

# Churches in Europe as Agents of Welfare – Sweden, Norway and Finland

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Welfare and Religion in a European Perspective

Volume 1

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# Researching the Changing European Landscape of Welfare and Religion

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Welfare and Religion in a European perspective (WREP) is a research project studying the function of the historic majority churches as welfare agents in eight European countries. The welfare function of the churches is analysed with analytical tools from sociology, theology and gender studies. The project is financed by The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation and involves 24 researchers. It runs during 2003–2006 and focuses on Sweden, Finland, Norway, Germany, England, France, Italy, and Greece. This is the second working paper published in the project, in two volumes reporting core results of the eight case studies conducted in one middle sized town in each country. This introductory chapter gives a brief overview of the research questions, methods and material used in the project.

## Changing landscape of welfare and religion at local European level

The future of welfare systems is high on the agenda in many countries all over the world and so also in Europe. The responsibilities of different agents in the welfare field are being debated. Simple models cannot be used to describe the present day European welfare pluralism. We live in the age of a welfare mix.

There are several reasons for the particular debates on welfare. Advantages in medicine, pharmacology, health care, and a number of other factors have prolonged the average length of life in most countries. The growing number of elderly people, in combination with low birth rates, is an important issue on the political agenda in all European countries. Existing public welfare solutions are faced with financial pressures, because of the fact that the relative costs of all types of service production are increasing. In relation to the continuously reduced costs in goods production, the relative price of public welfare services increases because of the higher dependence on human resources in the production process. It is not possible to rationalise human interaction in the same way as mechanical processes.<sup>1</sup>

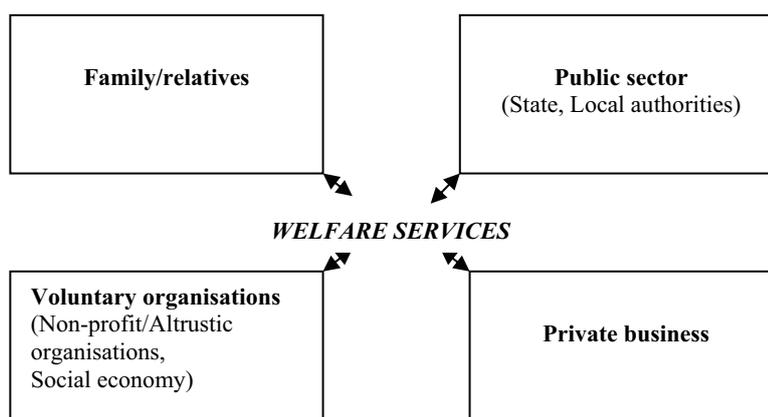
Other factors are the national deregulations of state affairs on the one hand and new regional and global regulations linked to transnational structures, like EU and

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<sup>1</sup> Ingelstam 1995, Pettersson 2000.

the IMF,<sup>2</sup> on the other hand. These transnational organisations put pressure on welfare systems where states are involved as major agents. At the same time as existing welfare solutions are questioned, new forms of social problems and poverty appear in all countries, not least in Europe, as effects of economic and social changes linked to globalisation and migration.<sup>3</sup>

The division of roles between different agents in providing welfare has changed over time, as well as between different parts of Europe.<sup>4</sup> Family and relatives have historically been the main agents providing assistance for individuals in need. During the industrial expansion period in the nineteenth century voluntary organisations based on altruistic social support grew up in many new settlements. These organisations were often linked in some way to churches. In the twentieth century the idea of a strong social state dominated in northern Europe and an expanding public sector liberated the family from many of their traditional responsibilities and also took over many of the activities organised by voluntary agents. The social responsibilities of private companies also varies according to context. Sometimes they provide important social security benefits for their employees and sometimes welfare services on a commercial basis. Family, voluntary organisations, the public sector and private business in this way constitute four social sectors involved in the provision of welfare services (Figure 1).



*Figure 1. Four sectors in the provision of welfare services.*

It is impossible to understand Europe without acknowledging the role of the Christian majority Churches. Still dominant on the religious scene they have historically served as providers of medical care, charity and education, but also contributed to the European understanding of solidarity and social responsibility. Furthermore, even today the churches have, in various manners effect on – and play various roles in – all the four sectors providing welfare. The churches sometimes co-operate with private business, they have manifold relations to individuals' family lives, they play

<sup>2</sup> IMF = International Monetary Fund.

<sup>3</sup> Castells 1998, 2000, Hoogvelt 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Jeppsson Grassman 2004; Bäckström & Beckman & Pettersson 2004.

versatile roles in the social economy, and they also are interlinked, in some places much more closely than others, with the public services.

Additionally, Europe has traditionally been pictured as a classical example of the secularisation thesis.<sup>5</sup> However, lately it has become more and more evident in sociological research on religion that European religiosity has not vanished – nor will it vanish in the perceivable future.<sup>6</sup> The present-day European religious landscape is often described as privatised and the interest for individual spirituality may even be increasing.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the European churches in many countries have during recent years, and in the 1990s, taken novel public roles, for instance in defending the rights of marginalised individuals.<sup>8</sup> The present-day role of the majority churches in welfare is truly an intricate topic of research.

A number of questions arise in relation to the ongoing challenges to the organisation of welfare. What is the actual role played today by the different churches? Which tasks do they have, as providers of welfare? How do they influence welfare at a normative level, in the formation of underlying values and in public debate? Which expectations do they meet from the population and authorities?

## Welfare regimes in relation to church traditions and gender patterns

In late modern secularised Europe the role of the majority churches differs considerably from country to country, depending on the respective theological traditions, but also on the shape of the welfare organisation in the country. In Northern Europe, where the state and the public authorities have the overall responsibility for welfare, what is expected of the Churches is minimal. In Southern Europe individuals in need are often reliant on families and kin, with the Churches as an important complement. In Germany voluntary organisations, including the Churches, execute a significant part of the welfare services decided upon by the “Sozialstaat”.<sup>9</sup>

Depending on how responsibility is divided between different agents, the welfare systems in Europe can be divided into different ideal types of so called “welfare regimes”.<sup>10</sup> In the WREP-project a typology of four ideal types is used: a Nordic Social-Democratic model, a continental corporate model, a British liberal model and a Southern European corporate-conservative model. All these four ideal types are represented among the eight countries studied in the project. In addition the countries represent differing church traditions, which may be grouped in five major types, namely the Nordic Lutheran folk churches, the German Evangelical Lutheran-Reformed, the Roman-Catholic, the Anglican and the Orthodox churches. The matrix in figure 2 illustrates how different welfare models and church traditions are represented in the project. Worth noting is that the figures for member-

<sup>5</sup> Berger 1967, Wilson 1982, Dobbelaere 1981.

<sup>6</sup> Berger 2001, Davie 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Woodhead & Heelas 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Casanova 1994, Davie 2000, Yeung 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Beckman ed. 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Cf Esping-Andersen 1990.

ship/affiliation/sense of belonging are high or very high in all countries, although the Christian population of Germany is divided between the Roman-Catholic and the Protestant Churches.

Table 1. Welfare model and church tradition in the eight countries.

<b>Four welfare models</b>	<b>Liberal social state</b>	<b>Nordic social democratic</b>	<b>Continental corporative</b>	<b>Southern European conservative</b>
<b><i>Five church traditions</i></b>				
<b><i>Lutheran</i></b> 80 % in Sweden, Norway, Finland		Sweden Norway Finland		
<b><i>Evangelical Lutheran/ Reformed</i></b> 30 % in Germany			Germany	
<b><i>Roman-Catholic</i></b> 90 % in Italy, 70 % in France, 30 % in Germany			Germany France	Italy
<b><i>Anglican</i></b> 50 % in England	England			
<b><i>Orthodox</i></b> 95 % in Greece				Greece

## Typologies and gender

One problem with the regime typology, as hitherto developed, is that it does not pay significant attention to gender and family as dimensions of the analysis. Research on welfare state change has been criticised for being too focused on the typical male worker, while care, and especially care within the family, has been neglected. Gender researchers argue that family is not a gender neutral word, but often a hidden way of speaking of the unpaid work of women. One type of response has been to develop a new set of regime qualifications focused on the degree of dependence on a male breadwinner in the organisation of welfare.<sup>11</sup>

Within WREP we take account of the feminist critique by paying special attention to the fact that many of the challenges today facing the organisation of welfare in Europe have to do with the changing life patterns for women and men, and especially so with changes related to families. The European churches have historically tended to defend traditional family roles and one aspect of the project thus concerns how the churches respond to the ongoing changes related to gender and family.

<sup>11</sup> Lewis 1992; 1997.

## Aim, theoretical framework and methodology

The basic aim of the project is to analyse the function of majority churches as agents of social welfare in a comparative European perspective. The project aims to contribute with new knowledge within primarily the following five areas:<sup>12</sup>

1. The actions of majority churches at local level, both as producers of welfare services and as forms of public opinion.
2. How local (public) authorities view church run provision as a part of the social welfare system.
3. Local attitudes to the function of churches as both providers of social welfare and as advocates of moral standards in the welfare debate.
4. The theological and ethical statements/positions of mainstream churches. Here, the focus will lie on the tension between local understandings and official statements (as they appear in official documents, primarily at the national level).
5. The importance of gender issues within the above areas.

Methodologically the project builds on case studies in one medium sized locality in each of the eight countries involved. These case studies form the basis of sociological, theological and gender related analyses country by country, comparatively between countries and at a comprehensive European level.

The basic approach of the project is sociological, focusing on the church as an organisation with certain functions in society. Theoretically the sociological analyses build on the earlier research-project "From State Church to Free Folk Church", a part of the major programme "The state and the individual: Swedish society undergoing change".<sup>13</sup> These analyses focus on the function of the church in society and how this function is perceived by different agents.

One of the specificities of studies of churches concerns the basic role played by theology. In the project theology is understood in a broad sense, as expressed both in dogmatic statements, in the concrete actions of the churches on the local level, as well as in how parishes and individuals within the parishes motivate their acting. Not least important in the theological analyses have been to relate and compare these levels to each other. As we are not only dealing with dogmatic texts, but with interviews and documentations of praxis, hermeneutical questions of how to analyse theology in different types of texts have come to the fore.

A third focus in the project, cross-cutting the sociological and theological analyses, concerns the gendered character of welfare provision and the function of the churches. In the project gender is understood as a social practice, continually created and reconstituted by the activities of women and men, as well as of social institutions.<sup>14</sup> Basic for the project has been to include religion and churches among the institutions partaking in the production and reproduction of gender in interaction with e.g. the family, the state and the labour market. This inclusion of religion and churches has unfortunately not been self-evident in many analyses of gender and welfare. Starting from the observation of a general predominance of women as care providers within various welfare systems, the aim of the case studies has been to get

<sup>12</sup> WREP project description 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Bäckström & Beckman & Petterson 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Daly and Rake 2004.

a more nuanced and rich picture of how the churches are part of this gendering, through their practices as well as through their theological legitimisations.

Theoretically as well as methodologically the explorative character of the project is important to stress. As the intersections of church traditions, welfare regimes and gender have hardly been studied before, it has been important to be open to contextual variations in the different countries concerning issues of whom to interview, how questions are posed etc. The basic idea has been to interview representatives of three agents; local public authorities, the majority church and the population. The detailed design of the different case studies has had to adapt to contextual circumstances, e.g. in some countries the role of the public authorities is minor, while other agents might be hugely important. Another example is that in order to collect relevant information on gender it has been important to contextualise the questions posed to the informants. While a question using the term “gender equality” may give a lot of response in e.g. Sweden it would not make sense in the Greek setting. Thus no question on gender was included among the seven questions posed to all agents in all countries. Instead the methods used for gathering data on gender was left to the local researchers to decide upon.

In order to be able to carry out these contextual adaptations of the methodology of the case studies the researchers in each country started by producing a brief description of the respective national welfare systems, the majority churches and the general situation with regard to gender. These national descriptions were published in a working paper called *Welfare, Church and Gender in Eight European Countries*.<sup>15</sup>

The work with the background descriptions turned out to be very important, as it clarified how much we all take for granted, also as researchers, of our own context. The big challenge for the researchers turned out to be how to become aware of the specificities of our own context. This first background description also revealed the fact that central concepts in the project like the concept “welfare” have very different connotations in different countries.

## Qualitative case studies in eight European countries

In each of the eight countries a medium sized town has been chosen with a population of between 25,000 and 110,000; Gävle in Sweden, Drammen in Norway, Lahti in Finland, Darlington in England, Evreux in France, Reutlingen in Germany, Vicenza in Italy and Thiva in Greece. The aim of the case studies has been to document, analyse and interpret the interaction within the welfare field between the respective local majority churches (and associated organisations) and the local authorities and to investigate attitudes to the role of the church. In some cases organisations linked to the church or ecumenical organisations play a major role in welfare issues and have thereby been included in the study.

Different qualitative methods have been used, mainly individual interviews, focus group interviews and document analyses. The research has had an explorative approach with the aim of being especially open to new and unexpected facts and

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<sup>15</sup> Beckman ed. 2004.

phenomena. As part of this approach the applicable research methods have been developed continuously during the project period. Data has been collected in each of the eight towns to cover the following areas:

1. Data which document ongoing co-operation at a local level between social authorities and church organisations.
2. Data (interviews) which document (a) how representatives of the social authorities view the role of the churches as social welfare providers and (b) how local churches view the organisation and development of social welfare.
3. Data (focus group interviews) which document attitudes of a strategic sample of the population towards the function of churches as welfare providers.
4. Data (e.g. documents, minutes, local papers) which document the theological position of the local church and its representatives as expressed in words and actions.
5. Data which document the importance of gender within the areas studied.

A first important task has been to map the activities of the local majority church within the area of welfare, and to describe these activities in relation to the social situation in the locality. A second part consists of mapping social areas and activities where cooperation exists between the local church and the public authorities. These two parts of the case studies have been performed through analysis of printed information from authorities and church, through newspapers, informal interviews, observation and study visits. Thirdly a main task has been to map attitudes to welfare and to the role of the church by interviewing representatives of local authorities, church and population.

In order to get hold of the attitudes of the church and the public authorities we have chosen to carry out individual interviews with a strategic sample of representatives. Concerning the attitudes among the population we have chosen to use the focus group method. A few groups in each town have been compiled and selected strategically. In most of the case studies existing groups of seven to ten people have been used, such as a group of pensioners, students or unemployed people. When choosing these groups we have striven to cover as broad range of age and social conditions as possible among the total number of individuals in order to get as good representation as possible of the population.

About 30 individual interviews and between two and four focus group interviews have been performed in each town, which means that altogether about 250 interviews with individual Europeans and about 24 focus group interviews involving about 200 individuals have been performed. This means that about 450 individuals spread in eight localities in Europe have delivered the empirical data for the analysis of attitudes concerning welfare and the role of the church. All interviews have been taped and transcribed.

## Seven common questions

One of the basic tasks and contributions of the project has been to map the local reality in an explorative way, but another basic aim has been to collect material that would make a comparative analysis possible. The risk with an explorative approach is that the collected material from different contexts would turn out to be so different

that it would be impossible to compare. In order to guarantee opportunities for comparison, seven common questions were asked in all individual and focus group interviews. Following the qualitative path all interview questions are open without fixed answer alternatives. These are the seven common questions in the way they were formulated in the Swedish case study (here translated to English):

1. In your opinion, what is welfare?
2. In your opinion, how well does the *Swedish* welfare system function in *Gävle*?
3. In your opinion, does the *Church of Sweden* have a role to play in the welfare and the well-being of people?
4. (If yes) How would you describe the role of the Church?
  - a. In your opinion, should the *Church of Sweden* carry out practical social work?
  - b. (If yes) What type?
5. In your opinion, should the *Church of Sweden* contribute to the public debate on welfare issues?
6. (If yes) How should the Church contribute?
7. In what ways do you think that the *Church of Sweden's* role in society has changed over the past 10 years?
8. Is there anything you would like to change regarding the Church's current role in society?

The answers to these seven questions constitute an essential part of the base for coming comparative analyses between the case studies. Other questions in the interview guides differ between the countries, depending on the national and local context.

## Concluding remarks

The local case studies were completed during spring 2005 and are reported in the two volumes now published. These volumes will, along with the background information given in a previous working-paper,<sup>16</sup> form the basic material for the following comparative analysis between the eight countries from the three theoretical perspectives of the project; sociology, theology and gender. Two further books for international publication are planned: firstly a book (during 2006) comprising country by country analyses based on the material in the two working reports, and secondly a book (in 2007) with comparative analyses from the three perspectives.

The present results of the case studies have confirmed our choice of methodology; qualitative explorative studies with focus at the local level. We have already seen that our findings differ from what would have been the image of the role of the church if we had used interviews and documents at the national level in each country for the analysis. Much new knowledge about the local reality and praxis has been gained. We thus foresee interesting tensions to be observed when we enter the phase of comparing national policies with local practices and attitudes.

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<sup>16</sup> Beckman ed. 2004.

It has been surprising for all researchers from these eight countries to discover how much we are bound up in our own national settings and contexts. Many things that we have taken for granted as being the same in other contexts as in our own, have proven to be different than we thought. In spite of the fact that we are well internationally orientated in the field of religion and society, many things have been shown to differ from our presuppositions. This also concerns familiar concepts. During the research process, including several meetings with all the researchers involved, we have experienced the inadequacy of common conceptualisations to describe our findings, particularly from a comparative international viewpoint. The project has contributed novel correctives concerning concepts of welfare and religion. These findings have been collected in a separate article in this volume, by Martha Middlemiss.

We are convinced that each of our eight local case studies in working report no 2 as well as the national descriptions in working report no 1 give important contributions to the ongoing discussion on the future organisation of welfare and the role of different agents – at a national as well as European and global level.

The editing of the report has been done in collaboration between Ninna Edgardh Beckman, Per Pettersson, and Anne Birgitta Yeung. We thank Martha Middlemiss, Lina Molokotos-Liederman, and Rod McConchie who have checked the language, while still showing great tolerance towards our respective language traditions. We also warmly thank Helena Riihiaho who did the layout work for this volume. Anders Bäckström and Grace Davie have offered valuable background support for our work, as always.

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# Divided by a common language: The benefits and problems created by linguistic diversity in a comparative European project

MARTHA MIDDLEMISS

To an American company setting up a European arm the number and variety of languages that have to be grappled with and their implications to the success of the business can often be overlooked. It is assumed that English is sufficient as a means of communication. Similarly in the international research community the expectation is often that English will be the common language when researchers meet to exchange ideas. Everyone can relate frustrated accounts from conferences where a language barrier meant that they were not understood or could not understand.

We were aware of all of this at the outset of the project Welfare and Religion in a European Perspective, but paid little attention to it given the good levels of English in the group and the fact that several of the researchers shared other languages in common. Gradually as the project progressed however we realised that the language question struck at the heart of the contextual nature of the very issues that the project is attempting to compare. This presented problems that could not simply be overcome with translation, as sometimes a key word simply did not exist in one language, but also opportunities, as in discussing problems of translation the researchers involved were forced to articulate values and concepts taken for granted in their native countries. This in turn meant that the group as a whole could, as the result of a query over how to translate a particular word for use in an interview guide, learn about deep-seated cultural values central to the understanding of religion or welfare in a particular country, which might otherwise not have come to light.

## Defining welfare

A key example of this is the concept of welfare. It was decided early on in the project, in line with the general explorative methodology of the empirical research, to start with a very broad definition of welfare, giving interviewees the opportunity to define the implications of the term for themselves before proceeding with the rest of the interview. This produced interesting results in some cases with a split appearing between those who saw welfare as something provided by the state, i.e. the welfare system and those who interpreted the word as having a broader meaning, encompassing health and wellbeing, both physical and spiritual.

Such results could be of considerable interest to the project, but it is important first to check the word that was used to translate welfare in each national context. In

French, for example, there exists no word that is a translation of the English welfare. The welfare state is referred to as “L’Etat Providence”, a phraseology which, in referring directly to the state cannot be used to ask questions of individuals if trying to ascertain whether or not an automatic connection is made between national state and welfare. The same is true of the situation in Italy, where the researcher chose to use the English word welfare in place of the Italian term, for this very reason.<sup>1</sup>

Neither were problems of definition restricted to the concept of welfare, or to words that exist in the English language, but have no counterpart in others. We have struggled, for example, to find a suitable translation for the German word ‘Ökonomisierung’. One author, writing in Swedish has translated the term as “ekonomisering”, which he defines as an “ongoing process effecting societal functions whereby increasing numbers of social and cultural phenomena are turned into markets and defined in economic terms”.<sup>2</sup> While the phenomenon is recognisable in an English context the word does not seem to exist in the language. Terms such as ‘marketisation’ are close, but do not have the same emphasis, while neo-liberalism is too politically loaded a term and economisation leads thoughts in the wrong direction.

## Cultural context

Having native speakers involved in a project is sometimes almost more of a hindrance than a help. The well known quip that the US and UK are two nations divided by a common language indicates the problems that can ensue if it is assumed that the English language transcends cultural context.

For an English speaker familiar with the English context the natural word to use for a priest with particular responsibility for a geographical parish would be Vicar or incumbent, but these words are loaded with meaning as to the legal status of the said clergyperson. Using this term of those Swedish parish priests with managerial/ leadership responsibility for other clergy, deacons and other parish staff (kyrkoherde) for example, could be misleading to an informed English reader. The question then arises of what term would be better suited? Priest in Charge might at first seem a logical choice if it were not for the fact that in the English Anglican context a Priest in Charge is a priest with specific responsibility for a particular church or church plant, but under the authority of the parish priest – the opposite in fact of what is intended.

The above is one example from the church environment, but there is no shortage of examples of illustrations for this predicament and here we stumbled across issues that are key not just to the project, but also to the developing structures of the EU. In trying to compare towns and their administrative structures of governance across Europe we sought comparable terms to describe the different geographical levels of responsibility. Again we met with the problem that the obvious English word for one level, local authority, has a very specific connotation in its native context, which may not be appropriate for what others are trying to describe. Similarly the word region is used in many countries, but can be used to describe areas of quite different

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<sup>1</sup> See chapter by Anna Lisa Frisina.

<sup>2</sup> Mårtensson, Bo, 2004, 1.

geographical size. Looking for guidance I turned to the website for the EU Committee of the Regions, hoping that for internal purposes some common terminology would have been created. Here it was possible to see which bodies from each of the countries in the project (except Norway) are represented in the commission and therefore counted as regions, but there is no common terminology. The list of national delegations and their coordinating institutions, for example, lists the Swedish delegation as coordinated by the common office for the Federation of County Councils and the Association of Local Authorities, while the UK equivalent is the Local Government International Bureau and the Finnish the Association of Local and Regional Authorities.<sup>3</sup>

Nor are such issues of context, tied up with terminology restricted to the domain of bureaucratic terms, whether ecclesiastical or secular. As the editors mentioned in their introduction the issue of gender equality became one of both major interest and complexity within the project, not least in terms of acquiring comparable material and relevant terminology. The project has its origins in the Swedish context where the issue of gender equality is well anchored in both political and public debate. The language even has a word for the phenomenon: 'jämställdhet.' The fact that such a specific term exists is revealing of political and cultural streams. In Sweden the issue is seen as specific and separate from discussion of other forms of inequality where as in the UK, for example, there is no specific term and gender equality is seen as one form of equality to be striven after along with racial, religious and ethnic equality, to name a few. This phenomenon can be clearly seen in a comparison of the case studies from Darlington and Gävle, where interviewees in Darlington naturally answered questions asked referring to gender inequalities with reference to inequality in general.

In the French case a further aspect of the complexities is revealed. As Corinne Valasik notes in her report on the national situation in France regarding gender, the issue of gender equality was largely absent from public debate until the late 1990s, and therefore lacks accepted terminology, as the dominance of a concept of republican universalism has been seen to exclude the possibility to focus on the rights of different sections of the population.<sup>4</sup>

## Developing an unexpected methodology

The question then is what value these considerations can have both to the project as a whole and beyond its boundaries as more than commentaries on the use of particular words? For me the process of uncovering and fighting with the linguistic challenges of the project has also revealed issues which have profound consequences for qualitative international comparative projects in the humanities and social sciences and the development of suitable methodologies to support them.

To shed some light on what I mean by these bold claims two issues, already hinted at in examples from the project require further discussion at a more theoretical level.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.cor.eu.int/document/presentation/Delegationsnat.pdf> 16 November 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Valasik, Corinne in Beckman, ed. Pages 255–268.

Firstly, contextualisation and the dangers of domestication, both linguistic and conceptual and secondly, universalisation and the problems raised by a search for universal models.

## Contextualisation

The problems which this project has faced in being grounded in both the English language and the Swedish cultural context have been noted above and to this must be added the fact that each of the individual researchers is based in and culturally conditioned by the national situation which they have studied. This grounding in particular situations, against the background of the assumptions which inform our particular domestic representations, to borrow a term from Lawrence Venuti, has its benefits in enabling us to see what is other, but also what is similar. They do however, as Theo Hermans has noted, create their own forms of dyslexia, enlarging some similarities while generating blind spots in other areas.<sup>5</sup> Translation, in other words, wields considerable power in constructing representations of foreign cultures both in relation to the foreign culture itself and in the influence it can have on the domestic culture. In Venuti's words:

Translation projects construct uniquely domestic representations of foreign cultures, but since these projects address specific cultural constituencies, they are simultaneously engaged in the formation of domestic identities.<sup>6</sup>

For Venuti there is an ethical element evident here which can allow a differentiation to be made between bad and good translation. Building on the work of Antoine Berman he argues that where bad translation is ethnocentric and forms the foreign culture, carrying out a "systematic negation of the strangeness of the foreign work" under the guise of making the text accessible,<sup>7</sup> good translation opens up a dialogue and allows for cross breeding which can enrich the translating language.<sup>8</sup> The relevant question for a translator, or scholar writing in a foreign language is therefore not what is the 'best' rendering of a term, but rather what is necessary to give an outsider access to the text?<sup>9</sup> Venuti's conclusion is that any "evaluation of a translation project must include a consideration of discursive strategies, their institutional settings and their social functions and effects".<sup>10</sup> The question which the project which we are currently considering raises is whether the evaluation of any comparative project, across languages, but also disciplines, should include such considerations?

For the members of the project 'Teaching Travelling Concepts,' a European project which aims to track "key feminist concepts across the geographical, political and cultural complexity that is contemporary Europe" the answer would almost certainly be yes.<sup>11</sup> For them

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<sup>5</sup> Hermans, Theo, 2003, 382.

<sup>6</sup> Venuti, Lawrence, 1998, 75.

<sup>7</sup> Berman, 1992, 5 cited in Venuti, Lawrence, 1998, 81.

<sup>8</sup> Venuti, Lawrence, 1998, 81.

<sup>9</sup> Hermans, Theo, 2003, 382.

<sup>10</sup> Venuti, Lawrence, 1998, 82.

<sup>11</sup> Bahovec, Eva D. and Hemmings, Clare, 2004, 333.

a consideration of how *sex/gender* travels is never simply a question of provision of terminology where there is no native term for gender, or where it refers to a grammatical rather than biological/ cultural distinction ... its translation incorporates a range of critiques or endorsements of its use as a dominant feminist heuristic. These ‘translations’ must therefore be understood not only as pragmatic ones, but also as theoretical and historically engaged approaches, that draw on, interpret and intervene within the fields that they seek to describe or transform.<sup>12</sup>

The authors note, in particular, the English language dominance of the field and the subsequent consequences that insufficient attention to detail in the translation and adaptation of European concepts has on the breadth of feminist thought. They comment on a phenomenon also brought to light in the Welfare and Religion project namely that

the absence of such work perpetuates the lack of acknowledgement of either the different histories of feminist concepts (in the case of French and Italian traditions), or the fundamental epistemological challenges to an English language feminism that European translation evidences.<sup>13</sup>

There is in other words much to be gained from a more reflexive approach to translation, not just for individual academic projects, but also for the development of and between academic disciplines. Concepts from feminist thought as from other areas that have fed into the project, such as notions of welfare and welfare systems are not only influenced by their national context, but also their disciplinary ‘affiliation’ and some have been incorporated to greater or lesser extents into more than one discipline.

