will be noted in various parts of this thesis, empowerment can have both positive and negative meanings and connotations. A good example of the former could be women’s empowerment, as mentioned above. UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund) argues that if women were empowered to do more and to be themselves more, the possibility for economic growth (and I would add quality of life in their community) becomes apparent.59 On the other hand, an illustration of the latter might be the case of the past Apartheid regime in South Africa where there was a policy of “empowerment”, by providing special opportunities in employment, training, etc. for Black people and others disadvantaged.60 We may wonder to what extent a person or community can actually be empowered in a situation of abuse of power, in a context of oppression, discrimination and exclusion like the one that existed at that time, in this African

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60 Collins English Dictionary, 2009
country. This is an illustration of how empowerment can be mishandled, misused or even abused.61

The process of empowerment enables individuals/groups to fully access personal/collective power, authority and influence, and to employ that strength when engaging with other people, institutions or society. In other words, as K. Blanchard puts it, “empowerment is not giving people power; people already have plenty of power, in the wealth of their knowledge and motivation, to do their jobs magnificently. We define empowerment as letting this power out”, he says.62 It encourages people to gain the skills and knowledge that will allow them to overcome obstacles in life or work environment and ultimately, help them develop within themselves or in the society, it helps to ‘opening-up’ the supporting strength, knowledge and wisdom, helping to strengthen individuals, organizations and communities to ‘get a grip on their own situation’, as expressed before.

Consequently, some persons or institutions may attempt to empower, imposing it, again, from a paternalistic, top-down point of view, saying: “I have the power which I give to you, since you are, poor, powerless or voiceless”. They may also assume, perhaps wrongly, that those considered by them as powerless or objects of their empowerment want or need this power of the powerful, who are expecting to grant or to give power, e.g. handing-out money. Many good-intended and compassionate persons might fall in the temptation to try to empower others this way. As it will be acknowledged in the dissertation, this attitude can be compared with a welfare conception of diakonia, which sees the people in need as objects of their aid.

Contrary to this position, the understanding that is being defended here is to facilitate a process by which the people in need can rise as subjects of their own lives and of their

61 Hence, empowerment is an attractive word and concept, and therefore can easily be manipulated. Martin Robra notes, “The term, coming from the churches and especially from community organizing groups, is coopted by the World Bank (WB) in the early 1990s, replacing the language of self-reliance and participation, self-empowerment, pretending that this was about empowerment. Therefore it is important to rescue and to safeguard the original meaning of empowerment—as a reference to the struggle against the dominating powers, in the midst of existing power asymmetries—since it is very manipulated, it is a beautiful discourse, many may say: ‘I am empowering you, furthermore, I am investing in your empowerment’” - Conversations with Martin Robra on 2 December 2013 in relation to this thesis. Martin Robra, a German pastor and scholar has served for many years as staff executive of the WCC mainly in the areas of justice, peace and integrity of creation, as well as in church relations. He has written various articles on ecumenical diakonia. During the time when this thesis was drafted he was the special advisor to the general secretary.

respective communities. As Zimmerman puts it, empowerment is “a process of strengthening at which individuals, organizations and communities get a grip on their own situation and environment and this through obtaining control, critical consciousness and the stimulation of participation”. Therefore, a key word here would be again participation, i.e. the facilitation of a process by which people are being enabled to decide on their own future and to act accordingly.

As can be seen, empowerment, consequently, has primarily both a personal and a collective dimension. The personal, even when it points to a process by which excluded people raise their levels of confidence, self-esteem and ability to meet their own needs, it nevertheless ought to be for the benefit of the community or the society. On the other hand, the collective dimension of empowerment is based on the fact that vulnerable people are better able to participate and defend their rights when they unite with common goals, for example, women who come together to demand properties, farmers occupying unproductive lands, or neighbors who struggling united, claim water supplies in their neighborhood.

In short, since the notion of empowerment is so ambivalent, carrying not only different but even antagonistic understandings, this is why questions like: empowerment of what, empowerment for whom and by whom, empowerment for what?, are important ones that will be addressed in this chapter and more broadly in the thesis.

**Biblical and Theological Grounding of Power and Empowerment**

As I have been arguing throughout this chapter, the issue of empowerment is crucial for the churches as well, particularly in relation to diakonia. On this regard, Herman Noordegraaf stresses, “The objective [of empowerment] is the expansion of knowledge and skills so that people can deploy activities on their own, or are better able to handle unsolvable situations, such as a handicap, systemic unemployment or loss of a partner. Essential to this is the development and reinforcement of self-respect and confirming the other person in their dignity. Empowerment is an idea that plays an important role

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worldwide in the quest of churches that strive against poverty”.64

This involvement of the churches has been facilitated by the fact, among other factors, that both the notions of power and empowerment have been present in the Bible and in the theological reflection. On this regard, the Lutheran World Federation underlines in one of its many publications, “As a theological concept, empowerment refers to the biblical understanding of creation that every human being is created in the image of God, with capacities and abilities, independent of their apparent social situation”.65 Therefore, empowerment goes back to the biblical notion of the *imago Dei*. In Ge. 1:26, we read: “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness …’” i.e. the fact that each and every human being is created in God’s image therefore is empowered with abilities and gifts to do God’s will.

Again, in order to understand better the notion of empowerment, it is pertinent to go back to the term *power*, since, as Lawrence Nwankwo has pointed out, “empowerment is an inflexion of the root concept *power*. Christian tradition has been ambivalent towards the concept of power. This ranges from outright condemnation to the identification of the Holy Spirit as the power of God”.66 This will become evident in this section, but also throughout the thesis as analysis will be made on issues like sharing of resources, the participation of women in the churches’ decision-making processes, the implementation of social projects locally, among others.

As Hans-Ruedi Weber affirms, “Although a wide range of issues and in vastly different situations have many important facets, it seems that dealing with all of them, the matter of power is ultimately the question to be faced. If Christians want to discover what it means to covenant together for justice, peace and integrity of creation, biblical reflection on how God’s power relate to human and cosmic powers of our time must be at the very heart of it … Behind nature’s power and the play of power within history, human beings have at all times been aware of the power of divine and demonic

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64 Herman Noordegraaf, “For Whom Would We Raise Our Hat? Considerations of Diaconate” (Utrecht, Netherlands, 2008), p. 12.
forces”.

This is one of the reasons why the churches have dealt with the issue of power so profusely and, as it will be highlighted throughout the thesis, it has been a crucial issue as it relates both to diakonia and empowerment.

Consequently, the notion of power has been part of the Christian tradition since the beginning. It has been present in the life of the churches, both to dominate and to serve, and, therefore, has been addressed by different theologies and Christian spiritualities. An example that can be mentioned from the ecumenical movement is from the WCC publication *Nurturing Peace. Theological Reflections on Overcoming Violence* edited by Deenabandhu Manchala.

In this book an invitation can be found of “Recognizing the Trinity as the power of God-in-community” with these words: “Trinity as the power shared within the Godhead, in the moving, pulsating, self-encircling of the divine, permeating the world with God’s purpose, is a profound model of mutuality and interdependence as well as diversity …” Thus, taking into consideration the importance of the Trinity as a way of understanding better the notions of power and empowerment in the Christian tradition, this section will focus on its logic; by summarizing and commenting on this volume, as well as citing other sources and biblical references related to it.

**God as the Source of Power**

God as the source of power is the Creator who not only loves and cares for the world but who is the very power that energizes the whole complex web of life. But God’s energy has a purpose, i.e. firing the world with the passion for justice, “the power that both works for justice and makes it”. This is God’s shalom, the well-being that is God’s very purpose for the world, and a well-being that has justice at its heart. Accordingly the church is empowered by God to project, proclaim and to live God’s love, to continue co-creating with God for justice in order to protect the web of life.

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68 Deenabandhu Manchala comes from Andhra Pradesh, India, and is a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in India. Worked as WCC staff in Geneva during 2000-2014 in the Justice, Peace and Creation team and coordinating the Decade to Overcome Violence, among other tasks.
69 WCC, *Nurturing Peace: Theological Reflections on Overcoming Violence. World Council of Churches. Chapter 2 - Abuses of Power and the Church’s responsibility*, Section 3 - Theological resources for the just and responsible use of power, p. 52.
There are numerous biblical references to God’s power and as a source of empowerment. Among many others, Kjell Nordstokke highlights two in 1Co. 12 in verses 6 and 11 respectively, noting, “The Greek verb *energein* is here translated *empower; energize* could evidently also have been used as long as the main point is clear: the energy to realize the kind of activities the Apostle Paul here refers to (Greek: *energema*) comes from God and is provided by the intervention of God’s Spirit”.\(^{71}\)

As it will be noted time and again, this strength that comes from God, is a vital and *renewable energy* that activates the persons’ various gifts for varieties of services through the same Spirit and the same Lord. Interestingly enough this is again one of those texts that combines diakonia (v. 4), as mentioned above, with empowerment (vv. 6 and 11).

**Jesus as the Presence of God’s Power**

If God as creator provides resourceful energy, then “Jesus is the revelation of the fullness of God’s power. So the mystery of incarnation is to be seen as a continuation of God’s expression of God’s intentions of power”.\(^{72}\) In Jesus, we encounter God as self-emptying, as a suffering servant (2Co. 12:9; Eph. 1:3-14; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-20). The life of Jesus manifests the servant nature of power and which needs to influence the church’s understanding of its being and purpose in the world. Jesus, the friend and dinner companion of the marginalized and the rejected, radicalizes the world’s view of the powerful and their associates. “Jesus’ greatest manifestation of service and power” was demonstrated in his death on the cross, which “became the exclusive center of the Gospel that Paul called ‘the power of God’ (1Co. 2:1-5)”.\(^{73}\) Several indications and interpretations will be made in this thesis on the relationship between service and the cross of Jesus.

Analyzing the model of power exercised by Jesus as it relates to diakonia, Walter Altmann says: “… there is a significant difference between exercising power over people and exercising it for people. Jesus exercised his Messianic authority (Greek: *exousia*) as power to lift up the sick and downtrodden, to include the sick and excluded.

\(^{71}\) Nordstokke, ‘Empowerment in the Perspective of Ecumenical Diakonia’, p. 194  
in society and in the communion of his reign, and even to empower them to participate
in his mission to the world. This authority for people, in defense of their dignity and for
transformation, reconciliation, and empowerment is the sort of authority that Jesus
commended the apostles to use in their leadership activities (Mk. 10:42-45; Jn. 13:15;
20:21)…”

Indeed, focusing on this classical text mentioned by Altmann, of Mk. 10:35-45, Jesus
calls his disciples to exercise power according to his model of leadership, i.e. “coming
not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many”, rather than
exercising power according to the model of “powerful” leaders. In other classical texts
the disciples are empowered to be Jesus’ witnesses worldwide and to become agents of
change and transformation (i.e. The Judgment of the Nations—Mt. 25:31-46; The
Parable of the Good Samaritan—Lk. 10:25-37 and Jesus Washes the Disciple’s Feet—

In other words, through the incarnation in Jesus, God’s power becomes present and
tangible in the world. Following his example, likewise, the church is called to exercise a
kenotic power, as a suffering servant, in a world where exclusive, absolute and
oppressive powers are being exercised over others, of which the church itself does not
escape from, both as victim and perpetuator. There is a huge difference between being
empowered and being powerful, hence the church is urged to follow the paradigm of the
crucified Jesus as it exercises power to serve the world not only for the people, but also
with the people, for which empowerment is essential to enable its participation for
transformation.

There are other interesting texts as well, perhaps considered non-classical or not used so
frequently, related to empowerment which involve Jesus, that can be useful as they
complement the others cited above, like the following: Mt. 3:13-4:11, where he is
empowered by his baptism, to overcome temptations and to serve God and the people;
Mt. 4:18-22 and Mk. 3:13-19 calling the first disciples and granting them power to

74 Walter Altmann, “Lecture - The Need for Diakonia and Its Role in the Churches. Diakonia World
Assembly” (Atlanta, 2009), p. 5. Altmann, a pastor of the IECL (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Brazil)
served as the WCC’s Central Committee during the period 2006-2013.
75 Commenting on this text Walter Altmann noted in a different occasion, “… Diakonia is a radical
alternative to the logic of power as instrument of dominance over other peoples. We could, however; also
say that diakonia is an alternative form of power, which consists precisely in serving, without distinction
preach and to exercise the authority to expel demons; Mk. 1:29-31 giving account that Jesus heals the mother-in-law of Peter who then went on to serve (diakónei); Mt. 1:35-39, where Jesus, in the midst of many tiring and stressful activities, retreats for prayer, meditation, silence. This experience of spirituality re-empowers him to continue his mission; Mk. 5:1-20 by which he empowers and liberates by healing the Gerasene demoniac, among others. 76

Kjell Nordstokke also mentions other healing stories from the Gospels, which he acknowledges are “… all about empowered action with the purpose of empowering people. Healing does not only mean to overcome an illness, but also rejecting stigmatization and mechanisms of social exclusion, and thus empowering for a dignified life”. He quotes the following texts on this focus: healing sick, affirming their dignity: the woman who touched his cloak (Lk. 8:43-48); the man born blind (Jn. 9); including the small and marginalized: blessing little children (Lk. 18:15-17); the woman with the alabaster jar in the Pharisee house (Lk. 7:36-50); qualifying the despised for participation in his project: the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4); Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:1-9). 77

This point raised by Nordstokke in relation to the healing narratives of Jesus is another important one, regarding more precisely the issue of social inclusion, since as expressed before, a relevant component of empowerment is the fact that it takes place through relationships, among the various members of the community. So a person that is being healed is empowered at least in two ways, i.e. being more capable physically, intellectually and emotionally, in this case, to serve, but also by being included in the community with dignity and respect.

The Spirit as the Outreaching of God’s Power

In an article called Empowerment the authors Christoph Stückelberger and Frank Mathwig include this term in a list of core values (together with justice, freedom,
responsibility, sustainability, community, participation, solidarity and peace) and reflect on the its relationship with the Holy Spirit. They underscore that,

An important source in the New Testament in strengthening the weak is the Holy Spirit. This Pneumatological empowerment, i.e., empowerment grounded in the Holy Spirit, means that through God’s Spirit, God gives the gifts (abilities, skills, known biblically as charisms) especially to the socially disadvantaged and vulnerable. The power of God’s Spirit (in Hebrew ruah, female) offers courage. It gives the power to resist. At the same time God’s enabling of people, his charisms, are gifts and not earned, they are gifts of grace in that they are more than technical skills and packaged-up knowledge. They represent the power to act in the spirit of love. They offer a special spiritual qualification.

The way in which this article understands the role that the Holy Spirit plays in the empowerment processes provides some helpful insights for this thesis, especially as it relates to diakonia. This allusion to “Pneumatological empowerment” reminds us of a reference from Browning’s book where he quotes Arthur Brazier, a pastor from the Apostolic Church of God, an African-American Pentecostal congregation in the USA, where he points to what he calls “spiritual empowerment, that he claims is deeper than political empowerment. Spiritual empowerment makes political empowerment possible”.

This indeed, is a relevant issue, since the awareness of this spiritual empowerment is seemingly stronger among those minorities, or the marginalized, or among the vast majority of people from the global South, or among those whose spirituality (e.g. the Pentecostal Christians) is part of their daily life vis-à-vis among the many mainline protestant historical churches in the global North. Furthermore, the conscientization (Freire) or the awareness of this process taking place, by those who are being strengthened, can even produce a greater effect of empowerment, which, again, is fueled by a spirituality that can be called existential, since it permeates the whole life of the empowered person. This spiritual empowerment makes other empowerments

80 Browning, who visited this church in various occasions, mentioned that on a particular Sunday “… and over the following months, I heard a message that incorporated an extremely powerful and generous portrait of God as a source of affirmation and empowerment for the people of [this church]. This generous message of love, grace, recognition, and empowerment by the Holy Spirit was balanced with equally challenging demands to live a personal and social moral life at the highest level” – Browning, p. 29.
possible for engagements such as the service to those in need and can be seen in contrast, as noted earlier, with the service provided by those who are empowered as technocrats or merely as social workers.

Another practical example of this experience, i.e. the empowering effect of a day-to-day Christian faith is mentioned by Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, as common characteristics of the African Instituted Churches that acknowledge: (1) the faith of the powerful is irrelevant; (2) the gospel is the source of liberating power; (3) faith is a spiritual combat; (4) the Western interpretation of Scripture is not the final word; (5) God is experienced as an awe-inspiring mystery and (6) the power of the faith community is the laity.81 There are interesting allusions to power in this quote out of which the second characteristic, i.e. the liberating power that is originated from faithfulness to the gospel, is essential for the life and mission of these indigenous churches.

Many examples can be found in the Bible on how the Holy Spirit empowers to pursue God’s liberating purposes in creation. A classical text often quoted is the one of Pentecost (Ac. 2:1-12), where its author Luke, tries to describe the most important event after the departure of Jesus, namely, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, which is considered as marking the birth of the Church and its character. With this account of Pentecost, Luke wants to tell an evident fact in the Christian communities of his time: the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus, was in action in them, for them, empowering them. The persons hearing his testimony were converting and the persecutions confirmed their faith and their decision to continue proclaiming the gospel.

Kjell Nordstokke notes on this text that, “The story of Pentecost can be read in the perspective of frightened and disillusioned disciples being transformed and empowered, and thereby enabled to exercise an important ministry in the public arena”.82 He underlines the importance of reading this text from the perspective of Ac. 1:8 saying, “From this understanding it is natural that the story of the establishment of the first congregation in Jerusalem is presented as an empowering act of God’s Spirit: “But you will receive power (Greek: dynamis) when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will

82 Nordstokke, “Empowerment in the Perspective of Ecumenical Diakonia”, p. 8
be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Consequently, a new community was then emerging in Jerusalem, where men and women were living as brothers and sisters, united in prayer, living a daily solidarity, since they shared everything, while they were happy for and by the gospel. So this text of Acts is a reaffirmation of the role of the Holy Spirit, which continues to empower the church to further promote the kingdom of God, incarnated in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.

Another significant one is Ac. 3:1-10, quoted briefly in the first section of this chapter, that tells the story of a man lame from birth who was laying at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And Peter said to him: “I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk!” (v. 6), he raised him and he was healed, began walking and leaping and praising God in the temple. The healing of the man lame is a symbol of the life-giving power of the Spirit, moving from a situation of desperation to one of hope, dignity and life in fullness. Peter is showing that Jesus is still alive and still empowers to bear witness of him and to serve others as he did.

A relevant point for the ecumenical movement of this text of Acts 3 is that the first step or moment in the study of empowerment noted above is no longer viable. The question of silver and gold is no longer the crucial issue, i.e. the NGOnization of diakonia, the technocrats, wealthy and the powerful ruling service, etc. Rather, this text lifts the perspective of the margins and the periphery where the seemingly worth-nothing, is the power of lifting up for transformation, “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth”. As the Colombo statement underlines, “To that extent, the margins are the privileged spaces for God’s compassion and justice and of God’s presence in vulnerability and resistance. Here the sick were healed, the domination of evil spirits broken, the dignity of the marginalized defended, and the disciples empowered with life-affirming values for ministry.” Of course, professionalism and expertize is required for diakonia, but one can argue that it is more sustainable, empowering, and perhaps even more effective.

83 Nordstokke, “Empowerment in the Perspective of Ecumenical Diakonia”, p. 8
moved by the faith in Jesus Christ that emerges from biblical-theological reflexion and socially engaged spirituality.

In synthesis all these biblical texts cited can be summarized in what Lawrence Nwankwo calls ‘the theology of empowerment’ and stresses that it “calls attention to the fact that as children of God, we have received the Spirit from on High, a Spirit of power that strengthens and enables us to contribute to the advent of God’s Kingdom here on earth. This is a theology that draws from the Trinity and has both Pneumatological and Christological concentration. God associates humanity in God’s work of creation and redemption. The incarnation is the high and unique point of this divine-human synergism. Through the Holy Spirit, God is still active in history…”85 Hence, the Christian tradition acknowledges the unique role that the Trinity plays, not only to empower Christians, but the human-kind in general, since all human beings are “children of God”, to bring redemption, liberation and transformation in today’s world.

This section on the biblical and theological grounding of power and empowerment will come to a close mentioning an Interpretative Report of a WCC consultation of young theologians from the global South, which produced interesting reflections on the notion of power, particularly in relation to diakonia. The report expresses: “A sense of powerlessness or a form of pragmatic realism often seem to dominate churches’ responses to socio-political challenges, resulting in their opting for traditional forms of diakonia…”86

In their fresh thinking, these young theologians then share some reflections to address this “sense of powerlessness” that can be highlighted or summarized in these points: (a) Power needs to be understood not in terms of physical or numerical strength but perhaps as a moral and spiritual resource enabling each individual to be an agent of transformation and healing in all situations; (b) Power should not be qualified by what we have but by the extent of transformation that it is able to effect; and (c) more in practical terms they raised the importance of working in partnerships with all

85 Nwankwo, p. 1.
expressions of Christianity and with people of other faiths and ideologies, committed to share power and to ‘life and justice for all’. 87

These three points in relation to power come to reaffirm the arguments in this section regarding empowerment, in the sense that if the former is understood as a ‘spiritual resource’, then the latter can take place enabling a renovating process by which persons become agents for transformation. This qualitative change happens not just individually but also in relation to the community, hence the importance of sharing the dreams and goals for diaconal action not only among the churches, but also with other religions and with the civil society in general, seeking justice for all creation. 88

**Conclusion**

This chapter has been an introduction to the theoretical content of the thesis, attempting, on the one hand to provide a brief synthesis of the theory of diakonia, and on the other a more elaborated overview of the theory of empowerment. There has been an intentional effort to observe how both relate to each other, highlighting some biblical and theological considerations in order to analyze critically their practical aspects both in WCC global events, as well as in local diaconal projects.

With regards to diakonia, I have perceived throughout this chapter how it is fundamentally interconnected with God’s mission, given to Jesus and entrusted by him to his disciples. The center of this mission is the proclamation, in words and in deeds the good news of God’s kingdom, defined as “justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Ro. 14:17). The whole church, as the Body of Christ present in today’s world, implements this mission of service, principally to the impoverished and marginalized, empowering and seeking koinonia, i.e. the building of a world community where the whole creation is included.

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87 WCC, Interrogating and Redefining Power. Consultation of Younger Theologians from the South. Jointly Sponsored by the WCC Faith and Order Team and the Faith, Mission and Unity Programme Area of the Christian Conference of Asia, pp. 3-4.

88 On this regard, Eberhard Hitzler points to the importance of choosing the right partners, “…moving away from partners with a charity approach to partners with an empowerment approach, away from those who see the poor as objects of their good work and services to those who see in the poor the subjects of change and the owners of their process towards justice” - Eberhard Hitzler, Poverty: A Scandal Challenging the Churches. Current Contexts and Approaches in Diakonia and Development: A Study Guide, ed. by Hanna Smidt (Geneva: WCC Diakonia & Solidarity, 2005), p. 36.
In relation to empowerment, I have observed a process by which its understanding has evolved in time and space. The different stages of this process have been described as: (a) one performed by professionals and researchers from a secular perspective; (b) where the main focus has been the discernment and affirmation of the power present in the impoverished persons in the Latin American reality, as it can be the case in other regions of the global South, through their conscientization, underlining an empowerment process that is communitarian, while at the same time seeking transformation towards liberation and dignity; and finally (c) an empowerment process, building on these previous experiences, that facilitates and enables the kenotic service by the church, as described above, enabling the active participation, specifically of those surviving in the margins of society, as subjects for transformation.

This diaconal endeavor, is realized from an interdisciplinary point of view, involving other sciences and it is inclusive as well, linking with persons of other faith base organizations and social actors, at the same time being aware of the power that comes from the Trinity for this mission. The Trinity as a Divine Community is revealed by God as the source of power, by Jesus as the presence of God’s power in the world and by the Spirit as the outreaching of God’s power. Consequently, this theology of empowerment acknowledges the divine purpose to bring life in fullness to the whole creation, for which the church in being capacitated and strengthened to become an agent or instrument of transformation.

These biblical and theological considerations on diakonia and empowerment highlighted in this chapter have been paving the way for the following one, dealing with them more extensively in global events of the ecumenical movement, as an important input to design the Empowering Diakonia model.
Chapter III. The Foundation and Identity of Diakonia and Empowerment in the Ecumenical Movement

Introduction

Having covered in the previous chapter a brief introduction to the *theory of diakonia*, citing a selected number biblical texts; and a more extensive introduction to the *theory of empowerment*, addressing its origin, meaning and development of the term, as well as the ways in which it can be grounded biblically and theologically, in this chapter I will focus on their presence in the ecumenical movement.

The WCC in particular, through its member churches, have had a very strong involvement in diaconal work throughout the 20th Century and up to the present days, both in reflection and in practice. In this thesis, and more intentionally in this chapter, I will be observing and commenting on three phases or models of ecumenical diakonia that I have identified throughout this rich history, where I find paradigm shifts. These phases will sometimes show conflicting signs or moments of tension and in other occasions, complementing trends among each other. The phases or models, which will be explained below, are the *charity*, the *reciprocity* and the *transformative* models.

a) The charity model. This is the *inter-church aid* period, characterized quite prominently by the transfer of funds in a rather vertical, top-down way, to support diaconal projects and persons in need. To a great extent, people were seen as *objects* of the aid, coming from the most powerful churches and church-related organizations, primarily from the global North. Diakonia was defined in this period as the “responsible service of the gospel by deeds and by words performed by Christians in response to the needs of people”.89 This charity model runs from the early 20th Century up until the beginning of the 1980s and its effect is help.

b) The reciprocity model. This phase is represented by the *Ecumenical Sharing of Resources* process, which was developed in the 1980s, primarily by the 1986 Global Consultation on Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service, *Diakonia*

2000. Called to be Neighbors, held in Larnaca (Cyprus) and the 1987 El Escorial (Spain) Consultation on Koinonia. During this period I start to observe a paradigm shift, mostly as a result of the presence and influence of voices and ministries from the churches in the global South. Here I begin to see emerging the notions and practices of empowerment in relation to diakonia.

In this model, which runs up to the first decade of the 21st Century, in a more intentional and collective way there is an assessment of the needs, the challenges and the problems, also on a more horizontal level. E.g. the participants at the Larnaca consultation underscored in their final Declaration “…Our diakonia now and for the future must be based on mutual trust and genuine sharing. We recognize that people and churches on all continents have needs and that our diakonia must reach out to all those who suffer”.90 Also at the El Escorial consultation there was a deliberate attempt to overcome the false dichotomy between mission and service. Its report acknowledges, “All activities of the Christian community in evangelism, diakonia, the struggle for human dignity, healing, peace and justice belong together in the one mission of God”.91 Nevertheless, I observe in this period that the we-they mentality is still quite prominent, while at the same time, there is a stronger emphasis on resources other than financial, e.g. human, that are expected to be shared. The effect of this trend is moving towards change.

c) The transformative model. The process leading to the 2012 Conference on Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in the Twenty-First Century, held in Colombo, Sri Lanka marks this period that I call transformative. There is a stronger influx in relation to the notion of diaconal practice from the different WCC related mission networks and not least from the persons quite often excluded by society and even by the churches. This further worked towards achieving inclusivity and integration of the different diaconal efforts, a stronger relationship to-each-other; done by those from the periphery, by those on the margins (disabled, women, indigenous people, afro-descendants, impoverished),

empowered to change society in a *bottom-up* approach, in an inductive manner. The effect of this model is transformation.

Again, I am aware of the fact that there are not clear borders between these different phases, since we can find similar elements in two or more, we can also find them moving in parallel to each other, e.g. we might observe even today the existence of expressions of the first (*charity*) model. The point of departure or criteria for the periodization and the titles of each phase have been taken from the structures, reflections and recommendations of the WCC itself.

As noted in the general introduction of the thesis, in the current chapter analysis will be made of the historical development of diakonia and empowerment in the ecumenical movement, following the structure of these periods. It will therefore, be divided by these three moments of *charity*, *reciprocity* and *transformative*. I will start focusing primarily on the 1986 Larnaca Diakonia Consultation and the 1987 El Escorial Consultation on ecumenical sharing of resources. I am deliberately emphasizing on these two events because here I discover a paradigm shift, lifting more intentionally the notions and practices of empowerment in relation to diakonia.

More purposely in these two events I start to observe already a model of ecumenical diakonia that threatens the *status quo* and its seemingly use and abuse of power for aid, since there is a stronger participation of the people to address, by their own power and means, the root causes and consequences of injustice in order, not only to solve their immediate needs, but also to construct a more just and sustainable society.

Then, in a third moment, examination will be made of both diakonia and empowerment in more general terms, at the WCC 2012 Colombo Conference on *Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in the Twenty-First Century*, co-organized by the Justice and Diakonia, Just and Inclusive Communities, and Mission and Evangelism programs. I will be studying the process leading to this conference as well, ending with the areas in which the WCC 10*th* Assembly, held in the Republic of Korea in 2013, dealt with issues related to diakonia.

Again, in this chapter I will analyze and describe the biblical-theological understanding and the conceptual framework of both diakonia and empowerment in the ecumenical
movement. More specifically, the first research question will be addressed, namely, to study and explain how the WCC has contributed to the development of the notions and implementation of these two terms, in all events mentioned above.

Applying the methodology of the *Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia*, here I will be observing to what extent have both diakonia and empowerment served as a meaningful hermeneutical key, a theoretical point of reference and a strategic task for diaconal engagement of the WCC’s member churches in these periods. Again, the result of this critical analysis will contribute, together with the inputs of the local congregations (developed in the following chapter) to discover the building blocks in order to design, build and propose the implementation of the *Empowering Diakonia* model in the subsequent chapter.

In short, this chapter will cover the following structure, namely, there is going to be an analysis of the historical development of diakonia and empowerment in the ecumenical movement in these three periods identified above, namely The Charity Period, The Reciprocity Period, focusing on Larnaca 1986 and El Escorial 1987, and finally The Transformative Period, highlighting Colombo 2012.

Each one of the sections dealing with the three events or gatherings mentioned above will end with a summary of the main outcomes reflected in the building blocks, and the chapter will finish with its conclusions, comparing these outcomes.

**Historical Development of Diakonia and Empowerment in the Ecumenical Movement: The Charity Period**

In this first section, as the historical development of both diakonia and empowerment in the ecumenical movement is being described, I will follow a chronological order, moving from one event to the other, explaining the different phases or periods.

In an article called *Diakonia and Diaconate in the World Council of Churches*, Kjell Nordstokke analyses the whole process by which the diaconal endeavor is being developed, starting with this first period that I have called the charity phase. He recalls

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92 It is important to highlight here that in spite of the fact that the thesis is not about history of diakonia and empowerment *per se*, some historical facts are being mentioned in order to understand better the ways in which they have been dealt with in the ecumenical movement.

the importance given to this effort, already by the first general secretary of the WCC, Visser ‘t Hooft, who, as mentioned in the general introduction of this thesis, conditioned his appointment for this office that the Council would be active in the field of mutual aid, by being responsible particularly for those in need, i.e. the hungry, the thirsty, the strangers, the naked, the sick, those in prison (Mt. 25). This engagement began more intensively ministering to the prisoners of war and the refugees during the years of the Second World War. Many churches and church related organizations worked together to alleviate this critical situation.

Nordstokke acknowledges that this effort already had an antecedent that was the European Central Bureau for Inter-Church Aid, founded in Zürich in 1922 and in 1945 a Department of Reconstruction and Inter-Church Aid was established, so when the WCC held its first Assembly in Amsterdam three years later, reports could be presented. The following Assembly, held in Evanston in 1954, stated that “Inter-Church Aid is based on the teaching of Scripture and the practice of the apostolic church”, (with reference to Ga. 6:10 and 1Co. 12:12.26).

The WCC 1966 Swanwick Consultation

In a historical review made by Katherine Kinnamon, on behalf of CICARWS, in preparation of the 1982 Seminar on Contemporary Understanding of Diakonia, that will be explained further down, it is mentioned that this Commission organized three consultations on diakonia in this phase that I call the charity period: in Geneva, in 1965, in Swanwick in 1966, and in Crete in 1978. In this review it is expressed in the introduction that “undoubtedly the most important of these was the Swanwick consultation for it greatly influenced the whole development debate during the WCC’s Fourth Assembly in Uppsala in 1968”.

Therefore, this World Consultation on Interchurch Aid, Refugee and World Service convened by the WCC in Swanwick, UK, was an important one, since it added the concept of social action or social development to the prevailing understanding of social

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94 The name of this department has changed over the years since it first was established in 1945 as Department of Reconstruction and Inter-Church Aid. In 1949 it was renamed Division of Inter-Church Aid and Service to Refugees (DICASR). After the Assembly in 1961 it was reorganized as Division of Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service (DICARWS), and then from 1971 to 1992 as Commission on Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service (CICARWS).

relief work and service. This was stirred, to great extent by voices from the global South that increasingly started to be present in global ecumenical gatherings. Consequently, with this consultation, I am beginning to observe an evolution of trends, being the churches better aware of causes and consequences of poverty, beyond the charity mentality, which will be more prominently present in the following periods.

Indeed, this event, under the leadership of Leslie Cooke, pointed in new directions, from relief towards justice and root causes. As a matter of fact, it was him who warned that the more involved in real development—as distinguished from relief—the churches were, the more controversial and sometimes unpopular their diaconal witness would become.

Hence, already in Swanwick the participants were taking new steps to examine the structural issues of justice, beyond aid, which oftentimes produce more dependence. At the event the conventional economic wisdom was challenged, doubting the validity of the well-known argument that growth strategies would eventually liberate the impoverished. Arguments were raised that economic growth without social justice would not necessarily bring about freedom. Interestingly enough pressures were made seeking more support and international cooperation towards policies that would produce structural changes, i.e. to transform the existing unjust international economic and social order.

As a result, in Swanwick the WCC was seen as playing a major role in the coordination of the help coming from the growing regional and national Christian agencies, especially in Europe.

Consequently, this understanding of interchurch aid has broadened over the years, which has been analyzed in the article called Interchurch Aid written for the Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement. Its author, Michael H. Taylor, underlines that this has been the result, on the one hand of the growing presence and influence of the churches in the global South, and of external pressures, on the other, since the persistence, and I

97 WCC, Digest of the 1966 World Consultation on Inter-Church Aid, Swanwick, England, p. 127.
98 White, p. 307.
would add, the aggravation, of poverty and inequality has urged the churches to deepen the debate about the adequacy of the churches’ response.99

An outstanding event that further made possible the presence and influence of these voices from the churches in the global South was the WCC 1966 Church and Society Conference which took place a few weeks after the Swanwick consultation, in Geneva, organized by the Life and Work Movement. As a result many burning issues such as colonialism, hunger, injustice and exploitation became even more urgent for the ecumenical agenda. This discussion has been extremely relevant since the joint action by churches and related organizations to address these challenges has been an essential raison d’être of the movement.100

Of course, both the Swanwick and Geneva gatherings, among other factors, helped to radicalize the understanding and practice of diakonia in the ecumenical movement. For example “Justice, not charity was a keynote for the debate about ecumenical diakonia during these years, and especially at the time of the WCC Uppsala Assembly (1968)”101

But this broadening, Taylor argues, is both geographical and conceptual. Inter-church aid started helping the churches in Europe—as we saw earlier—but then was extended to other parts of the world. At beginning it was more concerned with emergencies, i.e. supporting refugees but soon recognized that these emergencies were far from being temporary. A more sustained approach was required, and therefore, the concept of aid broadened out to include the concept of development, as we will see later. And finally its understanding has expanded further to include advocacy, campaigning for changes in policies and practices of governments in order to improve the people’s quality of life.102

Another important landmark in our research is the 1975 Nairobi Assembly, which, according to Martin Robra “called the member churches to recognize that empowerment of the poor and sharing and solidarity in the struggle for justice and human dignity are

99 It is important to stress here that at the time Taylor wrote this article, he was the director of Christian Aid and therefore was reflecting the perspective of one of the agencies of cooperation.
not only tasks of social action groups, but of the church. This call responded directly to the changing world-situation”. After mentioning several contextual situations at the time of the Assembly, he goes on to point out the ways in which liberation theology inspired the promotion of “people-centered development and making God’s option for the poor the central theological concern”.

An essential observation here is to acknowledge the fact that the ecumenical movement facilitated a process of conscientization; I could even call it conversion of the churches, creating a space of mutual exchanges and challenges, by which the churches of the global South contributed to an ecclesiology that trespasses the four walls of the sanctuaries and get involved in actions that traditionally were considered to be carried out by secular groups. A relevant example is the one mentioned on empowerment, that even when it sounds paternalistic as phrased, the “empowerment of the poor” (i.e. “the church is here to empower the poor”), nevertheless, again, raises this vital diakonia component.

It is interesting that Martin Robra, in a survey made in 1994 within the WCC, when he analyses this situation in the same period around the Nairobi Assembly, raises the issue of empowerment in similar terms. Concerning the ecclesiological implication in the discussion of “the project-system and the relationship of giving and receiving” he noted, “the aim was liberating empowerment of the powerless and poor. The question was no longer ‘what can the churches do for the poor?’ but ‘are they prepared to live with the poor and to take part in their struggle for liberation?’ The poor are the agents of change. However, this shift from helping the victims of a situation to supporting those struggling for justice meant conflict with the powers and was thus not accepted, especially by rich and powerful churches”.

In this same survey, Robra goes on to say: “Empowerment of the poor and sharing in the struggle for justice and human dignity were not only a task for social action and initiative. Transfer of power and mutual participation was on the agenda of the churches themselves. The changing world situation and the development of the ecumenical

movement created an increasing demand for a reappraisal of the Ecumenical Sharing of Resources (ESR)”. As we will observe in the coming pages, this was indeed what happened, a reassessment of the ESR in the *Empty Hands* process and later on at El Escorial.

Another significant reference to empowerment in the WCC around this period was in relation to the Urban and Rural Mission (URM). Richard D. N. Dickinson points out: “when URM was formed out of Urban Industrial Mission and Rural Agricultural Mission in 1978, it was in a period of escalating militarization and violence in many parts of the world, increasing exploitation of people by governments and transnational corporations. People’s struggles proliferated and most were ruthlessly crushed. The primary method used by URM during this period was organizing the victims of oppression and marginalization for empowerment, enabling them to participate in the decision-making processes which affected their lives. Community organizing activities within national and global liberation perspectives, undergirded by leadership development, training, documentation and information exchange were complemented by theological reflection”.

In other words, even when URM did not belong directly to the diakonia network, from the WCC’s program structure point of view, it showed a vital working strategy in the empowering process, which was *community organizing*. This was indeed its trademark throughout its history, by which the good news of the gospel was proclaimed to the victims of injustice, “enabling them to participate in the decision-making processes which affected their lives”. On this regard, I can conclude that empowerment is a common denominator that binds together efforts and ministries of proclamation with service in the WCC.

Reference was made earlier to the 1978 consultation on diakonia held in Crete organized by the WCC with the Orthodox churches. Incidentally a whole thesis can be written just in reference to the very rich and committed involvement in diaconal work of this family of churches, many of them WCC member churches as well. Just to mention

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one example, I can make a quick reference to the objectives of this 1978 conference, to see what was at stake at the time and place:

- “To stimulate and analyze Orthodox theological, patristic, historical and theoretical reflection on social and justice issues;
- To promote encounter and exchange among Orthodox churches and church-related social organizations;
- To deepen the understanding of Orthodox self-identity and forms of social diaconal work;
- To enable exchange of experience and methodologies among Orthodox social and humanitarian organizations;
- To contribute Orthodox perspectives to the ecumenical discussion on diakonia and development, and to relate the contribution of other churches to Orthodox social work;
- To encourage ongoing collaboration and exchange among Orthodox social initiatives and organizations worldwide, including through new networks and associations”.

Most likely, this event would prove to be very beneficial for the Orthodox family and the ecumenical movement in general, since—as it will be noted—ten years later and afterwards, these churches have been playing a very active role, helping the people in need, when the Berlin Wall collapsed. The spiritual aspect (liturgy, biblical-theological reflections, patristic) as well as the technical part (dealing with forms of diaconal work, etc.) and networking, facilitated by the convening role of the WCC which organized the gathering, have been a very important asset for the future diaconal involvement of these churches.

**Historical Development of Diakonia and Empowerment in the Ecumenical Movement: The Reciprocity Period**

In order to address in a stronger and more effective way the multiple challenges of the world at the time, a new process began in the WCC, the *Ecumenical Sharing of Resources* (ESR) that became an important ethos in the ecumenical movement throughout the years, and of course, paved the way and created a solid foundation for

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the El Escorial consultation and other related events. In 1980 a study guide on the ESR for use of the churches, local congregations and other groups was published by the WCC under the title *Empty Hands. An Agenda for the Churches.*

In the foreword of the booklet, the then general secretary of the WCC, Philip Potter explaining this process, noted that: “The ESR is of the essence of the ecumenical movement. It is the sharing among the churches of the fullness of their resources the sharing of what they are, not only what they have”, and argued, “The WCC Study on the Ecumenical Sharing of Resources was launched with a World Consultation at Glion, Switzerland, in 1977. This was followed by a series of regional and national consultations and working groups held in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe and North America during 1979-80. Three coordinators for Africa, Asia and Latin America also engaged in visits and individual consultation. This reflection process was summarized in an international working group which met in Geneva on June 1980, and which prepared the message and recommendations to the churches and worked on this study guide”.

Of course, this ESR process had a significant antecedent since it was sparked by the WCC’s 5th assembly held in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1975, where the issues interchurch aid, mission and development were debated in relation to a moratorium proposal by some church leaders in Africa and Asia. These representatives of the churches from the global South had raised essential issues in relation to their selfhood as denominations vis-à-vis the top-down or vertical mindset of classifying the churches between the senders on the one hand, and the receivers on the other.

This study guide acknowledges that “In 1976, the Central Committee of the WCC called for a study on the ESR, to study all existing methods of sharing of resources both human and financial, to seek new and more ecumenical methods and to relate the

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109 The notion of *Empty Hands* was inspired by a paper produced by Frederick R. Wilson where he pointed out: ”When people approach one another with their hands full of gifts for each other, they cannot even shake hands or embrace in greeting, much less exchange their gifts, so long as their hands are full. First they must set these gifts aside in order to greet each other with empty hands”. After suggesting to put our gifts on the “altar at the foot of the Cross”, he went on to say, “We are now free to greet one another as sisters and brothers in Christ, to embrace, to walk and work together in witness and service, to laugh and cry together in joy and sorrow experienced in solidarity -- and then to take from that same altar each according to our need” - WCC, *Empty Hands. An Agenda for the Churches. A Study Guide for the Ecumenical Sharing of Resources* (Geneva, Switzerland, 1980), p. 9.

whole issue to the World Council’s search for the unity of the Church’. This is a continuing process of reflection and action in which the WCC is both the launching pad, encouraging the process within its member churches, their agencies, councils and associated groups, and the target as it re-examines its own life and work”.\textsuperscript{111}

The essence of the ESR was defined as “a perspective from which to view other ecumenical issues and other WCC concerns and programs. It provides a renewed understanding of interchurch aid, a challenge to the churches in their relationships with one another and their use of institutional power, an expression of solidarity with the poor and the racially oppressed. It underlies the discussions on Church union, the dialogue with other faiths and ideologies, people's participation in development. It is fundamental to the search for a new international economic order and a just, participatory and sustainable society”.\textsuperscript{112}

Hubert van Beek explains, in other words, that the ESR emerged as a conceptual framework for new relationships that would free the churches from traditional roles of being either a sending (giving) or a receiving body and enable them to overcome structures of inequality and dependency between rich and poor. In some countries the issues of ESR are often taken up under the term partnership.\textsuperscript{113}

The vision of the ESR—van Beek goes on to say—implies a broad understanding of what is meant by resources, including spirituality, culture and human resources as well as finance and material goods. It calls for just relationships based on equality, which allow for mutual accountability, sharing of power and true interdependence. It requires holding together mission, development and service, which are often treated separately, both in theology and in church organizational structures.

So with the ESR process there is a clear intention by the WCC to move towards a more horizontal understanding and practice of solidarity where the mentality of reciprocity is stronger felt, where the awareness of mutuality in actions and benefits are being

\textsuperscript{113} Hubert van Beek, from the Netherlands, was the WCC secretary for the ESR in the 1980s and the main coordinator of the El Escorial consultation. This note can be found in the article written by him under this same title in the \textit{Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement} - van Beek, “Ecumenical Sharing of Resources”, pp. 382-383.
considered more prominently. More weight is starting to emerge given to relationships not only among the churches, but also expanded to representatives of other faiths and even of other ideologies. On the other hand, taking into consideration what has been stated in the previous chapter in relation to the meaning of empowerment, I am starting to observe a more relevant participation of the impoverished and oppressed and of the population in general, seeking sustainable societies.

Attention then shifted to elaborating a new resource-sharing system for the WCC, implementing the ESR principles, according to van Beek. The 6th assembly (Vancouver 1983) emphasized ESR as a priority for WCC programs and insisted on a “comprehensive understanding … as part of a continuing dialogue on the mission and service of the church … to facilitate models [and] not a heavy, centralized structure”. In response, a third phase in the process began, aiming at formulating an ecumenical discipline for the sharing of resources to which all participants, including the WCC, would be called to commit themselves, in the recognition that translating the concept of ESR into structural changes of the existing project system and relationships of giving and receiving would require such a commitment.

To have a general idea of the main issues and challenges addressed at the time, Empty Hands published under the section Agenda of the Churches, a study guide covering the following topics, each one of which ended with a questionnaire: The Eucharistic Community, Sharing our Lives, Sharing Through People, Financial and Material Resources, The Problem of the Givers, The Dilemma of Receiving, Causes of Injustice, The Exercise of Power, The Practice of Solidarity and The Search for Unity.

Relevant to this thesis, I find quite interesting, under the one called The Exercise of Power, the following quote: “Western nations are centers of power and influence, in the sphere of the churches as in that of politics. Western values and structures have been exported, and western denominationalism has contributed to the disunity of the Church. In the vicious circle of domination and dependence, the powerless remain powerless”. Then, interestingly enough it goes on to define empowerment stating that it “means gaining control of the decision-making process by which their lives [of the powerless] are shaped. But sharing power equitably is not easy; relinquishing power is ambiguous.

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as long as the resources in funds and personnel remain in the same hands. Shared decision-making is perhaps a step forward, but it is not necessarily a redistribution of power”.

And, even when the word empowerment is not explicitly pronounced in the following paragraph, again the notion of “the full participation of people” is cited, when it is expressed: “Efforts to share power tend to create new centers of power and influence, to rearrange but not to redistribute. Power elites in the Third World are as much an obstacle to true sharing as those in the West. The issue is not one of the geographical location of those who control and determine, but the role of a privileged minority whose actions do not encourage or permit the full participation of people in the decisions that control their lives. The availability of funds, scholarships, foreign travel and other forms of patronage in the hands of a few does not represent a new sharing of power. Christians must show ‘a more excellent way’ than that followed by secular powers”.

Furthermore, there is acknowledgment that in order to achieve an authentic sharing of power, a radical structural change is required. This study on the Exercise of Power ends with these words: “We must recognize, however, that a genuine sharing of power will not be possible unless there is a change of basic structures in the world, a new relationship of partners bound together in mutual trust. This will be a signpost for the wider human community, pointing towards a new economic and political order”. This concept is pretty much in line with the notion of prophetic diakonia, mentioned in various occasions in his thesis, which consists of addressing creatively the root causes of injustice in order to enable mutual empowerment and the people’s participation in decision-making on issues that affect their lives and in transformative actions to improve their living conditions.

On the other hand, van Beek’s article cited earlier ends with this paragraph relating explicitly the ESR process with empowerment. He notes, the “ESR is thus seen as a concept with significant implications for the fellowship of the churches but also reaching beyond to sharing life with all people. In response to the biblical imperative of

compassion and justice, it confronts the injustices of the prevailing world order with its unequal distribution of resources and power, calling for the empowerment of the powerless and for solidarity with the poor.\textsuperscript{118} Hence, I find here substantial insights for the thesis, in the sense that the ESR process not only enabled the sharing of resources in all its manifestation, but also facilitated an empowerment process to lift the voices of the impoverished and to enable their active involvement. Actually, in order to share human resources, empowerment is required through solidarity, as noted in various sections of this thesis, which again is consistent with the biblical mandate of seeking more just societies.

**The WCC 1982 Seminar on Contemporary Understandings of Diakonia**

In the decade of the 1980s, there was an intense process in the ecumenical movement to further build a strong foundation for the commitment to the diaconal work. On this regard, an important landmark was the world Seminar on *Contemporary Understandings of Diakonia* organized in Geneva, 22-26 November 1982, as part of the preparation process for the Vancouver Assembly which took place one year after.

Under the overarching direction of *Healing and Sharing Life in Community*, the participants at the Seminar characterized diakonia using eight keywords and concepts:\textsuperscript{119} (1) **essential** (diakonia is vital for the life and well-being of the church. In diakonia we become followers of our Lord); (2) **local** (diakonia takes shape in the local church, for in the local context diakonia becomes real and concrete, since it starts where the people are, addressing their needs); (3) **world-wide** (local diakonia needs to be completed by a global diakonia. To be effective, the efforts of the churches to address the needs of the people have to be taken up by the WCC member churches beyond the localities); (4) **preventive** (when diakonia becomes more preventive, it fights root causes and it sensitizes, educates and mobilizes people in order to become aware of whose systems and powers which deprives human beings from their dignity).\textsuperscript{120}

Following the list, these other words and concepts were highlighted: (5) **structural or political** (diakonia must pay attention to the structural and political causes of misery and suffering and take action in this respect. Churches must have a concern for justice); (6)

\textsuperscript{118} van Beek, “Ecumenical Sharing of Resources”, p. 383.
\textsuperscript{119} The keywords are underlined in the report and the author of this thesis summarized in brackets the concepts or explanations as they appear in it. An analysis follows the list.
\textsuperscript{120} Kinnamon, pp. 1-2.
humanitarian (which means that diakonia is not limited to churches and Christians and therefore should always be available to all people. Also, opportunities are increasing for cooperation by Christians with others); (7) mutual (real service recognizes in other people God’s image, and feelings of superiority are incompatible with this. Since the Christian emphasis is on giving one’s self, and not only material things, everyone can be a giver) and (8) liberating (the churches have been concerned for people’s participation, but if the people are to participate, they should do as equals. Therefore the prior concern needs to be the empowerment of people. Human life must be the ultimate value of diakonia). 121

To a certain degree, the Seminar was revolutionary, since it introduced a new momentum, primarily as a result of the inputs coming from participants of the global South. For instance, as we have read in the above summary, the seminar raised the importance of the local context, reaffirming that diakonia assumes real and concrete form in the local setting. It is the local community or congregation that is or can be in direct touch with human suffering and the challenges that may emerge from that reality. It is also where processes of real common exchange and mutual empowerment in community can be discovered and experienced.

The issue of power was perhaps one of the notions most contested, as it was traditionally understood and practiced in relation to diakonia, since it was questioned by many of the so called beneficiaries of diaconal projects, who lifted-up their voices and claimed ownership. On this regard, the seventh concept on mutuality underscores that “those who have power loose that power in a process of diakonia” and cites as an argument “the tragic story of the rich young man (Mk. 10) [that] shows clearly how hopeless and helpless he really was, tied down by his possessions. Only by freeing himself from his enslavement could he have become a real servant of Christ and his neighbor in mutuality”. 122

Incidentally, the notion that deals explicitly with the relationship between empowerment and diakonia is the one focusing on liberation. Again, it points out very boldly that “the prior concern needs to be the empowerment of the people”, seeking the people’s participation “as equals”. It goes on to acknowledge that “when marginalized people

121 Kinnamon, pp. 2-3.
122 Kinnamon, p. 3.
have power, they can freely make their own decision about participation; they can become an equal partner in dialogue about the best form of diakonia, and the church’s role. The church should serve the oppressed, not replace them in their struggle. Their culture should be valued so it is not destroyed but respected. Such liberating empowerment calls for new learning mechanisms that the oppressed may make their own assessment of their situation and determine the diakonia that can remedy it”.

As we will note, these views concerning power and empowerment in relation to diakonia will have an impact in WCC’s subsequent events, particularly in this decade of the 1980s. There is a clear message on the need of liberation from the traditional concept of a power that dominates and oppresses towards one that frees and empowers the people, recognizing all human beings as equals since all are created in God’s image. Views like free participation, partnership and dialogue among equals, collective assessment and decision-making, an ecclesiology that serves the oppressed (even when the language they/us still reflects the dualistic mentality), the importance of respecting and preserving the indigenous cultures, will have an impact in further events and not least will provide helpful insights for the construction of the Empowering Diakonia model.

Nevertheless, time and again, I keep coming back to the issue of reception in really practical terms. All these statements were radical in theory, but one gets the impression that they were not self-evident for those in charge of the diaconal projects. As we will observe in other occasions, notably at El Escorial consultation, the discourses and discussions were very innovative and drastic, but when it came to implement them, then the reality was different, since the agencies and churches that had the power, obviously had their own agenda, ideology and ways of doing things (some of them lacked freedom to decide because of the requirement of being accountable to the back-donors, among other factors), which some may call paternalistic and even patriarchal.

**The WCC 1983 Vancouver Assembly**

One year after this Seminar was held in Geneva, the WCC celebrated its 6th Assembly in Vancouver, Canada, 24 July – 10 August 1983, three years prior to the Larnaca consultation. David Gill underlines that it was recommended at the event: “that the

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123 Kinnamon, p. 4.
churches initiate new models of *diakonia*, rooted in the local congregation as it is confronted by increasing brokenness as a result of poverty, unemployment, marginalization and consumerism".\(^{124}\) Among other emphasis, the Assembly highlighted the importance of the ecclesial character of diakonia, which afterwards was prominently underscored at Larnaca.

Speaking about the historical importance of the Vancouver Assembly within the ecumenical movement, Klaus Poser\(^ {125} \) underlined that “its immediate effect and lasting impact on the witness, testimony and service of the Churches was far beyond the member churches of the WCC. Vancouver was definitely a *kairos* moment when the Conciliar Process for *Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation* was agreed upon and proclaimed. JPIC became the guiding principle for all the following events and church work”\(^ {126} \). And this background helps, of course, to understand better the remarkable emphasis on diakonia in this Assembly.

The Vancouver Assembly also was very intentional in relating liturgy with diakonia. In the Official Report, precisely under the section *Worship: the perspective and the power with which we witness* it is expressed in paragraph 23: “For the sake of the witnessing vocation of the Church we need to find a true rhythm of Christian involvement in the world. The Church is gathered for worship and scattered for everyday life. Whilst in some situations in the witnessing dimension of worship, there must be a ‘liturgy after the liturgy’, service to the world as praise to God, in other contexts it must be stressed that there is no Christian service to the world unless it is rooted in the service of worship”\(^ {127} \).

And also in the section *Theological Foundation*, the participants at the Assembly pointed out in paragraph 3: “The ‘liturgy after the liturgy’ is *diakonia*. *Diakonia* as the Church's ministry of shared, healing and reconciliation is of the very nature of the Church. It demands of individuals and churches a giving, which comes not out of what


\(^{125}\) Dr Klaus Poser, from Germany, served as director of CICARWS and later of Unit IV - *Service and Sharing* from March 1986 to March 1993. He is an economist by training. From 1957-69 worked with the Universities of Freiburg and Stanford as assistant and research associate on agricultural and development policies. From 1970-86 he served as director of EZE (Protestant Central Agency for Development Aid) in Bonn, Germany.

\(^{126}\) Notes from a Skype interview on 26 March 2014.

\(^{127}\) Gill, p. 35.
they have, but what they are. This exposes them to the risk of insecurity and the cost of justice and freedom. Diakonia constantly has to challenge the frozen static, self-centered structures of the Church and transform them into living instruments of the sharing and healing ministry of the Church. Diakonia cannot be confined within the institutional framework. It should transcend the established structures and boundaries of the institutional Church and become the sharing and healing action of the Holy Spirit through the community of God's people in and for the world”.  

In the article cited earlier, Nordstokke shares “four brief comments in relation to this [Vancouver] text: Firstly, it defines diakonia as belonging to the essence of being church. From this follows that diaconal action cannot be regarded as an optional response to external challenges, or limited to charitable services. The church is by nature diaconal. Secondly, diakonia has sharing, healing and reconciliation as focal points. All three indicate the communitarian nature of diaconal processes; they envisage participation and relationships of mutual empowerment. Thirdly, diakonia cannot be limited to actions organized by the church, God’s life-giving Spirit acts and calls people to participate in God’s mission of sharing and healing, in a way that has transformative effect also for the churches and their way of structuring their being and action in the world. And lastly, when reflecting on diakonia, no mention is made to the diaconate and the specific role of the diaconal ministry”.  

I think, indeed, that this is a fair comment from Nordstokke. Regarding the first remark, perhaps I can add that the Vancouver Assembly mentions primarily two reasons why diakonia belongs to the essence of being church, namely worship and theological reflection. On the one hand, service to the world is inspired by or “rooted in” the service of worship; and on the other, the biblical and theological foundation is critical if the diaconal endeavor is aiming to “become the sharing and healing action of the Holy Spirit through the community of God's people in and for the world”, as quoted earlier. Finally, Nordstokke refers to the fact that there is no mention at Vancouver of “the diaconate and the specific role of the diaconal ministry”, nevertheless it is actually cited in several occasions in the Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM) document, which was launched by the Commission on Faith and Order the previous year.

128 Gill, p. 62.  
129 Nordstokke, ‘Diakonia and Diaconate in the World Council of Churches’, p. 10
Coming back to the previous point of the relationship between diakonia and liturgy and also its biblical and theological foundation, maybe one of the background explanations or rationale behind these relationships can be traced in another interesting point of view regarding this particular Assembly shared by Martin Robra, when he argues: “Vancouver has been the Assembly that had the most integrated approach to the work of the WCC, and there you see the benefits of the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, where I find references to the witness for justice of the churches and diaconal action as expressions of the new community that is created by the baptism and celebrated in the eucharist. The BEM document is important to understand the Vancouver text, because Vancouver is the convergence”.

Robra goes on to say that “this is why Margot Käßmann wrote her thesis about the eucharistic vision of Vancouver, which is that the coming together of BEM with the equally responding section on justice and also the opening up through BEM to the holistic approach to service and diakonia, bringing all this together of what Margot has called *The Eucharistic Vision* and this is why we have the references to the Vancouver text. Therefore it is important to consider the *Vancouver moment* and what it meant. So BEM was an important source that fed in the Vancouver Assembly”.

Again, the references on diakonia that we find in BEM are in relation to the threefold pattern of ordained ministry, namely the Bishops, the Presbyters and the Deacons. Just to mention one example, in paragraph 31 we read:

Deacons represent to the Church its calling as servant in the world. By struggling in Christ’s name with the myriad needs of societies and persons, deacons exemplify the interdependence of worship and service in the Church’s life. They exercise responsibility in the worship of the congregation: for example by reading the scriptures, preaching and leading the people in prayer. They help in the teaching of the congregation. They exercise a ministry of love within the community. They fulfill certain administrative tasks and may be elected to responsibilities for governance.

Of course, the Vancouver Assembly played a mayor role in the designing of the two mayor events that took place in this decade of the 1980s, which will be examined in details in the following pages. As we will see, the analysis of both the 1986 Larnaca and

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130 Conversations with Martin Robra on 2 December 2013.
the 1987 El Escorial consultations are critical for the purpose of describing the foundation and identity of *diakonia* and *empowerment* in the ecumenical movement, in order to design the *Empowering Diakonia* model.

**The WCC 1986 Larnaca Consultation**

I will now proceed to describe and analyze the outcomes of the *Diakonia 2000 Called to be Neighbors* Consultation, that took place during 19-26 November 1986, gathering approximately 300 people (church leaders, community organizers, agency representatives, and WCC staff) in Larnaca, Cyprus, invited by CICARWS to discuss the future, precisely, of inter-church aid, refugee and world service. It had been twenty years since the previous Swanwick consultation, twenty years of change and of mounting problems for the churches.

The participants at Larnaca thus gathered with a sense of urgency and awareness that time was running out for the churches to address the many global challenges and “destructive forces”, such as racism, sexism, civil strife and wars, arms race, economic exploitation, unjust systems, refugees, asylum-seekers, immigrants, uprooted by oppressive regimes, unjust land distribution, nuclear pollutions and industrial waste, unemployment, among others. But also the participants were invited to prepare for the future, addressing creatively and collectively these global and at the same time, local challenges.

The theme of the Larnaca consultation reflected this concern for the future: *Diakonia 2000: Called to be Neighbors*. The emphasis on neighbors reminded participants that all are people of God and that all are called to diaconal ministry. The theme of neighbors was developed in the Bible studies and deepened in the unique participatory process of Larnaca, both before and in the gathering itself.

The participants at the Larnaca consultation sought to develop:

- A clearer view of the world situation as a basis for further analysis and study;

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132 It is important to underline the fact that this book, *Diakonia 2000, Called to be Neighbors. Official Report, Larnaca Consultation 1986*, edited by Klaus Poser, is very helpful for our research, since it gives an account of what happened in this consultation. It tries to provide, as accurate and faithful as possible, the relevant information of what actually was said and shared in the meetings. Nevertheless in most cases it neither analyzes nor explains in details the background information, the conflicts and the politics present before, during and after the meetings. Therefore, in order to study for academic purposes, I will be using other sources of information like articles, interviews to participants and other data.
• A theological understanding which, though not committing every church, serves as guidance for further action and relationships;
• An exchange of actual approaches and needs which can serve as a basis and orientation for learning and sharing; and finally
• Concrete suggestions for the work of the churches at different levels, out of which would come the new directions and agenda for CICARWS, for the next twenty years. 133

As I can infer from the previous points, this consultation had from the beginning an empowering approach and purpose for all participants and consequently for the churches and church related organizations represented in the event. The analysis of the context where they served, the discovering together of the biblical and theological foundation that undergirds the diakonia endeavor and not least the opportunity to share information, approaches and needs created the foundation for mutual learning and empowerment. The fact that there was an even stronger presence than before of participants from the global South and from the East, provided an unique opportunity for multicultural and inter-confessional nurturing and mutual equipping towards a better coordinated action.

