Report on the visit to South Korea for participating in International conference on 'Diakonia' at Seoul Korea,

14-20 October, hosted by Korea Diakonia, Seoul

Introduction

An invitation from Korea Diakonia was extended to EMS to participate and to bring inputs on the theme of Diakonia in contemporary context. There were participants from 6 different countries as resource person to share on the afore mentioned theme from their respective country context. Dr.Henry Von Bose, member of DOAM, who was the former director of Diakonia, in Oberkirchenrat, Wüttemberg, offered inputs on behalf of Germany and I participated in the conference and shared few insights from my own perspectives too. The conference also co-incided with Diakonia EXPO 2016, which is conducted evry two years by Korea Diakonia.

Who were the participants?

1. Revd.Dr.Henry Von Bose ( EMS, Germany)
2. Mr.Evert Jan Hazeleger ( KIA, Netherland)
3. Revd.Ninni Smedberg ( Vorsta Diakoal Center, Sweeden)
4. Ms.Zhao Jingwen ( Helen) (The Amity Foundation,China)
5. Revd.Dr.Carlos Emilio Ham (TES, Cuba)
6. Revd.Solomon.P.Benjamin ( EMS Germany)
7. Ms.Freeda Smedberg ( Sweeden)
8. Ms.Min Woo Oh ( Korea Diakonia, Korea)
9. Revd.Ariel ( Philippines)( Korea Diakonia, Korea)
10. Revd.Dr.CHEON Young Cheol, Director ( Korea Diakonia,Korea)
What is Diakonia in today's context.

This theme today is vividly understood as contextual and significant and hence need a clear perspectives in enacting Diakonia and living a theology of compassion. One could ask the following questions seeking clarity.

- Can Social work and doing good be defined as Diakonia?
- Can addressing Justice and Human rights be defined as Diakonia?
- Is Diakonia one form of social welfare offered by charity organization?
- What is the spiritual perspective on Diakonia?
- Why should a church engage in Diakonia?
- What is the connection between Missio-Dei and Missio Habitatat

Are some of the pondering questions we need to address while defining Diakonia?

Some general views of Diakonia

Diakonia as Empowerment

Some feel 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 engaging each person and group to live a rightful human hood. This in some cases needs a peoples participation to work towards transformation.

So the issue here, as we address the challenge of impoverishment, is not to help the poor just to solve their needs, rather, to facilitate an empowerment process by which they can be part of the solution and not only part of the problem. One way of doing this is by implementing what we call the Empowering Diakonia model. This can be an essential tool not only to interrelate both the theory and practice, but also as a helpful diagnosis instrument for analysis, description and interpretation for practical implementation. Hence, the application of the model, as it interrelates both diakonia and empowerment,

Diakonia as Transformative

Some call it as Transformative Diakonia—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.

Diakonia and biblical connotation

"Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority
over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves” (Lk. 22:24-27).

This means that the service, diakonia, of Jesus Christ, was addressed not only to the weak, sick and poor. In His earthly life, our Lord Jesus Christ showed that He understood the love of one's neighbor He preached (cf. Mt. 5:44) not in a figurative but in the most literary and real sense. Those who criticized Christ were right - He was a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Mt. 11:19). Diakonia, the service of Christ, embraces everyone including the deprived, tax collectors, sinners, and prostitutes. For instance, tax collectors were well-off people. In Mt. 21:23-31, Christ throws these cruel words into the face of the chief priests and elders: "The tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you".

The service of the Christ also reaches beyond the national borders of Israel. According to the Gospel from St. John, the Greeks came to Christ already in His lifetime (Jn. 12:20-22). The parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37) and the conversation of the Savior with the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:1-42) have a clear theological import. Belonging to God's elected Israel is related by the Lord to the other, a stranger or even an enemy.

According to St. Mathew, the risen Lord sends His disciples to all nations (Mt. 28:19). Remarkably, the beginning of this understanding of Christ's service is found already in the Old Testament. In many passages in Holy Scriptures, Israel is reminded that they "were slaves in Egypt" and therefore should not "deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice". What remains of the harvest should be left for the alien, the fatherless and the widow (Deut. 24:17-22, cf. Deut. 14:29; 16:11,14). Scripture underlines the heart of diakonical manifestation.

**Diakonia is also viewed as the face of the Church in the community.**

It is largely believed that Diakonia provided entry into the Christian community, whose members were called and sent to serve. During his visit to the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus expressed an awareness of his call to serve, as Luke 4:16-21 presents. Likewise, Jesus commissioned and sent The Twelve, as well as The Seventy to minister to all the world. Jesus' viewpoint was clear- a call to serve was essential for ministry. Jesus remarked, "I am among you as one who serves (Luke 22:27)" and "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve (Luke 12:37)." The diakonia of Jesus and the Apostles inaugurated the Holy Reign of God in which the hungry would eat, the blind would see, and the deaf would hear.

The building of this inclusive and just community is a responsibility of all humankind; where the churches have a leading 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.
In Korea. The first day was a full day with many strong impressions of human right activities and demonstrations being a Saturday.

1. We visited one of the Buddhist shrines that had special features of contemporary worship.

2. We participated in the DIAKONIA Expo run and walked in the sponsored run by church. The inauguration gathered almost 7000 people and was a strong church based programme. The inaugural programme brought the heads of many various churches in PCK, PROK, NCCK and other denominational churches too.

3. We visited the memorial of the farmer who protested for the rights of other farmers and went on an indefinite fasting. He gathered many supporters and they were chased away by water cannons. The farmer was hit by the water gun and fell into coma and died on 25 September 2016. His death raised many voices for justice.