Bal writing on this issue maintains that concepts which travel between disciplines can offer increased precision and reach precisely because of this movement,<sup>14</sup> so long as it entails a degree of reassessment and change, rather than the imposition of a concept from one discipline onto another.<sup>15</sup> Concepts are interesting and valuable, in other words, not because they mean the same for everyone, but precisely because they do not.<sup>16</sup>

## Universalisation

The discussion above highlights the pitfalls that exist in attempting to work over geographical and disciplinary boundaries, it automatically raises the question therefore as to the value and validity of universal models. Clifford Geertz articulated the tension evident here in his development of the concept of ‘Thick’ description. Geertz argues that Cultural analysis is, or ought to be

guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses, not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Bahovec, Eva D. and Hemmings, Clare, 2004, 335.

<sup>13</sup> Bahovec, Eva D. and Hemmings, Clare, 2004, 335–6.

<sup>14</sup> Bal, Mieke, 2002, 37.

<sup>15</sup> Bal, Mieke, 2002, 39.

<sup>16</sup> Bal, Mieke, 2002, 11.

<sup>17</sup> Geertz, Clifford, 1973, 20.

For him the problems with developing overarching models are clear in that they tend to obscure the particular and interesting in the cultural context studied, however the tension between the need to “penetrate an unfamiliar universe of symbolic action” and the need to advance theory, between the need to understand and the need to be able to analyse is both large and “essentially irremovable”.<sup>18</sup> Geertz writes as an ethnographer and anthropologist, but his observations are relevant to any scholar studying cultural phenomena and grappling with the need to describe and understand the specific, while also attempting to make the material accessible for comparison at an analytic level. Geertz concludes that the role of theory in ethnography is to “provide a vocabulary in which what symbolic action has to say about itself – that is about the role of culture in human life – can be expressed”.<sup>19</sup> The question is whether this reflexive approach cannot be of use to other disciplines when approaching comparative studies, and whether the idea of a linguistic ‘toolbox’ cannot be of help to the issues which surface in translation within such enterprises.

### Thick Translation

In terms of the linguistic challenge which is the focus of this article one scholar who has already made the connection is Theo Hermans. He has made use of the concept of thick description, as articulated by Geertz, to develop the concept of thick translation. In his discussion of cross cultural translation Hermans comes to the conclusion that Rodney Needham was correct in arguing that there is “no metalanguage to hold the invariant of transcultural comparison”.<sup>20</sup> There is no way therefore to establish fixed points around which to carry out objective comparison and all that can be done is to constantly reevaluate and question the “language that serves as our probing tool”.<sup>21</sup> Cross cultural mapping, translation and comparison are then, of necessity, self reflexive. We need, Hermans argues, to abandon ideas of achieving full and accurate reproductions and rather see language as a tool which can assist in the cross cultural mapping which we are really aiming at.

Thick translation, like thick description is such an approach which allows for a “self-conscious moment” and which keeps the “universalizing urge of theory in check”.<sup>22</sup> It tries to avoid imposing categories derived from one tradition on another and in making the translator, or author’s subject position visible removes the illusion of neutrality which is otherwise a danger.<sup>23</sup>

### Concluding remarks

Given the experiences of this project I whole heartedly support Hermans and Bal in their calls for a reflexive approach to language and the use of concepts which are negotiable. Both language in general and concepts in particular are both, in this way tools of analysis and “embodiments of the cultural practice”, to borrow from Bal,

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<sup>18</sup> Geertz, Clifford, 1973, 24.

<sup>19</sup> Geertz, Clifford, 1973, 27.

<sup>20</sup> Hermans, Theo, 2003, 384.

<sup>21</sup> Hermans, Theo, 2003, 384.

<sup>22</sup> Hermans, Theo, 2003, 386.

<sup>23</sup> Hermans, Theo, 2003, 387.

which we aim to understand through them.<sup>24</sup> Bal uses the metaphor of travel to illustrate this circular process and it is a choice which is singularly appropriate.

Travel both between languages and between disciplines can enrich a project if the researchers are prepared to keep an open mind and adopt a reflexive approach. A project which risks questioning assumptions and is prepared to go off the beaten track may not be taking the easiest path, but has much to gain and much to contribute to the development of appropriate methodologies for use in comparative research.

In practical terms therefore future projects in the field can learn from the experiences of this project and build into the construction of both theoretical frameworks and methodology, including the formulation of common research questions, discussion of key concepts and terminology.

## Appendix: Glossary of terms for National Reports

Charity	Assistance provided by organisations or individuals to those in need. Used here with the negative connotation of help imposed rather than requested. A top down implication.
State sector	Here are included all initiatives financed by public funds and politically controlled. This includes both national and local level.  Hence welfare state = welfare carried out by/or under the aegis of the state.
Voluntary Sector	Refers to the sector of society sometimes also termed third sector. Here are included initiatives and organisations in the social sphere not undertaken by the state or the private sector and where some level of ideological commitment is involved either at organisational or practical level.
Community	Denotes a collection of individuals or families united to a greater or lesser extent by some common factor. This can for example be ethnic identity, faith or geographical location. Where relevant this is noted for example local community, faith community.  A term which is rarely value free. 'Community care' implies something good which may or may not be the case in practice.
Co-operation	Used on a variety of levels usually to denote partnership of some kind between different organisations/sectors. Includes agreements between individuals on the ground as well as larger scale financial arrangements.

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<sup>24</sup> Bal, Mieke, 2002, 21.

Organisations	Structured groups, usually with a specific task/ aim active in the voluntary sector.
Local authority/ Region	<p>There seems to be little agreement even at EU level as to which English terms should be used for what. The body at EU level that represents local level interest is called the council for the regions and uses the terms regional and local authorities, but the list of representatives includes individual's titles which use the terms local authority, municipality, county council, district and region!</p> <p>Here the terms local and regional authority are mainly used following the general EU line. Where there are bodies in-between the national term is used with an explanation.</p>
Privatisation	To change (an industry or business, for example) from governmental or public ownership or control to private enterprise.
Individualisation	To focus on the needs/wishes/desires of an individual or individuals rather than a group of society as a generic whole.
Priest	Ordained minister in the church.
Vicar	Priest with leadership or management responsibility for a geographical parish or similar and/or other priests.
Pastor	The Protestant (free church) equivalent of priest.
Laïcité	Term specific to the political/religious situation in France. Used here in original language.
Secular	The opposite of religious – not necessarily hostile to religion though sometimes is.
Secularisation	A process over time.
Secularism	An ideology which does imply hostility to religion.
Lay person	Individual involved in/expressing affiliation to the church, but not ordained.
Laity	Collective noun, see lay person above.
Voluntary workers/ Volunteers	Individuals who undertake work/practical tasks without payment for the time/effort involved.

Not to be confused with definition of voluntary sector (see above).  
The word 'voluntary' is used in two different ways.

Parish	Church administrative area at local level – geographically defined.
Congregation	Group of believers/members of a church who gather regularly for worship.
Deacons	Given that the role of a deacon varies widely between different ecclesiastical traditions the term is not defined here. Definitions of how it is used in different national contexts are included in the respective reports.
Diaconal work	The caring/ social work of the church.
Religious orders	Those who have taken vows to the religious life including both 'ordo' and 'congregationi.'

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# The Church of Sweden as an Agent of Welfare – the case of Gävle

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## Gävle as a Swedish case

The Swedish case study has been carried out in Gävle, an old industrial town and commercial centre situated halfway up the eastern Swedish coastline, two hours drive north of Stockholm. There are several reasons for choosing Gävle as an example of the function of the Church in welfare. Gävle is a middle sized town that does not deviate from what is “typically Swedish” in any major way. It is an old industrial town, which from the 1950s and onwards has been gradually transforming to the new service economy. Today 92,000 people live in the municipality and 75 percent of the population lives in the urban district to which we have restricted our study. Politically the town has traditionally been dominated by the labour movement and the Social Democrats, even if the political picture during the last decade has been more mixed. Gävle is the residential town in the County of Gävleborg, which covers a wide area with 277,000 inhabitants in the middle of Sweden. This means that Gävle has a big hospital and many other public services which are not represented in smaller cities. Church of Sweden membership figures are about the same in Gävle as in Sweden at large. The urban district is geographically covered by five Church of Sweden parishes, to which we have restricted our study.

## Methods and materials

A number of different methods have been used in the Swedish case study in order to achieve the basic aim of analysing the function of Church of Sweden as an agent of welfare. In order to collect the relevant data individual interviews and focus group interviews have been performed, as well as qualitative and quantitative questionnaires, collection of articles from mass media, printed documents and documents published on the web.<sup>1</sup> These data are analysed from three different perspectives; a sociological, a theological and a gender perspective.

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<sup>1</sup> For assistance with the collection of material we direct special thanks to Stig Linde. We also thank Barbro Borg and Martha Middlemiss for their assistance.

## Mapping of organisational structure and activities

In order to grasp the organisational structure and activities of the Church of Sweden in Gävle and the organisation of public authorities within the social area, informal contacts were taken by telephone with local officials. Different kinds of printed information and statistics were collected in this way. In order to collect oral and printed information and to make visual observations of the church's premises, study visits were made to three of the five parishes in Gävle. Certain limits were imposed on the scope of our study, namely to include in it only the five parishes which geographically are situated in the municipality and together constitute *Gävle kyrkliga samfällighet* (The Association of Church of Sweden parishes in Gävle). This is an association devised for dealing with common issues of economy, personnel and pastoral areas and where it is convenient for the parishes to have a joint organisation. By limiting our study in this way, it means that parishes outside the town, but within the borders of Gävle local authority, are not covered in the study.

Printed material and material on the internet published by authorities and the church were collected, showing the basic organisation of the Swedish welfare system in Gävle, as well as the basic organisation and activities of the five parishes Tomas, Staffan, Maria, Heliga Trefaldighet and Bomhus.<sup>2</sup> This type of data was also complemented with information given by employees in authorities and church. In order to sharpen our awareness of issues arising in the public debate concerning welfare and church we subscribed to the two daily newspapers in Gävle over a period of nine months 2003–2004.<sup>3</sup>

## Individual interviews with authorities and church

40 individual interviews with public authority and church representatives were planned, but as we did not succeed in getting an appointment with the leading local politician who is chair of the municipality board, only 39 have been performed, taped and transcribed. One of the recordings was unfortunately of such bad quality that it was impossible to transcribe. Thus the individual interviews consist of interviews with 15 representatives of the public administration and 23 representatives of the Church of Sweden (and organisations linked to the church), altogether 17 women and 21 men.

The following representatives of public authorities were interviewed: seven persons employed in leading management positions in public authorities,<sup>4</sup> four persons in middle management positions in the local authority<sup>5</sup> and four elected politicians in key positions in the local authority.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> We have chosen to keep the Swedish names in the text.

<sup>3</sup> Gävle Dagblad (August 2003–April 2004) and Arbetarbladet (July 2003–March 2004).

<sup>4</sup> The interviewees included the following people: the Director for the social services department in the local authority, the Director for the social care department in the local authority, the Director for the department for Children and youth in the local authority, the Director for the department for education and labour market in the local authority, the Coordinator for relationships and cooperation between the local and regional authority (mainly in social care issues), the chief police officer in Gävle (a state official), the assistant health care director in the regional authority for the region of Gästrikland (which includes Gävle).

<sup>5</sup> The interviewees included: the head of the subsidiary unit of the social services, a social secretary responsible for a special sector within the social services, the head of the local au-

When it comes to the Church of Sweden the following persons were interviewed: six persons employed in leading management positions,<sup>7</sup> the five chair persons of the local parish councils,<sup>8</sup> eleven of the Church of Sweden's front personnel,<sup>9</sup> the managing director of the shelter for homeless people, and the person in charge of The Diaconal Council (Diakonirådet).<sup>10</sup>

The average ages among the groups of personnel in church and public authorities are about the same, but when it comes to the elected representatives the parish council chair persons have a much higher average age than the municipality politicians.

An interview guide with open questions has been used. The interview guide comprised 31 questions which were put to both church and authority representatives. The seven common questions were included in the first part of the interview guide. Ten added questions were put only to the church representatives in order to reach a deeper understanding of their attitudes. All questions in the respective interview guides were put to all the interviewed if they were not already automatically answered in connection with another question. Each interview took between 40 and 75 minutes.

## Focus group interviews with the population

The project also aims at contributing new knowledge about the attitudes of the population towards the role of the church in welfare. Two methods have been applied in order to achieve this aim; focus group interviews and a quantitative population survey.

Four focus group interviews were planned with the intention of covering a variety of different social groups and age groups. The chosen four groups were: young people/students, employed people in the middle ages, unemployed people, and old people/pensioners. The planned interview with students was cancelled due to organisational problems, so only three focus group interviews were carried out. Two of these were carried out in already existing groups; a group of participants in a course for unemployed people (A) and a group of employed middle aged people who are members of the board of a voluntary association (B). The third group was formed from members in an organisation for pensioners (C). Altogether 24 persons between the ages of 25 and 82 took part in the three focus group interviews, 12 women and 12 men.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately the recording technique failed in the first part of focus group interview A, with the consequence that the first half hour is missing.

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thority organisation for support of relatives to people in special need, the head of a special resident centre for old people.

<sup>6</sup> The interviewees included: the chair of the social services board, the chair of the social care board, the chair of the board for children and youth, the chair for the board for education and labour market.

<sup>7</sup> The interviewees included: all five vicars of the parishes in Gävle and the director of the Association of Church of Sweden parishes in Gävle. A vicar (kyrkoherde) is the priest who is responsible for the overall supervision and coordination of the work of the parish and who is also head of the parish personnel.

<sup>8</sup> One of these interviews defied technical transcription and is not included in the analysis.

<sup>9</sup> The interviewees included: five deacons, two parish educators, one church musician, two parish priests of which one is also a practising psychologist, one church caretaker who is also an elected politician in the local authority council.

<sup>10</sup> A foundation linked to the Church which financially supports individuals in need.

<sup>11</sup> The participants were distributed as follows: unemployed: 5 women, 4 men, 25–54 years. Employed: 3 women, 4 men, 33–61 years, with following occupations: salesman of flowers,

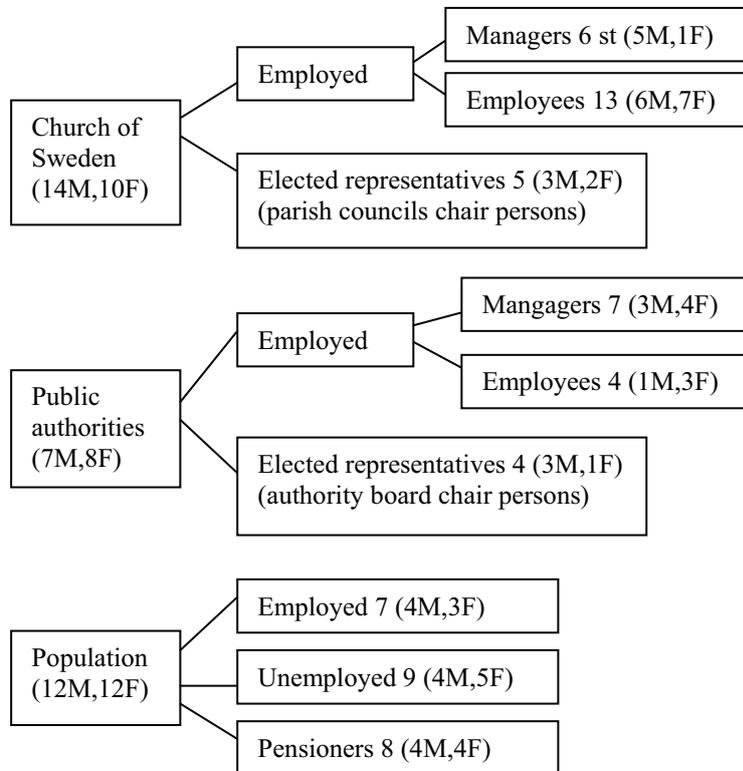


Figure 2. Sample of interviewees in Gävle, Sweden. Total of 63 informants (33 male, 30 female).

The focus group interviews took place in the education centre for unemployed, the office of the pensioners' organisation and in the home of one member of the board of the voluntary organisation. Each interview was conducted by one researcher, taped and took approximately one and a half hour. The interview guide used in the focus group interviews consisted of ten questions, the seven common questions and three extra questions just to clarify the responses to the seven questions.

A general observation relating to the focus group interviews was that the informants seemed very shy to express their religious thoughts or affiliations. There was also a tendency in the groups to prevent individuals from expressing personal religious affiliations. When participants mentioned a personal belief, experience of visiting a service or a positive opinion about the church, this was almost always rejected by someone in the group, often an outspoken person of strong personality. Religious issues seemed to be regarded as too personal and it was assumed that they should be kept that way. We did not think that this type of social control mechanism would appear in this setting, but perhaps the fact that the groups involved were ones which already existed and where people already knew each other can explain it.

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busdriver, process technician, insulator, cleaner, computer engineer, research engineer. Pensioners: 4 women, 4 men, 64–82 years. Educational levels among all 24 are well spread; grammar school (3), folk high-school) (2), one year business course (1) high school (9), university (9). Their residence in Gävle ranged from 6 to 67 years.

When personal religious aspects came up, they surprised the participants and showed previously hidden aspects of their personalities. It is also a feature of Swedish culture to keep religion within the private sphere and many feel it embarrassing when this privacy is exposed in a public or semi public space.

### Quantitative population survey

The second method used to collect information about the attitudes of the population was a quantitative population survey, performed in the spring of 2005.<sup>12</sup> A questionnaire with 30 questions was sent to 1,200 people in a statistical sample of the population between 16–75 years of age in Gävle municipality. 661 persons responded, which gives a response rate of 55 percent. The seven common questions, which were designed as open qualitative questions could only be partially formulated and expressed in the quantitative questionnaire.

### Quality of data

The collected material (i.e. the individual interviews, the quantitative population survey and the different sorts of material that has been used to describe Gävle municipality and the local church and its activities) is generally of high quality.

Concerning the individual interviews we have covered the variety of different church employees involved in different types of activities quite well. But when it comes to the public authorities it has not been possible to cover the variety of different types of employees and activities since these authorities employ several thousand people. Thus we have only chosen key persons, mainly from the central administration of the municipality. This means that opinions from the church are collected from a relatively broader range as compared with the attitudes of the public authorities. The weakest parts of the material are the focus group interviews since there are only three of them and one of the three, the interview with unemployed, did not give very much. This was partly due to technical problems, but also because the group had much less to say. They seemed to be a bit shy and less willing to confide in one another. In order to strengthen the focus group interview material, the analysis is complemented by data from the quantitative population survey.

### Gendered patterns

One of the aims of the study is to find out how gender makes an imprint on the function of the Church as an agent of welfare. In order to facilitate this analysis we have paid special attention to gender when collecting data on the welfare situation in Gävle and on the activities of the parishes. This data is in part integrated in the description of the town in chapter 2 and of the Church in chapter 3, but it is also given a more in-depth treatment in special sections of these chapters. The interview guide used for the interviews with representatives of the Church and of the public authorities included several contextual questions concerning the issue of gender equality, as

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<sup>12</sup> The survey has been performed by Lars-Olov Olsson as part of his master studies in Diakonal studies at Uppsala university.

this is a major issue in Swedish politics. A few questions of this kind were also included in the questionnaire to the population.

## Theological interpretation and reconstruction in Swedish context

To say something about theology in the official documents of the Church of Sweden in Gävle and in the interviews implies certain methodological difficulties. The official documents – e.g. the pastoral programmes – are not written with the purpose of being coherent theological texts of an academic character. In order to say something meaningful about the theology of these – from a theological point of view quite fragmentary – texts, it is necessary to pay special attention to hermeneutical questions. We have to reconstruct a theology from fragments, and this unavoidably means to “fill in the gaps” between the fragments with theological ideas which are not to be found in the texts and the interviews themselves. However, this *method of reconstruction* is not arbitrary.<sup>13</sup>

The theological interpretation of interviews roughly follows the same principles as the interpretation of official documents like the pastoral programmes. The interviews have been written down, and are interpreted as texts. Special attention of course has to be paid to the fact that the interviews are texts in some sense created by the interviewer – by her/his asking certain questions. But in principle the method of interpretation is the same. The reconstructive interpretation of theological themes in the material has been guided by the following four principles:

1) *The principle of logical coherence.* Every reconstruction must be able to be integrated with what can actually be read in the material. This means that the interpretations offered have to be logically consistent with what the documents or the interviewee actually says. But it is also reasonable to assume that those who have written the documents or the interviewees do not intend to be inconsistent. It is therefore possible to suggest a theological reading of the material in such a way that makes it maximally interesting provided this suggested reading is entirely consistent with the actual content and does not violate any other of the principles.

2) *The principle of discursive context.* Every meaningful utterance is part of a discourse. Within the Church of Sweden there are certain common, theologically laden words, expressions and ideas. It is therefore reasonable to assume – if there is nothing which directly contradicts such an assumption – that words and expressions in the interviews and the documents are used in accordance with normal usage within the Church of Sweden. This may apply to terms like ‘Folk Church’ (folkkyrka) and ‘human dignity’, for example.

3) *The principle of the local context* means that the interpretation has to be guided by what we know of the setting in which the document has been written or the interview performed. For example, it is reasonable to assume that what is said on the

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<sup>13</sup> Inspiration for this line of reasoning comes from Wedberg (1968), 201ff. The term *reconstructive interpretation* is based on Grenholm 1990, 71ff.

social work of a parish can be read in the light of the social context in which the parish is situated.

4) *The principle of generosity* means that the interpretation should make the text or interview as theologically interesting and meaningful as possible. This implies that contradictions and tensions in the material have to be analysed and discussed in a generous way, and should not be seen as a sign of lack of theological competence.

The reconstructive method of interpretation used aims at producing theological interpretations of the material analysed in such a way as would be acceptable to those who have written the documents or to the interviewees. It is, however, important to note that it is impossible to reconstruct what the authors of a certain text or an interviewee *really* meant. We do only claim to have presented a possible and reasonable interpretation of what they *could have intended to say*.

## The town of Gävle

During the 14<sup>th</sup> century increasing trade in fish and other goods brought people together in the area where the river Gavleån meets the Baltic sea. In 1445 the king granted the official status of ‘town’ to the village called Gävle.<sup>14</sup> Of this old history a modern visitor to Gävle sees very little. Coming to Gävle for the first time you recognise the river, cross-cutting the town, but you see nothing of the sea, and the city centre looks like similar centres in many Swedish towns. Several big fires have demolished the old wooden buildings and in the period from the 1950s to the 1980s the remaining houses were replaced by new concrete buildings, suitable for modern offices and shops. An odd attraction, which has become a kind of hallmark for the town, is a giant version of the traditional Swedish Christmas straw buck, which is constructed anew every year and placed on the Castle Square at the first of Advent. This straw goat is regularly set ablaze by unknown perpetrators with the result that the chances of its survival until New Year has become a matter for a wager on British betting lists.

With regard to trade and industry Gävle has a varied business life with around 40,000 jobs in more than 8,000 companies. Among the major and best known are Ericsson Radio Systems AB in the sector of electronics, Korsnäs AB and Stora Enso AB in forestry based industry, Kraft Sverige AB (Gevalia coffee) and MalacoLeaf AB (Läkerol and Ahlgren’s jelly cars) in the food sector. The largest employers today are however the local authority (kommunen), with 7,200 employees and the regional authority (landstinget), with 3,500 employees in Gävle and around 8,000 in the county at large, of which 85 percent work in the health care sector. The National Land Survey, run by the state, is also numbered among the main employers. The University of Gävle is one of many places for higher education established during the 1990s. It is growing quickly and has around 13,500 students.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Sterner 1999.

<sup>15</sup> The facts about Gävle are collected from the official website of the local authority, [www.gavle.se](http://www.gavle.se) and the regional authority at [www.lg.se](http://www.lg.se) between April 2004 and April 2005.

## The public sector in Gävle

The local and regional authorities together represent the Swedish welfare state at a local level, with responsibility for health care, care for children and elderly and all education up to university level. The services provided by the local and regional authorities are financed mainly by taxes, but also through fees and charges. For every 100 SEK in taxable income the residents of Gävle pay 10.35 to the regional authority and 21.55 to the local authority. Some services, which the local authorities are legally required to provide, are also in part financed through contributions from the national authorities.

*The regional authority* has the main responsibility for health and medical needs. Services include a full spectrum of health care, from prevention and health promotion to highly specialised acute and long-term care. The regional authority owns and operates the Hospital of Gävle and is responsible for the primary health care provided by local health centres. The regional authority also provides public dental service, including free dental care for children and youth up to age 19. In addition to this the regional authority is responsible for cultural activities and transportation. The supreme policymaking body is the full County Council of 75 elected members, of whom 28 represent the ruling Social Democrats. For the year 2003 the accounts were in balance, but only as a result of large economic measures, especially in the sector of health care.

*The local authority* has the main responsibility for pre-schools, primary and secondary schools and care for the elderly, as well as for public transport, road maintenance, street cleaning and garbage collection. Of the employees 82 percent are women, reflecting the overall quantitative dominance of women in the public sector. One fourth of the personnel work part time. The main posts in the budget of the local authority belong to the Child and Youth Committee (37 percent of the budget expenses 2004) and the Committee for the Care of the Elderly (29 percent of the budget expenses 2004). Overall responsibility for the operations of the local authority rests with the 65 councillors who are elected in general elections held every four years. The Social Democrats and the Left-Wing Party hold the political majority. Representatives of the Local Council elect the Executive Committee as well as a number of other committees for different operational areas.

## Living in Gävle

The Swedish welfare state is well documented in publicly accessible statistics from the Swedish central statistical office, Statistics Sweden. Through these statistics it is possible to see that Gävle is quite typical for Sweden, for example when it comes to demographics. The number of births per woman is slightly under the Swedish average of 1.6 (2002). The proportion of people of foreign origin (birth) in Gävle in 2003 was 9 percent, which is a little less than in Sweden as a whole (12 percent). The level of education is similar to Sweden as a whole, with 21 percent in the population 20–64 years having only compulsory schooling, 49 percent having a secondary

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Dated copies of used web-pages are collected at the Institute for Diaconal and Social Studies in Uppsala (DVI).

grade, and an additional 30 percent with post-secondary education. Women are slightly better educated than men.<sup>16</sup>

### **Employment and income**

The rate of employment in the population living in Gävle aged 20–64 is 75 percent (2004). The figure for women is a little lower (73 percent), than for men (76 percent). Unemployment is higher than in the nation as a whole. In March 2004 the percentage which were either un-employed seeking a job, or were involved in a training programme, reached 10 percent of the population (20–64 years), compared to 6 percent in the whole of Sweden. The highest numbers of job-seekers are among young people (both women and men, age 20–24). Although these figures are considerably lower than the European average unemployment, they are, in Swedish terms, at a long-term peak, and they have not fallen as much as expected in the improving trade conditions of recent years. As the Swedish welfare system is largely built upon employment, the increased unemployment has become a major political issue in recent years.