Almost 30 years after holding the consultation, Klaus Poser explains the importance of this event, both from a theoretical and a practical point of view:

Diakonia 2000 was a deliberate act if not a challenge to understand and profess the mission of the Church in a wider prophetic, inclusive, holistic and community based sense rather than in the limited sense of a –mostly institutional– service. This was on request as well as in response to the understanding of many churches, church organizations and congregations of their mission … I was impressed by Larnaca and its immediate consequences for me as CICARWS director and tried to implement its findings and recommendations. It was a learning and working event with immediate conceptual but also practical consequences. 134

As the ecumenical movement has struggled to define time and again the notion and practice of social service, the actual use or not of the term diakonia, per-se has been an important consideration. On this note Klaus Poser answered to one of my questions

133 Poser, p. 1.
134 Notes from a Skype interview on 26 March 2014.
addressing this, in relation to the Larnaca gathering, again, focusing on the significance of the consultation, by saying:

I agree that especially the term *service* has been used more than diakonia by the WCC. But I would not call it *historically*. I think it is a matter of language. With English being the major means of communication and *service* being the term by which the English speaking churches express their witness, *service* has become the generally used term with diakonia with its ‘k’ looking and sounding somewhat awkward in the English language context. This does not exclude that the term diakonia has and is also been used e.g. almost always in the context of Orthodox Diakonia – *Liturgy after the Liturgy*. In German it is *Diakonie*. But when it comes to the translation into English at least concerning its practical expression *Diakonie* will end up as *service*. *Diakonia 2000*\(^1\)\(^3\)\(^5\) was a deliberate act if not a challenge to understand and profess the mission of the Church in a wider prophetic, inclusive, holistic and community-based sense rather than in the limited sense of a - mostly institutional – *service*. This was on request as well as in response to the understanding of many churches, church organizations and congregations of their mission.\(^1\)\(^3\)\(^6\)

And in another interview made to Agnes Abuom,\(^1\)\(^3\)\(^7\) a participant at Larnaca, when I asked her about her memories of this event she shared these four points, which resonate with the elements raised above:

(1) I remember a genuine search by members to establish mechanisms of resource sharing that were transparent and empowering. (2) My other memory was the position of the members from global South who were ready to engage their counterparts especially development agencies in the North without much fear. In fact I could compare the Church and Society Conference of 1966 to this event because walls of intimidation, power and fear seemed broken down. (3) The participation of women at this meeting, me being one of them. The voice of women in diakonia was gaining momentum. And (4) My final impression was the contradiction of speaking on behalf of the poor people and in very luxurious hotels.\(^1\)\(^3\)\(^8\)

In spite of this apparent contradiction, of “speaking on behalf of the poor people in very luxurious hotels”, the Larnaca event has been considered by many a pivotal moment in the historical development of diaconal engagement. On this regard Kjell Nordstokke points out: “In many ways this event became a turning point in the process of conceptualizing what since then has been conceived as *ecumenical diakonia*. One basic

\(^1\)\(^3\)\(^5\) Referring to the Larnaca consultation.
\(^1\)\(^3\)\(^6\) Notes from a Skype interview on 26 March 2014.
\(^1\)\(^3\)\(^7\) Dr Agnes Abuom, from the Anglican Church of Kenya, was elected unanimously by the WCC 10\(^\text{th}\) Assembly on 8 November 2013 to serve as moderator of the WCC’s Central Committee. She is the first woman and the first African to take this position in the history of the Council.
\(^1\)\(^3\)\(^8\) Email sent on 19 March 2014.
element was that diakonia was viewed as a call to the whole church, not only to the affluent members of the ecumenical family in the North or to professional bodies. This was of course in line with what the WCC earlier had stated in relation to the communitarian nature of diakonia, but now this was explicitly linked to concrete experiences and expectations as voiced by representatives of the global South”.  

An indication of this was mentioned by the Director of CICARWS himself, Klaus Poser, when in the report he describes this turning point as follows: “There was relatively little discussion of development or projects; rather, discussion centered on the struggle for life and solidarity for justice. The consultation demonstrated that manifestations of Christian love assume many diverse forms and witness to the comprehensiveness of diakonia in the discipleship of Jesus Christ”.  

And Nordstokke adds the following reflections regarding Larnaca: “This way of seeing ordinary Christians and local congregations as agents of diakonia meant a radical breach with the traditional separation between donors and recipients that often had marked Christian charity work, also when involved in inter-church aid. Secondly, it interpreted diaconal engagement as struggle for justice and peace, as promotion of human dignity, and as prophetic action. Had diakonia in the past sometimes been conceived a humble service, it was now announced as bold action envisaging radical transformation”.  

Therefore, the importance of the Larnaca event is that a new model of diakonia is emerging in the ecumenical movement, with a strong emphasis on empowerment, by which the people in need become subjects of change, inspired by their Christian faith and engaged in their local communities, both in the congregations and in society.

As cited earlier, the Larnaca conference was preceded by the 1982 Seminar on Contemporary Understandings of Diakonia held in Geneva and on the 1983 Vancouver Assembly, which explicitly dealt with the concept of diakonia, following the same tendency of changing its conception and practice, and further made practical recommendations for its implementation by the churches.

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139 Nordstokke, ‘Diakonia and Diaconate in the World Council of Churches’, p. 11.
140 Poser, p. 35.
As pointed out in the general introduction, the structure of this section, describing and analyzing the Larnaca consultation, will follow the *Five Dimensions*, which again, will be used as calibration points, as an internal diagnostic instrument to discover, guide account and provide interpretation of the data of this event. I will let the *Five Dimensions* guide the description and analysis in the following pages, focusing more intentionally on the notions and practices of diakonia and empowerment.

**Important findings of the 1986 Larnaca Consultation**

The main themes addressed at the Larnaca event can be summarized by the seven clusters highlighted in the final report of the group discussions, namely: (1) affirming the witness of the local churches; (2) equipping the churches for the year 2000; (3) moving towards a global diakonia; (4) deepening the prophetic diakonia; (5) focusing on people; (6) committing ourselves to life together; and finally (7) addressing refugees issues.\(^{142}\) Most of these themes and other related topics dealt with at Larnaca will be analyzed in the following pages, again, profiting from the *Five Dimensions* scheme.

**A. The Visional Dimension**

The participants at Larnaca very intentionally worked on a vision of diakonia. This is explicitly acknowledged in the *Summary of Proceedings* expressed by these words: “By listening to each other and recognizing the diversity of Christian service, participants developed a vision of diakonia based on struggle—struggle for survival, liberation, dignity, justice, peace and reconciliation. While expressions of ecumenical solidarity are needed, this struggle must fundamentally belong to those who are oppressed”.\(^{143}\)

I find this particular quote very relevant to the theme of this thesis, since it points out to a vision of diakonia that is based not on handing-out aid to the *underserved*, rather on a struggle, which incidentally is carried out not *on behalf* of the oppressed, the marginalized and impoverished, rather *by* them, from below. Here I observe how the social experience becomes a theological locus. On this matter, the impoverished might have-been-made poor from a material point of view but not from a spiritual stand point since millions of people in this world have not renounced to struggle their liberation, dignity, justice, peace and reconciliation. Again the motto of the yearly World Social

\(^{142}\) Poser, pp. 87-91.

\(^{143}\) Poser, p. 14.
Forum, “another world is possible” reflects this fact, namely the self-empowerment, the self-determination of a large number of sectors in the two-thirds world who fight for their rights, for their dignity, for justice.

Of course, in all this, the proper notion and the responsible use of power is paramount. The Larnaca report recognizes this by raising a “power not based on money, but on the character of the community, which strengthened by the presence of God, confronts forces of evil that oppress them”. Here the report implicitly raises the value of empowerment when it goes on to say, “we have come to listen humbly to each other and to learn, in order to find ways of strengthening the forces of autonomy, self-reliance and development in the local communities, and on that basis to contribute to changing situations of injustice”.144

One of the panelists, June Rodriguez, from the Philippines, also spoke on favor of this issue in these terms: “We must recognize, and the churches must recognize, that it is the people, those who have been for centuries robbed of their dignity and humanity, who are in fact the subjects and the bearers of their own liberation”. And mentioning empowerment more explicitly, she underlined: “Because of this continuing struggle for justice, freedom and liberation, the priorities for diakonia must be in organizing, educating, and building social awareness, and mobilizing or empowering the people. The churches, if unable to identify with the struggle of the people, must at least be in solidarity with them”.145

An important source of empowerment cited at Larnaca was through education. Haifa Baramki, from the Occupied Territories (Palestine) stressed referring to her country that “If Palestinians are to take their place as a responsible nation in the human family, they need to be helped to have conditions in their schools and to receive better education that can help them build strong and responsible community leaders. Such assistance can be given by the churches internationally if they act in solidarity with the local churches”.146

Empowerment was thought of and expressed at Larnaca not only in individual terms both also in allusion to the community. On this note, Leslie Boseto, from Papua New Guinea and the Solomons shared these wise recommendations: “Communities must be

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144 Poser, p. 20.
145 Poser, p. 66.
146 Poser, p. 68.
involved in the thinking and planning for development. Therefore the basis for our
development work is: (a) local communities whose customs must be respected; (b)
communities must be fully consulted about development which directly affect them; (c)
development projects must be planned and carried out so as not to cause the break-up of
communities; and (d) more attention must be paid to the community roles of women
and their part in development”. ¹⁴⁷

As I can confirm time and again, a critical element that defines when empowerment
takes place is the direct involvement and participation of the citizens. Concerning this
issue, the director of CICARWS, making a Presentation of Issues that he had heard
following some sessions of the consultation and after pointing out the difficulties that
some political systems have “to accommodate popular participation”, he then
underscored the unique role of the local churches in many places to fulfill this task. He
went on to say, “The church congregation may find itself as the only organized form
able to rally people. People must get involved. Here is the place for empowering,
conscientizing, organizing people that may have access to and a word in the
determination of their fate”. ¹⁴⁸

On this issue of participation there was an important contribution from the Africa
Working Group as well, which commended it in relation to diakonia and also implicitly
to empowerment. They raised the importance of “Indigenous and integrated
development based on self-reliance and full participation of the people so that they can
live a more holistic life materially, socially, politically and spiritually”. ¹⁴⁹

A relevant form to further enable empowerment is by equipping. As mentioned at the
beginning of this section on Larnaca the second issue out of seven was Equipping the
churches for the year 2000. Here a number of recommendations were made that can be
summarized in the following points: ¹⁵⁰ (1) the need to equip the churches to undertake
programs of formation of the people of God for diaconal ministry; (2) to challenge the
members of the churches to commit themselves to specific personal ministries. This was
an important one, since as it has been acknowledged in the ecumenical movement that

¹⁴⁷ Poser, p. 79.
¹⁴⁸ Poser, p. 84.
¹⁴⁹ Poser, p. 106.
¹⁵⁰ These 11 recommendations can be found listed under the section Equipping the churches for the year
2000 of the Larnaca Report, in the appendix section of this thesis.
diaconal action belongs to the whole church, to each and every member and not to a particular office or ministry like the one of deacons. Recommendation (3) referred to the creation of mechanisms to share stories of struggle in diaconal ministry and also (4) to communicate all emergency appeals to all churches to enable the participation of the worldwide Christian family in the finding of solutions and resources. The participants also appealed (5) to improve and enlarge youth participation, as well as (6) to provide a deeper analysis of the root causes of injustice.

Other recommendations under *equipping the churches* were (7) to facilitate programs in management and administrative training for national churches. This was and indeed still is today a great need in the churches. In our dialogue with the churches I find quite often that there is a clear understanding of what needs to be done to serve the people, there is a well-defined theology of diakonia but their equipping in this field to do the job is missing. CICARWS was encouraged (8) to provide the vision for addressing diaconal needs in all countries as well as (9) facilitate team visits by ecumenical partners as an important part of resource sharing. The need (10) to identify and mobilize local resources of the churches for their diaconal ministries was yet another pertinent issue regarding empowerment, not only to reduce dependency, but also to further enable ownership, stronger commitment and creative work. There was also a very concrete recommendation relevant to that time, namely (11) to mobilize the churches in solidarity with the fight against apartheid.\(^{151}\)

The other section that dealt with empowerment at Larnaca was the fourth one on *Deepening the prophetic diakonia*. In point number 2 the participants said: “We call upon the churches to engage in educating, informing and empowering the people by:

1) assisting in identifying issues and their root causes;
2) providing relevant information;
3) issuing statements;
4) organizing consultations on specific issues;
5) facilitating the cooperation of churches and agencies;
6) reinforcing the network system;
7) visiting churches and grassroots communities;
8) supporting the training of personnel;
9) producing materials geared to use at the local level;

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\(^{151}\) Poser, pp. 93-94.
10) enabling them to discern how the actions by those in and with power (e.g. landlords, bureaucrats, the wealthy) affect them”.  

Another essential feature for this visiona]ional dimension of Empowering Diakonia, is the theological undergirding, which, apparently at the beginning of the Larnaca conference was missing. On a later stage, in his Presentation of Issues, cited earlier, Klaus Poser made this critical remark, which is a helpful contribution towards a theology of diakonia. “The theology behind diakonia seems to be lacking in our experience. There is a tendency to put aside the theological, ecclesiological motivation in our exercise of diakonia. How does our involvement emerge from our churches’ life and mission? How does diakonia challenge me in my personal faith experience to convergence? How does diakonia challenge the very life and life-style as well as the structures of the church? We feel that diakonia should not be done for the sake of diakonia. It must be done as the expression of the fullness of the body of Christ. By doing diakonia the church becomes more fully the body of Christ, concerned for each member of that body. The more we reflect on our involvement in diakonia, the more we get to understand it but in the final analysis we have to experience diakonia, to understand it in concrete terms”.  

Consequently an important feature of a theology of diakonia is the notion of what I could call corporative responsibility, not in the sense of a corporation or a company seeking financial profit, rather from corpus, referring to the body of Christ, where each and ever member is important, and where mainly those in need require more attention, “in concrete terms”. Therefore, as the Larnaca Report affirms: “Christians must first be committed to understand their own theological basis for diakonia and justice”.  

Afterwards, the Latin America Working Group, under diakonia as mediation, made a distinction between what they called the Theoretical perspectives (i.e. “We understand diakonia as a process of faith, collective, popular, integral, in solidarity and  

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152 Poser, pp. 96-97.  
153 Poser, p. 82.  
154 Poser, p. 94.  
155 It seems here that this group is (I would say positively) influenced by the Latin American Liberation Theology. According to L. Stanislaus, “Leonardo Boff names three necessary mediations to be used in Liberation theology, namely the socio-analytical mediation, hermeneutical mediation and the mediation of pastoral practice. These help people to see the reality with the eyes of the poor, to analyze the situation in the interests of the poor, and to join them in their struggle for liberation. This involves a clear option for the poor, political, ethical and evangelical” - Lazar Stanislaus, “Mission of the Church: A Liberation Theology Perspective,” SEDOS, 2007, accessed on 7 November 2014, <http://www.sedosmission.org/web/en/sedos-bulletin/doc_view/901-mission-of-the-church-a-liberation-theology-perspective>, p. 2.
transforming”) from the Theological perspectives. Under the latter they mentioned: “Our point of departure is our option for God, giver of life, creator of the world and of human beings in God's own image and likeness. God, as minister of salvation, is involved in a ministry of love, and calls us to a full and abundant life, to friendship and communion with God and with our brothers and sisters. We are called to be neighbors, brothers and sisters of Jesus, servants of the smallest. We are invited to be new men and women, constructors of a fraternal world in solidarity, conforming to the justice of God's kingdom”. 156

Therefore, we can understand diakonia as mediation in terms of a service that integrates both theology with social sciences in order to be better aware of the reality, and to be more effective, in practice. This points to a vision where there is mediation between theology and spirituality on the one hand, and socio-political-economical analysis on the other.

Moreover, the Concept of Christian diakonia that this Latin America group conceived at Larnaca as a result of this theological vision is seemingly relevant and at the same time contributes to the shaping of our visonal dimension. They said: “In light of our theological perspectives, we define diaconal ecclesial practice as liberating, kenotic, celebratory, and hopeful. Liberating because it defends and promotes the right to life in all its fullness. Kenotic, because loyal to Jesus' way, the diaconal community makes itself small, vulnerable, in solidarity, suffering. Celebratory because from the concrete gesture it celebrates with happiness the gift of life which comes from God, life which re-creates life. Hopeful because it affirms hope ‘against all hopes’. In its perspective, diakonia must be prophetic, liberating, participatory, communal, ecumenical”. 157

This Latin America group concluded this section with a very clear input that gives substance for the designing of our Empowering Diakonia model. They pointed out: “The objective of diaconal action is human development for the announcement of the kingdom, defined as fullness of life, justice, and peace. The subject of diaconal action is the oppressed people, victims of the social and economic context”. 158

156 Poser, p. 113.
157 Poser, pp. 113-114.
158 Poser, p. 114.
word empowerment is not openly mentioned here, I find it implicitly covered by the allusion to the oppressed people who are subjects of their own destiny.

Also the Middle East group, listing a number of Proposals for Diakonia in future expectations of CICARWS, noted the following Visions and aims:

1) renewal of philanthropic form of diakonia;
2) diakonia and development for justice and human rights dignity;
3) diakonia for peace between peoples, groups;
4) diakonia and church unity, unity in the service of society;
5) diakonia and inter-religious understanding for common involvement in justice and peace.\(^{159}\)

Interestingly enough, the term philanthropy, even when it is so traditionally related to diakonia, as “the desire to promote the welfare of others”, it was not so commonly used at the consultation, perhaps because of its charity connotations, “especially by donating money to good causes”.\(^ {160}\) Nevertheless, observing the other visional concepts proposed by this group, such as justice and human dignity, peace, service of society and inter-religious involvement seems to propose a “renewal” of the term in order to give a more broad-minded meaning to it.

Under the Issue Reports, Focusing on People, the participants stressed that “the local churches should develop a theology of diakonia based on an understanding of service as a way of life, not as a program. The focus on diakonia should be the oppressed people”.\(^ {161}\) And there were also other theological issues, to be more precise, both pneumatological and ecclesiological references, which helps to further design this visional dimension. Therefore, the participants also pointed out that “An ecclesiology of the church should be developed that recognizes the work of the Holy Spirit as a sustaining force and a necessary tool for the development of the people of God”.\(^ {162}\)

Not only theology, but also what I have called our spiritual-mystical understanding in order to shape our vision was also dealt with at the Larnaca conference. It was

\(^{159}\) Poser, p. 115.
\(^{160}\) ‘New Oxford American Dictionary.’ ORIGIN early 17th century: via late Latin from Greek *philanthrôpia*, from *philanthrôpos* ‘man-loving’
\(^{161}\) Poser, p. 97.
\(^{162}\) Poser, p. 98.
mentioned that “… the one-way street no longer is or should be valid for diakonia, in future only a with-and-for-one-another in solidarity is meaningful and effective… If this is so, then the with-and-for-one-another can only be eucharistic by nature, in the sense of a eucharistic fellowship with God, with one another, with the whole humanity and the cosmos. For this we do not need an independent official diaconal bureaucracy, but a truly liturgical diakonia, which has its source or power in the holy eucharist as all-compassing love, as dispenser of life and hope!”

And not only in Larnaca, but also in the CICARWS commission that met the following year, in 1987 this *spiritual-mystical understanding* was present. It was then pointed out: “Diakonia is service to the whole human being, to all humanity, and to the whole creation. Just as Jesus shared himself with us through the Eucharist, we are invited by him to share our lives with others. Our commitment to justice must be manifest through active solidarity with those who suffer, with all God’s creation. Diaconal action will therefore demand suffering and self-emptying (kenosis) but always celebrating the hope of the resurrection.”

**B. The Normative Dimension**

Since—according to my understanding—it is rooted in the Word of God, as the “transcendental” foundation of our faith (Browning), most of the biblical references and paradigms lifted at Larnaca will be brought-up in this section, as well as other aspects that have to do with professional effectiveness.

The biblical texts studied at Larnaca can be divided basically in three sections, namely: (1) the text of Ga. 6:1-14 chosen by the then WCC general secretary, Emilio Castro, for the opening sermon entitled: *Diakonia as our Response to the Crucified Lord*; (2) the three Bible studies facilitated by Albert van den Heuvel, quoting: Eph. 6:10-18 (*The Whole Armor of God*); Lk. 10:25-37 (*The Parable of the Good Samaritan*) and Lk.

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163 Poser, p. 61.
164 Dickinson, p. 428.
166 Albert van den Heuvel, a pastor of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, having served as WCC staff in Geneva in the Program to Combat Racism up until 1980, at the time of this consultation he was working for VARA, a Dutch public broadcasting association, accessed on 7 March 2014, http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/7612
and finally (3) the lecture *The Samaritan’s Diakonia: an Option for Life*, again based on Lk. 10:25-37, presented by Victorio Araya Guillén. After summarizing and analyzing these three sections and their respective biblical texts, other aspects raised at Larnaca will be mentioned, which I consider appropriate to place under this dimension.

a) The Opening Sermon

I will begin by summarizing the five points of Castro’s opening sermon, will give them titles according to the seemingly main subject of each one, and at the end, some comments will be offered. This will further help me to identify the relevant elements to build the normative dimension.

1. **The non-powerful sign of the cross.** For Castro, the apostle combines a profound theological reflection with a down-to-earth call to exercise responsibility. The essence of this letter to the Galatians: the cross of Jesus Christ is overcoming of all human pretensions and the removal of all obstacles created by our own shortcomings. At the same time, the cross allows us to see the reality of the redemption brought about God in Jesus Christ. We are called to proclaim and live up to the same quality of love and humility manifested on the cross. Its central point is the encounter between God and humankind, where we are all called to meet God and each other; therefore Christian diakonia is the awareness of God’s ministry in the service of reconciliation to humankind. The unpretentious, non-powerful, self-surrendering sign of the cross is the model to which we are called. The distinctive contribution that we can make to the world is the spirit of the cross, by which “we are liberated for the ministry of diakonia”.

2. **Human Solidarity as a consequence of the cross.** For the apostle, the immediate consequence of this perspective of the cross is the human solidarity manifested especially in help for one another: ‘Help to carry one another’s burdens and in this way you will obey the law of Christ’. Ecumenism in today’s world must be seen as solidarity, the awareness that we belong to a supportive family that does

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167 Victorio Araya Guillén, a Methodist pastor from Costa Rica, at the time of the Larnaca meeting was a professor at the Latin American Biblical Seminary in San José. It is interesting to note that all the key presentations (not least the ones dealing with the biblical texts) were made by male resource people. Two speakers had come from Latin America and non were general secretaries from the global North.


169 Poser, pp. 21-22.
not recognize any human barrier, that notwithstanding the ideological debate about struggles of the injustice of the international economic order, we belong together under the cross of Jesus Christ to help carry each other’s burdens.\textsuperscript{170}

3. \textbf{The liberating power of the cross.} In the ecumenical movement we have emphasized the need for self-reliance as one of the main components in any definition of development, and people’s participation has become more than an ecumenical slogan; it is a permanent criterion to be applied to schemes for transforming situations of dependency into situations of national identity and freedom. The difference between paternalism and the spirit of the cross is precisely the liberating power of the cross is always the power to personalize, to call people to a decision, to give them the sense of dignity that God has granted to each one of God’s creatures.\textsuperscript{171}

4. \textbf{Growing into the full manifestation of the spirit of the cross.} In the dialectic between solidarity and responsibility, the apostle knows that there are many frustrations and temptations. He calls himself and the Galatians and all of us to persevere, to endure, knowing that God is still in command of history and that in due time we shall see the fruits of our common labor. If God has not given up humanity but sent his only begotten Son to appeal from the cross to every human consciousness, how could we, followers of the cross, give up, surrender, reduce our work to routine, to repetition, to monotony? The apostle invites us to provoke each other, to challenge one another in love, so that together we might grow into the full manifestation of the spirit of the cross.\textsuperscript{172}

5. \textbf{Diakonia as our response to the crucified Lord.} In the discussion about resource-sharing we have incorporated the building up of the local church, the servant body of Jesus Christ, as one of the criteria to judge the work of solidarity. The building up of the body of Christ—the crucified One, the servant, the liberator—is to be a serving presence in the community. How do we persevere in doing good and equipping the family of the faith for better manifestations of the Spirit in the reality of the cross? “As for me, however, I will boast only about the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; for by means of his cross the world is dead to me and I

\begin{footnotesize}
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  \item \textsuperscript{170} Poser, p. 23.
  \item \textsuperscript{171} Poser, p. 24.
  \item \textsuperscript{172} Poser, p. 25.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
am dead to the world” … “What does matter is being a new creature” (Ga. 6:14-15). “Let our commitment to diakonia be our response to the crucified Lord!”

Through this sermon, Emilio Castro introduces a new biblical paradigm in the ecumenical movement in relation to diakonia, namely, what I would call the *Diakonia of the Cross*, or to put it in his own words, “*Diakonia as our Response to the Crucified Lord*”. And as I read it, the first question to be raised here is how to reconcile what the Apostle Paul calls in 1Co. 1:18, “the foolishness of the cross” with the highly scientific, interdisciplinary and efficient service that, e.g. some governments and related organizations, who fund diaconal projects, require from the churches in their social engagement. Nevertheless, I can argue that both are not contradictory, rather complementary. At the same time, Castro introduces the issue of power in relation to diakonia which I find revealing to further construct the *Empowering Diakonia* model.

Let’s unpack Castro’s points and try to follow his logic:

First of all Emilio Castro points to a combination of a “profound theological reflection with a down-to-earth call to exercise responsibility”, therefore there is a complementarity between our theological reflection and Christian spirituality on the one hand, with our social responsibility, on the other. This is consistent with a theology of the cross, since the meeting point of our faith and our social engagement is precisely the cross; it is the “central point [the point of] encounter between God and humankind, where we are all called to meet God and each other”, claims Castro.

Secondly, an important aspect of this theology of the cross is to believe that “the cross of Jesus Christ” is a way to “overcome all human pretensions and obstacles”, it leads to “human solidarity manifested especially in the help to one another”.

Thirdly, and related to the previous point, the followers of Jesus Christ “are called to proclaim and live up to the same quality of love and humility manifested on the cross”. “Christian diakonia (interestingly enough, Castro here refers not to diakonia in general, but qualifies it as *Christian*) is the awareness of God’s ministry in the service of reconciliation to humankind”. So beyond charity or inter-church aid, diakonia has the ultimate goal of serving to reconcile the world. This in Castro’s view is the churches’ “distinctive contribution to the world”.

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Fourthly, even when the preacher does not spell out explicitly the word empowerment, he mentions the root term, power, in relation to the cross. He points out that “the difference between paternalism and the spirit of the cross is precisely the liberating power of the cross”. Therefore, the cross frees and empowers towards “self-reliance” and “people’s participation” for transforming situations of dependency into situations of national identity and freedom. It contributes to the “equipping the family of the faith for better manifestations of the Spirit in the reality of the cross”. This empowerment takes expression in perseverance, endurance and by “knowing that God is still in command of history and that in due time we shall see the fruits of our common labor”, according to Castro.

Certainly the churches in the global South have been experiencing this reality in their daily lives. They are resilient and receive power and hope by being co-crucified with Jesus. I find very thought-provoking that here it is the cross (and not the resurrection, since Castro never refers to Jesus’ victorious resurrection!) what provides a “liberating power”. I say this, because many preachers and theologians might argue that the suffering does not matter, because after Good Friday comes Easter Sunday, i.e. after the sorrow and grief comes liberation through the resurrection, but no, Castro underscores the “liberating power of the cross”. At the same time he points out that “the model to which we are called” is “the unpretentious, non-powerful, self-surrendering sign of the cross”. Yet, I see this expression in the light of the text quoted above, where the Apostle Paul stressed, and here I quote now the full verse, “the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1Co. 1:18).

And fifthly, as the churches share their resources and live their solidarity of the cross “the building up of the local church, the servant body of Jesus Christ, [is] one of the criteria to judge [this] work of solidarity. The building up of the body of Christ –the crucified One, the servant, the liberator – is to be a serving presence in the community”. This final statement is critical for the topic of this thesis as well, since it is in the local expression of the body of Christ, namely, at the local church, where true solidarity takes place, in tangible terms, not as an end in itself, but rather as “a serving presence in the [wider] community”.

b) The Bible studies
I will now summarize and analyze the three Bible studies facilitated by Albert van den Heuvel. After making a short introduction there were group discussions, but since their conclusions do not appear in the report I will limit myself here to work on the presentation of the facilitator. This way I will mention, as a matter of summary, one normative aspect that is being discovered in each one of the Bible Studies.

i) Eph. 6:10-18 - The Whole Armor of God

According to van den Heuvel, “the main theme of the letter (often called the Magna Carta of the ecumenical movement, because it’s all about unity) is that all those who have decided to belong to the company of Jesus of Nazareth and who call him Lord – cornerstone of the spiritual community, teacher, example, master – must know that a secret has now come to light, namely that the wall has been broken down – the wall between those who are inside, the Jewish people, and the outsiders. Therefore a new unity is possible, not only between Jews and Christians, but also between God and people”.174

“The war is on, not against human beings … but against anonymous powers like nationalism and parochialism and self-centeredness and selfishness and cynicism and protectionism and racism”.175

The facilitator of the Bible Study points out that for this war the author of Eph. is urging to “take out the armory or your traditions your spiritual armor, those things you need for a spiritual war”. Then van den Heuvel mentions, as a way of illustration, a list armories to combat in this war, namely, the breastplate of hope; the boots of perseverance, of readiness of the gospel of peace; the belt of humor if there is strength, relentless analysis until coming to the truth of the situation, as well as righteousness; a hand-grenade of irony; faith as a shield in order to keep it up; a helmet of salvation; a sword, which should never be exchanged.176

The normative aspect that can be found in this biblical text and in the comments in relation to this thesis is that diaconal action is intended to be carried out in unity, not only among the churches but also with other actors and agents in society. Even when

174 Poser, p. 27.
175 Poser, pp. 27-28.
176 Poser, p. 29.
this belligerent language can sound awkward to some, the churches are therefore, empowered by unity and equipped by “the armory or [their] traditions for a spiritual war” against “anonymous powers” which create poverty and needs among the people, in the first place.

**ii) Lk. 10: 25-37 - The Parable of the Good Samaritan**

The facilitator of the Bible Study remembers the question that the lawyer posed to Jesus: “What do I have to do to inherit eternal life? The first move is when Jesus says: ‘You are a professional, answer your own question. What does the law say?’ And the answer comes like flash: Dt. 6 Then the lawyer goes to the second question and asks: ‘But then who is my neighbor?’ In the answer to this question lies the answer to the first one. The neighbor was, of course, ‘the man who helped’. The man has to come up with the reality that he is a victim”.177

Van den Heuvel goes on to say: “The Samaritan does not do charitable action. But he does what we would call ‘liberative action’, which is a combination of aid and the kind of help which makes it possible for the man who has fallen in the hands of robbers to walk by himself … It may be, in order to restore the story that we never talk about the Good Samaritan anymore rather ‘the liberating enemy’. Samaritan stands for enemy and enemy stands for Jesus, and ‘good’ stands for more than a man who does a good deed, it stands for total liberation”.178

Finally Jesus says, “now go and do the same”, which van den Heuvel would translate as “‘come and follow me’, because what is told to the man who asks the question is that he cannot do anything to inherit eternal life. He must accept that the enemy comes and helps him” … The story portraits Jesus himself, and ultimately the faithful community, because “Jesus does not claim anything for himself”.179

The normativity here in the *Parable of the Good Samaritan* is given by the call to a liberating action, which combines diakonia with empowerment, since, on the one hand it provides aid and assistance to the persons in need –in this case, to the victim of the

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177 Poser, p. 31.
178 Poser, pp. 31-32.
179 Poser, p. 32.
assault—and helps the people “to walk by themselves”, on the other, corresponding with “the man who has fallen in the hands of robbers”.

iii) Lk. 5 – The Question about Fasting

For the third and last Bible study, van den Heuvel chose the whole chapter 5 of Lk. He summarizes its content with these words: “The Jesus portrayed by Luke upsets the traditional community because it opens that community to all the outsiders. Chapter 5 opens with the authoritative preaching of Jesus. Then there is a cleansing of evil spirits. Then there is the forgiveness-of-sin stories. Then there is the eating-with-the-wrong-people story”.\textsuperscript{180}

I will focus here on the final part, i.e. Lk. 5:33-39, on the Question about Fasting, where Albert van den Heuvel gives the following interpretation: “Even the people who like Jesus are little upset by his teachings and practices. They come to him and say: “Could we now ask you a question? Look at the disciples of John the Baptist. They observe the religious practice of fasting. But your disciples don’t. Why is this so?” The answer of Jesus leads to at least two lessons:\textsuperscript{181}

1. “Jesus did not want any polarization between the disciples of John and his own. For us this sounds a warning, that we should not draw too radical a line between what precedes and points towards the Messianic event and the event itself. A passage like this teaches not compassion but respect for those who are dealing with the same mysteries to which we subscribe, but do it in ways which they have learned in earlier periods and which in the end point towards the same mystery we are celebrating”.\textsuperscript{182}

2. “The second lesson is that people can be preparing for the new and yet miss the event. ‘John saw rightly what was coming. But when it came, he missed it’. John was there, he saw it happen. He missed it because his expectations were totally different. He had hoped that it would all come about in his generation. How does one prepare ourself to see signals of that nature?”\textsuperscript{183}

\textsuperscript{180} Poser, p. 32.
\textsuperscript{181} Poser, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{182} Poser, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{183} Poser, p. 34.
Van den Heuvel ends his analysis of this section by pointing out: “Then comes the little parable about the piece of garment and the wine-skins. Let us take the wine image. It is a plea to have the new and the old co-existing till history or God shows which is stronger. Let the new stand next to the old until it is shown to the world which is better, and don’t try prematurely to integrate the new with the old”. 184

If I apply this to the theme of this thesis, the normative aspects here are driven by a couple elements: (1) respect, rather than compassion, is required for diaconal work, when working in partnership with others “who are dealing with the same mysteries to which we subscribe”; and (2) to be ready to read the signs of the times in such a way that in the churches’ social action it lets the new understandings and practices of diakonia stand next to the old, since both are valid and necessary.

c) The Samaritan Diakonia: an Option for Life

According to Victorio Araya “the parable of the Good Samaritan, by the force of its concrete language, provides us today a suitable delineation of the churches’ task—always an open one—of living out and defining its diakonia. Following the gospel, the diakonia of the churches is called to be always Samaritan diakonia—supporting those who have fallen and lie half-dead by the road side of history, so that they may be liberated and be able to live in its fullness the abundant life which comes from God (Jn. 10:10)”.

Then Araya goes on to explain what this Samaritan diakonia requires, which I offer in this summary having studied his presentation, followed by some of my own comments:

1. Opting for life: This means safeguarding and championing the basic right to life in all its fullness, including its actual material basis –the means of livelihood. The fundamental contradiction at present polarizing human history is the one between Life and Death. The ‘logic’ of dominance in today’s world is anti-life, it is a context of death (concentrations of economic, technological, financial and military power, colonial expansion and the resulting patterns of dependence,

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184 Poser, p. 34.
185 According to V. Araya, “this is an expression used by the Brazilian theologian, Leonardo Boff, whose thoughts on this parable have been of great help to us. Cf. Desde el lugar del pobre, Bogota, Paulinas, 1984, pp. 41-58”.
186 Poser, p. 50.
etc.). God’s challenge to us to undertake a *Samaritan diakonia* by opting for life is an invitation ‘to continue with God in the passion of the world’ (Bonhoeffer) and so transform that world.\(^\text{187}\)

2. *Faithfulness to the God of life*: The worldwide system of domination with its ‘anti-life logic’ has becoming more and more idolatrous. The *Samaritan diakonia* of opting for life offers us an opportunity for deep spiritual discernment. Then Araya goes on to explain what he means by this, which will be summarized in the following points:\(^\text{188}\)

   a. A real challenge is made to the obedience of faith in the true God. Today, the opposite to faith in the true God is not atheism or secularism as the denial of the existence of the mystery of God (desacralization). It is idolatry, the worship we give to the false gods of the system.

   b. Idolatry is an expression of a fundamental perversion of the meaning of God in whose name a covenant is being made with death. The denial of God as the giver of life is what makes it possible to legitimize or ignore the death of ‘the others’.

   c. We are witnessing a real struggle of the gods. The true God, the God of life, the God who was revealed in Jesus, is confronting the false gods with their instruments (structures) and purveyors (historical personages) of death.

   d. Faith in God can be experienced only within this struggle and in opposition to the idolatry of the system. To be a believer, it is necessary to abandon the false gods. We have to be ‘atheists’ as regards the false gods of oppression and death.

   e. From the option for life comes the revelation of what the grace of the experience of the true God really is: it is God who listens to the cry of the peoples, of those who suffer unto death, because of the sin of this world. It is God, who in the midst of our history of conflict keeps revealing the divine nature as saving and liberating action with a victorious strength, which conquers death and recreates life.

3. *The kenosis of the church*: Kenosis, in terms of the Christological hymn of Php. 2:6-8, is in principle the model of the *Samaritan diakonia* that listens to ‘the

\(^{187}\) Poser, pp. 51-53.

\(^{188}\) Poser. The following section can be found pp. 53-54.
others’ and enters into dialogue with them as it serves them; and it does so not ‘from outside’ their situation, but from within their struggles, sufferings and hopes in the name of God’s project of life for all creation [We are serving the gospel of] the kingdom that comes from the world of the periphery. That is where Jesus of Nazareth was born, lived and was killed, where God raised him from the dead. Galilee was the Third World of the Roman Empire.\textsuperscript{189}

4. \textit{Living in accordance with the Spirit}: The option of life in Samaritan diakonia is the expression of a powerful spirituality for the urgent conversion of individuals and churches for an authentic encounter with the Lord who ‘though was rich became poor’ (2Co. 8:9) and who appears to us in the world’s Calvary, in the suffering face of those crucified though history. The experience of the Spirit, historically and in community as we actively support life in a material way leads to an ethic of life in the fullest sense, an ethic of love and hope, in the struggle against everything which generates death in ourselves and in society. One expression of this spirituality is the celebration, with its highest point being the eucharist, the Lord’s supper, with its constitutive dialectic of memorial (paschal) and liberty (openness for the future). In the breaking of the bread, bread that is missing from the table of the poor of the earth, the life of the Risen Lord is made present and is recognized through the Spirit of Life.\textsuperscript{190}

According to my own experience, some may argue that the parable of the so-called Good Samaritan has justified the charity or the welfarism of the church. Nevertheless these reflections give us a whole different perspective. Therefore, I find the normative dimension here, very clearly, in the notion of Samaritan diakonia itself, which is exercised by \textit{opting for life}, i.e. serving, lifting and liberating the victims of injustice, so that they can enjoy the fullness of life that comes from God thought his Son Jesus Christ. Also by being \textit{faithful to the God of life}, practicing \textit{the kenosis of the church} and \textit{living in accordance with the Spirit}, which provides the necessary empowerment (“powerful spirituality”) towards the conversion to the God of life.

Regarding the relationship between kenosis and diakonia, it can be argued that the key verse here is 7, where it says: “but [Jesus] emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness”. In the Lexham Bible Dictionary it is mentioned that

\textsuperscript{189} Poser, p. 55.

\textsuperscript{190} Poser, pp. 55-56.
“Both Jesus and Paul use slave imagery as metaphors with positive connotations. Jesus often uses slave imagery the most. For example, He portrays a true follower as a slave (Mk. 10:42–44; Lk. 17:7–10) and likens slavery to discipleship (Mt. 10:24–25)”. Important here is also to see the connection between the kenosis text and Mk. 10:42-45 cited in this quote, which is one of the classic passages of Jesus’ teachings on servant hood (diakonia). In this text I find an interesting connection made by Jesus between *doulos* and *diakonein*.

And, the following verse (Php. 2:8) points to the cross: “He [Jesus] humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross”. And, again, I come back to Castro’s opening sermon where he highlights the “liberating power of the cross”. Therefore, emptiness does not happen for the sake of emptiness, as an end in itself, but rather it leads to a serving discipleship that is empowered by the cross of Christ.

After almost 30 years of the Larnaca consultation, I spoke with Victorio Araya,192 with regard to this normative dimension. He underscored that “the evangelical reading of the Bible is normative and diakonia is not optional. In the Latin American theology God is always going through the other. There is no direct route. The Bible speaks of the God of the orphan, the widow. Therefore, we have a responsibility towards the other, hence the normative character. Jesus Christ himself is normative and the Bible is the source of authority”. Then he goes on to say that “the diaconal normativity is an ethical imperative that is based on the commandment of love and is concretized, historicized and verified in the love of God manifested in the love-service of the neighbor, the brother, the sister, the ‘least of these’ (‘Those who say, ‘I love God’, and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen”—1Jn. 4:20).

Then Araya shares in our conversation the notion of what he calls *soteriological normativity*, in his own words: “Diakonia is inserted by God's design in the heart of the salvific experience itself, not in the sense of merit, human effort to win the favor of God, you can not buy God’s mercy though works, indulgences or economic pacts,
rather, in the sense that diakonia is the manifestation, realization or revelation of the gift of salvation. So we break with the traditional understanding of rigorous subjectivism - fideism - salvation of the individual or through ‘my personal acceptance of Christ’. It is the acceptance of Christ in my heart, and emotional freedom from guilt, punishment, condemnation, without the demands of a radical discipleship obedient to and engaged with the kingdom”.

And in relation to his presentation in Larnaca on the Samaritan Diakonia, Araya expressed that “The parable of the Good Samaritan has to be crossed with Mt. 25:31-46 (Final Judgment) and the radical criterion of discernment to decide, include or set-aside of eternal life”.

d) Other Biblical texts cited at Larnaca

As a complementary information regarding the use of biblical texts at the Larnaca event, the delegates from the Pacific, reported back from their regional working group meeting, some definitions of diakonia based on the following passages: Mk. 10:45 (service for all); Ac. 6:1-6 (just distribution); Jas. 2:14-26 (sacrificial service, love in action with justice, faith in action, liberating service, Christian discipleship, stewardship) and Jn. 10:10 (whole gospel, seeking fullness of life).

e) Additional Normative Elements present at Larnaca

Again, this normative dimension is relating to or deriving from a standard or norm, which provides meaning for actions particularly of behavior and therefore has ethical connotations. As diaconal engagement is not an option, rather part of the essence of being church, it is normative, essential for its mission, it is, therefore a faith based diakonia.

An example of this is that in the consultation there was an important definition of diakonia as “carrying God’s mercy into a merciless world. It is discipleship and unity, witness and obedience”. Here there is a clear reference to a value or norm, one of compassion or forgiveness in a context of merciless. A significant expression of God’s

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193 Poser, pp. 11-12.
service to the world, for which the church is called to act, is by bringing healing and reconciliation as important elements of God’s mercy and love for all creation.

Another instance of norms and values is the whole question of inclusiveness as a normative or ethical claim, that the African group in Larnaca mentioned, speaking from their own reality, from an existential point of view, in the sense that diakonia should address the issue of indigenous and integrated development based on self-reliance and full participation of the people so that they can live a more holistic life materially, socially, politically and spiritually. Relevant to the Larnaca consultation and to the notion of empowerment for diakonia is, therefore, the participatory process; indeed, there are many references to this, through sharing of people, person-to-person encounters, partnerships, networks, team visits, etc. Most of these, that can be understood as values or virtues, were underlined as a way for mutual empowerment and can be seen as indicators of quality in really practical diaconal work, which still today is pertinent for the work of the WCC and of the churches.

The quest for participation has been, throughout all these years of existence one of the main emphasis of the ecumenical movement, to the extent that it can be considered a normative and ethical claim. Since it points to the action of taking part in something it is critical for the empowering diakonia process, involving the whole laos or people of God in serving others.

More specifically, participation in decision-making processes is a basic principle for empowerment. As the Larnaca Declaration underscores: “Economic and social structures, which perpetuate inequality and poverty, must be replaced by a new international economic order and political structure, which ensures the full participation of all people in the decisions, which affect their lives”.

Another significant must, and therefore under the normative dimension, is the issue of justice. The group from the Caribbean at Larnaca shared these thoughts, focusing on issues of justice and unity, so critical for Christianity and in general for the ecumenical movement: “our work must be grounded –at the local and regional levels—in the scriptures and on the Christian principles of justice, love, hope and faith. Support for

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194 Poser, p. 106.
195 Poser, p. 124.
religious education and theological reflection programs is paramount… The prophetic and alternative message of the church regarding approaching issues and problems must not be based in ideological and divisive grounds, but rather in the unifying concept of scriptural teachings”.196

As a matter of fact, this quote from the Caribbean group can be an excellent conclusion for our normative dimension in the sense that diaconal work must be rooted in the context (locally and regionally)197 and in the text (the scriptures), which inform the Christian principles of justice, love, hope and faith. In order to enable this, support for religious education and theological reflection are critical.

C. The Need-Oriented Dimension

Diakonia has always been challenged by human needs. Here it would be essential to differentiate basic human needs, some of them mentioned at Larnaca (e.g. food, water, clothing and shelter, as well as sanitation, education, and healthcare) from others, like the necessity of empowerment of the churches for their diaconal action.

On this issue of serving vis-à-vis the needs, what I have found new in Larnaca is that the majority of those participating came from situations of tension, particularly in the global South, and their voices echoed concretely the cries of their people. This helped to focus more purposely on the needs for effective, preventive and comprehensive action.

As it was noted at the gathering, “focusing on [these] people is a revision of the concept and the direction our social diakonia has been taken”.198 “Our wounded and needy sisters and brothers must be urgently helped by diakonia. Continuous diakonia must also be concerned about the unjust structures which increase the number and the tragedy of the needy”.199 This was reiterated time and again with phrases like this one: “Victims of society must be the raison d’être for diaconal change; they must formulate their own needs and the church community must learn to listen. The whole person is important”.200 But they also stressed the relevance of making connections and networking, remarking that “In any society you can arrange for material and financial

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196 This section is taken from the Regional Working Groups report – Poser, p. 110.
197 This is another example where there is an interrelationship between the different dimensions.
198 Poser, p. 83.
199 Poser, p. 95.
200 Poser, p. 100.
help for the needy people, but the essence of diakonia is to be recognized in human relationships”.\textsuperscript{201}

At the same time there was at Larnaca a repeated emphasis on the “need to deepen the reflection on the theological bases of diakonia as was the necessity of incorporating dialogue with other faiths”.\textsuperscript{202} And it was also said, “we need a more comprehensive conception of the work of witness, service and the expression of solidarity between the churches”\textsuperscript{203}, underlining again the holistic understanding of mission, that I have been mentioning in countless occasions in the current dissertation.

As in previous events, the general message was that diakonia must address the root causes of injustice even as it responds to the pressing and urgent needs experienced by the people. They pointed out the need “To work out new models of diakonia which would envisage service in terms both of immediate needs and of action to tackle the root causes of the problems”.\textsuperscript{204}

On the other hand there was a more intentional focus on the local communities, e.g. \textit{Called to be Neighbors} as one of its main mottos, there was a clear focus on the immediate and more tangible needs of the people in the day-to-day life. This precisely will be one of the major focuses for my chapter IV on local congregations and projects.

At the same time, there was a more systematic and structural approach to the need of education that has been highlighted here as an important source of empowerment, e.g. ecumenical-based curriculum for diakonia, creation of more vocational training centers for the laity, education and ecumenical awareness-building.\textsuperscript{205} Therefore, a concrete way of addressing this need, at Larnaca was through a recommendation that was made

\textsuperscript{201} Poser, p. 74.
\textsuperscript{202} Poser, p. 14. The point here is not to define interreligious dialogue as a diaconal activity \textit{per se}, but rather to raise the need for a joint effort of social engagement to address the necessities of all people. The Larnaca report says: “The essence of Christian diakonia presupposes that all Christians work together [with people of other faiths] to face the needs of the whole world”. And it goes on to say: “interfaith work is often most effective at the micro-diakonal level” – Poser, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{203} Poser, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{204} Poser, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{205} Poser, pp. 115, 116, 118.
to create “an ecumenically-based curriculum for diakonia”. This proposal has been taken seriously by the WCC in the years after this event.\footnote{206}{One of the WCC’s recent goals has been to work on the development of this theological curriculum for diakonia, as a follow-up of the two global consultations on prophetic diakonia held in 2009 and 2010. It has been exploring the various ways of cooperating and strengthening the network of collaboration and resource sharing in training for diakonia. It also has been reviewing the existing curriculum utilized by different institutions looking at how this experience can be broadened toward the formation of an ecumenical and global theological curriculum. It has been looking as well at what resources are commonly available for supporting entities that do not have any institutional capacity for theological training on diakonia so that they can train staff with the needed capacities.}

Another way of educating was raised at the group from the Middle East acknowledging that for the future work of diakonia we will need vocational training centers, accelerated and long-term courses, income-generating projects through loans, community multi-purpose halls and programs; the North Americans: “The visitation model needs to be picked up. This is the best way for the one-third world to learn from the two-thirds world. Global education needs to be seen as part of service”; and finally the group from the Pacific underscored that “a key issue in this debate is education and ecumenical awareness-building”.\footnote{207}{This section is also taken from the Regional Working Groups report – Poser, pp. 115,116,118.}

There was a stronger emphasis on the necessity in relation to the global South as well, not so much in terms of addressing their material needs, but for the global North to learn from its resilience, its spirituality and its indigenous forms of service and empowerment. Under the section Committing ourselves to life together in point 5, the following recommendation was made: “Ways should be found for powerless communities, including those in the North, to share concerns and resources, and to form coalitions to develop their common strength”.\footnote{208}{Poser, p. 101.} Also in this same heading, there is a sub-theme called Open communication, where we will find three points mentioning education or training, as forms of empowerment, which I quote here.

For example, point 5: “Countries in the South should contribute in educating (training) for service people from the North (staff and churches)”. Point 7: “In exercising diakonia it is very important to acknowledge that all resources belong to God; therefore, the stewardship of resources should be assessed. This assessment should include the continual education of the community (or local organization) in order to improve the...
diaconal practice”. And point 8: “Training of local human resources is essential so that full local participation can be guaranteed at the different stages of diakonia”.

Incidentally and regarding the previous point, i.e. of “all resources belonging to God” an interesting practical illustration of this concept was shared by Jan (Jappe) Arnold Erichsen, who served as the Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) general secretary during 1978 and 1992 and attended both Larnaca and El Escorial consultations – He said: “I remember when I left Larnaca I traveled via Germany back home, and by that time Hannover was the center of the EKD (The Evangelical Church) and I stopped there to share my impression of the meeting. I was enthusiastic and wanted to test-out how it was viewed in Germany, that ‘the resources belong to God’ and that they should be distributed equally in the global world among the churches by WCC. This was the *raison d'être* for these recommendations, and then they laughed and said ‘no, they don’t understand that God does not have the ownership of this money, here it is the German State and in Norway, it is the Norwegian Government’. I felt that I came down from the mountain of Tabor and then I heard these bureaucrats quite ironically teardown the whole concept as it was”. This was pretty much the feeling, what I could call a clash between the Larnaca vision and dream with the harsh reality of the world of international cooperation. Nevertheless, Erichsen gave very positive examples on how this vision helped to reshape the *ethos* and practice of the NCA “to fight for justice in the world” and a lot of effort was made in the following years on education, awareness lifting and communication to implement this vision.

**D. The Contextual Dimension**

Faithful to a long tradition of social commitment and engagement of the ecumenical movement, this dimension, as described here, was one of the most lifted in the consultation. The significance of the context and the impact it had for the Larnaca event was reaffirmed by Klaus Poser when he sais: “As the motto goes diakonia has been the focus, concern and challenge of the consultation. Impressive were the many diakonias

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209 Poser, p. 102.

210 I made this interview in Oslo, on 28 October 2014.
reflecting the interpretation of the mission of the church and its challenges under different political and cultural conditions”.

Consequently, at the Larnaca gathering, relevant issues were discussed as hunger, debt, armaments expenditure and uprooted people. Of course, these are issues that can be listed under the previous dimension of needs, but I have chosen to place them here as, again, they have different contextual meanings. It is indeed paradoxical that all these challenges, are not only still present in today’s context, after more than a fourth of a Century, but have further deteriorated, as a result of our unjust world des-order. It noted that diakonia could exist on various levels – emergency, prevention, rehabilitation, development and change. The gathering also noticed the worldwide regression to parochialism (narrowness or pettiness of interests, opinions, or information), while at the same time, and this is very relevant for our work today, it concluded that the form diakonia takes should be shaped by local needs.

Many contexts were analyzed and studied at Larnaca. One of the participants, Adolfo Ham, in an interview on March 2014, expressed the following, regarding this context that was shared in the gathering:

As a Cuban I arrived at Larnaca with two strong stimulus/backgrounds: the triumph of the Cuban revolution in the January 1959 and the creation of the Cuba Project in 1964 by CICARWS, through the director for Latin America and the Caribbean Rev. Theo Tschuy. Through this project and by the agency of the Cuban Council of Churches, the Protestant churches, both members or not of the Council, were assisted financially in the midst of a severe crisis, as orphans, without any financial support as a result of the structural independence from the mother churches in the USA, the embargo and other political issues in that country. Through the Cuba case the WCC made a remarkable and uncommon missiological and ecumenical contribution. For these reasons I defended one of Larnaca’s major thesis: there is and must be a close relationship between diakonia and the socio-political-economic situation of where it is carried-out. For me it is important that its Final Declaration begins with a very realistic description of the world stage. It is terrible that these conditions after all these years have worsened, such as migration, concomitant xenophobia, etc.

As it was declared in the gathering, “We will find as many kinds of diakonia as there are reactions of Christians to incarnate the love of our Lord in the situations in which

211 Notes from a Skype interview on 26 March 2014.
212 Adolfo Ham is a pastor of the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba and at the time of the Larnaca consultation was the president of the Cuban Council of Churches.
they are.” 213 Facing the multiple world’s challenges at the time, there was clearly a trend—as mentioned above—of moving, both conceptually and practically, from a social service as charity towards one addressing the root causes of injustice.

Focusing on this dimension dealing with the context, historically, and Larnaca was not an exception; the ecumenical movement has reflected the reality of the church, as the body of Christ that has its expression, life and ministry both locally and globally. Therefore, as we will observe in many quotes taken from this consultation, there were various references to diakonia and empowerment, both to the critical role of the local churches, and at the same time to the catholicity of the church, namely, in allusion to its worldwide presence and mission, in other words, getting “involved in diakonia to build the whole oikoumene, the whole inhabited world”. 214 Let’s look at some examples, which I will comment, starting by grouping them at both local and global contexts, as well as considering the global North-South relationships:

1. Local Contexts.
   a. “Ecumenical diakonia presents us with a special challenge as we change from the idea of diakonia with our distant neighbor to serving the closer neighbor. However, this is not always understood in our local congregations”. 215 It might seem to be easier to serve our neighbors who are far away than those of the community, with whom we relate on a daily bases, whose faces we see frequently. The discussions at Larnaca, particularly focused on biblical texts dealing with the notion of neighbors, helped the participants to gain in clarity on who were their neighbors, mainly those in need, and how to love them through concrete ways of service, since “diakonia has to be incarnated in its concrete setting” as Joseph Hromadka, from former Czechoslovakia underlined. 216
   b. At Larnaca the participants said: “our own calling as Christians includes political action for structural change at micro-levels”. 217 This was one of the main reasons why it was also underscored, “Virtually all the reports emphasized that the witness of the local churches is the basis of all

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213 Poser, p. 82.
214 Poser, p. 84.
215 Poser, p. 64.
216 Poser, p. 75.
217 Poser, p. 95.
At the level of the local congregations, socio-political-economic engagement can become more effective, which is a major reason for highlighting this area in the thesis.

c. Under *Service in the community* the following recommendation was made: “CICARWS should make a conscious effort to support and equip the work of women, youth and local congregations”. This, again, as a way of enabling mutual empowerment in sectors of the church that historically, in many cases, have been neglected.

2. **Global context.**

   a. One of the assets or added values of the ecumenical movement is the empowerment that comes from the togetherness and the lively expressions of solidarity and accompaniment. On this note, a speaker from South Africa noted: “As we go forward with our difficulties we are happy and feel enriched by the world diakonia”.

   b. Political action is required at the global level as well. During the presentation of issues that were lifted at Larnaca, the relevance and functionality of pressing globally for justice was also mentioned. Klaus Poser underscored: “We were discussing the root causes of injustice. That means our advocacy has to be universal. It calls for the deepening of prophetic diakonia”.

   c. Another relevant aspect related to this interconnectedness facilitated by the WCC was quoted under *Visitation or exchanges*, where it is mentioned in point four: “The purpose of all exchanges and visitations should be to empower all people involved in the process by creating an experience of solidarity”.

3. **Global North-South.** While dealing with ecumenical cooperation the normal tendency is to believe that the global North should help, or contribute to the development of the global South. Nonetheless, as a practical example of how to address creatively contextual issues, from the report of the *Inter-regional group meetings*, the following was mentioned, under point 3: “We want to emphasize

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219 Poser, p. 96.
220 Poser, p. 71.
221 Poser, p. 85.
222 Poser, p. 99.
the many contributions that the South is making and can make to the North-South ecumenical diaconal sharing, for example:

a. the possibilities of contributing to the creation of just socio-political and economic alternatives;

b. the dynamism and life which exists in our Southern churches and which seem to be rare in our Northern counterparts;

c. the provision of expertise, human resources, information and broader ecumenical experience such as these at inter-religious and inter-ideological levels”.

Among the contextual issues that affect or challenge the diaconal effort, the following were mentioned in the Larnaca consultation’s report, which will be classified in these political, social and ecclesial areas:

1. Political context.

a. Again pointing to the vision of diakonia cited earlier, the participants reaffirmed that “Christians and churches are called to reconsider their diakonia in the political context. They are challenged to advocacy, to address root causes and to provide sanctuary where human lives and dignity are at stake. CICARWS was asked to promote global diakonia through awareness-building and networking, as well as to help to give expression to prophetic challenge”.

b. And under point 4 of the report coming from the Inter-regional group meetings and critical to empowerment: “We look towards practical methods and initiatives with a commitment for self-development/reliance. Thus, through this we wish to emphasize the need for national sovereignty and the overcoming of colonialism in all its contemporary and varied manifestations …”

These are indeed important points in my view, especially coming from the global South, but the question is, aren’t they too romantic or too idealistic? The critical question here would be, how to implement really in practical terms these proposals, particularly regarding this last point on

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223 Poser, p. 120.
225 Poser, p. 120.
self-development and self-reliance, so critical for the empowerment scheme?

2. Social context.
   a. The director of CICARWS, explaining the *Steps towards Larnaca* highlighted the following: “The theme *Called to be Neighbors* presents a challenge: How can we be neighbors in the midst of so many divisions, injustices, barriers?” The sociological analysis of the context helps the church to refocus its diaconal efforts in the community. One thing is to preach to love the neighbor in a situation of justice, harmony and unity and quite the opposite in situations of crisis and adversity. Hence, the relevance of taking into consideration the social context where the diaconal effort is being exercised.

   b. An interesting analysis of the world’s context at the time of the Larnaca gathering was made by Adebayo Adedeji (a Nigerian, from the UN Economic Commission for Africa) in his lecture called *Towards the Dawn of the Third Millennium*, by which he covered the following headline issues, relevant to the diaconal efforts at that time: the promise and disappointment of early post-war years; regression to parochialism; the debt problem and the danger it poses; the scandalous scourge of hunger; armaments expenditure and its opportunity cost; the persistence and pervasiveness of racism and racial discrimination; the tragedy of the uprooted and the displaced people; Africa – underdog of the world; the world in the year 2000 and the Christian response and responsibility.

   c. Also, concerning the issue 7, refugees, the participants pointed out: “we affirm that diakonia in the area of human rights, refugees and the marginalized, can move people more than anything else from charity to an informed and sustaining ministry … The refugee is a kind of mirror through whose suffering we can see the injustices, the oppression and maltreatment of the powerless by the powerful”.

   d. And finally, concerning this *contextual dimension*, where there is an intentional purpose of conceiving concrete patterns for our actual praxis

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226 Poser, p. 20.
227 Poser, pp. 35-45.
228 Poser, pp. 102-103.
in the everyday world, in the analysis of the world at the Larnaca conference, the participants in the final declaration, acknowledged that “on every continent - at a time of increased terrorism and violence - the people are now struggling for life, for justice, for peace. On every continent, and under every social, political and ideological system, the forces of evil are being manifested”.\(^{229}\) There was a clear focus on people,\(^{230}\) seeking for peace and justice.

3. **Ecclesial context.**

   a. Likewise in the *Steps towards Larnaca*, Poser also mentioned “the theme of justice and the struggle for human dignity within the wider context of the churches’ service and witness … as well as issues related to the use and distribution of power, and on questions of unity.\(^{231}\) Here again, there is an ecclesiology defined that is not limited to the four walls of the sanctuaries, but rather taking into account “the wider context” for service and empowerment, i.e. serving by making a responsible “use and distribution of power”.

   b. In reflecting on the measures of diakonia in relation to human rights, refugees and marginalized, in point 2 of the *Issue Reports*: “We recommend that because churches have much to learn from each other in the area of human rights, the various church structures should be encouraged to facilitate exchange visits of Christians engaged in such work”.\(^{232}\) This is a point that came up new and it strongly has to do with the inter-church cooperation addressing a common issue with affects both contexts, the one of the *sending* churches (from where the refugees comes) and the *receiving* churches (in the countries where the refugees land).

**E. The Transformative Dimension**

At the Larnaca consultation this dimension of transformation was also creatively tackled from its inception. In its planning process it was revealed by the CICARWS director

\(^{229}\) Poser, p. 123.

\(^{230}\) Poser, pp. 97-100.

\(^{231}\) Poser, pp. 16-17.

\(^{232}\) Poser, p. 103.
that its “main challenge is to find joint strategies that will enable us, despite our limitations, to make a transforming impact”.233

As to what type of transformation it was envisaged or towards what sort of society the churches were aiming at, through diaconal transforming, empowering and prophetic action, the following ideas were mentioned, among others:

In one of the reactions to the lecture *Towards the Dawn of the Third Millennium*, Hilkka Pietilä underscored that “The future of our societies can only be built on foundations of responsibility, cooperation and the free will of the people. All other patterns are hierarchical, suppressive, even dictatorial. Functional social networks are the basic structure of society, which create the control of power from below and can develop a social control for the protection of nature, the life basis of humanity … But the necessary precondition for society directed from below is for it to have independent, self-reliant and responsible citizens. In order to have such citizens we must be able to rehabilitate the dignity and value of human beings, to liberate people from their bridles of mass culture and from the addiction to the market carrousel”.

In spite of the fact that here H. Pietilä does not mention explicitly the word *empowerment*, I see the notion very clear in what she is trying to say, namely, that our call is to pursue a transforming diaconal action that enables and liberates the power of the people from within and from below in order for them to lead and conduct their own destiny.

Dealing with the call to transform, quite often the first thing that comes to our mind is to transform the world, i.e. the society needs to be transformed by the church as if we, as churches, would already be living the kingdom of God here and now, which, unfortunately is not the case. Nirwalka Fernando, reacting to the other presentation on *The Samaritan’s Diakonia*, helps us understand better this reality when she, quite rightly, points out that “The churches, the Christian community, will first have to experience powerlessness, it will have to choose God and not mammon. The call to become neighbors involves that choice and that transformation”.235 Hence, there was a call to start by transforming the churches in the way described above in the normative

233 Poser, p. 20.
234 Poser, p. 47.
235 Poser, p. 58.
dimension, in a *kenotic* manner, which leads to servanthood and to the power of the cross.

In situations of “continuing struggle for justice, freedom and liberation, the priorities for diakonia must be in organizing, educating and building social awareness, and mobilizing or empowering people. The churches, if unable to identify with the struggle of the people, must at least be in solidarity with them”.\(^{236}\) Taken from the context of the Philippines, June Rodríguez challenged the participants to very explicitly work towards a diaconal action that mobilizes and empowers people, which will help to transform the society towards justice, freedom and liberation.

Mary Mxadana, from the context of South Africa, at the time of the apartheid, pointed out: “In the midst of this suffering we do our diakonia. We call it suffering diakonia and we are working towards a liberating diakonia”.\(^{237}\) And yes, finally the apartheid was defeated, people were liberated but suffering and hopelessness are still pretty much present in the country. Therefore, it is not enough to liberate, rather, a transformative diakonia is needed.\(^{238}\)

From the Regional Working Groups’ report, it was claimed: “Development education in the North remains very important, particularly regarding structural questions. Studies should be undertaken regarding issues like agricultural policy of the EEC,\(^ {239}\) the migrant question, etc. The WCC could either play a facilitating or a coordinating role”.\(^{240}\) Here the European participants argued on the importance of working together churches, ecumenical agencies and civil societies in general towards what they called “change and aid”, important components of transformation.

And finally, the partakers at the Larnaca meeting acknowledged the unique role that the churches are called to play in the transformation of societies through the power of transformative diakonia. As we can read from the Larnaca Declaration: “Everywhere

\(^{236}\) Poser, p. 66.

\(^{237}\) Poser, p. 70.

\(^{238}\) On this regard and as the booklet *Diakonia in Context* clearly puts it: “Diakonia is challenged by the spiral of hopelessness, and in its action, it seeks to support the spiral of hope. Diakonia takes initiatives of accompaniment when people move from one step to another, envisioning transformation, reconciliation and empowerment” - LWF, *Diakonia in Context. Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment. The Lutheran World Federation*, ed. by Kjell Nordstokke (Geneva, 2009), p. 21.