4. Standing and mourning with the parents of the 300 children who drowned in a ferry or boat in 2014. The parents gather to offer tribute every day in Seoul. The yellow river they say. Many parents gather to mourn the demise of the loved ones and offer prayers and tributes while waiting for justice from government. They feel led down with no compassion.
Meeting and Congratulating the newly elected General Secretary of PROK

With Revd. Marianne Wagner the chairperson of EMS along with the EMS team congratulated the newly elected General Secretary of PROK Rev. Dr. LEE Jae Cheon. Along with Dr. Henry Von Bose, Corinna Waltz, Karina Schumacher, Rev. Dr. CHEON Min Heui, Rev. LEE Joon-Mo, Rev. KIM Seung-jong. Was a memorable meeting.

Trilateral Partnership of EMS member churches of Pfalz, PCK Korea and PC of Ghana.

EMS Trilateral partnership with Church of Pfalz Germany, PCK Church of Galilee Korea and Church of Ghana Africa. A beautiful mission blend of the 3 member churches of EMS. Held in Jong Do church Seoul on 19 October 2016.

The speakers were.

1. IMPEUNGJIN Muksanim of Korea
2. Rev. MARIANNE WAGNER of Pfalz and chair of EMS
3. Rev. FLORIAN GARTNER MOED Pfalz
4. Rev. DR. SAMUEL AYTE NYAMPONG from Ghana
5. Rev. SOLOMON BENJAMIN liaison secretary East Asia Mission EMS

A wonderful tribute to this South-South and North relationship. At the Seminar of Ecumenical Mission of the Trilateral Partnership Korea-Ghana-Germany, Solomon Paul Benjamin, EMS Liaison Secretary East Asia and India, had the chance to give a short greeting on behalf of EMS. This unique partnership between three EMS member churches - the Presbyterian Church of Korea, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and the Protestant Church of the Palatinate - exists for more than 15 years. A fruitful connection and great learning field for world mission.
Meeting with the founder of Galilee church and immediate former Moderator of PCK

Along with Revd. Marianne Wagner, we also met with immediate past Moderator of PCK. SON Dalig Muksanim, The founder of the Galilee church Revd. Impeung Jin Muksanim and also with Rev. Dr. Sangdo Choi and Rev. Dr. LEE Young IK. Was a memorable evening with many discussions?

Attended the Partnership Church with Pfalz, the Church of Galilee in Sindorim on Sunday the 16 October 2016.

We participated in the worship of the church of Galilee in Sindorim, along with Revd. Marianne WAGNER, the partner church on a Trilateral partnership with Pfalz and Ghana. The pastor demonstrated an exclusive tea ceremony and a very distinctive tea of a very high quality. Was an interesting time of fellowship.

Comfort Women do you know them ?????

Visited and shared solidarity with the victims of war personnel in Korea. These women who were abused are called COMFORT WOMEN. The statue represents countless women abused and their stories left unheard. Many have grown old and died also. The student community demonstrates on every Saturday a round vigil to protect the statue which is in front of Japanese embassy in SEOUL. They say the feet of the statue does not touch the ground symbolising their insecurity on belongingness. A vulnerable depiction of the trauma and hurt. There is still a younger generation raising their voice for the voiceless.

Visiting a Minjung Church along with Dr. Henry Von Bose in Incheon, Seoul.
Visited a Min jung church in Incheon Korea along with Dr.Henry. Henry Von Bose. The Church ministered by Rev. LEE Joon-Mo a PROK muksanim and his wife. On 19 October Seoul Korea.

The mission work with the vulnerable community, homeless people, migrants, with the special people and with women recued enhancing and transformed were significant in the work. There are special training for life skills and also further studies offered for those interested. The government has offered many facilities in terms of settlement and also provision for survival for this community. This is also a worshipping community, that shares and breaks bread with one another.

Meeting with BYUN Chang Bae Muksanim, Ecumenical Referent for PCK

It was wonderful meeting with BYUN Chang Bea, PCK Ecumenical Referent for breakfast meeting on 20 October at Shilla Stay, Seoul Korea. Was a wonderful time of discussion and view to future. There were many interesting topics of discussions we ahd and we llok forward to new horizons in mission

Encounter with few of the friends.

We met with few young people from NK and had a discussion. We also visited a home for young girls from NK and had

Wonderful time of listening to their stories and to know they are well cared for and hospitality of goodness.

International conference on Diakonia.

The presentation of the resource person on the theme of Diakonia gathered over 100 people who after listening to the speakers had raised questions seeking clarification on the
understanding of Diakonia from their respective cultural context. Revd.Dr.Henry Von Bose, represented EMS and shared on the understanding of Diakonia from a German perspective.

Conclusion

Therefore, in the flow of the church’s understanding of diakonia, 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 martyria (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.

Diakonia denies hierarchy and affirms the power-service. Hence we claim to enact Diakonia in our context and also strongly work to perform. The church’s return to Diakonia and the theology of compassion. In encounter with moses on mount Sinai, God spoke to him in a burning bush amidst fire of agony and pain and shared his concern. I heard my people cry and I have come down to deliver them. If this is god’s paradigm of Diakonia, we need to engage to awaken church today to give life and life in abundance for all.

Solomon Paul Benjamin
Liaison for East Asia and India

Interesting Observations.

While we were visiting the Buddhist temple in Seoul, it is astonishing to find that many expressions of their worship have been contemporized. They chant with rhythm and music and also they burn candles as offering. The personification of the Compassion Buddha remains with no gender expression but as a mother of compassion. The following pictures show to express these observations.