The average income in Gävle was in 2002 (age 20–64) 211,000 SEK (22,000 EUR), and in Sweden as a whole 217,000 SEK (23,000 EUR). The average income for women in Gävle was 178,000 (18,800 EUR) and for men 244,000 SEK (25,800 EUR). The differences between women and men are due to several reasons. One factor is the lower salaries which prevail in the public as opposed to the private sector. Another is that women are proportionately employed in more part-time work. In the region of Gävleborg in 2004, 34 percent of the employed women worked less than 35 hours per week, compared to 11 percent of the men.

The list of categories of people receiving financial assistance from the local authority (971) is headed by single men without children, followed by single women without children (581). Single mothers (394), however, more frequently receive economic assistance than single fathers (28). As shown in table 1 the number of households in Gävle receiving financial assistance in 2002 was 2,363. Slightly fewer than 30 percent of them (both women and men) were long-term dependent on assistance.

Table 1. Social Assistance 2002. Source: Gävle Municipal Facts 2004.

<b>Type of household</b>	<b>Households receiving financial assistance</b>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
<b>Cohabiting</b>		
without children	134	6
with Children	252	11
<b>Single men</b>		
without children	971	41
with children	28	1
<b>Single women</b>		
without children	581	25
with children	394	17
<i>Total</i>	<i>2,363</i>	<i>100</i>

<sup>16</sup> The statistics are taken from the official web-site of Statistics Sweden at [www.scb.se](http://www.scb.se) or from the yearly publication of the local statistics in *Gävle Municipal facts* and the regional statistics at [www.regionfakta.com/gavleborg/](http://www.regionfakta.com/gavleborg/).

The figures on unemployment and social assistance indicate the emergence of a new type of poverty especially among young people, who are not able to enter a labour market with increasing demands on educational skills. Another group which is excluded from the labour market and also from many welfare services is made up of people who do not have a permanent address. In Gävle the group of people who do not have a permanent address has grown in recent years. According to a study made by the local authority there were 199 persons in Gävle with no permanent address in March 2004, which was twice as many as those registered when the last study was made in 2001.<sup>17</sup>

### Education

Education is another indicator of welfare. All children in Sweden are obliged to spend nine years in the compulsory school. To get a job it is very important to have an exam from the upper secondary school, called “gymnasium”. 88 percent of the graduates from 9th grade in Gävle qualify for studies at a “gymnasium”, a figure very close to the national average of 89 percent (2001). The proportion of girls is 5 percent higher than that of boys.<sup>18</sup>

### Public health

Studies of public health in Sweden rank Gävle as average on a number of issues.<sup>19</sup> Life expectancy is high in Sweden and the health of the population is in general good. In spite of this, the increasing number of persons on sick leave is a problem in working-life. The official statistics present a figure of ill-health (Sw: ohälsotal) for each municipality and year. The figure is based on the number of days of compensation from public social insurance.<sup>20</sup> In Gävle, this figure increased from 31 1998 to 45 2003, an increase which quite well mirrors the development in Sweden at large. In general women have more days of ill-health than men. In 2003 the figures of ill-health for women in Gävle was 55 days and for men 35. Women in the age-group 55–64 years are the ones most affected, while women in the youngest age-group only have a few more days on sick-leave than men of the same age. The rate of sick leave is considerably higher in the public sector than in the private sector, and higher among the employees in local authorities and county councils than among the state employees.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> People are counted as homeless, if they do not own or rent a living place, and solve this problem on a very short time basis or not at all. The figures are to be seen as an underestimate as it has not been possible to find every person. Sammanställning av uppgifter kring personer som saknar bostad eller är hemlösa i Gävle kommun [Data on homeless people in Gävle municipality] 4 March 2004.

<sup>18</sup> Folkhälsoläget i Gävle [Public health in Gävle] 2003.

<sup>19</sup> Folkhälsoläget i Gävle [Public health in Gävle] 2003.

<sup>20</sup> The figure of ill-health (Sw: Ohälsotalet) is produced by dividing the number of days compensated by the public social insurance with the population aged 16–64 years. Two days with half compensation is counted as one day. Days compensated by the employer during the first period of sick leave are not included. Updated figures on ill-health in municipalities and regions are found on the website of the Swedish Social Insurance Agency: [www.forsakringskassan.se](http://www.forsakringskassan.se).

<sup>21</sup> Statistiska Centralbyrån [Statistics Sweden] 2004.

The rapid increase in days on sick leave, especially among older women employed in the public sector, has been much debated in Sweden recently. The increase may be explained by a combination of deterioration in the psycho-social working environment, increasing difficulties for persons with physical and psychological problems to keep their positions in working life, and organisational changes in working life during the 1990s due to bad times, but also as an adaptation to international trends.<sup>22</sup> The trend is the same all over Europe, although the rapid increase in women on sick-leave in Sweden during the 1990s and early years of 2000 is unique.<sup>23</sup>

### **Gender equality**

Gender specific data have in the previous text been presented in detail on a number of issues. All public statistics in Sweden have to be available divided according to gender as a result of the Swedish regulations on gender equality. Statistics Sweden every year compares the municipalities in Sweden according to their achievements in gender equality. A special Gender Equality Index (JämIndex) weighs together variables like education, participation in the work force, income, use of maternal and paternal leaves, ill-health, and participation in democratic bodies. The municipalities are ranked according to the gap between women and men, with as small gap as possible being the best. In 2003 Gävle was in this respect ranked 73 among the 289 Swedish municipalities.<sup>24</sup>

As an example of the differences indicated in the JämIndex may be mentioned that while 29 percent of the men in Gävle have an income which is reached only by the 20 percent of male Swedes only 9 percent of the women in Gävle reach this income. Women are on the other hand over-represented among the ones who have the lowest incomes in society.<sup>25</sup> Another example, where Gävle is close the Swedish average, concerns the use of parental leave, of which women in Gävle take around 83 percent of the available time.<sup>26</sup>

For this study it is interesting to note that prevailing inequalities between women and men in Swedish society are closely related to the welfare sector in society. There is a high degree of gender segregation among the employees in this sector. Women represent 90 percent of the employed in the sector of health and social care in Gävle, 90 percent of the employees in pre-schools and 75 percent of the teachers in the compulsory school. All these sectors are relatively low paid with a high rate of part-time workers, which is explained by the fact that women still spend considerably

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<sup>22</sup> Wikman & Marklund 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Riksförsäkringsverket 2004.

<sup>24</sup> JämIndex, Statistics Sweden, [www.scb.se](http://www.scb.se).

<sup>25</sup> The limit for a high income is defined as the income which is reached by only 20 percent of the men. The limit thus varies over the years and is defined on the basis of the income of men. Kommunala Basfakta för folkhälsoplanering (KBF) 2004, Folkhälsoinstitutet [The Institute for Public Health]: [www.fhi.se](http://www.fhi.se).

<sup>26</sup> Swedish social insurance give the parents right to stay home and take care of a child for 480 days, of which 390 days are compensated with 80 percent of the normal income. Each of the parents has the right to use half of the days. Each parent has the right to transfer his or her days to the other parent, except for 60 days, the so called daddy- and mummy-days. The Swedish Social Insurance Agency: [www.forsakringskassan.se](http://www.forsakringskassan.se), January 2005.

more time each week on household chores than men, and thus have less hours to spend on paid work.<sup>27</sup>

## Challenges to the welfare system

The starting point for the discussion is a system which is expected to secure the welfare of the citizens from cradle to grave. The challenges have to do with the capacity of the system to adapt to the rapid changes which take place at different levels in society. These mainly affect working life and the health sector. At present the incomes from taxes fail to keep pace with the increasing costs for welfare services like schools and the care of the elderly. The demographic development contributes to this situation, as the number of elderly is increasing, while the number of children 7–15 years old is expected to decrease for some years ahead. Added to this is the increasing number of employees in the public sector on sick leave. The average number of days on sick leave for each employee in the local authority increased from 25 days in 1999 to 38 days in 2002. For women the number of days on sick leave during the same period increased from 26 to 41.<sup>28</sup>

The number of people 80 years and over is steadily growing, both at a national level and also in Gävle, which puts a strain on the care of the elderly. While the local authorities are obliged to offer public day-care for all children, the trend concerning care for the elderly is in the opposite direction. Elderly people in Sweden are increasingly taken care of in their homes, through home-help service and home health care. As a consequence the number of “customers” (the word officially used) in home-help services in Gävle is steadily increasing. To save money the authorities in 2003 decided to reduce the cleaning services and to close down some homes for short term care. The main savings are however made by not employing substitutes for personnel on different types of short term leave.<sup>29</sup>

Somewhat surprisingly a decrease in the number of children adds to the economic problems. The explanation is that the local authority has the responsibility for running schools, for which it is compensated from the national authorities. The compensation depends upon the number of children. Fewer children thus reduce the income for the local authority. The problem has to be met by closing down schools and dismissing teachers. Not unnaturally these actions are not very popular and cannot be taken on short-term basis.<sup>30</sup>

An interesting indicator of how the population of Gävle looks at the welfare situation is presented in a report called *The Municipality Key*. The report is a result of a yearly survey made on behalf of the local authority among 1,000 citizens. The questions concern how the citizens value the quality and priorities associated with the municipal activities. The highest grades were in 2003 given to cultural and educational activities, while the citizens were least pleased with the care for the elderly and handicapped. Care for youth and children came somewhere in-between. As for future priorities, care for the elderly and handicapped, schools and childcare topped the list.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Statistiska Centralbyrån [Statistics Sweden] 2003.

<sup>28</sup> Gävle kommun, *Tidningen Gävle*, June 2003.

<sup>29</sup> Gävle kommun, *Tidningen Gävle*, June 2003.

<sup>30</sup> Gävle kommun, *Tidningen Gävle*, March 2004.

<sup>31</sup> Gävle kommun, *KommunNyckeln* 2003.

## The Church of Sweden in Gävle

The Church of Sweden has a dominant position in the religious life of Gävle. There are five Church of Sweden parishes geographically covering the city. These are Heliga Trefaldighet, Staffan, Tomas, Maria and Bomhus. The parishes work together in areas where it is convenient to have a joint organisation. The Association of Parishes in Gävle deals primarily with issues of economy and personnel, as well as with certain tasks within the social field.

The parishes in Gävle do not deviate significantly from the picture given in national statistics. There is a slow trend towards a lower degree of membership, from 88 percent in 1995 to 82 percent in 2003. Since the year 2000 the figures have decreased by roughly one percentage unit each year.<sup>32</sup> A more rapid decrease can be seen in the case of baptisms. In 1995, 93 percent of all newborn children in Bomhus were baptised in the Church of Sweden, but in 2002 the number was only 75 percent. In the parish Gävle Maria about 74 percent of all newborn infants were baptised in 1995, and in 2002 the numbers had gone down to 70 percent. Tomas parish is an exception in this regard. In 1995 77 percent of all children were baptised, but in 2002 the number had increased to 78 percent. In sum the religious activity of the parishioners in Gävle is very similar to the average for Sweden as a whole.

Table 2. Participation in a religious event 24–26 September 1999 in Gävle.<sup>33</sup>

<i>Denomination</i>	<i>Registered events</i>	<i>Registered Visits</i>
Church of Sweden/Svenska kyrkan	43	1941
Mission Covenant Church/Svenska missionsförbundet	9	452
Pentecostal movement/Pingströrelsen	5	422
Roman-Catholic Church/Romersk-katolska kyrkan	8	339
Jehova's Witnesses/Jehovas vittnen	3	222
The Evangelical Free Church InterAct/Nybygget	4	205
Baptist Union of Sweden/Svenska baptistsamfundet	3	120
Salvation Army/Frälsningsarmén	4	95
Swedish Salvation Army/Svenska Frälsningsarmén	4	44
Mormons/Sista dagars heliga	1	44
Word of Life/Livets ord	1	40
United Methodist Church/Metodistkyrkan	2	27
<i>Total</i>	<i>87</i>	<i>3,951</i>

### Religious context

The pietistic renewal of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was quite strong in the region of Gävleborg, but today the Free Churches have lost much of their influence, although they often have a higher percentage of religiously active members. Figures from a national survey shows participation in worship events and other religious gatherings a specific weekend, 24–26 September 1999. The survey includes almost any kind of

<sup>32</sup> Church of Sweden Statistics.

<sup>33</sup> Skog 2001, 320.

corporate religious activity and the results are available for every municipality. About half of the visits registered in Gävle took place within the context of Church of Sweden and the other half in a number of other denominations and faith communities, mostly the old Free Churches (table 2). The number of visits represents 4.4 percent of the population, whereas the Swedish average was 6.2 percent.

The majority of citizens with a foreign background in Gävle are from Finland, a country with a Lutheran tradition. The next largest groups of immigrants to Gävle are people from Iran, Iraq, former Yugoslavia and Latin America. The relatively high number of events registered on the Roman-Catholic Church is probably explained by the presence of immigrants from Latin America. The list of local organisations on the website of the local authority in addition to this mentions a Muslim youth organisation and also an organisation for Oriental Christians, neither of which is represented in the figures from the national survey.

## Church organisation

The chain of decision-making in the Church of Sweden is divided between the ordained ministry and elected representatives. Every parish has a vicar, who is responsible for the overall supervision and coordination of the work. Four out of five vicars in the Association of Parishes in Gävle are men, and the director of the Association is also a man. Every parish also has a parish council, consisting of representatives elected by the members of the parish. While all the chair-persons are men, the share of women and men among the members of the councils is more equal (table 3).

Table 3. Share of women and men in the parish councils in Gävle and in Sweden 2004.<sup>34</sup>

Parish councils	Members		Chair-persons	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Sweden	56 %	44 %	35 %	65 %
Gävle	45 %	55 %	0 %	100 %

Like most parishes in Church of Sweden, the parishes in Gävle have a lot of employees. In 2003 182 persons were employed on a long-term basis. Two thirds of these were women (table 4). A significant amount, around 30 people, worked part time. Two thirds of these were also women.

Table 4 shows that women are in majority in all positions, except in the case of priests, where the share is equal. This means the share of women among the priests is a bit higher in Gävle than in the Church of Sweden as a whole (34 percent 2002). The share of women among the deacons is hard to compare with the Church at large, since the annual report shows the number of deacons together with other personnel involved in social work. This may explain why the share of women among the personnel in diaconal/social work is a bit lower (75 percent) than the share of women

<sup>34</sup> Jämställdheten i Svenska kyrkan. Kyrkostyrelsens skrivelse 2004:6; Gävle kyrkliga samfällighet: [www.svenskakyrkan.se/gavle](http://www.svenskakyrkan.se/gavle); e-mail from administrative director Sture Larsson, Gävle kyrkliga samfällighet 4 February 2005.

among the deacons in the Church as a whole (86 percent). The share of women is highest among the personnel working with children and education (90 percent).<sup>35</sup>

Table 4. Yearly employments, according to sex and profession (Annual report 2003 Gävle kyrkliga samfällighet).

	<b>Number of persons</b>	<b>% women</b>	<b>% men</b>
Cemetery and crematorium	64	66 %	34 %
Education, children/youth work	31	90 %	10 %
Administration	27	63 %	37 %
Deacons/ social work	20	75 %	25 %
Properties and comfort	15	53 %	47 %
Priests	14	50 %	50 %
Church musicians	11	55 %	45 %
<i>Total</i>	<i>182</i>	<i>68 %</i>	<i>32 %</i>

Generally speaking personnel working with children and young people have the lowest salaries in the Church of Sweden and deacons are paid considerably less than priests, which means that the categories of personnel where women are in majority are the lowest paid. The situation is the same in the parishes in Gävle.<sup>36</sup>

The high degree of salaried, professional work in the Church of Sweden exists side by side with voluntary engagement of different kinds. Voluntary tasks vary from being a church warden, to visiting elderly or disabled people in their homes or in an institution, or participating in a choir, a sewing-circle or an international group for Church of Sweden Mission or Church of Sweden aid. Many parishes have groups of volunteers engaged in social work. No statistics, however, are available for voluntary engagement, which means that it is more difficult to discuss gender roles in voluntary work. Studies of voluntary work in Sweden, however, show that in no other category of organisations are women as dominating among the volunteers, as they are in the Church of Sweden. Voluntary work in connection with the Church has doubled during the 1990s, and now involves 4 percent of the population. The increase is to a large degree represented by women, who are three times more often engaged in this type of voluntary work than men. The typical volunteer in the Church of Sweden is an older (65–74 years) woman, born in Sweden, with a wide social network.<sup>37</sup>

In order to form a picture of the situation in Gävle in this respect we made enquiries about the situation in one specific parish. In Heliga Trefaldighet there is a group of volunteers consisting of 25 women. Five of them are engaged as hosts during worship at geriatric institutions, four participate in conversation-groups for immigrants learning Swedish, some take part in a group doing needlework in an organisation for immigrant women, two women support lone mothers and four prepare the soup lunches in the parish. Most of the women also uphold personal contact with individuals who want such contact. In another district in the parish there is a

<sup>35</sup> Gävle kyrkliga samfällighet. Årsredovisning 2003, 23; Jämställdheten i Svenska kyrkan. Kyrkostyrelsens skrivelse 2004:6.

<sup>36</sup> Gävle kyrkliga samfällighet. Årsredovisning 2003; Svenska kyrkan i Gävle. Jämställdhetsplan 2004.

<sup>37</sup> Jeppsson Grassman 2001; 2004.

group of volunteers consisting of eight women, with similar tasks. The same women also take part in the sewing-circle, the choir and some of them are church wardens. There are also some male volunteers, but they are not part of the organised groups. A group of 10–15 elderly men meet however regularly and in this way “care for each other”.<sup>38</sup>

The main income of the parishes comes from the church fee levied on every person belonging to the church. In Gävle the fee is one percent of the taxable income. The income from the church fee in 2003 was 69 million SEK (7.3 million EUR) and the annual turnover for the five parishes 92 million SEK (9.7 million EUR).<sup>39</sup>

In addition to the church fee another important economic source derives from the gifts collected during worship services and other gatherings. The purpose is often Church of Sweden Mission and Church of Sweden Aid, but also local activities or parishes abroad with which the parish has an established exchange. During 2003 the five parishes in Gävle collected 718,000 SEK (76,000 EUR).<sup>40</sup>

The Constitution of the Church of Sweden requires every parish to develop a pastoral programme, which has to be approved by the diocesan chapter. This means that it is relatively easy to get hold of written material in order to study the theological positions of local parishes. The pastoral programmes in Gävle are described in 5–10 pages and include, in addition to theological matters, principles for the education of the staff, descriptions of the parishes’ work for Finnish-speaking people etc.<sup>41</sup> All pastoral programmes in Gävle are structured according to the Church Constitution’s description of the tasks of the parish: worship, teaching, diaconal/social work (Sw: diakoni) and mission. In this way they provide some material of a theological character, which makes it possible to reconstruct a few theological themes, which can be said to make up the theological identity of Church of Sweden in Gävle.

## The Church as Agent of Welfare

In describing the Church of Sweden in Gävle as an agent of welfare we adopt a broad approach. As mentioned above diaconal/social work is according to the Church constitution one of the basic tasks of the parish. The webpage of Church of Sweden at the national level summarises the meaning of the concept “diakoni” as “care for the fellow human beings” and “faith in practice”. One way of delimiting this study would then be to restrict ourselves to what is seen by the local church as diaconal/social work. This delimitation could also be defended on the basis of a conceptual interpretation made in a basic study of voluntary social work in Sweden, where diaconal work (Sw: “diakoni”) is defined as activities with a primary welfare aim, carried out by, or connected to, a church.<sup>42</sup> We have however found it reasonable to include other additional activities which are perceived by our interviewees as

<sup>38</sup> Letter 23 January 2005 and e-mail 22 February 2005 from Anna-Karin Lidberg, administrator in Heliga Trefaldighet.

<sup>39</sup> Gävle kyrkliga samfällighet. Årsredovisning 2003.

<sup>40</sup> Gävle kyrkliga samfällighet. Årsredovisning 2003.

<sup>41</sup> Församlingsinstruktion Gävle Heliga Trefaldighets församling; Församlingsinstruktion Gävle Staffans församling; Församlingsinstruktion Gävle Tomas församling; Församlingsinstruktion för Gävle Maria församling, Församlingsinstruktion för Bomhus församling.

<sup>42</sup> Blennberger 1993, 61.

contributing to the welfare of the citizens. As will be illustrated by quotations from the interviews below, the mere presence of a Church to which the majority of the people belong also implies a major contribution to welfare when the church concentrates on its basic tasks of worshipping and performing important life rites.

Some social work in the Church is connected with professional competence, like counselling, therapeutically oriented groups and support in crisis. Some of it aims more at community-building. It could again be argued that this should not be included in diaconal work, as it might not have “a primary welfare aim”. As noted by Swedish researchers, however, there are in the activities in a Swedish church often “flexible boundaries between practice of religion, togetherness, leisure activities, the creation of networks and social support”.<sup>43</sup> To take part in these kinds of church activity does not necessarily imply “being religious”, which might be a sensitive thing in Swedish secular society. It is rather perceived as being part of local community-building as a Swedish citizen. This broad understanding of how the Church contributes to welfare also fits in well with a theological view of *diakonia*, not as primarily specific activities or services, but as one basic dimension of being church.<sup>44</sup>

To be a deacon is not a stage on the way to priesthood in the Church of Sweden, but a separate ordained ministry. Deacons have a special responsibility, according to their ordination, to seek out and help anyone in bodily or spiritual need, defend human rights, actively support the oppressed, and “exhort God’s people to all good works, so that the love of God is made visible in the world”.<sup>45</sup> Theologically *diakonia* is seen as the responsibility of all God’s people, that is to say all those who are baptised. Most of the activities described below are organised by employed personnel, often deacons, but it also often involves a great deal of voluntary engagement.

### **The aim of the social work**

The 2004 budget for the association of the parishes in Gävle starts with a principle statement on the tasks of the parishes. Like the pastoral programmes, the statement is structured according to the definition in the Church Constitution of the tasks of the parish, namely worship, teaching, diaconal/social work and mission. The parishes in Gävle declare that in their diaconal/social work they want to offer opportunities:

- to be treated according to needs in situations of distress,
- to be reminded of one’s human dignity and be strengthened in that dignity
- to contribute directly or indirectly to “matter-of-fact care”,
- for spiritual dimensions to be respected in situations of crisis.<sup>46</sup>

Diaconal work is described as varying from one-to-one counselling, to direct assistance of different kinds and community building. In practice the parishes have slightly different ways of carrying out their diaconal mission, including a great diversity of activities, more and less professionalised, in very different parts of society and with very different aims and expectations.

Before the year 2000, when the Church of Sweden was formally separated from the state, the Church was not permitted to interfere with the public authorities in areas

<sup>43</sup> Jeppsson Grassman 2001, 195.

<sup>44</sup> Brodd et al 1999.

<sup>45</sup> Den svenska kyrkohandboken 1987.

<sup>46</sup> Gävle kyrkliga samfällighet *Budget 2004*.

where the latter have an official responsibility. This study has been carried out only a few years after these restrictions were abolished. It will thus be of special interest for the study to clarify the relations between the local and regional authorities and the Church. For that reason we have structured the different activities of the parishes in Gävle according to how they relate to society and especially to the public responsibility for people's welfare. A summary of this overview is presented in table 5.

### Church based activities

We start with what the church does with its own money and on its own premises. The Church itself looks upon gathering for worship as its basic task.<sup>47</sup> For this study it is of interest to note that these gatherings, which have a primary religious aim, are often accompanied by a social gathering, normally over a cup of coffee. Regular services are not very highly attended, as is clear from the statistics above. Most Swedes do, however, attend for example a baptism, a wedding or a burial in church one or several times a year. These too are occasions which are normally followed by some kind of social gathering including coffee or a meal.

Linked to acts of worship are the church choirs, which attract altogether more than 100,000 Swedes. The choirs thus constitute important social groups in every parish. The parishes in Gävle have 440 singers organised in choirs (2003).<sup>48</sup> As Tomas parish announces on its web-page: "the spirit of community is often as important as the singing".<sup>49</sup> A church musician interviewed in the study illustrates this by speaking about the choir as a "social choir" (14, m).

A type of worship with a very obvious connection to social work is the so called "peace-of-mind-service". This type of worship has its origin in the Minnesota-model and has been developed to meet the specific needs of alcoholics and drug addicts. The form of worship has, however, been found to suit many groups in modern society.<sup>50</sup> The type of worship is now spread all over Sweden, although the exact form varies. "Peace-of-mind-services" have been celebrated since 1995 in Staffan's church in Gävle, one Friday night every month. Holy Communion is celebrated and the participants are given opportunity to light candles, to receive personal blessings, intercessions and anointment. The services bring together several hundred participants, which is more than any other type of act of worship. The worship services have their origin in the fact that from 1993 one of the ministers has participated in the treatment of alcoholics according to the Minnesota-model.<sup>51</sup>

There are many other opportunities for community-building in the parishes in Gävle. One classic form, attracting almost only women, is the sewing-circles. In earlier times these gathered hundreds of women. Today the participants belong to the older generation and women from younger generations are less attracted. Still more than 300 women were listed as belonging to the sewing-circles in the parishes

<sup>47</sup> Svenska kyrkan, 1999, inledning kap. 2.

<sup>48</sup> Gävle kyrkliga samfällighet. Årsredovisning 2003, 22.

<sup>49</sup> [www.svenskakyrkan.se/gavle](http://www.svenskakyrkan.se/gavle), 27 April 2005.

<sup>50</sup> One common feature of "peace-of-mind-services" is the use of the so called prayer of serenity, which is used in Alcoholics Anonymous.

<sup>51</sup> Protokoll fört vid biskopsvisitation i Gävle Staffans församling 8, 9 och 11 oktober 1998. [Minutes from the Bishop's Inspection], § 6; E-mail from the vicar Peter Lööv, 24 February 2005.

in Gävle in 2003.<sup>52</sup> It is worth noting that these circles have made a major contribution to diaconal work in Gävle, both in the form of community-building and in fundraising for diaconal purposes in Sweden and abroad.<sup>53</sup>

Several of the parishes in Gävle have more intentional community-building activities, like cafés (Tomas and Staffan), soup lunches (Heliga Trefaldighet, Bomhus and Staffan), regular walks in town (Heliga Trefaldighet), or regular meetings for specific groups like senior men (Bomhus) or international meetings for women from Sweden and from other countries (Maria, Heliga Trefaldighet).<sup>54</sup> Many of these activities are aimed at groups of people who lack strong social networks of their own. Other activities are directed towards people in temporary crises. Several parishes for example offer counselling groups for bereaved.

All parishes have group-activities for children in different age groups and also teaching in preparation for confirmation. All in all 1,500 children were engaged in different group activities in Gävle during 2003.<sup>55</sup> These activities play an important role in integrating young people into social networks and the symbolic world of the church.