\(^{239}\) European Economic Community, today called the European Union.

\(^{240}\) Poser, p. 111.
the people make a prophetic diakonia essential to the churches’ role in shaping the future. We have all experienced, one way or another, the transforming power of Christian service”.

Summary of the outcomes of the Larnaca Consultation

For this section, as we synthesize, highlight and comment the main outcomes of the Diakonia 2000 Larnaca consultation, again, we will come back to the Five Dimensions in order to summarize the findings regarding the notions and practices of diakonia and empowerment. Again, this exercise will lead to the creation of the building blocks in order to further design and construct the Empowering Diakonia model.

A. The Visional Dimension

The Larnaca Vision of diakonia reflects the struggle by the oppressed, the marginalized and impoverished, accompanied by expressions of ecumenical solidarity. The priorities for diakonia of this continuing struggle must be in organizing, educating, building social awareness, mobilizing, in other words, empowering the people, both in individual terms but also in relation to the community. Therefore, this empowerment takes place for strengthening the forces of autonomy, self-reliance and development in the local communities, and on that basis to contribute to improving their situations.

The theological undergirding also contributes to the Vision of diakonia, which must be done as the expression of the fullness of the body of Christ. Service is a way of life; by doing diakonia the church becomes more fully the servant body of Christ, concerned for each member of that body, but also of the wider community. It is an ecclesial practice that is liberating, kenotic, celebratory, and hopeful, seeking human development for the announcement of the kingdom, defined as fullness of life, justice, and peace. This ecclesiology recognizes the work of the Holy Spirit as a sustaining force and a necessary tool for the development of the people of God, receiving its source of power in the holy Eucharist as all-compassing love, as dispenser of life and hope, as a

241 Poser, p. 124.
Eucharistic fellowship\textsuperscript{242} with God, with one another, with the whole humanity and the cosmos for transformation.

**B. The Normative Dimension**

Based on the findings of the Larnaca Report, and focusing primarily on the exegesis, hermeneutics and biblical paradigms, a significant prescriptive dimension present at event was the concept of *Diakonia as our response to the Crucified Lord* where we find a profound theological reflection with a down-to-earth call to exercise responsibility, therefore there is a complementarity between the churches’ theological reflection and Christian spirituality on the one hand, and with its social responsibility, on the other. This is consistent with a theology of the cross, since the meeting point of the churches’ faith and its social engagement is precisely the cross; as the central point of encounter between God and humankind, where all are called to meet God and each other.

An important aspect of this theology is to believe that the cross of Jesus Christ is a way for overcoming all human pretensions and obstacles, leading to a community of solidarity, manifested especially in the help to one another. Hence, Christian diakonia is the awareness of God’s ministry in the humble service of reconciliation to humankind. So beyond charity or inter-church aid, diakonia has the ultimate goal of serving to reconcile the world. This is the distinctive contribution to the world of the followers of Christ. The spirit of the cross is a liberating power. Therefore, the cross frees and empowers towards self-reliance and people’s participation for transforming situations of dependency into situations of national identity and freedom. It contributes to the equipping the family of the faith for better manifestations of the Spirit in the reality of the cross. This empowerment takes expression in perseverance, endurance and by knowing that God is still in command of history and that in due time the followers of the crucified Jesus shall see the fruits of their common labor.

\textsuperscript{242} On this issue of Eucharistic fellowship and in relation to diakonia and empowerment, one of the participants at the Larnaca consultation, Madeleine Strub-Jaccoud, representing the Swiss churches, who later became the director of ‘Mission 21’ in Basel, shared this experience, thirty years after this event. She says: “… In my church a new concept of Diakonia is implemented in the congregations. It speaks about the Holy Communion as center of the life of the church. God’s people meet at the Lord’s Table and are empowered to act in solidarity. The focus is laid on the acting of the congregation. It has become naturally for the congregation to act in solidarity” (email sent on 4 April 2014).
Another normative or regulatory aspect of the Larnaca gathering is what was identified as the *Samaritan Diakonia*, which is exercised by opting for life, i.e. serving, lifting and liberating the victims of injustice, so that they can enjoy the fullness of life that comes from God thought his Son Jesus Christ. Also by being faithful to the God of life, practicing the *kenosis* of the church and living in accordance with the Spirit, which provides the necessary empowerment (*powerful spirituality*) towards the conversion to the God of life.

This emptiness (*kenosis*) follows the example of Jesus, who emptied himself, taking the form of a crucified slave (Php. 2:7-8). Therefore, emptiness does not happen for the sake of emptiness, as an end in itself, but rather it leads to a serving discipleship that is empowered by the cross of Christ. So the normativity here is given by the call to a liberating action, which combines diakonia with empowerment, since, on the one hand it provides aid and assistance to the persons in need, in the case of the *Parable of the Good Samaritan*, to the victim of the assault, and helps the people “to walk by themselves”, on the other, corresponding with “the man who has fallen in the hands of robbers”.

In the light of Eph. 6, other text studied at Larnaca, diaconal action is called to be carried out by the followers of Jesus in unity, not only among the churches but also with other actors and agents in society. The churches are therefore, empowered by unity and equipped by the *armory* or their traditions for a spiritual war against anonymous powers, which create poverty and needs among the people, in the first place.

An additional normative or authoritative dimension can be driven by Lk. 5, also worked on in this consultation, highlighting a couple elements: on the one hand, respect, rather than compassion, is required for diaconal work, when working in partnership with others who are dealing with the same mysteries to which the churches subscribe. And on the other, to be prepared to read the signs of the times in such a way that in the churches’ social action it lets the new understandings and practices of diakonia stand next to the old, since both are valid and necessary.

**C. The Need-Oriented Dimension**
Of course, diakonia has always been challenged by human needs, but what I have found new in Larnaca, is that the majority of those participating came from situations of tension, mainly in the global South, and their voices echoed the cries of their people. As in previous events, the general message was that diakonia must address the root causes of injustice even as it responds to the pressing and urgent needs experienced by the people. But what made Larnaca unique, for the first time, was the presence of people who in their own flesh and/or ministry suffered the results of injustice. This helped to focus more purposely on the needs for effective, preventive and comprehensive action, towards justice and dignity.

As noted earlier, the participants from the global South mentioned their contributions in ecumenical sharing, particularly in these three areas: the possibilities of contributing to the creation of just socio-political and economic alternatives; the dynamism and life which exists in their Southern churches and which seem to be rare in the Northern counterparts; and the provision of expertise, human resources, information and broader ecumenical experience such as these at inter-religious and inter-ideological levels.

On the other hand there was a more intentional focus on the local communities, e.g. Called to be Neighbors as one of its main mottos, there was a clear focus on the immediate and more tangible needs of the people in the day-to-day life. At the same time, there was a more systemic and structural approach to the need of education that has been highlighted as an important source of empowerment, e.g. ecumenical-based curriculum for diakonia, creation of more vocational training centers for the laity, education and ecumenical awareness-building; and finally, there was a stronger emphasis on the global South and North relationships, not so much in terms of addressing their material needs, but for the global North to learn from its resilience, its spirituality and its indigenous forms of service and empowerment.

Therefore there was a need expressed to develop a so-called collective empowerment process. It was mentioned at Larnaca, e.g. that ways should be found for powerless communities, including those in the North, to share concerns and resources, and to form coalitions to develop their common strength. Hence, an important source for empowerment towards action is through interactions, i.e. it was highlighted at the consultation that in any society arrangement can be made for material and financial help for the needy, but the essence of diakonia is to be recognized in human relationships.
Indeed, through relationships the human beings share not just what they have, but, which is even more important on the long run, also what they are. This way the values of solidarity, commonality, of care for one another are being shared, as a family in God in this common oikos.

**D. The Contextual Dimension**

Condensing my findings at Larnaca regarding this dimension we can reaffirm the importance of recognizing the social-political-economic-environmental context, both at global and local levels, for diaconal engagement, i.e. for “macro- and micro-diakonia”.243 From the local standpoint, again, the theme of the conference of Called to be Neighbors helped to lift awareness more accurately on the immediate needs of the people and to fine-tune the witness of the local churches as the basis of all diakonia. At the global level, the role of advocacy was underlined, primarily focusing on prophetic diakonia (addressing the root causes of injustices) and struggling for life, for justice, for peace.

Likewise, the context informs the empowerment efforts mainly by equipping the women and youth at local congregations through the togetherness and the lively expressions of solidarity and accompaniment, as underscored earlier. Also by looking towards practical methods and initiatives with a commitment for self-development/reliance and people’s participation, as well as serving by making a responsible use and distribution of power.

**E. The Transformative Dimension**

The participants at Larnaca envisioned an interdisciplinary and multidimensional transformative diakonia, proclaiming and working towards a just society that takes into consideration the holistic understanding of being human in relation to the rest of society and creation. Beyond financial changes, it seeks an economy of life that provides opportunities and empowers people to decide and work towards a more participatory society.

244 Poser, p. 20.
On this matter in general and on the type of society that the participants of Larnaca were seeking to build through transformative action, in particular, we found concrete viewpoints like the building of societies on foundations of responsibility, cooperation and the free will of the people, creating the control of power from below in order to form independent, self-reliant and responsible citizens. Here again we find an allusion to the notion of empowerment in the sense that our call is to pursue a transforming diaconal action that enables and liberates the power of the people from within and from below in order for them to construct their own destiny.

On the other hand, even when the world needs to be transformed, the churches, the Christian communities, will first have to experience powerlessness, by choosing God rather than mammon, among other actions. The call to become neighbors involves that choice and that transformation, starting with the transformation of the church, as this has been reaffirmed years after, e.g. the Bolivian president expressed at the World Social Forum held in Belem, Brazil, in February 2009, “another church is possible”.244

Perhaps the best quote of Larnaca’s final Official Report in relation to the type of society they were seeking to construct through the churches’ transforming diaconal action is expressed in the way in which The Larnaca Declaration ends. The participants’ commitment was sealed in these final words: “As the third millennium A.D. approaches, we dedicate ourselves, from this day forward, to work for justice and peace through our diakonia. We commit ourselves to implement a vision to identify ourselves and to be in solidarity with the people who are now in the process of struggling for peace based on justice. Our diakonia now and for the future must be based on mutual trust and genuine sharing. We recognize that people and churches on all continents have needs and that our diakonia must reach out to all those who suffer. We know the forces, which confront us, are many; we know that the road before us is long and painful. We know we can do no less than to pick up the cross and follow in the footsteps of the suffering servant, Christ our Lord. His victory over death gives us life and hope”.245

245 Poser, pp. 124-125.
The WCC 1987 El Escorial Consultation

The other event that we are studying in this decade is the *WCC World Consultation on Koinonia: Sharing Life in a World Community*, held 24-31 October 1987, in El Escorial, Spain, which brought together some 250 people from all parts of the world. Its purpose was “to formulate a discipline of ecumenical sharing and to foster a process of commitment to such discipline”. According to reports, the consultation, itself a valuable sharing experience, more than fulfilled that purpose. The participants represented a wide variety of churches belonging to all the major Christian confessions, national and regional ecumenical bodies, church-related agencies for mission, service and development, as well as ecumenical action groups and networks.

In the spirit of the ESR process described extensively at the beginning of this section on the *Reciprocity Period*, the relevance of this meeting was determined to avoid the *donor-recipient* language towards a more horizontal form of cooperation, through partnerships, highlighting the importance of the ecumenical sharing of human resources, as well as financial ones. The participants also expressed their commitment to promote the holistic mission of the church in obedience to God's liberating and life-giving will.

In our research for this thesis, a number of interviews were performed to some participants and other experts in order to hear their assessments and reactions to what actually happened in El Escorial consultation and in the process that followed this event. Here, in this introductory section we will include some of the results of these rich dialogues, together with some analysis from my perspective.

Looking in retrospect, Martin Robra points out that “El Escorial, basically builds on Philip Potter’s thinking, that he developed in the 1970s where he moved into the mission discourse, the dialogue between cultures, into the necessity of the churches to function as a contrast community to the world where he always asked, how can we criticize the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) if in our own sharing of resources we don’t show a clear different paradigm or an alternative. This is what he was looking for, and therefore he started with the *Empty Hands* process.

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246 The foundational data for the analysis here can be found in the book: van Beek, *Sharing Life in a World Community. Official Report of the WCC World Consultation on Koinonia, El Escorial, Spain, 1987*. Again, like the report of the Larnaca consultation, it basically narrates the facts and presentations, whereas, for this academic research I am depending on other sources of information that will be indicated.

because it expresses the means to share, everyone receives, so you don’t start from having, you start from been given. But the question is whose money is it anyhow; just because it comes into your coffers is it yours? Is it your own money or does it belong to the community, to the fellowship? So El Escorial consultation was about this starting point, from the fact that we are all receiving, these are all gifts of God for the best of the fellowship, which is the subject, and the fellowship should help to address and overcome the given asymmetries, because you don’t accept them as given. That you do when you say ‘we have and we are sharing with you’. This was about sharing what was given to all, not to some. This is what for him the difference that the churches had to make in the way how they had to share the resources among themselves”.

Even when this gathering was not about diakonia specifically, rather about interactions, as they relate to power, to people and to resources, it also meant a lot to the shaping of the concept and practice of diakonia at that time and even today. Authentic service is intrinsically connected to proper relationships and to a responsible sharing of resources and power at all levels. Indeed, this has an impact on the causes and consequences of diaconal ministry, as it will be analyzed later.

The consultation produced both an engagement text called Guidelines for Sharing, with practical recommendations, and adopted as well, a Common Discipline of Ecumenical Sharing which served as the biblical-theological basis and steps for implementing ecumenical sharing at all levels of the oikoumene. In August 1988 the Central Committee received these guidelines and recommendations, affirmed the WCC’s own commitment and called on the churches to implement the discipline in their own situation.

Before addressing the more specific findings of the El Escorial, in the following pages I will quote the reflections in retrospective of some participants that I have interviewed, with regard to various aspects of the consultation and more particularly to the implementation or not of the Guidelines for Sharing. I will then make a commented summary further down, under the contextual dimension (point D), since, as we will observe, both the implementation of the Guidelines as well as the interpretation of what

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248 Conversations with Martin Robra on 2 December 2013.
249 van Beek, “Ecumenical Sharing of Resources”, pp. 382-383.
actually happened in the process after, is pretty much influenced by the diverse contexts where the churches and church related organizations serve.

In an interview with Hubert van Beek in relation to the El Escorial Consultation he shared with me that *The Guidelines for Sharing* were very revolutionary, since they were recommending achieving equal representation of both mission agencies and development people, but they were never implemented.\(^{250}\) The reasons he gave, among others, were that precisely around the time of El Escorial Consultation the agencies were starting to be pressured by the back donors, especially their respective governments to insist on professionalism, efficiency and projects management, which was opposed to the spirit of the ESR. “El Escorial Consultation—he said—came too late; *The Guidelines* were too idealistic, they were *wishful thinking*, without having a proper commitment for implementation; in other words, there was not a political will to implement them”.

Van Beek also pointed out again that El Escorial was not about diakonia *per-se*, rather about relationships, it was about power, about who decides, in the hands of who are the resources. He and his colleagues were interested in promoting a model of relationships beyond power, focusing on the values of the Bible, on power-sharing, responsible stewardship.

In another interview which I carried-out with Konrad Raiser, he mentioned that he was involved in the early phases of the ESR and therefore had a lot to do with Hubert van Beek who coordinated the El Escorial Consultation.\(^{251}\) He said the following:

> I regretted, as some people have written also afterwards, that it was not possible to bring the processes in CICARWS, which led to Larnaca and the processes of the ESR, which led to El Escorial together, since they should have been seen in mutual relationships. We had a two track approach; on the one hand CICARWS and Larnaca with the focus on prophetic diakonia, on diakonia and justice… whereas El Escorial and the whole process of the sharing of resources, that was aiming at a new understanding of being church and integrating the sharing of resources into the way in which the churches are relating to each other. There was, of course, the very substantial preparatory document for El Escorial, which it was hoped that

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\(^{250}\) The interview took place on 23 May 2012.

the meeting could adopt, but the meeting then refused to deal with this substantive document, and rather decided to draft its own *Guidelines for Sharing*.

And, in the same interview, to my question of why were these *Guidelines* not implemented Raiser noted the following factors: (1) that these *Guidelines* refer to a model of personal commitment but are addressed really to institutions, agencies, specialized agencies, who may have had committed persons, who were personally quite committed to these *Guidelines*, but who could not translate this thrust into the policy of the respective organizations and institutions; (2) the agencies began to emancipate themselves more and more from a common ecumenical discipline, responding as they felt, to challenges and requirements in the global humanitarian scene and in particular having to respond to demands placed upon them by public donors; and (3) while the agencies are among the most important donors and therefore very crucial partners for the WCC, they did not have the possibility of participating directly in decision making in the WCC, because the governing bodies insisted that this would only be reserved for representatives of the member churches.

Reflecting on this same issue Martin Robra points to the need of relating the sharing of resources with the sharing of power. He says: “It remains an unresolved question in the field of ecumenical diakonia how the alternative *system of sharing* envisaged by the ESR process can be realized. The sharing of resources must go hand in hand with the sharing of power. Such an alternative praxis aiming at God's reign must be nurtured and sustained by the inspiring energy of a common spirituality of life that is at the same time a spirituality of resistance against powers of death and destruction”. 252

Another participant, John Moyer shared these reflections on the dynamics of those times in the ecumenical movement. 253 He points out: “El Escorial was more important than any of the Assemblies since its theme went to the heart of the WCC’s capacity to carry out its mission. Nevertheless, very little time was given to the ecumenical justice agendas. Agencies were not interested in sharing, they used the WCC to carry out their agendas and inside the WCC, among staff, there was major tension, almost contempt,

253 John Moyer, pastor of the Presbyterian Church in the USA and former director of Frontier Internship in Mission (FIM), also participated very actively in the ecumenical movement during those days. At the time of this event he was serving at the Northern California Ecumenical Council where they were hosting around 800,000 Salvadoran refugees. He also had five years experience with the WCC serving as the European secretary for URM. Moyer shared these reflections in an email sent on May 2013.
between those who supported charity and those who supported justice. So the issue is still how to build a global political economy to serve the people”.

In another interview I did, this time with Juan Abelardo Schvindt\textsuperscript{254} in Geneva, on September 2013, he expressed that he participated in and witnessed the process between these two conferences Larnaca (1986), which was on diakonia, service and El Escorial (1987) on koinonia, sharing. He remembers that in the first one, all diakonia efforts of the churches were brought into dialogue at a global level and for the first time the WCC facilitated gatherings on this topic, where there was a stronger presence of the global South.

He recalls that one of the emphases that the Latin American delegation brought in this process was the concept and practice of political diakonia (also known as prophetic diakonia), but the theologians of the global North opposed this notion, saying: “there is not such a thing as political diakonia”, rather, they only spoke of service. They argued that the aim of the church is to assist, promote, while the Latin American delegation argued that it is about change, transformation. It's about going to the root causes that produce a growing number of marginalized sectors in society. So there was this tension caused by two different worldviews in the field of international cooperation.

Schvindt goes on to say that the Latin American participants insisted with the agencies as well, that they should earmark part of their financial resources in the North in order to raise awareness of the causes of dependency and marginalization. In those days the language used referred to the duality dependence/liberation, namely, to see and clarify the causes of dependency and of under-development, but they were not interested in that topic either.

This delegation also insisted on the importance of hope as they pursued these changes and transformation in society. It is not about fatalism, produced by a defeatist view of history, the human being and of life in general, but rather from a perspective or horizon

\textsuperscript{254} Juan Abelardo Schvindt is a pastor of the Evangelical Church of the River Plate (IERP) and was sent to El Escorial, due to his diaconal work in Paraguay that was carried on in the city of Hernandarias, promoting the rights of the Paraguayan peasants and the Brazilian immigrants in Paraguay from the 1970s and ‘80s. This program was developed in very close collaboration between the IERP and the Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB), as well as the Roman Catholic Church in Paraguay. It was called Christian Aid Program (PAC, in Spanish) and supported the reaffirmation of the farmer's identity, aiming at generating a self-sustaining economy, as its main priority. The program was also supported by Bread for the World, in Germany, and other agencies both European and from the USA.
of hope, where the church is called to carry out its political engagement and commitment, Schvindt comments.

The tension between the global and the local was also present in Larnaca, but even stronger at El Escorial. In the latter, the notion of the ESR was pursued for the first time in a global and ecumenical context. According to Schvindt, one of the problems faced in El Escorial was that most agencies did not send to the meeting their highest rank executives, but rather third-line officials. On the other hand, some participants from the global South pushed for a covenant to be signed, an agreement that would hold everyone accountable, but they only managed to pass the Guidelines for Sharing as well as A Common Discipline of Ecumenical Sharing, and even so, the agencies were slow to respond to them, and those that did, were not very unanimous in addressing the challenges posed by the new demands of ecumenical sharing, as part of a global community, to use a language of those times.

Referring more specifically to his regional context, Schvindt pointed out that another issue that they insisted much on at El Escorial was to make an evaluation of the CLACER (Latin American Committee Ecumenical Sharing of Resources). The WCC tried to, but eventually closed it because there were no more resources to share. All this was happening while the causes of under-development were not diminished; on the contrary, the crisis that produces the conflict between dependence and liberation was becoming increasingly radical and was deepening.

All this was happening around the year 1987, when some Latin American countries were getting rid of dictatorships, democracies were been reestablished, and they had to rebuild not only the political order, but also the economy, the social fabric, etc. It was a moment of truth, a time of life or death and of reconstruction into the future, especially for countries that had regained democracy.

So CLACER tried to accompany the reconstruction of the civil society and all that was done in Latin America, from the perspective of the ESR, calling the agencies for a dialogue with the churches and organizations of the civil society. It would also have been necessary to evaluate the three legs, which were involved in this process, namely, the WCC, which coordinated a new articulation between agencies and churches, in order to have a clearer idea on how to proceed. The WCC was the one that created the
space, led the discussion and promoted the agenda, but the agencies were becoming more independent, carrying-on their own bilateral relationships and began to disperse their priorities and resources.

Juan Abelardo Schvindt remembers one of the ways in which this bilateral collaboration took place in his region. He points out: “during those days, many of us in Latin America saw the resources coming from the church related organizations of the global North bypassing our churches and we did not know where they were going to, since they were transferred to non-church sectors (NGOs, social projects, civil society in general). They were perhaps interesting initiatives but were not allocated in dialogue with the churches, while we wanted to reinforce a diakonia of commitment, of reconstruction of the civil society, from a pastoral perspective and as part of the mission of the church, with biblical-theological foundation and a spirituality of engagement, without proselytizing. We wanted to enhance the spirituality of service and commitment, inspired in Php. 2, of kenosis, trying to empty ourselves in service to others, as Jesus Christ did, attempting, as it was said at El Escorial, to ‘share what we are’”.

Schvindt concluded his remarks underlining that the WCC was growing and was not seeing the changes that were taking place outside. Somehow ties and relationships were developed in Latin America, bypassing CLACER. The Latin American delegation therefore called at El Escorial for an evaluation of CLACER because they saw the problem that the agencies did not feel confident to continue working on a systemic or multilateral scheme, which was provided by the WCC. But the agencies were not going to fight with the WCC because they depended on the churches much more than now.

Other Latin American participants expressed similar visions. Carmelo Álvarez pointed out that “from the theological point of view, El Escorial has been one of the best ecumenical events in which I have participated. It is a milestone. The theme of koinonia was very well taken with a solid theological foundation and was an attempt to move from paternalism to ecumenical solidarity. Nevertheless, I wonder if there were sufficient conditions for the reception of the Guidelines for Sharing with regards to their own ecumenical structures and in the decisions making processes. We continue with the ecumenical patronage (bilateralism) and dependence, which is very hard to break, so the way from El Escorial so far has been very rocky. Just to mention one example, in
Central America and the Caribbean today we have less solidarity or international Cooperation than before, at all levels”.255

Another participant, Humberto Shikiya, bringing-in a different perspective, added that “after El Escorial several churches, including my own Methodist Church officially adopted and implemented these Guidelines, mainly in the South and some in the North (e.g. the United Church of Canada, the British Methodist Church). So we need to make a difference between the specialized ministries and the WCC member churches. It is true that in practical terms in many cases the Guidelines were not implemented, but always the spirit and the theological significance of the ESR was present, because that's what goes through the relations of cooperation. This is critical for the current role of the WCC, namely to share non-financial resources, such as theological relationships, spirituality, which are very important for self-sustainability. It also helped to mobilize resources with a strategy beyond financial interests for peace processes in Central America, as well as discussion and critical evaluation of the popular educational practices and spiritual dimensions, such as solidarity. All this was inspired by the ESR and was instrumental in the post El Escorial process”.256

A Brazilian female participant, Eliana Rolemberg underlined, on the implementation of the Guidelines, the following: “I think that we in Latin America have done a lot as a follow-up of El Escorial. A Latin American Regional Group was created that held several meetings. In our region we made every effort to bring agencies and churches from the North for them to be committed to the Discipline but it was not easy. We should differentiate between those who were closer to us as the United Church of Canada, the churches from the Nordic countries, mainly from Sweden, also Bread for the World, Christian Aid, ICCO (Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation – Netherlands), and others, were very closely related to us, but afterwards came many changes. The ESR-Brazil was formed and we celebrated the event El Escorial, Fifteen Years Later. I'm not as pessimistic as others in connection with the implementation of the Guidelines, because for us they were very interesting. We still

255Carmelo Álvarez, a Puerto Rican pastor, participated in El Escorial as director of DEI (Ecumenical Department of Research) and professor of the SBL (Latin American Biblical Seminary) in San José, Costa Rica. This quote is taken from a Skype conversation on 3 March 2014.
256Humberto Shikiya, executive director of CREAS (Ecumenical Regional Centre for Advisory and Service), participated in El Escorial as a delegate or representative of the Evangelical Methodist Church of Argentina, when he was serving as it manager and general secretary. This quote is taken from a Skype conversation on 4 March 2014.
remember El Escorial and we are always discussing this. We have a group of institutions working to fund small projects, which are organizations that have relationships with the churches. This was an initiative, inspired in El Escorial, from Bread for the World and EED (Church Development Service – Germany), in several Latin American countries which is still relevant today even on a smaller scale.”

As we will observe, the result that was expected from the process of the 1980s was not reached completely, namely, to create a multilateral environment or discipline of ESR, where all parts could benefit, where all partners involved could give and at the same time receive, partaking their gifts and who they were. Again this situation reflects the culture of the ecumenical movement, since historically it has organized excellent meetings, consultations, gatherings, congresses, with a profound biblical-theological level, with a strong ecumenical vision and commitment, but then often times it has not been consistent enough at the time of implementing and delivering. Indeed, it has been an enormous challenge of putting into practice the agreements and outcomes, particularly to bring the results to the grassroots, since frequently, and in the best of the cases, we find final documents placed in the drawers at the offices of the general secretaries, or the bishops, or on the shelves at the WCC offices in Geneva.

Nevertheless, in all fairness, there are external factors as well, beyond the control of the WCC, that have conspired against these practical implementations, not least in the case of El Escorial, since, as we have seen in the quotes, due to diverse factors, many churches, especially non WCC members, and specialized ministries were not able to readjust or not willing to sacrifice their structures and practices for the sake of a wider and multilateral system, culture or discipline of sharing.

And, of course, in this particular case of 1980s in relation to diakonia, the situation was even more complex, since, as acknowledged earlier, there was this tension caused by two different worldviews, namely diakonia as charity or inter-church aid on the one hand, and diakonia as political or prophetic, as transformative diakonia, on the other. There is also a conflict between the understanding of the global and the local settings where diaconal work is been carried-out. On the other hand, the agencies were

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257 Eliana Rolemberg participated in El Escorial as coordinator of programs and projects of CESE (Ecumenical Coordination of Service), Brazil and was its director for many years until her retirement in 2013. This quote is taken from a Skype conversation on 24 March 2014.
increasingly becoming more autonomous, developing bilateral lines of collaboration. Nevertheless this vision of ecumenical sharing of resources was there and is still there, inspiring many projects and initiatives both globally and locally.

In order to finish this section of testimonies with a rather positive note, I will quote some reflections made by Jan (Jappe) Arnold Erichsen, who attended this consultation, as expressed earlier, during the period when he was serving as the Norwegian Church Aid general secretary. He shared the following: “As a result of El Escorial the NCA changed of being an agency of charity to becoming an agency that, together with brothers and sisters in the global South, were ready to fight for justice. The slogan of NCA today is *Together for a Just World*, and is a direct result of the participation of the partners and my participation in these events in the 1980s”.

And finally, before analyzing the main findings of the El Escorial consultation, a couple of references will be made to the relationship between both this consultation and the previous one held in Larnaca. Van Beek puts both of them in a wider perspective, which I find very helpful for this research. He commented: “The ESR discussion related to the broader process of continuing reflection on ecumenical diakonia within the WCC’s interchurch aid section (CICARWS until 1992, then the Unit on Sharing and Service) and its partners, especially the large church-related development agencies in the West. The world consultation on interchurch aid (Larnaca 1986) placed the vision of ESR at the center of the WCC's diaconal agenda, as reflected in the call of the Larnaca declaration for a *comprehensive diakonia*, i.e. a prophetic, pastoral and reconciling service, not simply charity which involves the whole people of God in the context of local churches in every place and continent”.

And in response to a question that I raised to Klaus Poser with regard to this relationship between both events, as well as the whole process of the ESR, he answered: “I remember *El Escorial* as a lively and inspiring consultation. There was a lot of exchange and celebration and certainly a serious study of practices and possible improvements of ESR. And the findings and results of *El Escorial* were also translated into our CICARWS work and operations. However, I don’t remember an intentional or planned relationship. While *El Escorial* was on ESR as an ecumenical, council-wide

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258 Interview made in Oslo on 28 October 2014.
259 van Beek, “Ecumenical Sharing of Resources”, p. 383
issue (including CCPD—the Commission of the Churches’ Participation in Development and CWME—the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism), Larnaca’s *Diakonia 2000 Called to be Neighbors* was on request and in response to the challenges and queries of its constituency – Commissioners, churches, and partner organizations. They were two distinct events with their own history.²⁶⁰

**Important findings of the 1987 El Escorial Consultation**

As it was done with the Larnaca conference, the *Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia* will be used again, in order to describe the relevant discussions which took place at El Escorial, in the task of “formulating an ecumenical discipline for sharing of resources” to facilitate ecumenically the social engagement of the churches. As pointed-out earlier, these *Dimensions* will help us discover and understand better the ways in which this particular event has dealt with the notions and practices of diakonia and empowerment to further design the *Empowering Diakonia* model.

**A. The Visional Dimension**

At the conference, Sithembiso Nyoni²⁶¹ and Konrad Raiser made the two opening presentations. She entitled hers: *Perspective of the Grassroots Churches*, beginning with these three points, which can help us to start identifying the vision of this gathering:

1. “One of the most painful experiences in my adult life is to receive. Especially when something is given to me because of my compromised and vulnerable position in life”.
2. “One of the easiest things I have experienced is to give – especially if the giving is on my own terms”.
3. “But one of the most enriching and most fulfilling experiences I have ever had is that of sharing”.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ Notes from a Skype interview on 26 March 2014.
²⁶¹ Sithembiso Nyoni is a Zimbabwean politician and a former Minister of Small and Medium Enterprises Development.
Therefore, a fundamental visional impulse was the one of sharing; in fact, this was, again, one of the main purposes of having the consultation in the first place, in order to formulate a discipline that could enable the ecumenical movement’s constituency to share its resources effectively.

She went on to say that “we need the kind of resource-sharing which will enable us to build our own indigenous and local institutions through which every poor will be able to express their political and economic needs and through which they will be able to find political and economic solutions to their present state of powerlessness, poverty and underdevelopment”.  

Here we are starting to detect important elements in relation to empowerment, namely: the building of the indigenous and local institutions and the participation of the poor by expressing their needs. Even when they find themselves in a “state of powerlessness” from a financial standpoint, from the point of view of a concept of development conceived by the West, nevertheless as we are observing in this thesis, they have an intrinsic power to change their desperate situation in one of dignity and self-realization.

“The richer churches also have spiritual resources and other experiences to share. Let us share the who we are first, before we share what we have”, Nyoni emphasized. And she went on to say, “This sharing of ourselves must be at both horizontal and vertical levels. For a long time, sharing has taken place between governments and top church leadership. Today there are signs of grassroots to grassroots and governments/top churches to grassroots sharing. This should be encouraged and developed. In this process, however, the rural poor have to be encouraged to be strong and to value their own resources. They also should not let go unless and until what they value is valued, expressed and appreciated by the outside. In the past, and to a very large extent now, a lot of power and information, a lot of resources are being sucked out of grassroots churches without recognition of the source. The present relationships of resource-sharing are largely exploitative”.

So I am reading in Nyoni’s words an implicit call for an empowerment process by which the poor, mainly in the rural areas, can be encouraged to be strong and value their own resources. But interestingly enough, what legitimizes these values is the recognition or the understanding by the outside world. Therefore, she concluded, “resource-sharing with grassroots churches does not begin with aid. It begins with understanding those ordinary members of God's universal church, as people who are part of God’s plan for creation and renewal for a better world for all!”

In his presentation, Konrad Raiser addressed, among other topics, the question of empowerment, relevant for our study, using these words: “We say that ecumenical solidarity must not limit itself to the transfer of material resources, and must be expressed first and foremost in defense of the rights of the poor in their struggle for liberation and a life of human dignity. But we continue as before to be prisoners of the power of money, negotiating as between donors and receivers, and we have to acknowledge that at best the poor are there as a passive presence in our systems and structures, but not as active partners. We know from experience that a change of course leading to liberation only happens when the people concerned take their destiny into their own hands and that the obstacle is often not the lack of resources but the lack of the power to control their own resources for themselves...” Even when Raiser does not mention explicitly here the term empowerment, as he will actually do later, there are important elements of this vision here, i.e. in reference to the active participation of the people claiming power to steer their own resources and destiny.

Raiser also talks of a renewal process, which, even after decades, is still relevant for the WCC’s involvement in diaconal work. He said: “it is also clear that the vision of ecumenical sharing offers a real opportunity for a new beginning. Then we can and must talk about the experience of the church as a community of sharing and solidarity that exists as a reality and not just as a theological program, in both North and South... Here it can be clearly seen that sharing has to do with sharing in the life of people, in

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reciprocal giving and taking, and is not simply a matter of transferring material goods…" 267

I find interesting that both presenters referred to the importance of the sharing of people. In an era when the WCC no longer transfers grants for diaconal work, it enables the sharing of life among the churches and people, where all are encouraged to give and receive; and a significant aspect of this process is the sharing of knowledge and information, mutual empowerment to serve others.

Raiser goes on to reaffirm the notion of sharing, which is common among all people. He says, “Sharing is thus a fundamental symbol of life, which points to the manifestation of fully human living, and so has a wider frame of reference than a moral commandment. Sharing takes place in relationships, which are truly reciprocal and free of domination, in other words, the test of sharing is ultimately the sharing of power, mutual empowerment”. He admits, however, that “this ideal vision of ‘sharing’ is constantly being shattered by the conditions of human existence or, to put it in theological terms, human sinfulness”. 268

Nevertheless, argues Raiser, “precisely because people suffer from this inherent contradiction, they experience God's sharing of himself in Jesus Christ, the life of the world, as liberation for life in a sharing community”. But when we are confronted “with the realities of human life”, adds Raiser, we can’t ignore, in his own words, “the troubling reality of the asymmetrical power relationships, not least within and between the churches”. Raiser goes on to express the difficulty he has “with attempts to speak of ecumenical sharing where the issue is first and foremost one of justice and injustice, defense of legitimate rights and control of power through participatory decision-making processes”. 269

Raiser points out here to an important issue that can be related to the empowerment issue, namely, that for it to happen it is not enough for it to enable participatory and decision-making processes. This enabling can be manipulated if there is a control of

power through it and if it leads to injustice. Therefore, we can identify an important element of the vision of El Escorial consultation as pointing to a sharing community, liberated by God’s sharing in Jesus Christ, which empowers by just and participatory decision-making processes.

Another reference to this visional dimension can be traced in the preparation for the El Escorial world consultation, by which an international effort was made to seek regional input through a process of reflection in the regions on ecumenical resource sharing and also in light of the world consultation on inter-church aid, refugee and world service. Just to mention one example, an enlarged meeting of the Africa resource-sharing group was held 25-27 March 1987 in Arusha, Tanzania. The group 3, dealing with the theme: “Relevant education for sharing, solidarity and justice”, made the following radical reflections, very pertinent for our search of the notions of empowerment and diakonia.

They said at that time, “Such relevant education would have identifiable characteristics. Education should provide animators and community leaders, empower people to become change-makers, and facilitate the initiatives of grassroots people to liberate themselves. Relevant education must include informal education through workshops, seminars, etc. for the purpose of training and leadership formation. For all aspects of relevant education, questions must be asked to determine who sets the educational agenda and who controls the content, etc.”

In the African gathering, ten models of education were identified as appropriate for relevant education, which also provides inputs for our vision, including the concept of empowerment. Summarizing in my own words the main tendencies and emphasis, I can mention the following: the importance of community organization to empower people as change-makers; decentralization, including the transfer of power and decision-making to the communities (not transfer of power to local manifestations of institutions); conscientization to make people critically aware of the oppressive structures and ideologies around them; networking, as a way of creating linkages among

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people’s movements to foster solidarity and sharing; and training institutions as places of creative reflection even for communities at the grassroots level.  

Another critical element that we have identified for the vision of theological reflection. In the same meeting held in Africa, the group 5, on Theological Issues made, among others, the following recommendations, which I am listing and describing with my own words, pertinent to empowerment: (1) church structures at the local level must be empowered for decision-making and priority-setting; (2) the African churches should re-examine the content and methods of their theological training, especially for the lay people, in order to build educational programs that encourage sharing, solidarity, justice, selfhood and participation; (3) relevant training should emphasize development of community-oriented skills; and finally, (4) the ecumenical family should identify, encourage and facilitate grassroots initiatives, especially in innovating and developing new approaches to education and training.  

A task, therefore for the WCC has been to facilitate this process of identifying and connecting these grassroots initiatives among the regions, at a global scale.

Bach in El Escorial and also pointing out the significance of theological reflection as an important element to guide the churches’ vision, in a section of the Common Discipline of Sharing, it was underlined that the WCC has an important role in providing the theological undergirdings from which the practices of ecumenical sharing evolve. The intention is not to channel more funds through the administration of the WCC but to make the guiding principles of ecumenical sharing more widely accepted by the churches.  

On the other hand, we have also identified the churches’ spiritual-mystical understanding and its liturgical practices, as central features, which help to shape its vision in relation to diakonia and empowerment. On this matter Konrad Raiser underlined that “there has been a rediscovery of the inseparable link that binds together the Eucharist and diakonia, the sacrament of the altar and the sacrament of the brother

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and the sister, the renewal of life and worship and the sharing of life in the liturgy after the liturgy”. 275

On this note, I find that the concept of the liturgy after the liturgy is an important vision and a beautiful metaphor, since, for many people spirituality in general and liturgy in particular are experienced in a space divorced of our daily lives, reflecting an Hellenic dichotomy which tended to separate body from soul, material life from spiritual life. Ion Bria corrects this notion and points out that “The eucharistic liturgy is not an escape into an inner realm of prayer, a pious turning away from social realities; rather, it calls and sends the faithful to celebrate ‘the sacrament of the brother’ outside the temple in the public market place, where the cries of the poor and marginalized are heard”. 276

Of course, one of the issues we face with the notion of the liturgy after the liturgy is that it seems idealistic and not so practical, hence, the importance of linking together all the Five Dimensions, chiefly in our quest to closely binding together vision and reality. But also sometimes the visions tend to be a bit idealistic, in the sense that they motivate our imagination, our utopia as mentioned earlier. But it also has a practical connection, as Pedro Carrasco underlines, “The liturgy is one of the few descriptive formulas of the church that contains the concept of work. Diakonia is the liturgy after the liturgy as the Christian Orthodox tradition reminds us. It comes from urchos, ergo (work). You cannot do diakonia in the absence of the liturgy. Diakonia is the way the church praises and serves God in creation”. 277

“This concept of liturgy after the liturgy, is an extension of the holy Eucharist and an expression of the unity of the Church as the body of Christ. Such an approach does not separate the vertical from the horizontal dimension, love of God from love of neighbor, the micro-from the macro-level of diaconal service”. 278 As Chris Ferguson and Ofelia Ortega emphasize, “This view of Christian service does not separate love of God from

277 Pedro Carrasco is the pastor at the French-speaking congregation in Zürich, Switzerland. This quote is taken from conversations on my thesis on 18 September 2012.
love of neighbor. Here, the basis for diakonia is the self-emptying love (*kenosis*) of Christ. This, Orthodox contribution of the theological understanding of the inalienable call to service and sharing can be summarized as follows: *It is a direct consequence of Christ's service* ‘Who did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many’; *It flows from the Divine Liturgy*, in which Christ sanctifies our offerings; Like the Eucharist, *it is an expression of the unity of the church as the body of Christ*, offered for both the spiritual and material needs of the whole world; It is not an optional extra but an indispensable *expression of that community which has its source in the liturgy*; *It is the 'liturgy after the liturgy'*; containing all the themes of worship in active service; *It is an offering in the form of alms and collections*, intended for the totality of human needs; *It liberates humanity from poverty, oppression and penury*, which are an obstacle to salvation”\(^{279}\)

The Eucharist is a process that is completed when the community turns from the table, hands still laden with the bread of the meal, and offers sustenance to those at its margins who have yet to come to the feast. The Eucharist is a centrifugal force that compels the church outward from its ritual by opening it to the world. The body of Christ, as the serving community, is inspired in him to serve. As Julia Esquivel writes in her poem *Eucaristía*: “You emptied yourself fully / keeping nothing for You / Already naked, self-emptying / you have become the bread that sustains us and wine that comforts us / You are Light and Truth / Way and Hope / You are Love / Grow in us, Lord!”\(^{280}\)

**B. The Normative Dimension**

A crucial area identified under the *normative dimension* is the reading, interpretation and application of biblical texts, which, according to the Judeo-Christian tradition draw core values, principles and standards of comportment. In her keynote presentation, *Perspective of the Grassroots Churches*, Sithembiso Nyoni referred to the early church which had all in common: Ac. 4:32,35. The other keynote presenter, Konrad Raiser, in his paper, *Towards a Sharing Community*, quoted the following biblical and theological notions: eucharist and diakonia, koinonia, God’s Spirit and the kingdom of God, God

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\(^{279}\) Chris Ferguson and Ofelia Ortega, “Ecumenical Diakonia” (WCC Regional Relations Team, 2002), p. 10.

\(^{280}\) Julia Esquivel (Guatemala, 1930). Theologian and poet, her poems are inspired by the liberation theology, being forced to live in exile for many years, accessed on 23 April 2014, [http://www.clailiturgia.org/eucaristia-poema-1825.html](http://www.clailiturgia.org/eucaristia-poema-1825.html). The original poem in Spanish goes like this: “Te vaciaste todo sin retener nada para Ti. Ya desnudo, total despojo, te nos das hecho pan que sostiene y vino que reconforta. Eres Luz y Verdad, Camino y Esperanza, eres Amor. ¡Cree en nosotros, Señor!”
sharing himself in Jesus Christ, the Decalogue in the Old Testament and Israel’s covenant.\textsuperscript{281}

The consultation’s report, under the section \textit{A Common Discipline for Ecumenical Sharing}, has a whole part called: \textit{Biblical and Theological Convictions}, covering the following points: call to koinonia, call to mutuality and call to responsibility in the world, quoting several biblical texts. I will proceed now to summarize and comment them in order to find some of the \textit{normative dimensions} to further construct the \textit{Empowering Diakonia} model.

Call to koinonia

1. \textit{The model of sharing}. “The Bible speaks of sharing in many places and in many ways, for example, the feeding to the multitudes (Jn. 6:1-14), the early church (Ac. 2:43-47), the collection for Jerusalem (2Co. 8&9), Elizabeth and Mary sharing their spiritual joy (Lk. 1:39-56). In the Jubilee Year (Le. 25) and the vision of the new earth (Is. 65:17-25) sharing is a manifestation of justice; its aim is to eliminate the causes of poverty and exploitation. The covenant (Le. 26:9-13) and the body (1Co. 12:12-26) are metaphors of the biblical concept of koinonia”.\textsuperscript{282}

“Perhaps the strongest biblical paradigm of sharing is the Eucharist. In the sharing of the bread and the wine we celebrate the communion with him who died for us and was raised, so that we share in his life, through the Holy Spirit, and receive life abundantly. Through this shared communion with Christ we enter into the communion with one another. This is what constitutes the Christian community, the koinonia. It belongs to the essence of the church to be a community of sharing … This sharing goes beyond the communion of the churches to the oikoumene, the whole inhabited world, so that all God’s people may enjoy the abundance of the resources of creation”.\textsuperscript{283} I have already examined the Eucharist in the previous dimension, pointing to a \textit{Eucharistic vision}, nevertheless it is cited here again since it may also be considered normative as well.

\textsuperscript{281} van Beek, \textit{Sharing Life in a World Community. Official Report of the WCC World Consultation on Koinonia, El Escorial, Spain, 1987}, pp. 5,17,18,19,22.
\textsuperscript{282} van Beek, \textit{Sharing Life in a World Community. Official Report of the WCC World Consultation on Koinonia, El Escorial, Spain, 1987}, p. 41.
\textsuperscript{283} van Beek, \textit{Sharing Life in a World Community. Official Report of the WCC World Consultation on Koinonia, El Escorial, Spain, 1987}, pp. 41-42.
This is again another example where we find cross-cutting concepts which bind together the different dimensions.

2. **Sharing life.** “In Jesus’ ministry we find the example of what it means to share life (Mk. 10:45). He shared the afflictions of the weak, the suffering, and the oppressed of his day. Sharing life is giving ourselves in compassion for those who suffer today in our world… hearing the cries of those who are exploited and are denied life because of unjust international structures, to identify with their suffering and support them.” The point that I find missing here is this notion of *sharing life* in the opposite direction, namely, the fact that quite often those who suffer, the impoverished, the exploited, are the ones that more generously share their lives, in fact, in many cases, the only thing that they have to share is their own lives. So *sharing of lives* goes beyond a paternalistic approach towards a more horizontal and participatory manner.

3. **Wholeness.** “… In our churches the disproportionate importance attached to the material over the spiritual and human has often degraded the wholeness of sharing. The ESR cannot function with a division between the spiritual and the material”.

**Call to mutuality**

1. **In power sharing.** [In all our human relationships] “We have to assess whether the power that displays itself is a power that will liberate or oppress, heal or wound, love or hate. God's power is shown in love and justice: the self-emptying love of Christ (*kenosis*), who affirms the real power, which the poor and oppressed can exert when they find the truth of God's good news. Jesus teaches us that love is the strongest power. He has shown us a way in which strength is revealed in surrender that does not become submission, and promised us the power of the Spirit to love and to serve. Empowerment is a process of enabling all God's people to bring their sharing together, affirming the dignity and capability of individuals and communities to be themselves…” The text goes on to say that this “implies helping oppressed groups to expose unjust use of power and oppose it, and enabling them to exercise the power they have in themselves. It also means that we must listen to the poor and the marginalized and allow their voices

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to penetrate and change all our institutions. These are the victims of economic and racial oppression, but also the unemployed, people with disabilities, youth, women, the homeless, migrants, etc. They should have the power to take their own decisions in situations affecting their life and future. This empowerment is needed in both South and North.\(^{286}\)

This issue reminds me of the Latin America Theology of Liberation in the 1970s and after, namely, the preferential option for the poor. Perhaps this phrase is no longer fashionable, but it continues to be a mandatory call, not only to be as churches the voice of the voiceless, as Archbishop Romero said, but furthermore to make sure that their voices are been heard, and furthermore that they take the decisions for themselves. This is the normative empowerment that the churches are called to exercise in their prophetic diakonia.

2. \textit{In repentance.} “We often seek influence over others through our gifts. We are tempted to attach more importance to money than to spiritual values. The marginalized and the powerless in our communities are often excluded from the centers of decision-making. In all our churches, agencies and ecumenical organizations there is always some competition for power and control … We must be willing to admit our faults, forgive one another and make a new beginning. We are enabled to do so if we live by grace and have the mind of Christ…”\(^{287}\)

3. \textit{In participation.} “The church is a community. ESR means that all members must be given a full part in the local communities and groups as well as in our institutions and decision-making bodies … Perhaps our greatest difficulty has to do with the participation of the poor who are often the first to be excluded from our deliberations and decisions…”\(^{288}\) Here there is another implicit indication of empowerment, with the encouragement and enabling of the participation of the impoverished people in order for them to decide for their own and for their community.


\(^{288}\) van Beek, \textit{Sharing Life in a World Community. Official Report of the WCC World Consultation on Koinonia, El Escorial, Spain, 1987}, p. 44.
4. **In relationships.** “As churches and Christians we are both dependent on and responsible to each other because we have a common relationship with Christ as Lord… Together we form a fellowship that is linked to the body: if one member suffers the others suffer too; if one rejoices, so do all … God has entrusted to all many varied talents and gifts. No one can claim exclusive ownership of resources. We do not share what is ours; rather, we distribute and partake in what is God’s…”

5. **In accountability.** “… We must listen to one another and help each other by interpreting situations and needs … Accountability cannot only be reduced to responsible stewardship of the use of resources but demands mutual openness to questions about priorities, use of power, relationships and theological convictions … We are accountable to one another, to the poor and ultimately to God …”

6. **In structures.** “… Whenever structures perpetuate the tendency to separate the material sharing from the spiritual, or service and development from mission and evangelism, or political action from mission and development, whenever structures deny power to the poor and oppressed, or the commitment to justice, or the importance of non-institutional action groups, then those structures should be dismantled or transformed, and new ones built in their place …”

Consistent with the biblical-theological tradition of the ecumenical movement, again, a fundamental consideration in diaconal action is to address the root causes of injustice in the first place. As we have been observing throughout its history, not least the documents of Larnaca and El Escorial prophetic diakonia is a call not only to comfort the people in need, but also to confront the unjust powers and structures that cause so much pain and impoverishment in the world.

**Call to responsibility in the world**

1. **Sharing in the one mission of God.** “The fellowship of sharing is a means whereby the church seeks to live out its universality and fulfill its task of bringing God’s love
and justice revealed in Jesus Christ to all people. The focus of the church’s proclamation and action is to restore the intended relationship between God, humanity and the creation. From this perspective there is no reason to separate mission from service and development … All activities of the Christian community in evangelism, diakonia, the struggle for human dignity, healing, peace and justice belong together in the one mission of God”.292 This section helps to overcome the issue, mentioned several times in this thesis, of the false dichotomy between mission and service. It appeals time and again to a holistic mission, which includes diakonia.

The comprehensive understanding of mission and development as two sides of the same coin is indeed absolutely critical. The false dichotomy that has been tried to introduce between the two, both in theory and practice has harmed the two endeavors. In general terms, one of the great contributions of many churches from the global South is to hold and practice a holistic understanding of mission, which includes both. But for this, as it was mentioned several times at El Escorial gathering, one of the greatest needs expressed by the churches is for capacity building. Therefore, the downside of many churches from the global South, that have a clear and consistent missiology in the sense expressed in the previous point is that they need empowerment in this field, need the knowhow to pursue a holistic mission to proclaim effectively the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ in words and in deeds.

2. Sharing with all people. “Christian sharing takes place in the midst of the life of people, in local situations of need and struggle. We must listen to and learn from the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized; share in their suffering and hope and confront those institutions, which cause such suffering and injustice. We must take seriously the realities of people in their immediate communities and the opportunities for learning and sharing … Sharing life across religious and ideological barriers is part of our Christian obedience to the calling to be in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed and, indeed, with the whole human family”.293

As we can read in the previous paragraph and in other parts of this thesis, very much of the directives of these events organized by the WCC are volitive, i.e. we should do this

293 van Beek, Sharing Life in a World Community. Official Report of the WCC World Consultation on Koinonia, El Escorial, Spain, 1987, p. 46.
or that, churches and believers must act; it would be urgent to implement, etc., which reminds us of the content of many sermons we proclaim and hear in our churches. Even when there are clear guidelines for implementation, what we find missing to large extent are guidelines to measure the follow up, the execution and the real effect of all these directives.

Again, under the *normative dimension*, we will look at the Bible studies at the consultation, which were facilitated by Christopher Duraisingh. He selected three key concepts in the Bible and examined, both individually and in inter-relation, how they bring out relevant insights on sharing in and for a world community in Christ. The three concepts are *covenant*, *body*, *Eucharist*, which I will proceed to summarize in my own words. He argued how the concept of *covenant* raises crucial issues for sharing, but as a model in itself it tends to become arbitrary or contractual, for it is often used in a managerial or organizational sense. The metaphor *body* with its organic connotations therefore adds to and corrects the pitfalls of the *covenant* concept as a model for sharing. But it, too, in itself may lack the purposefulness and spontaneous commitment, which is so crucial in koinonia based on the love of God in Jesus Christ shed abroad in our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is here that the *Eucharist* - where the body is broken and the blood of the covenant is poured out - is a bringing together of both these concepts.

Duraisingh stressed that it is interesting that the motifs of *body* and *covenant* are essential parts of *eucharistic* theology in the Bible. He therefore looked at these concepts not only within themselves but in their relationship to each other, thus enabling the participants to gain a more holistic understanding of sharing life in and for a world community in Christ. He facilitated three Bible studies with these themes and texts:


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294 Christopher Duraisingh served as the general secretary of Council for World Mission, London, and both as the director of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism and the executive secretary for Gospel and Cultures of the World Council of Churches, during the time when this event took place.

2. *Body* as a liberating metaphor for sharing life in community - 2Co. 12:12-31; Ro. 12:4-8; Eph. 4:1-13.

Again, diaconal engagement requires repentance and a radical new awareness to promote the ESR and to pursue a holistic approach to overcome the false dichotomy between mission and development and amid spiritual and the material resources. It also compels a radical new awareness towards empowerment as a process of enabling all God's people to bring their sharing together; and finally, it should be based on solid biblical foundations, focusing on the *covenant*, the *body* and the *Eucharist*.

**C. The Need-Oriented Dimension**

In his presentation, Konrad Raiser describes the role of the church, expressing: “The church as koinonia is called to be a living example of an effective community of sharing, prefiguring the fellowship in the kingdom of God. But wherever the church takes form among people, it is subject to the conditions of human life”. He then points to an important need of the church in order to fulfill its mission, he says, “It needs structures and regulations. Hence the church is always caught up in the tension between the language of sharing and the language of the established structures... We can and must strive to make the relationships between the churches with their structures and regulations just, and to ensure that the exercise of power and authority within and between church structures—especially where money is concerned—is subject to effective and transparent control... In the last analysis, only the freedom granted by the Spirit of God can help us to do that”.

The *Common Discipline of Ecumenical Sharing* mentions in several parts different needs calling implicitly for the diaconal intervention. It says, “our awareness of each other’s needs and gifts should be increased through a learning process, in which we may discover the vast human and spiritual resources of our communities”.

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And its final section called Models, is worthwhile citing since it makes reference to our main focus of empowerment and diakonia, which we are discussing under this need-oriented dimension. The participants at the conference underscored that “In spite of many good intentions, the system of providing external resources have often perpetuated and sometimes increased dependency. On the other hand, there are situations where development and popular movements take place without external aid. Self-reliance of the poor must be the aim of any sharing process. Symbolic new models of sharing alone will not reverse the trend of dependency. What we need are steps that will change the existing system. Some guiding principles in this search for models are:

• “The goal of self-reliance. Some external aid aims at making the church structures self-reliant in the hope that the community at large will follow. New models may be sought in the role of the church as an instrument enabling the community through its self-governing structures to use its own potentials to gain self-reliance.

• The decentralization of mechanisms for decision-making. Some decentralized models are proposed in the report of the Asia preparatory consultation (Singapore, 29-31 March 1987).

• Joint decision-making by local and external partners. Regional, sub-regional and national forums should bring together churches, councils, grass root organizations, mission and development agencies to decide on priorities.

• The inclusion of bilateral relationships in joint structures at the different levels. Bilateral and ecumenical models should inform, enrich and correct each other.

• The increase of undesignated funding and the use of block grants.

• The equal participation (i.e. 50%) of representatives of local or grass root communities in bodies where decisions on funding are taken.

• The extension of the concept of round table structures to countries in the North. Models of sharing of this type could promote new understandings of interdependency and solidarity”.  

We have been observing in the ecumenical movement this repeated tendency throughout the years, on the one hand, of creating dependency through the different

church-aid projects and grants, and to the need, of producing self-reliance, a more horizontal structure of decision-making, equal participation and the promotion of new considerations of solidarity, on the other. In the Common Discipline of Ecumenical Sharing, among the basic issues that lie at the heart of this discipline are: “the self-reliance of the poor and the marginalized as the goal of sharing and solidarity. There may be different methods of achieving self-reliance according to context and culture, but sharing should always aim at the empowerment and selfhood of the recipient community”.299

In practical terms, even when there is still a long way to go, one approach that the ecumenical movement has taken to deal with this issue, very successfully in some cases, is through networking. As Richard Dickinson points out in his article Diakonia in the Ecumenical Movement: “An important aspect of this multiplication of projects and programs has been the forging of significant networks of people across national, ethnic, racial, class, gender and even religious boundaries – networks of people who share aspirations for the improvement of the lot of the poor. Today these networks are vital nerve centers for the whole church. They often generate a sense of power and self-reliance among the poor, promote contact between the privileged and the poor, and relate churches to communities of the poor. Such networks have also enhanced South-to-South relationships. Sometimes sharing is as concrete as learning how to use a bicycle, to lift water for irrigation; at other times sharing through networks reaches deeper levels, reinforcing the sense of identity and dignity”.300 And, in my opinion, the work through networking is less heavy in its structure and not so costly financially, which makes it more viable and sustainable.

The Guidelines for Sharing also cover a number of needs to take into consideration. Just to mention some examples:

Under II.7 it is recommended “To represent to one another our needs and problems in relationships where there are no absolute donors, or absolute recipients, but all have

300 Dickinson, p. 426.
needs to be met and gifts to give, and to work for the structural changes in the institutions of the North and the South which this calls for”. 301

Important as well are the needs in reference to youth. Here we can find: “Young people around the world are bearing the heavy burden of the world's pain and injustice. Churches need to know and hear the experiences of young people. Young people need solidarity, resources and support through the sharing of resources within the ecumenical movement. Youth organizations, networks and projects need the support and the trust of those who themselves have once been young”. 302

D. The Contextual Dimension

As it is common in the ecumenical movement the analysis of the context was also significantly present at El Escorial in various deliberations. For example, the Common Discipline for Sharing described the context at the time of the conference as one where “there is much dissatisfaction with the present system of sharing, e.g. the problem of power and the unwillingness to give up power … and the existing patterns of assistance impede the growth of self-reliance”. 303 Today, after all these years, I am afraid that this situation of unwillingness to give up power continues, but on the other hand, the fact that there has been a diminishing pattern of assistance this is forcing many communities to have their self-reliance and self-sustainability increased, may be a positive sign.

In another section of the Common Discipline, the Call to responsibility in the world, section 2, Sharing with all people, we read: “Our awareness of each other’s needs and gifts should be increased through a learning process, in which we may discover the vast human and spiritual resources of our communities”. 304 We can see here another important reference to empowerment as enabling a learning process that on the one hand discovers the needs of the people and on the other, realizes the gifts and enormous human and spiritual resources in our communities in order to address them creatively and in a more sustainable manner.

301 van Beek, Sharing Life in a World Community. Official Report of the WCC World Consultation on Koinonia, El Escorial, Spain, 1987, p. 29.
304 van Beek, Sharing Life in a World Community. Official Report of the WCC World Consultation on Koinonia, El Escorial, Spain, 1987, p. 46.
An additional important matter, in relation to this *contextual dimension*, which came up very strongly at El Escorial, was the importance of the local church to carry out God’s mission in the world. Under this social-systemic and ecological level, the *Common Discipline* also calls to involve the local church in the struggle of the poor and the marginalized in both South and North, by learning: (1) “from people’s organizations such as women’s and youth’s organizations, workers’ unions, base communities, etc. and to take part in actions aiming at empowering the poor, women and youth and bringing justice to the local situation”; and also (2) “from marginalized and oppressed groups in the community and to take part in their struggle against injustice: these could be migrant workers in some countries, elsewhere indigenous people or the oppressed majority …”\textsuperscript{305}

At the same time, the *Common Discipline* calls again to educate for sharing, solidarity and justice, using the examples of the local situation. In some places the emphasis may be on the sharing of spiritual resources; in others, on contributing to projects. But the principle remains - all churches should learn to think and act ecumenically; all should learn to be givers and all should learn to be receivers.\textsuperscript{306}

And finally, the *Common Discipline* also acknowledges that: (1) at a national and regional level “a joint effort of the churches in the South and in the North is needed to inform and educate each other, so that we all may be better equipped to put into practice our vision of sharing”,\textsuperscript{307} and (2) at the international level: “special emphasis on people-to-people sharing is needed as the most effective means to learn about one another, share in the suffering of others and build up solidarity … to use the so-called ‘partnership’ of dioceses/districts/local churches/groups as opportunities for ecumenical sharing and learning; [and] to link churches, groups and movements in different parts of the world which are working on similar issues of justice, peace, empowerment of the poor and oppressed, in order to build up solidarity networks …”\textsuperscript{308}

\textsuperscript{305} van Beek, *Sharing Life in a World Community. Official Report of the WCC World Consultation on Koinonia, El Escorial, Spain, 1987*, p. 48.


\textsuperscript{307} van Beek, *Sharing Life in a World Community. Official Report of the WCC World Consultation on Koinonia, El Escorial, Spain, 1987*, p. 50.

\textsuperscript{308} van Beek, *Sharing Life in a World Community. Official Report of the WCC World Consultation on Koinonia, El Escorial, Spain, 1987*, pp. 53-54.
Another interesting section in the account of the El Escorial meeting, related to the contextual dimension can be found in the Regional Group Discussions. The report Sharing Life also contains rich discussions on power-sharing and empowerment, as they happened in the regional group discussions. The Africa group expressed that “sharing of resources should include sharing of power and decision-making, which creates interdependency between the partners instead of making the other perpetually dependent. This is empowerment as mediated in the New Testament, enabling people to use their capacities and to become the people of God, as God would like us to be”. While the Asia group uttered that “sharing is defined as involvement in the struggles for justice in conflict situations, where the poor need to empower themselves not only in terms of transfer and sharing in decision-making but with the goal of overcoming the roots of poverty and powerlessness …” Participation of the poor as active partner is imperative in all areas for sharing of resources.

The group from Europe said that it is important “to enable people to realize their potential and power as communities and as individuals, so that relationships of equality can grow”. The Latin Americans commented that “there must be a break with the present system of evaluations and that the regions must be helped to take on this task and take decisions themselves”. And finally the group from the Pacific expressed: “we have the power to make the decision. Power can only be shared if people are allowed to participate. Power should not be mishandled or misused; it should be used for the best interests of all people. The churches should empower people for self-determination, making their own decisions, and deciding for the life of the whole community”.

E. The Transformative Dimension
The most tangible of the *Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia* is this one, of concrete practices towards transformation. I would argue on this respect that the *Guidelines for Sharing* produced by the participants at the El Escorial would be the most concrete proposals for the practical follow-up. They expressed: “Having confidence in the grace of God in Jesus Christ, who alone to the divine will through the Holy Spirit enables us to live in obedience to the divine will, we the participants in the world consultation on resource-sharing, coming from different regions, commit ourselves to a common discipline of sharing among all God's people”.\(^{314}\)

In the following paragraphs I will highlight and comment on some of the commitments from the *Guidelines for Sharing* that I have identified in concrete reference to empowerment for social engagement towards transformation. The participants shared the commitment, firstly “To a fundamentally new value system based on justice, peace and integrity of creation. It will be a system that recognizes the rich resources of human communities, their cultural and spiritual contributions and the wealth of nature. It will be radically different from the value system on which the present economic and political orders are based and which lies behind the current crises like those of nuclear threat and industrial pollution”.\(^{315}\) The values of God’s kingdom, values of “peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Ro. 14:17) are not the values of the market, the neo-liberal economy, or of today’s Empire. God is calling the churches towards a transformative action to proclaim and live these values of the kingdom, which includes preserving the integrity of creation.

In this first commitment there is an important acknowledgment of the self-empowerment that takes place in the communities due to their cultural and spiritual heritages. The human history (and not least the church history in particular) is filled with examples where communities have been invaded and countries colonized; and in the case of the church, quite often it has tried to evangelize and to teach by oppressing and imposing cultures, systems and ideologies. One of the empowering principles is to enable the “wealth of nature” that we find in communities, which have been cultivated throughout

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the centuries and therefore no external forces are entitled to impose their powers from outside, even when they are *blessed* by the church.

Secondly, “To a new understanding of sharing in which those who have been marginalized by reason of sex, age, economic and political condition, ethnic origin and disability, and those who are homeless, refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants take their place at the center of all decision and actions as equal partners”. 316 The same way that Jesus of Nazareth, “filled with the power of the Spirit” (Lk. 4:14) proclaimed “the good news to the poor”, and the “release to the captives”, “let the oppressed free” and proclaimed “the year of the Lord’s favor” (Lk. 4:18-19) the churches are called to participate in an empowering process to contribute bringing those from the margins to the center of decisions and sharing as equals.

Thirdly “To identify with the poor and oppressed and their organized movements in the struggle for justice and human dignity in church and society. This in turn will imply the refusal to participate, either as giver or receiver, in ways of sharing that undermine this struggle”. 317 The transforming action also has an element of resistance; it entitles the rejection to participate in a ‘sharing’ that does not identify with the impoverished and the oppressed, rather to participate in the promotion of justice and human dignity.

Fourthly “To enable people to organize themselves and realize their potential and power as individuals and communities, working towards the kind of self-reliance and self-determination, which are an essential condition of interdependence”. 318 Namely to take part in an empowerment process that leads to self-reliance and self-determination.

And finally, “To devise ways of shifting the power to set priorities and terms for the use of resources to those who are wrongfully denied both the resources and the power, such as movements for social justice”. 319 Serving in an empowerment process of movements for social justice that can also contribute to a transformative process of the community.

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These Guidelines for Sharing produced by the participants at El Escorial after so many years are very useful still today, especially as we try to identify concrete practices on Empowering Diakonia. These Guidelines are very specific, spelling out concrete practical proposals for the work of the WCC, its member churches and partners. Nevertheless, the question still remains as to what extent have them been implemented or not.

**Summary of the outcomes of the El Escorial consultation**

I will end the analysis of this portion of El Escorial by making a commented summary of the implementation of the Guidelines, as mentioned earlier in some interviews. We will observe that both the implementation of the Guidelines as well as the interpretation of what actually happened is pretty much influenced by the diverse contexts where the churches and church related organizations serve.

Most of the participants interviewed from the global North, expressed that the Guidelines were not implemented for the following reasons.

1. Precisely around the time of El Escorial Consultation the agencies were starting to be pressured by the back donors, principally their respective governments to insist on professionalism, efficiency and projects management, which was opposed to the spirit of the ESR.
2. Some participants, predominantly from the agencies, argued that the Guidelines were too idealistic, they were wishful thinking, appealing more to a personal commitment but, at the end of the day, there was not a political will to implement them by the organizations or institutions.
3. There was a sense of urgency, since the specialized ministries had to respond straightaway to challenges and requirements in the global humanitarian scene and in particular having to react to demands placed upon them by public donors.
4. There were WCC internal factors, which conspired against the application of the Guidelines as well. On the one hand there was a governance component, which many considered contradictory with regard to the implementation of the Guidelines, i.e. while the agencies were among the most important donors and therefore very crucial partners for the WCC, they did not have the possibility of participating directly in decision making of the Council. One indication of this is
that many participated in the meetings of the Central Committee but did not have voting rights since these are reserved only for the representatives of the member churches. On the other hand, among staff there was major tension between those who supported diakonia (as charity) and those who promoted justice. This provoked that positions hardened and no action was taken on sharing. The WCC became a territory of principalities, of little kingdoms, with their own power, budgets and procedures of spending their resources.

5. Consequently and in relation to the previous point, the sharing of resources must go hand in hand with the sharing of power and this applies to all elements of the ecumenical movement, to the specialized ministries and to the churches as well. In other words, how is it possible to share resources without actually sharing power? There are, at least, a couple of hermeneutical keys that help us to respond responsibly this question:

a. As we saw in his presentation at El Escorial consultation, Konrad Raiser said: “Sharing takes place in relationships, which are truly reciprocal and free of domination, in other words, the test of sharing is ultimately the sharing of power, mutual empowerment”\[320\] and

b. The Faith and Order Paper No. 151 on Church and World where we read that “The basic choice is between seeing power as quantitative and seeing it qualitative. If power is quantitative, then a gain in power for one person must mean a loss of power for someone else; if power is qualitative it can be shared, in such a way that more power becomes available for the growth of individuals and their community. Hierarchy—in any church—must be a conscientious, intentional exercise, in love, of such qualitative power according to the model offered by Jesus”.\[321\]

Hence empowerment is about sharing resources and sharing power in a qualitative way that enables more power to be available for all.

6. Another problem faced in El Escorial was that some agencies did not send to the meeting their highest rank executives, but rather third-line officials, who, did not

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have a big power of influence to apply the *Guidelines* in their respective organizations.

7. The agencies of ecumenical cooperation were becoming more independent from the WCC, carrying-on their own *bilateral* relationships and began to disperse their priorities and resources. In many instances, e.g. in Latin America, resources coming from the church related organizations of the global North bypassed the churches and were transferred to non-church sectors.

Some participants, principally from the global South, have witnessed to the fact that not all was lost, namely, that the *Guidelines* were actually honored by some instances, not least by the WCC member churches, both in the North and in the South. Time and again, they highlight the importance, as it was done in various occasions at El Escorial of seeing the resources not limited to the financial ones. This is even more critical and relevant decades after, when the WCC no longer supports projects financially but rather continues to promote and facilitate other significant and relevant elements or values of the ESR, such as theological reflection, capacity building, mutual solidarity and accountability, empowerment and others.

And finally, I will proceed to summarize and underscore and main outcomes I have identified at El Escorial, again, applying the *Five Dimensions* scheme.

### A. The Visional Dimension

The best summary of the El Escorial vision is expressed explicitly by Chris Ferguson and Ofelia Ortega by which they conclude their booklet *Ecumenical Diakonia*: “The El Escorial vision is a biblically rooted call to be a Eucharist community of sharing forging just relationships based on mutuality, power sharing, participation, empowerment and accountability. The theological vision of El Escorial remains a rich source of inspiration for our understanding of Ecumenical diakonia. Sharing in solidarity requires the building of just relationships and addressing the imbalances of power and access to material resources so that life may be shared!”

### B. The Normative Dimension

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322 Ferguson and Ortega, p. 33.
I will recapitulate in this section identifying certain forms of normativity that I find helpful for this research. Diaconal engagement requires repentance and a radical new awareness in order to promote an ecumenical sharing of resources that helps to shift mentalities by addressing the root causes of suffering and injustice. It is mandatory as well to pursue a holistic approach by which, on the one hand we overcome the false dichotomy that has been introduced between mission and development, sharing one mission, and to avoid the recurring tendency to divide the spiritual and the material resources, on the other.

Diaconal engagement also compels a radical new awareness towards empowerment as a process of enabling all God's people to bring their sharing together, affirming the dignity and capability of individuals and communities to be themselves. This process facilitates “the voice of the voiceless” to be heard, the marginalized to participate and to share what they are, to share their own lives, in order for them to decide for themselves and for their communities. We must listen to and learn from the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized; share in their suffering and hope, and take seriously the realities of people in their immediate communities and the opportunities for learning and sharing together in true koinonia.

It is required as well to shape the diaconal action on solid biblical foundations, building on the notions and practices of the covenant as a subversive paradigm for sharing life in community, the body as a liberating metaphor for sharing life in community and the Eucharist as a holistic and costly model for sharing life in community.

C. The Need-Oriented Dimension

The church, in order to fulfill its mission needs structures and regulations trying to overcome tension between the language of sharing and the language of the established structures that need to be just, through the freedom granted by the Spirit of God. The church also should be aware of the communities’ needs and gifts through a learning process, by which it may discover the vast human and spiritual resources of its own communities. An empowerment process is needed towards the self-reliance of the poor, equal participation, the decentralization of mechanisms for decision-making and the creation of networks as the aim of any sharing process in order to reverse the trend of dependency.
D. The Contextual Dimension

In conclusion, I infer that there is a close connection between the sharing of resources and the sharing of power, and both vary according to the different contexts. A critical component of the empowering process is to shake-up and awaken those, both individuals and communities, who believe that are powerless, for them to discover and liberate their potential, the actual power within them, as well as their gifts and enormous human and spiritual resources. This enables them for self-determination, to take their own decisions that they consider the best for their communities. This open and wide participation of the people, in the midst of their daily lives and needs, is what facilitates the sharing in general and of power and resources in particular, especially in the local situations. Both at global and local levels, the principle remains - all churches should learn to think and act ecumenically, linking common efforts and building solidarity networks; all should learn to be givers and all should learn to be receivers. In other words, sharing is defined as involvement in the struggles for justice in conflict situations, where the poor need to empower themselves not only in terms of transfer and sharing in decision-making but with the goal of overcoming the root causes of poverty and powerlessness.

E. The Transformative Dimension

As a way of conclusion of this final dimension, I will point to a concrete reference to empowerment for social engagement and transformation, which is enabled through responsible relations leading to a sharing community that should meet the fundamental requirement of justice. This sharing as meeting between people, as the exchange of experiences and spiritual testimonies has priority over the sharing of material resources. As members of the body of Christ his followers live in a fundamental relationship to one another, which binds them in mutual obligation, but at the same time a Christian congregation can only become a parable of shared life to the extent that it shares the goodness of God’s creation with all human beings. They are called to deny the values of the market, the neo-liberal economy and of today’s Empire and to live the values of the kingdom, of “peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Ro. 14:17).

God is calling the churches towards a transformative action to proclaim and live these values of the kingdom, which includes preserving the integrity of creation. The same
way as Jesus of Nazareth, the churches are urged to participate in an empowering process to bring those from the margins to the center of decisions and sharing as equals. They are called to a transforming and empowering action that participates in the promotion of justice and human dignity, particularly among the impoverished and the oppressed that leads to self-reliance and self-determination. This empowerment process of movements for social justice can also contribute to a transformative process of the community and the whole oikoumene.

**Historical Development of Diakonia and Empowerment in the Ecumenical Movement: The Transformative Period**

In this third and final section of the current chapter, I will be covering the period identified as Transformative and it goes from the 1990s up to the present. As it is being argued throughout the thesis, diakonia is not to be seen as an end in itself, rather seeking a transformation of society that leads to building inclusive and just communities, in other words, building koinonia. Several positive examples and experiences of this can be found in various places, e.g. women bring-in interesting perspectives based on their natural ethos of building communities, really in practical terms. On this regard, “… it would seem that for women the interconnection between diakonia—Christian service—and koinonia—fellowship—is very strong. This notion gains approval and acceptance regardless of the women's context. For them service is complementary to the building up of the community. The effect of the service, which is called for by their Christian commitment, is only really worthwhile if it helps to ensure the growth and development of the community and benefits all. Service is not self-serving; not designed to make those who serve feel good. This may be a side effect but its aim is to bring greater well-being and justice to those who are served”.

In broad terms further research will be made in this section on the notions and practices of diakonia in the ecumenical movement and more particularly in the WCC, focusing on its subsequent assemblies and on global events that I helped to coordinate, with other colleagues, when serving as WCC executive. These are the 2009 International Consultation on Local Diakonia, held in Bucharest, Rumania and the 2010 Global Consultation on Prophetic Diakonia, which took place in Utrecht, Netherlands.

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And, as stated in the Introduction of this chapter, this section will focus more deeply on the 2012 WCC Conference on Theology of Diakonia, which was organized in Colombo, Sri Lanka with a substantial participation of persons from the margins. As we will explain, there we experienced a paradigm shift, which I am calling transformative (that gives the name to this period), seeking a transformed world with the active and empowered participation of the people from the periphery. Again, the conference produced the document *Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in the Twenty First Century*, which I will analyze following the *Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia*. There is a final reference in this section to the 10th Assembly of the WCC where also the issue of diakonia was addressed, principally in the Ecumenical Conversations.

**World Changes in the 1990s**

At the beginning of the 1990s the world’s geo-politics changed drastically. The challenge of diakonia faced churches in the formerly socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe in dramatic new ways. The collapse of this political and economic system brought to the surface a wide range of unmet needs in society. In the case of the Orthodox churches, as we observed earlier, significant reflection on diakonia had come from a 1978 consultation in Crete, which had articulated a theological approach linking diakonia with liturgy.

The WCC’s most relevant event that took place at the beginning of this period was its 7th Assembly, held in Canberra, Australia, on 1991. There was an explicit reference to empowerment concerning the churches’ social involvement, but not as isolated or independent actors, rather in collaboration with other organizations that are also part of the civil society. The Section II of the report expressed that “Churches must recognize the increasing importance of the civil societies, those non-governmental public organizations which express the interests and concerns of the people. It is in the civil societies that the energy of people aimed at greater emancipation and justice emerges. Churches belong to this civil society in the large majority of nations. They must put part of their resources towards the growth, the development, the empowerment and consolidation of these societies”.

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Analyzing the period after, the former general secretary of the WCC, Konrad Raiser stressed that “Following the 1991 Canberra Assembly a new effort was made to open up theological reflection on diakonia … There was a fairly representative and substantial confrontation on the theological understanding on diakonia, there was an addition-renewed interest among Orthodox theologians in theological reflection on diakonia. Therefore, the concern for diakonia did not disappear; in fact, the effort to substantiate or to strengthen the theological basis for the understanding and the praxis of diakonia was even stronger”.

In 1992 the work of inter-church aid that CICARWS was carrying out was then followed by the Unit IV—Sharing and Service whose responsibilities were shared out between a number of teams within a newly-formed cluster on relations after the 1998 Harare Assembly. Klaus Poser remembers these changes with these words:

Contrary to the other Commissions of the WCC which were combined with others in Unit I, II and III, CICARWS in its entirety was renamed or turned into Unit IV—Sharing and Service... I resented this change for a number of reasons: beacons of ecumenical action and witness like CCIA, CCPD, but also Christian Education and, not least, CICARWS lost their visibility through the units anonymization... In a way it was also a break with their history. CICARWS had achieved tremendous work and acknowledgement and gratitude... it extended its mission effectively to other continents, standing for the solidarity of the churches in the world...

But in those days there were other spaces actively serving in different fronts, both within the WCC structure and out of it. Within was the CCPD (the Commission of the Churches’ Participation in Development), ECLOF (Ecumenical Church Loan Fund), the PCR (Program to Combat Racism), CWME (Commission on World Mission and Evangelism), among others. Perhaps the most significant here is CCPD since it deliberately questioned the handling of aid, which created some frictions with the donor agencies. On the other hand, observing the historical interaction between these various organizations, one gets the impression that more coordination was needed, since quite often, instead of complementing each other, they were competing against each other, in some cases, supported by the same agency.

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325 From Skype interview on 21 February 2014
326 Notes from a Skype interview on 26 March 2014.
Outside the domain of the WCC, but still part of the ecumenical movement, were the churches *per se*, and their different councils, as well as other organizations (formally known as *agencies* or even *donor agencies*), identified today as *specialized ministries*, very competent and professional, which, even when in many cases they were created by the churches, have become increasingly autonomous. But also we find networks and alliances of these type of organizations like APRODEV (Association of WCC-Related Development Organizations in Europe) that was founded in 1990. Another important actor has been ACT (Action by Churches Together), which started in 1995 as ACT International, as a joint venture between the WCC and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and later became the ACT Alliance, working on humanitarian aid, development and advocacy.\(^\text{327}\)

I have encountered many complaints and frustrations from former WCC staff with regard to the creation of ACT Alliance arguing that it has caused a further disempowerment of the WCC. As Klaus Poser puts it, in relation to the area he directed:

> Another piece of dismantling CICARWS was the creation of ACT International, which was formed after I left the Council: CICARWS had always and successfully cooperated with operational agencies like CWS (Church World Service) in responding to the needs of the victims of natural or man-made catastrophes. It issued the worldwide appeals thus mobilizing the awareness and solidarity of the churches and their members as a sign and witness of a sharing ecumenical community. Much of this is lost. In fact, during the Kosovo crisis when Albania was flooded with refugees ACT was very helpful but also sidelined and substituted the organization Diakonia of the Orthodox Church of Albania, which had been strengthened with the support of CICARWS.\(^\text{328}\)

Even though I can understand and even share this frustration, I also agree with the argument that the creation of ACT Alliance has further helped to reach out and include efforts of other sectors related to the ecumenical movement, dealing with emergency, advocacy and development, that otherwise probably would not have taken place.

Around those days, there was an important process related to our research, which was reflected in the booklet *Discerning the Way Together. Southern Perspectives*, published in 1993. In reference to this, Martin Robra pointed out that this “reflection-process jointly organized by development agencies and ecumenical organizations… was meant

\(^{327}\) ACT Alliance, accessed on 5 February 2014, [http://www.actalliance.org](http://www.actalliance.org)

\(^{328}\) Notes from a Skype interview on 26 March 2014.
to identify new challenges and opportunities for ecumenical diaconia. The widely publicized critique of official development aid and the new interest in civil society, however, led the development agencies to the conclusion that NGOs in many ways seem to be more important for the implementation of their work than their traditional partners: the churches”.

Nevertheless, the booklet proposed a number of practical recommendations in order to strengthen the cooperation within the ecumenical movement concerning the social commitment of the churches, towards development, where the issue of empowerment was also considered. For example, there were four basic principles enumerated in order to “encourage a new ecumenical spirit”, namely, on: ecumenical vision, anti-systemic nature, work ethic and people. Under this heading the publication points out that “Development processes interlock political, social and cultural factors and issues around the aspirations of people’s empowerment towards the achievement of justice, participation and the enhancement of life”. On the issue of measuring development, quite often we see the indicators of the macro-economy being used. Nonetheless, this quote acknowledges the fact that “people come first” and therefore the “people's empowerment”, or self-development of people, is another critical component in order to achieve justice and sustainability.

In the booklet From Inter-Church Aid to Jubilee. A brief history of ecumenical diaconia in the WCC, published in 2002 by the WCC Diakonia and Solidarity team, we can read some interesting findings in relation to these process described above and how it relates to the topic of our thesis. Here the editors note that “The conclusions of the Discerning the Way Together process on issues such as poverty in the North, gender, education, health, agriculture and population do not amount to a single, unified vision of the future, its goals or strategies, but they do address the unfinished agenda of the wider ecumenical family in areas such as partnership, empowerment and theology”. As a matter of fact these three elements mentioned at the end of the quote will be major emphasis of the WCC’s work on diaconia in the following years.

331 Hookway and others, p. 18.
In an interview with Humberto Shikiya, he made an important connection between the Discerning the Way Together (DWT) and the Ecumenical Sharing of Resources (ESR) processes. He pointed out the following: “while the DWT initiative was facilitated by CCPD, nevertheless WCC’s partner organizations in the South, especially in Latin America, brought in the ESR perspective. On the one hand WCC’s programs had the spirit and the mainstreaming of ESR and on the other, it was guaranteed structurally by the proactivity of its regional desks and regional groups”.

This position was reaffirmed by Eliana Rolemberg who pointed out that actually, there was not an intentional planning of interrelating both processes but in practical terms, the outcomes of the El Escorial consultation and more broadly the whole ESR process, had an important influence in the DWT process. For example, during those days when four agencies of cooperation in the global North planned an important evaluation, the WCC, guided by the spirit of ESR, requested to have representatives from the global South, which was accepted, and of course, it had a positive impact in the outcomes of the assessment.

We have been seeing in the thesis the relevant contribution that the Faith and Order movement has made through its reflections on diakonia, e.g. the BEM document and its allusion to the ministry of deacons. An additional significant development during this period of time that we are analyzing was the celebration of the 1993 Santiago de Compostela Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order. I have traced here references to diakonia and empowerment as well. From the report on Section 1: The Understanding of Koinonia and its Implications we find interesting quotes on our topic. For example, in paragraph 8: “Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians die with Christ and rise to new life in him, and are thus joined to the Father (c.f. Ro. 6:4-5). Koinonia signifies this dynamic relationship based on participation in the reality of God’s grace. No one is untouched by God’s gifts and call to service …” Further down, in allusion to the Lord’s Supper, it affirms in paragraph 12 that “It feeds the impulse to engage in the task of standing in solidarity with the hungry, the dispossessed and the marginalized through costly acts of empowering as a sign of God’s love for all.

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332 Notes from a Skype interview on 4 March 2014.
333 Notes from a Skype interview on 24 March 2014.
humanity”. Then in paragraph 21 there is a reaffirmation of the importance of the inseparable character of both diakonia and koinonia. It says:

The Church as koinonia is called to share not only in the suffering of its own community but in the suffering of all; by advocacy and care for the poor, needy and marginalized; by joining in the efforts for justice and peace within human societies; by exercising and promoting responsible stewardship of creation and by keeping alive hope in the heart of humanity. 

Commenting on these helpful reflections from the Faith and Order movement, I can reaffirm the following points, as key concepts to further build the Empowering Diakonia model: (1) Diakonia belongs to the whole church, it is not reserved only for a specific group of chosen disciples, rather all followers of Jesus Christ are “touched by God’s gifts and call to service”; (2) the Eucharist provides the necessary “impulse to engage” in the task of diakonia; (3) empowerment takes place not cheaply, rather through costly acts, which are embraced and enabled by the Holy Spirit and by God’s love for all humanity; (4) this empowered diakonia works for the fulfillment of the church’s mission as koinonia, beyond its own community, by sharing in the suffering, advocating and caring for the poor, by joining with others in the efforts for justice and peace, by working towards the integrity of creation, and finally keeping hope alive.

Of course, much of this is echoed from other Faith and Order documents which contributed to the Santiago de Compostela Conference. E.g. the Faith and Order Paper No. 151 called Church and World. The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community, chapter VI on Discipleship and Community highlights under the section The Life of Christian Communion the following:

As Jesus called his followers on a pilgrimage into the future, so the Christian community, always imperfect, is one of growth in the Spirit, a community of forgiveness and empowerment where all persons are accepted as they are and challenged to become fully what God wants them to be… As Jesus strengthened his followers by proclaiming God's word and instituting in their midst his meal of forgiveness, thanksgiving and communion, so the Christian community, in the power of the Holy Spirit, will be sustained and renewed by these means of God's grace. Here are its deepest well-springs

for becoming a sign of justice and community for all humanity, until that
perfect justice and communion will be celebrated in the Kingdom of God. 336

The Beginning of a New Millennium

In the start of the 21st century, the ecumenical movement has been going through a
number of significant changes. One of them, which already began in the previous
century, is that the center of gravity of Christianity has moved from the global North to
the global South and East, as far as statistics are concerned, i.e., from a quantitative
point of view. 337 Nevertheless, from the point of view of the power asymmetry and of
availability of financial resources, indeed this center of gravity remains in the North, but
not necessarily in the hands of the churches and specialized ministries (as it use to be in
former times), and therefore no longer have the resources to support their partners in the
global South, at least at the same level as in previous years.

This scenario also affects the way the WCC accompanies the diaconal work of the
different denominations, shifting from transferring grants to further creating more
spaces to sustain, encourage and further empower the churches in their reflections and
actions on diakonia.

This trend has been confirmed and described by Beth Ferris who says: “Funds for
traditional multilateral ecumenical institutions dried up. Institutions such as the World
Council of Churches were caught in a bind. Its history, culture, and constituency
predisposed it to continue working as it had always done, while the growing power of
the agencies was insisting on new ways of working”. 338 These “new ways of working”,

336 WCC, Church and World. The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community. A Faith
and Order Study Document (Paper No. 151), p. 72.
337 Wesley Granberg-Michaelson on 11 September 2013 in a joint WCC-GCF (Global Christian Forum)
Consultation held in Geneva on the Role of Councils and Forums, mentioned these statistics, in reference
to this point: “We are living in one of the most significant times of change in all of Christian history. That
is reflected first in the geographical presence of the world’s Christians. By now we are familiar with this
picture: Europe and North America, which held 80% of the world’s Christians a century ago, now have
40%, while only 2% of all Christians lived in Africa in 1910, today 25% do; astonishing growth; by 2025
the continent will be the home of 633 million Christians. About the same, as the projected number of
Christians in Latin America by that time (640 million). Today over 1 billion Christians are in Africa and
Latin America. This shift in the presence of world Christianity is not only to the South, but also to the
East. Any given Sunday, there are more people in congregations in China than in the U.S. Christian
population in Asia will grow to 460 million by 2025. In last century—statistical center of gravity of world
Christianity has moved from Spain to a point near Timbuktu. This is the most dramatic geographical shift
in the history of Christianity” (lecture not published).
338 Elizabeth Ferris, “New Wineskins or New Wine? The Evolution of Ecumenical Humanitarian
Assistance,” 2010, p. 22. Ferris has spent more than twenty years working in the field of humanitarian
assistance. Most recently, she worked in humanitarian response and long-term development for the WCC
in Geneva, Switzerland. Ferris served as the Director of the Church World Service’s Immigration and
included the *professionalization* of the work, which was a challenge for the churches, particularly from the global South. Many of them had, and still have, a clear and consistent theoretical (and theological) framework, but also needed the institutional capacity to implement their work.

I think that the WCC, observing this tendency, tried to act strategically to avoid hindering its multilateral sharing to support the churches’ diaconal work. This is one of the reasons why it has exercised its convening role and has been organizing the consultations and events that we are analyzing in this thesis.

In my opinion, the fact that the WCC no longer is capable of financing diaconal projects does not mean that it has not been working substantially in this area throughout all these years, primarily focusing more purposely on empowerment and on capacity development, which includes theological reflection for diakonia of its member churches. As a matter of fact, I would even argue that the WCC has still been involved in inter-church aid but in a different way, understanding *aid* not necessarily as transferring funds for diaconal projects, but rather *aid* as providing help or assistance. This *aid* comes not as an end in itself, but focusing more on facilitating and enabling spaces for discussions, dialogue and mutual empowerment, mainly through gatherings and networking, where the churches equip each other to serve more effectively the world in need.

This shift from channeling funds for supporting projects to networking, of course, was by no means an easy or a smooth transition since many churches, especially those working on diakonia in the global South, depended almost totally from WCC funding for their work. Nevertheless, on this regard, I find interesting Michael Taylor’s comments when he underscores that “Churches of the ‘South’, however, insisted that inter-church aid was in many ways perpetuating the very dependency it sought to eradicate whereby powerful and well-off churches and nations dictated what should happen to the less powerful and the poor and kept the decision making, whether with good or bad intentions, firmly in their own hands”.

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337 Taylor, p. 586.
Actually, as we have been observing, this issue of power is a crucial topic for my thesis, where I find, on the one hand its enforcement through aid and financial support by the “well-off” churches and church-related agencies; and its emerging manifestation through an empowerment process, by what I would call the less powerful churches, on the other. There is an apparent contradiction of the two approaches on diakonia, mentioned earlier, and reflects, in fact a historical tension between both models of diakonia, where on the one hand we find the charity (the traditional interchurch aid) model, and the emphasis on empowerment, on the other. Nevertheless, I like to see both models as complementary, since both are needed and can benefit from each other.

We have been seeing how some diaconal projects continue functioning with the support of sister churches or church-related organizations, while others had to be closed because the funding was interrupted, since they depended entirely on an income source that no longer existed. At the same time other churches managed to continue serving either with the funding of other sources, or by developing their own means, towards sustainability, based on the innate gifts and talents to become subjects of transformation.

Here again is where the whole question of empowerment is important, since, as we will observe in the thesis, many of these churches managed to become self-empowered and self-sustainable to continue serving the people. Even when this has been an increasing concern of the WCC, it has been present in the life and mission of the churches themselves throughout the years. As the booklet From Inter-Church Aid to Jubilee, puts it: “Empowerment of the poor and sharing in the struggle for justice and human dignity were not the only task for social action and initiative in the WCC understanding. Transfer of power and mutual participation was on the agenda of the churches themselves”.340 The unique role of the WCC has been, therefore, to bring all these reflections and practices on diakonia and empowerment together at different levels and among diverse denominations for networking, in order to be more effective while serving the people.

Even when this convening role of the WCC in this area became increasingly stronger in recent years, it was not a new development. As From Inter-Church Aid to Jubilee points out: “After the 1998 Assembly, WCC undertook a further restructuring, breaking down

340 Hookway and others, p. 11.
the unit structure into inter-related programmatic teams. Unit IV-Sharing and Service was reconfigured and renamed Regional Relations and Ecumenical Sharing. The revised nomination expressed a fundamental break with any operational involvement of WCC, and a shift towards facilitation, coordination and networking functions of the Geneva staff. It also reflected the growing emphasis on WCC as a relational and not a programmatic (or funding) organization, enabling community and ‘visible unity’ among the churches, in line with the WCC policy statement Common Understanding and Vision. One important emerging focus during this period was on the capacity building of ecumenical organizations, understood as more than technical strengthening of organizations, but as real empowerment on the level of autonomous reflection, decision-making and action”.

The previous quote explains very accurately the recent historical development of WCC’s diaconal engagement. Again, the experiences gained by the WCC in this area of “real empowerment”, developed further after the 1998 Harare Assembly, has been a strong asset up to the present, pursuing its convening and facilitating role, by enabling a process of “autonomous reflection, decision-making and action” among its member churches but also in relation to the wider constituency.

It is interesting to observe how many local churches are in fact empowered for diaconal work inspired by their own community’s wisdom, namely, indigenous knowledge and experience related to day-to-day living, occupations and culture passed-on from generations to generations, in areas like agriculture, industrial work and handicraft, herbal doctors, management of natural resources and environment, community’s business and fund raising, art and folk drama, local language and literature, etc.

In addition, the local congregations are empowered by their ecclesial nature, i.e. living values of Christian solidarity, dignity and spirituality, and urged by the needs of the people. Empowerment and diakonia are integral parts of being church; people are emerging self-empowered for action. The WCC creates spaces where churches learn from each other and also provides the necessary complementary learning tools to face together more effectively and creatively the diaconal challenges of today’s world.

Hookway and others, p. 23.
In recent years empowerment has played an important role as a guideline within the ecumenical movement, church development and mission agencies. Thus, for example, Bread for All, the development service of the Protestant churches of Switzerland, made “empowering community” one of its six core values, and together with the Catholic Lenten Fund (Fastenopfer) made empowerment the main element of the 2006 national ecumenical campaign on human rights. As Frank Mathwig & Christoph Stückelberger point out in the publication Grundwerte: “Empowerment has played a role in the ecumenical movement for many years, particularly in the empowerment of women and indigenous peoples, but also in overcoming violence”.342

In this empowerment process to strengthen the institutional capacity of the churches in order to develop diaconal work more effectively, also the Orthodox churches have been very active. This is indeed, very relevant to mention in this thesis as well, in order to have a better panoramic vision of the ecumenical movement in this field. Earlier in this chapter the 1978 consultation in Crete was mentioned. As an important follow-up process, the WCC and other partners joined the International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC), in the organization of a major international conference on Orthodox Social Witness and Service in Valamo, Finland in 2004. The conference mandated the organizers to strengthen the sharing of information, networking and collaboration among the many Orthodox social departments, structures and organizations worldwide. It also appointed an Orthodox Diakonia Continuation Committee to maintain the necessary follow-up of this initiative.343

The Orthodox family, of course, has participated throughout the years in various other events organized by the ecumenical movement in order to boost the capacity and coordination among the churches and related organizations as well, to address more effectively the social-economic-ecological challenges in their respective countries. Such was the case of the Consultation on Enhancing Cooperation in the Field of Diakonia and Development, which was held in the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey 4-5 February 2005.

342 Stückelberger and Mathwig, p. 6.
This event was also an important milestone in the study of ecumenical diakonia, since, as it is mentioned in the Final Statement: “Together we recognise and affirm the need to establish a new alliance for churches and church-related organisations who work ecumenically in relief and development. This new alliance, provisionally called ‘ACT Global’, is intended to address the needs identified by participants.”

Then the WCC held its 9th Assembly on 14-23 February 2006 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, under the theme: *God in your grace, transform the world*. Its final Message was crafted as *An Invitation to Prayer*, where we can find two references to empowerment, related to witness and service each. The first one is: “we are made aware by Assembly participants of cries arising daily in their home countries and regions due to disasters, violent conflicts and conditions of oppression and suffering. Yet we are also empowered by God to bear witness to transformation in personal lives, churches, societies and the world as a whole”. And the other: “God of grace, together we turn to you in prayer, for it is you who unite us: you are the one God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – in whom we believe, you alone empower us for good, you send us out across the earth in mission and service in the name of Christ”.

As we can read, both quotes point to what I would call the Judeo-Christian meaning of empowerment, which refers to an inner source of power, which is communitarian, since it comes from God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit who blows the “breath of life” not only to resist the powers of death and destruction, but also enables the necessary power and strength to bear witness and to transform the world, which, of course includes the churches, that also need to be transformed. The faith of the church in the Triune and Gracious God is what gives power and strength to act “in mission and in service in the name of Christ”. I will stress in the following chapter of this thesis, this is the sort and the source of empowerment that millions of Christians, mainly from the global South, receive and share in order to serve and transform today’s world.

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344 WCC, ‘Consultation Enhancing Cooperation on Diakonia & Development Feb 2005. World Council of Churches’, 2005, accessed on 7 May 2014, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/search-wcc-documents/advanced-search.html?tx_docdb_pi1%5Bdescriptors%5D=29777>. Interestingly enough, even when this event was about diakonia, the term was seemingly hardly used, e.g. in this Final Statement it is only mentioned in the title, nevertheless there were many implicit references made to its content and most importantly on how “to increase our effectiveness in addressing issues of poverty and injustice through increased coordination at the global level and on the ground…” as the Statement points out.

And this interconnection between mission and service noted in the previous quote, not only has been addressed in previous WCC documents on diakonia, but also in other programmatic areas, like, e.g. Faith and Order. On this regard, a paper produced the year before the Assembly, expresses that: “The Church is called into being by the Father ‘who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life’ (Jn. 3:16) and who sent the Holy Spirit to lead these believers into all truth, reminding them of all that Jesus taught (cf. Jn. 14:26). The Church is thus the creature of God’s Word and of the Holy Spirit. It belongs to God, is God’s gift and cannot exist by and for itself. Of its very nature it is missionary, called and sent to serve, as an instrument of the Word and the Spirit, as a witness to the Kingdom of God”. 346

Not only the interrelationship between mission and service, I also find implicitly the notion of empowerment in this portion of the Faith and Order text. As I read it, the Church is empowered by God’s Word and Spirit as well as an instrument of both, “sent to serve”, bearing witness to God’s Kingdom.

As it usually happens after a WCC Assembly, a new programmatic structure was introduced in the Geneva secretariat. The Solidarity and Diakonia team was created in which I participated as staff and even when it introduced the new inputs coming from the Assembly in order to address the new challenges identified by the delegates of the churches, it also followed the rich heritage in the ecumenical movement, explained above. So during the period up to the WCC’s 10th Assembly held in Korea, our team aimed “to strengthen the diaconal capacity of member churches that will empower them to transform the structures of injustice and violence that exacerbate the suffering of peoples and communities through the development and strengthening of ecumenical networks of cooperation and collaboration which enhance the sharing of best practices and resources for training in local, community based diakonia”.

Following this overall objective, in practical terms, the WCC further has been creating spaces of mutual sharing on empowerment, through: team visits; networking; exchange of information; administering the scholarships Fund (both for individuals and group training); designing an ecumenical curriculum on diakonia working with theological

346 WCC, The Nature and Mission of the Church. Faith and Order Paper No. 198, p. 6. This document is being studied by the churches and therefore still has not been adopted officially.
institutions and mapping the ones that have it (e.g. agreement WCC/Diakonhjemmet University College in Oslo, Norway); among other tasks.

The Two First WCC Global Consultations on Diakonia of the 21st Century

Furthermore, the WCC team coordinated several regional capacity building seminars for diakonia and as mentioned at the beginning of this third section, two global events in the first decade of the 21st Century, namely the 2009 International Consultation on Local Diakonia, held in Bucharest, Rumania and the 2010 Global Consultation on Prophetic Diakonia, which took place in Utrecht, the Netherlands.\(^{347}\)

Since our purpose is not to get deep into an analysis of these two global consultations, we will raise, just to have a general idea, the visions we have discovered of each (looking at the first of the *Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia*). By observing and summarizing the presentations and the reports of the group discussions of the 2009 event, we would define the *Diakonia Vision of Bucharest* as: a Christian awareness of the social responsibility with the society and the environment open to cooperate with other actors; as part of the mission of the church, carried-out mainly by the local congregation, seeking to build communities that are transforming communities in order to advocate for economic justice.

This *Diakonia Vision of Bucharest* embraces the notion of *liturgy after liturgy*, meaning that this effort is part of the church’s celebration and therefore linked to its spirituality, since it is both *Table and Proclamation*, it is *Celebration of the Spirit*. This enables the church to share the gospel in the world in practical terms, through concrete actions of effective love and solidarity. For this, more biblical-theological formation on diaconal related issues is needed both at the level of the local churches and also of the theological institutions. It also aims at sustainable development, interrelated to the *rights based approach*, by empowering people and the local communities for them to raise their own voices. All institutions of diaconal work need to see the people as subjects and not like objects, overcoming the colonial/patriarchal point of view.

On the other hand, what I would call the *Diakonia Vision of Utrecht*, a product of synthesizing the presentations and discussions at the conference, reaffirmed the notion

\(^{347}\) The reports of these events have not been published.
of prophetic diakonia, by which God sends the church out in mission to bring the good news to the poor and oppressed, in word and in deed. Faithful to this call, it tries to serve human needs, focusing on the marginalized, the “least of these”, not only by comforting them but also by addressing the root causes of their pain, sorrow and shortages. This ministry of prophetic diakonia seeks to confront the powers of this world that lead to violence, exclusion, death and destruction, and it calls for the transformation of unjust structures and practices into God’s kingdom of justice, with fullness of life for all God’s creation.

Another important project of the WCC’s work on diakonia in the period being analyzed was a *Mapping Prophetic Diakonia*, facilitated by the consultant William Temu and its findings were shared in this WCC Global Consultation on Prophetic Diakonia held in the Netherlands. In the Executive Summary the following is stated:

> Diakonia is at the heart of the mission of the Church and it has been so since its beginning… The churches are actively engaged in on-going biblical and theological reflection on diakonia as they seek to contextualize their diaconal ministries and conduct work through the most effective methods. Many churches are doing diakonia ecumenically and would seek to do more because the issues being addressed are larger than any one particular church and quite often societal in nature… The analysis of the information received reveal three major issues facing the diaconal ministries of the churches in their unique contexts: the rapidly changing contexts in a globalizing world leading to new areas of diaconal work; inadequate resources to cope with the increasing needs; and the growing number of organizations claiming the space previously held by the churches… The study also revealed that the congregational level is the place where diakonia is practiced most naturally in meeting or serving the neighbor in need. Congregations further play a vital role in resource mobilization for higher diaconal levels in the churches.\(^{348}\)

What follows in these two next paragraphs is a commented summary I have produced by observing the results of this survey. I perceive an understanding of diakonia in this period that covers the following features: (1) it is part (“at the heart!”) of the mission of the Church; (2) it is informed both by the biblical texts and theological reflection, as well as the context (of globalization), which is changing rapidly; (3) it is carried-out ecumenically; (4) challenged by inadequate resources and increasing needs; (5) in competition (and not always in collaboration) with a growing number of social actors.

(NGOs) and (5) the congregational level is the place where diakonia is practiced most naturally in meeting or serving the neighbor in need.

As many churches interviewed are historical and have benefited for many years from the financial support of the WCC and specialized ministries, they have a rather pessimistic attitude facing the shortage of financial resources transferred from abroad, hence my point (4) above reflects more what I would understand as a complaint due to the “inadequate resources” instead of being more pro-active in developing their own resources and assets to be more sustainable and less dependent from foreign funding. E.g. the word empowerment cannot be found in the whole 40 pages document.

**The 2012 Conference on Theology of Diakonia in the 21st Century**

Three programs of the WCC, namely, Solidarity and Diakonia, Just and Inclusive Communities and Mission and Evangelism, organized in 2012 a *Conference on Theology of Diakonia in the 21st Century*, held on 6-12 June, in Colombo, Sri Lanka. 50 participants involved in various diaconal initiatives in about 25 countries attended the meeting. I see this gathering as the climax of a process, since, to certain extent, the two other global events on diakonia held after the Porto Alegre Assembly, led to this one and also helped to prepare the Busan Assembly.

The Colombo conference had a clear purpose and actually achieved integration in the different ecumenical efforts to serve the people in need, bringing voices from the periphery of the churches and society (indigenous people, persons living with disabilities, racial and ethnic minorities, and other marginalized people), but also people representing their respective mission networks and those traditionally considered objects of diaconal efforts and projects. The event itself was an empowering experience, moving, as described in the introduction of this chapter, in a *bottom-up* approach, in an inductive mode.

As an expression of its commitment to justice, human dignity and liberation, the WCC, since its inception, has been a reliable partner of discriminated and excluded people in their struggles. For decades, it has facilitated shared reflection and analysis, advocacy and communication among them. It has supported their efforts at local, national and international levels, encouraging churches and societies to be more just, responsive and
inclusive.\textsuperscript{349} This event held in Colombo was yet another example of this emphasis on inclusivity, interrelating it more intentionally and explicitly with diakonia and mission, as three inseparable components, or pillars and actions carried-out jointly by the churches and the ecumenical movement in general.

Three vantage points were identified and met at the Conference:

1. In view of the shift of the center of gravity of world Christianity to the global South and also of the fact that it is often the locale where injustice is most intensely experienced and struggles for justice are also many, the Conference will attempt to explore new directions and forms of diakonia today.

2. The experience, perspectives and visions of the marginalized and those yearning for justice will inform the exploration towards a new ecumenical theology of diakonia.

3. By viewing diakonia as essential to the nature and mission of the Church, the conference will work towards new expressions of diaconal engagement.

Two preparatory meetings of the conference took place, one at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute, on April 2011 and a second one in Oslo, Norway, in May of the same year. The latter was for convening a drafting group that brought to the Colombo Conference a proposal of a document called \textit{Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in the Twenty-First Century}.\textsuperscript{350} After all the rich and substantial inputs and debates, the statement was adopted at the conference, covering the three vantage points quoted above, as well as other concerns and challenges faced by these groups, victims of exclusion. As I will note at the end of this chapter, the declaration was submitted to the WCC’s 10\textsuperscript{th} Assembly held in the Republic of Korea on October-November 2013.

\textbf{Important findings of the 2012 Colombo Consultation}

\textsuperscript{349} Cf. the 2013 WCC program on \textit{Towards Just and Inclusive Communities}: one of the co-organizers of the gathering, accessed on 5 May 2014, \url{http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/just-and-inclusive-communities}

\textsuperscript{350} While serving as a WCC executive staff I was responsible for convening all these events, together with other colleagues.
As I did before, both with the 1986 Larnaca and the 1987 El Escorial gatherings I will apply the methodology of the *Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia* to examine the Colombo conference, and more specifically its theological statement.\(^{351}\)

**A. The Visional Dimension**

The more explicit references to empowerment as well as theological reflection, liturgy and spirituality, or a combination of them, are included in this level. On this regard, there were at least two explicitly critical components that contributed to this dimension, both taken from the name of the event itself: (a) the theological since there was an intentional focus on *Theology of Diakonia* and (b) forward looking, while, as stressed earlier, the vision requires a component of future, and the conference’s organizers had in mind *the 21st Century*, at its beginning. The following are my guiding terms and concepts, taken from Colombo, for the analysis of this section.

The conference acknowledged the importance of spirituality as an empowering source for diakonia and in this particular quote connects it with what in the ecumenical movement is understood as *prophetic diakonia*. The Colombo declaration expresses: “… As *liturgy after the Liturgy* – empowered by what faith celebrates - diakonia involves actions of care, relief and service, but goes further and addresses the root causes of injustice embedded in oppressive systems and structures. Sustained action for justice is upheld by our faith in and allegiance to the God of life when faced with the death-dealing powers of Empire”.\(^{352}\)

It is important to highlight here, as well, the sharp –and I would even add the irreconcilable—contrast between two expressions of power, on the one hand, the empowerment that comes from God, through the celebration of the Christian faith, and the “death-dealing powers of Empire”, on the other. Therefore, a significant component to construct our *Vision of Colombo* is the commitment to the “allegiance to the God of

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\(^{351}\) Since this declaration is included at the end of the current chapter as Appendix III, I will refer to the paragraph numbers where the actual quote can be found in the text.

life”, that empowers us to defeat the powers of Empire and to transform the world towards the values of the kingdom.353

In Colombo there was recognition of what I would call, non-conventional forms of practicing diakonia like the ones done by the people living in the margins. The statement underlines: “Even if they do not have the material and financial resources to do diakonia in the way many churches are accustomed to, marginalized people, through their lives and everyday resistance, practice diakonia”.354

Therefore, “Diakonia of the marginalized, then, is crucial for church’s engagement in realizing God’s oikoumene, the alternative vision of the world”.355 “Diakonia must… legitimate rights and power of marginalized people to transform the world. In a world where people are treated as objects and commodities and are also mistreated on account of their identities such as gender, ethnicity, color, caste, age, disability, sexual orientation and economic and cultural locations, diakonia must build persons and communities, affirm the dignity of all people, and transform cultures and practices that discriminate and abuse some people”356

It might sound contradictory, but another factor of the Visional Dimension has to do with the “power of the marginalized to transform the world”, since it is based on dignity, it is “built on persons and communities” and not necessarily on the value of money or the market. Of course, money is important, but a vision built on money as an end in itself, can be effective, but not necessarily just and fair. Rather, a vision shaped by the human values of those in the margins and their communities can be liberating and sustainable.

This is re-confirmed by the following sentence: “Marginalized people, through their yearnings for life with dignity and justice and through their participation in movements, are offering alternative visions of a world free of forces that deny justice, dignity and life for many. To many churches this is a demanding challenge but even more a

353 The Colombo statement refers to the kingdom of God as the reign of God. In this thesis no distinction is made between the two.
liberating promise for renewing traditional models of diaconal practice and theological reflection, towards new patterns of inclusiveness, sharing and transformative action”. It is furthermore confirmed by the fact that “Jesus too found himself among the marginalized of his time as he began his ministry of announcing the coming reign of God…”357

B. The Normative Dimension

This dimension is expressed in our core values, principles and standards, which in our particular case as Christians, are rooted in the authority of the Bible, therefore the biblical texts quoted at the Colombo meeting will be listed under this dimension. References to the interdisciplinary approach of diaconal action, and its interconnectedness with God’s mission are also included in this section.

On the latter, the Colombo statement precisely begins expressing, under the portion named Church, Mission and Diakonia, that “God’s mission is about the realization of God’s vision for the world, a world in which ‘God rejoices … where the aggressors are transformed so that all shall live in peace’ (Is. 65:17-25). This eschatological hope of a ‘new heaven and earth’ (Re. 21:1) is not passive but constantly breaks into our present, inviting people to become co-workers with God by realizing it in every here and now. This mission of God is dynamic and inclusive of all people and forces that uphold the sanctity and integrity of God’s creation”.358

After developing what I would call a biblical missiology, the document goes on to claim a foundational ecclesiology that purposely interrelates service with God’s mission. The second paragraph states: “The Church, as a community called into being through baptism and led by the Holy Spirit, participates in this mission through its very being, proclamation and service. Commonly understood as service, diakonia is a way of living out faith and hope as a community, witnessing to what God has done in Jesus Christ”.359

The Christological sentence at the end of paragraph two is developed further, stating, “Through its diakonia, the Church witnesses to God’s purpose in Jesus Christ and participates in God’s mission. In its diakonia, the Church follows the way of its Servant Lord who claimed that he came to serve and not to be served (Mk. 10:45). In Christ, the Church is called to hold forth the power of service over the power of domination, so that life, in all its fullness, may be possible for all. Therefore, the Church presents itself not only as a sign of the coming reign of God but also of the way leading to it, Christ’s way”. Then the element of power, so crucial to the theme of this thesis, is introduced in such a way that helps us to define the Empowering Diakonia model as the power of service that not only is opposed to the power of domination but it is over it.

Other Biblical texts quoted in the Colombo document will be listed in the following paragraphs:

Ex. 3:7-8. “God hears the cry of the oppressed and responds by sustaining and accompanying them in their journey towards liberation. This is the diakonia of God: a diakonia of liberation as well as of restoring dignity, and ensuring justice and peace”.361

Jn. 1:46; Lk. 4:16f; Lk. 4:1-12; Mk. 10:45; Lk. 11:37-54; Mk. 3:1-6. Consistent with the text of the previous paragraph, Jesus announces his diakonia as one that liberates the oppressed, opens the eyes that are blind, and heals the sick. His diakonia stands beside the marginalized and therefore rejects abusive power and refuses to be co-opted by the prevailing logic of power. He exposes and confronts the forces of marginalization. “To that extent, the margins are the privileged spaces for God’s compassion and justice and of God’s presence in vulnerability and resistance. Here the sick were healed, the domination of evil spirits broken, the dignity of the marginalized defended, and the disciples empowered with life-affirming values for ministry”.362

The last section of the document called Diakonia for Transformation begins with this short, but at the same time very meaningful quote of Mic. 6:8: “To do justice and to love kindness”, mentioning two key elements related to the diaconal endeavor, namely,

to comfort the people in need—motivated by “love kindness”—while at the same time, confronting the root causes of injustice, precisely by “doing justice”.

And the document ends quoting these two other biblical texts: Ro. 12:2, pointing to a diaconal action that “not merely resists and confronts evil, but also proposes alternatives to the ways in which human beings relate with one another and with nature”, through transformation. The other text is taken from the Gospels, Mt. 5:13-14, where Jesus calls his disciples to be “salt of the earth, the light, and the leaven of the world”. This text is quoted in the document to explain how his followers are called “to be agents of change and transformation”\(^\text{363}\) and just after, there is an explicit reference to “empowerment by the Holy Spirit”.

This “empowerment by the Holy Spirit” is not \textit{cemented} on almighty forces and dominating power, rather it is founded on simple and ordinary elements such as salt, light and leaven. Precisely this empowerment fostered through the common rudiments of daily life and sealed by the Holy Spirit is what enabled “the diakonia of the early Christian community [that] resisted the power of the Empire by proposing alternative values and visions of the world”. \(^\text{364}\) Likewise today Christian communities are “empowered by the Holy Spirit”, through their own daily and ordinary means to resist the current Empire and to work towards a transformed world.

\textbf{C. The Need-Oriented Dimension}

The participants at the conference mentioned the need to focus on the following challenges to be taken into account in this reflection towards action for diakonia in the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century. These were, among others: the institutionalization of injustice, particularly in the present regime of neo-liberal economic globalization; the reality of climate change and its impact; wars and conflicts and the consequent destruction, trauma and broken relationships; the fragmentation of communities due to aggressive assertion of religious and ethnic identities. Also the dispossession and displacement of vulnerable people; the violence against many sections of society, especially of women, children, people with disabilities and the aged; malnutrition, disease and the HIV and Aids

pandemic; and the marginalization of ethnic and religious minorities, Indigenous peoples, the Afro-descendent communities, the Dalits in South Asia and others experiencing discrimination for various reasons.365

Some of the larger institutional expressions of diakonia must be affirmed for their role in enabling human resource development, meeting human need in critical situations, and for advancing the causes of justice and economic development of the vulnerable people...366

For many, diakonia is a Christian response to people in need and situations of crisis, and is characterized by actions of reaching out to them from locations of power and privilege with resources and infrastructure. Such an understanding has often resulted in viewing those in need as objects or recipients of diakonia. Many philanthropic or humanitarian initiatives are also guided by such attitudes. This concept has not only failed to acknowledge the diakonia of the marginalized people but also treated them as mere objects and recipients. Some forms of diakonia have been pursued without attitudes of respect, awareness of the potential or a spirit of partnership with local communities.367

Furthermore, marginalized people are not to be seen always as those in need and despair. They resist injustice and oppression in their own ways and through their struggles for life, justice, dignity and rights for themselves and for all, unveil the presence and power of God in their lives ...368

D. The Contextual Dimension

In the framework of the oikoumene, the Colombo document understands the context where diaconal action takes place, both as a reason and also as an instrument for unity. It notes the following: “In bringing people and communities together around issues of life and of justice and peace, diakonia stands out as a reason for unity and as such also

needs to be seen as its instrument. As an expression of participation in God’s mission in the world, diakonia is beyond all parochial interests or the agenda of religious propagation”.

As I have mentioned earlier there is a close interconnection between the different dimensions of *Empowering Diakonia*. The last part of the previous paragraph is another example of this, where the *normative* element of diaconal engagement, as participation of God’s mission is by definition contextual, rooted in the local setting, but at the same time is global. And again this mission is not about “religious propagation”, rather about “bringing people and communities together around issues of life and of justice and peace”.

As a response in faith to the hope of the coming reign of God, the signs of which are present in all experiences of hope amidst turmoil, in actions that heal and nurture people and relationships, in struggles that seek justice and affirm truth, diakonia has to be dynamic, contextual, and versatile. It must effect partnerships, not only at the level of global or larger church structures, but also among congregations, special ministries, and networks of people committed to values of justice, peace and human dignity at local, regional and national levels.

I have argued as well on the significance of considering under this *dimension* the interdisciplinary approach of diaconal theology and action. In order to be more effective, the church has to work in partnership with other agents also serving in the community. This is even more critical if the church is reaching out to those excluded and rejected by society and in many cases, even by the churches.

For example, working in partnership with other sciences, such as psychology, anthropology, sociology, the church can understand better the causes and consequences of the exclusion of people due to ethnic reasons, or in relation to people living with disabilities. Working in dialogue and in partnership with sciences like economy and statistics can help to carry out surveys or capacity building seminars to further empower the victims of unjust economic policies.

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E. The Transformative Dimension

It is very significant and at the same time relevant for our thesis that the Colombo statement ends precisely with the fifth and last dimension of Empowering Diakonia, which is named Diakonia for transformation. Furthermore, it indicates the main emphasis identified for the third and last period of ecumenical diakonia in this research, namely, the Transformative Model. Again, as described in this method, the transformative dimension, points to a diakonia that “will be effective through concrete prophetic actions towards social transformation and justice”.

Paragraph 16 signals that “Diakonia is service that makes the celebration of life possible for all. It is faith effecting change, transforming people and situations so that God’s reign may be real in the lives of all people, in every here and now”.371 Considering that this document is theological by nature, it signifies an “effecting change” that is grounded and inspired in a spirituality of transformation, which we can even call metanoia or conversion, not in terms of producing more Presbyterians, or Methodists, or Roman-Catholics.

Rather, it points to a re-conversion to the God of life who has opted preferentially for the impoverished, the exploited, the victims of injustice and exclusion. This re-conversion seeks not only a “celebration of life for all”, but also the necessary empowerment for “transformation of peoples and situations” towards the values of the kingdom. This is indeed, a distinctive feature of our Judeo-Christian spirituality that motivates for action, compared to the ones of other human efforts that aim at social transformation.

This reality is reconfirmed by the document’s following paragraph, when it underlines that “The God of the Bible seeks and effects change in concrete situations of life, especially of those who are denied the same. Therefore, diakonia as an action in God’s love must strive to transform people, systems and cultures”. And then it goes on to address the issue of power with these words: “God announces judgment upon those who abuse power and deny justice to the poor. Jesus too challenged unjust systems and

practices and called the powerful and privileged who benefit from such, to repent and be transformed by the values of love, sharing, truthfulness and humility.”

The document makes a sharp distinction between diakonia as charity aiming at “binding the wounds of the victims or doing acts of compassion” and transforming diakonia. It recognizes that “While such expressions of love and care are necessary, they do not preclude efforts aimed at confronting and transforming the forces and factors which cause suffering and deprivation”. So here again there is a clear reference to the importance of what the ecumenical movement has defined as prophetic diakonia that while “comforting the victims” y also “confronts ‘the powers and principalities’ (Eph. 6:12)”. It adds, “Without transformative work, diakonia would be a mere expression of service, subtly serving the interests of the oppressive and exploitative powers by covering up their complicity. If it does not challenge injustice and abuse of power, it ceases to be authentic diakonia”.

As I mentioned under the normative dimension, quoting Ro. 12:2 and again, following on the previous paragraph here, there is a clear way that the Colombo statement defines diaconal transformation and that is by establishing a difference between “resisting and confronting evil” on the one hand and “proposing alternatives to the ways in which human beings relate with one another and with nature” on the other. And the sentence concludes, “To that extent, diakonia is transformative”.

**Summary of the outcomes of the Colombo Consultation**

As explained in the introduction of this chapter and following the same procedure with the analysis of the 1986 Larnaca and the 1987 El Escorial consultations, this section devoted to the 2012 Colombo conference, will conclude by drawing some conclusions based on the findings through the Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia methodology. Again, as exposed earlier, all these conclusions plus the ones from the

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375 Note: the Colombo statement finishes with a number of concrete recommendations under the heading Challenges and Opportunities for three levels of implementation, namely: at the local congregations, by the larger church bodies and for the WCC and similar international organizations. These proposals will be dealt with in the chapter addressing the Empowering Diakonia model of this thesis.
practical experiences being analyzed in the following chapter will provide the necessary tools and raw material to build the *Empowering Diakonia* model in chapter V.

**A. The Visional Dimension**

What the world traditionally considers the margins of society, and therefore the object of the church’s diaconal action, is actually the center of God’s interest and thus, one of the main focuses of God’s kingdom to come. Consequently, the participants at the Colombo conference reaffirmed their allegiance to the God of life that empowers to defeat the powers of Empire and to transform the world towards the values of God’s kingdom. This transformation takes expression in partnership and solidarity with the marginalized, as subjects, who’s liberating power transforms the world, following the ultimate example of Jesus. The Lord served the marginalized of his time as he began his ministry of announcing the coming kingdom of God.

**B. The Normative Dimension**

There was a demand towards a faithful and consistent response to Scripture and God’s call, urging the church to be an inclusive diaconal community, in order to fulfill its witnessing service. Its members are empowered by the Holy Spirit with life-affirming values to exercise the power of service over the power of domination. This power of service enables and nurtures possibilities for life, and witnessing to God’s transforming grace through Jesus Christ, who thought and realized acts of service that hold forth the promise of God’s kingdom, as part of God’s mission.

**C. The Need-Oriented Dimension**

In other words, the participants at the Colombo event reiterated the importance of a diakonia that is oriented in the needs of the people, but what is innovative here is the emphasis on the need to those living and quite often surviving in the margins of society, victims of situations of injustice. There is a need to no longer perceive them as objects of diaconal action, rather as subjects, to include them in planning and actions where they participate directly and actively in the improvement of their own living conditions. The resilience of the vulnerable people, their capacity and experience of resisting and overcoming injustice and oppression, are important assets that unveil the presence and
power of God in their lives. This points to the need of working not for, but with them in solidarity and in partnership for the transformation towards justice of the society that also includes the churches.

D. The Contextual Dimension

There was a reassertion of the essential prerequisite to take into consideration very seriously the context, both local and global where diaconal engagement is being exercised, mostly in solidarity with those excluded, victims of unjust situations. The context is the motivation that unites and the instrument that helps to focus the social action of the church, working in partnership with other actors and disciplines. In situations of injustice a response in faith and in hope of the coming reign of God, is required, working towards transformation, healing and reconciliation.

E. The Transformative Dimension

Finally, the Colombo statement endorses the notion and practice of diakonia that enables a celebration of fullness of life for all by an effecting change that is grounded and inspired on a spirituality of transformation. This transformation is supported by a process of re-conversion to the God of life that takes place in the church of Jesus Christ who gave his life for the impoverished, the exploited, the victims of injustice and exclusion. Likewise, the church today is empowered for a diaconal action that not only binds the wounds of the victims or realizes acts of compassion, but also resists the power of the Empire and transforms society by proposing and living alternative values and visions towards justice and peace.

The Period following the Colombo Conference until the WCC 10th Assembly

The subsequent year of the Colombo conference on Theology of Diakonia in the 21st Century, the WCC held its 10th Assembly in Busan, Republic of Korea, during 30 October – 8 November 2013, under the theme: God of life, lead us to justice and peace.

A few months before the Assembly, the WCC general secretary, Olav Fykse Tveit, made a presentation in an important global gathering organized by the Diakonia World Federation that, even when it was not a WCC event per-se, its worthwhile mentioning in this thesis. It is important since in his speech he made some relevant reflections on this ministry, connecting both the themes of the Colombo conference and of the Busan
Assembly, in reference to the topic of the event he attended called, *Diaconia – Healing and Wholeness for the World*. He defined the meaning of “being diaconal churches in the world today” based on four *P’s*, and finally encouraging the churches to be “… the agents of Christ for *priestly, pastoral, prophetic* and *professional* transformative service, bringing healing and wholeness, justice and peace to this broken world”.

Among the various activities organized at the Busan Assembly were the ecumenical conversations, which engaged assembly participants in sustained, in depth dialogue on critical issues challenging the churches and the world at that time. They were rooted in the theme of the assembly and helped participants to discern together on the meaning and mission of the church in the world today, seeking justice and peace; and the fullness of life for all creation. The results of the conversations further helped to guide future ecumenical cooperation and the WCC’s work for the coming years.

Among the 21 ecumenical conversations there was one on diakonia, called: *Compelled to Serve: Diaconal Church in a Radically Changing World*, which was one of the main spaces dealing with this topic and was co-organized with the ACT (Action by Churches Together) Alliance. From the report of this activity I will quote the following: “The purpose of this ecumenical conversation was to invite churches, ecumenical partners and the WCC to a deeper analysis of diakonia and development in a rapidly changing world and to identify its challenges; to reflect theologically on the implications of the changing development paradigm, in which the ecumenical movement is compelled to engage and to witness for and serve God. The four sessions provided space for theological, ecclesiological and practical reflection on how these change factors affect churches and specialized ministries. Through group discussions, focus was on vulnerabilities, opportunities and new patterns of cooperation. The background to these discussions was provided through the reading of two key documents: *The Changing Development Paradigm: An ACT Alliance Discussion Paper* and *Theological

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Perspectives on Diakonia in the Twenty-First Century. The latter is precisely the
document that I analyzed in the previous section of this chapter.

At the end of this ecumenical conversation on diakonia, the following statement was
issued, looking forward to the work after the Assembly: “The participants affirm that
churches, ecumenical partners and the WCC:

1. Must continue to network and form alliances across denominations in order to
work together and add value to our diaconal work in a rapidly changing
development context in which the private sector and new actors are increasingly
playing a role in development and in times where migration is changing the
global demographics.

2. Must respond to the shrinking political space even where it may be a new role
for churches. We must claim our space through common action, advocacy and
building awareness together with other faiths in the civil society.

3. Must respond to the signs of the times by developing a common diaconal
language. We are faith based and rights based and we need to identify what this
means in practice including defining our mandate, our core values and to map
our diaconal assets.