Apart from all these group and community activities much of what the parishes do is oriented towards individuals. Priests and deacons offer individual counselling. Deacons and volunteers visit the elderly and sick in their homes. The association of parishes offers professional family guidance, based in the parish Heliga Trefaldighet. The guidance is offered to couples and individuals who experience difficulties in their personal relations. During 2003 136 clients received such guidance.<sup>56</sup>

Direct financial assistance has traditionally been part of the social work of the church, even if it is today a legal obligation for the local authority to provide such assistance. The parishes in Gävle have a long tradition in engaging in social and diaconal activities, going back to the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For legal reasons, the parishes could not use the church tax freely in this type of diaconal work, and therefore in 1919 *Heliga Trefaldighets Diakoniförening* (Holy Trinity Association for Diaconal work) was formed. This is an independent foundation, which is chaired by the vicar in the parish Heliga Trefaldighet. The foundation has a capital of about 60 million SEK (6.3 million EUR), and is able to use about 3 million SEK (0.32 million EUR) each year (including costs for administration) for the financial support of people in need.<sup>57</sup> *The Diaconal Council*, as it is called in everyday speech, gives financial support to people living in the city of Gävle, and deals with about 1,500 requests for help each year. According to the personnel of the Diaconal Council, the need for financial support from the Church has grown significantly in recent years. From an average of 4 visits a week in 1999 the number of visits to the Diaconal Council has risen to 25–30 a week in 2004.<sup>58</sup> Concurrent factors in this development are higher demands, and lower levels of compensation, from the public authorities,

<sup>52</sup> Gävle kyrkliga samfällighet. Årsredovisning 2003, 22.

<sup>53</sup> Borg 2004.

<sup>54</sup> Protokoll vid biskopsvisitation Gävle Maria församling [Minutes from the Bishop's inspection] 18, 19 och 21 april 2002, §8.

<sup>55</sup> Gävle kyrkliga samfällighet. Årsredovisning 2003, 22.

<sup>56</sup> The figures include 62 couples, 72 individuals and 2 families. Gävle kyrkliga samfällighet. Årsredovisning 2003, 18.

<sup>57</sup> Heliga Trefaldighets församlings Diakoniförening. Årsredovisning 2003.

<sup>58</sup> Arbetarbladet, 4 December 2004.

together with limited social networks and small economic margins for many households. About 70 percent of all grants are given to women, mainly for assisting in paying rent, food and electricity. As the Diaconal Council is able to support individuals, requests for economic assistance are normally not handled by the parish deacons. The personnel of the Diaconal Council cooperate closely with the parish deacons and with the local authorities in order to be able to offer the clients long term support. The Diaconal Council aspires not only to see to the immediate needs, but to strengthen the ability of the individual to support him- or herself and also to contribute to a better social situation for the individual in a broader sense.<sup>59</sup> This rehabilitative role is made even clearer through the initiative to create a *Centre for economic knowledge*. The idea is to find a way to support people who do not automatically fit into the support-systems created by the authorities and who for some reason are not capable of requesting the support they have the right to.<sup>60</sup>

### **The church in the public sector**

The public sector in Sweden has the primary responsibility for most welfare services. As a result, the Church extends its activities outside of its own premises and tries to be present in different parts of the public sector. The Church of Sweden has a long tradition of being present in major public institutions, like in the military, the schools, the prisons and the hospitals.<sup>61</sup> This tradition continues, but also take new forms when society changes.

A presence in the schools is given priority by all parishes in Gävle. In the nine year compulsory school the parishes contribute with teaching and dialogue about the Christian tradition, ethics and values. The activities normally have quite an organised status, with special activities being repeated every year at Easter and Christmas and the Church being a permanent member of groups with responsibilities. A parish may for example take part in a group aiming at preventing harassment and being at hand in situations of crisis. Tomas' parish is responsible for the presence of the church at the university. One of the priests has this as his main task and works in close cooperation with a pastor from one of the free churches. The church relates mainly to individual students, but also cooperates with the student organisations and offers its services in teaching.

The parish of Heliga Trefaldighet is responsible for the presence of the Church at the hospital, where a priest serves in close collaboration with two pastors from the free churches. It is worth noting that the "hospital church" functions as an integrated part of the hospital, but is paid and administered by the church. The parish Maria has taken an unconventional initiative by placing one of their priests, who is also a professional psychologist, at the primary health care centre one day a week. Staffan's parish has a special responsibility for the presence of the church at the prison and the parish has also tried to help those who have served a prison sentence, getting a place to live after release.<sup>62</sup>

Another major church presence in public institutions is in geriatric care. The parishes often arrange worship services for the elderly in geriatric institutions, but also

<sup>59</sup> Telephone interview with P-E Lindberg, The Diaconal Council 18 January 2005.

<sup>60</sup> "Angående ekonomiskt kunskapscenter (EKC) eller social ekonomi i Gävle".

<sup>61</sup> Levenskog 1997.

<sup>62</sup> Report from the project "Bättre ut", Per-Olof Engström 18 May 2005.

offer guidance and education for the personnel. Many geriatric institutions are served by a number of organisations and networks sometimes lacking internal coordination. In Gävle the local authority has met this situation by shouldering the responsibility for coordinating the networks around some of the larger public institutions for the care of elderly people.<sup>63</sup> The coordination has been given poetic names like *Glimpse of the Sun* (Solglimten) and *Gold-rim* (Guldkanten) and involves e.g. organisations for pensioners, the Red Cross and the churches. This means that the public authorities take on the responsibility for organising activities including religious activities and which are in part carried out with the help of volunteers. This is an anomalous situation in a Swedish context where the strong labour unions carefully guard the collective agreements on wages and working conditions and where religious activities have not for a long time been a matter for the public authorities.

### **Publicly financed – run by the Church**

Representatives of the Church have testified, both in written material and in interviews, that there is a growing positive attitude from the public sector towards the Church and a more open interest in cooperating with the Church. This is also shown in the fact that the public sector makes more use of the church for carrying out activities for which the public sector is responsible, but where it is seen as more suitable, for one reason or the other, to pay the church for providing the services.

One such venture is the shelter for homeless people, which is run by a local ecumenical organisation, The Council of Christian Churches in Gävle (*Gävle kristna råd*), with economic support from the local authorities. The shelter was started in 1996. The local authority contributes a half of the costs for the shelter. The Association of Parishes contributes 20 percent and also takes care of the administration of finance and personnel for the shelter. Gifts and contributions from local firms, individuals and different foundations are also important sources of finance. The shelter has room for 17 people and is open for both men and women, with separate rooms for women. On an average night eight beds are occupied and 95 percent of the guests are men. Employed staff and volunteers run the shelter together.<sup>64</sup>

Other examples of publicly (part)financed activities, run by the church, are pre-schools in several parishes and a youth centre in Bomhus' parish, run together with the youth organisation of the Mission Covenant Church.<sup>65</sup> Because they are financed by public means, the pre-schools have to follow the educational program of the authorities. Within this framework, however, they are allowed to follow their own educational ideas and also to convey Christian traditions and values. Bible stories, Christian songs and visits to the worship room are regular parts of their program. One of the parishes explains that their pre-school "has a Christian basis and is permeated by Christian values and traditions".<sup>66</sup> The pre-schools represent a form of cooperation which is fairly uncommon in Sweden, since they are financed by the local authority and discharge a public responsibility on contract. Here the role of the

<sup>63</sup> Interview 33f. Telephone interview with Vicar Peter Stjerndorff, 19 January 2005.

<sup>64</sup> Härbärgat i Gävle. Report by Director Anders Åstrand, 14 October 2003.

<sup>65</sup> Staffans Hus and Staffanssalens pre-schools in Staffan's parish; the youth centre Legenden and the pre-school Pärlan in Bomhus' parish; the pre-school Stjärnan in Maria parish.

<sup>66</sup> The pre-school Pärlan in Bomhus parish according to information at [www.svenskakyrkan.se/gavle](http://www.svenskakyrkan.se/gavle).

Church is the same as the role of other entrepreneurs such as co-operative societies and private companies. When pre-schools run by the local authority have closed down for economic reasons the need for parallel Church alternatives has increased.<sup>67</sup>

### Joint ventures

Another form of cooperation between public sector and church, and sometimes other actors, are projects run in direct cooperation. Perhaps the best example of this is the "Emergency-counselling" (Sw: Samtalsakuten). This is a centre for counselling in so called "healthy life-crises", caused by accidents, unemployment, or other incidents in life which may cause a temporary loss of foothold. The contributions are short-term (maximum five consultations), available immediately (within 48 hours) and based on ideas of empowerment. The centre is run by the regional authorities and the association of the parishes in cooperation, and started in 2000. It is in great demand. The report from 2003 says "the need seems infinite".<sup>68</sup>

Local authorities in Sweden have as part of their emergency organisation so called POSOM-groups. POSOM stands for psychological and social care in the case of major accidents or disasters. The groups are responsible for coordinating emergency activities and builds on a network consisting of public institutions like school, primary health care and social services in cooperation with voluntary organisations. The Church of Sweden is a regular part of the organisation. In Gävle, the Church of Sweden is represented in POSOM by The Association of parishes in Gävle and individual priests and deacons are part of the local teams.<sup>69</sup>

A recent initiative based on direct cooperation between the Church and the local and regional authorities is the Family-centre, which was inaugurated in Andersberg in Tomas' parish in February 2005. The centre is the result of several years of preparation on the part of the public authorities in order to offer preventive support to families in Gävle. This has its background in actions taken by the Swedish parliament, which in 2003 set up goals for public health in Sweden. One of these goals addressed the issue of psychological problems among children and young people.<sup>70</sup> Family centres are one way in which the authorities in Sweden try to deal with this problem. The purpose is to bring together competence and resources from different parts of society in one centre which caters to a wide demand. The centres build on the basic principles in the health care system, with universal and free care for pregnant women and children. What is new is that the public authorities do not act separately, but work together, and that they also aim at involving other agents, like the church, in the work of prevention.

In Gävle the family centre is located in the district of Andersberg, where there was formerly a district church belonging to Tomas' parish. This church, however, was sold some years ago, when many other public institutions also left Andersberg. When it was decided that the family centre should be placed in Andersberg the vicar of the parish contacted the authorities in order to establish cooperation.<sup>71</sup> In 2004 it

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<sup>67</sup> Gefle Dagblad, 20 November 2003.

<sup>68</sup> Gävle kyrkliga samfällighet. Årsredovisning 2003:19; Utvärdering av Samtalsakuten, Kon-sultrapport. March 2003.

<sup>69</sup> Plan for POSOM in Gävle, [www.gavle.se](http://www.gavle.se).

<sup>70</sup> Action plan for the Family centre in Andersberg 2004.

<sup>71</sup> Peter Stjernedorff, telephone interview, 19 January 2005.

was agreed that the parish should contribute two youth leaders, both working half time, and also contribute to the rent for the premises. The aim is social and preventive; on the part of the parish, it is not seen as involving mission or teaching. The contribution consists mainly in the engagement of the youth leaders, who both have long experience of working with children and their parents. This church involvement in the family centre in Gävle is thus an example of the Church redirecting its activities from worship (the church was sold) to social work.

### **Other forms of cooperation**

The three types of church involvement mentioned above are the major ones in Gävle, but there are also a few other types of social involvement worth mentioning. Bomhus' parish has recently established a Church presence at one of the local industries, quite similar to its presence in the public institutions. One of the parish priests works half time at the industry, paid by the parish, but assigned to the staff manager with the task of being a resource for "the spiritual aspect" of the preventive health measures of the company. The parish motivates its presence as "a way of establishing good relations with the parishioners and their work place".<sup>72</sup>

Another way for the Church to fulfil its mission is to give financial contributions to other organisations. In 2005 contributions were given e.g. to the emergency-service for victims of crimes (Brottsofferjouren), the emergency-service for men (Mansjouren Stickan), the guidance on drug-issues (RIA) and the youth centre Block 17.<sup>73</sup> The personnel in the parishes work sometimes very closely together with other voluntary organisations, like The Red Cross, Free Church congregations, ethnic organisations for immigrants and interest groups for e.g. pensioners, drug addicts or disabled people.<sup>74</sup>

Table 5. Different types of organisational and financial relationships between the Church and local authorities.

<b>Church based activities</b>	<b>Church presence/activities within the public sector</b>
Social gatherings related to worship	University-church
Peace-of-mind-services	Teaching, crisis-groups, anti-harassments groups in schools
Choirs	Priest in the prison
Sewing-circles	Hospital-church
Groups for children and youth	Priest at the health care centre
Cafés, soup-lunches, walks in town, international gatherings	Worship, visits and guidance for the personnel at geriatric institutions
Counselling groups for bereaved	
Financial assistance through the Diaconal Council	
Individual counselling	
House calls	
Family guidance	

<sup>72</sup> Parish council (Sw: Kyrkonämnden) minutes, December 9th 2004.

<sup>73</sup> Parish council (Sw: Kyrkonämnden) minutes, December 9th 2004, § 78.

<sup>74</sup> WREP-enquiry to Church employees in Gävle with responses.

<b>Publicly financed activities run by the Church</b>
Pre-schools
Youth-centre
Hostel for homeless people
<b>Joint ventures between the Church, the public sector and other organisations</b>
Emergency-counselling
Emergency-group in case of accidents (POSOM)
Family centre
<b>Other forms of cooperation</b>
Presence in a private work-place
Financial contributions

Cooperation between the social authorities and the Church in Gävle exists at many different levels and in many different forms. The major forms of cooperation are summarised in table 5. What does not become visible in the table is the degree to which all this cooperation is based on daily contacts between deacons and other personnel employed in the parishes and their colleagues in different public authorities, mainly schools and geriatric care.<sup>75</sup>

### The voice of the Church in public debate

The function of the Church in welfare has, at least in principle, a dual aspect, namely that of being a provider of services on the one hand and of being a voice in the public debate on the other. Several issues concerning welfare were high on the agenda in the local public debate during the period from August 2003 to March 2004, when we followed the reports on welfare in the two dailies in Gävle.<sup>76</sup> Most articles concerned the financial difficulties mentioned above. The local authority decided on an employment freeze from the first of June 2003. During the autumn, reports and action plans concerning the region and the county hospital were made public one after the other. Protests from citizens, patients and employees followed each event. The regional authority decided during the autumn on reductions in the activities of the hospital as well as in primary health care. Another frequently debated issue was the care of the elderly, but also the issue of closing pre-schools occurred frequently among the headlines.

The voice of the Church was not heard in the referred media debate in Gävle during the period. Once a month the parishes pay for two pages in the newspapers as a way of advertising their activities. During the period none of the articles were of polemic character. The only example of a representative from the Church expressing a clear opinion in the newspapers on a controversial issue during the period was a vicar, who said in an interview that he wanted to marry homosexual couples. This statement was made into a headline.<sup>77</sup>

Our observations on the relatively low profile of the Church in public debate fits in well with the impressions of a number of the interviewed representatives of the

<sup>75</sup> A lot of examples of this kind of cooperation is given in the replies to the enquiry sent out to the church personnel in Gävle when this study was initiated.

<sup>76</sup> Gefle Dagblad and Arbetarbladet August 2003–March 2004.

<sup>77</sup> Arbetarbladet, October 25th 2003.

public authorities, who regard the role of the Church in Gävle in public debate as limited.<sup>78</sup> Some of the interviewees from the Church have noted that to be active in public debate is a complicated role for a Church to which the majority of the population belong. There are however tendencies in another direction, which might indicate the importance of personalities with regard to the function of the Church in public debate. Two vicars in Gävle are mentioned in several of the interviews. These vicars have both become known in Gävle for speaking up on behalf of the poor and vulnerable in society. One of them participated in a radio program on family and social issues for seven years. But as both of them left active parish ministry in Gävle during the research period, they made no imprint on what we actually could observe in the debate. Large farewell-articles in the newspapers, however, indicate their former public role.

It is worth observing that we followed the press for a relatively short period. Half a year after we had ended our subscriptions, just before Christmas 2004, one of the deacons in Gävle was interviewed in the newspaper under the headline “The poor in Gävle ask the Church for money”.<sup>79</sup> The article dealt with an initiative from deacons in Gävle in cooperation with the ecumenical organisation Gävle Christian Council and official representatives of the psychologically disabled. The deacon interviewed pointed to the increase in the number of people who turn to the Church for economic assistance. She asked for greater availability and more preventive measures from the local authority in attending to the needs of the poor. In spring 2005 representatives of the Church organised local activities as part of a national campaign for a humanitarian policy towards refugees who have been denied asylum.<sup>80</sup>

A question about involvement in public debate was included in the enquiry sent out to all Church personnel when our research first got under way.<sup>81</sup> The employees were asked if they had at any time in their professional role in the Church been actively engaged in any societal issue e.g. writing a letter to the editor, writing a statement to the authorities, taking part in a public debate or participating in a demonstration. In general it seems to be the vicars who, as representatives of the parish, take on this role, while other employees seem to be more hesitant. A gender pattern is also noted in the results. As many women as men said they had been active in this way, but four times as many women said they had not. Examples of engagement on the part of the personnel are cooperation with organisations like Amnesty International and manifestations for the support to victims of HIV/AIDS. Representatives of the Church have also spoken out against the closing down of a youth centre and for better assistance to homeless people.

## Theological motivations

How then does the Church motivate its role in welfare? One way is to refer to the tradition of the Church, like some employees in Tomas’ parish do, in an interview in the Church’s monthly advertisement: “To serve people has always been a part of the

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<sup>78</sup> Interviews 21m, 31m, 32f, 38f.

<sup>79</sup> *Arbetsbladet*, 4 December 2004.

<sup>80</sup> *Gefle Dagblad*, 21 March 2005.

<sup>81</sup> Enquiry to Church employees in Gävle with responses.

Christian tradition.”<sup>82</sup> They also refer to the fact that many public responsibilities in Swedish society have their roots in the work of the Church. The most important task of the Church is to give hope and faith in the future, they say, and to point to the value of every human being. They also point to the fact that mission and social work is close to each other, although the Church assists everyone, regardless of religion.

The parish of Staffan says in its pastoral programme that the social work aims at a good life, built on human dignity and on cooperation between every person of good will. The parish wants to “help people to have a good life by encouraging a life in the imitation of Jesus”. The Church is said to have a special task in contributing to respect for spiritual values.<sup>83</sup> The pastoral programs for the parishes of Staffan, Heliga Trefaldighet and Maria mention the task of meeting people in crisis and distress according to their needs. This is to be done “without reservation” (Maria) and “disregarding personal factors” (Heliga Trefaldighet). The parish is to give “voice to the poor” (Heliga Trefaldighet) and to be a critical voice in society (Maria).

All parishes see themselves as channels also for international assistance through Church of Sweden Aid. The pastoral programmes do not motivate the aims of the social work with Biblical references or any specific theological models, except the reference to a life in imitation of Christ. The aim seems infinite: “to seek liberation and restitution for people”. However, it is possible to reconstruct a few theological themes which can be understood as motives for the Church’s activities within the field of welfare. These themes can be summarised in the following points: a) The imitation of Christ/The love of Christ, b) A necessary practical expression of Christian faith, c) Human dignity.

The pastoral programme of the parish of Staffan says that the purpose of the Church’s social work is to help people to live a good life, “in the imitation of Jesus”. There is, however, no explanation of how this concept is to be understood. But a common sense interpretation of this concept could be that the life of Christ is seen as paradigmatic for all Christians. This means that all Christians ought to strive to become more and more like Christ in their way of living and love their neighbours in a way taught and shown by Christ.

A similar way of reasoning is the argument that the social work of the Church is a *necessary expression* of Christian faith.<sup>84</sup> The implication of this statement – which in different forms occurs frequently also in the interviews of church representatives – is not quite clear, and its meaning is hardly clarified in the written documents. If the written documents are read together with the interviews, it could be said to mean that it is a normative part of Christian identity to help those in need. This is expressed by one informant in the following way:

... it is simply a part of the Gospel, in the Christian message, to help one’s neighbour, so it is and should be natural for Christians to contribute ... (2, m)

The meaning seems to be that Christian faith in God implies the will to help one’s neighbour. The official documents of the Church of Sweden in Gävle seem to take

<sup>82</sup> Arbetarbladet, 21 March 2004.

<sup>83</sup> This wording is found also in the pastoral programmes of Heliga Trefaldighet and Maria.

<sup>84</sup> E.g. on the website of the parish of Heliga Trefaldighet 15 July 2005, [www.svenskakyrkan.se/gavle](http://www.svenskakyrkan.se/gavle).

this view for granted, and show no need of a more detailed theological discussion of the church's social activities. In one sense this is not strange at all. It is a common sense interpretation of Christianity that it implies a strong exhortation to caring love, and it does not belong to the genre of pastoral programmes to offer advanced theological analyses. In this sense the Church of Sweden in Gävle is no exception. What is interesting is rather the rather strongly expressed view in all the pastoral programmes that the Church's social action should preferably be carried out in cooperation with local and state authorities and other voluntary organisations. The pastoral programme in Heliga Trefaldighet, for example, says that the parish cooperates with "every organisation and individual who shares the values and goals of the parish in one or several respects". The parishes, in their pastoral programmes, are mainly strongly opposed to a view of the Church as an alternative or contrasting society in open or tacit opposition to the world. The pastoral programmes do not express any need to mark the distinctiveness of the Church in regard to its welfare activities.

One theological reason for this might be the stress on *human dignity* and *value* in the pastoral programmes. The pastoral programme of the parish of Tomas, for example, stresses that the task of the Church's *diakonia* is to "call attention to the value and dignity of human beings and to support the good life in every way". The stress on human dignity implies, according to the pastoral programme, that the social work of the parish should avoid making people passive and helpless.

It is not possible to identify any elaborate definitions of concepts like 'human dignity' in the pastoral programmes or other official documents of the Church of Sweden in Gävle. But it is not unreasonable to reconstruct the idea as implying that all human beings have an intrinsic and infinite value as created in the image of God. This line of reasoning can be found in several official documents of the Church of Sweden on the national level,<sup>85</sup> and also in other publications connected to different church-run institutions.<sup>86</sup> Human dignity is seen as a value based in God's creation of all humans in God's image. Therefore all humans must be treated with respect. The purpose of the Church's welfare activities can thus be seen as the *restoration* of a good life, as intended in God's creation.

## The parishes from a gender perspective

From what has been described above it is clear that the welfare role of the parishes in Gävle reflects traditional gender-roles. This contrasts with the aims set up by the parishes themselves in the gender equality plan for The Association of Parishes in Gävle. All working-places in Sweden with more than 9 employees have to adopt such a plan. Among the aims in the plan for 2004 is the breaking down of the traditional gender segregation between different occupations. Categories like vicars, child-care workers, deacons, cleaners and administrators are mentioned specifically.

An aspect of gender segregation which has maybe not been sufficiently clarified above, concerns the persons who seek the assistance of the Church. For some of the activities there are statistics available; for others the figures are estimated by the employed personnel. The general image is that it is mostly women who make use of

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<sup>85</sup> E.g. in Svenska kyrkans kommunikationsplattform. Kyrkostyrelsens protokoll 2004:5.

<sup>86</sup> E.g. Blennberger & Nilsson 1998, 78.

the services offered by the church, with the exception of the hostel for homeless and the youth centre (table 6). The hostel is open to women, but very few women make use of it and the youth centre is, as most youth centres in Sweden, mostly frequented by boys.<sup>87</sup> Among the beneficiaries elderly women and widows are commonly mentioned by our interviewees as frequent partakers of other parish activities. The majority of people seen by The Diaconal council are women, mainly lone mothers.<sup>88</sup> In emergency-counselling, women form a clear majority.<sup>89</sup> In the case of Family guidance, there are no statistics available, but the director says that women traditionally dominate, although there is a new trend for men to come too.<sup>90</sup>

Table 6. Estimated share of women and men among visitors/clients in the Church's social work.

<i>Visitors/clients</i>	<i>Women %</i>	<i>Men %</i>
Diaconal Council	75	25
Emergency-counselling	69	31
Youth Centre	10–33	66–90
Shelter for homeless people	5	95

Few activities are directed specifically towards women or men, which is quite typical of a Swedish situation where equal access for women and men is taken for granted. Occasionally there are worship services focussing especially on women (International Women's Day and Mother's Day) or men (Father's Day). In one parish there is a male group of senior citizens who meet regularly and in two parishes there are international groups for women from Sweden and from other countries. Except for these examples, patterns of gender segregation appear spontaneously, as a result of the interaction between the personnel and the visitors, for example when only women take part in the sewing circle, and mostly mothers come with their children to the pre-schools. In some of the parishes there has been a discussion about starting activities directed at men, for example wood-work or cooking.<sup>91</sup>

There is no visible theological reflection in any official documents from the parishes in Gävle about gendered patterns of parish life. The positions taken in the gender equality plan are not defended by references to the bible or theology. The one issue related to gender, where we have found clear public statements, is that of same-sex marriages. Two of the vicars have declared in interviews in the local newspapers that they are willing to perform same-sex weddings in church.<sup>92</sup> No such act existed at this time in Church of Sweden, although the Church synod in 2005 decided on an act of blessing for couples who are registered partners according to Swedish law.

<sup>87</sup> Härbärgat i Gävle. Report by Director Anders Åstrand, 14 October 2003; interview with the director of the youth-centre Legenden, Christin From 7 February 2005.

<sup>88</sup> Årsredovisning 2003. Heliga Trefaldighets församlings diakoniförening.

<sup>89</sup> Gävle kyrkliga samfällighet. Årsredovisning 2003.

<sup>90</sup> E-mail from Director Ally Palmquist 4 February 2005.

<sup>91</sup> Interviews 14m and 26f.

<sup>92</sup> Arbetarbladet 25 October 2003; Gefle dagblad 3 October 2004; Arbetarbladet 22 August 2004.

## The Church as an agent of welfare – opinions and attitudes

### Views held by the public authorities

#### **Welfare**

The public authority representatives say that welfare consists in having basic material as well as immaterial needs satisfied, and in getting help when one needs it, e.g. in illness. Their view of welfare includes individual well-being as part of welfare. Most of them start by mentioning material/physical aspects like having a place to live, having food, medical care, having a job etc. “Welfare has to do with having a certain level of resources in society, but also with seeing that they are sensibly distributed among people” (39, m). Other interviewees refer to concepts like a feeling of security, having social relationships and experiencing life as meaningful. A male head of a public authority says that welfare consists of “having functioning social networks” (17, m). The head of another authority (also male) further stresses this by saying that welfare is “to build relationships, to have very good relationships with people, to have friends with whom you can have meaningful conversations” (29, m). In what they say they all defend and stress the Swedish model, the general welfare system based on solidarity and grounded in employment, medical care, social care and school “I think it is also solidarity in a way, that it should be *general* welfare – not only for certain persons, but for all” (33, f).

#### **Function of the local welfare system**

According to public authority representatives the welfare system is largely working well in Gävle, even if there are some social problems that have not been solved. In particular they note that there are people with drug problems, homeless people and some children in lower social groups who need better care than they have at present. Some informants point out that welfare is not distributed equally to all “There is welfare, but not for some. I am thinking primarily of those who are (mentally) ill where we lack insight” (36, f). Some also note the powerful egoism operating today, due to a change in values: “values have changed ... it is becoming a very secularised society where people tend to focus very much on the self and upon self-fulfilment” (29, m).

#### **Role of the Church**

All accept that the church has or could have a role in social welfare. But all of them mean that the public authorities must guarantee the basic material resources. They express their positive appreciation of the church as having a complementary welfare function. The church adds a lot which the municipality can't offer within the welfare area. They also stress that the church is an important cooperative partner. However, the church's role is not to go into the field of practical social work in the same way as the municipality. The competence and role of the church is different. The Church represents “the Christian message which is the foundation of our culture to a large extent ... the Church has had such a great influence on our views and our way of being”, as one head of a public authority express it (19, f). Another official says that “They [the Church and its members] represent the basic message that people have to take care of one another” (33, f). In different ways the public authority interviewees

stress that the Church contributes to welfare by values and spirituality in a way that the local authority does not and neither has the competence to do. Some stress the importance of the church as providing a sense of belonging through church membership and the life rites; e.g. baptism and the wedding ceremony which contributes to a feeling of security. A few of the informants say that religion as such gives people security and that the very existence of the church contributes to security.