4. Must be in closer contact with local congregations and support diaconal work at
the grassroots level.

5. Must respond to the social impact of gender, economic and climate injustice
through networking, developing the capacity for policy analysis, and
transnational advocacy in order to promote equitable and sustainable
development.

6. Must continue to engage in new ways of biblical and theological reflection in
order to reveal and articulate a transformative vision as outlined in the two
background documents: The Changing Development Paradigm: An ACT
Alliance Discussion Paper and Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in the

WCC, Ecumenical Conversations. Reports, Affirmations and Challenges from the 10th. Assembly
Twenty-First Century, in order to undergird our diaconal work in a rapidly changing world”.

These affirmations and recommendations to the churches, the WCC and the wider constituency came as a result of a serious and collective analysis of the rapidly changing context in the world, particularly in the area of development, and played a major role in the implementation of the new program structure of the Council after the Assembly. This changing situation is reflected, as noted above, in the shrinking of the political space, i.e. the decreasing responsibility of the states and governments towards addressing the needs of the most vulnerable in the society.

Of course, as the ecumenical movement and the churches have been proclaiming for decades, and this thesis tries to argument on this, the long-term solution of this problem is to address the root causes and to build more just and sustainable societies by which the states and governments take full responsibility to protect and serve the most helpless. At the same time, the churches are called to promote a viable alternative in order to make sure nobody stays behind, meeting their basic needs. Furthermore, even when the states are able to take care of the most needy in society, the churches will always have a relevant role to play by serving the society in word and deeds as if they would be serving Jesus Christ himself (Mt. 25:31-46).

In order to do so, as it was recommended in Busan, they are called to “continue to network and form alliances across denominations in order to work together and add value to our diaconal work”. And again, this must be done “through common action, advocacy and building awareness together with other faiths in the civil society”.

Even when the concept of empowerment is not mentioned explicitly in the report of this ecumenical conversation, one of the panelists, Kjell Nordstokke, in his presentation entitled Ecumenical Diakonia Responding to Signs of the Times, defined the Distinct Diaconal Assets as: “Assets that bring diaconal practice into being and doing – assets that motivate, mobilize, transform and empower for diaconal action”. Also pointing to the added values of Faith Based Organizations he mentioned the importance to “Empower marginalized people to stand up for their rights and to participate in social

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processes”. So, among these assets we find the human resources, people that are empowered to serve in the communities, but quite often they go unknown or undiscovered, hence the importance of “mapping these diaconal assets” towards a more sustainable and effective diaconal action.

Also very diligently linked to the theme of this thesis is the need to “be in closer contact with local congregations and support diaconal work at the grassroots level”, but as it often happens in gatherings like this one, we fail to spell-out the ways to implement these good ideas, in really practical terms. I therefore agree with Kjell Nordstokke when in an article analyzing the Busan Assembly he points out: “It did not for instance go deeply into the question of how to strengthen the diaconal ability of local congregations, how to equip volunteers and diaconal leadership, and how to develop diaconal institutions so that they can serve as mobilizers and animators of a diakonia from below”. Hopefully the WCC will take into consideration this important need for its proper implementation, as part of its work on diaconal engagement with the churches and other partners.

And finally, there was a call to “continue to engage in new ways of biblical and theological reflection in order to reveal and articulate a transformational vision”. And there is, of course, an encouragement to the churches to further study, among other documents, the Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in the Twenty-First Century, in order to undergird our diaconal work in a rapidly changing world”.

What I find very interesting, but to certain extent not surprising, is the fact that the notion of God’s mission and its relationship to diakonia, as analyzed in this thesis, is not mentioned in the report. Of course, there was another ecumenical conversation that covered extensively this issue called, Together towards life: mission in changing contexts, but I could not find boldly the crucial question of service as God’s mission.

As pointed out before, this particular ecumenical conversation was co-organized with ACT Alliance. Incidentally, humanitarian organizations of Christian inspiration, like this Alliance, have mission statements but are very careful to not mention explicitly God’s mission as the “principle of obligation” that propels their work, since they are, as

380 (PowerPoint presentation on 01.11.2013).
Beth Ferris puts it, “careful to stay away from anything smacking of missionary activity or proselytizing”.\textsuperscript{382}

Of course, the history of the church is full of very negative examples of conditioning material aid or charity to conversion or forcing the affiliation of a particular church or religion. This is one of the reasons why; many to these organizations adhere to the \textit{Code of Conduct for The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief}\textsuperscript{383} where it is specified quite rightly that “Aid is given regardless of the race, creed or nationality of the recipients and without adverse distinction of any kind. Aid priorities are calculated on the basis of need alone” and “Aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint”.

Another cause for trying to separate mission from diakonia is that, as a result of the reduction of many churches’ budgets (due to the loss of members, financial crisis, etc.), various specialized ministries in the global North no longer are receiving their financial support from them and are depending more on funds from governments, which condition their funding to the separation between missionary activities and diaconal or development projects. And one of the challenges today is precisely that the churches, predominantly in the global South, find hard to cope with this mission/development dichotomy imposed by these organizations.

Nevertheless, as a fellowship of churches, the WCC has claimed historically the significance, both in theory and in practice, of the close link between mission and diakonia/development, up until our days. This, of course, is further facilitated by the fact that it is no longer a humanitarian organization, like the ACT Alliance, and therefore, is not required to honor a \textit{Code of Conduct} that excludes the consideration of mission both in its reflection and its praxis.

This interrelationship and interdependence between mission and service was eloquently espoused by Gerard Granado, general secretary of the Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC) in a WCC meeting in 2012, when he highlighted “an understanding of Diakonia as \textit{witnessing service}. Here the notions of \textit{diakonia} and \textit{martyria} come together very meaningfully to bring out the ECCLESIAL nature of the \textit{service} that is

\textsuperscript{382} Ferris, p. 22.  
\textsuperscript{383} Accessed on 27 March 2014, \url{http://www.actalliance.org/stories/code-of-conduct}
involved. This was expressed very clearly in the former title of one of our North American partners - "Church World SERVICE and WITNESS" (CWSW), he noted.

Also, a more recent document, Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes, a Proposal for a new WCC Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism, which was shared at the Busan Assembly, states that “The church in every geo-political and socio-economic context is called to service (diakonia) – to live out to the world the faith and hope of the community of God’s people, witnessing to what God has done in Jesus Christ. Through service the church participates in God’s mission, following the way of its Servant Lord. The church is called to be a diaconal community manifesting the power of service over the power of domination, enabling and nurturing possibilities for life, and witnessing to God’s transforming grace through acts of service that hold forth the promise of God’s reign”.

So, one issue is to do “mission” by proselyting and a quite different one is to support people in need, conceiving it as God’s mission, who sends the church out to the world, to proclaim the good news of the gospel in words and deeds, especially to those in the margins of society. As the Colombo document underlines, “… Partnership and solidarity with the marginalized alone will ensure the credibility of the churches’ claim of their participation in the mission of God”.

And finally, just to quote a non-WCC text, the LWF Diakonia in Context booklet clearly states: “diakonia is seen to be an integral part of mission in its bold action to address the root causes of human suffering and injustice”, which is inspired in “Jesus’ diakonia [whose] authority to invite persons, even sinners, to be included in the messianic fellowship that he establishes, and to empower them to participate in his mission”, is still relevant for us today.

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384 This contribution was made at a Consultation on Conciliar Ecumenism organized by the WCC in Beirut, Lebanon, 5-11 February 2012.
387 LWF, p. 9.
As already underlined, among the officers elected at the WCC Assembly was Agnes Abuom, as moderator of its Central Committee. Also, as pointed out in the section of this chapter devoted to Larnaca, she attended this consultation, during which an interview was made to her, where she shared her vision of the event. After this Assembly, I asked her if currently this vision was the same after almost 30 years and this was her answer:

My vision has not changed, if anything, the opaque structures have intensified with back donor funding and the decline of the church funds especially in Europe. Further the so-called anti-terrorist act of the USA has also limited collaboration with some countries a case in point was Sudan. But in my vision today I would include the understanding of diakonia that is cognizant, affirmative and works to transform local community assets for only then shall there be lasting peace and sustainable development and livelihoods. As communities make use of fundamental freedoms of speech, assembly and association and as they form community organizations to pursue their interests peacefully, diaconal organizations should facilitate, empower and advocate for change of structures, policies that continue to generate disequilibrium both between and within communities and in creation at large. Yes my vision is one that looks at responding to immediate humanitarian needs, advocacy for change of structures, systems and policies and value/ideological base of diakonia, which is biblical.

So, here Abuom is calling for a diakonia, like the one stressed at Larnaca and in other ecumenical events, that on the one hand addresses the immediate needs of the people, but also, from a medium to long term basis, addresses the root causes of injustice and works toward a change of structure. For this, empowerment and advocacy are crucial elements to develop.

I will like to end the description of this current chapter on The Foundation and Identity of Diakonia and Empowerment in the Ecumenical Movement by quoting the last section of the Message of the 10th Assembly of the WCC: “We intend to move together.

389 She defined this vision in these terms: “… If we are going to have a vision for diakonia we certainly are going to be challenging the existing structures which are not transparent, which are not enabling justice, far from it. They are not on equal terms, they are not for partnership, and to be able to advocate for structures that can permit people’s participation, people’s will, people’s aspirations, will require a certain sacrifice both on the part of the people themselves and on those of us who are involved in the structures. I guess my anguish has been not to hear from the people in the structures where do they see difficulties of what has been so far identified in terms of change. Are the structures that we are operating really in a position to transmit, to enable that process? How far are they able to and how far are they not able to? Are we in a position to chance them? What are the difficulties which counteract these wishes and determinations?” - WCC, My Neighbour-Myself. Visions of Diakonia. Interviews during the Larnaca Consultation by C. Cecon and K. Paludan, p. 31.

390 Email sent on 19 March 2014.
Challenged by our experiences in Busan, we challenge all people of good will to engage their God-given gifts in transforming actions … May the churches be communities of healing and compassion, and may we seed the Good News so that justice will grow and God’s deep peace rest on the world”. 391 In spite of the fact that the word diakonia is not explicitly mentioned in this quote, it urges the churches to continue serving as healing and reconciling communities towards transformation.

**Conclusions**

In this current chapter, I have been addressing the first research question of the thesis, namely, I have shown and documented extensively how has the WCC contributed to the development of the notions of *diakonia* and *empowerment*. I have observed to what extent both have served as a meaningful hermeneutical key, a theoretical point of reference and a strategic task for diaconal engagement of the WCC’s member churches in each one of the three periods that I have called *The Charity Model, The Reciprocity Model* and *The Transformative Model*.

In the case of the first model, the *Charity* stage, which began with the joint effort of the churches to serve in the reconstruction of Europe after the Second World War, the focus was mainly on what is known as *inter-church aid*. Afterwards the collaboration was expanded, in order to fund diaconal projects mostly in a hierarchical manner. Then the two other periods were analyzed more in details focusing on events and following the methodology of the *Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia*, which produced a number of *building blocks* that were synthesized here briefly and that have been used to design and construct the *Empowering Diakonia* model, further down in chapter V.

In the *Reciprocity* period, both the 1986 Larnaca and the 1987 El Escorial consultations were studied. The vision of this period can best be described as one that empowers the victims of exclusion for their struggle for dignity and justice. This empowerment process and struggle is accompanied by the churches’ solidarity, as the servant body of Christ, which is nourished by the holy Eucharist. Indeed, “worship and prayer play a

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significant role in self-identification and empowerment…”392 Hence, this vision inspires relationships, based on justice, mutuality and power-sharing in order to share, particularly in the local churches (c.f. Larnaca) the abundant life proclaimed by Jesus.

Diakonia as the churches’ response to the Crucified Lord was identified as a major normative guidance, understanding it as a liberating power to seek justice and reconciliation in the world, and as a meeting point of the churches’ faith with its social engagement. Secondly, repentance is required on the ways the churches have mishandled or abused power, in order to truly uphold the ecumenical sharing of resources envisioned. Thirdly it is paramount to pursue a holistic approach both towards mission-development and spiritual-material resources. And fourthly, the churches are required to build their diaconal understanding and effort on solid biblical foundations, e.g. the covenant, the body and the Eucharist as paradigms for sharing life in community.

In this period the need was acknowledged of facilitating a process by the ecumenical movement for a ‘collective empowerment’ in order for the churches to learn from each other both denominationally as well as regionally and also to share the resources more effectively. This way the churches can be better prepared to face the needs in their respective communities in order to, in similar manner, facilitate an empowerment process to further discover the vast human and spiritual resources among its members. This practice can seek self-reliance, equal participation, decentralization decision-making processes pursuing sustainability.

Another crucial element acknowledged in this period was the serious consideration of the contexts, both global and local, where the diaconal engagement as well as the empowerment processes are being tracked. According to the different settings they are developed in such a way that the participation of people, mainly of the excluded and impoverished is ensured, in order to engage in prophetic diakonia, i.e. addressing and eradicating the root causes of injustice.

Transformation in this stage was envisioned in order to seek an economy of life that enables and liberates people to decide and work towards a more participatory society.

This includes the transformation of the churches, perhaps as the starting point, through the experience of powerlessness and by picking up the cross and follow in the footsteps of Jesus, the suffering servant. This transformation shall lead to an empowered and sharing community. At the same time, this empowerment process leads to transformation, living the values of the kingdom, promoting justice and human dignity for all, which goes beyond the Western development paradigm.

A more explicit expression of transformation can be found in the Transformative model or period in the ecumenical movement, essentially focusing on the 2012 Colombo conference on diakonia in the 21st Century, where there was an intentional emphasis on the marginalized. Therefore, one of the main motivations for its vision was precisely the excluded who, on the contrary, are the center of God’s interest. Therefore faith was lifted in the God of life who enables power from below, who empowers, especially the marginalized for transformation towards the values of the kingdom.

Consequently, the normativity identified was one to respond faithfully to the call of God of life to perform God’s mission holistically, as witnessing service, which was one of the vantage points of the conference in Colombo. Acknowledgement was made of the empowerment by the Holy Spirit with life-affirming values to exercise the power of service over the power of domination, by witnessing to God’s transforming grace in the world, following the example of Jesus Christ.

When the churches address the needs of the people, this service should acknowledge them as subjects rather than objects of care. This way they participate both in the diagnosis of the needs as well as in the churches’ plan of action in order for them to participate actively in the improvement of their own living conditions and of their respective communities. Since God has made a preferential option for the impoverished, they are being blessed with resilience and hope to continue struggling towards transformation.

The context here is marked by the solidarity with the marginalized and excluded at all levels. The common analysis of the various settings where the churches are serving is one of the main motivations that unites their social action, working in partnership with other actors and disciplines, contributing in faith and in hope as added values, as faith based organizations in this struggle.
And finally, the practice of diakonia was conceived in Colombo as one that produces change, grounded in a *spirituality of transformation*. In order to serve the victims of injustice, a process of *metanoia* was mentioned, an experience of re-conversion to the God of life in Jesus Christ, has been highlighted. This empowers the churches for resisting the power of the Empire and transforming society by proposing and living alternative values and visions towards justice and peace lived in *koinonia*.

The conclusion of this analysis is that I have observed both streams and both elements of *diakonia* and *empowerment* in parallel and even when there has been a close interrelationship between the two, there has not been any system or model that connects both of them. Nevertheless, these elements that I have studied, are going to be a major input to build the *Empowering Diakonia* model in chapter V, together with the outcomes of the chapter devoted to the local projects, which I will deal with in the following pages. This model is being produced to address creatively the need of interconnecting both diakonia and empowerment in a system that orients and enables a more sustainable diaconal action of the churches, seeking a global fellowship, *koinonia*, through transformation.
Chapter IV. Diakonia and Empowerment in Local Congregations and Projects

Introduction

In the previous chapter of this thesis the historical development of diakonia and empowerment in the ecumenical movement was analyzed in each one of the three periods that were identified, namely, the charity, reciprocity and transformative stages. This analysis was carried-out using the research method of the Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia that includes the visional, normative, need-oriented, contextual and transformative levels.

These findings helped to build the theoretical framework to study the WCC’s diaconal engagement at a global level, which is one of the two main sources producing the necessary building blocks to design the Empowering Diakonia model in chapter V.

Now, in this current chapter, the investigation among local churches and other related diaconal projects will be pursued, applying again these Five Dimensions, in order to tackle the second research question, i.e. to further learn from local experiences and practices with regard to diakonia and empowerment in the current world’s situation of increasing asymmetry and impoverishment. So these concepts and practices will be placed in common frames of reference and reflection.

The key concern here in this chapter, is to bring the large problem down to the local stage, precisely during this current transformative period, as I have called it, and analyzed in chapter III. Consequently, there is going to be a verification of a paradigm shift, a discovery of a common ground, shared tendencies, trend and orientations. As Don Browning points out in reference to his case studies, the data analyzed in this chapter will “provide illustrative material … to help make some of my denser theological discussions clearer”. It will enable a “practical interpretative process of

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393 By local, I mean a particular region or district where normally a congregation serves, i.e. its immediate neighborhood, grassroots or community level.
understanding these religious communities” and more specifically both their understanding and practice of diakonia and empowerment.

Furthermore, the research among local congregations and projects is more relevant and intentional for the whole question of empowerment, since through practical local experience, development of self-esteem and participation can take place more openly, spontaneously and genuinely. On this regard and reflecting on the relationship between empowerment and diakonia, anticipating the model that is being designed in chapter V, Konrad Raiser expressed:

It is important to place the emphasis on *Empowering Diakonia* in the local community, because if you stay on the global or in the international level, then the issue of empowerment is too much up with the inequality or the asymmetry of power relations and you will never get out of the vicious circle. Whereas, on the local level, through the active witness of the Christian community in a given situation, there the emphasis on *Empowering Diakonia* makes a lot of sense and could help, in fact to revive the diaconal ministry as a common ministry of the church which belongs to what it means to be church today.

As a matter of fact, this comment is important and helpful, not only for this current chapter, but for the whole thesis, since, as the title expresses, one of its main emphases and focuses is on empowerment and diakonia at the level of the local community. Hence, the added value of this chapter is to verify the relevance of and further contribute to a broader understanding of the *Five Dimensions* from the standpoint of these local and contemporary practical experiences. The result of this effort in chapter IV, by complementing practice and theory, more intentionally at the grassroots stage, will be the other main source of material, producing the necessary *building blocks* to design the *Empowering Diakonia* model in chapter V.

The projects I am studying are very diverse in nature, and yet, a common thread or denominator unites them, namely, that they are serving in contexts of vulnerability, crisis and of transformation where the churches are trying to analyze and understand their *kairos*, by reading the signs of the times, addressing the root causes and finding better ways, as well as transformative opportunities, to respond to their respective challenges. Consequently, examination will be made on how in each and every context

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395 Notes from a Skype interview on 21 February 2014.
there is a need for liberating and empowering diakonia, which reaffirms its wide scope, and of the gospel in general.

The four countries that were chosen for this study are: Cuba (several projects coordinated by the Council of Churches, from a Caribbean socialist country); Colombia (ecumenical projects, representing a Third World capitalist country); South Africa (Diakonia Council of Churches in a post apartheid era) and Armenia (Oriental Orthodox). The first three nations are from the global South and the fourth from Eastern Europe. They are participatory nations, where the people are increasingly taking the responsibility of addressing creatively their own needs and where the churches are seemingly becoming more active in their social outreach as a result of the growing needs.

Here we will find two groupings of nations, on the one hand, Cuba and Colombia, where I am raising directly the voices of the representatives of the local congregations, and South Africa and Armenia, on the other. In the case of the latter, the focus is more on ecumenical organizations, but my intention here is to actually lift the voices of the churches in these two countries as well. Therefore, I understand these not as an end in themselves but rather, as convening instruments of the churches for these to carry-out the diaconal work. E.g. the Diakonia Council of Churches.

My argument to chose the churches and organizations in these four countries is not their representative character, but rather their working relationship with the WCC, and therefore, according to my own experience when I was serving as a Council’s staff. I had to limit myself and the intention of the thesis is not to examine diaconal practices worldwide, but only those that could show traces of the connection with the WCC. So again, I am not addressing contexts, but actors, as it will be noted later, who have had their links to the ecumenical movement.

The WCC connects the global with the local. Hence, these low-income societies considered fragile and vulnerable, but at the same time in transformation, have been selected as locations where the WCC has supported diaconal projects and has facilitated empowering processes among the churches. Furthermore, these particular local projects were chosen since most of them have been related to the diaconal work of the WCC, one way or another.
Beyond an office in Geneva, its raison d’être is the local constituency, i.e. its member churches. Therefore, some of the different features that the Council takes into consideration for its work with the churches and partners have been represented, i.e. taking into consideration certain diversities between church confessions, geographical locations and social-political-economic contexts. In order to select and to explore these local projects, I have also profited from my former job at the WCC, which has allowed me to relate to most of them, first for my work and later for this research.

This study was also conducted analyzing the ways in which these projects relate, among others, to the following issues:

1. Their understanding of empowerment and diakonia both biblical-theologically and in relation to God’s mission.
2. Their practical application of both the notions of empowerment and diakonia.
3. The challenges they face and their solutions to put them into practice.
4. Their possible definition of an Empowering Diakonia model.

It is important to acknowledge here, particularly in relation to the first issue that the research is conducted mainly among congregations, i.e. faith based communities. Congregations therefore are defined differently vis-à-vis secular projects. Here empowerment and diakonia are taken as theological points of departure which are expected to be implemented practically by these local congregations, in terms of faithfulness to the gospel and also as an expression of the missional identity, integrity and commitment of the congregation as a contextual faith community. On this regard, the churches, predominantly the local congregations, have the great responsibility of being intermediary of God’s mercy, channels of God’s love for all creation, committed to God’s kingdom by serving, predominantly those in need.

The data and information collected from the local projects were taken from materials and documents published, as well as through interviews that were conducted mainly with the so-called reflective practitioners, they are local actors rather than

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396 This concept was introduced by Browning commenting on the book ‘The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action’, written by Donald Schön in 1983. Browning defines the reflective practitioner as one who “can both act and think about, or reflects on [his or her] action” – cf. Browning, p. 3.
intellectuals from the academia. I am giving them voice through the interviews. These informants represent social and diaconal realities since they have knowledge to share based on their direct experience and observations of all aspects related to the implementation of the projects, and at the same time, are committed to this work.

Of course these informants might be biased, but these are the best witnesses I got. Taking into consideration this partiality, I do not depend on them unconditionally; hence, the information they are providing is being analyzed critically, complementing it with other sources, like websites, newsletters as well as publications. In other words what is being offered here are visions and voices of the seeds of ideal diakonia, being very aware of the fact that at the actual local project, in some cases, the situation can be different, but at least those voices, perceptions, biblical texts quoted are there and are shared.

Through their own experience, many of these reflective practitioners or gatekeepers, have become convinced of the potential and real importance of using local knowledge and making it available to others. On the other hand, in most cases they have a solid biblical-theological formation, which helps to build the theoretical foundation and provides inspiration of what they are doing. Many have been related to the WCC, one way or another, as well. In order to organize properly the interviews, questionnaires were drafted\textsuperscript{397} and in most cases were sent to the informants before the interviews. This helped them to prepare better for the answers and hence contributed to gather more and enriched data for the current research.

The reader will perceive some disparity or asymmetry observing the data emerging from the cases, since they are different by nature and diverse methods to obtain the data have been employed. Hence distinctive quoting styles will be used from the reflective practitioners, e.g. in the cases of Cuba and Colombia no names were mentioned because I visited them and contacted many persons, whereas for South Africa and Armenia remote interviews were made, only to one informant per country, i.e. using Skype, emails and analyzing various documents. Since I did not have the opportunity of visiting these two countries, fewer resources were available and therefore it is more difficult to have a wider diversity of opinions.

\textsuperscript{397} The questionnaires can be found in the Appendix IV, towards the end of the thesis.
But even the *reflective practitioners* serving at the national level provided very accurate and practical answers. They were recruited from local positions and therefore, their qualification depends on their experiences and insight as practitioners locally. Also in their position at national level, they reported to have active cooperation with colleagues at local level. On the other hand, their national position allows them to have a better overview and compare a variety of experiences.

So the quality of the data and material provided by the *reflective practitioners* has been convincing that it is important to have these perspectives for the thesis as well. At the same time, and even considering these disparities, cohesion and recurring themes among the different cases will be discovered, like ecumenical commitment, struggle for justice and dignity towards transformation, highlighting the relevance of empowerment with regards to diakonia, among others.

This research will be exploratory, rather than representative; it seeks to find practical indications that can be useful for the WCC to further promote empowerment and diakonia. The purpose is not to make a deep analysis of the socio-political-economic and ecclesial reality, nor to evaluate the outcomes of these respective diaconal ministries,\(^\text{398}\) rather I am interested in studying the *reflective practitioner’s* motivation and determination to be agents of care and change, being mobilized and as mobilizers, empowered and empowering towards transformative justice. At the same time, there is an intention of understanding better diakonia, as reflected in these projects even when the approach is somehow narrow or limited, but equally important and promising.

So in synthesis, this chapter will cover an analysis of the various local projects by implementing the *Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia* method. This will help to organize better the data and to draft more accurately the main outcomes and findings as well as answering the second research question, formulated at the beginning of this chapter. It will end with some concluding remarks, providing the transition to connect the current chapter with the following one, where the *building blocks* both from the global events and from the local projects will be processed.

\(^{398}\) Since the purpose of this chapter is not to evaluate the outcomes of the projects, most answers of the practical questions (e.g. number of beneficiaries and measuring success of the diaconal work) have not being included in this analysis.
Research Among Local Congregations and Projects

Cuba – Diaconal Ministry as Pathfinding

Introduction

Cuba is a *sui generis Third World* country. Its Socialist system, even with its shortcomings, has been a moral authority for more than half a century, since, unlike other similar political systems in Eastern and Central European countries, it carried out a victorious Revolution that triumphed in 1959, against the regime of Fulgencio Batista. At the same time, Cuba has suffered one longest embargoes, imposed by the US Government, which has been condemned by the great majority of the world’s nations and by various United Nations General Assemblies. After the collapse of the Berlin wall and since the early 1990s, when the country’s *Secular Constitution* was adopted, the churches have been carrying out their mission no longer confined to the four walls of the sanctuaries, rather, extended throughout the Cuban society.

It is not the task of this dissertation, to evaluate the political developments in Cuba, but what is being observed is that there are signs of changes taking place where the churches that were analyzed in this research are playing an important role in the society. The diaconal mission of these churches has gained a new momentum, primarily for the following reasons: (a) the growing improvement of the relations between the state and the churches, by which the latter have more freedom to carry-out their mission; (b) the needs of the population have increased as a result of the economic crisis; and (c) as a consequence of the decentralization of the economy by the state, which challenges the civil society in general. This will be further explained in more details below, in the description of the Cuban context.

399 Ever since the foundation of the Cuban Republic, at the beginning of the 20th Century, church and state have remained separated, from the Constitution point of view. In 1976 a Socialist Constitution was approved by a referendum that acknowledged that the socialist state “bases its educational and cultural policy in the scientific materialist concept of the world, established and developed by Marxism-Leninism” (Article 38-2-a). In 1991 the Communist Party changed its by-laws allowing its membership to have different religious affiliations and also for religious people to become members of the Party. The Constitution was amended one year later resulting in the elimination of all references to the *scientific atheism*, and consequently the state became *secular*.

400 On this regard, the President of the nation, Raúl Castro, has admitted, “The excessively centralized model characterizing our economy at the moment shall move in an orderly fashion, with discipline and the participation of all workers, toward a decentralized system where planning will prevail, as a socialist feature of management, albeit without ignoring the current market trends. This will contribute to the
The Cuban Council of Churches (CCC)

The entry point or main focus for this research is the Cuban Council of Churches (CCC), as the most inclusive ecumenical body and convener of networks of actors serving in Cuba. Its motto, *United in Service*, historically has reflected the ethos of the organization and of its constituency in the country. It also conveys the spirit and the content of this research, which embraces *ecumenical diakonia*. Diakonia is one of the four program areas of the CCC, together with Communications, Education and Formation, and Relationships. It works very closely in diaconal projects with many of the member churches.

The methodology used to carry out the investigation for this first country was through the visit of a team to the various churches, centers and organizations that have a strong diaconal engagement, all of which are related to the CCC. The projects in Cuba were visited during 1-5 August 2011 by a well-focused and highly experienced team, with participants both from abroad and from the country selected. The work began at the

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402 More information regarding the history and constituency of the CCC can be found in Appendix V. The Roman Catholic Church, which is not part of the CCC, was not included in this study.

403 Focusing on one of the main roles of the WCC, i.e. convening and calling together the churches towards service.

404 Concerning some statistics on religion in Cuba, the Roman-Catholic Church is the largest religious institution; Catholicism has historically been the dominant faith on the island. According to its own records, 60 to 70 percent of Cuba’s population of more than 11 million people has been baptized in this Church. At the same time, baptized Catholics are not necessarily active churchgoers—the Church estimates that only 4 to 5 percent of Catholics regularly attend Mass. The Afro-Cuban religious traditions remain strong on the island, even among Catholics. There are at least three distinct Afro-Cuban religious traditions. The most well-known is *Santería*. In addition, Cuba has active Protestant churches, including a rapidly growing community of Pentecostals. Currently, the membership of the diverse Protestant community numbers between 600,000 and 800,000. Cuba is also home to a small but active Jewish community of about 1,500 active congregants. There are smaller communities of Muslims, Orthodox Christians, and others in Cuba. The number of religious practitioners in Cuba has been growing significantly since the early 1990s, when some legal barriers were removed and social stigmas reduced.


406 The team was composed by Ofelia Ortega, a Cuban Presbyterian pastor and professor of the Matanzas Theological Seminary. It was a great asset to have her as part of the team, since she was very instrumental in the formation and follow-up with some of these projects, when she was the president of the Seminary. At the same time, she brought in the global perspective, since, during the period of the visit, she was the WCC president for Latin America/Caribbean and had co-drafted the booklet on *Ecumenical Diakonia* that I have been quoting in this thesis. Kjell Nordstokke, Norwegian Lutheran pastor, professor emeritus of the Diakonhjemmet University College in Oslo and moderator of Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) was also part of the team. With his profound academic knowledge of the discipline of ecumenical diakonia and his
offices of the CCC itself, where the delegation met with the director of its Diakonia Area. She explained that they are working on the following programs, objectives and activities:

1) **Sustainable Development.** To promote and facilitate the social commitment of the Cuban churches for sustainable development at a local level, through: their conscientization for social engagement; capacity building of local actors, focusing on women; promotion of sustainable agriculture, care for the environment, promotion of local alternative technics, support for local development initiatives; elaboration of didactic materials and enabling spaces for exchange of experiences.

2) **Communal Health and Life.** To sensitize leaders and communities of faith on the holistic mission of the church with a focus on health; and its activities: promotion of reflection and social commitment of pastors and community leaders; general and specialized formation; support of local health initiatives and prevention of diseases.

3) **Emergency and Humanitarian Aid.** To promote the required level of the churches’ commitment and service to the community through participatory spaces of awareness, reflection and dialogue; focusing on prevention of risks; humanitarian support; socio-psychological care and development of capacities.

4) **Accompaniment of Persons with Disability.** To educate churches and Christian leaders to assume an attitude of understanding and solidarity to eradicate traditional patterns that have characterized the treatment of persons with disabilities; working on: lifting awareness and capacity building of the churches; accompaniment of disabled persons, their families and collaborators; community rehabilitation and providing spaces for exchange with disabled persons in Latin America and the Caribbean.

5) **Ecclesial Infrastructure.** Related to the previous point, to allow levels of accessibility of buildings removing architectural barriers, but also providing methodological advisory on elaboration of projects, the use of alternative technics

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familiarity with Latin America, since he studied and served in Brazil as a pastor and professor for 10 years, he also contributed substantially to the reflections and feedbacks of the visits and meetings. The other member of the team was the author of this thesis.

Throughout the years in the ecumenical movement the expression differently able has been used here. Nevertheless, in order to lift awareness among the churches on this issue, the notion of persons with disability is currently being used. Cf. Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN), accessed on 7 September 2014, [http://www.edan-wcc.org](http://www.edan-wcc.org)
and materials for constructions of buildings; information and promotion of Cuban norms to remove architectonic barriers; and exchange of experiences.

With very few exceptions, the team found similar emphases of diaconal work in the local projects visited. Most of the program areas have a strong capacity building component. With the decentralization of Cuba’s economy there is an increasingly urgent need of capacity development both for individuals and cooperatives, as well as for the churches themselves. Hence, most of the projects visited had a strong formation component, mainly through workshops, with the support of the CCC, on management, e.g. on PMER (planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting), gender and family issues, among others.

The visiting team travelled more than 1,000 Km to observe the projects and during the trip its members had frequent meetings and discussions among ourselves, comparing notes and reflecting on the different observations. The list of people/organizations contacted and interviewed can be found in Appendix VI. The team visited the following projects:

1. The Centre for Reflection and Dialogue, Cárdenas, Matanzas province.
2. The Episcopal Church’s Diaconal Project in Cuatro Esquinas, Matanzas province.
3. The Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Santa Clara, Villa Clara province.
4. The Rural Brotherhood Church’s Diaconal Project in Tarafa, Camajuaní, Villa Clara province.
5. The Diaconal Ecological Centre, Matanzas province.
6. The Evangelical Theological Seminary, Matanzas.
7. The Martin Luther King Centre, Havana.

During the visits, the data collected was mainly the result of the interviews made to the reflective practitioners, most of them pastors and leaders of these local projects. The discussions were based on the questionnaire that was sent to these informants before the interviews. The members of the team also visited some of the sites where the projects take place and interviewed some of the workers and beneficiaries. Finally, the first-hand

407 Since the team could not visit many more projects serving in the country, due to time constraints, I took these as samples for the investigation.
data collected was classified, processed and analyzed, using the *Five Dimensions* method explained above and here are some of the findings.

**The Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia in Cuba**

**A. The Visional Dimension**

The *Mission Statement* of the CCC’s Diakonia Area is: “Making the peace of God a reality, serving our people and learning together with them, with the vocation and commitment to which we are called by Jesus Christ, to contribute to the fullness of life of our community, as the church of Cuba”.408 The *Statement* points to an empowering diaconal vision, responding to God’s call, by uniting the churches to serve and to learn with the people. Consequently, service is being with the people, working towards Christ’s fullness of life for all.

In our visits, meetings and discussions, it became clear that empowerment, has a relevant and positive meaning, i.e. to create abilities for the diaconal work; it means to socialize the knowledge of good practices through discipleship; Jesus involved his followers, so empowerment means *to be part of*, it suggests a sense of ownership. In one of our conversations an informant stressed that it implies *conscientization* (to lift awareness), as Paulo Freire understood it, related to empowerment, involving both theory and practice, as described earlier in this thesis.

Hence, among the projects visited by the team, there is a strong commitment of the leadership of the churches towards empowerment. On this regard, another informant said, “we empower and at the same time, are being empowered to respond to God’s call to serve others. It is a matter of cultivating the vocation, the *charisms* that each one of us have”.

Among the many voices heard, diakonia was defined in Cuba as: “Generating practical experiences or diaconal actions, which will help to materialize happiness and high quality of life (housing, care to the elderly, food, healthcare, and education); enabling the active participation of the *beneficiaries* of the diaconal action”. Hence it has a strong empowering component seeking “active participation” of those who will benefit from this service.

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408 CCC’s Diakonia Area working plan – August 2011, 1.
During the visit the delegation also heard that diaconal work strengthens evangelism, but conversion is not a condition *sine qua non* to receive support or help and that diakonia is a ministry that cuts across the work of the churches. Most congregations understand their vocation of service as part of God’s mission, i.e. they serve God, by responding to God’s call to serve others. This mission is understood by many historical churches as holistic, aiming at satisfying both material and spiritual needs of the population.

By addressing these spiritual necessities the churches visited seek to provide meaning for the lives of many people that feel hopeless and lonely. Here spirituality and liturgy, particularly the Eucharist, further strengthens the commitment of God’s people to serve the world. Nevertheless, this vision is not shared by many other churches, more charismatic and fundamentalist, most of them imported from the USA, that preach and teach an escapist theology of *prosperity* which places hope in eternal life and therefore are not committed to serve the people, seeking fullness of life here and now.

**B. The Normative Dimension**

If ecumenical commitment and mutuality are taken as a normative principle, indeed, it was present in all projects visited. In many cases there is an intention and action of serving the people in collaboration, rather than in competition against each other. There is also an informal diaconal network *de facto*, which unites—in practical terms—the efforts of many churches and organizations. “Diakonia unites the churches” it was said. This *ethos* is again reflected in the Cuban Council of Churches’ motto, i.e. *United in Service*.

On the other hand, again, all the projects visited conceive their diaconal ministry as part of God’s mission entrusted to the churches. “We are collaborators with God to accompany the people in need” was one of the expressions shared by an informant. In the Matanzas Theological Seminary diakonia is taught as a subject under the course of mission, which is a practical expression of this logic. This capacity building for diakonia also takes place in the various churches but more informally, through sermons, in the Sunday Schools and in other related activities.
It was also emphasized, “Christian witness and service are two sides of the same coin”. This aspect, of conceiving diakonia as part of the *missio Dei*, is another normative value that the global ecumenical movement cherishes and is also present largely among the Cuban *historical* churches.

The biblical texts on diakonia and empowerment, which were quoted in our interviews were, among others: the Sermon of the Mount (Mt. 5-7); the parables of Jesus; Jesus and the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4); Jesus’ miracles; the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37); Jesus and Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:1-10) and Serving Well-Pleasing to God (Heb. 13). The relevance of discipleship and of following the example of Jesus Christ as the supreme servant was mentioned time and again.

The Cuban churches analyzed, together with other social actors, are playing a more active role in country’s economy, serving the “least of these” by giving food to the hungry, providing a drink to the thirsty, welcoming the strangers, offering clothing to the naked, visiting the sick and those in prison (Mt. 25:31-46). The normativity was given, through the biblical passages mentioned by the informants, in the sense that the church today is called and furthermore, obliged, to serve. A hermeneutical paradigm was identified time and again as one that follows the example of Jesus, who assisted unconditionally those in need. Thus diakonia is not an option, rather an integral component of being church, was a notion frequently underscored by the persons the delegation met.

### C. The Need-Oriented Dimension

The financial crisis, explained before, that the Cuban population faces, generates all kinds of needs. At the same time, this situation produces some level of frustration among the people, as well as spiritual and existential necessities, since there is a crisis of values as well. Hence, the churches are challenged by these needs of the Cuban population and are called to address them holistically, providing both material support as well as a message that offers meaning and hope for the lives of the people. This is one of the reasons why many church buildings are literally packed with people.

A pastor interviewed said, “diakonia has always been with the Cuban churches”. This means that in spite of the fact that during the first years of the Revolution, the state was
capable of meeting the basic needs of the population and the churches were more confined to the four walls of the sanctuaries; many of them continued serving the people in need, in a more discrete and implicit way, offering solidarity, accompanying pastorally the most vulnerable, providing transportation, even when there was not an explicit awareness and a theological articulation of the term.

Many churches continue to be truly incarnated in their neighborhoods, providing their buildings and facilities for social work (running Alcoholics Anonymous programs, or organizing sports, meetings) apart from their own activities (worship, Christian education, etc.). They also provide service to the people in need, mainly the elderly (supplying food, washing their clothes, lifting up their dignity and morale, providing pastoral care and accompaniment), sowing, weaving, farming, producing and preserving food, publishing food recipes, producing and selling handcrafts, serving in prison chaplaincy, distributing medicines, among others.

Oftentimes the churches are urged to solve the immediate needs in their respective wider communities, following a pragmatic approach, rather than planning strategically for a longer-term support as well as reflecting theologically on this ministry.

Of course, the churches face needs as well, especially to address these necessities of the population and one of them is the required formation. Therefore, as raised before, the CCC’s Diakonia Area and other projects visited, focus on: empowerment through capacity building of church leaders, formation of promoters which enable local developments, lifting awareness and promoting the formation of equality of opportunities. Particularly, the CCC has identified a need for leadership capacity development among women, since there is a very strong female participation in the implementation of the diaconal projects, but in less degree leading and coordinating them.409

Throughout the years, the state has provided a robust technical and professional formation to its citizens, forming, free of tuition, engineers, sociologists, psychologists, medical staff, among others. It is interesting to note here that many of these

409 Historically there have been important capacity building programs and projects for women, facilitated by the CCC and other ecumenical organizations, like the Cuban Institute of Gender Studies (ICEG), among others. Some churches have worked on this as well, but still much has to be done in order to achieve gender balances.
professionals later were converted to Christianity, which has become a great asset for the churches to develop their diaconal ministry. Even when these technicians do not have a long-term experience in their faith, nor a deep biblical-theological baggage, they contribute tremendously through their technical knowledge, to empower the churches for their diaconal action. This is one of the ways by which interdisciplinary empowerment is taking place among the Cuban churches.

The delegation also learned that some churches, mostly from the evangelical tradition, which call themselves a-political, are more interested in addressing only the spiritual needs of their members and are not so inclined to the social engagement. For them the biblical text, and its literal interpretation is more relevant than the analysis of the context. Indeed, the needs are closely related to the different contexts. Wherever there is a church there will always be a need for diakonia, but the actual context is what determines its profile, which leads us to the next dimension.

D. The Contextual Dimension

In Cuba there is a new kairos. A changing situation in Cuba is being observed, where the churches—predominantly the historical—are playing a more active role in society, e.g. in the area of diakonia; the civil society in general is becoming a stronger actor in moments when poverty is increasing. Consequently, there is a stronger prominence given to entrepreneurship, in order to operate small businesses, enterprises and dealerships, while at the same time the state has promised to not leave anyone abandoned.

The elderly population, which is growing, is among the most vulnerable and affected by the crisis and therefore many of the diaconal projects are directed to them. There is also a return to the land for the production of food. For this purpose the state is offering it in usufruct to those who want to labor it. Churches and the laity as regular citizens are using this opportunity to further learn how to cultivate the land in order to feed the people. The Christian lay centers, some visited by our team, were among the first ones to carry out this collaborative diaconal work in a rather more institutionalized way and
are helping to empower the churches for this task as well as organizing debates on the present and future of the country.⁴¹⁰

Some reflective practitioners reaffirmed the prominence of empowerment for diakonia in Cuba and their struggle for it to be contextual and indigenous, responding to the current situation of the country. It is done with a sense of urgency and at the same time, of dignity, self-esteem and confidence in God and in the future. It interprets the signs of the times in order to act accordingly, in a moment when the Cuban population in general is going through a process of formation and transformation to run small (or private) enterprises and cooperatives.

Of course, there are areas where improvements are required. The team observed dependencies of some projects on foreign financial support. This is a reality of many churches in the global South but in the Cuban case it is even more remarkable, on the one hand, as a consequence of the US embargo, and of the heavily centralized state economy, with its double-currency;⁴¹¹ on the other. One of the worst consequences of this crisis is emigration and brain drain since both the churches and society are losing many talented people. This will further require formation and empowerment, seeking sustainability and self-reliance of the projects.

Another issue was ecclesio-centrism. Even when this was not a wide-spread problem of the local projects visited, the team heard of denominations in the country, which conceive their structures and work in a rather sectarian way, as an end in itself, rather than open to serve the wider communities. On the other hand, in spite of the openness of the state there are still leaders, both of the government and of the churches with prejudice against each other, which also threatens trust and willingness to work together

⁴¹⁰ There is a concrete example of this. On October 2014, the Christian Center for Reflection and Dialogue, in Cárdenas (150 Km East Havana), organized, with other entities, the colloquium Cuba: Sovereignty and Future. This was the first of a series of events as part of the Project Possible Cuba, which has been defined as a platform for dialogue, supported by the Norwegian University of Oslo. More than 60 intellectuals of diverse disciplines as well as social activists from different locations of Cuba debated openly and frankly on issues such as: Cuban sovereignty vis-à-vis the Latin American integration; the role of the civil society; education; the unity in diversity of the nation, which includes groups that traditionally have been discriminated; the growth of the private sector and cooperatives; migration and the crisis of moral values. The project includes the holding of meetings, as well as setting-up a website and the publication of books on the Cuban reality both in printed and digital versions. Accessed on 7 January 2015, http://www.ipscuba.net/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=10395%3Aprimera-acción-de-cuba-posible-apuesta-a-la-soberan%C3%A1ndo&Itemid=5

⁴¹¹ Cuba has two currencies: the Cuban peso (cup) and the Convertible peso (cuc).
to benefit the people.

Among the Christians and the society in general, some fear that all the achievements gained by the Cuban model of socialism can be lost if it does not have the capacity to renew itself with a substantial participation of the people, and consequently returning to the kind of the savage capitalism that prevailed in the country before the Revolution. On the other hand, the proliferation and propagation in the country of new denominations and new religious movements (mostly coming from the USA with lots of money), many of them sectarian, proselytizing and materialistic, was identified as another threat against the unity of religions and of the nation as a whole. This, among other factors, hinders the ecumenical spirit and commitment to improve the lives of the people.

There is also the implementation of a strategy by the CCC in order to establish alliances with secular organizations, which work in this field, to enrich and enhance the experiences at the local level, enabling the exchange of experiences and better results. On this regard, in situations of corruption in society, many churches and other religions are still considered credible entities that provide moral authority to serve and to be in dialogue with the state and other social actors.

**E. The Transformative Dimension**

One of the key words of our visit was *kairos*. The people that reported to us stated the view that they are living a very special moment, a crucial and critical time to bear witness to the living Christ, both in words and in deeds. They seek to become relevant actors in the Cuban society as agents for transformation, empowerment and reconciliation. The visiting team found a huge potential but also great vulnerability of the churches, since many still are requiring proper formation and experience for this ministry, both to relate creatively and prophetically to the state and to other social actors. The CCC’s Diakonia Area is working boldly on this with the churches.

At the same time, there is a process of discernment on the causes and consequences of poverty to address them critically and constructively, with a sense of justice and dignity, acknowledging that much has to do with the crisis of the economy and of spiritual/moral values as well. Mostly the ecumenical churches have the courage to assume a new task, helping not only in material terms, but also lifting the values of
solidarity, reconciliation, hospitality and respect, as well as empowering towards transformative justice.

**Conclusions. Cuba – Diaconal Ministry as Pathfinding**

Reflecting on the data, outcomes and analysis of this visit, the following *building blocks* based on the *Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia* can be discovered:

1. **Vision.** The research team that visited these local projects in Cuba identified a shared vision embedded in their identity as churches, which provides the necessary impulse and commitment for diaconal actions. In my view, this vision lifts empowerment in order to meet creatively the challenges of the Cuban churches, which in many cases are playing an important *pathfinding* role.

2. **Normative.** Acknowledging various biblical texts, the churches are morally obliged to serve, ecumenically when possible, the most vulnerable, following the example of Jesus, who helped unconditionally those in need.

3. **Needs.** The Cuban churches are challenged by the needs of the population and are called to address them holistically, providing both material support as well as meaning and hope for the lives of the people. At the same time, the churches face needs themselves, mainly in the area of competence, in order to address these necessities in the society, in a sustainable manner.

4. **Context.** In the changing situation in Cuba, the *historical* churches are playing a more active role in their setting, e.g. in the area of diakonia; the civil society in general is becoming a stronger actor in moments when poverty is increasing. In this context, discernment and courage are required by the churches to fulfill this mission.

5. **Transformative.** Moving towards the future, several transformative priorities for Cuba in the area of diakonia were identified, namely, strengthening the initiatives of capacity building for diakonia; enabling ecumenical networking of churches and interreligious cooperation with diaconal projects; and reinforcing dialogue among the churches, the state and with other social actors in the area of service. The Cuban churches as *pathfinders* are living a very important *kairos*, a crucial and critical time to bear witness to the living Christ, both in words and in deeds. They are becoming relevant actors in the Cuban society as agents for transformation, empowerment and reconciliation, further developing a sense and
commitment to justice and dignity. Consequently, the churches are playing a very active role as pioneers, helping to discover a new course or way, re-orienting in order to promote better human and social relationships.

In conclusion, reflecting on the data obtained, it becomes clear that the concept of *diakonia as pathfinder* is central in Cuba’s present *kairos* as expressed in the *Five Dimensions*. The Cuban churches are called to play this role in diakonia, as humble service, juxtaposed with servility towards the state and other powers. Consequently they are empowered not only to serve the most vulnerable people, but also being proactive in prophetic engagement, going ahead, discerning God’s will for the nation, discovering and showing the way towards God’s kingdom. This role is to be with the people, particularly with the “least of these”, not as a political party, rather, offering care and building bridges for communication, dialogue and reconciliation. This is a “treasure in clay” (2Co. 4:7), the utopia of the gospel, it is what the churches bring to the Cuban society in order to seek transformative justice and to build communities.

**Colombia – Diaconal Ministry as Sanctuaries of Peace**

**Introduction**

For over 50 years, the conflict in Colombia has become one of the world’s most violent hot spots. Tens of thousands of civilians have been killed, on average 14 civilians every day, and around five million Colombians have been uprooted from their homes. The armed conflict is fueled by violent disputes over land, resources, including oil, and military control. There are continuing situations of discrimination, drug trafficking, violation of human rights, corruption, impunity, displacement of people, and crime, among others.

In this context, numerous internationally supported peace processes have been undertaken with the different armed groups. Notably, in 2013 formal talks began in Havana between the Colombian government and left-wing rebels from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) that have aimed to end the country's civil conflict.\(^{412}\) On 15 June 2014 Colombian voters handed President Juan Manuel Santos a mandate to continue his efforts to negotiate this peace deal when he was

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reelected for this position. The churches both in the country and abroad have heard the voices calling for unarmed solutions to the conflict, and are participating in and leading initiatives for peace building as part of their diaconal work.413

The Roman Catholic Church e.g. has been very active in this work. For many years it has supported and enlivened the National Commission for Conciliation as a way to open space for dialogue with the guerrilla groups. In the last several years this church has been one of the driving forces behind the celebration of the Week of Peace, and also, through some of its dioceses, has promoted “peace laboratories” as a way of contributing regionally to peace building.414

The Reformed University in Barranquilla organized a conference on *Service, Human Rights, and Holistic Development*, during 20-22 January 2010, with the participation of representatives of local diaconal projects, among others. At the end of the conference a *Pastoral Declaration* was issued, entitled: *Toward service which integrates compassion, defense of life and advocacy for a new heaven and a new earth*. Part of this *Declaration* expresses the following, in relation to the call of the churches in Colombia to pursue diaconal engagement as peace-building. It says:

> It is necessary to make service more visible in Christian communities because its purpose has a social projection. It is necessary to cross the borders of the church in order to reach those who suffer from violence in our time. As such, service is one way in which we can demand and claim our rights through political and social advocacy.415

Therefore, many protestant and evangelical churches, with the support of the international ecumenical community, have also tried to contribute to the search for peace. One example is the role they and ecumenical groups have played in the Peace Plan that was supported by CLAI (the Latin American Council of Churches) and a German organization of ecumenical cooperation led by the Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Mennonite churches.

413 Many declarations of churches and ecumenical organizations, as well as letters sent to the Colombian president supporting the peace talks can be found in this publication: Milton Mejía, ‘Iglesias Y Familia Ecuménica Aportan En La Búsqueda de La Paz En Colombia‘, *Observatorio Iglesia y Sociedad*, 2013.


415 Corporación Universidad Reformada, *Declaración Pastoral: Hacia Una Diaconía Que Integre La Misericordia, La Defensa de La Vida Y La Incidencia Por Un Cielo Nuevo Y Una Tierra Nueva* (Barranquilla, 2010), p. 2.
Along the same lines, in recent years the Ecumenical Network (Red Ecuménica) of Colombia, created with the support of the WCC, composed of protestant-evangelical churches and catholic groups, has worked on issues of human rights, accompanying victims and developing programs of training and advocacy towards justice and peace in Colombia. This work of training and advocacy, from the Colombian perspective, brings interesting insights as the relationship between diakonia and empowerment is further being studied.

These efforts of the churches have been important, but there is the perception, and in some cases frustration among various ecumenical leaders, both in Colombia and internationally, that they have not been able to coordinate this work or become significantly visible given the different ways their leaders understand the mission, role, and politics in a situation of conflict, such as the one the Colombian people are suffering. These differences have not allowed on a long term basis, the building of stable, sustainable and strategic agreements upon which the churches and ecumenical groups might act and contribute to overcoming the armed conflict and establishing peace in the country.

The WCC, its constituencies and other related organizations and networks, both in the region and globally, have had a long history of accompaniment of the churches and people of Colombia in their struggle to put an end to this long-standing armed conflict. The WCC, and the ecumenical movement in general, has been engaged with Colombia through programs promoting peace with justice and reconciliation; respect for human rights; and addressing the issues of corruption, displacement and widespread impunity. Colombia was a focus of the WCC’s United Nation’s Advocacy Week in New York on 2009, which I helped to coordinate with other colleagues.

416 Pablo Moreno, *La Acción Social de Las Iglesias Evangélicas En Colombia* (Bogotá, Colombia: CEDECOL, 2013) - (Social Acción of the Protestant Churches in Colombia), p. 10.

417 On this note, Milton Mejía in his article *Diakonia e Incidencia para la Paz* (Diakonia and Advocacy Towards Peace), argues: “Diakonia from the perspective of advocacy is a service of the churches to the powerless groups to enable them to build and strengthen their strategies towards a democracy where citizens can have possibilities to propose or amend laws as well as having opportunities to hold accountable and change political leaders and legislators when they do not meet the interests of those who suffer most in society”. Corporación Universitaria Reformada, *Propuesta de Libro - Diaconia Para La Paz, Teología Y Gestos de Reconciliación En Un Contexto de Guerra*, ed. Milton Mejia (Barranquilla, Colombia, 2014), p. 6.
The WCC’s Latin America Regional Group and CLAI leadership that met in Bogota, Colombia, in 2009, also called for increased international ecumenical accompaniment, which can also be seeing as an appeal to strengthen this diaconal effort.\(^{418}\) As a direct result, the Program for Ecumenical Accompaniment in Colombia (PEAC) was set-up.\(^{419}\)

This notion and the practice of accompaniment has a long history among the Colombian churches, as a very accurate way of describing their pastoral care and diaconal commitment to assist the victims of the armed conflict. A document published by the Ecumenical Network of Colombia on August 2006, points out on this regard, “this identity and spirituality should be reflected in the accompaniment that is founded in the God of Israel who accompanies his people out of their slavery in Egypt”. The statement goes on to say: “The accompaniment can be understood as umbrella for shelter from the rain, as a cane for support and as a bridge to walk on ... but the accompaniment does not replace the resistance, dreams, hope and life projects of the victims themselves”.\(^{420}\)

Consequently, accompaniment may have an empowering component as well, since it describes a process by which solidarity can be experienced with the full participation of the victims themselves.

Nevertheless these peace-building efforts of the historical protestant churches are by no means representative of all churches in the country. There are many other churches in Colombia that are fundamentalist in their theology and seemingly \textit{a-political} as well, in their practice, preaching an understanding of a \textit{peace of Christ} which is escapist,

\(^{418}\) There is a close connection and interaction between diakonia and accompaniment. The Lutheran World Federation’s booklet \textit{Diakonia in Context} defines accompaniment as “walking with others with shared mutuality and respect, especially in demanding situations; growing out of the relationships that Christ modeled in his interaction with others” [LWF, \textit{Diakonia in Context. Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment. The Lutheran World Federation}, ed. Kjell Nordstokke (Geneva, 2009), p. 94]. It also expresses in another section: “All diaconal actions, including those addressing immediate needs, are embedded in a comprehensive mandate of building relationships. As a diaconal method, accompaniment seeks to overcome isolation and exclusion, and to identify pathways that may offer possibilities for broader sharing in mutual solidarity. A Latin American regional meeting on diakonia described this task as ‘migrant diakonia’, in a context where people often are on the road, trying to escape poverty” [LWF, p. 15].

\(^{419}\) Accessed on 7 May 2003. More information on PEAC can be found in: http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2011-10/ecumenical-accompaniment-program-launched-colombia and also in: http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/towards-ecumenical-accompaniment-in-colombia, among other websites. The initial plan was that this program would be the institutional \textit{umbrella} for Colombia in this thesis (similar to other countries), nevertheless, after all these years of efforts to develop this meaningful project, unfortunately on 2014 it was dismantled, again another indication of the difficulties for the leadership of the churches to work together, among other factors. For this reason this initial plan was dropped.

\(^{420}\) Red Ecuménica de Colombia, \textit{Síntesis de La Oikoumene. Acompañamiento a Las Comunidades Colombianas} (Barranquilla, 2006), p. 3.
reserved for eternal life as well. In fact, this tendency may end-up supporting the *status quo*, the powerful and therefore can be dis-empowering, de-mobilizing. Consequently, one of the greatest challenges is to involve all churches in these peace-building efforts.

During that time I was serving as a WCC executive and had a direct participation in this whole process, which allowed me to become closer to the Colombian reality and to search for information among the local diaconal projects. On 6-7 October 2011, the first meeting of the PEAC’s International Reference Group (IRG) was held in Bogotá. Around these days a series of interviews were conducted in order to prepare this case study on Colombia. The questionnaire applied was the same as in Cuba421 and the list of persons/churches that were interviewed can be found in Appendix VII. Some of these *reflective practitioners* interviewed had participated at the conference mentioned before, held in 2010 at the Reformed University in Barranquilla, on diakonia and human rights.

Even when the great majority of the Christian population of Colombia is Roman-Catholic, this research was directed among the mainline protestant churches, to which the WCC relates more closely.422

In the following pages the Colombian local diaconal projects will be examined applying my *Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia*, in order to discover the *building blocks*.

**The Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia in Colombia**

**A. The Visional Dimension**

In relation to their social engagement, one of the *informants* expressed “We do not use the term diakonia or diaconal work. Our work is associated more with the expression *Holistic (Integral) Ministry* of the church or the mission of the church in building peace. For eleven years we have been speaking of churches as *Sanctuaries of Peace*”.

421 The questionnaire can be found in Appendix IV.
As a matter of fact, this concept of Sanctuaries of Peace is being acknowledged as the core vision of the Colombian churches as they carry out their diaconal mission. This is indeed a very precise description of the churches’ ministry among the people, providing a safe space for refuge in situations of extreme life threatening violence caused by the armed conflict. Furthermore, it has a deep theological meaning, since it originates from the Latin sanctuarium, from sanctus, holy, a place consecrated to God in order to protect all human beings, created in God’s image.

In a context of massive IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons), the Colombian churches’ history is full of examples where many ecclesial institutions and communities have pursued this sacred duty of protecting the lives of the people and many churches have followed this tradition risking their own security and the lives of their leaders and members. Following this tradition, a set of practical recommendations issued by CEDECOL (the Evangelical Council of Colombia) in its First National Summit of Churches for Peace in Colombia, held on February 2006, included the “Adequacy of temples as sanctuaries of conciliation and peace” and urged to “set-up teams of counseling and resolution of conflicts” in these places.423

This same recommendation included the need of “capacity building for pastors and leaders on analysis and transformation of conflicts” and many persons that were interviewed reaffirmed this matter and addressed the importance of diaconal training and capacity strengthening schemes for building a culture of peace. It is important to stress here, on this regard, that the empowering patterns for diakonia in most of the churches studied, are conducted by local trainers, and with resources and materials both from Colombia and the Latin American region.

The Pastoral Declaration quoted above, from the 2010 conference held at the Reformed University in Barranquilla, helps to further construct this visional dimension of diakonia, from the perspective of the Colombian churches as Sanctuaries of Peace, that includes both the notions and practice of mercy and compasion towards others, as well as political advocacy towards justice and peace. It underscored,

Diakonia as mercy, which takes care of humanitarian needs and focuses on God’s prophetic voice against injustice, political advocacy for a just society

and ethics to guide us in the hope or utopia that allows us to live peacefully among humans and with nature.\textsuperscript{424}

Therefore, political advocacy is expressed in biblical and theological terms as “prophetic voice against injustice”. On this regard and pointing to their program of political advocacy a church informant said that “It promotes the importance of the prophetic work of the church, by denouncing abuses and injustices, and announcing the good news in Jesus Christ and the good practice initiatives of the churches that are not so visible but work for transformation and generate hope”.

 Principally the violation of human rights’ issue, again, has been a very hot matter in the country for several years and was cited by the representatives of several projects. Therefore it has been very important to work on the documentation of the violation of human rights’ cases, as well as developing capacity building on this topic. Also the pastoral, judicial and psychosocial accompaniment to victims of these violations and of the armed conflict, as well as supporting processes of re-settlement of new communities, were highlighted.

The notion of Diakonia for Peace was also underscored as another relevant concept for the vision, directed towards reconciliation, to diminish the levels of urban violence (domestic, common crime, etc.) and to achieve public security. There is a program in another church for the promotion of a Culture of Peace, Conflict Transformation, Conscientious Objection, Nonviolence and Human Rights. It empowers by developing basic and specialized training in these issues, including biblical, theological and sociopolitical components.

It is indeed difficult to measure the effect, success and relevance in the local projects of these visions and notions with regards to diakonia and empowerment. Nevertheless throughout the years with patience and perseverance they have being the salt and the light providing hope and quality of life as Sanctuaries of Peace, as an active ministry. Hence, this is a vision that orients a practice of being together, supporting not only the church members, but also the community at large.

\textbf{B. The Normative Dimension}

\textsuperscript{424} Universidad Reformada de Barranquilla, \textit{Declaración Pastoral: Hacia Una Diaconía Que Integre La Misericordia, La Defensa de La Vida Y La Incidencia Por Un Cielo Nuevo Y Una Tierra Nueva}, p. 1.
The representative of one of the Colombian churches said that they have been in the process of redefining their social strategic work. He stressed, “For this we are going to the following key guiding sources: re-reading Bible, the re-reading of the tradition of the People of God, and the re-reading of the historical and cultural context. We enter with that information to affirm that as the Wesleyan principle of Social Holiness underscores, all activities undertaken as living life and mission of the church as God's people, are expressions of diakonia, of service. The church is a partner and servant in the realization of the reign of God and its righteousness while moving in history as leaven to care for, defend, produce and reproduce real life in all creation”.

This quote helps us to build a normative understanding of diakonia and empowerment that takes into consideration, in practical terms, the trilogy of the Biblical text, the tradition (both popular and ecclesial), as well as the local context. Indeed the trilogy of this particular church has been chosen as the core emphasis for the normative dimension, i.e. lifting a hermeneutical key that re-reads the Text, the context and the tradition to be better focused.

Concerning the biblical texts and paradigms, the informants made several references and reflections. The most relevant, as pertinent inputs, will be quoted here for the normative dimension on diakonia as Sanctuaries of Peace. One of the persons interviewed, commenting on Es. 4:12-14, argued that “We are urged to recognize that God has put us in Colombia at this time to help, to bring the message and action of salvation and peace”.

While other stressed, “We understand that God is a God of peace; Jesus Christ is Lord of peace (Eph. 2:14,17), his gospel is the good news of peace (Eph. 6:15); and the children of God are peacemakers (Mt. 5:9), therefore it is imperative for us, as Christians to assume a modest but clear and committed role to pursue peace in Colombia”.

Another informant expressed, “Peace requires a change of life on a personal level, to live the values of the kingdom of God by the power of the Holy Spirit, as Jesus taught us (Lk. 14:25-27). The Lord Jesus invites all Colombians, having demonstrated the bankruptcy of the wrong ways in which we walk, to take seriously his Word, to live as
he teaches us in the Sermon on the Mount and live in community as brothers and sisters (Ac. 2:42)."

“Diakonia is part of God’s work, who encourages the church to carry, in a holistic and concrete way, the gospel of grace. This service of the body of Christ is based in the action of the Lord, who empties himself (Php. 2:7) of power and glory in order to come to humankind to serve and to empower with love the needy”. Henceforth the church’s peace effort relates to God’s action and to discipleship, as humble service to the world.