According to the informants, the Church's contributions are especially important within the area of crisis support and when it comes to defend what they identify as weak groups. As examples of this, they mention the shelter for homeless people, the diaconal activities and the role of the church in crisis and disaster. Some public authority interviewees stress the importance of the church as being present in people's context and thereby contributing to their social network. Some specifically stress the important function of the children and youth work and the confirmation courses, as well as the church's collaboration with the new family centre. The church as a resource for individual counselling is also mentioned as being an important welfare function. People can turn to the church with confidence and be treated with respect. Some say that the church has an advantage in not being so regulated by laws etc. as are the public authorities. It is freer and can thus contribute to people's welfare in a way that is not possible for authorities. Some of the informants refer to the financial support by the "diaconal council" to people in need. The church can add "that little extra" (35, m) by its financial support. One informant says explicitly that he is "convinced that the Church has saved many human lives" (34, m).

### **Church and social work**

Most public authority representatives stress that the church does a lot of good things that have a complementary function to the services provided by the public authorities. They do not say that the church ought to do it, but that it is good that the church contributes. One informant is positive to the church as a social agent but generally critical to philanthropy, "I am little allergic to philanthropy, because philanthropy has to do with a hierarchical view of society, and it must always be about respect for the individual and on the individual's own terms" (28, f). The public authority representatives welcome the contribution of the church within areas where the church has a special competence, e.g. in counselling and spiritual issues. Several of them say that a special task for the church is to care for people who are underprivileged. Often they speak about "the weak" as the ones that the church should focus on. The church also has a special mission in helping to promote good values in society.

When it comes to specific activities that the public authority representatives appreciate or consider suitable for the church, they mention counselling, pre-schools, living and care for old people, care for the sick and the socially excluded, mourning groups, family counselling, shelter for homeless, youth work and support for people in crisis. The public authorities view provision run by the church as an important complement to the public welfare provision. They view the church together with other organisations as partners in building a good society for all people. One public authority employee suggests a more close partnership between different agents in the field of social services, "Think if one could manage this as a form of cooperative or foundation, in which the church does this, and the Stroke Association does that and the Red Cross this and Gävle Local Authority this and the Regional authority this" (38, f).

### **Church and the public debate**

All say that the church should participate in the debate just as any other organisation. It is worth noting that they view the Church of Sweden as one of the many organisations in society. Many informants want the church to be more active in society and especially, for example, in the public debate concerning values and ethical issues. A few stress with emphasis that the knowledge and competence of the church is absolutely needed in the public debate, “I would be very disappointed if the church keeps silent and stands aside when it comes to social issues of different kinds” (28, f).

### **Changes in the past ten years**

The general opinion among the informants is that on the one hand the church has become more open and a part of society, but on the other hand the church has lost much of its role in forming values in society and thus has lost its traditional role in relation to the citizens. The development is perceived as ambiguous and one informant cannot see any change at all in the role of the church in society, “I don’t think there is any difference” (33, f).

### **Wishes for changes in the church**

The public authority representatives want the church to change its current role in society in a way that makes it more open and active in action as well as in the public debate. One of the informants says that even if the church now is separated from the state, it is still an institution that is important for many people, “I would like them to be a more integrated part of society. Even if they are now standing separate from the state, they are in any case an institution which is important for many people” (33, f). Some public authority informants would like the church to be more involved in the needs of today in the areas where the church has special competence. They want to see more cooperation between the church and the public authorities. Thus the church needs to be open to society. Some say that they would like the church to renew its forms, e.g. trying new ways of using the church halls, in other ways than the traditional mass. “Try different forms, as I think they do with the peace-of-mind-services and things like that” (32, f).

### **Significance of gender**

The representatives of the public authorities were asked two questions concerning gender. The first was if they had a view as to whether it is primarily women or men who benefit from the social work of the church. The opinions diverge among the 15 informants. Several do not have a decided opinion on the issue. Most of the others think women make more use of the Church. Groups of women mentioned are single and poor mothers and widows. The ones who think that men benefit more from the work of the Church mention shelter and guidance on drug issues (RIA), to which the Church contributes.

The second question was whether the informants see equality between women and men as an important issue for the church. Most informants agree that gender equality *should* be important for the church, although they are not so sure if this is really the case. Six of the informants spontaneously mentioned the resistance to

women priests as an indicator that the issue has to be given more priority by the Church. Some also point to traditions which are difficult to do away with.

... it is something which is deeply rooted, it is difficult to change, just as in the military. (33, f)

Several informants see Swedish society as the norm, also for the Church, in this respect. One informant argues that gender equality is important everywhere in society and therefore also must be important in the Church. Another informant argues that gender equality is an issue of human dignity and another sees it as an important issue for the credibility of the Church.

## Views held by the church

### Welfare

The church representatives express the same range of definitions of welfare as the representatives of public authorities. There are no major differences between them. Most of the Church representatives also say that welfare is to have basic material as well as immaterial needs satisfied, and to get help when one needs it. But the church representatives stress immaterial welfare aspects more often than the public authority representatives. Like the public authority representatives, they look upon well-being as an essential part of welfare and take the Swedish welfare system for granted. In defending it, they point out that “when you become unemployed, when you become ill or when you are handicapped by accident or illness or so, then there is a security system that takes care of you. You don’t end up on the street.” (6, f). Basic material needs are the responsibility of the state and local authority, but that is not enough. One informant expresses it like this: “To have a roof over your head and food for the day, but also a meaningful life, to be part of a setting which feels meaningful. You cannot live only for food and housing, you ought to have something more, and that I think is included in welfare”, (24, m). Good welfare also means a sense of meaning, the fulfilling of spiritual needs, social relationships and a sense of security; it means “that a human being has a good life, from the perspective of his or her conditions ... not only at a material level, but also at a spiritual level” (25, m).

### Function of the local welfare system

The majority of church representatives say that the status of welfare in Gävle is both good and bad at the same time. Only three of them say that the welfare system functions mostly in a good way. Most informants believe that welfare in Gävle has deteriorated and functions quite badly for those in most need; “the gap has grown between those who are doing well and those who are not. For those without the situation has become even worse.” (24, m). “The welfare system is about to crack ... here in Gävle ... there are people with nowhere to live, those with drug problems, but also people with mental illnesses, often a combination of both ... yes, and then I also think of the lack of integration of those who come here from other countries” (6, f). The church representatives have a feeling that the gap, polarisation and segregation between different groups are growing with the effect that many people become socially excluded. Many of these people have resigned in pessimism in the face of

their future; “belief in the future is lacking among individuals but also, which is actually worse, among the representatives of the local authority” (3, m). Some interviewees stress that a major problem is growing egoism in society, with the consequence that people’s solidarity with those in need has been reduced; “the desire of human beings for material things is quite large; you look after yourself first, then your neighbour” (23, m).

### **Role of the church**

All church informants recognise that the church has a role in society’s welfare, but stress that the public authorities have the main responsibility and that the church should only be a complement. The informants expect the public authorities to provide every citizen with basic needs like housing, food, education, medical and social care. “I think the churches ought to be there and support, but they should not take over what society cannot handle. The situation can arise that the churches take over when society is in a bad financial situation, and that I think is totally wrong” (1, f). A few informants note that in some areas it is an advantage for the church that it is not so regulated by law and formalities as the public authorities: “we are more free, we are not locked up in the same way as the local and regional authorities perhaps are” (22, f). Thus it can complement the public services by doing things that they can’t do. An example of this is the financial support to individuals which complements the local authorities’ distribution of financial support.

Full employment is often mentioned in the Swedish public debate as a foundation for welfare according to the Swedish model. Church representatives often mention having a job as part of welfare, but do not directly say that the authorities have an obligation to provide this. But the previously mentioned basic welfare components are seen as obligatory parts of the public welfare system. Thus they see the defects in these areas as shortcomings on the part of the authorities and they thereby become issues on the church agenda. The role of the church is seen first of as moulding opinion in order to get the authorities to carry out their responsibilities. Secondly these defects in welfare which create people in need compel the church to social action in practice. So even if the church representatives don’t want the church to take over the responsibility of public authorities, they sometimes assume that role anyway. These partly contradictory positions are to be found expressed in the interview material.

Many informants stress that the church ought especially to support the weak in society, by drawing attention to defects in welfare and by being a prophetic voice, not only criticizing political decisions, but also by pioneering new activities, “to be there as a pioneer, see and discover things, and go in and raise the quality in activities by their participation ... they must also always support the idea of the dignity of human beings and call into question decisions which are taken by politicians. Decisions which perhaps are economically correct, but where the faith in human dignity is disturbed” (3, m).

The church informants express the view that the church can in principle provide any kind of social services, but that it has special competence and a particularly important function in some areas. e.g. in crisis management and work among bereaved people. They also stress that the ordinary church activities like worship, rituals etc. has a welfare function by providing energy and inspiration to people in their

daily life. Some church representatives say that the church has a special task in the welfare setting by contributing with a spiritual dimension, values, a view of human beings, and in encouraging hope with regard to the future. As a result, the church has the function of increasing the quality in the area of welfare as a whole.

### **Theological motives and references**

Some, but not all, church representatives refer to theological motives involved in the role of the church as social agent. Some of these motives are linked specifically to the church's role in practical social work, others to the role of the church in the public debate, and some refer to both of these roles. The motives present in the interviews with Church representatives are quite similar to those present in the various documents of the Church of Sweden in Gävle, and can be arranged under the same headings: a) The imitation of Christ/The love of Christ, b) A necessary practical expression of Christian faith, c) Human dignity.

With regard to whether the Church has a particular responsibility for certain groups of people, several of the interviewees respond by pointing out that Christians and the Church have a special responsibility in seeing and helping the weak, and those whom no one else cares for. But some also note that it might not be a simple matter to determine who in fact is weak. As one priest says:

There is a task that one ought to care for the weak. And then it becomes necessary to identify what is meant by being weak. Today I believe that what traditionally have been considered to be weak groups, might not be the weak groups at all. So then you have to analyse what you mean by weak and then you have to see: where are the weak groups today. (7, f)

Directly or indirectly many of the informants refer to the words of Jesus in Matthew 25 "Just as you did ...." This biblical passage seems to be the most important biblical text when the informants refer to the Bible concerning the Church's welfare activities. In one of the interviews the informant is asked if the Church has any responsibility for welfare in society. After having said that the Church ought not to take away the individual's responsibility for his/her own life, he continues:

But, of course, the Church has a responsibility because of the task given from our Lord. What you have done to one of these, he says, the least of these my brethren, you have done to me. [...] There is the motive of the Church. (24, m)

On the other hand, one should not read too much into the fact that this biblical passage is quoted or referred to several times. It is a well-known text and it is easy to quote this passage in an interview. But it is interesting that no Church representative expresses his or her view by means of more elaborate biblical language. It seems that they have very little need of motivating or expressing their views on the Church's welfare activities by direct reference to the Bible. This does not of course mean that there is no biblical influence on their thought.

One priest says that the church should first of all look after the people who have no spokesman. He continues by saying that the church is unique in the sense that it knows *why* it acts in the way it does, e.g. when defending the value of human beings (3, m). The question of human dignity and the equal value of all human beings come

to the fore in several interviews and are seen as central Christian values which the Church must defend. A lay educator says:

You have to have an opinion about such things and say that it is not in accordance with human dignity. That an 80 year old not be operated for cancer of the prostate because it is game over anyway ... A Christian cannot let such things go unchallenged [...] Perhaps we cannot influence [the decision] but one can anyway have an agent who stands for something ... But then, on the other hand, it can also end up the opposite so that the Church of Sweden has too much to say about everything ... (4, f)

It is also worth noting that some of the Church representatives think that it can be problematic for the Church to be active in the public debate on welfare issues. Since about 80 percent of the population are members of the Church, one interviewee argues, the Church itself contains a wide variety of political views. He continues:

But a voice, which puts the pressure on the authorities to prioritise this or that – I do not think that the Church can be that. [...] The role of the lobbyist does not suit the Church. But I believe in pointing out difficulties and drawing attention to minorities with problems, and such things. I believe in that. (5, m)

Another interviewee points out that it is difficult to say what it means to say that the Church is active in the public debate. The Church acts through its members, and this means that for example many politicians in the local authorities also are a part of the Church when they act politically.

[T]he Church is supposed to act through its limbs in society, and in the world and in the everyday world. That is, in some sense, the main task. “What does the Church do?” people say. But the Church is made up of many of those who are members of the municipal council or the social services board ... [...] So the main task of the Church in that respect is, I suppose, to give support to people to get on with their lives, in their everyday world and to shoulder the responsibility which belongs to every human being. (12, m)

In sum, it is safe to say that most Church representatives think that the Church should both carry out practical social work and be a part in the public debate on welfare issues. Some of the interviewees give priority to practical social work, others to the Church’s role in the public debate. Some think that it is a bit difficult to draw the line between the religiously motivated prophetic role and being directly involved in party politics, which none of the Church representatives seems to think would be appropriate for the Church. Taking part in the public debate and carrying out practical social work is seen as two sides of the same coin; the Church’s mission to defend human dignity because of the love of Christ.

In different ways the church representatives express the view that the diaconal-social function and character of the church is an integrative part of the church itself and thus should be integrated in all types of activities. Thus the theological motive of social action and opinion forming is seen by most informants as intrinsic in the identity of the church. One informant refers to the liturgical service as the centre from which all church activity ought to emanate (6, f). Several of the church representatives link the societal role to the theological identity of the Church of Sweden as being a “Folk Church”, commonly interpreted as a church for all citizens.

### Church and social work

On the one hand the church representatives view provision run by the majority Church as being complementary to a social welfare system which is the basic responsibility of the state and municipality. But on the other hand they also refer to a wider welfare definition, including individual and spiritual well being, seeing the church's competence in the spiritual and value forming areas as essential contributions to welfare at an individual as well as a collective level. They defend the "Swedish model" with a guaranteed social security system run by public authorities and with voluntary organisations, including the church, as possible complements rather than competitors who take over the task of state and municipality. "I think that we should be a complement to the activities run by the local authority, that we must be able to complement each other" (15, f). All informants affirm that the church can carry out practical social work, but only as a complement to the main responsibility of the public authorities to provide people with the basic welfare services. Some informants stress that the church should not fill the role of taking over activities from the public sector just because they want to save money. Many emphasise that the social work of the Church should preferably be managed in cooperation with the public authorities, "the best is if it is arranged in cooperation with the public authorities, preferably with the church as actual entrepreneur, where the responsibility still rests with the public authorities" (3, m).

The church informants describe in different ways three legitimate motives for church involvement in social work. Firstly the church can enter into activities where it has *special competence*. Secondly the church being less bound to regulations in its role, can act as a *pioneer* in new areas of need. Thirdly the church can provide *alternative forms* to parallel public activities of the same kind. The latter can, for example, be a church run alternative in which the values of the church give the activity a different character than the same activity provided by the public alternative.

### Church and the public debate

Almost all informants think that the Church should contribute to the public debate on welfare issues, although a few do not agree, saying that the Church is not an interest organisation. Two of these informants stress that an opinion forming role is problematic since almost all citizens, of all political colours, belong to the church, "We have this problem with the type of church we have, that it makes it difficult to find someone who can represent the church. We have the privilege or the problem that almost all people can say they represent church" (18, m). Other informants say the opposite, that the church is an interest organisation, a bearer of values and ideology, and thus should be active as an opinion former. An example of the latter is a statement of one of the vicars who says that "opinion forming is important. I don't believe that the Church needs to do everything. It does not need to be the one that carries out everything, because we will never ever manage to do that" (16, m). He means that the church should defend the public welfare system and argue for high levels of welfare ambition in the authorities, instead of becoming a welfare entrepreneur.

Most of the informants would like the church to increase its presence in the public debate. But this does not mean that the church should go into party politics. The church can contribute in different ways, for example by writing letters to the press or writing debate articles. Some say that the church should initiate ideological debates

on how people are treated in different parts of society. When human dignity is threatened it is a duty for the church to speak out so that everyone can hear. As an example of this, someone noted the special need for the church to be clear in defending the ordination of female priests and the public adoption of the idea of marriage open for people of the same sex.

### **Changes in the past ten years**

All church representatives think that the role of the Church in society has changed in many ways over the past ten years. The church itself has become less hierarchic and more open, more directed towards issues in contemporary society. Relationships between the church and different other parts of society have also become more open. Services provided by the church are much more asked for today than in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, “a typical example is to look at the schools coming to church, which was not possible at all for a time. Today it is a matter of course to come to Christmas services, coming to Easter gatherings and such things” (16, m). Several informants mention the growing role of the church in the handling of major disasters and crises as crucial for this change. They mention the role-model for the Church of Sweden which was created by the activities of the local church in Kista, a suburb of Stockholm, in connection with a major bus crash 1988. Since then the role of the church in situations like this has been recognised in a new way that has had an effect even in other social areas: “One has somehow discovered the need for the knowledge that exists in the Church of Sweden. And I think this happened in connection with crisis, all since this bus in Kista” (7, f).

Some informants also mention the deregulation of church-state relationship as part of the change in the role of the church, although it seems as they view this formal change as more a part of a general and overall change. Some look upon deregulation as positive since the church is no longer an authority and is thus more free to act in ways which previously were impossible: “gradually we are being transformed from being a part of the public authorities with the function of a public authority to something totally different, with freer forms and faster decision making” (3, m). Some stress that the new expectations with regard to the church on the part of other parts of society are demanding a higher degree of professionalism from the church. The church personnel have to adapt to a new role as specialists in the new fields they are invited into or invite themselves into. A few stress that the expectations of other parts of society today about what the church can do, go beyond what the church can deliver.

### **Wishes for changes in the church**

The church representatives mention a great deal of different things they want to change regarding the Church's current role in society, but their suggestions all point in the same direction. They want the church to continue developing in the same direction as it has, becoming more open and active in society in cooperation with public authorities and other organisations. The vicars mention the need for a higher degree of competence and professionalism among church personnel and among elected people in the parish councils. One vicar points out the necessity of having professional competence in responding to the excessive expectations on the church in the social field, “to clarify in which areas our professionalism is located. To dare

focus on things we are good at and not take part in every context. I also think it is important to be able to say no to some things” (3, m). Somewhat inconsistently, some church representatives stress professionalism, but at the same time say that they want more voluntary – and presumably non-professional – workers involved in church activities: “... and I would also like the voluntary work in the church to be much broader than it is today” (7, f).

### **Significance of gender**

Six explicit questions concerning gender were put to the church informants. The first asked if there is any difference between women and men’s involvement in speech and action in the social work of the parish. As the question was interpreted in different ways by the informants, the value of the responses lies primarily in how the respondents discussed the topic and related it to their own experiences and impressions.

Most informants from the Church agree with the picture above, that there is a majority of women who are engaged in the social work in the parishes, while a few stress that it depends on the tasks. The complete dominance of women in teaching and children’s groups is mentioned as a problem (5, m). Several informants try to explain the perceived differences between the engagement of women and men. One explanation given is that it is often the role of the woman to represent the family in relation to the church.

... this is very interesting. You call the family in making preparations for baptism and the man answers: ‘Yes, hold on a sec and you can talk to her ...’ This is interesting. Matters like these belong to her. (12, m).

Other explanations given refer to the fact that women survive their husbands and then engage in church work. Other informants stress that many women uphold the caring role throughout their lives. (30, m) Some respondents discuss the attitudes of women and men taking part in Church activities. As an example female volunteers are said to be enthusiastic about preparing an act of worship, but when it occurs, they do not want to be on stage (1, f). Men on the other hand, do not want to be seen in social aid, but this doesn’t mean they do not want to help. They just find less visible ways of doing it.

Maybe it is not that man ... a man doesn’t like to stand there and show that he is helping, but nevertheless he is prepared to pitch in. (18, m)

The stories exemplify how women and men may feel awkward being visible in each other’s arenas. Men do not want to be visible in doing care work while women do not want to be visible in a public arena. Another example of the same kind concerns a group of female volunteers, visiting elderly people. There are also some male volunteers, but for some reason they do not take part in the group. (7, f)

The second question concerned who benefits from the social work of the parish. The informants from the Church agree that women take part more than men, with the exception of the shelter which is used mostly by homeless men. Some stress that certain activities are used more by men while others are more used by women. Examples mentioned are older women in sewing-circles and social gatherings, and

single mothers and widows seeking economic assistance. Again a lot of spontaneous explanations come to the fore. Among these is the opinion that the form of the social activities organised by the Church attracts women more than men. One example is the open café, which one informant sees as a form of socialising which does not attract men. He himself would never take part, because as a man he is interested in activities which are geared towards visible results.

As a man I would not go there because I would be frustrated over not having an agenda, a precise aim in what I do there - - - I think that if you want men to take part, there has to be something more. There must be a result of some kind, to make an impression, yes, to make an imprint for humanity. (3, m).

Other informants stress that women ponder things verbally (5, m) and that it is easier for women to ask for help, as this is part of their mentality. (9, f) It might also be easier for women to turn to the Church, when they need help. (13, f) Several informants express the view that women are expected to represent the family in relation to the Church. (12, m, 18, m)

The third question asked if any of the activities of the parish is arranged specifically for women or men and the answers were – apart from a few exceptions mentioned in chapter three – negative. The fourth question asked if the informants saw equality between women and men as an important issue for the Church. The informants generally agree that it is. The interviewers' impression is that the question is perceived as unnecessary, as the answer is self-evidently expected to be positive. The Church representatives with managerial responsibility (5 men, for some reason the question was not posed to the one woman in this group) answered somewhat hesitantly, or defensively, with formulations like "I suppose so" (16, m) "it is so important in society at the moment, and then it becomes important in church too" (5, m). No informant in this group argues theologically about the issue. One man avoids the question by saying that he has never had to confront these issues which is a bit surprising for a person in a managerial position, considering the Swedish laws on gender equality. After having reflected a little, he concluded that he thought gender equality was difficult to speak about: it becomes akin to "a crazy word-game", although it is essentially an issue of equal rights.

The important thing in a parish must be that both men and women are important and that you somehow have the same possibilities. (12, m)

The employees who do not have a managerial position mostly agree that gender equality is important. One reason given is that women have a much more important role in society today.

... I think we will have to allow women in the church to assert themselves too ... (10, m)

It was only among the elected representatives that a theological argument for gender equality was presented, with reference to women and men as images of God. One of the women in this group said that she did not see gender equality as important, as long as a position is given to the person most suited for it. (9, f)

When asked, fifthly, about the importance of gender equality for the activities of the church, the persons in leadership had more answers, stressing the importance of influencing attitudes among young people, the importance of going beyond superficial appearances and seeing the needs which are not so visible. In addition it is important not only to meet women and men in the same way, but also to strengthen the self-confidence of women and be attentive to any kind of abuse. The same question was not as frequently put to the rest of the employees. The ones who answered stressed the need for conscious efforts to meet patterns of inequality, including ways of counterbalancing the dominance of women in many activities.

... that you constantly watch that you do not, in activities, spend all your time with beads and necklaces and such things, which don't perhaps attract the lads ... (22, f)

Other representatives of the employees in the parishes have another perspective, and – perhaps somewhat inconsistently – think the most important is not to start from any principle of equality, but to see to the needs of each person.

The issue is important in itself, but in social work the church tries to help where it is needed. (2, m)

The Church representatives were finally asked if they considered the parish as gender-equal. A response from a deacon may serve as a typical example of the answers given. When asked if the treatment is gender-equal she praises the leadership, but at the same time her exclamation indicates that there is much to be done. When she gives an example it does not concern the traditional predominance of men in leading positions, but the quantitative dominance of women.

Yes, I think that they do. We have a parish council which is outstanding. And then I believe, and think that our vicar is ... sees the equality issue clearly, and wants things to be equal. Thank Goodness! But it is dominated by women if you look at the number of people working. So it is easier to count how many men there are. (15, f)

The issue was not pursued in the interview, so we may only guess what was left unsaid. From the other interviews a similar pattern, however, emerges. The answers are generally surprisingly positive, taking into consideration both data implying otherwise and the answers the interviewees themselves had given to other questions. The employees generally praise the leadership in the parish, but also comment on the “otherness” of the situation in the Church. The problem is not perceived as the dominance of men, but of women. It is difficult to make men apply for a job in the Church.

We are happy when men take up positions. We have been short of men. And that is not good. Much better with a balance. (13, f)

The view that a balance between women and men is needed in the Church would seem to prevail. The answers express a clearly complementary view about gender, saying that; “It should not tip one way or the other” (22, f), “we complement each other” (24, m) and that men are needed “for the other viewpoint” (25, m).

A few of the employees make observations about prevailing problems with male dominance, but also mention actions taken to counter this, e.g. in a parish with a male vicar, but with two female pedagogues who serve as supervisors for the other employees, including priests. The persons with managerial responsibility are more hesitant than the rest of the Church representatives about describing the situation as being one of gender equality. However, they fail to agree in their analyses of what is problematic. Four out of six mentioned the dominance of women as a problem, while one vicar stressed the prevailing dominance of men, saying that “it is downright embarrassing that the working committee of the parish council consists of four blokes” (27, m) One man comments that “it works officially of course, but man to man, all the prejudices come out ...” (5, m). Another man mentions the idea that the increasing amount of women among the employees will change the image of the Church in a negative direction.

... some say that now that there are more female priests, it will turn ... from a so to speak respected job, to a lower paid caring profession with the arrival of all these women on the scene. (12, m)

## Views held by the population

### **Welfare**

An acceptance of the Swedish welfare model is borne out by what is said in all three focus groups. A basic experience of security is stressed in all groups as an important part of welfare. The same expression for society’s life time care of the individual is used in two of the groups. A pensioner says: “welfare, as I see it, is something for human beings from birth to the grave so to speak. What it means to have good care, the chance of a good education, a fairly good social upbringing and a relatively good financial situation” (B, m). One of the employed says: “Swedish welfare means security from the cradle to the grave. From the moment you are born until you are laid to rest you are taken care of by the public authorities if you can’t manage on your own” (C, m).

Some stress specifically the importance of having a job and secure finances, others put medical care, education, care for old people or child care first. All hold that it is important that welfare is for all people and ought to be general. One of the unemployed put it the other way round saying that welfare has to do with preventing social problems. The pensioners added a good infra structure, roads and communications as part of welfare. They have grown up in a society which lacked many of these things which are taken for granted by younger generations and thus not seen as part of the welfare discourse.

The group of pensioners and the group of employed mention a number of other aspects of welfare apart from the traditional welfare issues. One of the pensioners mention cultural development as a part of welfare; access to music, theatres and books. Another mention the importance of having good close relationships and a harmonic private life, “that you don’t have to worry anytime actually for anything which is essential for the human being. This means that, for example a happy marriage is a part of welfare” (B, m).

One of those employed, a man, drew a distinction between general welfare and individual welfare which has to do with human relationships: "There is a welfare which differs from that which the state provides. It can be your own welfare in the sense of having a job – a job to go to – you meet people you know with whom you can speak and discuss things. This is also part of welfare" (C, m).

### **Function of the local welfare system**

Most of the interview subjects think that welfare functions quite well in Gävle, even from their own personal experience. But among the unemployed and pensioners, there are those who think it has become worse and less accessible as far as help from the welfare system is concerned, "it has been cut down ... it is the economy that rules" (A, m), "the way that things are handled has deteriorated ... it is as though there should be barbed wire that you have to get over before you can get help" (B, f). In the group of pensioners there are personal negative experiences of this: "As an old nurse I think it is tragic that it is so wrongly organised" (B, f). One pensioner says it is because of bad education among the personnel and bad leadership. One of the unemployed maintains that the changes have brought Sweden closer and closer to the welfare solutions in other European countries.