From a more confessional perspective under this dimension, another informant added: “In my practice of diakonia, I am inspired by the Calvinist theological point of view, namely, the service to the neighbor in mutual love and communion”. He mentioned that the Reformer quoted (1Co. 13:4-7) and commented on it in his Institutes the following, “The Lord enjoins us to do good to all without exception … Scripture subjoins a most excellent reason, when it tells us that we are not to look to what men in themselves deserve, but to attend to the image of God, which exists in all, and to which we owe all honor and love.”

C. The Need-Oriented Dimension

In a situation infected by violence, fear and uncertainty, as a result of the long-lasting armed conflict, this section will address, from the perspective of the informants, what is needed in order for the churches to carryout effectively their diaconal work as Sanctuaries of Peace and as peace-builders. But also observation will be made on how these local projects are actually empowered by their assets for diaconal engagement.

As a matter of fact, one of the greatest needs for the churches to pursue their peacemaking vocation is to further strengthen their institutional capacities to engage in diaconal ministry more effectively. Regarding this question, all seven churches responded that they had this deficit. Just to mention one example: “we need to improve the way we implement our diaconal projects, especially those which are communitarian and participatory, with the support of publications for the leadership of the churches. We will always need more support and resources for capacity building as well”.

Another church representative added here: “from a biblical and theological foundation [we need] to implement the notions of social sciences. Christians should learn the methodologies applied by the UN agencies and NGOs for human development … We need to empower the members of our churches as facilitators of social action, with the required expertise”. As a practical example of implementation, a church agent said that they work with governmental entities as well, such as the Colombian Institute for Family Welfare, the Presidential Agency for Social Action and International Cooperation. This interaction contributes to address the need of applying this interdisciplinary approach and practice of diakonia.

Other informant argued: “we also need capacity building to achieve the required specialization on types of service required. We need to see the different categories or types of service, e.g. service to achieve peace, management towards a sustainable economy of solidarity, health care, education, and therapeutic care to the victims of addictions”.\footnote{The Ecumenical Regional Centre for Advisory and Service (CREAS), based in Buenos Aires, Argentina, has had a long-standing involvement with the churches in Colombia. At their request, it conducted an external evaluation in September 2007 by Domingos Armani and Mirela Armand Ugon. Relevant to this quote and under the section entitled Capacity Building, several needs and remarks were made, which I will summarize as they are relevant for our diakonia and empowerment theme. It was recommended mainly to (a) seek for more links and institutional support for those who multiply the work in the churches and communities; (b) take into consideration the biblical reflections and the liturgy, always trying to incorporate them in the workshops; and (c) concerning methodology, identify themes, which have not been dealt with enough, to use more examples and the experiences of the local groups as the starting point for empowerment. This third recommendation is relevant to this point. Cf. Mobilizing Ecumenical Networks in South America. Executive Summary, p 5.} It was also learned that capacity building for political diakonia is needed, i.e. for a more responsible political participation of the civil society in order to transform the nation.

In our research carried-out in various projects, the informants have identified the need to further empower women as well, in order to play more noticeable leadership roles for the peace-building ministry. Even when this is not the reality with other churches and organizations, I was very positively impressed that most of the Colombian informants gave an encouraging account (perhaps too optimistic) with regards to this issue. Maybe one of the greatest needs and challenges here are to better mobilize these assets and resources in order for these women to provide leadership formation for women in other projects.
Even when this was not the case in all churches, a lot of dependency was found on financial support, mainly from abroad, for diaconal work. The latter is seemingly a dilemma, since on the one hand this international aid is crucial to develop some local projects; but on the other, it is a *stumbling block* for the churches to become fully self-sufficient, and therefore it may further create more needs. Nevertheless, the great majority of the projects were conducted as well as implemented with local human resources (both with employees and volunteers), resulting of the empowering ability of the churches to discover and activate their own human assets.

Finally, a key component for practicing a peace-building diaconal task is the accompaniment by sister churches, particularly at a global level. In my experience working with the Colombian churches, accompaniment is not lacking, rather what is needed is a better coordination of these efforts, in order to be better stewards of the resources and to be more effective in this diaconal endeavor. The ecumenical movement, as a fellowship sister of churches, in general, has played a relevant role to address this need, but much more effort, both locally and globally, is essential to achieve the required level of synergy and of sharing of resources.

**D. The Contextual Dimension**

Colombia is a country marked by both social and political violence for many decades, which is caused by the colonial heritage, unequal distribution of the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and of the possession of the land, among other factors. Again, according to international organizations, there are around five million of displaced people in Colombia, out of the total population of 48 million. This displacement is expressed by the internal migration towards the cities, such as: Bogotá, Cali, Medellin, Cartagena and Barranquilla; and also to other countries such as Ecuador, where more than 300,000 Colombians live. The armed conflict that has claimed the lives of

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427 The Colombian churches receive financial support from the following sister churches and agencies from abroad: international NGOs, Diakonia Sweden, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, the Mennonite Central Committee, Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ in the USA, the Lutheran World Relief, the Mennonite Central Committee, the International Organization for Migration, CHF International, the UN Development Program, the World Food Program, Action Against Hunger, the organization Compassion (Bethany Project), Swedish Fellowship of Reconciliation (SweFOR), Church Development Service (EED) from Germany, Church World Service, Institute of Peace of the US Congress (USIP), among others.
thousands of people and produced the worst humanitarian crisis in the Western hemisphere, that can’t be solved just through social aid.\footnote{According to a study by Colombia's National Centre for Historical Memory, 220,000 people have died in the conflict between 1958 and 2013, most of them civilians (177,307 civilians and 40,787 fighters) and around five million civilians were forced from their homes between 1985 – 2012, generating the world’s second largest population of internally displaced persons (IDPs), accessed on 8 May 2014, \url{http://www.centrodememorialhistorica.gov.co/micrositios/informeGeneral/estadisticas.html}}

The questionnaire applied for the survey among the churches has a specific question concerning the way in which the Colombian context influence their diaconal ministry. With very few exceptions, many \textit{reflective practitioners} would agree that Colombia is living a new \textit{kairos} as well, since there is a new time for reconciliation, there are new opportunities and spaces for the churches to become \textit{Sanctuaries of Peace}. This newness is given chiefly by the peace dialogue taking place in Havana between the government and the guerrillas mentioned before, and their agreements will require the follow-up and support of the churches and other social actors for them to be viable and sustainable.

At a more theological level an \textit{informant} answered that the context affects the diaconal endeavor “in the sense that we are living the counter values of the kingdom, which we would like to promote and to realize among the people. We are living in a culture of extreme individualism, which ignores security, and even worst, that lives in complicity with these counter values”.

But the representatives of the churches who were interviewed not only listed the diaconal challenges they face, but also mentioned their response. One said, “In this situation, the churches have started to develop diaconal ministries, which include the defense of human rights, the accompaniment to victim communities that seek justice and peace …” Hence the context of violence and persecution where the Colombian churches are serving urge them to take action in favor of the most vulnerable of the society.

Another informant underscored: “The political, economic, religious, historical and cultural context is the scenario, it is the environment, is the theo-diaconal location, i.e. the place where the church serves, and remembered John Wesley’s sentence, ‘The world is our parish’. In this extremely contradictory context, overshadowed by thick darkness... miserable callousness and neglect, the \textit{least} of the gospel, are our challenge,
our problem and our service location”. This term *theo-diaconal*, which may sound redundant, is a very accurate way of expressing the mission of the Colombian churches, combining theology and praxis, a way of responding creatively to a new *kairos*, re-reading in order to re-new their liberating practice.

All the informants agreed that their diaconal response to the challenges stated above should be done ecumenically and more inclusively, together with other actors, both in the country and with the sister churches abroad. This macro-ecumenical work locally also includes other religions, the state and the civil society in general. One mentioned, “Part of the work is done only by the church, but there are other areas and situations which are pursued jointly with other churches and organizations. For example, the accompaniment work and the defense of human rights are carried out ecumenically”. Nevertheless, in some cases, the Colombian context gives the impression that this ecumenical spirit is hindered by denominationalist and sectarian attitudes, mainly coming from the fundamentalist and sectarian churches.

In other words, in this significant *kairos* of the Colombian context, the churches and local diaconal projects that were contacted, from the standpoint of their respective confessional traditions, are reading the signs of the times and trying to be faithful to their mandate of working towards a culture and reality of peace in their beloved nation.

**E. The Transformative Dimension**

In the introduction of this section on Colombia a portion of the *Pastoral Declaration*, was quoted, which was issued at the conference on *Service, Human Rights, and Holistic Development*, held on January 2010. Part of this *Declaration* expresses the following, which can be considered meaningful in order to continue constructing this transformative dimension. After it raises the relevance of making more visible social service through political and social advocacy, it goes on to say:

> It is important that the communities understand that service is a form of spreading the gospel without proselytizing. Service invites us to participate in social movements in order to make structural changes. Service motivates displaced persons in the midst of difficult situations to continue fighting for the community and to demand their rights. Service is the prophetic voice and action of the church … From this perspective [it] surpasses assistance and is transformed into work for a dignified life as a social and political project ... In this sense there are various important aspects within the concept of service such as the theme of gender and
ecumenical co-existence [aiming] at creating new relationships that are not marked by hierarchical attitudes but rather by equity and inclusivity in conformance with Christian community (koinonia). It is important to emphasize from a biblical perspective, that justice and compassion are intimately linked with service, which makes sense in the measure with which we recognize that service is prophetic and is naturally inclined toward the transformation of unjust situations.  

Reading this quote, the following observations can be made concerning the transformative diaconal engagement in Colombia. A call for a diaconal action can be seen that: Firstly is evangelizing, understood as a way of sharing the good news of the gospel, without proselytizing. Secondly is participatory, not only in the realm of the churches but also in different social movements. Thirdly is empowering, motivating the vulnerable and displaced persons to fight for their own rights and for those of the community as a whole.

Fourthly, is prophetic, both in words and deeds, demanding and claiming the rights of the people, through political and social advocacy. Fifthly, is communitarian, beyond hierarchical and androcentric practices, creating new and just relationships, seeking equity and inclusivity. An finally, is transformative, surpassing assistance, working for a dignifying life, as a social and political project, pursuing peace, compassion and the transformation of unjust structures.

In summary, transformation, truth, justice and quality of life is the environment for peace that the churches are called to pursue through their diaconal action. This is the understanding of the Colombian churches’ transformative role as Sanctuaries of Peace, not only providing a safe space for the victims of the armed conflict, but also working actively to transform the society in the terms described above.

Conclusions. Colombia – Diaconal Ministry as Sanctuaries of Peace

429 Universidad Reformada de Barranquilla, Declaración Pastoral: Hacia Una Diaconía Que Integre La Misericordia, La Defensa de La Vida Y La Incidencia Por Un Cielo Nuevo Y Una Tierra Nueva, 2. The cited Declaration also has an empowering significance through the final Proposals, worthwhile mentioning, by which: The publication of a primer about service, as an instrument of formation/training in the communities, which includes at least, biblical input from both the Old and New Testaments, and focusing on the practice of service by Jesus of Nazareth. Also, the historical/theological aspect that accounts for the origin of service among the first Christian communities, as well as crosscutting themes such as: gender, ecumenism, human rights, and the care of creation. Another proposal, after the training process, is to develop a systematization of the diverse practices of service that are being undertaken by the churches, organization, and communities through the Colombia Ecumenical Network. And finally, a team for the investigation and theological/pedagogical production was proposed that would have as their work the responsibility of implementing these proposals, p. 4.
Synthesizing the information provided by the reflective practitioners interviewed in Colombia, the following building blocks have been identified based on the Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia:

1. **Vision.** The vision acknowledged for the Colombian churches is one of being able to read the sign of the times in the present kairos in order to develop their unique role of being Sanctuaries of Peace, empowered to provide care, to overcome violence and to achieve public security and fullness of life for all. The result of this survey among these local projects, points to a diaconal vision that inspires the active engagement of the churches as social care, and as public/political advocacy towards building a culture of peace, dignity and respect of human rights. This is a prophetic task that accompanies the people by denouncing abuses and injustices, as well as announcing the good news of God’s kingdom.

2. **Normative.** In a situation of death, violence, violation of human rights, internal displacement and disregard for human dignity for more than half a century, the Colombian churches are re-reading creatively and with new lenses, the trilogy of the biblical text, the tradition (both popular and ecclesial), as well as the local context, in order to defend life. This, even when is not an option of all denominations, serves as the foundation to reformulate the mission of peace of the historical churches, in obedience of the God of life, incarnated in the Prince of Peace.

3. **Needs.** As far as needs are concerned, some informants shared, that there is a lack of resources at all three levels: financial, institutional and human; and as a result, there is a need to discover and unlock their own assets. Hence, a need of reducing dependency from abroad and further developing sustainable projects; strengthening the organizational capacity of the churches; and empowering pastors and the laity in general, chiefly the women, for leadership roles, respectively. Finally a better coordination of the accompaniment efforts by the sister churches of the oikoumene from abroad is required for better stewardship of the resources and in order for the churches to be more effective and credible.

4. **Context.** The Colombian informants also restated the prominence of reading the signs of the times in the current kairos in order to pursue a better-focused diaconal work as Sanctuaries of Peace, by taking care of the victims and
excluded, and constructing peace with justice. As raised in various occasions in this section, one of the worst challenges is the armed conflict, which has forced internal displacement as well as emigration to other countries and has claimed the lives of thousands of people. Facing this logic of violence the churches are urged to pursue this prominent peace-making task.

5. **Transformative.** And finally, under the transformative dimension, there is a call for a diaconal action by the Colombian churches as *Sanctuaries of Peace*, by: sharing unconditionally the good news of the gospel; participating in social movements; empowering the vulnerable and displaced victims to defend their rights; but also defending the rights of the people through political and social advocacy; building communities of new relationships, seeking equity and inclusivity; and ultimately transforming the society towards dignity, peace with justice.

In conclusion, having studied and analyzed this country, specifically the data provided by the *informants*, the diaconal ministry of the Colombians churches as *Sanctuaries of Peace* can be reaffirmed. It carries an empowered vision of reading anew the signs of the times in the current *kairos* for diaconal engagement as social aid and advocacy, as well as urging the churches to become peace-builders towards the defense of life.

Inspired by re-reading the biblical message, led by the tradition and challenged by the context, they seek to be empowered for their peacemaking task in order to reconstruct the lives of the victims of the armed conflict and pursing reparation for truth and justice. Acknowledgement can be made that there is a gap between this vision and dreams expressed by the *reflective practitioners* and what is happening on the ground, in practical terms, nevertheless they are devoted to continue developing their assets in order to be agents of transforming peace and justice.

**South Africa – Diaconal Ministry as Prophetic Action**

**Introduction**

The South African context is yet another interesting case study with regards to the diaconal commitment and engagement of countless mainline *historical* churches, which as it will be analyzed, have been involved in prophetic action throughout the different
stages of its history. After the apartheid was instituted by the Nationalist Party of the Afrikaners (Boers), which took power in 1948, a great polarization among the churches took place, since this racist ideology and practice was established with the blessing and biblical-theological justification of the Dutch reformed churches.

This practice of these white churches was widely condemned by the ecumenical movement globally which forced them to withdraw their membership from the WCC in 1961. Afterwards, the WCC’s Program to Combat Racism (PCR) was launched in 1969 in response to a mandate from its 4th Assembly in held in Uppsala, Sweden, the previous year.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the PCR played a highly visible and controversial role in international debate about white-minority rule in Southern Africa. It supported reflection and action among churches in that region, provided direct humanitarian support to liberation movements, and was a leader in international campaigns for economic disengagement from apartheid.\(^{430}\) A potent instrument that supported the work of the PCR was the WCC Special Fund to Combat Racism, that even when it supported various organizations struggling against racism in many parts of the world, the clear priority for grants and the focus of PCR’s work was on Southern Africa.\(^{431}\)

Other global ecumenical and confessional organizations took action as well. The 21\(^{st}\) General Council of the then World Alliance of Reformed Churches (today World Communion of Reformed Churches), held in Ottawa, August 1982, stated that the apartheid in South Africa constituted “a sin, and that the moral and theological justification of it is a travesty of the Gospel and, in its persistent disobedience to the Word of God, a theological heresy”.\(^{432}\) It declared that status confessionis had to


\(^{432}\)Accessed on 7 March 2014, WARC Ottawa 1982, Proceedings of the 21st General Council, Geneva: http://www.warc.ch/dcw/bs25/11.html. I remember very vividly these discussions since I had the opportunity to attend this General Council meeting as a youth delegate.
condemn apartheid\textsuperscript{433} and suspended the membership of the Dutch Reformed Church, the dominant white church in the country.

**The Diakonia Council of Churches\textsuperscript{434}**

The study on South Africa will be centered on the outstanding work of the Diakonia Council of Churches (DCC). This particular organization has been chosen since it embodies two main features that I am looking for in this thesis, which have been emphasis of the WCC program on diakonia; namely, unity and service, i.e. to unite the churches to better serve the world.

Concerning these features, Archbishop Denis Hurley, the founding father of the DCC underscored, “because the healing of division is so important in our time, whatever we do in terms of diakonia should be ecumenical. Christian service offers the best opportunity to the churches to engage in ecumenical collaboration. Where the ministries of word and worship have their problems in the field of ecumenism, practical Christian service can offer opportunities for united action without reservation or hesitation”.\textsuperscript{435}

The churches founded this organization in 1976, under the name *Diakonia* at a time of increasing racial discrimination and oppression in South Africa, to mobilize its member churches and facilitate their work for justice. Thus it started as a human rights movement, struggling for justice in the context of the apartheid. It wanted to witness itself, as an environment in which white and black persons could work together, with the same salaries and shared responsibilities.

According to Kjell Nordstokke,\textsuperscript{436} in addition to the biblical, theological and practical meaning of the term diakonia, Archbishop Hurley said that they used strategically this name at that time, in order to avoid the understanding among the police that they were a political human rights organization. Then with the transition from apartheid to a multi-party democracy the organization became in 1994 the *Diakonia Council of Churches*, having merged with the Durban & District Council of Churches, still with a relevant

\textsuperscript{433} This means that the WARC issued a public protest, in the strongest terms possible, condemning apartheid, on which it is impossible to differ without seriously jeopardizing the integrity of its common confession as Reformed Churches.


\textsuperscript{435} Paddey Kearney, “Archbishop Hurley on Diakonia” (Durban, South Africa, 2011), p. 3.

\textsuperscript{436} Kjell Nordstokke was part of the evaluation team that recommended in 1992 the merger of *Diakonia* with the Council of Churches. Quoted from a Skype interview on 30 September 2014.
role to play. It was an organization that continued to foster its prophetic identity, from defeating apartheid to overcoming poverty, as it will be acknowledged further down. There was this important transition both of the country, but also of the organization.

The organization also played an important role in theological reflection, e.g. it was very instrumental in the drafting in 1985 of the South Africa *Kairos* document, *A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa.*\(^{437}\) The other important one that they have promoted is the *Oikos* document,\(^{438}\) *A Theological Reflection on the Economic Crisis*, published in 2006, which is another relevant initiative to identify the *kairos* moment of post-apartheid South Africa.

The research on the Diakonia Council of Churches will also contribute substantially to our notion of *Empowering Diakonia* in this thesis, since it works directly with its member churches, not only to serve the people in need, but also to facilitate an empowerment process, working towards transformative justice in a society which has been torn apart firstly by apartheid and currently by increasing violence and impoverishment. As they strongly argue, the churches are “… places of life and creativity, where people are empowered by their faith to overcome the despair and death around them. The churches have a unique contribution to make to the struggle against poverty and injustice. Our task as an organization is to facilitate, enable and equip the churches for the task of making this unique contribution”.\(^{439}\)

The following programs of the DCC reflect its main emphasis:\(^{440}\)

1. **Social Justice.** The overall objective of this program is to empower local churches and communities to be actively involved in fostering peace, healing and reconciliation, increasing participation in democratic governance, as well as enabling social transformation by empowering disadvantaged communities to take charge of their lives. The program is divided into the following aspects: Self Help Groups, Empowering for healing and transformation, Democracy and governance, and Social Justice Season.


2. **Economic Justice.** The program aims at building the capacity to understand and claim socio-economic rights for the poor, promoting economic literacy, and access to services, as well as raising awareness of global and macroeconomic links to the local economy. It enables local churches to engage in meaningful economic transformation within the eThekwini municipal area.

3. **Environmental Justice.** God demands that humanity takes care of the environment and restore its beauty. Christians are reminded that they are mere stewards, taking care of the environment for God. With this in mind, the Environmental Justice Program is aimed at promoting sustainable environment use, striving for food security, challenging approaches, which may upset the ecological balance, and protecting the integrity of all creation.

4. **Ministries Support.** The Ministries Support program develops, strengthens and nurtures the relationship between Diakonia Council of Churches and the member churches. By so doing the DCC aims to promote local ecumenism and encourage churches to co-operate on social justice issues. Through this program, Diakonia supports its member churches in their programs through church visits to keep in touch with what is happening in churches/congregations, briefings, praise and worship sessions.

5. **Cross Cutting Issues.** All programs include relevant aspects of the following issues of the DCC’s work: HIV/AIDS, Crime, Advocacy and Gender issues.

The study the DCC and the South African context in general, will rely mainly on three sources of information: (a) the presentation *Challenges and Opportunities for Diakonia Today* made by its executive director, Ms. Nomabelu Mvambo-Dandala, at the WCC Africa Formation Seminar on Diakonia, which we organized in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 18-24 November 2012; (b) her answers to the questionnaire sent on 10 June 2014, and (c) the organization’s website and documents. The data produced by all these

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441 This issue of crime was one of the main concerns of Mandela during his presidency. He promoted the *Moral Regeneration Initiative* that dates back to a meeting between him and key South African religious leaders in June 1997. At that meeting, Mandela described the ‘spiritual malaise’ underpinning the crime problem as “a lack of good spirit, as pessimism, or lack of hope and faith. And from it emerge the problems of greed and cruelty, of laziness and egotism, of personal and family failure. It both helps fuel the problems of crime and corruption and hinders our efforts to deal with them” - Janine Rauch, *Crime Prevention and Morality. The Campaign for Moral Regeneration in South Africa* (Pretoria, South Africa, 2005), p. 4.
documents was considered sufficient for evaluating the DCC’s self-understanding and action, using again the *Five Dimensions*.

**The Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia in South Africa**

**A. The Visional Dimension**

Perhaps no other quote can express better and more accurately the vision of the Diakonia Council of Churches than this one, conveyed by its current chairperson, Ian Booth, who underscored, “We might have attained political freedom, but we have a struggle which is conceivably larger and more difficult to wage than that against apartheid - the struggle against poverty”.

This is why the council’s vision clearly has been identified as “A transformed society actively working for social justice” and its mission statement “In partnership with our member churches and organizations we are inspired by our Christian faith to play a transformative role enabling people to take responsibility for their lives and to promote prophetic action on social justice issues”. Hence, both the vision and mission of the South Africa’s Diakonia Council of Churches reflect, in theory as well as in practice, the essence of what is being argued in this thesis, namely, *Empowering Diakonia: A Model for Service and Transformation in the Ecumenical Movement and Local Congregations*.

Thus, at least three elements which are crucial with regard to this first visional dimension can be identified in the DCC’s vision/mission, namely, (a) the inspiration in the Christian faith and related to this, the work with the churches pursing transformative justice; (b) enabling, empowering people; and (c) the prophetic aspect of diaconal action.

Commenting on this vision and mission Mvambo-Dandala underscores that the strength of the organization is driven by the work with the churches. On this issue she expressed: “the Council mobilizes the churches for social justice work, and the churches

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443 DCC, p. 27. The *Diakonia* community is a big family that consists of member churches, member organizations, friends, partners and funding partners. The list of this community can be found in Appendix VIII towards the end of the thesis.
implement”. Reflecting on the role of this crucial working relationship, Archbishop Denis Hurley underlined, “Diakonia should guard against spinning off from the churches, leaving them untouched by its concerns and activities by constant review, regular self-examination of its success or otherwise in activating the social conscience of its member churches”. Clearly, he wanted to avoid that the organization could become another NGO, loosing its identity as a church based organization.

Regarding empowerment, and in the line of the arguments of this thesis, there is an acknowledgment of the role that the Christian faith can play—and is playing—to inspire and transform “enabling people to take responsibility for their lives”. This is the essence of Empowering Diakonia, beyond charity, to facilitate a gospel-driven power that comes from the faith of the people, a faith in Jesus Christ and also in their own abilities and gifts to be agents of their own change.

And finally with regards to prophetic diakonia, the executive director helps us understand better this when she pointed out in Addis Ababa: “While our organization supported the struggle of veterans who are now in government during the struggle days, our argument is that we have to be critical of them when they divert from the goals of the struggle…” She then describes the challenge expressing that many people tend to sacralize the ANC (African National Congress, the governing party) and when it “abuses its power or when it fails to deliver basic services to the poor”; they do not want to criticize it. “That has the effect of weakening the church’s prophetic voice”, she concluded.

Hence, studying the significant example of the DCC helps to construct an Empowering Diakonia model, which both challenges prophetically the abuse of power of the status quo, “given that it is in the nature of politicians to abuse power”, Mvambo-Dandala argues and enables power in the civil society, bottom-up, for the people to participate in a responsible governance.

The executive director reflects on the importance of empowerment, identified as a pertinent element for the vision as well. She notes the importance of “Empowering

444 Email sent on 10 June 2014.
445 DCC, p. 20.
447 Mvambo-Dandala, p. 3.
people for healing and transformation in order to help themselves. People will therefore not be dependent on external sources but rather from within”. The Council has practical experiences of this interrelationship “through self help groups, stress and trauma healing experiences, environmental groups, advocacy groups”.\footnote{Email sent on 10 June 2014.} Consequently, Mvambo-Dandala’s understanding of empowerment has a communitarian sense, i.e. it is a source of power within, but is shared in relationships, in solidarity, particularly with those more vulnerable people, in a similar way as stressed previously in this thesis.

**B. The Normative Dimension**

In reference to the biblical and theological understanding of diakonia, the executive director quoted the text “Not to be served, but to serve” (Mk. 10:45) commenting that “Jesus was a deacon, which means that He was a servant who worked with marginalized people and brought justice where there was injustice”. This biblical paradigm has inspired the work of the DCC, focusing on the diaconal example of Jesus. And she went on to say, “The nature of the service that we offer focuses on social justice rather than social welfare, as we believe in addressing the root/underlying causes of the social ills, rather than the symptoms. This means inspiring and mobilizing the churches to get their hands dirty, and speak truth to power”.\footnote{Email sent on 10 June 2014.}

This sharp distinction between social welfare or charity and social justice was also strongly made at our Addis Ababa meeting. There she claimed, “Although we do not discount the need for welfare, we nonetheless know that it only offers a temporary solution to the dilemma of a transformative diakonia … Essentially, justice requires that the world be organized to create a playing field in which ALL can participate with dignity. But what distinguishes it from charity, which while providing needed relief from suffering, does not address the deeper causes of suffering … The DCC is not a social welfare, but a social justice organization. Experience has shown that it is much easier to mobilize member churches for social welfare activity than for social justice action. The latter is often the more difficult part of diaconal service”.\footnote{Mvambo-Dandala, pp. 1 & 3.}

Regarding the previous quote, perhaps a better qualification of the term *charity* is required here since it has been argued that charity has indeed a social justice
connotation as well. Conceivably charity can be understood, as expressed in the former quote, as mere material aid or giving, or in similar terms, by observing the history of the church, where the social welfare understanding was perhaps easier to pursue.

The insistence on this concept leads us to reaffirm a theological understanding and practice of diakonia that is rooted in social justice and normed by the Bible, following both the teachings and ministry of the prophetic movement and more specifically of Jesus Christ. As the Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia are being worked-out various observations can be made how they relate and complement each other. This is the case, especially with the visional and normative dimensions, where a biblical-theological concept can be found, i.e., cross-fertilization between theology and Bible.

C. The Need-Oriented Dimension

Regarding the needs in South Africa that urge the DCC’s diaconal action, the director’s answer was “poverty, inequality, unemployment, climate change, food security, gender justice, crime and violence”. And in the organization’s annual report an interesting testimony can be found by Sthembile Doncabe, in reference to a practical way by which they addressed creatively one of these needs. This person said:

In my area of cZakheni, we were not getting basic services like electricity and decent accommodation. We did not know what to do about these challenges. We did not know that it was our right as citizens to demand such services from our government. We did not know what protocol to follow to address these needs. Diakonia held an advocacy workshop in my area. I learned about my rights as a citizen. I learned how to advocate for the provision of basic services. After the workshop, we organized ourselves as an Unemployed People's Movement. We decided to work with people from Emhlabeni informal settlement sharing information on our rights and basic needs. Together we organized a march to the local councilor. After the

451 Nevertheless, it is important to note here reflections regarding charity, taken from the LWF booklet Diakonia in Context. Here we read, “these observations could give the impression that charity is something negative. On the contrary, it is a virtue that belongs to the tradition of the Church. South African theologian Molefe Tsele stated at the LWF consultation on prophetic diakonia: ‘We must resist the tendency to turn charity into a dirty word. God is charitable to his entire creation. Society as a whole needs to be made more charitable’. True charity relates to community and justice. Community-based diakonia enhances inclusiveness and mutuality in dealing with challenges of suffering and injustice. It affirms the value of doing things together and the conviction that all persons are gifted and able to participate in working for what is good and right. It resembles the African saying: ‘If you want to hurry, walk alone, if you want to go far, walk together’”. LWF, Diakonia in Context. Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment, The Lutheran World Federation, p. 49.

452 Email sent on 10 June 2014.
march in November, we saw the first phase of installing electricity happening in eZakheni and eMhlabeni communities. The process of installation still continues though not at a pace that we would have loved.453

This is another good example of effective Empowering Diakonia. The DCC instead of advocating with the local government to solve the basic services and decent accommodation for this family, it enabled through the churches, a process of empowerment of the community, in this case through advocacy workshops, to learn about their rights to defend them, to live in dignity and with the basic needs met. As a result, they are in the process of being solved in a more democratic and participatory way.

In order to address the capacity building needs, Mvambo-Dandala underscored that Diakonia also carries-out “courses and workshops on economic justice, environmental justice, self help groups, democracy and governance, stress and trauma healing, conflict transformation, HIV & AIDS, gender justice, human rights, leadership, youth development”. She added that this empowerment process also takes place through printed publications on diakonia such as Through the Mud,454 various bible studies, The Oikos Journey, Pilgrimage of Hope, Stress and Trauma healing manual, liturgies, among others. These supplies, many of which can be found in their webpage, help to better equip the churches to address the needs and challenges of their communities.455

With regards to its resources (human, financial, etc.), the DCC has full time staff, volunteers and interns, but, at the same time, they are largely dependent on overseas funders for financial resources.456 On this note, Mvambo-Dandala commented:

An even more serious challenge facing the diaconal movement in South Africa is the dwindling of funding for the Non-Profit sector. Traditionally, the sector has heavily relied on overseas donor funding. With the recent economic recession in the North coupled with the notion there that South Africa is a middle-income economy, donors have had to pull out completely or drastically cut their funding to the country. As a result most diaconal organizations have had to shut down, cut down on their projects or lay off a significant size of their staff, this at a time when their services are desperately needed ... The problem is compounded by the fact that local donors are interested in funding welfare organizations that have, in their

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454 Kjell Nordstokke, Through the Mud. Reflections on Diakonia (Durban, South Africa: Diakonia Council of Churches, 2000).
455 Email sent on 10 June 2014.
456 A list of them can be found in Appendix VIII.
view, tangible results. Social justice organizations have to battle to raise funds for their projects.457

The description of this situation, a trend increasingly found in other contexts, further worsens the condition of the impoverished, points to the critical need to further develop an institutional capacity that is sustainable in the long run. On the other hand, it is also understandable that donors, with their shrinking resources, consider other African countries in greater need than South Africa. Of course, the churches in this country face similar needs and challenges as well, but with a stronger ownership of the DCC’s mission, enabling a more ecumenical sharing of resources, can further contribute to alleviate this deficit.

D. The Contextual Dimension

In order to study the country’s context from a wider ecumenical perspective, some documents of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) were also analyzed for this research. Evaluating this situation, its Strategic Focus stresses that in the country “the greatest enemy today is poverty and the disregard for human life. There are people who will grow and never experience employment. On their death-bed they only have poverty to bequeath to their children. This happens in an environment when others have so much to even throw away. Then the question must be asked, ‘is God indifferent of all this?’ We need life and life in abundance”.458

Again, the Diakonia Council of Churches is not unaware of these challenges. Its Social Justice program, under the section Empowering for Healing and Transformation, also describes the South African context with these words: “The depth of pain, damage and hurt in our country, let alone our municipality, is so acute. The high levels of domestic violence, poverty, child abuse, HIV and AIDS, as well as the effects of the historic political violence, have left many people … with limited capacity and strength to engage meaningfully with their lives. They are still carrying the scars. There is therefore a need for healing. Diakonia requires that Christians facilitate that process”.459

It is also important to point out as well that the DCC not only works with its constituency, the churches, but also with the state, NGOs and the civil society as well.

457 Mvambo-Dandala, p. 3.
On this regard, the South Africa informant highlighted the following, “Churches also need to look out of the window and respond to the wider issues that they see in the communities around them” and to do it with other social actors, she also stressed, as pointed out above.\footnote{Email sent on 10 June 2014.}

E. The Transformative Dimension

As acknowledged at the beginning of this portion on the DCC, its first program mentioned is the one on Social Justice, which provides interesting and helpful insights to elucidate this dimension, pointing to a fascinating relationship between empowerment and transformation. It begins by stressing that the main objective of the program is to empower both the congregations and their respective communities, particularly the most disadvantaged ones, to participate in democratic governance and to take charge of their own lives.

This active involvement seeks the ultimate goal of transformation, which is not an activity or an action that is carried out \textit{for} the people, or \textit{on behalf of} the people, rather \textit{with} or \textit{by} the people. Then comes the purpose of this transformation that is performed by the people, i.e. seeking to foster social justice, peace, healing and reconciliation.

Precisely one of the emphases of this program is \textit{Empowering for healing and transformation}. And under this section, the DCC’s 2013-2014 annual report highlights, “The stress and trauma that communities in our geographical area experience on daily basis rob them of their freedom. As such they cannot engage fully in social transformation. We thus believe that healing should take place”. Here again, prominence is given to healing as a way that leads to transformation and the “healing journey” is channeled by the DCC through “stress and trauma healing workshops” and enabling “with impressive testimonies from the survivors”.\footnote{DCC, p. 12.}

As very wisely the report underlines, “Healing doesn't mean the damage never existed. It means the damage no longer controls our lives”, therefore, it has a liberating and empowering effect. Here, again, the churches are called, in the current \textit{kairos}, to pursue their struggle for freedom, healing and social justice, in order for the people, mostly the marginalized, to continue being agents of their own transformation.
Conclusions. South Africa – Diaconal Ministry as Prophetic Action

Having read and analyzed the data of this portion dealing with the diaconal involvement on diakonia of the South African churches, here the building blocks based on the Five Dimensions will be listed.

1. **Vision.** The diaconal vision, which is notorious among the churches in South Africa, impulses their prophetic action to seek a transformed and just society. It *speaks truth to power*, when it is abusive and absolute, and at the same time, empowers people to engage in their own growth. According to the reflective practitioners, this vision is founded in the Christian faith, which has been a very important liberating factor firstly from apartheid and currently from impoverishment.

2. **Normative.** A relevant strength and normative feature of the DCC is to deepen the biblical and socio-political understanding of diakonia pursuing social justice and to urge its constituency to practice it in unity. Hence the churches are prompted to read the signs of the times ecumenically, and to serve prophetically as a moral authority. As Archbishop Hurley understood it, the church cannot be prophetic if is not united.

3. **Needs.** One of the most significant needs faced by the DCC is self-sustainability in order to address more effectively the necessities of the South African population. The strengthening of its institutional capacity, the empowerment of its constituencies and a stronger commitment and ownership of the council’s work is paramount towards achieving this goal.

4. **Context.** Having overcome the apartheid era, one of the main diaconal challenges for the South African churches in the current *kairos* is fighting poverty. Their challenge in the country is to work together in order to read the signs of the times and to defend human life by addressing prophetically, in the wider community its root causes, as well as its consequences, and acting effectively to eradicate them. In situations of violence, HIV/AIDS and other diseases, the churches are called to play a therapeutic role in order to facilitate healing and reconciling processes.

5. **Transformative.** Furthermore the churches are urged to work towards a transformed society, fostering social justice, peace, healing and reconciliation,
with the active participation of the people. Consequently empowerment is said to play a significant transformative role, for them to improve their quality of life, of the communities and of the society in general. The goal is to make possible the vision of the DCC, to accomplish “a transformed society actively working for social justice”.

Summarizing, the main findings of the South Africa Diakonia Council of Churches’ ministry, provide more thought-provoking material to construct the Empowering Diakonia model. Its vision, inspired by the Christian faith has been an important prophetic and liberating factor that empowers the people for struggling. It is nurtured both by the biblical text and the social context, focusing on the organizational needs of the churches to address the larger necessities of the society. The churches are urged to work seeking transformative justice, with the active participation of the people.

**Armenia – Diaconal Ministry as Restoring Values**

**Introduction**

Armenia is the fourth country that is being studied. It has been chosen for various reasons, on the one hand, it is a predominantly Orthodox country, i.e. the Armenian national aspirations and the Armenian Orthodox faith are integrally interconnected, secondly, it is an Eastern European nation, a member of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and finally, the umbrella organization that will be

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462 As it will be explained further down the predominant denomination is the Armenian Apostolic Church, which is an Oriental Orthodox Church. According to Geevarghese Mar Osthathios, there are six Churches that belong to this family, namely, Coptic, Syrian, Armenian, Ethiopian, Eritrean and (Indian) Malankara. He says that they “are also called ancient Oriental, lesser Eastern, and pre- or ante-Chalcedonian churches. They are the churches of the first three ecumenical councils (Nicaea, Constantinople and Ephesus) but do not accept the fourth, Chalcedon (451)” – c.f. Geervaghese Mar Osthathios, “Oriental Orthodox Churches,” in Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, ed. Nicholas Lossky et al, 2nd ed. (Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications, 2002), pp. 857-858.

463 According to the WCC website, “Armenia was for many centuries an independent nation and kingdom that in some periods of its history extended far beyond its present geographical location in the South Caucasus. It adopted Christianity as the official religion in 301, and thus became the first Christian nation of the world. From 1920 onwards, Armenia was a republic in the Soviet Union. It regained its independence in 1991. The country is in the process of rebuilding its economy. The Armenian Apostolic Church is by large the majority church. The Catholic Church has had a minority presence in Armenia since the time of the Crusaders and Catholic missions that begun in the 15th century. Protestant missions (mainly Baptist) arrived in the 19th century. In recent years there has been an influx of some Evangelical and Pentecostal groups. Due to historic circumstances there is a large Armenian diaspora. At present a little over three million Armenians live in the Republic of Armenia, more than two million in Russia and the other republics of the former Soviet Union, and another three million in the diaspora”, accessed on 7 April 2014, [http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/europe/armenia](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/europe/armenia)
analyzed has had a long-standing working relationship with the WCC. Indeed, these characteristics will further provide substance and enrichment to this thesis.

As seen in the previous chapter of this thesis, the Orthodox tradition of Christianity has played a relevant role in shaping a pertinent theology of diakonia and also promoting very important diaconal projects in many countries. The 1978 consultation on *The Orthodox Approach to Diakonia*, held in Crete was mentioned, where the notion of *Liturgy after the Liturgy* was lifted once more, and where the theological connection between diakonia and worship was reinforced.

Of course, the outcomes of this consultation not only influenced the Orthodox family, but the wider ecumenical movement as well. As it is mentioned in the booklet *From Inter-church Aid to Jubilee*, “This Orthodox contribution to ecumenical reflection, emphasizing the broader sense of diakonia as rooted in the sacramental life and in the vision of the kingdom of God, was to provide an important counterbalance to the increasingly complex ecumenical approach to effective programs and specialized ministries to the marginalized.”

Hence, this significant element rooted in the Orthodox tradition and spirituality plus the technical *know how* to carryout diaconal work proved to be extremely helpful particularly to face resolutely all the socio-political-economic changes that took place in Central and Eastern Europe nearly ten years after this gathering in Crete, when the Berlin wall collapsed in 1989 and with the subsequent dismantlement of the Soviet Union.

During the Soviet period, the governments of the countries belonging to the Union were very centralized both politically and economically and imposed heavily atheistic policies, in many cases, with a clear purpose to destroy the churches, their missions and social involvement. Consequently, their social engagement became almost non-existent. This repression and suppression of the churches for almost seven decades not only hindered their diaconal effort, as one of its traditional pillars, but also had an impact on the population that benefited from these services, even when the centralized governments were intending to provide highly qualified and free services, which,

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indeed, in many cases were achieved. As analyzed further down, this issue also affected Armenia.

Urged by this need to further empower the Orthodox churches, the largest serving in many of these former Soviet Republics, and by other challenges globally, in 2004 an international conference on *Orthodox Social Witness and Diakonia*, was organized by the WCC, the IOCC (International Orthodox Christian Charities) and the OrtAid (Orthodox Church Aid from Finland), in Valamo, Finland, which brought together leaders of Orthodox social service organizations, theologians and other academic specialists, church hierarchs, and other representatives.

The participants exchanged discussions and analysis, shared practical experiences on current Orthodox social service worldwide and formulated recommendations in five key areas: theology of diakonia; Pan-Orthodox cooperation in diakonia; Orthodox church and civil society; methodologies of social action and stewardship and management. As part of this project, the Continuation Committee and the IOCC conducted in 2009 a survey of the social and humanitarian work of Orthodox social organizations worldwide, which is being used to further implement the diaconal work in different countries.

It is important to acknowledge here as well, that many churches in the countries of the former Soviet block interpreted that period as a time when the values (especially the Christian ones) were annihilated. Coincidently His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of all Armenians was invited to deliver the Message of Blessing (Opening Sermon Prayer) at the WCC’s 10th Assembly in Busan, Republic of Korea, based on Lk. 24:25-26 (The Walk to Emmaus). On this regard it was not by chance that he mentioned, as a core part of his homily and seemingly based on his own context, the need to restore what he called the “bedrock and fundamental values” that the churches are called to rebuild in their respective societies.

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465 During a panel discussion, the social experience of the Orthodox churches in diverse contexts was analyzed. Armenia was studied, together with East Africa, the United States and the Middle East, accessed on 7 April 2014, [http://www.orthodoxdiakonia.net](http://www.orthodoxdiakonia.net)


His Holiness cited the following values in his message: (1) Morality, noting: “As the Church, our moral preaching must be an extension of Christ’s example of love and compassion. It must not discriminate or set conditions, but rather welcome all in a spirit of charity”, apparently eluding to diakonia; (2) Education, mentioning that it: “builds respect towards one’s fellow man; a mutual acceptance and cooperation among peoples”, which can be interpreted in reference to empowerment; (3) the fundamental human association of the Family, adding: “closely related to morality and education”; and finally Peace, observing: “Peace remains an elusive reality in our world”.468

Hence, considering this crisis of values and the fact that diaconal engagement of the churches can be an essential tool to restore them, the main focus of this analysis of Armenia is precisely Diaconal Ministry as Restoring Values. This will be extremely crucial in the case of this particular country that has suffered many oppressions, foreign conquests and interventions throughout its history and not least its genocide,469 mainly as a result of its geographic position. On this regard, the Catholicos from the Armenian Apostolic Church highlighted in his sermon mentioned above, the following,

In the year 2015, Armenians in Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and in every nation on earth will commemorate a tragic anniversary – one hundred years since the greatest cataclysm of our history: the Genocide of the Armenians, committed by Ottoman Turkey. Four generations have passed since 1915; but the memory of our time of horror remains alive. And the quest for justice—if only through the simple act of official recognition and universal condemnation—will not die.470

For all these reasons noted in this introduction, this study on Armenia as a country, and the crucial diaconal ministry of the churches in their quest to restore critical values, to empower the civil society, to help the most vulnerable people, to reconstruct the nation and to reaffirm its sovereignty, will further contribute substantially to the content of the thesis.

470 WCC, p. 4.
The WCC Armenia Inter-Church Round Table Foundation (ART)\textsuperscript{471}

This research is basically centered on the WCC Armenia Inter-Church Round Table Foundation (ART).\textsuperscript{472} The data for this study comes principally from the questionnaire that has been applied to other projects. Using these set of questions as a guide, its executive director Karen Nazaryan was interviewed,\textsuperscript{473} with whom we have worked together in various WCC diakonia-related projects. Acknowledging the fact that he could be biased in relation to the organization he leads, but also to obtain more information, other data has also been collected from the ART reports and documents, as well as from its website, which has very informative and updated compilation of documents, materials, photos and videos.

The ART is an ecumenical organization\textsuperscript{474} which works in close collaboration with churches and NGOs (non-governmental organizations) to contribute to the poverty\textsuperscript{475} eradication, sustainable community development, active involvement of the church in the social work, overall development of civil society in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.\textsuperscript{476}

Founded in 1996, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, by the Armenian Apostolic Church (AAC)\textsuperscript{477} and the WCC, the ART has evolved its activities in diverse areas,

\textsuperscript{471} Accessed on 7 May 2014, \url{http://www.roundtable-act.am/en/}
\textsuperscript{472} Accessed on 7 May 2014. The ART is listed among the ‘Orthodox Diakonia Organizations’ – \url{http://www.iocc.org/pdfs/orthodox-diakonia-directory2009.pdf}
\textsuperscript{473} Notes from a Skype interview on 2 October 2014.
\textsuperscript{474} Armenia has a very long tradition of ecumenical engagement. This was also acknowledged by His Holiness Karekin II at the WCC Assembly when he underlined: “The ecumenical spirit has deep roots in Armenian civilization—extending back to the blessed fathers of the Armenian Apostolic Church: Saint Nerses the Graceful, Saint Nerses of Lambron, and their legacy. In the Middle Ages, they boldly undertook dialogues with the Roman Catholic and Byzantine churches, under the noble slogan: “Unity in the essentials; Liberty in the non-essentials; Love in all things.” And today as well, the Armenian Church sincerely welcomes expanded dialogue—a quest for common ground and mutual support—for the glory of Christ’s Holy Church, the peace of the world, and the welfare of all mankind” – WCC, pp. 1-2.
\textsuperscript{475} Armenia is the poorest country in the Caucasus, with roughly a third of the population living at or below the poverty line.
\textsuperscript{476} The AAC is the only WCC member church based in the country. The historical center of this autocephalous national church is the Mother See of Etchmiadzin, near the capital city of Yerevan. Holy Etchmiadzin and other monastic centers have contributed to the advancement of faith, culture, literature, science and the arts for centuries. They represent the religious, linguistic and cultural unity of Armenians in their homeland and abroad. As a result of the historical situation of the Armenians, two patriarchates were established within the hierarchy of the Armenian Church, in Jerusalem and Constantinople, both with local jurisdiction. During the last years, 16 new bishops have been consecrated, 63 celibate priests and over 100 married priests have been ordained, and hundreds of deacons have graduated from the Gevorkian Theological Seminary located at the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. In recent years, the number of believers has considerably increased and its social engagement has expanded, accessed on 7
including development, capacity building, education, peace and reconciliation, diakonia and humanitarian aid. The following year the Evangelical Church and the Roman Catholic Church joined the organization so it is therefore an inter-church program, covering around the 95% of the Armenian believers, putting the membership of these three churches together.

On November 2004 the ART was registered as an independent legal entity in the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Armenia under the name World Council of Churches Armenia Inter-Church Charitable Round Table Foundation. The Foundation now works under the patronage of His Holiness Karekin II Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians.

Delegates of these three churches plus two representatives of the secular NGOs form the Board of the ART. This is so, according to Nazaryan, “because our understanding of the Round Table is that we invite church-related but also non-church organizations (non-governmental and non-profit organizations) to work together on different social issues of the country. We wanted to create a real cooperation between social actors who are really working in this field”.

At present the ART focuses its activities mainly in the areas of:

- Integrated Community Development and Diakonia
- Capacity Building
- Regional Peace and Reconciliation
- Emergency Preparedness and Response.

The methodology of the ART’s work is chiefly with the local congregations and with various community centers. Its diaconal work gives the impression to be more charity


478 Indeed, an evaluation carried-out by a consultant in 2010 identified this work on inter-church relations as a very positive contribution. It said: “For the first time, thanks to the ART, the concept of an ‘ecumenical board of trustees’, has emerged. C.f. Anna Voskanyan, Charitable Round Table Foundation of the World Council of Churches Member of ACT Alliance. Testing and Practizing with ACT Development Guide (Yerevan, 2010), p. 35.

479 Notes from a Skype interview on 2 October 2014.

480 Nazaryan pointed out in the interview that the “ART has around 10 social centers of different sizes owned by the Church, throughout the country. The facilities can be a big three-story building like the one in Gyumri, the second biggest city of the country, or sometimes very small, functioning in 2-3 rooms near
oriented, compared to other projects analyzed in this thesis, due to the urgent needs of the increasingly impoverished population, but at the same time, empowering people to be active citizens. Indeed, as observed above, Capacity Building is one of the four programs or major priorities of the ART, for which the organization edited a manual, as well as other training methods such as No Harm Approach, for working with the communities.

As it was the case in previous countries, the data obtained in this research has been processed, classified and examined applying the Five Dimensions, which helps to discover the building blocks needed to construct the Empowering Diakonia method in the following chapter.

**The Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia in Armenia**

**A. The Visional Dimension**

In order to figure-out this first dimension, it is helpful to acknowledge the Vision of the ART itself, that is stated as: “Inspired by the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ and Christian social teaching, Armenia Inter-Church Charitable Round Table Foundation strives to promote a peaceful and just society that respects all of God’s creation, practices Christian values in word and deed, and ensures a dignified life for the vulnerable, with equal rights and opportunities for all”.

The essence of this vision seems to be the promotion of “a peaceful and just society”, hence determining the main focus of this visional dimension. Therefore service, on the one hand, pursues the achievement of justice and peace both in word and deed; while it seeks to facilitate life in dignity, equal rights and opportunities for the whole society, particularly for the most vulnerable, on the other. This vision also promotes responsible stewardship, since it also fosters the care of God’s creation.

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481 Regarding this manual, in the ART’s 2012-2013 report its executive director underscores: “During these years we have seen further development of the concept of church social centers. As the clergy, who are working in the field of diaconal or development projects, needed more practical and theoretical information on diaconal work, we, in cooperation with World Vision Armenia prepared a manual for program work, entitled ‘Fundamentals of Diaconal Work’. It was distributed among our church partners in all regions of Armenia and Artsakh” – c.f. Armenia Round Table, *WCC Armenia Round Table Foundation. Annual Report 2013* (Yerevan, 2013), p. 3.

Furthermore, the whole question of peace is pertinent not only for the Armenian society but also for its relationships with the neighboring countries, since historically, there have been many conflicts within the borders as well as numerous threats that make the current peace coexistence very fragile among these countries.

The ART’s vision also starts by acknowledging that it is “Inspired by the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ”. On this note, its Integrated Community Development booklet published in 2013, stresses that “the ART is a FBO and our approach is Christian: believing in justice, fairness, peace, stewardship, integrity and relevance. Also working in a participatory relationship, driven by a compassion for the poor and the helpless. Spiritual counseling, baptism, pilgrimages, Bible studies, spiritual lessons are some of the directions in this area”. 483

The quote also points to promoting “a participatory relationship”, which, as observed throughout this thesis, has a strong connection with empowerment. Indeed, the notion and practice of empowerment contributes to lift the self-esteem that enables the active participation of the citizens in society contributing to the transformation of their own livelihood. And the Christian values, as listed above, are also paramount in shaping this empowerment process, which has been one of the goals of the ART and one of the main points stressed in this thesis.

B. The Normative Dimension

As observed in the previous dimension, the ART’s vision makes an explicit reference to the “practices [of] Christian values in word and deed”. These values or classical virtues of faith are in the process of being rescued in the construction of a post-Soviet society, even acknowledging the fact that the ideology and practice of neo-liberal capitalism is not necessarily conducive either to living these Christian values or virtues. Hence, the church is called to be always alert in each and every socio-political-economic system to pursue a prophetic diakonia that is in accordance with these values, seeking above all God’s kingdom and its justice.

Precisely under the section called Our Values, the Foundation’s website mentions: the “ART attaches importance to Christian fundamental values, vigorous expression of

483 ART, Armenia Round Table. Integrated Community Development (Yerevan, Armenia, 2013), p. 2.
love, faith and hope. Based on the Biblical belief that people are made in the image and likeness of God and should be treated equally, ART in its activities is adhering to [a number of] guiding principles”.

These directorial values lead to action and therefore help to understand better, in practical terms, the vision explained above, which include, as listed in the website: the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms; the care for the needs of vulnerable groups of the society; the protection of the environment; maintaining accountability, transparency and participation, mutual trust, impartiality and consistency; the achievement of high efficiency and impact of the activities; the continuous evaluation of the quality of the provided services, results achieved and impact, and where needed, introduce necessary changes; as well as the encouragement of the team’s work and cooperation.  

As it would be expected, this focus on norms is pretty much influenced by the doctrinal body of the organization’s founding mother, the AAC, which bases its faith on the Bible, holy Tradition, and on the decisions of the first three ecumenical councils, mentioned previously. It aims at restoring the values in society, as pointed out by the Catholicos at the WCC Assembly in Busan, and especially in the Armenian context both diakonia and empowerment, are crucial instruments to reestablish them.

C. The Need-Oriented Dimension

In the ART’s 2012-2013 report the executive director Nazaryan summarized the current challenges and needs of his country in these terms, “Unfortunately the economic crisis, blockade and increasing level of emigration were the main news on the geo-political and socio-economical landscape of Armenia, which was accompanied by growing poverty and increasing polarization”.  

Nazaryan further argued, “35% of the Armenian population is living in poverty and it is growing rapidly, at an alarming rate. Also there are different types of polarization, e.g. gaps between the Capital city and small, remote villages.” Another need is to tackle

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486 To further illustrate this, “In 2012 ART, together with its local partners, implemented 36 big and small scale projects in the most vulnerable and remote areas of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. The number of direct beneficiaries stood at more than 26,000 with about 60% women participation. Programs like
the situations of war and regional conflicts. Thirdly, due to the war in Syria, there are around 15,000 Armenian refugees from this country that were forced to immigrate into Armenia, adding more challenges to be addressed, and these are just three concrete examples.\textsuperscript{487}

In other words, there are new developments in the Armenian situation that bring different challenges, for which the organization might feel it is not prepared e.g. the overwhelming influx of refugees; the instability of the country, both internally and with regards to its neighbors; moving from one extreme to another, i.e. from communism to wild capitalism; the shrinking of financial support from abroad, which hinders the institutional capacity of the organization; among others.

Therefore, the needs among the Armenian population are so overwhelming that evangelical independent organizations like World Vision cooperate with the Armenian Apostolic Church, which in other countries would be unthinkable, in projects to support children’s development, e.g. in Summer Camps and publishing Christian educational materials for them, as well as teacher’s manuals.\textsuperscript{488}

This is just one instance that illustrates further a fundamental and urgent need to address more creatively and effectively these necessities, which is the unity of all faith-based organizations for common action. Even when, there is a genuine ecumenical effort, there is still a pressing need to involve more churches, which can be facilitated further by their strong ethnic bonds, in order to be more effective for facing the necessities. In other words, the folkloric and indigenous ties are oftentimes stronger than the confessional of doctrinal differences, precisely towards restoring values and seeking the common good.

Consequently, in order to face creatively these needs, the ART’s setup, as an ecumenical organization and with its powerful and symbolic structure as a roundtable, enables a common effort, which becomes more effective.\textsuperscript{489} Nevertheless, a risk in


\textsuperscript{488} Notes from a Skype interview on 2 October 2014.

\textsuperscript{489} Access on 7 May 2014, http://www.wvarmenia.am/en/who-we-are

\textsuperscript{489} In the country there are around 20 Armenian NGOs working with the ART, as well as international NGOs, like World Vision, the NGO anchor, Caritas, among other few. Sometimes there are informal
Diakonia is that what was initially a tool for service can become a goal in itself, i.e. in the case of the ART, the issue is not to consider the institution as an end in itself, but rather as a space to convene and challenge the Armenian churches to serve together the population. This is indeed the challenge of many organizations and councils of churches, locally, regionally and globally, including the WCC, namely, to play a facilitating role, as its main raison d'être rather than focusing on its own institutional existence.

D. The Contextual Dimension

In order to understand better the current Armenian context it is paramount to take into consideration its history. As mentioned earlier, Armenia has been under occupation for most of its existence, very seldom it has enjoyed independence and sovereignty. Just to mention a couple of more recent examples, the Ottoman Empire that committed the genocide—still not recognized by some nations, including Turkey, the perpetuator—and the Soviet era, which, among other issues, deprived the country of its values as a nation. For all these reasons the country has been very vulnerable, pretty much on its own.

Nevertheless, in most periods of this tragic history described above, the Church stood by its people, almost as the only entity that tried to guarantee the ethnic identity and values of the nation. It accompanied its people and even suffered with its people, therefore, an important feature of the Armenian historical context has been the involvement of the churches, particularly its pastoral work, even with all its limitations.

As an indicator of the ART’s involvement in the Armenian context, both the issues of beneficiaries and resources are being considered here. In relation to the former, Nazaryan responded that they are working on all regions of Armenia except in Yerevan, the Capital city, as well as in the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. Every year the ART implements around 30-45 diaconal projects and “it is difficult to say the

contacts and in other cases they sign with them Memorandums of Understanding when they are working in the framework of some activities. Other times, they have institutional contacts, e.g. the director of anchor Armenia is member of the ART Board and vice versa, e.g. Nazaryan is member from the World Vision Armenia Board, so this is another way of mutual exchange and collaboration – Notes form a Skype interview on 2 October 2014.
amount of beneficiaries of our work, but all-in-all, the target is more than 10,000 people”, he argued.490

With regard to the latter (human and financial resources) that the ART counts on, its executive director shared that in the past, they use to work with 10-12 ecumenical agencies from abroad, that were supporting financially the organization, but now they are only 3, since all of them started to move further East. One of the reasons for this is that Armenia, according to the UN categorization, is classified as a *middle-income* country. “They don’t take into account that our country is highly polarized internally, namely, that there is a huge gap between the very rich and the very poor people in the nation”, 491 he stressed.

In spite of this, there are some UN programs, e.g. the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) that has in their mandate the work with FBOs (Faith Based Organizations). They organized a network of FBOs in the Southern Caucasus countries, Central Asia post-Soviet countries, including Russia, Byelorussia and Moldova, Balkan countries and Turkey and the ART is the convener of this network. In order to coordinate this task the Foundation has a fulltime staff paid by the UN program.

**E. The Transformative Dimension**

One of the main features of the current Armenian *kairos* is the situation of transition. The moment requires a balance between restoration and transformation. Consequently, one of the dilemmas is how to bring back and repair the values lost during all those years of crisis and occupations—especially when tradition is so heavy and important—while, at the same time, moving forward, renewing and performing the radical changes that the nation requires for its holistic development.

Perhaps the best way of describing this task is expressed in the ART’s mission statement, contributing “to poverty reduction, strengthen civil society, promote regional peace building and reconciliation, enable a fair and value base society through diaconal and development interventions in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh”.

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490 Notes from a Skype interview on 2 October 2014.
491 Notes from a Skype interview on 2 October 2014.
As stated before the main roles and instruments to implement this transformative task are to: collaborate with churches and NGOs, in the fields of community empowerment and development, including advocacy; contribute to the capacity-building of its partners; implement programs for regional peace and reconciliation, and advocacy; fund innovative pilot projects that enhance core programs; and manage a Small Project Fund for development and diakonia purposes.  

Here again and following the logic of this thesis, the crucial instruments to address this *kairos* are both empowerment and diakonia, which are indeed, essential conditions for transformation. Reflecting on both, Nazaryan underscored that “they are interrelated, one cannot go without the other, namely, if you are organizing diaconal action, it should be done in a participatory way and if you have not empowered people, diakonia is not transformative and vice versa is also right, that when you involve people they are empowered in order to transform the society”.  

In the analysis of the Armenian context above, acknowledgement was made of the important role that the church has played in its different historical stages. Nevertheless, since there is a lack of priests, quite often they have to serve in the liturgies and other church-related activities in different parishes, and therefore, the support of their wives in social projects is significant.  

This is an interesting aspect of the pastoral work where, in many occasions, both the priests and their wives serve together in the church as empowering and transforming agents. Again the ART plays a very active role in the capacity development of the latter, for them to implement better this complementary role. They particularly play a relevant role in the process of restoring values of love, care and solidarity among the  

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493 Notes from a Skype interview on 2 October 2014.  
494 Notes from a Skype interview on 2 October 2014. This is also well synthetized in his introduction, as the executive director, to the 2012-2013 report where he notes: “… In general, we prioritize education and capacity building activities in the fields, where our partners are working. That is why we organize systematic trainings of our partners in computer literacy, project development and managing skills, counseling in the field of HIV/AIDS and work with PLWH, our clergy were trained and provided additional information in the field of domestic violence prevention and family well being. With the involvement of key foreign specialists we organized seminars and meetings on Diaconal education, Church-State Relations, ART periodical meetings became common practice and instrument of exchanging innovative ideas and new trends in social and diaconal work”. Armenia Round Table, WCC Armenia Round Table Foundation. Annual Report 2013 (Yerevan, 2013), p. 3.
families and communities in general, as an important expression of transformative action.

Regarding the empowerment of priests more specifically, through their biblical-theological formation, Nazaryan shared the experience that on the 1 October 2014 he participated in the defense of a Masters in Theology thesis of Levon, a candidate to the priesthood, at the Gevorgyan Theological Seminary of the AAC. For the first time a thesis was defended that covers both the Theological and Practical Aspects of Diakonia in Armenia in the 21st Century.

Commenting on this experience the ART’s executive director argued that, “the understanding of diakonia as one of the most important functions of the Church, is formed in Armenia already and we, the ART, were one of the bodies that helped to formulate this understanding ... I am very happy to see, that after the Soviet era, not only this practical dimension is being rescued, but also the theological understanding through research work is also re-emerging and now we have these two pillars together, when we are dealing with diakonia”.495

Nazaryan went on to say, “We want to empower all priests in Armenia, for them to work not only on missionary work, but also on diakonia”. On this regard, he quoted His Holiness the Catholicos of the AAC who expressed in the annual meeting he holds with all clergy, that the diaconal work should be the essence of their ministry and practically all priests should be involved in this task. Therefore when they graduate in the seminary should get in their diploma a certificate on diaconal work.

Nazaryan also pointed to another form of empowerment—spiritual empowerment—carried-out by the Church but also with a decisive participation of the ART. He said, “The liturgy is, of course, empowering spiritually, and the classical Orthodox concept of the Liturgy after the Liturgy is present in the local parishes”.496

And finally, more intentionally combining both notions in order to build the Empowering Diakonia model, he reflected, “A good diaconal project should respond to two principles, namely, it should be participatory and it should sustainable as well. If you meet these two conditions you are on the safe side. We are not interested to start a

495 Notes from a Skype interview on 2 October 2014.
496 Notes from a Skype interview on 2 October 2014.
project in a particular location that disappears if we leave the place. This is indeed a very important aspect of empowerment, since it entitles participation, ownership, and self-sustainability”, he underlined.

In conclusion, empowerment provides both the inspiration and the technical tools to better serve the people in need, which, unfortunately, are not very few, for them to be protagonists of the change needed. As one of the ART’s Capacity Building booklets highlights: “Knowledge Leads to Change”. And this transformation of the society that the ART is seeking to achieve can be defined as Karin Nazaryan put it in his presentation of the 2012-2013 bi-annual report, quoting this vision of the prophet Isaiah, and hoping that it becomes a reality in the lives of his people:

They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people, and My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth children for trouble; for they shall be the descendants of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them (Is. 65:21-23).

Conclusions. Armenia – Diaconal Ministry as Restoring Values

The following building blocks have been identified, having reflected on and analyzed the information provided in relation to the Armenian Round Table, and resulting from the logic of the Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia:

1. Vision. The ART’s documents and activities are enthused by a vision that pursues an empowering diakonia action, seeking life in abundance, peace justice, equality of rights and opportunity, as well as dignity for the Armenian society, predominantly for the most vulnerable.

2. Normative. The Armenian churches are urged to engage in a pastoral and diaconal action towards the restoration of values, which are founded on the values of God’s Kingdom and traditional Christian standards. They comprise love, faith and hope, considering that each and every human being has been created in God’s image and likeness and therefore deserves to be treated with respect and equally. Consequently the churches are pressed to rebuild these

497 Notes from a Skype interview on 2 October 2014.
498 ART, WCC Armenia Round Table Foundation. Annual Report 2013, p. 3.
values, in word and deed, as a distinctive contribution for the transformation of the nation.

3. **Needs.** In order to address more creatively and effectively the emerging and pressing necessities of the Armenian population, the greatest need is for all churches and the civil society in general to work ecumenically, in unity and complementarity, towards a common goal of restoring values. This joint effort enables the sharing resources, experience and networks, seeking sustainability, in a situation of vulnerability. Among the needs that the ART is tackling in coordination with other partners, are integrated community development and diakonia; capacity building; regional peace and reconciliation; as well as emergency preparedness and response.

4. **Context.** The Armenian context is characterized by a situation of increasing impoverishment and polarization at different levels, mainly between the largest cities and the rural areas. There is a growing involvement of the churches to serve the people. The churches in general and the ART in particular are intentionally working in order to reduce dependency on financial aid from abroad and seeking creative forms of self-sustainability.

5. **Transformative.** The ART and related churches analyzed are very committed in their situation of transition, working towards a restoration of values, leading to transformation. Accordingly, they are seeking a value based and sustainable society, with the irreplaceable participation of the civil society of which the churches are part. This transformation seeks holistic development by addressing both the causes and consequences of poverty in order to eradicate it, through the empowerment. This process enables more intentionally the priests, pastors and their wives, in order to be better equipped for facilitating the social services of their parishes and of the wider community. It also includes the formation and capacity development of the local communities in general, working towards the nation’s transformative justice.

In synthesis, the Armenian Round Table is engaged in a diaconal endeavor, together with churches and related partners, focusing on the pastoral ministry of restoring values and empowering the leaders and the *laos*, the whole people of God, in order to work together towards a transformed and just society.
Conclusions

Applying the *Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia* to the study of various local diaconal projects in each one of the countries reviewed has helped to tackle the second research question of this thesis. This investigation, therefore, has enhanced our learning with regard to diakonia and empowerment from the perspective of these local experiences and practices in the current world’s situation of increasing asymmetry and impoverishment. It has verified the relevance and has further contributed to a broader understanding of the *Five Dimensions* from the standpoint of these local and contemporary practical capabilities.

In other words, as tested throughout this chapter, when I relate more intentionally, at the grassroots’ level, the understanding of empowerment to the concept of diakonia, this practice of service becomes more genuine, spontaneous, popular and more participatory. This has been contrasted with the general debates on Christian social practice at the global level where dealing with issues like inequality and the asymmetry of power relations, seem to be endless, without getting anywhere. But they can be addressed more effectively and resourcefully at the local level where the congregations practice their witnessing service, connecting with people, relating to one another in transformative practices.

It is therefore crucial to reaffirm time and again the fact that the research on social services was conducted not only at the local stage, but deliberately focusing on diaconal projects, *vis-à-vis* secular social ventures. There was hence an intentional attempt to study the social work performed by congregations, most of them connected historically with the WCC. The added value observed in the performance of these faith-based communities was the fact that it is considered as part of God’s mission entrusted to them in order to make a difference in this world. It grows out of the conviction that God who sends out to serve also empowers from within, through the liturgy and through a spirituality of commitment to the gospel, in order to serve “the least of these”. It is inspired by biblical-theological reflection as well, that provides a unique motivation to assist as channels of God’s grace in the world, to further serve those, particularly in need, as serving Jesus Christ himself.

Hence, it has been very interesting to analyze and compare the diverse expressions of the visions, norms, needs, contexts and transformations with regards to empowerment
and diakonia in these countries, and at the same time, to appreciate how the common denominator of all four of them has been present. Indeed, we have seen in this chapter, for instance, the commonality of the reading the signs of the times, in situations of extreme vulnerability, in societies in transition and working towards transformation, in *participatory nations* with a decisive involvement and participation of the people, mainly of the marginalized, to improve their living conditions.

This cohesion has been expressed in the titles or emphases identified for each country, on the one hand, by acknowledging diaconal action as ministries (very often in the Bible the original Greek word diakonia --διακονία—is translated into English as ministry, e.g. Ac. 20:24), while at the same time their specificities have been highlighted as *Pathfinding* (Cuba), *Sanctuaries of Peace* (Colombia), *Prophetic Action* (South Africa) and *Restoring Values* (Armenia).

On this regard, a relevant factor for the completion of this research has been the mediation of the *reflective practitioners*, who not only provided the data and information from their respective projects, but also have shared their valuable analysis and biblical-theological reflections based on their practical experiences, involvement and commitment to the gospel and to their people.

In summary, the result of this investigation has provided helpful data that has qualitatively complemented the findings of the previous chapter where the historical development of diakonia and empowerment in the ecumenical movement was analyzed. The outcome of this research, both at the global stage and local level has revealed a number of *building blocks* as important raw materials to build the *Empowering Diakonia* model, which will be the next phase of this thesis.
Chapter V. The Empowering Diakonia Model, a Practical Application for Local Congregations

Introduction
This chapter is the core section of the thesis. Its main purpose is to design the Empowering Diakonia model, as a new pragmatic and operational method for service and transformation at the level of the local projects. Hence, it will try to address the dissertation’s third set of research questions, namely, How to respond to the need of bridging gaps between theory and practice, in relation to diakonia and empowerment, by designing the Empowering Diakonia model? And how to implement this model at the local congregations? Consequently it is an architectural exercise of conceiving and building a new model that interrelates both diakonia and empowerment in a cross-fertilizing manner, as a way of achieving a more self-sustainable and effective service of the churches together and in their respective contexts.

The building blocks that are being used as the raw material to construct this model are the result of applying the Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia, as a tool for diagnosis and analysis of the data discovered in the previous two chapters of the dissertation. Namely, chapter III dealt with The Foundation and Identity of Diakonia and Empowerment in the Ecumenical Movement at an international level, analyzing primarily the 1986 Global Consultation on Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service, Diakonia 2000. Called to be Neighbors, held in Larnaca (Cyprus); the 1987 El Escorial (Spain) Consultation on Koinonia and finally, the 2012 Conference on Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in the Twenty-First Century, held in Colombo (Sri Lanka). The following chapter was a Research Among Local Congregations and Projects implemented in Cuba, Colombia, South Africa and Armenia.

In the general introduction of the thesis reference was made to the book A Fundamental Practical Theology. Descriptive and Strategic Proposals, written by Don S. Browning, which provided the methodological tools to conceive the Five Dimensions mentioned above. Hence Browning’s dimensions have been an essential tool not only to interrelate both the theory and practice, but also as a helpful diagnosis instrument for analysis, description and interpretation. The application of this same logic in the thesis has been a
helpful tool for articulating a reflected understanding, in this particular case, of both diakonia and empowerment, moving from practice to theory and back to practice.

Consequently, the *Five Dimensions* scheme is being referred to in three different phases of the dissertation, namely: (a) in chapter I (the general introduction) where the levels are explained and unpacked; (b) as a facilitating tool for the research, diagnosis and analysis of data, carried-out in chapters III and IV; and finally (c) in the current chapter, forward looking, helping to design the *Empowering Diakonia* model as a proposal for planning effectively diaconal action, as well as implementing and assessing its performance and impact.

In other words, this current chapter of the thesis will contain basically a synthesis and analysis of the *building blocks* of the two previous chapters, defining both empowerment and diakonia, which will lead to the design the *Empowering Diakonia* model. The final portion of the chapter will include some practical proposals for the application of the model at the local congregations, based mainly on a selection of recommendations made at the WCC global gatherings, analyzed in chapter III.

**The Empowering Diakonia Model. Practical Synthesis and Analysis of the Building Blocks**

In this portion the reader will observe how elements of the *Empowering Diakonia* model will start to emerge, as the *Five Dimensions* are being unpacked. It will be noted that the components related to the first two dimensions (visional and normative) are more generic or common to all contexts in general, whereas the three others (needs, context and transformative) can be applied or adapted more intentionally to the particular settings.

**A. The Visional Dimension**

The vision contains elements that have a potential for empowering people, it denotes what is dearest to them, e.g. the appreciation of the image of God who cares and promotes justice. This vision is inclusive, i.e. any person who belongs to this faith, in principle is authorized and enabled to be part of the diaconal commitment.

The various events and projects analyzed reveal very important visions, as one of the most crucial dimensions to provide meaning for diaconal action and to facilitate the
planning, performance and evaluation of local projects. For example, the *Larnaca Vision* of diakonia is based on the struggle for dignity and justice, by the relegated, accompanied by ecumenical solidarity. It seeks to empower the people for strengthening their forces of autonomy and self-reliance and, as churches, to be the servant body of Christ. This ecclesiology recognizes the work of the Holy Spirit as a sustaining force and the holy Eucharist as a source of power for fellowship.

It is very interesting that this Eucharist *ethos* is a recurring theme in the various WCC events in relation to diakonia. To mention another example, the El Escorial vision has been identified as a biblically rooted call to be a Eucharist community of sharing, forging relationships based on justice, mutuality, power sharing, participation, empowerment and accountability. Therefore, the theological vision of El Escorial remains a rich source of inspiration for our understanding of ecumenical diakonia. Sharing in solidarity requires the building of just relationships, addressing the imbalances of power and accessing fairly both human and material resources so that life may be shared.

This is one of the reasons why the participants at the Colombo conference seemed to uphold a vision that reaffirms their allegiance to the God of life that empowers, particularly the marginalized, to defeat the powers of Empire and to transform the world towards the values of God’s kingdom. Hence, what the world traditionally considers the margins of society, and therefore the object of the church’s diaconal action, is actually the center of God’s interest and thus, a preferential focus of God’s kingdom to come.

Nevertheless, observing and even admiring these visions coming from global gatherings, when we go to the practice, at the grassroots level, we encounter oftentimes a different story, i.e. that they are actually hard to implement, or in some cases, hardly implemented. For example, taking into consideration the division among some churches one may wonder to what extent can actually the holy Eucharist be “a source of power for fellowship”. So, among many challenges, the churches are called to overcome the divisions and be faithful to the vision of unity. How can the churches work and struggle to feed the people when, in many cases there are not even willing to sit down and share in the Lord’s Table, which precisely is a source of power for fellowship? Consequently, again, these visions are incentives to be self-critical and therefore self-empowering for diaconal action.
Another important vision that provides meaning to further understand the contexts where the churches are serving is the one of the Cuban projects, where they carry out a relevant *pathfinding* role, in a changing society. In a situation where empowerment of the civil society is paramount, due to the decentralization of the state’s economy, the purpose of the churches is to play a pioneering role, enabling empowerment from within, emerging from the Cuban civil society as such and providing meaning and purpose, founded on the gospel of Jesus Christ, for the lives of hopeless people.

Not less important is the role of the Colombian churches that are enthused by the vision of *Sanctuaries of Peace*, reading the signs of the times in the present *kairos*, empowered to overcome violence and to work towards a culture a peace. It also inspires the active engagement of the churches in social care, and in public/political advocacy towards building dignity and respect of human rights, in a situation of violence and armed conflict. This is a prophetic task that accompanies the people by denouncing abuses and injustices, as well as announcing the good news of God’s kingdom.

Another prophetic vision was identified in the South African context as well, where the churches, convened by the Diakonia Council, *speak truth to power*, when it is abusive and absolute. This is so remarkable that the main emphasis of this dissertation’s analysis of this country is *Diaconal Ministry as Prophetic Action*; hence, the vision is founded in the Christian faith, a relevant liberating factor, firstly from apartheid and currently from impoverishment. On the other hand, the work seeking life in abundance, peace with justice, equality of rights and opportunities, as well as dignity for the Armenian society, principally for the most vulnerable, was the vision identified for the churches in that country. At the same time, solely the churches cannot implement this vision rather; it is done in partnership with other actors and agents of the civil society.

An opposite approach and therefore could be considered a negative understanding of empowerment, can be taken from Obama’s remarks on U.S.–Cuba relations, on 17 December 2014, when he emphasized, “… With the changes I’m announcing today, it will be easier for Americans to travel to Cuba, and Americans will be able to use American credit and debit cards on the island. Nobody represents America’s values better than the American people, and I believe this contact will ultimately do more to empower the Cuban people”, accessed on 7 February 2015, ([http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/12/17/statement-president-cuba-policy-changes](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/12/17/statement-president-cuba-policy-changes)). Obama’s words can be perceived as paternalistic and even imperialistic, since he suggests an empowerment process that is imported (and can even be imposed) from abroad loaded with a meaning completely foreign to the history and idiosyncrasy of the Cuban people, and hence violating its sovereignty. Of course, the civil society of the Island needs to be further empowered, as it has been noted in this thesis, but, as Freire suggests, following a genuine process of *conscientization* of the Cuban reality in order to produce transformation from within.

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In summary the vision for *Empowering Diakonia* is inspired by the Trinity, grounded in theological reflection and in a spiritual-mystical practice that seeks solidarity and the building of just relationships through reading critically and prophetically the signs of the times.

### B. The Normative Dimension

In the analysis of both the WCC global events as well as the local diaconal projects many biblical paradigms emerged as a normative guidance. Starting with the Larnaca event, a very significant prescriptive dimension was *Diakonia as our response to the Crucified Lord*, i.e. the spirit of the cross as a liberating power to serve,\(^{500}\) as the meeting point of the church’s faith and social engagement; therefore one of the ultimate goals of diakonia is serving to reconcile the world, even when the *logic* of the world is not inclined to accept it.\(^{501}\) Other biblical paradigms identified were *The Samaritan Diakonia*, by opting for life, through *kenosis*, following the example of Jesus (Php. 2:7-8), exercised in unity (Eph. 6), respecting others and reading the signs of the times (Lk. 5).

Both these biblical normative principles of humility and contrition, as well as working in unity as pre-requisites for diakonia were present at El Escorial as well. The participants at this gathering noted that diaconal engagement requires repentance to promote the ecumenical sharing of resources, by pursuing a holistic approach of mission/development on the one hand and of spiritual/material resources, on the other.

This holistic understanding compels a radical new awareness towards empowerment that enables all God's people to bring their sharing together, affirming their dignity and capability to be themselves. It is required to build this understanding on solid Biblical foundations, focusing, e.g. on the *covenant*, the *body* and the *Eucharist* as holistic and costly paradigms for sharing life in community.

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\(^{501}\) Interesting here is the quote of the Apostle Paul: “For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1Co. 1:18).
In this same line, working towards the unity of the body of Christ, a pressing demand was made in Colombo towards a faithful response to God’s call, urging the church to be an inclusive diaconal community, in order to fulfill its witnessing service. Its members are empowered by the Holy Spirit with life-affirming values to exercise the power of service over the power of domination, enabling and nurturing possibilities of life for all, by witnessing to God’s transforming grace in the world through Jesus Christ.

Some of these normative values were present at the local projects as well. One of the findings in the Cuban situation was the call to serve in unity, ecumenically, to the extent that it was considered a moral obligation as one of the most effective ways to help the people in need. Unfortunately this historical ecumenical spirit and practice is increasingly threatened by the intrusion of evangelical denominations and Christian fundamentalist groups which enter the country—mainly from the USA—with a lot of financial resources, trying to buy pastors and leaders for their own cause, but, in general terms, there is awareness of this situation among the historical churches in order to be vigilant and face the situation resolutely.

One of the most outstanding diaconal requirements of the Colombian churches is the defense of life in a context of violence, death, violation of human rights, internal displacement and disregard for human dignity, for more than half a century. A weakness encountered in the study of the Colombian context is the division among the churches, both in terms of their understanding of the situation, and consequently, of their involvement, but at the same time, there are many ecumenical initiatives to unite this effort to build together a culture a peace.

A relevant strength and normative feature of the Diakonia Council of Churches is to deepen the Biblical and socio-political understanding of justice in the South African context, and to urge its constituency to practice it in unity. Here again, the churches are urged to be more effective in their prophetic diaconal ministry by working together, in collaboration, rather than competing against each other. This united engagement, facilitated by the DCC, also provides the necessary moral authority that the society seeks to receive from the churches.

And finally, the Diaconal Ministry as Restoring Values, in a post-Soviet era, is a crucial role that the churches are playing in Armenia, convened by the Round Table. Due to the
historical and prominent presence of the churches, this is indeed an important strength, attempting to rebuild love, faith and hope, considering that each and every human being has been created in God’s image and likeness and therefore deserves to be treated with respect and equally in the Armenian society. Nevertheless, a rather intra-ecclesial understanding of values could weaken it, but at the same time, one of the crucial contributions of the ART is to expand this concept and action in general, towards a interdisciplinary approach and collaboration.

In other words, Empowering Diakonia is rooted in the authority of the Bible and as such, it is a core component of being church, an essential part of its mission to proclaim in words and deeds the abundant life that Jesus Christ brings for all. It also entails working in unity within the Christian communities and other actors, as well as developing the resources and assets in collaboration with other sciences. Therefore, similarly to the vision, these norms should not be strictly limited to the Judeo-Christian tradition, rather they ought to include and embrace other secular values, e.g. national legislations, defense of human rights, struggle for dignity, among others.

C. The Need-Oriented Dimension

The church is motivated and challenged by the reality of the people, particularly of the excluded and the most vulnerable, when their dignity is being neglected, in order, not only to provide care and to improve this situation, but also to be empowered by them. As Kjell Nordstokke underscores, “In processes of empowerment there is special importance given to the lowly and seemingly insignificant. There is an inversion of importance in the sense that the last are given the role of being the first, as their insight and power count most”. 502 Consequently, the church has the responsibility of facilitating mutual care and a process of shared empowerment in the community where all its members, regardless of their position, or even of their educational level, can both learn and, at the same time, contribute to the common knowledge and wisdom.

The needs of the people feed-in crucial elements of judgment to understand better the situation where the churches are called to serve the people, but at the same time, the churches themselves have needs to meet in order to serve better those surviving in the margins of society, victims of situations of injustice. For this, it is paramount to work on

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capacity building to improve the structures, but also to develop the infrastructures, and to achieve the sustainability of these churches.

From a global perspective, the majority of the participants at the Larnaca consultation came from situations of tensions and crisis, especially in the global South, and their voices echoed the cries of their people. They focused more purposefully on the needs for ecumenical sharing, towards effective, preventive and comprehensive action, seeking justice and dignity. Need was expressed to develop what could be called a collective empowerment process by which the global North can learn from the resilience, spirituality and indigenous forms of service and empowerment from the South. There was also a call to further strengthen the South-South dialogue and cooperation.

At El Escorial it was highlighted that the church needs to overcome the tension between its language of sharing and of its established structures. Also to be aware of each other’s needs and gifts through an empowering process, to further discover the vast human and spiritual resources, what Kjell Nordstokke and other authors would call today the assets, of its own communities. This sharing practice seeks self-reliance predominantly of the poor, equal participation, decentralization decision-making processes and the creation of networks to reverse the trend of dependency.

At the same time, a diakonia that is oriented to the needs mainly of those surviving in the margins of society, victims of situations of injustice, was mentioned in Colombo. It is paramount for the churches to work side-by-side with them as subjects of diaconal action, rather than objects, sharing in the planning and actions where they participate actively in the improvement of their own living conditions. The capacity of resisting and struggling of the marginalized persons, are important assets that unveil the presence and power of God in their lives, which can be shared with other persons in need.

The various researches made at the local level showed countless needs that the churches face in their diaconal endeavor. In some cases, there was a call to address these necessities holistically, i.e. responding both to the material and spiritual needs of the population. This was definitively the case of Cuba, where many churches, mainly the historical and ecumenical ones, try to respond to situations of hopelessness and

existential emptiness. Here people in need profit from the services provided by the churches, both the liturgical services, as well as the material services. At the same time, the churches face needs themselves, mainly in the area of competence, in order to address these necessities in the society, in a sustainable manner. The Council of Churches is attempting to address this creatively not only with its own resources, but also facilitating a process of mutual empowerment where the churches can share their experiences and learn from each other.

With regards to the Colombian situation, there is an apparent lack of resources at all three levels: financial, institutional and human; therefore, there is a need to further discover and unlock their own assets. Consequently, some churches are focusing on further developing sustainable projects; strengthening their organizational capacity; and empowering pastors and the laity in general to exercise better their respective leadership roles. However, in this capacity development process an important need was identified, which was a clear focus on prioritizing the empowerment of women.

On the other hand, in South Africa there is again, the need for self-reliance and sustainability, e.g. the case of the Diakonia Council of Churches. The strengthening of its institutional capacity, the empowerment of its constituencies and a stronger commitment and ownership of the council’s work is paramount towards achieving this goal to serve more effectively the needs of the people. The nature of this particular organization, i.e. of being a fellowship of serving churches, provides a great potential and opportunity to further increase to achieve this, through a uniting effort, in order to be more effective.

Similarly, in Armenia, in order to address creatively and constructively the needs of the population, in a critical situation of vulnerability and scarcity, there is a great necessity to serve in unity and complementarity as well. This joint effort enables the sharing of resources, experience and networks, further seeking sustainability. Among the needs or challenges that the Round Table is tackling in coordination with other partners, are integrated community development and diakonia; capacity building; regional peace and reconciliation; as well as emergency preparedness and response. And here again, there is a substantial need of reaching a common goal of restoring values, which is, in fact, the main focus of the research in this country.
Agnes Abuom, reflecting on the relationship between empowerment and diakonia points out, with regards to this role of the churches, the following, “Each congregation can articulate its diaconal values, principles, approaches and interventions. Shifting diakonia from a funding paradigm to a church lived paradigm where Christians value their daily engagement with justice and peace issues beginning with their local congregations and moving upward to national regional and global level. The focus would then be more on biblical stewardship of resources and the sharing of the same”. Consequently there is recognition of the unique capacity of the churches to identify and to try to meet the needs of the people, through their values and practices.

Hence, moved by a holistic approach to material as well as spiritual necessities, *Empowering Diakonia* addresses creatively both their causes and consequences, following the ministry of Jesus Christ, for which the churches also address their own needs to serve better, working side-by-side with the needy, in order for them to unlock their own assets, supporting their empowerment as subjects of change, equipping them for self-development/reliance, in order to share both power and resources.

**D. The Contextual Dimension**

Of course, the contextual dimension was the one that addressed more intentionally the situation where the churches are placed to serve. The recognition of the social-political-economic-environmental context, both at global level, *macro-diakonia* (through advocacy/prophetic diakonia) and locally, *micro-diakonia* (e.g. the Larnaca conference’s theme *Called to be Neighbors* was hence an invitation to the congregations), for diaconal engagement, was highlighted in various events and projects. The context also informs more purposely the empowering efforts by equipping for self-development/reliance and people’s participation.

In numerous presentations at El Escorial some close connections were made between the sharing of resources and the sharing of power, which, as it was analyzed, can vary according to the different contexts. E.g. one issue is to share power in a context of asymmetrical and hierarchical power relationships, and a completely different issue is to really share power in a situation where the decision-making processes are taken in a

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504 Agnes Abuom, elected moderator of the WCC’s Central Committee at the Busan 10th Assembly, had attended the Larnaca conference and was interviewed for this thesis on 19 March 2014.
participatory manner, among the members of a community, that have the opportunity of organizing themselves.

Therefore, an empowering process enabling a wide participation of the people, to share power and resources, especially in the local situations, can address both. Sharing also takes place in the struggles for justice in conflict situations where the empowerment of the impoverished occurs to overcome the root causes of poverty and powerlessness and where their self-determination and self-reliance can become real.

In many instances, there was a reassertion of the essential prerequisite to take into consideration very seriously the context, both local and global where diaconal engagement is being exercised, particularly in solidarity with those excluded, as it was acknowledged at the Colombo conference as well. In other words, the context is the situation that helps to focus better the social action of the church, working in partnership with other actors, disciplines and sciences, contributing in faith and in hope, as added values in this struggle.

In other words, this dimension considers a theology and a praxis that are contextual; i.e. informed and guided by the social-political-economic-ecological context in which the churches are serving. Therefore, diaconal involvement is concerned with the community, society in general and the environment as well. Service is not pursued in abstraction but is fully empowered and focused creatively on the surrounding reality and challenges in today’s world. The situation where the church is immersed activates her values to reflect upon and to act through an interdisciplinary approach in order to regenerate the lives of the people.

At the same time, the context also informs empowering efforts by equipping for self-development/reliance and people’s participation, in order to share both power and resources in their respective communities. Sharing also takes place in the struggles for justice in conflict situations where the empowerment of the impoverished occurs to overcome the root causes of poverty and seemingly powerlessness, where their self-determination and self-reliance can become real.

Having said all this, when observing the curriculum of many theological institutions, one gets the impression that the students receive a very solid formation on biblical
hermeneutics, i.e. to learn the relevant instruments to read and to interpret the biblical text. Nevertheless, some of the abilities that are apparently lacking are the ones to read and interpret the contexts as well, and this is even projected to the churches.  

Interestingly enough even in Sunday Schools a lot is being taught on Bible, theology, church history, tradition and doctrines, but obviously, not much on how to interpret the surrounding reality of the churches. Taking into consideration the relevance of the context in order to fine-tune the diaconal efforts, churches, in many cases, need further preparation to address this more effectively.

Synthesizing this dimension it can be affirmed that Empowering Diakonia is guided by the social-political-economic-ecological context in which the churches are located, hence it is concerned with the community, society in general and the environment as well, both for service and empowerment, seeking a koinonia of peace and justice.

**E. The Transformative Dimension**

Transformation denotes a change of attitude or of a trend that can take place through what the Larnaca Declaration calls “the transforming power of Christian service”\(^\text{506}\) e.g. focusing more on Empowering Diakonia, on the churches’ participation dealing with service, rather than depending solely of external aid to serve the people. Hence, it is not by chance that “The [Larnaca] consultation underlined the importance of the local church as agent of change. It is there that people decide to get involved in social action and struggle. It is there that youth and women must secure more space for participation and involvement in decision-making”\(^\text{507}\).

At El Escorial there were also concrete references to social engagement, empowered through a sharing community. The members of the body of Christ live in a fundamental relationship to one another by which the exchange of experiences and spiritual life precede the sharing of material resources.

This empowerment process is meant to produce transformation, living-out the values of the kingdom, i.e. promoting justice and human dignity, mainly among the

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\(^{505}\) Carlos Ham, “The Homiletical Tripod. A Guide for Lay Preachers. A Project for the Doctor of Ministry Degree” (Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 1999), p. 25. This same point expressed above is being argued in this dissertation quoted in the current footnote.

\(^{506}\) Poser, p. 124.

\(^{507}\) Poser, pp. vii-viii.
impoverished. Consequently, one of the most effective means of achieving transformation could be through empowerment, especially of the community and by the community, i.e. taking place not only personally, but also at the communal level, predominantly when it occurs through the spiritual bonds among the members of the body of Christ. This, of course, may sound idealistic, since the truth of the matter is that human relationships can prove to be very complex, due, precisely to power games and other manifestations of human sin. Nevertheless, through a *spirituality of transformation*, i.e. by praying together and working together, it can be achievable and it actually takes place in various communities. A concrete example of this that has been mentioned in various events is the notion and the practice of the *liturgy after the liturgy*, considering the liturgy as an empowering source that is present both in the Sunday service at the sanctuaries, as well as the service to the people, throughout the week.

Furthermore, the portion entitled *Challenges and Opportunities* of the Colombo statement, lifts the notion and practice of diakonia that works towards change, grounded in a *spirituality of transformation*, which is one of the main topics of the declaration, in fact, there is a whole section called *Diakonia for Transformation* that further down will be quoted and analyzed. For this, a process of re-conversion to the God of life in Jesus Christ who gave his life for the impoverished, the exploited, the victims of injustice and exclusion, is vital. This empowers the church for resisting the power of the Empire and transforming society by proposing and living alternative values and visions towards justice and peace. Additionally, the fourth section of the statement proposes twenty-four practical recommendations regarding diakonia addressed to the local congregations, to the larger church bodies and to the WCC and similar international organizations.

Some of these emphases and various others were highlighted in the study on Colombia, as well, where the notion and practice of transformation has been identified with the diaconal ministry as *Sanctuaries of Peace*, i.e. to transform the society so that people can live in a culture and reality of peace. And the following actions were cited by which this transformation can be brought about, namely by: sharing unconditionally the good news of the gospel; participating in social movements; empowering the vulnerable and displaced victims to defend their rights; but also defending the rights of the community through political and social advocacy; building communities of new relationships,
seeking equity and inclusivity; and ultimately transforming the society towards dignity, peace with justice.

Of course, many of these means or instruments for transformation can be embraced by the diaconal effort by the churches in other countries, like in the case of South Africa, where a transformed society, fostering social justice, peace, healing and reconciliation, with the active participation of the people has also being a long-standing dream and struggle. But perhaps their main goal is to realize and make possible the vision of the Diakonia Council of Churches, to accomplish “a transformed society actively working for social justice”. A practical way of achieving this social justice by the churches is thorough a spirituality of transformation, which among many examples can be the Good Friday celebration, a procession that brings many denominations together for prayer and joint action.

In various events and projects examined there were concerns expressed by participants and by the reflective practitioners, respectively, to not limit the proceedings of events and projects to theoretical or theological reflections and even to simply produce nice declarations, but also to implement accordingly what is being discussed. And, of course, in some cases, even plan of actions were produced to strategize in order to achieve a particular aim.

Then, the reflective practitioners identified some other strategies in order to achieve transformation locally. E.g. in Cuba among the plans mentioned were strengthening the initiatives of capacity building for diakonia, enabling ecumenical networking of churches and interreligious cooperation with diaconal projects and reinforcing dialogue among the churches, the state and with other social actors in the area of service. This work is being planned and implemented by the Council of Churches. Whereas one of the main strategies of the Colombian churches reviewed is to re-read creatively and with new lenses, the trilogy of the Biblical text, the tradition (both popular and ecclesial), as well as the local context, in order to defend life.

In the case of Armenia an apparent dilemma was observed on this issue. On the one hand, there is a strong commitment of the churches to restore the values, many of which were considered lost during the Soviet era, and at the same time, to move forward, transforming the society, on the other. One can wonder to what extent is this restoration
too dangerous because it could become too unilateral or too backwards looking. Perhaps it is a difficult choice to make between two seemingly contradictory emphases. Nevertheless, maybe a viable strategy to transform the society is precisely to do so by preaching in word and deeds, these traditional values of the kingdom which are at the same time transforming, such as justice, joy, respect of the other’s rights, dignity, love, among others.

And, of course, as it is the case in Cuba and other countries, the transformation process in Armenia seeks to enable the churches, and more intentionally in their case, the priests, pastors and their wives, in order to be better equipped for facilitating the social services of their parishes and of the wider community. It also includes the formation and capacity development of the local communities in general, working towards the nation’s transformative justice.

All this means that the process of Empowering Diakonia can bring about a course of transformation that involves spirituality, life style and a transformative praxis, i.e. it empowers for transformation. And the fundamental goal of Empowering Diakonia is to reach koinonia, to build inclusive and just communities, through transformation, beginning with the kenosis and a spirituality of transformation of the churches themselves, in order to change perspectives and attitudes through popular participation.

**The Building of the Empowering Diakonia Model**

So far I have been focusing on a heuristic meaning of the model, i.e. a way of exploring the material, as a tool or a method in order to find good answers to the research questions, but now, in this chapter, the Empowering Diakonia model will be presented as a platform or a point of reference for diaconal reflection and praxis, both at the level of ecumenical cooperation and at the local congregations. Therefore, as a way to approach the question of relevant diakonia in today’s world now I will embark in the designing of the model and, again, using the raw material the Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia, constructed with the building blocks. Consequently, the first meaning brings to the findings in this research, and these findings bring us to the current understanding of the model.

In the ecumenical movement several quotes can be found that point to the crucial relationship between empowerment and diakonia, by which there is a cross-fertilization
among the two, i.e. a call can be found for the churches to work towards achieving empowerment to lift human dignity, self-sustainability and transformation by the own people. An outstanding example can be this one: “Empowerment is at the heart of diaconal and justice-seeking activities and can be seen as an overarching characteristic or goal of much of the work of the churches and church-related organizations. Empowerment activities in a Christian framework address the dignity of humanity and reveal to each person and group their inherent gifts and abilities so that they may actively work towards transformation”.508

Consequently and observing closely the outcomes of the previous section, the Empowering Diakonia model can be defined as the driving force that leads local congregations towards self-fulfillment as social actors, renouncing any power over people, but rather through God’s power to serve with the people, through acts of effective love, and serving human needs, for individual and social transformation for mutuality and justice. Of course, this empowerment process is not limited to the congregations, but also includes the wider communities.

In the general introduction of the thesis, the hypothesis was developed that even when the ecumenical movement both globally and locally, has tackled the issues of empowerment and diakonia in theory as well as in practice, there is no conceptual framework, i.e. a basic structure underlying a theoretical unit or concept that merges both concepts together. Indeed, having made the research for this thesis, in my judgment I have not found any agreed-upon conceptual framework in these terms described. Hence this model is being proposed as a coherent reflection or a comprehensive way of thinking that binds together both empowerment and diakonia in a system, which can provide a fresh and meaningful vision for the diaconal endeavor.

Again, considering the relevance of these discoveries in relation to the diakonia/empowerment interconnectedness, this Empowering Diakonia model emerges with a dual function. As noted earlier, diakonia is empowering (adjective) for those serving and who are being served, for the latter to be transforming subjects, rather than objects of plain charity; and at the same time the model points to the forces or actions, which actually help to empower (verb) diakonia, e.g. through the Holy Spirit, acting in

capacity building, or the Eucharist, among others. Consequently, diakonia both empowers and is being empowered, in an ongoing process of cross-fertilization and mutual enhancement, seeking transformation towards the values of God’s Kingdom (Ro. 14:17). This cycle on *Empowering Diakonia* can be illustrated by the following graphic:

**The Empowering Diakonia Model**

![Empowering Diakonia Model Diagram]

The model in question proposes that diaconal efforts should take into consideration and ought to apply these *Five Dimensions*, namely, the visional, the normative, the need-oriented, the contextual and the transformative, where there is no hierarchy. Hence, acknowledging the initial explanation given in the general introduction of each one of the dimensions, the designing and the practical implementation of the *Empowering Diakonia* model is conceived, moving in a cyclical manner, as an ongoing spiral, seeking transformation towards a *koinonia* or the *oikoumene*, i.e. a world community where all creatures are included enjoying fullness of life.

Kjell Nordstokke, who points out the following, reaffirms this emphasis on the community, “Empowerment is a process of establishing meaningful relationships. Its goal is not self-realization, as autonomous rational beings, but self-esteem activated and
energized in dignified relations with others”.  

Therefore, this cross-fertilizing relationship between empowerment and diakonia seeks this ultimate goal of creating an inclusive community.

The building of this inclusive and just community is a responsibility of all humankind; where the churches have a unique role to play in this diaconal effort. As Rodolfo Gaede Neto puts it, “Diakonia is the service rendered by those who follow Jesus Christ in the perspective of the via crucis discipleship, being therefore an attitude of faith. It is the service provided to assist persons in situations of suffering as a consequence of the exercise of oppressive power of some people over others. It is the service with a clear prophetic dimension, pointing to the denouncing and the transformation of unjust situations”. In this same line of thought, he goes on to say, “diakonia is defined as the renunciation of power over the people, as a denial of that power. It is the confession of the unique power of God. It is the manifestation of obedience only to the will of God. Therefore, diakonia denies hierarchy and affirms the power-service”.

Precisely this binomial power-service is a very accurate way of defining the Empowering Diakonia model, seeking to enable a power to serve and at the same time a service to empower that the church achieves through “an attitude of faith”, i.e. a spirituality of transformation that embraces the via crucis discipleship. The model particularly enables the people from the margins to become protagonists, to participate actively in the building of a just and inclusive world community.

**The Empowering Diakonia Model. Practical Proposals**

In view of the Empowering Diakonia model and taking into consideration the spirituality of transformation described in the previous section, the following proposals to be implemented in diaconal projects have been extracted mainly from recommendations of WCC diakonia global events analyzed in this thesis (quoted in the

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510 Rodolfo Gaede Neto is a professor of diakonia at the Superior School of Theology (EST) in São Leopoldo, Brazil. His book, *La Diaconía de Jesús. Aporte para la fundamentación teológica de la diaconía en América Latina* (The Diakonia of Jesus. Contribution Towards the Theological Foundation of Diakonia in Latin America) is being used extensively in the continent, by the churches and ecumenical organizations. The volume was written originally in Portuguese, but we have used this Spanish translation.


512 Neto, p. 183.
footnotes). In general terms, practical suggestions from the local projects, highlighted in chapter IV, overlap with these and therefore are understood as implicitly covered by them. These practical proposals can be highlighted for the application of the model, especially in local congregations and diaconal projects at the grass root level.

As far as the visional dimension is concerned, a joint effort of the churches in the South and the North can be carried-out to inform and educate each other, predominantly from a gender perspective, to be better equipped to put into practice a vision of sharing. E.g. the spirituality of transformation can provide more energy to the visions and the expectations in order that sharing can take place. Documents produced both by local congregations as well as the ecumenical movement can be shared and studied jointly to pursue this effort. Also the congregations are called to recognize and affirm the theological significance of diakonia through worship and proclamation among the various congregations in a particular location, with exchange of pulpits and Christian education facilitators. And finally, it is also proposed to advocate for the causes of justice, dignity and peace and for the victims of aggression, displacement and dispossession. This advocacy effort can be pursued with representatives of other religions, NGOs and other organizations of the civil society.

The churches are urged to be uniting communities and to share God’s mission with all people. This promotes spirituality and provides the biblical-theological convictions for the common discipline of ecumenical sharing. In order to deepen and expand this understanding it is recommended that the congregations organize and participate in biblical-theological reflections on God’s mission, diakonia and sharing. Secondly, to address issues of discrimination and exclusion within the church itself and launch campaigns to end the same, both within and outside; develop easily readable Bible study materials on diakonia for pastors and lay people; journey with the people, communities and congregations in their struggles against discrimination and marginalization; and facilitate dialogue with international diaconal agencies to

516 van Beek, p. 41.
encourage patterns of church cooperation and to foster mutual accountability.\textsuperscript{517} And finally, relevant to the normative dimension, diakonia must be based on ethical, social, political, environmental, legal and inter-cultural values, to be faithful to the churches’ overall mission, and be inclusive in its activities, bringing together young people, children and women.\textsuperscript{518} Intercultural readings of the Bible can be organized to jointly learn and exchange this information in order to be mutually supportive among the local diaconal projects.

Focusing on the need-oriented dimension, firstly in order to overcome the dependence syndrome (i.e. the reliance on foreign aid or financial support to carry out diaconal projects) it is recommended to take as the starting point the congregation’s own abundance of assets rather than the scarcity of resources, and the urgent need to address the current maldistribution of those existing resources.\textsuperscript{519} As a starting point it is necessary to encourage and draw up an inventory of the churches’ technical, financial and material resources for diakonia and to work on self-sustainable projects.\textsuperscript{520} Likewise, since the young people around the world are bearing the heavy burden of the world’s pain and injustice, churches need to know and hear their experiences. Young people need solidarity, resources and support through the sharing of resources within the ecumenical movement.\textsuperscript{521} It is recommended, therefore, that the churches prioritize in their budgets and planning the participation of youth organizations and networks in diaconal projects.

Secondly, there is a need to develop policies and programs as well, around burning issues in the congregations, such as HIV/AIDS, disability, poverty, food security and environmental stewardship, among others, highlighting the people’s rights approach. It must pinpoint concrete needs, i.e. serve on the basis of what the communities themselves indicate to be essential to their well-being.

And finally, in order to address the overwhelming need of empowerment through capacity development, the following recommendations can be considered: to engage in

\textsuperscript{519} Poser, p. 119.
\textsuperscript{521} van Beek, p. 33.
diac nal actions with people from different faith communities, learning from each-
other; to encourage and accompany the existing initiatives of the churches, fostering
partnerships, and mobilization of resources wherever necessary and exchanging of
networks to prepare and share models and courses on education for diakonia, within the
framework of an understanding of the mission of the church and ecumenical in
nature.\textsuperscript{522} Methodologically, it should encourage the gathering and building up together
of studies and experiences in the work and changes in practice.\textsuperscript{523} Particularly
concerning theological institutions it is recommended that the churches encourage them
to introduce diakonia as an intentional discipline wherever necessary, and also to initiate
advanced studies and research on relevant diaconal practices. For this it is crucial to
produce and use a curriculum on ecumenical diakonia, as part of theological education
that will help in creating capabilities and in the institutional strengthening of the
churches’ diaconal programs. This curriculum may include, among others, the
methodological tools that will help to plan the institutional development of the churches
(planning, monitoring and evaluation).\textsuperscript{524}

It is essential for the local congregations to develop a \textit{theology of the local context},
which will help to further fine-tune the diaconal work. Such theology will have to take
people in struggle and people’s struggle, and specially the youth, as its starting point.\textsuperscript{525}
In order to develop this, a small commission on theology can be created in the
congregations, with the advice of the pastors, which can work with theologians of other
congregations and denominations since the analysis of the context is a common
denominator of the various confessions. The creation and development of new
ecumenical partnerships locally is also recommended, to enable churches of different
traditions and contexts to enrich one another.\textsuperscript{526}

These partnerships can help to address jointly common challenges, such as people-level
action on environmental issues; the reality of abuse and violence against women at
home, community and church; educate people against alcoholism and substance abuse;

\textsuperscript{522} WCC, “Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in the Twenty First Century. Document Adopted at the
\textsuperscript{523} WCC, \textit{Final Statement of Seminar on Empowerment for Diakonia in Central America and the
\textsuperscript{524} WCC, \textit{Final Statement of Seminar on Empowerment for Diakonia in Central America and the
\textsuperscript{525} Poser, p. 121.
\textsuperscript{526} van Beek, p. 31.
build capacities among members, especially in areas of counseling, de-
addiction programs, educational and employment opportunities, gender sensitivity, etc.;
experiences on sharing resources; encourage expressions of solidarity and mutual
responsibility, especially by bridging the divide between urban and rural, affluent and
poor, established and migrant congregations, among others;\(^{527}\) as well as accompany
grassroots level people’s initiatives for change.\(^{528}\) Correspondingly, it is also proposed
to prepare resources and facilitate processes for inter-church exchange of theological
support for creative diaconal engagement in different contexts.\(^{529}\) In order to implement
this, it is recommended to create joint working groups in order to share experiences and
for mutual support.

And finally, seeking transformation, since the victims of society must be the raison
d’être for diaconal engagement, it is proposed that churches create spaces (joint
working groups) for them to formulate their own needs and the church community must
learn to listen.\(^{530}\) At the same time, the victims also ought to participate in these spaces
working towards the solutions and ultimately to transform their own lives of and of their
communities. Also to create spaces to represent to one another the needs and problems
in relationships where there are no absolute donors, or absolute recipients, but all have
needs to be met and gifts to give, and to work for the structural changes in the
institutions of the North and the South which this calls for.\(^{531}\)

Through a *spirituality of transformation* and practical exercises the churches are
recommended to become open, just, hospitable and inclusive communities.
Furthermore, they must strive to become discrimination-free zones and sanctuaries of
safety and hope\(^{532}\) and recognize the power of solidarity in struggle for transformation
and therefore, enable, encourage and nurture such expressions of solidarity at all
levels.\(^{533}\) Diaconal work must promote processes enabling individuals to be capable of

\(^{527}\) WCC, “Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in the Twenty First Century. Document Adopted at the
\(^{528}\) WCC, “Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in the Twenty First Century. Document Adopted at the
\(^{529}\) WCC, “Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in the Twenty First Century. Document Adopted at the
\(^{530}\) Poser, p. 100.
\(^{531}\) van Beek, p. 29.
\(^{532}\) WCC, “Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in the Twenty First Century. Document Adopted at the
\(^{533}\) WCC, “Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in the Twenty First Century. Document Adopted at the
changing their situation and of promoting the principles of an economy that is inclusive, in the form of cooperatives and associations. And lastly, it is being proposed that strategic planning processes should become essential for the various diaconal expressions and activities. Their starting point should be the actual situation in order to analyze it and intervene in the form of positive change resulting in a more dignified, complete and abundant life, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. These changes must not only be maintained, but should also provide inspiration for the possibility of extending and qualitatively improving such changes.

**Conclusion**

Throughout the thesis I have been working with the *Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia* as a diagnostic tool, as a way of discovering and organizing the data in the form of building blocks and to design the *Empowering Diakonia* model. The main findings can be summarized in these following conclusions.

I have discovered that in the WCC there is not a constant presentation of the vision, rather, it has been evolving, as a process, moving from the emphasis on unity, to Eucharistic, to pilgrimage, while always founded on the allegiance to the God of life. But at the same time, these different accents relate to each other, e.g. when the vision is being built, quite often observation is made of a pilgrimage towards unity, which often times is influenced by the contexts and other factors. Furthermore and often times these trends have had an impact on the ways that diakonia is understood and practiced.

In the various events and projects analyzed an imperative for diakonia has been highlighted, linked to the identity, to the vision and it is an imperative that empowers, that does not exclude, not even the small, i.e. even among the smallest it is expected to have the power to serve and to transform. Furthermore, there is an imperative to be a united and an inclusive diaconal community, empowered by the Holy Spirit with life-affirming values, to exercise the power of service over the power of domination. E.g. this emphasis on unity brings churches together for mutual empowerment in order to become more effective in addressing the needs in their communities, also the

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Eucharistic practices can further nourish spiritually in a common pilgrimage towards *koinonia*, inclusion and justice. Moreover, the emphasis on unity goes beyond the harmony of the churches, seeking the unity of humanity, where whose excluded by unjust systems belong to the wider community.

At the same time, the authority of the Bible has been constantly present in all global events and local projects studied, which has been a relevant normative indicator. Many texts have been cited and interpreted as pertinent paradigms for the diaconal action of the churches, pointing to discipleship and sharing in response to God’s mission. Nevertheless, in spite of these hermeneutical options that have been made, it is also fair to ask how many resources have been devoted for developing a *diaconal reading of the Bible*, or an *intercultural reading of the Bible* focusing on diakonia. Perhaps this is rather small in the churches and therefore some times there are only superficial references to the Bible and to some limited and standard verses, and not so much to a hermeneutical program allowing the biblical message to shape a critical and a powerful understanding of diakonia. Hence the proposals in the previous section of the chapter to reinforce this important and empowering aspect.

The term *unlocking* has been underlined as key word, because frequently, when references are made to the needs, there is a tendency to talk about root causes and in some places and occasions, observations have been made that people have been brought into needs, e.g. some institutions try to invent needs to meet their institutional requirements and to create and maintain dependency, which disempowers people. Organizations like Eurodiaconia are aware of this danger when it underlines, “As part of our holistic and complete care for a person we must include the element of empowerment. Because of our understanding of Diakonia as service, there is a risk that we talk about ‘helping’ people in vulnerable situations instead of supporting, enabling, empowering and facilitating. We must avoid focusing on ourselves as helpers but keep our focus on the service users’ perspectives and seek to be engaged in that perspective rather than our own”.

Consequently, there has been a *logic* of letting the needs to define the situation; nevertheless, it is important also to *unlock* the potential of the people and communities

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to become agents of transformation. This is precisely one of the concerns that the *Empowering Diakonia* model tries to address. Indeed, there is a great need to *unlock* mentalities, which block the sharing of resources (in all its meaning), *unlock* power structures of domination, both in church and society, as well as *unlocking* the power within the people themselves to become agents and subjects of change of their lives and of their communities. This helps the diaconal commitment of the churches in order to be more open, innovative and sustainable, avoiding unhealthy dependences, which create more needs in the first place.

The exploration of the diverse contexts have reminded the churches of the incarnation of God in each and every one of the situations where the churches are serving, lifting the human dignity in all settings. Regarding this dimension, there has been a common denominator in the WCC’s emphasis, trying to follow the example of Jesus incarnate, and it has been to privilege the service to and by those in the margins, precisely the ones that have been excluded by society and even by the churches. This means that the context is the element that reminds the churches engaged in diakonia that are rooted in a socio-political-ecclesial reality; therefore, it is the anchor, the grounding. This consideration of the context is also linked to the other dimensions e.g. the vision, if not, it can become irrelevant and it might create more damage than help. So the knowledge and the taking into consideration of the context, in relation to the other dimensions, is an empowering factor.

And finally, the outcome of the diaconal praxis is not development, but rather, a transformation that is much more comprehensive and holistic and closely linked to all other dimensions. In situations of injustice, action is required, a diaconal pro-action which is transformative. It is a matter of not just charity, or feeding the people, but also of enabling empowerment within the people and the community for transformation. Consequently, this is a transformative action that is not carried out for the people, or on behalf of the people, rather with or by the people, seeking to foster social justice, peace, healing and reconciliation leading to community building.\(^{537}\)

\(^{537}\)The Lutheran World Federation’s booklet ‘Diakonia in Context’ understands that there are three directions of diaconal work, namely, transformation, reconciliation and empowerment. Precisely under the first one, it underlines that “Transformation is clearly a process, but at the same time, transformation envisions the achievement of certain goals, arriving at a new situation where human dignity is more respected with peace and justice for more people...” - LWF, *Diakonia in Context. Transformation,*
Since there is a close interdependence between all five dimensions, e.g. when there is a clear vision and norms, this creates spaces for transformation, according to the respective contexts. The model can also be used for PMER (planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting), when implemented, it can help to see better how important factors facilitate processes of empowerment and diakonia, such are the notions of accompaniment, capacity building, lifting awareness regarding the kairos, theological reflection, spirituality (liturgy after the liturgy), sharing of resources and God’s mission, among others. Consequently, the model links diakonia with empowerment, bringing them together in such a way that the action of the church can seek a full koinonia, a community where the whole creation is embraced and included.

Consequently, these five elements of vision, normativity, needs, context and transformation have provided a methodological framework to design and construct the Empowering Diakonia model, as a useful tool to empower diakonia and at the same time to serve or achieve empowerment. It can be considered and adapted to particular situations where the churches are serving together and where at least these five dimensions can be present.

The Empowering Diakonia model relates to discipleship both at a personal and at a community level, in reference to the people of God, an expression of the mission of the church. At the same time the model is able to dialogue with professional practices in a way that it also becomes professional work, which completes a holistic and integrated picture of the model.

Therefore, summarizing this whole chapter, the Empowering Diakonia model is defined as the driving force that leads, chiefly local congregations, towards self-fulfillment as social actors, renouncing any power over people, rather by sharing power to serve with the people. This dynamic is breath of life (Gn. 2:7) that comes from the Divine Community as revealed by God as the source of power, by Jesus as the presence of God’s power in the world and by the Spirit as the outreaching of God’s power, in order to serve through acts of effective love, for individual, social and ecological transformation towards koinonia.

Reconciliation, Empowerment. The Lutheran World Federation, ed. by Kjell Nordstokke (Geneva, 2009), p. 44.


Chapter VI. Concluding Remarks

It’s all about power, either at the personal level, or at the level of the institutions (including the churches) or nations, the ultimate question is about power. Here I remember Hans-Ruedi Weber’s quote who points out, “Although a wide range of issues and in vastly different situations have many important facets, it seems that dealing with all of them, the matter of power is ultimately the question to be faced”.\footnote{Hans-Ruedi Weber, Power. Focus for a Biblical Theology (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1989), p. ix.} Incidentally, I remember in one of our classes of Pastoral Psychology in the 1980s at the Matanzas seminary in Cuba, our professor René Castellanos, who has formed generations of pastors, used to say, “if you really want to know how the persons are, grant them power”.

Indeed, throughout the years I have discovered time and again the truthfulness of this phrase; if the person is humble, s/he will exercise power discretely, will share power and will use it to serve others; however, if the person is arrogant, ambitious, s/he will use the power absolutely to manipulate and to dominate. Hans de Wit puts it bluntly when he says, “Absolute power corruptions absolutely”.\footnote{Lecture given by Hans de Wit at the WCC Seminar on Empowerment for Diakonia in Central America and the Spanish-Speaking Caribbean, held at the Matanzas Theological Seminary, Cuba – July 2012. The phrase was shared commenting on Gn. 3.}

As I have been observing throughout the thesis, the issue of power—and its inflexion, empowerment—has been a recurrent theme as it relates to diakonia. We saw the quote from Clodovis Boff in the book The Gospel of Power-Service, where he contrasts power-domination with power-service,\footnote{Clodovis Boff, El Evangelio Del Poder-Servicio (Bogotá, Colombia: Confederación Latinoamericana de Religiosos - CLAR, 1985), p. 51.} focusing on the example of Jesus of Nazareth, who lifted the power of the people, by the power given by his Father, as witnessing service, i.e. in order to carryout God’s mission of serving the world. This means for the church the experience of an empowerment by the Holy Spirit with life-affirming values to exercise the power of service over the power of domination, by witnessing to God’s transforming grace in the world, following the example of Jesus Christ. This way, the church serves as a channel of God’s grace in the world, to further serve those, especially in need, as serving Jesus Christ himself.
During the time I was serving as an executive staff at the World Council of Churches in Geneva I had the opportunity to meet Ms. Geesje Werkman, a project manager of ICOO/Kerk in Actie, the Netherlands. We worked together in various projects, two of the main ones mentioned in this thesis, namely, the Global Consultation on Prophetic Diakonia, which took place in Utrecht, Netherlands on December 2010, co-hosted by her organization and the WCC. We also had the opportunity of coordinating, together with other colleagues, one of the ecumenical conversations organized at the WCC’s 10th Assembly held in Busan, Republic of Korea, during October – November 2013.

One of Geesje’s passions—both personally, but also professionally—is to work with the immigrants. Indeed, migration is one of the greatest diaconal challenges that the churches face today, both globally and locally, and at both ends, namely, in the countries of origin, dealing with root causes of injustice that generates inhumane living conditions, family separations, the loose of many talented people, etc. But also on the side of the receiving countries, many churches are “challenging anti-immigration laws that deny the dispossessed and the displaced their right to live” and work to provide care and human dignity to the refugees. On both ends, the churches are called to play a prophetic and pastoral role in order to protect the lives of the migrants and to ensure their life in abundance.

So here, in this concluding chapter, I would like to introduce the issue of migration, which actually has been mentioned several times in the thesis, both in global ecumenical events and at the local diaconal projects, as another very relevant example of empowerment and diakonia in the ecumenical movement. This way, I am trying to answer the main research question in a fresh way, attempting to open renewed perspectives in this final section.

In her longstanding and intense experience relating to the immigrants, Geesje has a lot to share, especially, again, on this whole question of power. Quite often she is moved by the power and the positive thinking of these people, who, in her own words “are created by the image of the Almighty, just like us”. She tells very touching stories like the one of Natalija (Azerbeidzjan), “who isn’t allowed to be anywhere, and nevertheless shouts...”

full of joy ‘I am graduated!’ During the terrible period that she wasn’t supposed to be here, and also when no other country admitted her, she studied Dutch and completed her higher professional education as a social worker, with the help of the Foundation for Refugee Students UAF”.

She also shares about “François (Rwanda), the volunteer of a church choir, while being in a shelter, who gets no recognition as a refugee. He knows he will never see his family again in this life, since all of them were murdered. He is also studying and as soon as he gets a permit, he will go to work, he will have a job. Just like he shows the pain of the genocide, the joy of his work glances”.

Sally (Cameroon) is also mentioned by Geesje, as “a very young women, in a totally strange environment, after seven years of prison, can rely on God when she says no to a doctor who advised her to sign for euthanasia of her newborn baby. Mina (Iran), daughter of Maryam, graduates for her MBO (middle-level vocational training) diploma and studied while she and her family were shipped around. She understands her profession and after her internship she gets a steady job in de Vijverhof. Hoessein (Somalia) is happy, he wants to work on his future, while his wife died because of a gunshot. He has said goodbye to her since he will never see her again”.

And Geesje concludes: “As I hear these stories, I think: God is alive, as He still creates miracles. He presents Himself in the power of these people. We should be grateful that we can see Him in the stories of these people. The Netherlands should be grateful for these fellow citizens”.

What do all these stories have in common? On the one hand, they speak about the resilience, about what she calls “the power and the positive thinking of these people”. They are, therefore empowered by their faith (Christian or otherwise) and also by the

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542 Geesje Werkman, ‘When I See the Bridge of Kampen, I Think to Myself, I’m Home’ (Utrecht, Netherlands, 2011). In the introduction she underlines, “While deciding what should be written in this book, we chose it to be short stories. In these stories we would focus on the power of people. Of course the stories had to be of people who weren’t allowed here to stay at first, but who, by mediation of the churches or church organizations, obtained a residence permit”.
church that accompanies them prophetically and in solidarity, defending their rights as human beings.\textsuperscript{543}

As a matter of fact this case illustrates what the thesis has been trying to convey with regards to the relationship between empowerment and diakonia. On the one hand we have a church, the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, that uses its power, i.e. its human and financial resources, to serve those in need, trying to be faithful to the values of God’s kingdom. On the other hand, this effort is coupled with the resilience, positive thinking, and the determination, in other words, the power to participate and to succeed on the side of the immigrants or refugees, and, in more general terms, of those living in the periphery of the various societies.

Of course, one of our greatest challenges in this world scenario is how to create better living conditions in order that the countries and churches do not loose all these talents in their original countries. This situation points to a vicious circle by which talented people are forced to leave which leads to an increasingly worsening of the countries’ situation. I am not pretending that this Church and other church related organizations from the global North that are serving in the global South, as well as other development agencies will solve this and other challenges, but at least this is one of the visions or motivations to get involved in this diaconal ministry. Many of these churches work in partnership with their sister churches in the South to facilitate an empowering process contributing towards a transformation that helps to improve the living conditions of the people, seeking koinonia, an authentic community where all are included, enjoying the abundant life intended by God for all creation.

When dealing with the notion of power from a theological perspective, another frequent reference that was made was in relation to the cross of Christ. As it has been highlighted, “Jesus’ greatest manifestation of service and power” was demonstrated in his death on the cross, which “became the exclusive center of the Gospel that Paul called ‘the power of God’ (1Co. 2:1-5)”.\textsuperscript{544} This image might sound a bit awkward to

\textsuperscript{543} A concrete result of this prophetic diakonia is that last November the European Committee of Social Charter decided, at the request of ICOO/Kerk in Actie, to take action against the Dutch state, urging to compensate and provide basic services to the undocumented/rejected asylum-seekers. Furthermore, they have a project on safe passage that is about the death in the Mediterranean, together with some European churches and CCME (Churches’ Commission for Migrants in Europe).

\textsuperscript{544} WCC, Nurturing Peace: Theological Reflections on Overcoming Violence. World Council of Churches, pp. 49-50.
the world out of the church, i.e. according to the *human logic*, one may ask, How is it possible to find power from a person nailed to the cross? Nevertheless the cross has been an outstanding symbol and source of empowerment, mainly for diakonia, e.g. the *Diakonia as the churches’ response to the Crucified Lord*, or a *diakonia via crucis*, understanding it as a liberating power to seek justice and reconciliation in the world, and as a meeting point of the churches’ faith with its social commitment, where engagement with other sciences and partnerships with other social actors is paramount. It also points to a sort of *powerlessness*, *kenosis* (emptiness), cf. Col. 2:14-15 (transformation) and repentance, required for the churches to take part in the process of power-sharing in a world infected by the power-asymmetry.

Similarly, the churches’ spiritual-mystical understanding and liturgical practices, e.g. the *spirituality of transformation*, have been other empowering sources for diakonia and transformation. On this matter, again the following quote from Konrad Raiser is revealing, when he underlines that “… there has been a rediscovery of the inseparable link that binds together the Eucharist and diakonia, the sacrament of the altar and the sacrament of the brother and the sister, the renewal of life and worship and the sharing of life in the *liturgy after the liturgy*”.  

This also can lead to a *collective empowerment* facilitated by the ecumenical movement in order for the churches to learn from each other both denominationally and regionally and also to share the resources more effectively. As Hielke Wolters puts it, “… The aim is to help the faith communities, even more than the organized church structures, to strengthen their diaconal self-understanding and to share models of diakonia which are based on the locally available resources, how limited they might be”.  

This way the churches can be better prepared to face creatively the needs in their respective communities in order to, in similar manner, facilitate an empowerment process to further discover the huge human and spiritual resources among its members, persons like Natalija, François, Sally, Maryam, Hoessein. This practice can seek self-reliance, equal participation, decentralization decision-making processes, pursuing sustainability.

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Therefore, in order to bind together all this rich content, both in theory and in practice, the Empowering Diakonia model is provided with its five elements of vision, normativity, needs, context and transformation as a methodological framework to plan, develop, monitor and evaluate, as a useful tool to empower diakonia and at the same time to serve or achieve empowerment. The intention is to implement the model at the grassroots’ level, where, according to ongoing experiences, the understanding and the practice of both empowerment and diakonia, becomes more genuine, spontaneous, popular and more participatory. It can also be taught in theological academic institutions in the quest to prepare better the pastoral facilitators who should be involved in empowering diakonia.

The model is intended to be a driving force that leads, particularly local congregations, towards self-fulfillment as social actors, renouncing any power over people, rather by sharing power to serve with the people, as power-service, in order to serve through acts of effective love, for individual, social and ecological transformation. By unlocking mentalities, power structures of domination, as well the power within the people themselves to become agents and subjects of change of their own lives and of their communities, the model is conceived to move in a cyclical manner, as an ongoing spiral, seeking transformation towards a koinonia of the oikoumene in the wider sense.

This means a world community where all creatures are included enjoying fullness of life intended by God for all, as expressed in the prophet Isaiah’s vision for this people: “They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people, and My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth children for trouble; for they shall be the descendants of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them” (Is. 65:21-23).547

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547 This text was quoted in the study of Armenia – c.f. ART, WCC Armenia Round Table Foundation. Annual Report 2013, p. 3.
Summaries

Summary in English

Empowering Diakonia: A Model for Service and Transformation in the Ecumenical Movement and Local Congregations

The ecumenical movement in general and the World Council of Churches (WCC) in particular, as well as the local projects studied, have tackled the issues of empowerment and diakonia in various events, documents and in the daily implementation of the work. Nevertheless, the problem that is being addressed in this thesis is that there is no conceptual framework, i.e. a basic structure underlying a theoretical unit that merges both concepts together. In other words, what is being missed is a coherent reflection or a comprehensive way of thinking that binds together both empowerment and diakonia in a system that can provide a fresh and relevant vision for the diaconal endeavor.

We think that this is a critical issue in order to address creatively the need for the churches to become self-sustainable for diaconal engagement. The solution that is being suggested and the way of addressing resourcefully this requirement consists of designing, constructing and proposing the practical implementation of the Empowering Diakonia model. This model synthesizes, combines and binds both concepts together, namely, a new method, using the steps and tools that are described in the thesis. Arguments are made that this model can become an effective way for diaconal engagement today, since it is being built on a concept and practice of diaconia that are both empowered and empowering.

The main conceptual platform and methodology of the thesis is built focusing on the book A Fundamental Practical Theology. Descriptive and Strategic Proposals, written by Don S. Browning. The author argues profusely in this volume in favor of what he calls “the five dimensions of practical reason”, as foundational elements that conform his understanding of practical theology. These elements have been the starting point to design the Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia, which I am calling the visional, normative, need-oriented, contextual and transformative.