In the quantitative population survey a number of social areas were listed and the respondents were asked to specify the areas where there are welfare shortcomings in Gävle. The following areas scored highest; care for old people (51 percent), education in primary school (49 percent), support to abused children (44 percent), emergency medical care (42 percent), support to maltreated women (40 percent), care for handicapped people (39 percent), and support to homeless people (38 percent).

### **Role of the church**

All three groups of the sample population hold that the church has a role complementary to that of public welfare. Since most of the participants lack deeper knowledge about the activities of the church, they do not go into details but express a general positive opinion concerning the church's contribution. Nevertheless some informants do mention certain activities as positive contributions from the church: the role of the church in situations of crisis, the hostel for homeless people, the choirs, the activities for children, the diaconal work and the Peace-of-mind-services. The church can also distribute financial support in an easier and quicker way than the local authority, because the church doesn't examine the economy of the individual in the same way as the local authority. Participants in the groups of pensioners and employed emphasise the importance of the church much more than people in the group of unemployed. A number of pensioners speak about the importance of the church for security, basic values, traditions and historical anchoring, "I think it is of great importance ... it is also a tradition and a sense of belonging ... I believe that we human beings need someone to hold our hand, who ... we can talk to in times of difficulty" (B, f). One pensioner was worried what would happen with the church after the church-state separation, but discovered that the positive role of the church seems to work as before, "things became a bit shaky when it was separated from the state, but things seems to be progressing well anyway, but it symbolises security" (B, f).

When touching upon issues concerning the church the focus group discussions were clearly coloured by the participants' personal experiences of, and general opinions about, religion and church. In the group of unemployed as well as in the group of pensioners there was one man who was strongly critical of religion and church, and his emotional engagement served to hinder an open discussion. These two men criticised religion as such. The critical man among the unemployed said: "I think it is quite dangerous ... in countries where the church has strong support, they support the private sphere" (A, m). The critical pensioner said to another participant who spoke positively about having a personal faith: "I cannot see what kind of security you have in religion; can't you find security in another human being?" (B, m). In the group of employed the sensitivity in talking personally about religious attachment is expressed by the hesitation of a woman in telling the group about personal positive experiences of participating in peace-of-mind-services (C, f).

One of the questions in the population survey concerned people's confidence or trust in different kind of public and voluntary organisations, their services and activities. The highest trust among the given alternatives was shown in the sports organisations activities for children and young people where 60 percent have trust, the Red Cross social activities (47 percent) and the Church of Sweden activities for children and young people (40 percent). Generally people tended to place relatively little trust in public authority activities and in relative terms a high level of trust in voluntary organisations. The public medical and health care came in fourth place with 37 percent, followed by the public child care (35 percent), the pensioner organisations social activities (33 percent) and the social/diaconal activities of the Church of Sweden (32 percent).

### **Church and social work**

Most participants in the three groups say that it is good that the church is in charge of certain forms of practical social work, "it is in their tradition to do that, to offer assistance" (C, m). The unemployed and employed specifically mention the importance of the role of the church in the handling of crisis situations, "There is no doubt that the church plays a role when there is a crisis in society. At such times, there is a need to have somewhere to go to" (C, m). "In a crisis the church becomes more flexible" (A, m). One of the unemployed says that the church building is a resource in itself by being a different kind of building which gives a feeling of peace and calm. The pensioners mentioned the importance of the activities for drug addicts and activities for children and young people. One of the employed stressed that the church does not have to be the one and only welfare agent in any field: "there are many who have other religions and many who do not want to have any religion at all" (C, f). She stresses that there always ought to be a public welfare alternative, unaffiliated to any organisation or religion.

According to the population survey, a majority of people in Gävle find it important or quite important that the church contributes with direct social action within the following areas; support for abused children (76 percent), emergency measures for crisis and disasters (76 percent), care for old people (75 percent), support to homeless (73 percent), support for maltreated women (73 percent), care for people with drug problems (67 percent), financial support (59 percent), and care for handicapped people (51 percent). Significantly fewer people feel that it is the task of the church to

contribute in emergency medical care (33 percent), nursery schools (32 percent) and education in primary schools (23 percent).

### **The Church and the public debate**

The question of whether the church should participate in the public debate about welfare did not cause any greater discussion among the unemployed and employed. One person from each of the two groups expressed a positive opinion about the church's contribution in the debate, "Yes, I think so, because they have more insight in these issues" (A, f) and "I think they should be more aggressive, bring up the moral aspects ... if there are cutbacks within the public welfare ..." (C, m).

On the other hand, opinions are strongly divided within the group of pensioners. All agree that the church should keep out of politics. Some think this is a reason for the church to be totally out of the debate, while others mean that the representatives of the church have the same right as other people to participate in the public debate. A few of the pensioners stressed that the church should not have too much power and referred to warning signs in history and how religion can become oppressive in different ways even today. One of them included all religions: "You can see what happens especially in the Muslim countries when religious fundamentalists get too much power ... historically the church should keep its mouth shut" (B, m), while another participant noted: "Church of Sweden ... it has been an incredible oppressor of people ... and women especially" (C, f).

In the quantitative population survey the respondents were asked to state their opinion whether it is important or not that the church becomes involved in the public debate in a number of specified social issues. The results show that a majority of the respondents find it important that the Church of Sweden takes part in the debate concerning the needs of people who are in special forms of need and are especially vulnerable. The following social issues scored highest; support to abused children (76 percent), care of old people (76 percent), support for the homeless (74 percent), emergency measures for crisis and disasters (74 percent), support for maltreated women (71 percent). But much fewer people find it important for the church to become involved in issues concerning the emergency medical care (36 percent), nursery schools (36 percent) and primary school (33 percent).

### **Changes in the past ten years**

Most of the focus group participants have very little knowledge about the church and its activities. This is something which is frequently said during the interviews and is referred to and stressed when they are asked how the role of the church in society has changed during the last ten years. Only a few participants expressed an opinion on this subject. One of the pensioners held that the church has begun to change and has become more open (B, f). She mentioned the peace-of-mind-services and cultural activities as examples of that, but stressed that changes to a large extent have to do with the person who is priest and the person who has the power. One man in the group of employees said that the role of the church has definitely changed by the fact that it is no longer a state church, "The church has much more freedom of action than it had before" (C, m). A woman added that the church-state reform has not had any dramatic effects, and said that for example the church's choirs and work among children "function as well now as they did before ... I haven't seen any difference"

(C, f). As for the group of unemployed, the question about changes in the church was never raised since the participants were largely ignorant of the church and its activities.

### **Wishes for changes in the church**

Due to this lack of knowledge about the church, the question about wishes for change was explicitly raised only in the group of employed people. A number of them wished that the church would become more open and modern. It has to become a church for all people. Female priests should be accepted and homosexuals should be able to marry in church. Some informants gave examples of changes in that direction that has already taken place by introducing new forms of worship, for example peace-of-mind-services, folklore dance in the Christmas morning service and by the practice of parents having a more active participation in baptism ceremonies. One of the informants saw these changes as part of a generational shift among the priests, “I think it is about to open up. The new priests ... are not bombastic, rigid ... they are different” (C, f).

### **Significance of gender**

In the focus groups, only the seven questions common to all the case-studies were posed. For reasons given in the introduction these did not include any explicit reference to gender. As a result, few comments related to gender surfaced in the discussions. As an indication it might be interesting to note that the few gender observations made in the interviews concerned the oppression of women and opposition to women priests.

The questionnaire sent out to 1,200 citizens in Gävle included two explicit questions on gender equality (Sw: jämställdhet). When asked if equality between women and men is an important social issue 48 percent answered that it is very important and an additional 32 percent agreed that it is fairly important. This means that altogether 80 percent see it as important. When asked if gender equality is a value endorsed by the church, people are more hesitant. Only 8 percent agree that this is true *to a high degree*, while 30 percent agree that it is *in part* a value endorsed by the church.

The consensus among the population in Gävle about gender equality as something important in society mirrors the situation that gender equality is an accepted norm in Swedish society. But the figures also indicate that the norm does not emanate from the Church and that people are even hesitant about how far the Church accepts the norm. One reason is probably the attention given in media to the prevailing opposition within certain groups in the Church to the ordination of women. The decision was taken almost 50 years ago (1958), but the issue is still a cause of internal conflict. The conflicts mainly concern restrictions directed against male priests, who are unwilling to collaborate to a full extent with their female colleagues. While some see these restrictions as too mild, the persons who do not accept women as priests generally argue that they are a persecuted minority prevented from expressing their opinion. As their position deviates so greatly from the norm and the active political efforts towards gender equality in society, the media see the debate as a “hot issue”. In this matter, the interests of secularised journalists and theologically conservative groups tend to coincide. The journalists are grateful for being able to

blame the church and the conservative groups want to keep the issue alive, as this visibility might facilitate their position. Recent surveys among people deciding to leave the Church indicate that a major argument, besides wanting to save money by not having to pay the church fee, is the perceived discrimination of women priests.<sup>93</sup>

## Sociological analysis

### Background variables

Within the whole group of interviewed informants no distinguishing background variables have been found except religious socialisation and personal experience of the Church of Sweden. These are background variables which not surprisingly affect attitudes concerning the potential social role of the church. Informants among the public authorities and population often refer to specific personal experiences of a church or church activity. Those with positive experiences tend to stress the special competence and contribution of the church more than others do. A few informants with a negative view of the church refer to negative images they have got of churches, mainly through media. The analysis of background variables in the quantitative population survey is not yet completed.

### Diverging opinions on the welfare situation

The concept welfare is defined by all three agents, church, public authority and population representatives, in material as well as immaterial terms. Church representatives have a tendency to stress more immaterial aspects than do public authority and population representatives. No significant differences have been observed according to sex, position and age.

Church and population representatives have more negative views of how the welfare system functions in Gävle than do public authority representatives. The latter hold that – generally speaking – the welfare situation in Gävle is quite good and under control, while church and population representatives go more into details about specific areas which in their opinion don't work well. The general opinion among church and population representatives is that welfare has deteriorated in many ways. They mention especially health care and social care, but also the widespread loneliness among people and a growing gap between the rich and the poor. The population representatives stress the difficulties for individuals of accessing the services in the welfare system in situations of need. According to many of them, in recent years the gap has widened between individuals and the public welfare organisation. Some population informants give examples of this problem from their own family experience. Like the church representatives, they appear as observers of a social reality in which they experience a decline in the level of ambition on the part of the public authorities. The church informants see the growing social agent role of the church as a consequence of this deterioration.

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<sup>93</sup> Bromander 2005.

The public authority representatives take a totally different view of the social reality in Gävle. They stress the positive development of the welfare state in a longer perspective and hold that the present welfare situation in Gävle is quite good, although there are problems in some groups. But they tend to see these problems as isolated and linked to shortcomings concerning the provision of welfare for certain groups and individuals in the population. They see no major problems in the public welfare system, but rather in how individual citizens take responsibility for themselves and their use of the welfare which is provided. Some of the public authority informants mention the change of values in society by people becoming more egoistic, as an important problem. In a way one can say that both public authorities and the church have a tendency to defend their own area of responsibility and their own work in relation to the population they serve. The public authorities defend the welfare system which they are part of, and the church defends its role as a critical agent in filling the gaps that appear in the system.

### Consensus on the church having only a complementary role

The general attitude among church, local authority as well as population representatives is that they are positive to the church as a social agent, with only a few exceptions among population informants. The church informants see it as a necessary part of what the church *has* to do, while the public authority informants welcome the church's contribution and the population representatives stress that it is a natural part of the church to be involved in social issues. The church links the social agent role more to the identity of the church, while the public authority links the role of the church more to being an organisation that complements the public services. All three – church, authorities and population – emphasise that the church must only have a complementary role to public welfare. A common public welfare system which serves all people equally without any ideological or religious attachment must be the basic structure. Everyone is keen to defend the Swedish welfare model, which provides individual security from cradle to the grave. The main view is that there must be no gaps in the welfare system. If gaps appear, it is due to mistakes by the public authorities which should be corrected. The role of the church is seen only as complementary, filling the gaps that occasionally appear in the basic public system and providing society with good values that strengthen solidarity and thereby also support the existing welfare model. Thus all three groups of informants stress explicitly as well as implicitly that the role in practical social work is not the major task of the church and should not become too great.

Church, public authority representatives and population have a generally positive attitude to the church as taking part in the public debate on welfare. There are no major differences between the three groups of agents, except that one participant in the group of pensioners said that the church should not participate at all in the public debate. All informants stress that the church should not become involved directly in party politics. This can of course be problematic to avoid since it is in practice very difficult to avoid politics altogether when entering the public debate in crucial issues. In all groups of agents some expect and would like a more active church role in the debate. These informants stress that the church has important contributions to make. For example, one of the public authority representatives had this to say: "I

would be very disappointed if the church were to keep silent and avoid social issues of various kinds” (28, f).

The church and public authority informants were asked what they think is most important for the church, to be a social agent in practice or to be a voice in the public debate. The general opinion among church and public authorities were that these two functions goes hand in hand, but that it is more important to do something than just speaking without doing anything.

## The church as an organisation

When talking about the church, public authority, church and population representatives described it as an organisation among other organisations in society. In many ways they all describe the church just as any other organisation, but they also add that the church is different by having a special character. But this special character of the church is defined in two different ways. Public authority and population representatives tend to talk about this character as the special competence of the church and the values which the church represents. They describe the church as a resource in society which can contribute as a service provider in certain areas as far as it does not interfere with the general welfare system. The church representatives, like the public authorities and population representatives, tend to speak about the church in similar organisational terms but express the specificity of the church more often in terms of the special mission of the church. They stress implicitly the role of the church in society as part of its vocation; the church has to contribute in the social field because it is part of its identity.

## Effects of the state-church disestablishment

The Church of Sweden was disestablished in the year 2000. In the public and political debate during the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century, this reform has mostly been described as a major change in the role of the church in society.<sup>94</sup> Thus one would have expected the interviewees to give many examples of the effects of deregulation when asked about changes in the social role of the church during the past ten years, but this was not the case. Many informants were unable to see that the role of the church in society has changed at all, but most of them, the representatives the public authorities, church and population, say that the church has during the last years become more open and involved in social issues. The church is described as cooperating with the authorities to a larger extent today than before. This is also documented in the survey of church activities in Gävle. Thus the church is in a sense perceived as more closely related to the public service sector (the state) after its formal separation than it was before the separation. A part of this seemingly contradictory development has to do with the change in the laws which governed the church-state relationship, and hindered church social work, as part of the division of labour between state and church. But this is hardly the only explanation. In many ways the interviews as well as the survey of church's social activities in Gävle show a growing increase in closer cooperation between the Church of Sweden and the public authorities in parallel

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<sup>94</sup> Bäckström, Beckman & Pettersson 2004.

with the church state separation process. This has to do with a longer-term process in which the church of Sweden has organisationally and ideologically developed a separate identity from that of the state. This process has been going on during the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century and was completed by the reform 2000, when the church as an organisation can be said to have moved its social position from the public sector to the voluntary sector. This change of position is an important change for the church as well as for the state and will presumably be of importance for the future development of the social role of the church.

From these points of view it seems that the church in many ways has become more involved with the state after the disestablishment than it was before. The church is also perceived as being involved and is even expected to be involved, in the daily issues of society and the public sector to a larger extent today than before the church-state reform. Thus it is even increasing its presence in the public sphere in a new way which is different from its public role in the old agricultural society.<sup>95</sup>

### Is Gävle a secularised town?

Sweden has often been described as one of the world's most secularised countries. The description of Sweden as secularised or not is of course dependent on how you define secularisation.<sup>96</sup> The case study in Gävle displays at the local level a counter image to the secularisation image according to some central aspects of religious presence and position in society.<sup>97</sup> Thus the study shows the complexity of the Swedish religious scene.

Almost all inhabitants in Gävle (82 percent) belong to the same Christian context, the Church of Sweden, and almost all newborn children are baptised in this church (75 percent). In this respect Gävle is a highly religious/Christian town. But when it comes to worship attendance, the image is the opposite since these figures are very low. On an ordinary weekend only about 4–5 percent takes part in any kind of religious worship. Most people in Gävle are not regular churchgoers, but 60 percent have some kind of belief in God. The number of atheists (14 percent) and agnostics (25 percent) is some percentages higher than the average in Sweden.<sup>98</sup>

As the survey of church activities shows, the Church of Sweden runs a wide range of social activities in Gävle. The interviews show that the broad role of the church in community building and especially its work among children and young people are regarded as important complementary welfare contributions by the public authority representatives. In this way, the church succeeds in bequeathing good values to coming generations. It is worth noting that even if the church employs much fewer people than the public authorities, it is the second largest organisation according to number of employees, apart from the local and regional authorities (private profit-earning companies excluded). There are no other organisations of the same size in the voluntary non-profit sector in Gävle, especially given the fact that eight out of ten inhabitants are members of the Church.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Casanova 1994.

<sup>96</sup> Martin 2005.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Bäckström & Beckman & Pettersson 2004.

<sup>98</sup> Gävle figures from the WREP population survey in Gävle 2005. Comparable national figures from Gustafsson & Pettersson 2000.

The role of the Church of Sweden as social agent in Gävle is multifaceted. The Church interacts now and then with almost all inhabitants in Gävle on a private family level in the context of life rites.<sup>99</sup> The Church cooperates with different parts of the public sector within the social field and is in demand in its complementary role.

The case study shows tendencies to a shift in the organisational position of the church at society's meso level. Analysis of the whole material suggests the following development. Previously the Church acted more within its own organisational sphere, in line with society's overall functional differentiation. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century the special competence of the church has been observed in a new way as a social resource. Many informants in all three groups refer to the role of the church in major crisis and disasters as significant of the changing view of the church as a resource in social issues.<sup>100</sup> The Church is nowadays in demand as a complementary service provider in many different fields. It has thereby changed its position at society's meso level and become a collaborative partner with other agents at the same level. Thereby the complementary function of the Church becomes more visible and many functions that have existed in the previous state-church setting tend to be viewed from a different perspective when the Church's position has changed. Interestingly this new position separate from the state will not necessarily be a position in society which is weaker than the previous position when it was restricted by laws and in a way hidden in the formal structure of the state. In many ways the results and survey material point in the opposite direction. The Church, from having been hidden and ignored under the state umbrella, appears in a new way as a resource.

## Theological analysis

### General evaluation of the data collected

The reflections among the interviewed concerning the division of labour between church and municipality can be seen to correspond well to the Lutheran theological idea of the two kingdoms, but the interviewed do not refer much to theology in their reflections concerning this division. One possible interpretation of this circumstance could be that the idea of the two kingdoms has been integrated in the discourse of social affairs in Sweden. But it is notoriously difficult to say exactly what kind of influence an idea like this has had in the historical development. There are of course different interpretations of this idea in the history of Lutheranism. But a shorthand description of the basic idea might be as follows.

God governs the world in two ways, through the Word and through the civil authorities. Both these "kingdoms" (spiritual and worldly) are of divine origin. The spiritual kingdom concerns the eternal salvation of human beings, while the worldly kingdom is God's way of giving order and structure to creation. The division between the two kingdoms is not totally identical with the division between state and Church, but it still implies that these two entities – both being God's instruments – have different responsibilities. The state is responsible for worldly order, and the

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<sup>99</sup> Pettersson 2000.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Pettersson 2003.

Church should preach the Gospel. According to the doctrine of the two kingdoms it is mainly the responsibility of the state to organise social care, while the Church should concentrate on preaching the Gospel, understood as God's promise to forgive humanity's sins through Christ.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century diaconal movements' engagement in social work can be seen as a break away from this traditional Lutheran teaching.<sup>101</sup> The diaconal movements had their origins in pietistic circles, and organised themselves in societies for Christian social work. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, diaconal-social work has become more and more integrated in ordinary parish life. The present situation cannot be interpreted in any simplistic manner as an expression of the idea of the two kingdoms. Rather, Church of Sweden *diakonia* today has a complex background, and has been formed by a number of factors including the heritage from 19<sup>th</sup> century pietism, traditional Lutheranism, present day social challenges and influences from a wide variety of theological traditions. For example, one of the informants in our material, a priest, explicitly denies that his view of society is much informed by a traditional Lutheran view. Instead he points to Catholic social teachings as a source of inspiration (3, m). The dominating theological ideas in the material could be summarised by means of the concepts of *liberation*, *identity* and *the vision of the Folk Church*.

The meaning of salvation is sometimes described as *liberation*. In the beginning of the 1990s, Church of Sweden at the national level published a book called *Befrielsen – stora boken om kristen tro* [Liberation – the Big Book on Christian faith]. This book was intended as an inspiration for people to reflect about Christian faith. In it, it is said that God wanted human beings to be “free and responsible”, and living in a good relation to the whole of creation. God wants to liberate us from everything that hinders us from living such a life.<sup>102</sup> In the material from Gävle (e.g. the pastoral programme of Staffan's parish) *liberation* is presented as an important goal for the Church's diaconal-social work. It can be noted that liberation sometimes functions as a central theological concept in the discourse of the Church of Sweden. It might represent the idea that salvation is not only spiritual in a narrow sense, but concerns both societies and individuals, both body and soul.

Another interesting observation in the material is that among a few of the interviewees there seems to be some concern that the Church's cooperation with state authorities in welfare issues might threaten the identity of the Church. As one interviewee says about the social work of the church:

But it must never be forgotten that the reason that we do this arises from our faith. And here I can sometimes feel that this, so to speak, is hanging in the air. And that really anyone who is kind and has a lot of money could be doing this. But we are doing it from somewhat different presuppositions. And these presuppositions, I believe, must be made clear from time to time. (18, m)

## The vision of the Folk Church

The Church of Sweden in Gävle in both words and deeds clearly expresses the view that the Church has an important role to play within the field of welfare. Christian

<sup>101</sup> Håkansson 2001, 233.

<sup>102</sup> *Befrielsen – Stora boken om kristen tro*, p.130.

life ought to be a life lived in the imitation of Christ. Christ gives an example of a love-centred life, and the task of the Church is to make Christ's example a living reality, by its words and deeds. According to both interviewees and the pastoral programmes of the parishes in Gävle, the defence of *human dignity* and the *value* of human life is a central part of Christian faith, and thus functions as a motive for the Church to engage in welfare activities.

At the same time, there is a strongly held view that the Church ought to cooperate with the state sector and also other parts of the voluntary sector within the field of welfare. Many church representatives stress that the Church ought to be a *complement* to social work carried out by local authorities. This ideal of complementarity is advanced and defended at different levels. One level seems to be political rather than theological in the more limited sense: there is strong support for the Swedish welfare model where the state has a major role. There is no reason for the Church to take over the social work carried out by the state sector. But in some cases, the Church can act as an avant-garde and prophetic voice. When human dignity is threatened, the Church has to speak out.

Another type of argument for the ideal of complementarity is practical or pragmatic. The Church ought to have a different role than state authorities because such a differentiation improves the quality of welfare in society at large. The local authorities' social work is regulated by law and has to follow strict procedures and can be quite formalistic. The Church, on the other hand, can act more freely and can see more individual aspects. One interviewee expresses this idea by saying:

And much of what constitutes the Church's welfare, if I may say so, or which is run under the supervision of the Church, is not really general welfare, but it is very specific in character. And such specific efforts for a limited circle of people [...] can often be more generous in attitude and in their approach, and that is welfare for me. ... there is something beyond what is regulated. [...] And such breathing spaces are needed, I believe. (18, m)

More specific ecclesiological arguments for the principle of complementarity can also be identified in the material. One priest is concerned to stress that the Church ought not to be a sect, but should live in an open community with society at large. Therefore he is sceptical towards the idea of Christian schools, where the pupils do not have to be confronted with other opinions and faiths. (3, m)

Another priest argues that the Church acts in society through its members. The ecclesiastical structure has as its main task to help people to live their lives in the everyday world. Church run social work is not an end in itself. Rather it is the task of the Church to strengthen what is good in every human being and in society. (12, m)

In sum, the theological understanding of the Church's role in Swedish society among Church representatives, is very much in line with what could be called a common sense understanding of Swedish 'Folk Church ecclesiology'. The Church has an errand to Swedish society at large, and should be open and welcoming. The Church's task is to help people find liberation in Christ or as the pastoral programme of Gävle Heliga Trefaldighet describes the task of the parish:

The task of the parish is to praise God, bear witness to Jesus and to spread the love which faith expresses through deeds.

But the Church ought not to be what has been called “a Church of resistance”. Rather, the Church is to be formed according to an ideal of being “a Church for the everyday world”.<sup>103</sup> It seems to be of vital importance for many of the interviewees to stress that the world ought to be seen as God’s good creation. The Church should not be a contrasting society in opposition to society at large, but rather try to strengthen and affirm what is good in everything. One priest describes herself as very much in line with Folk Church theology. When asked what this means for her, she answers that she wants all the baptised people she meets, to “discover what they already have” (6, f).

Another priest points out that the Church of Sweden is not a Church which is centred on its members. The Church has a responsibility for all people within its territory, whether they are members or not. The Church of Sweden does not try to convert people, he continues. Therefore it is welcomed in many places, and can be a part of everyday life in society (27, m). A Church politician describes the Church of Sweden as much more open than other churches: “The Church of Sweden invites everyone to its church, regardless of whether you are Catholic, Muslim or ...” (9, f)

## Welfare provision and prophetic critique

The theological motives for welfare provision and for taking part in the public debate cannot really be said to differ in principle in the material. Both the provision of welfare services and being a prophetic voice the Church are seen as defending human dignity, and acting as a messenger of God’s love for creation. The interviewees prioritise these two kinds of activities in different ways. There is a wide agreement that the Church, even in its prophetic role, should try to avoid becoming directly involved in party politics, not least because it is a Church which harbours a lot of different views among its members (5, m).

Generally, there is not much conflict between what the Church says in its documents and in interviews and how it actually acts. What can be noted, however, is that the Church’s prophetic and critical task is seen as more important in the interviews with Church representatives, than it seems to be if one takes the relatively low profile of the Church in local media into account.

## Welfare and liturgy

The relation between the Church as a liturgical community and as an agent of welfare as expressed in the material can be organised under three different headings: a) the liturgy as the centre of everything done by the Church; b) the liturgy as inspiration; and c) the liturgy as a part of the Church’s welfare activities. In the pastoral programme of the parish of Tomas, it is said that the liturgy should be the centre of everything that the parish does:

... there should be a relation to the liturgy in everything that the parish does. How this relation is expressed is open to variation, but nothing should be done without such a relation.

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<sup>103</sup> These concepts are based on the terms *motståndets kyrka* and *vardagens kyrka* in Håkansson 2001, 5.

Further, this means that the parish worship should be conducted in such a way that its relation to other activities of the parish is perceived as natural and clear.

Similar ideals are expressed in some of the interviews (e.g. 1, f; 6, f; 13, f;) The liturgy is seen as the spiritual centre of the Church. At the same time, it seems as if some of the informants think that the relations between liturgy and the parish's welfare activities are not as strong and clear as they should be. In one interview the interviewee says that she cannot see any clear relation between liturgy and the social work of the parish. This, she says, is problematic, because such connections *ought* to exist (6, f).

Another relation between liturgy and welfare activities is the *inspiration* the liturgy is seen to give to both the employees of the Church and to the congregation at large. In the services of the Church, people can "receive the strength to be able to cope with the difficulties in the everyday world during the week" (2, m). The liturgy can also be seen as a part of the Church's welfare activities. The Sunday service provides an opportunity to meet other people, and to be part of a community:

We have a number of people who go to High Mass every Sunday ... we have become their family. [...] There are always people today who come to the Church, who might not be able to join some organisation or something like that. (9, f)

Many of the interviewees express similar views. The Sunday service is a meeting place, which has great importance for those who come there (e.g. 3, m; 8, m; 10, m; 15, f; 18, m). Another example of liturgy as a kind of welfare activity is the *peace-of-mind-services* held in Staffan's Church once a month, and one of the priests even describes it as *the most important* welfare activity of the parish (27, m). It is interesting to note that the peace-of-mind-services are also noted by one representative of the local authorities (38, f) and in two focus group interviews.

One of the interviewees says that the liturgy is a unique resource for the Church. No other organisation has a similar tool, and the Church ought to use it wisely (7, f). The main impression from the interviews, however, is that most of the interviewees when asked about the relation between the Church's liturgy and its welfare activities think in practical and inspirational terms. But no far-reaching theological conclusions should be drawn from this. The overall context of the interviews might have led the interviewees to think in very practical terms. The lack of more elaborate theological reflection on this relation in the interviews is not necessarily a sign of a lack of reflection on the liturgy's relation to the social work of the Church. Some of the informants also clearly state that there is ongoing reflection about the meaning and form of worship activities (e.g. 13, f) in the parish.

## Public authorities and population

It is interesting to note, that the most strongly formulated critique of the Folk Church theology in the material is to be found in an interview with a representative of the local authority. As a person who has left the Church, he cannot understand how it is possible to be a member of an organisation whose beliefs you do not accept as your own: "If you are going to be a member of the Church, you should have faith. I am sceptical about the idea of the Folk Church, because it encompasses everything" (21, m).

But generally, representatives of the local authorities express a great deal of sympathy with the vision of the Folk Church. The Church is seen as open towards society, and it represents the values of human dignity, and love for one's neighbour (33, f; 32, f; 31, m). There is not much of explicit theological reasoning in the interviews with representatives of public authorities, but in some interviews it is noted that the idea of love and of the duty to care for the weak is a central part of Christian faith (e.g. 19, f). This actually coincides with some of the arguments in the interviews with Church representatives.

### The Church of Sweden in Gävle and the national level

The Church of Sweden has no tradition of publishing documents which are regarded as authoritative theological texts. The bishops and the general synod might publish different statements, and these can in a wide sense be seen as expressions of what the Church believes. But it is difficult to identify *the* teaching of the Church of Sweden at the national level. In the following, we have chosen to take our point of departure in a short document called the Communication Platform for the Church of Sweden. This document was accepted by the national Church Board (Sw: kyrkostyrelsen) as the theological basis for the visual profile of the Church. It is thus a very short summary of what is seen as the ideas which the Church of Sweden wants to be identified with, at the national level. In its Communication Platform, the Church of Sweden at the national level identifies three central values, which ought to characterise the Church at all levels. These central values are *presence*, *openness* and *hope*.

The task of the Church is said to be to “make room” for God's presence in all the phases of life. This means that the Church organises worship in the form of Sunday services, baptisms, weddings, confirmation and funeral services. The Church wants to offer support for life in Swedish society. This also means that the Church wants to be an *open Folk Church*. In the Communication Platform the Church of Sweden is also presented as a bearer of hope: “The Church wants to contribute to the possibility for everyone to experience their lives as meaningful.”

This vision of the Church, formulated at the national level, could also be seen as the vision of the Church of Sweden in Gävle, as it appears in our material. The strong and dominating vision of the Folk Church, a commitment to openness and a will to support and strengthen what is good is common to both the national level and to the Church of Sweden parishes in Gävle. There are no obvious contradictions or tensions between what is presented as the Church of Sweden at the national level and what is said and done in Gävle. Rather, it can be concluded that the parishes in Gävle are well in line with the dominating vision of the Folk Church.

### Gender analysis

The following analysis concerns how gender-related attitudes and practices influence the social role of Church of Sweden in Gävle. How does gender influence the degree to which men and women seek the support of the Church? How do internal structures and attitudes, related to gender, make an imprint on the response from the Church to the needs of the citizens?

## Gender and welfare in Gävle

Gender affects the general welfare situation in Gävle in two major ways. There are more women than men in some of the most needy and vulnerable groups in society. Elderly widows with low pensions are one example, lone mothers another. Secondly the welfare sector in Gävle, like in Sweden at large, is largely built on the work of women. When the public sector does not suffice, this puts new strains on the voluntary contributions, which also to a high degree come from women.

## Attitudes towards “gender equality”

The concept “gender equality” (Sw: jämställdhet) served as a heuristic tool in the interviews. The concept alludes to the Swedish public policies aiming at giving women and men the same opportunities, rights and responsibilities in all significant areas of life. Both the questionnaire to the population and the interviews with representatives of church and public authorities show a high degree of consensus about gender equality as a positive goal. The informants from the different groups all see gender equality as an aim which the Church should urgently promote. As the concept has not been defined it is difficult to interpret the few negative comments which were made. These say that the important thing is not gender equality as such, but the equal treatment of every individual, and the allocation of jobs to the people best suited to them. One way of interpreting the answers is that gender equality is understood by these respondents as limited to the issue of an equal number of women and men, and they do not see this as an overarching ideal. On the contrary it might be legitimate to have more women or men in a working place or in an elected body if this reflects the distribution of those most suited for the job. Gender equality as a more structural and collective issue, might also be perceived in contrast to seeing to the needs of each person, regardless of gender, which according to some informants, is the true attitude of the church.

When it comes to the question of whether the Church actually contributes to gender equality, there are obvious differences of opinion between the different groups. Interviewees outside of the active circles of the Church repeatedly mention the issue of the resistance to women’s ordination to priesthood as a problem. Among the representatives from the Church, on the contrary, this issue is not mentioned as a problem at all. The obvious reason is that the matter is not currently controversial in the five parishes. No influential persons in the parishes seem to represent such resistance, even if this has not always been the case. Given this, it is probable that the comments of the representatives of population and public authorities do not refer to the situation in Gävle *per se*, but to the more general debate as commented upon in the mass media.

Most representatives of the Church seem to experience the parish as quite equal from a gender perspective. Some mention prevailing patterns of male dominance as a problem, but the problem which is most commonly raised among the representatives of the Church in connection with gender equality concerns the predominance of women among the partakers in Church activities, among the volunteers and among the employees, and especially those who relate to children and young people.

A predominance of women was sometimes commented upon by the informants from the public authorities and the population, but never mentioned as a problem.

## Power and influence

The documents studied in some ways verify and in some ways contradict this perception of the Church representatives. An organisational analysis of decision-making structures reveals an almost complete male dominance among the vicars and the chair-persons in the elected bodies. As the Church activities are organised in collaboration between these two organisational structures, it is an obvious example of male dominance. There might be various reasons for why it is not more frequently raised as a problem by the informants. The dominance of men in the highest positions might be perceived as a counterbalance to a more equal share at the lower levels, as women are better represented in the elected bodies, than among chair persons, and better represented among priests, than among vicars.

The fact that male dominance is not seen as a problem by more interviewees might also have to do with the parallel existence of informal structures of influence, which are recognised as a problem in the gender equality plan of The Association of Parishes.<sup>104</sup> Our material does not reveal to what degree informal structures of influence are perceived as a problem, nor if these informal structures favour women or not. A couple of questions in the interviews of representatives of the Church, however, concerned responsibility for and influence over the social work. The answers suggest that the formal structures of influence are not very clear. A summary of the responses indicates that most groups are expected to share in the responsibility, even if the formal structures of influence are not open to everyone:

- The deacon has a special responsibility for the social work. The degree to which this is combined with a formalised authority varies.
- On the other hand every baptised person is a deacon, even if there are few ways for the ordinary parishioners to directly influence the social work of the Church.
- The priests have a lot of influence, which is stressed especially by representatives of other professions.
- The vicars are said to have the last word.
- On the other hand the vicars themselves stress that the employees work together as a group and share influence and responsibility.
- The parish council has a responsibility, which is especially stressed by the elected representatives, but also by the employees.

All together it seems reasonable to conclude that the power structures are not very clear and might also lack transparency with regard to gender.

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<sup>104</sup> According to an enquiry 40 percent of the male and 20 percent of the female employees say that they are influenced by informal leadership. Gävle kyrkliga samfällighet. Frågeformulär för jämställdhetsplan 2002. [Enquiry in preparation for the Gender Equality Plan 2002].

## Predominance of women or lack of men

Representatives of the authorities and the Church agree that women are in a majority among the beneficiaries of the social work of the Church, even if there are specific activities, like the shelter for homeless people, which are primarily used by men. The difference is that the Church representatives raise it as a problem. It is then interesting to see how the problem is formulated and what kind of solutions are proposed. The analysis shows that the problem is most frequently formulated as a problem of too many women, resulting in too few men. Natural reasons for a majority of women are given in the case of elderly women, who tend to survive men in their age group, and single mothers, who are often in need of support both financially and socially. But there are also other aspects of the predominance of women which are perceived as a problem, at least by some of the Church representatives.

The basic problem seems to be that a predominance of women comes into conflict with an ideal of gender balance. This balance is sometimes explained in terms of how women and men “are” and sometimes the differences are even given a divine legitimacy:

If you imagine the divine as a reflection ... that human being reflects the divine, then both men and women are needed. Somehow this is what it is about. (18, m)<sup>105</sup>

One problem with the predominance of women, which several people comment on, is that it tends to increase. Women recruit women, both among the employees, the volunteers and the partakers in activities. At present the general perception is that it is difficult to recruit men, especially to positions related to children and young people. Several people also note that the activities of the Church do not seem to attract men. Finally another problem cited is that a predominance of women generates lower salaries and lower status, which in turn makes the Church more unattractive.

## The gendering of care

A majority of women among the persons benefiting from the church services had been anticipated in the study, given that women have lower incomes and are over-represented in the older age groups. It is clear that women are sent forth to represent the family in relation to the church.<sup>106</sup> The numerical dominance of women in caring activities within the church is a clear sign of how social care is associated with women, both at the giving and the receiving end. Among the explanations given by the respondents, one finds the argument that women easier make contacts and are more inclined to seek help and especially help from the Church. Women also have a tradition of being carers in the family, which is easily transposed to being a carer as a volunteer or a professional in Church. There thus seems to be a perceived positive correlation between women, caring, relation to the church and tendency to ask for

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<sup>105</sup> “Om man nu tänker sig då det gudomliga som en spegling då ... alltså människorna ska spegla det gudomliga, så behövs det ju både män och kvinnor. Det är ju det det, liksom, bygger på.”

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Davie 2000, Pettersson 2000.

help, and a perceived negative correlation between men, caring, and being connected to the Church or in need of help.

There seems to be a growing awareness among the Church representatives that this situation is problematic and needs to be dealt with. One care-taker is responsible for such a group of elderly men, meeting once a month. Several of the interviewees mention that they have tried to persuade the care-taker in the parish to start an activity for men, but that they have not succeeded yet. One reason this expectation is directed towards the care-takers might be that it is a position traditionally more often upheld by men than women. Taking the organisational structures into consideration it seems a bit over-optimistic to hope that the care-takers, who have little formal influence in the parish, will be able to solve the perceived problems.

## Church and society

What is very obvious in the interviews is the impact of the Swedish public discourse on gender equality on the Church. This might be another expression of the same phenomenon, which is seen in the increasing cooperation between the church and the public sector and the appreciation of this by both parties. For the Church to stand up for gender equality is in such a context an important matter of credibility. The fight over this credibility has obviously not been won yet, taking into account the many comments about opposition to women priests from the representatives of the public authorities.

While most representatives of the Church agree that gender equality is also important for the Church, almost no theological arguments are used to underpin the position. It seems that they fully accept society as the norm when it comes to these issues. This is especially interesting since historically, when the Church was a more influential part of Swedish society, the subordination of women was argued for theologically.<sup>107</sup> One of the elected representatives of the Church (18, m) comments that the role of the Church in public debate has changed during the last decades. The examples taken are all related to gender and family, where the Church took a negative stance against abortions 30 years ago, while today it publicly advocates gender equality and gender-neutral marriages. The latter issue is illustrated in our material by the vicars who gave their public assent to same-sex weddings being performed by the Church.

## Challenges for church and society

To summarise these observations, the gendered character of the role of the Church in welfare turns out to be a complex reality, involving several and sometimes contradictory levels. Taken as a whole, church social work seems to reflect quite well – an in some respects caricature – the gendered character of the public welfare sector in Sweden. One of our research questions concerned if the church represents any challenge to the dominant pattern of gender, which does not seem to be the case.

The main change demanded by the public authorities in Sweden with regard to gender and welfare is for men to take a greater responsibility for care, both for chil-

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<sup>107</sup> Beckman ed. 2004.

dren and the elderly. According to a recent study, the care of the elderly in Sweden went through a process of formal regulation up to 1980. From then on, a process of deregulation began which has meant less public care for the elderly, offset by an increase in the volume of unpaid care given by relatives. Women are in the majority both among the givers of unpaid care and on the receiving side. For neither group has the deregulation been voluntary. One of the greatest challenges in the present situation, the report concludes, is to find ways to make use of the hidden potential for the care of the elderly, to be found in the male half of the population.<sup>108</sup>

The problems observed by the personnel in the Church illustrate the same reality. It is however worth observing that the problem is more often formulated by the Church representatives as a problem of female dominance, rather than a lack of men. The suggested countermeasures are directed towards making Church activities more attractive to men, rather than changing the attitudes of men. Something that is not reflected upon in the interviews, but which theoretically at least could make the Church into an interesting actor in society in this respect is that the Church theologically favours the role taken by women in social care. Theologically this is a role model also for men, based on the imitation of Christ. Such a perspective although drawing attention to a challenging potential, is quite hypothetical, as long as the church in its practice is not really able to attract more men to this life-style.

## Main findings

The case of Gävle illustrates very well the specific features of the Swedish system and the role of the church. The public authorities are expected to serve as a safety net for all citizens, from the cradle to the grave. The 20<sup>th</sup> century image of the Swedish society as a big family, “the home of the people” (Sw: folkhemmet) portrays the situation. In this home there is a Church, “the people’s Church” (Sw: folkkyrkan), which is expected to serve the religious needs of all citizens. The Swedish model is by tradition characterised by an idea of homogeneity, universality and equal access for all people regardless of social position or financial opportunities. Gaps in the welfare net are seen as temporary failures on the part of the public authorities, which should be corrected as soon as possible. The Church as an organisation among other organisations is welcome in responding to the immediate needs of the situation, but also in reminding the authorities of their presupposed duties.

The analysis of the situation in Gävle from our three analytical perspectives; sociology, theology and gender, most strikingly show a consensus among the representatives of the public authorities, church and general population, around these basic ideals of the Swedish welfare system. Secondly however, tensions are detected which show that this superficially neat image is flawed. This has to do with the ongoing and interacting social and religious changes at local, national as well as European and global level.

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<sup>108</sup> Szebehely 2005.

## Consensus

The most striking feature of the situation in Gävle is the general level of consensus. All three agents (public authorities, church organisation and population) agree that the public authorities must provide the basic welfare for all people. Gaps in the welfare system are seen as shortcomings that have to be corrected by the authorities. Secondly there is a consensus about the role of the Church in social issues. It is a natural consequence of the church's mission to be involved in social issues. Thirdly there is a general consensus about the role of the Church as complementary to, and preferably in cooperation with, the public welfare system. The most basic role of the Church in welfare is seen as providing society and individuals with good values and a sense of meaning. This role is e.g. realised through the life rites used by almost all people and through the Church's work among children and young people. The parishes all give high priority to confirmation classes, children's groups and to being present in the public school system. A fourth area of consensus concerns the role of the Church in the public debate on welfare issues. The church is both welcomed and expected to take part in the debate, as long as it does not interfere in party politics. A fifth area of consensus is the view that Church of Sweden is, and should be, a church for the whole population. The open and broad character of the church is stressed and defended, sometimes with specific comments drawing attention to more "closed" denominational settings. A sixth area of consensus concerns equality between women and men. Gender equality is seen as an ideal which is so basic that arguments for it are considered superfluous.

## Tensions

Some interesting tensions concerning the role of the church as welfare agent in Gävle are also apparent in the material. They exemplify conflicts between ideals and reality. First there is an obvious tension between the folk church situation on the one hand, and on the other hand the role of the church in public debate. The tension concerns the issue of how to combine being a critical voice as a free agent, with simultaneously being a church representing a large majority of the population.

A second tension concerns how the Church in practice fails to fully realise the ideals of gender equality. From the church's point of view the overrepresentation of women among the employed and voluntary personnel as well as among the participants in church activities is seen as a problem. From people outside the church's organisation this is not seen as a problem, as it mainly mirrors the gendered situation in public welfare. Instead they see the prevailing conflicts about women being priests as a major problem for the credibility of the church.

A third tension concerns the relation between the social activities of the Church and the liturgy. The liturgy is in theological documents often stated to be at the centre of Church life and to be the basis for the social work as well. But according to most of the interviewed informants from church as well as public authorities it is not perceived in this way. When they speak about the church's social activities they do not mention that these are in any significant way anchored in the ordinary liturgy. Liturgy is implicitly referred to as an activity in parallel with other church activities. So there is a tension between the principal theological statements about the central

position of liturgy and the perceived position in practise as being just one among other activities.

## Revival of religion as social agent

The analysis confirms the ongoing interplay between general changes in society and religious change. The social role of the Church in Gävle has changed in parallel with general social changes. All the various types of material give the same image of the church as having become more open and active in different fields outside its own organisation during the last decade. As part of this change it has become more involved in different public social fields and is also in more demand as a voice in the public debate. This has taken place during a period of religious deregulation manifested in the separation of Church and state in the year 2000. On the one hand the Church has been formally removed from the public arena by the deregulation, while on the other hand the study shows a growing active public role of the church in practice, even in closer cooperation with the public authorities. These seemingly contradictory processes of a simultaneously diminishing and increasing role of the Church in the public sphere at a local level illustrate processes which are ongoing at national, European and even global levels.<sup>109</sup>

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# The Church of Norway as an Agent of Welfare – the case of Drammen

OLAV HELGE ANGELL & TRYGVE WYLLER

## Methods and materials

### Methods

Methods used in the data collection have mainly been interviews and the collection of written material. Mainly individual interviews have been carried out with representatives of the majority church, the public welfare sector at the municipal level, and other local informants for the purpose of extending the data material on which descriptions and analyses are based. Group interviews have been conducted with representatives of the local adult population for the purpose of investigating popular perceptions of the welfare system in Drammen and attitudes to various types of actors contributing to welfare and well-being. In addition, documents have been collected from various sources for the purpose of analysis and for constructing the historical and present day context of the study and to complement information received through the interviews, especially with regards to the role of the church in the local community.

### Material/data

Material from individual and group interviews was collected. Both types of interviews were typed and transcribed more or less fully. Drammen has an active historical society and productive local historians. Advantage was taken of the books and pamphlets they had produced on the history of Drammen. The municipality of Drammen has a well structured web site with plenty of relevant information on the structure of the political and administrative system, also containing information on civil society in Drammen, organisations and associations. The local press is a source of information on issues related to the functioning of the welfare system and the role and activities of the church. For these purposes advantage was taken of the systematic web based archives of the local newspaper. The web sites of the Church of Norway in Drammen served as a source of information on the organisation of the Church and on welfare activities organised by the parishes. Parish newsletters served the same purpose.

All in all, 28 individual interviews were made. Twelve interviews were made with representatives of the Church of Norway, including representatives of voluntary organisations within the church. Fourteen interviews were made with representatives

of the public authorities in Drammen; four with politicians, ten with public employees employed in the primary health and social care services and in the culture sector. In addition, representatives of the labour movement and the Red Cross in Drammen were interviewed.

Table 1. Sample of interviewees by function, gender and age.

<b>Function</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Gender (m=male, f=female)</b>	<b>Age</b>
<i>Municipality</i>			
Politicians	4	3m, 1 f	34–59
Top level managers	1	f	59
Middle level managers	7	1 m, 6 f	31–56
Others	1	m	58
Volunteer/former middle level manager	1	f	67
<i>Church</i>			
Top level managers	1	m	65
Rural deans	1	f	61
Parish priests	4	4m	46–58
Deacons	3	1 m, 2 f	30–42
Leaders parish councils	1	f	63
Leaders local voluntary organisations	2	1 m, 1 f	35–48
<i>Others</i>			
Leaders voluntary organisations	1	f	49
Leaders trade unions	1	m	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>13 m, 15 f</b>	

Three group interviews were conducted. Participants were selected in different ways. Two of the groups were composed of representatives of existing groups and associations: one group was made up by the board of the local Red Cross association, the other by representatives of a Turkish club in Drammen. The Turkish population is the largest ethnic minority group in Drammen. Participants in the third group were recruited through a poster with an invitation to participate at the local unemployment office.

The size of the groups varied between four and eight. Taken together, the number of male and female participants was balanced; age ranging from the early twenties to the sixties. The males were older than the females, on average. The first interview group consisted of a majority of females, in the second group men made up the majority, and the third group the gender distribution was fifty-fifty.

### **Interviews with representatives of the church and municipality**

The individual interviews were in most cases carried out in the interviewees' offices; in some cases telephone interviews were made. In addition to the main interviews,

some follow-up interviews were made, exclusively on the telephone. All interviews were conducted using an interview guide.

The core of the interview guide was the seven common themes for the project as a whole. Some of the questions in the Swedish interview guide were used, and other questions were added that had more of a national, and in some cases, a local contextual character. Mainly the same interview guide was used in all interviews, but the themes actually introduced in the interviews depended on the context in the sense that some of the themes introduced in the interviews with the church representatives were not introduced in the interviews with the representatives of the public authorities and vice versa.

In the Drammen case additional questions were included in the interview guide concerning the following topics:

- the role of the public sector in the Norwegian welfare system
- the role of the voluntary – including the church – sector in the Norwegian welfare system
- people's general expectations from the church and its welfare activities in Drammen and what they consider to be the most important social contribution of the church
- possible co-operation between the public sector and the church in matters of welfare provision
- gender equality as a topic for the church and in the church, e.g. gender aspects of church-based welfare activities in the parishes
- knowledge and perceptions of the Church City Mission in Drammen.

The qualitative approach allows flexibility in the research design. In the interviews this flexibility was taken advantage of e.g. in the following way: in the course of the interviewing it became clear that one of the church-based, voluntary organisations in Drammen seemed to have a significance which we did not expect in advance, the Church City Mission of Drammen.<sup>1</sup> This discovery made us include a question on this particular organisation and its significance in the following individual interviews and in the group interviews.

Some questions were added concerning co-operation between the church and the public sector on matters of welfare services, and on the perception of the popular image of the church in the local community. These questions were added due to their relevance in other, ongoing research projects in which the researchers were involved.

### **Focus group interviews with representatives of the population**

The group interviews were carried out as follows: the facilitator introduced himself, the project and the theme and purpose of the interview. As a start, the participants were asked to introduce themselves and to mention one good thing about living in Drammen. After this introductory round the focus was put on welfare. The interviews were taped. In two of the interviews the facilitator had no assistant. In the third interview, the assistant took notes and made observations. During the inter-

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<sup>1</sup> The organisation is presented in more detail and its significance analysed and reflected on later in the report.

views attempts were made to structure the communication in the groups in such a way as to avoid a few members monopolising the conversation, and so that all members were given the chance to contribute. In situations where this was a challenge, the challenge implied securing the contributions of female members of the groups.

The main themes addressed in the interviews were in most cases only those that were common in all interview guides. They covered the question about denotations of “welfare”, how Drammen functioned as a “welfare municipality”, the role of the church in this context, how the role of the church had changed and how the groups would like to see it (future).

A question was added regarding the role of one particular church-based organisation in Drammen, the Church City Mission (CCM). The reason for adding this question was the symbolic value of the organisation as it had already appeared in the individual interviews, with representatives of the church as well as the public authorities.<sup>2</sup>

### **Critical analysis of methods and material**

The most frequently used method for data collection was the qualitative research interview. Epistemologically, it draws on ideas from phenomenological and hermeneutical philosophical traditions. In its core, it aims to elucidate how the interviewee perceives and understands his/her life world.

The strength of the method is its flexibility. During the interviews we were able to follow up perspectives and issues arising in an interview, even though they were not considered interesting at the outset, but which turned out to be relevant to the study, and pursued in later interviews.

A weakness is that some of the perspectives, issues, and questions addressed in the interviews did not seem to be central to the life world of several interviewees. In such cases, the value of the information collected may be difficult to assess. Generally, at the local level, especially among publicly employed persons, it seems as if the issue of “welfare pluralism”, which in its contents has been in focus at the central government level, so far has had little impact on the way of thinking at the local level, at least in Drammen.

A parallel situation seemed to exist in the local church concerning the issue of gender. The issue was not easy to approach fruitfully through the interviews, at least not in the way it was suggested in the common guidelines.<sup>3</sup> The quality of the information on aspects of gender resulting from the interviews as they were carried out varied, and in some cases was rather poor. One of the reasons for that was probably the absence of debate of such issues in the local church.

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<sup>2</sup> See e.g. p.101f., p.111ff. and p.132ff.

<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting, that this is an *ex post* conclusion, in the form of an interpretation of the life worlds already interpreted by the interviewees. In this way, the conclusion is dependent on the hermeneutical processes and structures connected with the interviewees' life worlds. Answers to explicit questions about gender may reveal nothing but the level of consciousness and reflection about matters of gender of the interviewee at the time of the interview. Underlying structures of thinking about gender may be more difficult to reveal. Structural aspects of the issue may be easier to get to terms with using other methodological approaches.

In either case, it may have been more fruitful and productive to complement the interview method with participatory observation, which would have required more time and money. Thus, restrictions on the resources available may have contributed to reducing the quality of the information collected in the study.

## The town of Drammen

### Economy, demography and public welfare

Drammen is an old port, industrial town and commercial centre in the south-eastern part of Norway, only some 40 km south of the capital, Oslo, with about 55 000 inhabitants. Drammen has undergone significant structural change during the last twenty to thirty years and has become a regional service centre. Together with Oslo Drammen is the Norwegian town with the largest proportion of non-western ethnic groups in its population. Social democrats have, traditionally, held a majority in the town but this is now changing. The local parishes and the voluntary organisations of the Church of Norway have a long tradition of engaging in social work.<sup>4</sup> The town contains examples of major relevant issues that are crucial for the project; it is representative of Norway as regards the elderly population and epitomises issues of immigration and multi-ethnic communities

Of special interest for the Norwegian study are different forms of cooperation and network relationships between the Church of Norway and local authorities concerning social work. The relationship between the expectations of the local church, population and authorities will be paid particular attention.

Drammen grew up on trade in timber and wooden products. The logs were rafted down the 45-km-long Drammen River. On its shores were until recently a large number of sawmills and paper/cellulose factories. The river was the main “traffic artery” on which tug boats carried timber and related products to the mouth of the river. From here, the products were freighted by Norwegian and foreign small ships to all corners of the world. This is now history. The river turned into one large sewer; however, after a huge effort on the part of several parties, the river has been cleaned and it is now possible to swim here or to fish – the river abounds in fish. Drammen River flows into Drammen fjord, which is 25 km long. Its shores are one large recreational area with cottages and opportunities for bathing and angling.

By 1 January 2005 the population of Drammen was 57,148 (Statistics Norway). The development of the population 1990–2005 and anticipated development 2005–2020 are shown in Figure 1.