These Five Dimensions are an essential tool not only to interrelate both the theory and practice, but also as a helpful diagnosis instrument for analysis, description and
interpretation. In other words, they have proven to be a useful mechanism for articulating an understanding, of both diakonia and empowerment, moving from practice to theory and back to practice, in order to ultimately design the Empowering Diakonia model.

The thesis consists of six chapters and is guided by four main research questions that are stated in the first chapter, i.e. the general introduction. The first question is how has the WCC contributed to the development of the concepts of diakonia and empowerment throughout its history? The second one is what can we learn from local experiences and practices with regard to diakonia and empowerment? And the two final questions are how to respond to the need of bridging gaps between theory and practice, in relation to diakonia and empowerment, by designing the Empowering Diakonia model? And how to implement this model in the ecumenical movement, and more intentionally in the local congregations? This general introduction also explores the theoretical point of departure and the explanation of the Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia mentioned above, as well as a general description of the steps and procedures of the thesis.

Chapter II offers on the one hand, a brief impression of the theory of diakonia, citing a selected number of biblical texts; and on the other, a more extensive overview of the theory of empowerment, exploring its origin, meaning and development of the term, as well as the ways in which it was and can be grounded biblical and theologically.

In chapter III, analyzing the biblical–theological foundation and evaluating the identity of diakonia and empowerment in the ecumenical movement, I am addressing the first research question. This question again, concentrates on the ways the WCC has contributed to the development of both notions throughout its history, observing to what extent have both served as a meaningful hermeneutical key, a theoretical point of reference and a strategic task for diaconal engagement of the WCC’s member churches.

These Five Dimensions are analyzed and interpreted more in depth, dealing with the empirical data collected both in chapter III and in chapter IV. Doing the research among local churches and other related diaconal projects, in this fourth chapter, I am tackling the research question number two. This question seeks to further learn from local experiences and practices with regard to diakonia and empowerment in the current
world’s situation of increasing asymmetry and impoverishment. This investigation, moving from practice to theory is not representative, but rather exploratory, more in terms of getting indications and useful data, which will be the other main source of material to design the *Empowering Diakonia* model.

This data discovered as a result of the research, both at the global stage and the local level has been synthesized as *building blocks* and organized according to the *Five Dimensions*, and these *blocks* are the main raw material to build the *Empowering Diakonia* model.

Chapter V is the core section of the thesis. Its main purpose is to design the *Empowering Diakonia* model, as a new pragmatic and operational method for service and transformation in the ecumenical movement. Hence, it tries to address the dissertation’s third set of research questions, namely, what should a model look like that tries to bridge the gaps between theory and practice, in relation to diakonia and empowerment. Also how could that model contribute to facilitate the implementation of diaconal projects in local congregations.

This fifth chapter covers mainly two areas: firstly, an analysis and a synthesis of the *building blocks* of the two previous chapters, in order to define both empowerment and diakonia, leading to design the *Empowering Diakonia* model. In this analysis also *stumbling blocks* and dilemmas have been critically taken into consideration as well, e.g. financial dependency from abroad for diaconal work, the need for institutional capacity building for social engagement, or the tendency of some churches to work by themselves.

The *Empowering Diakonia* model emerges with a dual function. It is noted that diakonia is empowering (adjective) for those serving and who are being served, for the latter to be transforming subjects, rather than objects of plain charity. At the same time the model points to the forces or actions, which actually help to empower (verb) diakonia, e.g. through the Holy Spirit and the Eucharist, among others, acting in strengthening capacity. Consequently, diakonia both empowers and is being empowered, in an ongoing process of cross-fertilization and mutual enhancement, seeking transformation towards the values of God’s Kingdom.
In short the *Empowering Diakonia* model is defined as the driving force that leads, particularly local congregations, towards self-fulfillment as social actors, renouncing any power *over* people, rather by sharing power to serve *with* the people. This dynamic of power-service is *breath of life* that comes from the *Divine Community* as revealed by God as the source of power, by Jesus as the presence of God’s power in the world and by the Spirit as the outreaching of God’s power, in order to serve through acts of effective love, for individual, social and ecological transformation towards *koinonia*.

The second and final portion of chapter V includes some practical proposals for the application of the model at the local congregations, based mainly on a selection of recommendations made at the WCC global gatherings, analyzed in chapter III. This segment seeks to *unlock* the inherent empowering ability of the churches, discovering and activating their own human assets to answer God’s call towards defending abundant life for all, in a more effective and self-sufficient manner.

And finally, chapter VI brings several concluding remarks, where very briefly some final answers to the research questions are shared and various reflections with regards to the assumptions made initially are being addressed. This offers an opportunity to contextualize this dissertation, forward looking.

**Summary in Spanish**

*Empoderar la Diaconía: un modelo para el servicio y la transformación en el movimiento ecuménico y las congregaciones locales*

El movimiento ecuménico en general y el Consejo Mundial de Iglesias (CMI) en particular, así como los proyectos locales estudiados, han abordado los temas del empoderamiento y la diaconía en varios eventos, documentos y en la realización cotidiana del trabajo. Sin embargo, el problema que se está afrontando en esta tesis es que no existe un marco conceptual, es decir, una estructura básica que subyace en una unidad teórica que fusiona ambos conceptos. En otras palabras, se nota la falta de una reflexión coherente o una manera integral de pensamiento que une el empoderamiento y la diaconía en un sistema que puede proporcionar una visión fresca y relevante para la tarea diaconal.
Creemos que éste es un tema crítico para abordar de forma creativa la necesidad de que las iglesias se conviertan en auto-sostenibles para el compromiso diaconal. La solución que se sugiere y la manera de abordar adecuadamente este requisito consiste en diseñar, construir y proponer la aplicación práctica del modelo Empoderar la Diaconía. Este modelo sintetiza, combina y une ambos conceptos, es decir, es un método nuevo, que utiliza los pasos y las herramientas que se describen en la tesis. Se presentan los argumentos a favor de este modelo, el cual puede llegar a ser una forma eficaz para el compromiso diaconal de hoy, ya que está construido sobre un concepto y una práctica diaconal que son a la vez empoderados y empoderadores.

La principal plataforma conceptual y la metodología de la tesis se construyen en base al libro Una teología práctica fundamental. Propuestas descriptivas y estratégicas, escrito por Don S. Browning. El autor argumenta profusamente en este volumen a favor de lo que él llama “las cinco dimensiones de la razón práctica”, como elementos fundamentales que conforman su comprensión de la teología práctica. Dichos elementos han sido el punto de partida para diseñar las Cinco Dimensiones de Empoderar la Diaconía, basadas en la visión, la normatividad, las necesidades, el contexto y la transformación.

Estas Cinco Dimensiones son una herramienta esencial para interrelacionar la teoría y la práctica, así como un instrumento de diagnóstico útil para el análisis, la descripción y la interpretación. En otras palabras, es un mecanismo que ha demostrado ser provechoso para articular una comprensión sobre la diaconía y el empoderamiento, al pasar de la práctica a la teoría y de vuelta a la práctica, con el fin de diseñar en última instancia, el modelo Empoderar la Diaconía.

La tesis consta de seis capítulos y se guía por cuatro preguntas principales de investigación que se indican en el primer capítulo, es decir, la introducción general. La primera pregunta es ¿cómo el CMI ha contribuido al desarrollo de los conceptos de la diaconía y el empoderamiento a lo largo de su historia? La segunda es ¿qué podemos aprender de las experiencias y prácticas locales en relación con la diaconía y el empoderamiento? Y las dos últimas preguntas son ¿cómo responder a la necesidad de reducir las diferencias entre la teoría y la práctica, en relación con la diaconía y el empoderamiento, mediante el diseño del modelo Empoderar la Diaconía? Y ¿cómo aplicar este modelo en el movimiento ecuménico, y más específicamente en las
congregaciones locales? Esta introducción general también explora el punto de partida teórico y la explicación de las Cinco Dimensiones de Empoderar la Diaconía mencionadas anteriormente, así como una descripción general de los pasos y procedimientos de la tesis.

El Capítulo II ofrece, por un lado, una breve impresión de la teoría de la diaconía, que cita un número seleccionado de textos bíblicos; y por el otro, una visión más amplia de la teoría de empoderamiento, la exploración de su origen, el significado y el desarrollo del término, así como las formas en que se fundamentaba y puede fundamentarse bíblica y teológicamente.

En el capítulo III, que analiza el fundamento bíblico-teológico y evalúa la identidad de la diaconía y el empoderamiento en el movimiento ecuménico, estamos abordando la primera pregunta de investigación. Esta pregunta, de nuevo, se centra en las formas en que el CMI ha contribuido al desarrollo de ambas nociones a lo largo de su historia. Se trata de observar en qué medida han servido como clave hermenéutica significativa un punto de referencia teórico y una tarea estratégica para el compromiso diaconal de las iglesias miembros del CMI.

Estas Cinco Dimensiones se analizan e interpretan más profundamente al procesar los datos empíricos recogidos en los capítulos III y IV. Al realizar la investigación entre las iglesias locales y otros proyectos diaconales relacionados, en este cuarto capítulo, estamos abordando la segunda pregunta de la investigación. Es decir, se busca aprender más de las experiencias y prácticas locales en relación con la diaconía y el empoderamiento en la situación actual del mundo, de creciente asimetría y empobrecimiento. Esta investigación, que va de la práctica a la teoría no es representativa, sino más bien busca elementos para obtener un conjunto de indicaciones y datos útiles, que será la otra fuente principal de material para diseñar el modelo Empoderar la Diaconía.

Esta información encontrada como resultado de la investigación, tanto en el escenario mundial como en el plano local, se ha sintetizado como bloques de construcción y organizada de acuerdo con las Cinco Dimensiones, y estos bloques son la principal materia prima para construir el modelo Empoderar la Diaconía.
El capítulo V es el corazón de la tesis, cuyo objetivo principal es diseñar el modelo Empoderar la Diaconía como un nuevo método pragmático y operativo para el servicio y la transformación en el movimiento ecuménico. En el mismo se trata de abordar las dos últimas preguntas de investigación de la disertación, es decir, cómo concebir un modelo que trata de reducir las brechas entre la teoría y la práctica, en relación con la diaconía y el empoderamiento. Y la segunda, cómo podría dicho modelo contribuir a facilitar la aplicación de proyectos diaconales en las congregaciones locales.

Este quinto capítulo comprende principalmente dos áreas: la realización de un análisis y una síntesis de los bloques de construcción de los dos capítulos anteriores, con el fin de definir tanto el empoderamiento como la diaconía, que lleva a diseñar el modelo Empoderar la Diaconía. En este análisis también se tienen en cuenta críticamente las piedras de tropiezo y los dilemas, así, por ejemplo, la dependencia financiera del exterior para el trabajo diaconal, la necesidad de fortalecer la capacidad institucional para el compromiso social, o la tendencia de algunas iglesias a trabajar por sí mismas.

El modelo Empoderar la Diaconía surge con una doble función. Se observa que la diaconía es empoderadora (adjetivo) para aquellas personas que sirven y para aquellas que están siendo servidas, para que éstas últimas sean sujetos transformadores, en lugar de objetos de la caridad asistencialista. Al mismo tiempo el modelo apunta a las fuerzas o acciones, que en realidad ayudan a empoderar (verbo) la diaconía, por ejemplo, a través del Espíritu Santo y la Eucaristía, entre otros, que actúan en el fortalecimiento de la capacidad. En consecuencia, la diaconía empodera y al mismo tiempo es empoderada, en un proceso continuo de enriquecimiento mutuo, en la búsqueda de la transformación hacia los valores del Reino de Dios.

En resumen, el modelo Empoderar la Diaconía se define como la fuerza motriz que conduce, en particular a las congregaciones locales, hacia la autorrealización como actores sociales para que renuncien al poder sobre las personas, en vez de compartir el poder para servir con las personas. Esta dinámica del poder-servicio es el aliento vital que viene de la Comunidad Divina revelada por Dios como fuente de poder, por Jesús como presencia del poder de Dios en el mundo y por el Espíritu como poder de Dios que lo alcanza todo, para servir a través de actos de amor eficaz, y buscar la transformación individual, social y ecológica hacia la koinonia.
La segunda y última parte del capítulo V incluye algunas propuestas prácticas para la aplicación del modelo en las congregaciones locales, basadas principalmente en una selección de las recomendaciones formuladas en las reuniones del CMI, analizadas en el capítulo III. Este segmento busca desbloquear la capacidad de empoderamiento inherente en las iglesias, para descubrir y activar sus propios recursos humanos con el objetivo de responder al llamado de Dios, en defensa de la vida abundante para todos y todas, de una manera más eficaz y auto-sostenible.

Y, por último, el capítulo VI contiene varias observaciones finales, a través de las cuales se ofrecen de forma breve algunas respuestas finales a las preguntas de investigación, así como reflexiones con respecto a las hipótesis formuladas inicialmente. Esto brinda una oportunidad de contextualizar esta disertación, hacia el futuro.

Summary in Dutch (Nederlandse Samenvatting)

Empowering Diakonaat: Een model voor dienstverlening en transformatie in de oecumenische beweging en lokale gemeenten

Binnen de oecumenische beweging in het algemeen en de Wereldraad van Kerken (WvK) in het bijzonder, alsmede in de hier bestudeerde lokale projecten, is tijdens verschillende evenementen, in documenten en in de dagelijkse toepassing van het werk gereflecteerd op vraagstukken van empowerment en diakonia. Het probleem waarop deze dissertatie zich richt, is dat een conceptueel raamwerk ontbreekt en dat er geen theoretische basisstructuur is waarin beide concepten verbonden worden. Met andere woorden, wat gemist wordt is een coherente reflectie of een omvattende theorie die empowerment en diakonia samenbrengt binnen een manier van denken die een nieuwe en relevante visie voor het initiëren van diaconale projecten kan bieden.

Wij menen dat dit urgent is voor kerken om op creatieve wijze na te denken over de noodzaak om, op een niet van anderen afhankelijke wijze, hun diaconale betrokkenheid vorm te geven. De oplossing die hier gesuggereerd wordt en de manier om op vindingrijke wijze na te denken over deze behoefte is dat men reflecteert op de vraag hoe een Empowering Diakonia model ontworpen kan worden en hoe de praktische implementatie van dit model vorm kan krijgen. Dit model combineert en verbindt beide concepten met elkaar, biedt aldus een nieuwe methode aan en maakt daarbij gebruik van stappen en instrumenten die beschreven worden in de dissertatie. Gearchiveerd
wordt dat dit model een effectieve manier kan worden om diaconale betrokkenheid vandaag de dag vorm te geven, omdat het steunt op een concept en praktijk van diakonaat die zowel *empowered* als *empowering* zijn.

Het centrale conceptuele platform en de methodologie van de dissertatie zijn ontworpen aan de hand van het boek *A Fundamental Practical Theology. Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*, geschreven door Don S. Browning. Uitgebreid beargumenteert deze auteur in dit boek zijn keus voor wat hij “the five dimensions of practical reason” noemt en die hij beschouwt als elementaire bouwstenen voor wat hij onder praktische theologie wil verstaan. Deze elementen zijn het uitgangspunt geweest voor het ontwerpen van de *Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia*, die we visionair, normatief, behoefte-georiënteerd, contextueel en transformerend zullen noemen.

Deze *Five Dimensions* zijn een essentieel instrument, niet slechts om theorie en praktijk met elkaar te verbinden, maar dienen ook als behulpzaam diagnostisch instrument voor de analyse, beschrijving en interpretatie van diaconale projecten. Zij hebben hun nut bewezen voor een adequaat begrijpen van zowel *diakonia* als *empowerment*, hebben het onderzoek geleid van praktijk naar theorie en weer terug naar de praktijk, waarbij het uiteindelijke resultaat de constructie van het *Empowering Diakonia* model is geweest.

De dissertatie bevat een zestal hoofdstukken en is georiënteerd op vier onderzoeksvragen die beschreven zijn in het eerste hoofdstuk, de algemene inleiding. De eerste vraag is hoe de Wereld Raad van Kerken (WvK) in de loop van zijn geschiedenis heeft bijgedragen aan de ontwikkeling van de concepten *diakonia* en *empowerment*. De tweede onderzoeksvraag is wat geleerd kan worden van lokale ervaringen en praktijken met betrekking tot *diakonia* en *empowerment*. De twee laatste onderzoeksvragen gaan in op de vraag op welke wijze het *Empowering Diakonia* model antwoorden kan bieden op de noodzaak de kloof tussen theorie en praktijk te dichten. Vervolgens wordt dan ook geanalyseerd hoe dit model geïmplementeerd kan worden in de oecumenische beweging en, meer direct, in lokale gemeenten. In de algemene inleiding worden tevens de theoretische achtergrond en inhoud van de genoemde *Five Dimensions of Empowering Diakonia* verkend en uitgelegd, en wordt een beschrijving geboden van de stappen en gehanteerde werkwijze in deze dissertatie.
Hoofdstuk II biedt enerzijds een beknopte impressie van de theorie van *diakonia* — hier wordt een aantal bijbelteksten geciteerd — en anderzijds een meer uitgebreid overzicht van theorievorming met betrekking tot *empowerment*. De oorsprong van de term, zijn betekenis en ontwikkeling worden verkend, en tevens van de wijze waarop de term bijbels en theologisch gefundeerd werd en kan worden.

In hoofdstuk III bespreken we de eerste onderzoeksvraag. We analyseren het bijbels-theologische fundament van diakonaat en evalueren definities van *diakonia* en *empowerment* in de oecumenische beweging. De analyse richt zich tevens op de wijze waarop de WvK in zijn geschiedenis heeft bijgedragen aan de ontwikkeling van beide noties. Hebben beide concepten gediend als een betekenisvolle hermeneutische sleutel, een theoretisch referentiepunt en strategie voor diaconale betrokkenheid van kerken die lid zijn van de WvK?

De *Five Dimensions* worden met meer diepgang geanalyseerd en geïnterpreteerd met behulp van de in hoofdstuk III en in hoofdstuk IV verzamelde empirische gegevens. In dit vierde hoofdstuk richten we ons op de tweede onderzoeksvraag en worden resultaten geboden van onderzoek in lokale kerken en gerelateerde diaconale projecten. We stellen de vraag wat we geleerd hebben van lokale ervaringen en praktijken die betrekking hebben op *diakonia* en *empowerment* in de huidige wereldsituatie van toenemende asymmetrie en armoede. Dit onderzoek, dat van de praktijk teruggaat naar de theorie, is niet representatief, maar vooral exploratief en beoogt aanwijzingen te vinden voor bruikbare gegevens, die de andere belangrijke bron van materiaal zullen zijn voor de constructie van het *Empowering Diakonia* model.

Die gegevens, resulterend uit het onderzoek dat zowel op globaal als lokaal niveau werd verricht, worden als *bouwstenen* van het model samengebracht en georganiseerd in overeenstemming met de *Five Dimensions*. Ze vormen de kern van het ruwe materiaal dat dient voor het ontwerp van het *Empowering Diakonia* model.

Hoofdstuk V vormt de kern van de dissertatie. Het hoofddoel is het ontwerpen van het *Empowering Diakonia* model als een nieuwe pragmatische en operationele methode voor dienst aan en transformatie in de oecumenische beweging. Vandaar dat het probeert de derde set onderzoeksvragen van deze dissertatie te bespreken, namelijk hoe een model eruit zou moeten zijn, dat, gerelateerd aan *diakonia* en *empowerment*, in
staat is de kloof tussen theorie en praktijk te overbruggen. En tevens hoe dat model kan bijdragen aan het faciliteren van de implementatie van diaconale projecten in lokale geloofsgemeenschappen.

Dit vijfde hoofdstuk beslaat voornamelijk twee gebieden: allereerst een analyse en synthese van de *bouwstenen* uit de twee voorgaande hoofdstukken, om daarmee zowel *empowerment* als *diakonia* te definiëren, en die vervolgens leiden tot het ontwerpen van het *Empowering Diakonia* model. In deze analyse worden ook ‘struikelblokken’ kritisch beschouwd, bij voorbeeld de financiële afhankelijkheid van het buitenland voor diaconaal werk, de noodzaak van het opbouwen van institutionele bekwaamheid in het betrokken raken bij sociale projecten, of de neiging van sommige kerken om voor zichzelf te werken.

Het *Empowering Diakonia* model heeft een dubbele functie. *Diakonia* is voor degenen die dienen en voor wie gediend worden *empowering* (adjectief): de laatsten worden subject, dragen aan transformatie bij en zijn geen objecten van louter charitatieve projecten. Tegelijkertijd verwijst het model naar de krachten of acties die daadwerkelijk bijdragen aan een proces van vitalisering (*empowering* als verbum) van *diakonia*, bij voorbeeld door de Heilige Geest en de Eucharistie, en aldus aan bekwaamheidsbevordering. *Diakonia*, is dus zowel subject als object van het proces van *empowerment*: *it empowers* en *is being empowered* in een voortdurend proces van kruisbestuiving en wederzijdse betrokkenheid, zoekend naar transformatie overeenkomstig de waarden van Gods Koninkrijk.

Samenvattend: het *Empowering Diakonia* model wordt gedefinieerd als de drijvende kracht die, in het bijzonder bij lokale geloofsgemeenschappen, leidt tot zelfverwerkelijking als sociale actoren, waarbij afgezien wordt van het uitoefenen van macht *over* mensen, en in plaats daarvan macht gedeeld wordt *met* mensen. Deze dynamiek van dienstbare macht (*power-service*) is de levensadem die voortkomt uit ‘Gods Gemeenschap’, zoals door God, de bron van macht, is geopenbaard, door Jezus die de aanwezigheid van Gods macht in de wereld manifest maakt en door de Geest die Gods macht overdraagt, om zo door daden van echte liefde individuele, sociale en ecologische transformatie tot gemeenschap (*koinonia*) te dienen.
Het tweede en laatste gedeelte van hoofdstuk V bevat enkele praktische voorstellen voor de toepassing van het model in lokale geloofsgemeenschappen, voornamelijk gebaseerd op een selectie van aanbevelingen die werden gedaan op de mondiale bijeenkomsten van de WvK en werden geanalyseerd in hoofdstuk III. Dit onderdeel beoogt het vermogen tot *empowerment* dat altijd in kerken aanwezig is, te ontsluiten en ze het eigen menselijk kapitaal waarover ze beschikken te laten ontdekken en activeren om daarmee Gods oproep tot het verdedigen van overvloedig leven voor iedereen te kunnen beantwoorden op een meer effectieve en meer onafhankelijke wijze.

Hoofdstuk VI biedt, tot slot, verschillende afsluitende opmerkingen, waarin zeer beknopt een paar uiteindelijke antwoorden op de onderzoeksvragen worden gedeeld en wordt teruggeblikt op de vooronderstellingen die aan het begin werden geformuleerd. Dit biedt de mogelijkheid om deze dissertatie in context te plaatsen en vooruit te kijken.
Appendices

The Larnaca Declaration

World Consultation on Inter-church Aid, Refugee and World Service, Diakonia 2000 - Larnaca, Cyprus, 19-26 November 1986

As Christians from all continents, and as women, men and young people, we have come together in Larnaca to affirm our commitment to justice and peace through diakonia. For all Christians, the choice between life and death is clear. Christ himself said: I have come to give you life and give it abundantly (John 10:10). Hence we opt for life and commit ourselves to working for its fulfillment through Christian service, which is rendered to all the world. We are called to be neighbors to one and all.

Jesus Christ is Lord. We pledge again to obey him in the power of the Holy Spirit. We accept no other lordship. God's kingdom is one of Trinitarian sharing of love. God alone has ultimate ownership over matter and energy. God's spiritual and material resources belong to all people and all must have a say in their use.

In the twenty years since the consultation on inter-church aid in Swanwick, the suffering in the world has increased. We confess our sin and confess our complicity in upholding, tacitly or implicitly, structures and systems in the churches and society that oppress human beings, causing suffering for the people of God. We believe that diakonia - in all its many authentic forms - cannot be separated from the struggle for justice and peace.

And on every continent - at a time of increased terrorism and violence - the people are now struggling for life, for justice, for peace. In Latin America and the Caribbean, they struggle against economic, political and military structures that seek to choke their very existence, and the people are struggling to break the stranglehold of foreign debt and the inequality in distribution of land. In Asia, unjust economic structures, including the phenomenon of an export-oriented economy, have created devastating human consequences. Ethnic minorities and socially marginalized people struggle to combat centuries of discrimination and oppression. In South Africa and Namibia, people are

suffering and dying, under the dehumanizing yoke of the apartheid regime which is continuously destabilizing the front-line and the neighboring states, even the whole continent and the world. We strongly support the implementation of economic sanctions against the regime. We appeal to all people of goodwill to support and strengthen the economies of the countries affected, without whose solidarity the struggle would be difficult and even more people would die. In North America, Europe and Australasia the poor and oppressed fight for justice against ever more sophisticated forms of political and economic control. We express especially our concern that in Albania all believers, Christians and Muslims alike, are denied the right to exist as religious and worshipping communities. In the Pacific, the people are struggling for self-determination and to protect their lives, their cultures and their environment from the poison of nuclear arms and wastes.

In the Middle East, the struggles for justice and peace take many forms. In Lebanon, the agony of a nation is the result of both regional and international forces, which have disturbed and destabilized the nation. Death and repeated evacuations from homes and areas have forced people to suffer and to lose their power to regain their national sovereignty and unity. The Palestinian struggle for self-determination and right to a sovereign state demand more world support, and call for more active involvement of the world churches in bringing about peace and justice for all the peoples of the region. The Iran-Iraq war calls on us to develop new ways of expressing solidarity with all victims, and demands of us our appeal to the powers, which are fuelling this war by the sale of arms, thus delaying a solution to the violence. It also demands us to encourage those who have taken initiatives for peace. The Armenian genocide, one of the first in our century, must not be forgotten and must be recognized by the world community. In Cyprus, the cry for unity among the divided communities and for peace, including the care for refugees and missing persons, needs to be supported.

On every continent, and under every social, political and ideological system, the forces of evil are being manifested. Growing militarization makes poor people poorer, and the nuclear arms race, reaching even outer space, threatens life on our beloved planet with complete destruction. The continued scourge of hunger shames us all. Growing numbers of refugees and growing xenophobia have created situations around the world where the protection of human life and dignity is jeopardized. The growth of migration puts at risk
the rights of many who are subject to severe exploitation. As Christians, we must act, and act now, to ensure a decent life with dignity for all. Economic and social structures, which perpetuate inequality and poverty, must be replaced by a new international economic order and political structure, which ensures the full participation of all people in the decisions, which affect their lives. The existence of repressive regimes, which are supported by global economic structures, has led to violations of human rights on all continents, which we can only label as sinful. Violence in all its forms, especially state violence, must be confronted. As Christians, we reaffirm our fundamental belief that all of God's people must live in dignity and must determine their own future. The polarization and fragmentation, which we see in many forms on all continents, threaten the survival of us all. Throughout the world, the suffering and the pain and the struggle grow.

And yet, in the midst of oppression and pain, we also see hope and faith and joy manifested. Young people are in the forefront of the struggle and are challenging churches with their resistance and liberating diaconia. Women, who have always performed most of the diaconal ministry of the churches, are even more engaged in deepening Christian understandings of a diaconia centered on people. We recognize that many Christians are paying a price for their faith. The churches themselves must do much more to confront the unjust structures, which have prevented women and young people from being full and active participants in determining the directions of Christian service. Young people and women must be the enablers and mediators in building networks of solidarity.

Everywhere the people make a prophetic diaconia essential for the churches' role in shaping the future. We have all experienced, in one way or another, the transforming power of Christian service. We have seen our faith deepen through service and our diaconia enriched by our spiritual quest for truth. And truth shall liberate us from all forms of selfishness, inviting us to serve for the glory of God as an act of giving of ourselves (see John 8:32). As Christians, we believe that God is manifest through all creation and God's servants become instruments of calling to repentance, obedience and love, proclaiming the force of the kingdom of God (see Matt. 11:12). We recognize that justice will not be given by the powerful until and unless the powerless stand together. We know that God is with those struggling for justice and peace, and we know in our
hearts - if not yet in our actions - that our place must be with them.

As the third millennium A.D. approaches, we dedicate ourselves, from this day forward, to work for justice and peace through our diakonia. We commit ourselves to implement a vision to identify ourselves and to be in solidarity with the people who are now in the process of struggling for peace based on justice. Our diakonia now and for the future must be based on mutual trust and genuine sharing. We recognize that people and churches on all continents have needs and that our diakonia must reach out to all those who suffer. We know the forces, which confront us, are many; we know that the road before us is long and painful. We know we can do no less than to pick up the cross and follow in the footsteps of the suffering servant, Christ our Lord. His victory over death gives us life and hope.

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**Guidelines for Sharing**

*World Consultation on Koinonia: Sharing Life in a World Community, El Escorial, Spain, 24-31 October 1987*

I

Out of abundant and outgoing love, God has created the world, and has given it to all humanity for faithful use and sharing. As recipients of God's gift of life, we are called to see the world through God's eyes, offering it in blessing through our own acts of love, sharing and appropriate use.

But, because of our sin and selfishness, we have misused God's gift. We have allowed the interests of a few to diminish the life of many. It has led to the rise of unjust structures, which perpetuate dependence and poverty for the majority of the world's people. This surely is contrary to the purpose of God.

It is in the midst of this sinful reality that in Jesus Christ God offered God's very self for the life of the world. Jesus’ self-emptying love on the cross leads to repentance. It becomes the power and pattern of our sharing.

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The presence of the Risen Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit enables us to break down barriers and renew structures, preparing for the coming of God's kingdom of justice and peace.

The new life given by the Holy Spirit in Christ creates us as a new people members of one body, bearing one another's burdens and sharing together in God's gift of life for all.

In the eucharist, we offer to God ourselves and the whole of creation in its brokenness, and receive all things back anew. The eucharist sends us back into the world to be Christ's body, broken and shared for the life of the world.

As the first-fruits of the new humanity, the church is called to stand in solidarity with all people, particularly with the poor and the oppressed, and to challenge the value systems of this world.

Having confidence in the grace of God in Jesus Christ, who alone to the divine will through the Holy Spirit enables us to live in obedience to the divine will, we the participants in the world consultation on resource-sharing, coming from different regions, commit ourselves to a common discipline of sharing among all God's people.

II

In all such sharing we commit ourselves:

1. To a fundamentally new value system based on justice, peace and the integrity of creation. It will be a system that recognizes the rich resources of human communities, their cultural and spiritual contributions and the wealth of nature. It will be radically different from the value system on which the present economic and political orders are based and which lies behind the current crises like those of nuclear threat and industrial pollution.

2. To a new understanding of sharing in which those who have been marginalized by reason of sex, age, economic and political condition, ethnic origin and disability, and those who are homeless, refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants take their place at the canter of all decision and actions as equal partners.

This means, for example, that
• churches, council and networks will establish for this purpose ecumenical mechanisms both nationally and regionally;
• equitable representation will be provided for women and youth in decision-making structures.

3. To identify with the poor and oppressed and their organized movements in the struggle for justice and human dignity in church and society. This in turn will imply the refusal to participate, either as giver or receiver, in ways of sharing that undermine this struggle.

4. To bear witness to the mission of God by identifying, exposing and confronting at all levels the root causes, and the structures, of injustice which lead to the exploitation of the wealth and people of the third world and result in poverty and the destruction of creation. This entails working for a new economic and political order.

This would mean, for example that the churches of the North and the South commit themselves to strengthen and participate in the various anti-nuclear movements and to bring pressure upon their governments to stop nuclear testing and the dumping of nuclear waste. It will also mean joining with the people in their struggle against transnational corporations, militarism and foreign intervention and occupation.

5. To enable people to organize themselves and realize their potential and power as individuals and communities, working towards the kind of self-reliance and self-determination, which are an essential condition of interdependence.

6. To be open to one another as friends on the basis of common commitment, mutual trust, confession and forgiveness, keeping one another informed of all plans and programs and submitting ourselves to mutual accountability and correction.

This implies, for example, the implementation of mutual accountability and participation in decision-making between the South and the North.

7. To represent to one another our needs and problems in relationships where there are no absolute donors, or absolute recipients, but all have needs to be met and gifts to give, and to work for the structural changes in the institutions of the North and the South which this calls for.
8. To promote through words and deeds the holistic mission of the church in obedience to God's liberating will. We are convinced that in responding only to certain parts of the mission we distort and disrupt mission as a whole.

9. To participate in the struggles of people for justice, and thereby overcome all barriers between different faiths and ideologies which today divide the human family.

This means, for example, churches in East and West making use of all opportunities to strengthen the process of detente and integrating the resources freed by this process for ecumenical sharing.

10. To resist international mechanisms (such as the International Monetary Fund/World Bank) which deprive the people of the South of their resources, transferring for example their hard-earned capital, which is more than the aid they receive, in payment of foreign debt, thereby putting them in a state of perpetual dependence contributing instead to a fundamental and just redistribution of the wealth and resources of a country including the wealth of its churches.

11. To devise ways of shifting the power to set priorities and terms for the use of resources to those who are wrongfully denied both the resources and the power, such as movements for social justice.

This would imply that participation of the South in the decision-making must not only be on a consultative basis as it is practiced today.

12. To facilitate and encourage mutual involvement among the churches and people in the South who have common concerns, for example through the sharing of human resources.

13. To promote and strengthen ecumenical sharing at all levels, national, regional and international.

III

Ecumenical sharing of resources will take place at all these three levels:

- local;
• national/regional;
• international/inter-regional.

Relations between bodies at the three levels of sharing should be characterized by flexibility, complementarity and mutual power-sharing.

All levels of implementation should recognize and work towards the goal of an equitable representation of 50% women and 20% youth in all decision-making structures over the next five years.

**At the local level**

The initiative to obtain resources from national and international agencies should, as far as possible, be taken by the local community.

In situations where local ecumenical groups and churches are not working together and where it prevents resource-sharing, the process should be facilitated through local community action, and every effort made to encourage ecumenical cooperation among groups and churches.

**At national and regional levels**

Where national or regional mechanisms for resource-sharing do not exist, the need to set them up must be seen as a matter of urgency. These mechanisms may consist of representatives of churches, ecumenical groups and those popular or people's movements, which are involved in the struggle for justice, peace and full human development.

These bodies should constantly and critically examine their own composition and activities and the power structures inside and outside the church, in order to achieve a more just and equitable resource-sharing. They should invite and facilitate both dialogue and critical assessment through visiting teams from the churches or groups with whom they share resources, to enhance mutuality and the sharing of power. International agencies should take part in the activities of these bodies only when invited.
It is important to educate public opinion in all our countries regarding the structural causes of world economic disorder. This can be done in theological training centers, for example, with the help of witnesses from among partners in sharing.

The regional level is where methods for monitoring resource-sharing can be most effectively established.

**At the international level**

International ecumenical resource-sharing bodies must be based on equal representation of the partners involved. They should complement the national/regional and local decision-making bodies, for example through round table structures and through the sharing of all relevant information, including financial, of projects/programs among the partners involved.

All Christian World Communions and ecumenical organizations are called on to take part in the ecumenical sharing of resources through the WCC and to adhere to the discipline emerging from this consultation.

The WCC is called to a better integration of existing units and sub-units of the Council and, as far as possible, to coordinate the channeling of its resources through existing networks.

It is recommended that the WCC set up a mechanism to follow up the implementation of the discipline emerging from this consultation.

**IV**

We will follow this discipline ourselves. We will try to create a climate in which it is understood and welcomed. We will challenge our churches, their peoples and their agencies to accept it.

We will urge acceptance of this discipline beyond the membership of the WCC.

We will refuse cooperation when this discipline is explicitly being rejected.
We will create opportunities to develop new ecumenical partnerships to enable churches of different traditions and contexts to enrich one another.

We will support one another in our commitment. We undertake to give an account to each other and so to God, of the ways in which we have turned our words into deeds, within a period of three years.

**Recommendations on women and youth**

As a result of the meetings of women and youth at the consultation the following recommendations and comments were approved in plenary:

*Women*

The women's group recognizes that there is a very strong connection between the plight of women and the patriarchal interpretation of the Bible. Men's theology perpetuates a system where women are considered "less than". The theological section of the report must address this issue.

In the sharing of resources, women can offer new theological perspectives growing out of their experience (for example, "As Seen by Women" and "Asian Women Reading the Bible"). We strongly urge that during the Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women, the churches commit themselves to an in-depth study of and engagement with these perspectives.

1. We recommend that there must be 50% representation by women in all decision-making and consultative structures set up or changed as a result of this consultation, such as follow-up committees, local, national, and international bodies, and that all these bodies must reflect the liberating perspectives of women in their decisions.

2. We recommend that participants in this consultation commend to their organizations the Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women and encourage their support for it. In concrete terms, this means making available sufficient financial and other resources to initiatives which work towards justice for women and which enable their full participation in the societies in which they live.
3. We recommend that within the first five years of the Decade the goal be achieved of using 50% of the total annual flow of funds channeled through ecumenical bodies for programs and activities empowering women, and their communities. These include:

   a) those entirely planned and implemented by women;
   b) those benefiting the larger community in which women play an equal part in decision-making and planning;
   c) those which enable people to organize themselves and realize their potentials as individuals and communities.

Special emphasis should be placed on funding activities which:

   a) enable women to develop in a systematic way visions and concepts for an alternative society based on justice, peace, equality, and an ecologically appropriate economy;
   b) conscientize women of their rights and potential in their own societies;
   c) provide leadership and skills training for women;
   d) provide opportunity for regional meetings of women from all sectors and levels, particularly in the South-South context.

We urge decision-making bodies to scrutinize all funding requests to eliminate those which discriminate or work against the empowerment of women.

In 1992 there should be an evaluation by women of the achievements of this recommendation, both in financial and programmatic terms.

4. We also recommend that churches, church-related organizations and other donor agencies commit themselves to the 50% funding and decision-making patterns described above and submit themselves to the same review procedures. As these are likely to be bilateral relationships, it is important that the whole of God's family represented here, women and men, adopt and support this position as, in many cases, organizations are represented here by men alone.

5. We recommend that prior to the distribution of the audiovisual prepared for this consultation, alterations be made to the art work to make it inclusive of all God's family.
Youth

The youth group is not satisfied with the way young people have been invited to this consultation. The process has been going on for many years but youth have not been included. The primary concern of the youth group is the participation of young people in the ecumenical sharing of resources.

Young people around the world are bearing the heavy burden of the world's pain and injustice. Churches need to know and hear the experiences of young people.

Young people need solidarity, resources and support through the sharing of resources within the ecumenical movement.

Youth organizations, networks and projects need the support and the trust of those who themselves have once been young.

1. We recommend that in all decision-making bodies on resource sharing there should be 20% youth including both women and men.

2. We recommend that 10% of all programs and project funds be designated for youth projects and programs. These funds should include the administrative budgets of youth organizations.

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Theological Perspectives on Diakonia in the Twenty-First Century

From the conference jointly organized by the Justice and Diakonia, Just and Inclusive Communities, and Mission and Evangelism programmes of the World Council of Churches, in Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2-6 June 2012

This theological reflection is intentionally inductive – contextual and experiential. The 50 participants involved in various diaconal initiatives in about 25 countries brought with them some hard questions as well as insights on new possibilities, arising out of their engagement in the lives of marginalized people. They put forth some of the following challenges to be taken into account in this reflection on Diakonia in the Twenty-First Century. These were: the institutionalization of injustice, particularly in the present regime of neo-liberal economic globalization; the reality of climate change

and its impact; wars and conflicts and the consequent destruction, trauma and broken relationships; the fragmentation of communities due to aggressive assertion of religious and ethnic identities; the dispossession and displacement of vulnerable people; the violence against many sections of society, especially of women, children, people with disabilities and the aged; malnutrition, disease and the HIV and Aids pandemic; and the marginalization of ethnic and religious minorities, Indigenous peoples, the Afro-descendant communities, the Dalits in South Asia and others experiencing discrimination for various reasons.

Sri Lanka, a nation ravaged by prolonged war and conflict, struggling to find possibilities for healing and hope, provided the context of this conference. The conference was hosted by the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka that represents the witness of churches - small, on the margins with limited space for public engagement, and each with a distinct identity, yet united in their witness to heal and reconcile. The conference, therefore, opted to look at diakonia from three specific vantage points as elaborated below:

First, it pursued its reflection by holding diakonia as a primary expression of the churches’ participation in the ongoing mission of God. This option was chosen to assert that churches are not to be exclusive, inward-looking religious communities, but have a calling to be engaged with the world. The event also responded to the common tendency to view and pursue diakonia in institutional forms and to respond only to those challenges that these forms would allow.

Second, it attempted to re-imagine diakonia from the vantage point of those who are, in many cases, traditionally considered as recipients or objects of churches’ diakonia - the vulnerable and marginalized communities. Besides the theological reasons, this option was taken to search for more people-based and less resource-intensive forms of diakonia, arising out of their aspirations, and in doing so to ensure their agency in redefining diakonia in today’s world. It was also to suggest a possible shift from patronizing interventions to catalytic accompaniment.

And third, in view of the fact that many of the current models of diakonia were shaped by the perceptions and preferences of the churches in the geo-political North, the conference wanted to explore what diakonia would be if seen from the vantage point of the global South where the dynamics of life are radically different. Incidentally, more Christians live in the South than the North, mostly as fragmented minority communities, often in hostile contexts, as socially and economically marginalized, and amid intense struggles for life. This preference for the South does not imply that the global North lacks these same challenges or possibilities. Neither does it imply a rejection of the contributions of churches in the North to diakonia and this reflection. This choice was made deliberately, in view of the variety of life-expressions as well as Christian expressions that the South offers, and in an effort to address some of the complex questions arising there about the human predicament and the fate and future of the earth.
The following is a summary of reflections on the theme as seen from the vantage points mentioned above:

I. Church, Mission and Diakonia

“As the Father has sent me, so I send you...” (John 20:21)

1. God’s mission is about the realization of God’s vision for the world, a world in which “God rejoices because there shall no more be the sound of weeping, or the cry of distress, where people shall not die young, where people build houses and live in them and enjoy the fruits of their labour, where people will not die of calamities, and where the aggressors are transformed so that all shall live in peace.” (Isaiah 65:17-25) This eschatological hope of a “new heaven and earth” (Revelation 21:1) is not passive but constantly breaks into our present, inviting people to become co-workers with God by realizing it in every here and now. This mission of God is dynamic and inclusive of all people and forces that uphold the sanctity and integrity of God’s creation.

2. The Church, as a community called into being through baptism and led by the Holy Spirit, participates in this mission through its very being, proclamation and service. Commonly understood as service, diakonia is a way of living out faith and hope as a community, witnessing to what God has done in Jesus Christ.

3. Through its diakonia, the Church witnesses to God’s purpose in Jesus Christ and participates in God’s mission. In its diakonia, the Church follows the way of its Servant Lord who claimed that he came to serve and not to be served (Mark 10:45). In Christ, the Church is called to hold forth the power of service over the power of domination, so that life, in all its fullness, may be possible for all. Therefore, the Church presents itself not only as a sign of the coming reign of God but also of the way leading to it, Christ’s way.

4. As a diaconal community, the church is called to live out its Christian witness both at local and larger as well as personal and corporate levels. This is to be reflected in all the different expressions of being Church: in worship and proclamation, in practices of hospitality and visitation (Hebrews 13:1-3), in public witness and advocacy. As “liturgy after the Liturgy” – empowered by what faith celebrates - diakonia involves actions of care, relief and service, but goes further and addresses the root causes of injustice embedded in oppressive systems and structures. Sustained action for justice is upheld by our faith in and allegiance to the God of life when faced with the death-dealing powers of Empire.

5. Every Christian community in every geo-political and socio-economic context is called to be a diaconal community, witnessing to God’s transforming grace through acts of service that hold forth the promise of God’s reign. It heals relationships, and nurtures partnerships for the sake of God’s good creation. In bringing people and communities together around issues of life and of justice and peace, diakonia stands out
as a reason for unity and as such also needs to be seen as its instrument. As an expression of participation in God’s mission in the world, diakonia is beyond all parochial interests or the agenda of religious propagation.

6. Some of the larger institutional expressions of diakonia must be affirmed for their role in enabling human resource development, meeting human need in crisis situations, and for advancing the causes of justice and economic development of the vulnerable people. Since some of these and other traditional forms of diakonia have tended to rely on infrastructure, institutions, expertise and resources, many Christian communities have come to see themselves either as supporters or as beneficiaries and rarely as participants in diakonia. Such specialized ministries do not replace the mandate of every Christian community to be diaconal.

7. As a response in faith to the hope of the coming reign of God, the signs of which are present in all experiences of hope amidst turmoil, in actions that heal and nurture people and relationships, in struggles that seek justice and affirm truth, diakonia has to be dynamic, contextual, and versatile. It must effect partnerships, not only at the level of global or larger church structures, but also among congregations, special ministries, and networks of people committed to values of justice, peace and human dignity at local, regional and national levels.

II. The diakonia of the marginalized people

“The stone that was rejected…” (Psalm 118:22, Acts 4:11)

8. For many, diakonia is a Christian response to people in need and situations of crisis, and is characterized by actions of reaching out to them from locations of power and privilege with resources and infrastructure. Such an understanding has often resulted in viewing those in need as objects or recipients of diakonia. Many philanthropic or humanitarian initiatives are also guided by such attitudes. Such an understanding has not only failed to acknowledge the diakonia of the marginalized people but also treated them as mere objects and recipients. Some forms of diakonia have been pursued without attitudes of respect, awareness of the potential or a spirit of partnership with local communities.

9. Some diaconal initiatives which began with the intention of serving the weak and the vulnerable people, over the years have become instruments of service to the privileged and affluent sections of the society. Unfortunately, service to the poor is hardly the objective of some Christian educational and health institutions in many parts of the world today. Furthermore, the overwhelming culture of globalization with its accents on profit-making and consumerism has also introduced new meanings to service, resulting in the co-option of the traditional service structures into meeting the requirements of economic activity and interests. Because of this trend, reaching out to those disempowered by social and economic structures does not seem a priority for some churches anymore. Some other diaconal initiatives have also been used as means
of proselytism. Diakonia is integral to who we are as Christians, and diaconal initiatives should not be misused. Repenting for these and other ways in which the churches have deviated from the path of God’s mission is urgent and essential for their credibility and integrity.

10. Even if they do not have the material and financial resources to do diakonia in the way many churches are accustomed to, marginalized people, through their lives and everyday resistance, practise diakonia. They testify to the sinfulness of the world, holding it accountable for its complicity and silence. Therefore, God opts for the marginalized people not because they are weak by choice, nor because of paternalistic compassion, but primarily because their lives point towards the urgent need of social transformation.

11. The world may tend to see the margins as places of disgrace and powerlessness; however, the biblical witness points towards God who is always present in the struggles of those unjustly pushed to the margins of society. It gives several accounts of God’s attention and caring love to people in situations of oppression and consequent depravation. God hears the cry of the oppressed and responds by sustaining and accompanying them in their journey towards liberation. (Exodus 3:7-8). This is the diakonia of God: a diakonia of liberation as well as of restoring dignity, and ensuring justice and peace.

12. “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” (John 1:46) This critical question indicates the decisive entry point that God made for this mission when sending the Son into the world. Jesus announces his diakonia as one that liberates the oppressed, opens the eyes that are blind, and heals the sick. (Luke 4: 16f) By asserting time and again that he has come to seek the lost and the least, Jesus constantly locates himself among the marginalized of his time. His diakonia rejects abusive power (Luke 4:1-12), refuses to be co-opted by the prevailing logic of power (Mark 10.45) and defies oppressive religious traditions (Luke 11:37-54). Instead, his diakonia opts to restore the ones who are denied life, even if these actions ultimately led him to the cross. [e.g. the man with the withered hand (Mark 3:1-6)]. Through such an option, he exposes and confronts the forces of marginalization. To that extent, the margins are the privileged spaces for God’s compassion and justice and of God’s presence in vulnerability and resistance. Here the sick were healed, the domination of evil spirits broken, the dignity of the marginalized defended, and the disciples empowered with life-affirming values for ministry.

13. Furthermore, marginalized people are not to be seen always as those in need and despair. They resist injustice and oppression in their own ways and through their struggles for life, justice, dignity and rights for themselves and for all, unveil the presence and power of God in their lives. For example, people with disabilities are promoting the values of sensitivity and partnership; the Afro-descendent communities, the Dalits and other discriminated communities are calling churches and communities to resist and overcome cultures and practices that discriminate and dehumanize millions of
people; the Indigenous peoples are advocating for the value of the interconnectedness of life, even as their own lives and lands are threatened; young people in disadvantaged situations are resisting policies that deprive them of opportunities for education and employment; and vulnerable migrant workers, through their struggles for human rights, dignity and justice, are challenging political systems that deny them basic human rights in the name of national interests. There are many such expressions in every part of the world, in the global south as well as in the global north. In all such expressions, in their actions and allegiances towards liberation and transformation, the churches today have new possibilities of diakonia as well as of new ecclesial self-discovery. Diakonia of the marginalized, then, is crucial for church’s engagement in realizing God’s oikoumene, the alternative vision of the world.

14. From a theological perspective the language of marginalized people may be conceived as a way of labelling or of reducing people to victims of systems and structures. Diakonia, however, must acknowledge the destructive and dehumanizing power of such structures, not only in order to point to the tragic effects of their reality, but also to the demands, legitimate rights and power of marginalized people to transform the world. In a world where people are treated as objects and commodities and are also mistreated on account of their identities such as gender, ethnicity, colour, caste, age, disability, sexual orientation and economic and cultural locations, diakonia must build persons and communities, affirm the dignity of all people, and transform cultures and practices that discriminate and abuse some people.

15. Marginalized people, through their yearnings for life with dignity and justice and through their participation in movements, are offering alternative visions of a world free of forces that deny justice, dignity and life for many. To many churches this is a demanding challenge but even more a liberating promise for renewing traditional models of diaconal practice and theological reflection, towards new patterns of inclusiveness, sharing and transformative action. Jesus too found himself among the marginalized of his time as he began his ministry of announcing the coming reign of God. A majority of Christian congregations around the world are made up of people who are mostly poor and marginalized on account of several factors, and this reality needs to be seen as an opportunity and a resource for more authentic ecumenical engagement. Partnership and solidarity with the marginalized alone will ensure the credibility of the churches’ claim of their participation in the mission of God.

III. Diakonia for transformation

“To do justice and to love kindness.” (Micah 6:8)

16. Diakonia, then, is service that makes the celebration of life possible for all. It is faith effecting change, transforming people and situations so that God’s reign may be real in the lives of all people, in every here and now.
17. The God of the Bible seeks and effects change in concrete situations of life, especially of those who are denied the same. Therefore, diakonia as an action in God’s love must strive to transform people, systems and cultures. God announces judgment upon those who abuse power and deny justice to the poor. Jesus too challenged unjust systems and practices and called the powerful and privileged who benefit from such, to repent and be transformed by the values of love, sharing, truthfulness and humility.

18. Diakonia is not limited to binding the wounds of the victims or doing acts of compassion. While such expressions of love and care are necessary, they do not preclude efforts aimed at confronting and transforming the forces and factors which cause suffering and deprivation. Diaconal ministry thus involves both comforting the victim and confronting “the powers and principalities” (Ephesians 6:12). It must heal the victim as well as the one who victimizes. It is a radical spirituality of struggle and commitment for transformation of sinful social structures and for the liberation of their victims. Without transformative work, diakonia would be a mere expression of service, subtly serving the interests of the oppressive and exploitative powers by covering up their complicity. If it does not challenge injustice and abuse of power, it ceases to be authentic diakonia.

19. Diakonia also does not settle for superficial expressions of peace and good will. Resonating with the indignation of prophet Jeremiah, “They have healed the brokenness of my people superficially, saying, ‘Peace, peace’, when there is no peace.” (Jer.6:14), diakonia exposes such attempts of the powerful and privileged, often done to sustain the unjust and oppressive status quo. Diakonia is prophetic action which also involves speaking truth to powers.

20. In today’s world, diakonia may also imply political action, confronting unjust military and economic powers; questioning the state policies that seem to invest more on defence rather than on people’s basic needs and human development; challenging anti-immigration laws that deny the dispossessed and the displaced their right to live; opposing development policies that destroy the earth and its people; and in working with and advocating for the rights of people who have been made vulnerable by social and economic structures.

21. Diakonia may also imply social action, aimed at dismantling oppressive cultures such as patriarchy, racism, casteism, xenophobia and other discriminatory and exclusionary practices. The churches too need to repent for the presence and practice of these cultures right within and for their derisive attitudes and theological constructions that stigmatize certain sections of society.

22. However, diakonia does not merely resist and confront evil but also proposes alternatives to the ways in which human beings relate with one another and with nature. To that extent, diakonia is transformative (Romans 12:2). Jesus, our Servant Lord, called those who followed him to be the salt of the earth, the light, and the leaven of the world (Matthew 5:13,14); in other words, to be agents of change and transformation.
Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the diakonia of the early Christian community resisted the power of the Empire by proposing alternative values and visions of the world. Diakonia, then, besides being an expression of support and help to those in need, is essentially a creative action meant to bring about the world God so desires.

IV. Challenges and Opportunities

“I am about to do a new thing!” (Isaiah 43:19)

21. In addition to the challenges, the context of the Twenty-First century presents numerous initiatives and struggles of people for freedom, justice, dignity and life in many parts of the world. Here lie new opportunities for churches to attempt diakonia in many creative ways while rediscovering themselves afresh in the process. There may be many other opportunities and possibilities, specific to each context. The following insightful suggestions, shared during the conference, may be considered for further reflection and action:

a. Diakonia of the local congregations

1. Become aware of the social, political and economic realities of life and people within which they exist as diaconal communities. Christian education must aim at cultivating a sense of social responsibility.

2. Strive to recognize and affirm the theological significance of diakonia through worship and proclamation. Church needs to be a training ground for creative engagement with the world.

3. Initiate people-level action on environmental issues.

4. Firmly respond to the reality of abuse and violence against women at home, community and church.

5. Educate people against alcoholism and substance abuse, enabling the victims to overcome these conditions.

6. Be and become open, just, hospitable and inclusive communities. Churches must strive to become discrimination-free zones and sanctuaries of safety and hope.

7. Build capacities among members, especially in areas of counselling, de-addiction programmes, educational and employment opportunities, gender sensitivity etc.

8. Seek cooperation and collaboration with other churches, other faith communities, and people’s initiatives on relevant issues of people and life in each specific context. This may also include affirming diaconal actions as well as sharing resources.
b. Diakonia of the larger church bodies

1. Encourage, support and accompany local churches as they respond to their own issues by developing and implementing diaconal work.

2. Encourage expressions of solidarity and mutual responsibility, especially by bridging the divide between urban and rural, affluent and poor, established and migrant congregations, among others.

3. Address issues of discrimination and exclusion within the church itself and launch campaigns to end the same, both within and outside.

4. Develop policies and programmes around issues of HIV/AIDS, disability, poverty, food security and environmental stewardship.

5. Recognize, strengthen and support prophetic voices and initiatives that strive to uphold the causes of human rights, justice and rights of the marginalized communities.

6. Build partnerships with regional and national level churches and organizations with a view to encourage grassroots, people-based initiatives.

7. Encourage theological institutions to introduce diakonia as a discipline wherever necessary, and also to initiate advanced study and research on relevant diaconal practices.

8. Develop easily readable Bible study materials on diakonia for pastors and lay people.

9. Engage in diaconal actions with people from different faith communities.

c. Diakonia of the WCC and similar international organizations

1. Recognize diakonia as an essential ecclesial expression, and that their organizations’ primary calling is not only to attempt certain diaconal actions on the behalf of churches but necessarily to accompany the initiatives of the churches. This may also include capacity-building, fostering partnerships, and mobilization of resources wherever necessary.

2. Journey with the people, communities and congregations in their struggles against discrimination and marginalization.

3. Advocate for the causes of justice, dignity and peace and for the victims of aggression, displacement and dispossession.
4. Support and accompany grassroots level people’s initiatives for change. Some of these may not have the needed visibility and infrastructural presence to attract support.

5. Facilitate dialogue with international diaconal agencies to encourage patterns of church cooperation and to foster mutual accountability.

6. Prepare resources and facilitate processes for inter-church exchange of theological support for creative diaconal engagement in different contexts.

7. Recognize the power of solidarity in struggle for transformation and therefore, enable, encourage and nurture such expressions of solidarity at all levels.

22. Understood this way at this moment in time, Diakonia may sometimes involve confrontation with powers vested in the status quo. Risk may be inevitable at times, requiring an attitude of love, humility, courage and commitment. Jesus insists that discipleship seeks expression under the shadow of the cross (Matthew 16: 24). Therefore, as communities called together to a vocation of service in the way of Christ, who laid down his life while serving, the churches may encourage one another in the words of the First Letter of Peter: “Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make the defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence” (I Peter 3: 13-16).

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**Questionnaire for the Local Projects**

In order to carry-out the investigation, for the interviews we focused, among others, on the following questions.

1) What activities do you call diaconal?
2) What is your biblical and theological understanding of diakonia?
3) Is your diaconal work informed by this understanding?
4) How does your current context influence your diaconal ministry?
5) What materials have you printed or produced on diakonia?
6) What is the participation of women in this diaconal project?
7) Is your diaconal work carried-out by your own church/organization only, or together with others?

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551 Most of these questions were used in a mapping survey on diakonia, carried-out by the WCC in 2010.
8) Do you also work with the civil society, NGOs and/or the state?
9) Who and how many are the beneficiaries of your diaconal work?
10) How do you measure success by the diaconal work you carry-out?
11) With what resources (human, financial, etc.) do you work and where do they come from?
12) What kind of diaconal training schemes do you have?
13) Do you have mechanisms of self-empowerment for diakonia?
14) Do you have needs to further strengthen your diaconal capacities?

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**The Cuban Council of Churches (CCC)**

Founded in 1941 as the Cuban Council of Evangelical (Protestant) Churches, it later became the Cuban Ecumenical Council, and in 1995 the Cuban Council of Churches. It is a fellowship of churches, ecumenical groups, and other ecumenical organizations which confess Jesus Christ as Son of God and Savior, according to the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and seek to respond to their common calling, to the glory of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

During 25-28 May the Council organized a special celebration to commemorate its 70th Anniversary to which attended a delegation of the WCC lead by its general secretary, Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit. This Council of Churches is also affiliated with the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism. Two Cuban churches belong to the WCC, namely: the Methodist Church and the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba.

**Member Churches of the CCC:**

- Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ
- Christian Pentecostal Church
- Christian Reformed Church
- Church of Christ
- Church of God
- Church of the Friends (Quakers)
- Church of the Nazarene
- Congregational Pentecostal Church
- Episcopal Church (Anglican)
- Evangelical Church Gethsemane
- Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession
- Fraternity of Baptist Churches
- Free Baptist Convention
- Free Evangelical Church
- Global Mission Church
- Light of God Pentecostal Church
- Methodist Church
- Missionary Church of God
- New Life Christian Church
Pentecostal Holiness Church
Presbyterian-Reformed Church
Rural Brotherhood Church
Salvation Army.

**Member ecumenical groups and centers:**
Baptist Workers – Student Coordination (COEBAC)
Christian Centre for Reflection and Dialogue (CCRD)
Christian Peace Conference (CCP)
Evangelical Theological Seminary (SET)
Information and Study Centre ‘Augusto Cotto’ (CIAC)
Interdenominational Fellowship of Evangelical Ministers and Pastors of Cuba (CIMPEC)
Koinonia Movement (MK)
Latin-American Ecumenical Social Action (ASEL)
Memorial Centre Dr Martin Luther King (CMMLK)
Student Christian Movement (SCM)
Study Commission on the History of the Church in Latin America (CEHILA)
Union of Latin-American Ecumenical Youth (ULAJE).

**Observer members:**
Open Bible Church
World-wide Missions
Greek Orthodox Church.

**Fraternal Associates:**
Autonomous Bethel Church
Church of the Moravian Brethren
Hebrew Community
International Christian Community
Pentecostal Church of Sovereign Grace
United Church
Yoga Association.

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**The people/organizations contacted in Cuba**

1) Dr. Reinerio Arce – President of the Matanzas Theological Seminary.
2) Rev. Marcial Miguel Hernández – President of the Cuban Council of Churches (CCC).
3) Dr. Elina Ceballos – Director of the CCC’s Diakonia Area.
4) Dr. Lourdes Regueiro – Executive of the Centre of International Studies.
5) Eng. Joel Suárez – Coordinator of the Martin Luther King Centre.
6) Rev. Raimundo García – Director of the Cárdenas Centre for Reflection and Dialogue.
7) Mr. Carlos León-Rubio – from the Diaconal Ecological Centre.
8) Father Carlos Alberto Tamayo – Priest of the Episcopal Church and Director of the Diaconal Project in *Cuatro Esquinas*, Matanzas province.
9) Seminarian Michael Beaton – serving at the Santa Clara Presbyterian-Reformed Church.
10) Rev. Manuel Morales – Vice-President of the Rural Brotherhood Church and Director of the Diaconal Project in Tarafa, Camajuani, Villa Clara province.
11) Rev. Daniel Montoya – Professor of mission at the Matanzas Theological Seminary.
12) Rev. Francisco Rodés – Baptist pastor, Coordinator of the Cuban Evangelical Prison Chaplaincy and Director of the Kairos Centre in Matanzas.  

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**The people/organizations contacted in Colombia**

1) Rev. Eduardo Martínez-Díaz – Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.
2) Dr. Pablo Moreno – President of the Baptist University, Cali.
3) Rev. Milton Mejía – member of the Presbytery of the Coast’s Diakonia Committee, Presbyterian Church of Colombia, professor of theology and coordinator of the Church and Society Observer in Colombia, Reformed University, Barranquilla.
5) Mr. Pedro Acosta-Fernández – Executive Director of the Corporation for Social Community Development (CORSOC-ASVIDAS).
6) Rev. Angel Ortiz – Cuban Presbyterian pastor serving in Colombia, collaborating especially in the rural areas of the Central Presbytery, Presbyterian Church of Colombia.
7) Ms. Jenny Neme – Director of JUSTAPAZ (Christian Centre for Justice, Peace and Non-Violent Action), belonging to the Mennonite Church of Colombia.
8) Mr. José Duque, Director of the Department of Formation and Ministries of the Colombian Methodist Church (ICM).

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552 During the visit, contacts and/or meetings were also made with: Rev. Daniel Izquierdo – Moderator of the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba; Rev. Edelberto Valdés – Director of the Program and Mission Department of the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba; Very Rev. Pablo Odén Marichal – Vice-President of the Matanzas Theological Seminary; Bishop Ricardo Pereira – Methodist Church; Bishop Griselda Delgado – Episcopal Church and Ms. María de los Ángeles Pérez – Office of Religious Affairs.
The Diakonia Community of the South Africa Diakonia Council of Churches

Member Churches. The following churches are full members and are represented on the Council:

* Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA)
* African Methodist Episcopal Church
* Dutch Reformed Church (DRC)
* Ethiopian Episcopal Church
* Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA)
* Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (Natal-Transvaal)
* Orthodox Church
* Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA)
* Religious Society of Friends
* Roman Catholic Church
* Salvation Army
* United Apostolic Church (UAC)
* United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA)
* United Methodist Church
* Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa
* Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa.

The following organizations are special members as a result of a long-standing association with the Council:

* Vuleka Trust
* YMCA – Durban.

The following are the current funding partners:

*Brot fur die Welt
*Catholic Fund for Overseas Development
*Church of Sweden
*Missio
*Embassy of Finland
*CS Mott Foundation
*Mense met een Missie
*Sinamandla
*Christian Aid
*Evangelical Reformed Church of the Canton Saint Grail
*Hudson Trust
*Misereor
*Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

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