The figure shows that extrapolation of recent trends in demography in the area justifies an anticipated increase in population in the coming decades. It may be taken as an indicator of optimism and prosperity. One of the many factors behind the foreseen development is Drammen’s location only about 40 km from the capital. A general tendency of centralisation of the population in the area around the Oslo fjord, and especially in Oslo and the neighbouring municipalities, will most likely benefit

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<sup>4</sup>In this case study the relevant church-based welfare activities are those that are organised either by actors integrated in the formal structure of the Church of Norway in Drammen, usually at the parish level, or by organised agents (associations and organisations) with a strong linkage to the Church of Norway, ideologically and/or practically (see also Yeung 2004 p.55).

Drammen. Well developed public communications and lower housing prices than in the capital are likely to contribute to this development.

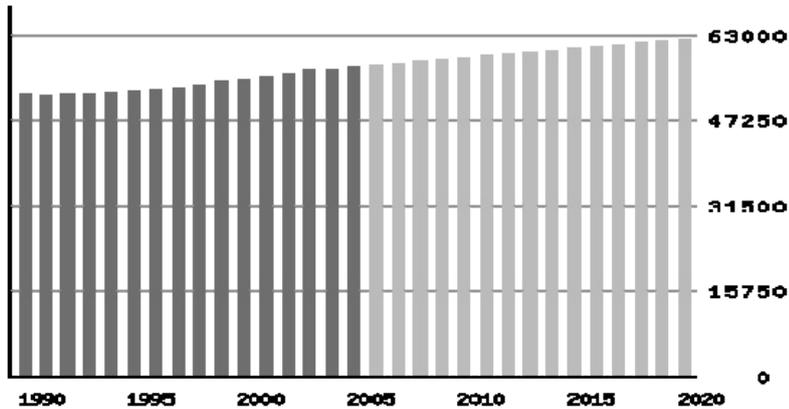


Figure 1. Population development in Drammen, actual and anticipated. Source: Statistics Norway.

Figure 2 shows the population pyramid for Drammen, and for Oslo for comparative purposes. In this perspective the population structure of Drammen looks reasonably favourable. The proportion of children and young people is higher than in Oslo, and so is the proportion of their grandparents' generation. This means there seems to be a potential for growth in the proportion of the population in fertile and employment age. On the other hand, as Table 2 shows, the number of young people in Drammen is proportionately somewhat less than in the country as a whole.

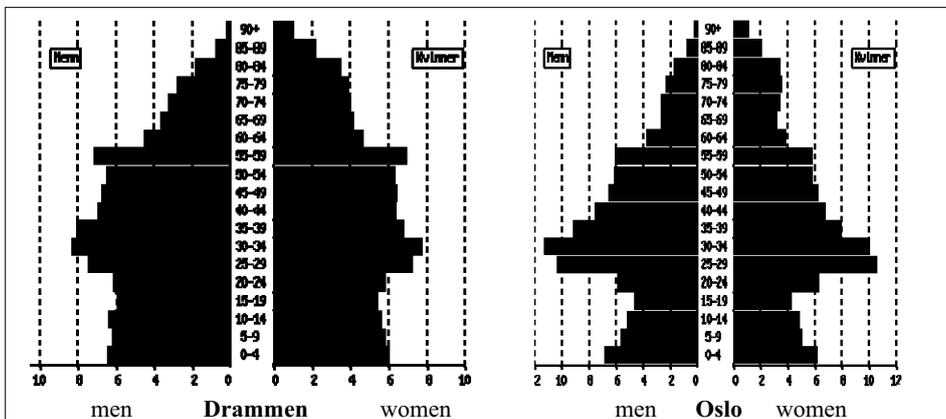


Figure 2. Population in Drammen and Oslo (for comparison) by age and gender. 1.1.2003. Source: Statistics Norway.

Another approach to demography than that of Figure 2 is illustrated in Table 2. Drammen municipality has the second largest population of immigrants with non-western background in Norway relative to the total population, approaching three times the country average. The proportion of minority language pupils in the schools in Drammen is about 20 percent.

Table 2. Distribution of population in Drammen and in Norway as a whole. 2004. Percent. Source: Statistics Norway.

	<b>Drammen</b>	<b>Buskerud county</b>	<b>Norway</b>
Number of children and young people, 0–17 years	21.7	22.8	23.6
Number of people 80 years and more	4.9	4.7	4.6
Number of immigrants <sup>5</sup> with western background	2.5	2.3	2.2
Number of immigrants with non-western background	13.4	6.0	5.4

Among the immigrants with non-western background, the Turkish group is by far the largest and makes up about 3,000 persons. The second group is those with background from Pakistan. Both groups have organised themselves in local cultural and other forms of associations.

The municipality established an international culture centre in 2003 to stimulate an expansion of the range and ethnic diversity of what is offered to the population in the field of art and culture. Culture is a means to support the integration of the ethnic minorities in the local community and also to stimulate cultural exchange across national borders. The municipality aims to build up the centre to become a national knowledge base for multi-cultural understanding, where institutions of higher education, the United Nations Association of Norway, the Helsinki Committee and other agencies are involved.<sup>6</sup> As another approach to facilitate cross-cultural integration the municipality has initiated a project called “Build bridges, not walls” to facilitate social interaction and understanding between persons and groups, across age and ethnicity.

Drammen municipality has built up an introductory programme for newly arrived refugees to introduce the new country and the new community to them. Since 2003 all Norwegian municipalities have been required to organise such a programme. Those who participate receive economic support from the municipality based on a contract between the participant and the municipality.

Of the area covered by the municipality, 12 percent is farm land, most of which is used for the production of cereals. Forestry is an important industry. The municipality owns substantial forest areas. Traditionally Drammen was an industrial town. In 1980 27 percent of the employed population was employed in industry, as compared to 21 percent for the country as a whole. Table 3 illustrates the change that has taken place in the structure of trades and industries in Drammen over the past 20–25 years. In 2003 the secondary industries made up 18 percent of the total employment, somewhat less than the national average. Over the period Drammen changed to become primarily a trade and service town. In 2003 more than 80 percent of the gainfully employed persons in Drammen had their work in the tertiary industries, well above the national average. The deviance from the national average reflects the fact that Drammen is an urban area while the national average also covers the rural

<sup>5</sup> Immigrants: a) persons who have immigrated to Norway and were born abroad to parents who were also born abroad, b) persons born in Norway with two foreign born parents.

<sup>6</sup> Drammen municipality’s web site <http://www.drammen.kommune.no/>

areas. In this way, typically, the employment structure in Drammen resembles that of the capital, Oslo, more than the national average. Important private employers are Aass brewery, ABB Power (electrical and electronic equipment), OSRAM (light bulbs), and some companies in the paper industry.

Table 3. Employment and income in Drammen 2003. Source: Statistics Norway.

	<b>Drammen</b>	<b>Buskerud county</b>	<b>Norway</b>
<i>Employed persons 16–74 years,<sup>7</sup> percent of the population</i>	68	71	69
Males	71	74	73
Females	64	68	66
<i>Registered unemployed persons 16–74 years in percent of the work force<sup>8</sup></i>	3.9	2.6	3.2
Males	4.3	2.7	3.4
Females	3.6	2.5	3.0
<i>Number of disabled pensioners 16–66 years, percent<sup>9</sup></i>	9.6	9.0	9.5
<i>Gross earnings EUR per inhabitant 17 years and above<sup>10</sup></i>	34,800	34,000	33,700
Males	44,400	43,100	42,200
Females	26,100	25,400	25,600
<i>Employed persons by industry, percent</i>			
Primary	0.6	6.3	11.2
Secondary	17.8	25.2	22.6
Tertiary/service	81.6	68.5	66.0
<i>Employed persons by sector, percent</i>			
Government administration	30.1	30	34.9
Private sector and public businesses	69.9	70	64.8

Drammen has a wide variety of clubs, unions, societies, and associations. In this way the local civil society is rich and strong. An indicator of the importance of civil society in Drammen may be that some of the committees and associations are regularly represented in the town council meetings where they have the opportunity to submit proposals or to give their comment on current issues of political decision making. In particular, this applies to collective actors involved in social welfare activities.

<sup>7</sup> Persons resident in Drammen, 4th quarter 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Data applies to 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Data applies to 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Data applies to 2002.

Table 4. Kindergartens and education 2002. Source: Statistics Norway.

	<b>Drammen</b>	<b>Buskerud county</b>	<b>Norway</b>
Number of children 1–5 years in kindergarten, percent	64.6	65.7	65.9
Number of pupils per class, grades 1–7	23.0	19.8	19.5
Number of pupils per class, grades 8–10	27.9	24.1	23.8
Number of persons 16 years and above with higher education, percent	21.5	19.6	22.3
Males	22.6	20.1	22.1
Females	20.4	19.1	22.5

To the extent that Drammen statistically deviates from the county and the country as a whole with regard to the variables presented in the tables of this subsection, one explanation is that Drammen is a middle sized town, whereas the county and the country as a whole comprise both urban and rural areas. The situation in the rural areas is generally different from that of the cities concerning the aspects of welfare covered in the tables. If, on the other hand, Drammen is compared to other Norwegian cities, the differences are smaller.

Table 5. Health care, social assistance and social care. 2002. Source: Statistics Norway.

	<b>Drammen</b>	<b>Buskerud county</b>	<b>Norway</b>
Number of children 0–17 years with assistance from the Child Welfare Service	4.1	3.4	3.3
Social assistance recipients per 100 inhabitants	4.6	4.1	4.6
Person years physicians per 10,000 inhabitants	8.5	8.0	8.4
Number of persons 80 years and above in residential care	13.4	13.9	15.4
Number of persons 80 years and above receiving home-based care services, percent	49.7	46.5	48.0

With regard to care for frail elderly, Drammen had (2002) a lower percent of its old population<sup>11</sup> in residential care than was common in other cities in south-eastern Norway and a higher percent of elderly people receiving home-based care services.

In the last local elections (2003) the voter turnout was 57 percent, slightly less than the average for the country as a whole (59 percent). In the town council females make up 41 percent as compared with 35 percent for the country as a whole. The Labour party is the largest party but a conservative coalition constitutes a majority in the town council and has the political power in the town. Among the members of the town council eight persons belong to ethnic minority groups. Seven are members of left-wing parties (Labour Party and Socialist Left Party); one belongs to the Conservative Party.

<sup>11</sup> People 80 years of age and above.

The main, recurring issue concerning welfare in Drammen over the last two or three years is old age welfare services. After the turn of the millennium the number of beds in in-patient care was reduced, and home-based care was not strengthened to compensate for this change. The result was that the quality of the old age welfare services declined, eliciting strong protests from different agents in civil society. In some of the affected parishes, church employees engaged in the protests.

The changes that took place were explained by municipal authorities to be a consequence of the difficult financial situation of the municipality. On the other hand, there has seemed to be conflict over the issue even within the municipal administration. Thus, early 2005, the director of health and care resigned from her office in disagreement with administrative decisions made concerning old age welfare services. Improved financial conditions have helped increase the amount of money transferred to this field of municipal activity and, consequently, the level of care.

## Religion in Drammen

Drammen hosts a plethora of Christian and non-Christian religious and philosophical groups and communities. The Church of Norway is the largest, comprising 77 percent of the population. Among the other Christian groups and communities represented are the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, Drammen Christian Center,<sup>12</sup> the Mission Covenant Church of Norway,<sup>13</sup> the Free Evangelical Assemblies,<sup>14</sup> the Focus Church,<sup>15</sup> the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Baptist Church, the Pentecostal Movement, the Methodist Church, the Salvation Army, and the Roman Catholic Church.

Other religious groups and traditions represented are Muslims, Buddhists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Hindus and the Sikh community. In the past, Muslims have encountered some difficulties in obtaining local permission to build mosques in areas where they are concentrated. After the first application in 1975 the town council regularly turned down applications to build a mosque. However, in the early 1980s, the Muslim community in Drammen received permission to build a mosque.<sup>16</sup> Table 6 shows how persons who are not members of the majority church are distributed among different religious and philosophical traditions.

Not surprisingly, the largest religious group outside the Church of Norway is Muslims. This reflects the significant immigration of ethnic minority groups in Drammen. Among the Christian denominations outside the Church of Norway the Pentecostal Movement is the largest. This position of Muslims and Pentecostals in Drammen correspond to the relative strength of the two groups at the national level. Sikhs, Buddhists, and Hindus make up three to four percent each. It is also worth

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<sup>12</sup> Drammen Kristne Senter.

<sup>13</sup> Det Norske Misjonsforbund.

<sup>14</sup> De Frie Evangeliske Forsamlinger.

<sup>15</sup> Fokuskirken.

<sup>16</sup> US Department of State: International Religious Freedom Report 2004 – Norway. <http://66.102.9.104/search?q=cache:iK6drUGinqMJ:www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2004/35476.htm+religion+drammen&hl=en>

notice that the Norwegian Humanist Association holds a relatively strong position among the religious and philosophical groups outside the majority church.<sup>17</sup>

Table 6. Religious affiliation of the population in Drammen, main categories 2004, percentage distribution of members outside the Church of Norway (N=8610). Source: Drammen municipality.

	Percent of population outside CoN	Percent of total population
Muslims	42	6.4
Pentecostals	10	1.4
Sikhs, Buddhists, Hindu	10	1.4
Norwegian Humanist Association	9	1.4
Roman Catholics	7	1.0
Other Christian groups	20	2.8
Other religious groups	2	0.6
Total	100	15.0

As is seen from the table, a total of 15 percent of the population in Drammen belongs to religious or ideological groups outside the Church of Norway. Bearing in mind that 77 percent are members of the Church of Norway, it means that some eight percent of the population are not members of any registered religious community or the Norwegian Humanist Association.

### Drammen in a gender perspective

Based on the information presented in the tables above and some additional information we may get a picture of the gender distribution in education and the workforce. Overall, there seem to be the same pattern of differences between males and females in Drammen as in the country as a whole. The employment rate is higher among males than females; unemployment is lower among females. Lower unemployment rate among women than among men may be a consequence of difference in trade distribution of men and women. A larger part of the employed males may be employed in trades with a high degree of exposure to national and international competition and fluctuations in supply and demand than are employed females. The different levels of average earnings among males and females, which are much the same in Drammen as in the country as a whole, may also primarily be a consequence of the gender segregation of the labour market in Norway.<sup>18</sup> With regard to higher education,<sup>19</sup> it is worth noting that the number of persons with such education in Drammen is higher among men than among women. This is contrary to what is the case at the national level. On the other hand, among students in upper secondary school in Drammen there are more girls than boys and girls tend to be somewhat more likely to choose theoretical subjects than are boys.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> This is in line with the situation on the national level, see Angell 2004.

<sup>18</sup> See Angell 2004.

<sup>19</sup> See Table 4.

<sup>20</sup> Source of basic figures: Office of education, Buskerud county.

In the political system in Drammen women hold a central place though men dominate in numbers. In the town council 40 percent of the members are women, 60 percent are men.<sup>21</sup> This distribution is in line with the norms for the gender composition of publicly established councils, boards and the like as prescribed by law.<sup>22</sup> In the municipal board of aldermen the gender distribution is about the same. However, if we compare the gender distribution among members and deputy members in the two bodies, it is clear that the rates of men are higher among members than among deputy members in both bodies.

## The Church of Norway in Drammen

### Membership rates and finances

Drammen makes up a deanery comprising 8 parishes. The parishes, the membership numbers and rates are shown in Table 7.

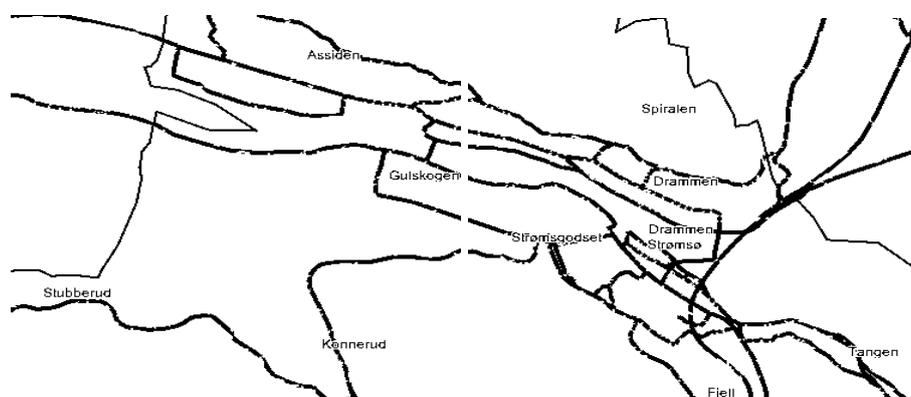
Table 7. Members of the Church of Norway in the parishes in Drammen. 2003.  
Source: web sites Drammen municipality and the Church of Norway, Drammen.

Parish	Members of CoN	Population	Percent members
Bragernes	7,600	8,600	89
Åssiden	8,800	10,500	84
Strømsgodset	4,700	~6,000	79
Strømsø	7,300	13,500	54
Tangen	5,000	~6,000	83
Skoger	10,200	12,200	84
Total	43,600	56,800	77

The percentage figures vary somewhat between the parishes and the most striking deviance from the main tendency is the low percentage of members of the Church of Norway in Strømsø parish. The parish (“prestegjeld”), as the term is used in this context, comprises two sub-units (“sokn”), Strømsø and Fjell. The proportions of people in Strømsø and in Fjell that are members of the Church of Norway are 73 percent and 37 percent respectively. This reflects the fact that most immigrants of non-western background in Drammen live at Fjell, and that Christianity is a minority religion among them. The majority religion in this area is Islam.

<sup>21</sup> Source: website Drammen municipality <http://www.drammen.kommune.no/>

<sup>22</sup> See regulations in the Local Government Act (lov om kommuner og fylkeskommuner) and the Gender Equality Act (lov om likestilling mellom kjønnene).



*Figure 3. Map of Drammen.*

For the Church of Norway, financial responsibility for salaries and the maintenance of buildings is shared by state and municipal authorities. Additional parish activity largely depends on offertory money and voluntary activities.<sup>23</sup> According to Norwegian church law the municipal councils are obliged to finance a certain level of activity in the Church parishes. Another source of money is the annual church offerings. They contribute, among other things, towards funding voluntary activities in the parishes. In particular, for most of the parish deacons, funding is supported by the state (up to 50 percent). The remaining financial resources are provided by the church. The deacons whose employment is not financed this way are either fully employed by the municipality or through a combination of municipal and private means.<sup>24</sup>

The financial situation in Drammen has been difficult since the turn of the century. Since funding the local church (Church of Norway) is the responsibility of the municipality, the difficult financial situation in Drammen since the turn of the century also had its impact on the church and its activities. Two aspects should be mentioned, lack of maintenance of the church buildings and the downsizing of the local church administration.

### Theological and church style of the local Church of Norway

Traditionally an industrial town, Drammen has been dominated by the working class, especially Tangen, Strømsø and Strømsgodset parishes. These were the areas where the old industry was situated. Bragernes was the place for the upper middle class, and Åssiden was the district where people moved to, in the 1960s. As far as we know there are no earlier written papers on the ecclesiology of Drammen. But one must say that the influence of the working class traditions is still significant. As one sees from the church statistics above, the Church of Norway has a predominant position in the population. In this way, the Lutheran tradition is without doubt the most influential ecclesiological tradition in Drammen. But this tradition must be put in the context of the influence from working class traditions. Both in Drammen and elsewhere in Norway and other countries, UK being the most prominent example,

<sup>23</sup> Angell 2004.

<sup>24</sup> Fæhn 2004.

the other protestant traditions are more influential than their numbers seem to justify. Therefore, one must say that the Lutheran ecclesiology in Drammen has been strongly influenced by more radical protestant traditions, Methodists, Baptists, different variants of reformed traditions and others. One of the interviewees representing the church also mentioned the influence from the important Norwegian lay preacher, Hans Nilsen Hauge.<sup>25</sup> Hauge has been one of the most influential Norwegian lay Christians. His message combined the criticism of the hierarchical tradition of the Lutheran church with the strong Pietistic practice of moderation, not doing wrong and building a fortune out of material gifts from the Father in heaven. By sociologists, Hauge has been characterised as the embodiment of Weber's ideal type entrepreneur, combining a Protestant ethic with a spirit of capitalism. Hauge was a left-wing Lutheran ascetic who took prosperity to be a sign of God's blessing.

The influence from Hauge can still be felt in Drammen. Many of the industrial entrepreneurs in the area were influenced by his thinking, and so was the working class, either directly or indirectly. It is not possible to understand the "ecclesiology of Drammen" without this threefold influence from the official Church of Norway, other protestant movements, and the spirit of Hans Nielsen Hauge. The mix of the three has provided the context for tendencies which are otherwise difficult to grasp. The most interesting tendency is the positive attitude towards the welfare state which one finds in most of the interviews; be it among church representatives or public authorities. This must be explained as a local case of the "coalition" between the social democrats in the working class and left wing Protestant groups (Haugians, Methodists, Baptists etc). Most of the left-wing Haugians traditionally remained in the Church of Norway and made their influence there. And through other working class representatives the influence from the other Protestant groups was also remarkably strong in the local parishes of the Church of Norway. So one reached the situation where the local parishes, dominated by social democratic Haugians and other left-wing protestant movements, politically urged for a strong public commitment to social and health care.

The responsibility towards the local community is, of course, strong in the Protestant sects, but in Norway, through the influence of the social democratic Haugians, the commitment to the wider community is also significant. This means that in Norway, not least in Drammen, it is not thought dubious both to urge for a community of believers and at the same time to engage in society, in this case at a municipal level, with the aim to have a stronger tax-funded, public engagement for the poor and the sick. We return to the importance of this way of reflecting ecclesiology later.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771–1824) as a young man experienced a strong religious calling. He decided to become a preacher. He travelled most of the southern part of Norway and also Denmark. In his most busy years, 1803–1804, he walked some 6,500 km, knitting as he went. He founded 16 businesses, among them a mine, paper mills and a brickyard. The peculiar emphasis which he laid upon the evangelical doctrines of faith and grace involved considerable antagonism to the rationalistic or sacerdotal views commonly held by the established clergy. He was resisted in his religious undertakings by the state authorities and the clergy and many times put in jail. Many of his adherents achieved high-ranked positions in society, both in economic and political life.

<sup>26</sup> See p.119f.

## The structure of the local church – a gender perspective

Gender is an important aspect of the church, both historically and in contemporary society. Formally, the Church of Norway adheres to a policy of equality of gender.<sup>27</sup> In 2000 15 percent of the clergy were women at a national level. Among parish priests, the proportion of women was 14 percent.<sup>28</sup> In Drammen, in 2004 three of eleven priests (rural dean included) were women, i.e. in a gender equality perspective, Drammen came out favourably.

Among the deacons the situation was quite the reverse. The six parishes in Drammen each had a parish deacon.<sup>29</sup> Of the six four were females, two were males. The gender distribution is easily explained by the gender distribution among students in the relevant higher educations from where deacons are recruited. Most of them are educated nurses or social workers. In these educations females dominate. At a national level the proportion of women parish deacons in 2004 was 69 percent.<sup>30</sup> This figure corresponds well with that of the deanery of Drammen.

Among parish council leaders in Drammen five were females, three were males.<sup>31</sup> Among the 70 members of the parish councils, women made up 54 percent, i.e. with regard to gender the councils were well balanced. This means that females were overrepresented among the leaders. It has long been tradition that women have had a more prominent position in lay activities in the church than in society at large.<sup>32</sup>

## The church as an agent of welfare – opinions and attitudes

### Church-based welfare agents and activities in Drammen

The concept of “welfare” is most fruitfully understood as a multidimensional concept. In this chapter we will link our understanding of welfare to Erik Allardt’s discussion of the concept.<sup>33</sup> The concept of ‘need’ is his starting point, and he differentiates between three dimensions of welfare, a material or economic dimension (“to

<sup>27</sup> See Angell 2004.

<sup>28</sup> Høeg 2002.

<sup>29</sup> In parishes with a deacon, the deacon is the manager of the diaconal work. According to employment regulations for deacons in the Church of Norway, central tasks for the deacon are the planning and co-ordination of the diaconal work in the parish, visiting service, support for people in mourning, help and support for people in difficult life situations, qualification of volunteers, co-ordination and co-operation with public authorities and the voluntary sector. Required qualifications are a five-year higher education, including a three-year degree in health, social or education studies. Source: [http://www.kirken.no/Materiell/lovsamling\\_valgt\\_lov.cfm?lid=31](http://www.kirken.no/Materiell/lovsamling_valgt_lov.cfm?lid=31)

<sup>30</sup> Figures for 2004 provided by Kirkens Arbeidsgiverforening.

<sup>31</sup> Source: <http://www.kirken.no/Sokeresultat/ProstiDet.cfm?pProstiId=p0404> (accessed 14.6.2005).

<sup>32</sup> See e.g. Jordansson & Vammen 1998; Ramsøy 1968. General voting right for women were introduced in some of the Norwegian missionary organisations before universal suffrage was introduced in the national political system (1913). Other important missionary organisations exist in Norway where women still do not have general voting right.

<sup>33</sup> Allardt 1975.

have”), a dimension referring to social relations (“to love”), and a dimension of human quality referring to the person’s relationship to society, e.g. connected to the need for self-fulfilment (“to be”). The way the Church defines its mission in society, to preach and to help, to simplify somewhat; it is supposed to cover all three dimensions of welfare.

### **Church-based associations and organisations**

There are two main types of collective agents acting as church-based providers of welfare services in Drammen, parishes and organisations and associations not formally linked to the parishes.<sup>34</sup> An example of the latter is the Church City Mission in Drammen.<sup>35</sup> The CCM runs a café and an activity centre. The primary target group for its activities is people who suffer from substance abuse problems or who have suffered from such problems and now try to live a sober life. The parishes in Drammen have not engaged in helping these groups. In the new situation the parishes seem to think that they have delegated the work with persons with substance abuse problems to the CCM. The cooperation between the parishes and the CCM does not seem to be close. About 45 percent of their running expenses are covered through grants from the municipality.<sup>36</sup> Other sources are private grants, offerings, private foundations and associations.

Another faith-based welfare organisation in Drammen is the Blue Cross. The organisation is strictly speaking inter-denominational but it is natural to include it in this context. The organisation defines itself as a “diaconal interdenominational temperance organisation”.<sup>37</sup> The Blue Cross in Drammen is part of the national organisation Blue Cross Norway. Its main contribution as a welfare organisation is in prevention and treatment of substance abuse problems. In Drammen the Blue Cross comprises a membership organisation and an in-patient treatment centre. The treatment centre is an integrated part of the public care for people with substance abuse problems. The running of the centre is publicly funded.

YMCA/YWCA should in this context be considered a welfare organisation. In Drammen the organisation’s activities may well be classified as social integration. Activities range from scouting (males and females of a wide age range), teenage choirs (“ten-sing”), sports and related activities for young people, to arrangements for seniors. These are all voluntary activities receiving some public money.

Another type of welfare activity is that which is organised by the Christian Intercultural Association (“Kristent interkulturelt arbeid”), KIA. KIA is partly a religious organisation with a religious mission, partly a welfare organisation. One of its main purposes is to “provide care in the sense of taking care of mind, body and soul, provide cross-cultural contact and friendships, [and to] help each other to accommodate to the society”.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the organisation works to help in the integration process of

<sup>34</sup> Also see footnote 4, p.90.

<sup>35</sup> This organisation belongs to a family of Church City Missions in Norway extending from that of Oslo, which was founded in 1855. The Church City Mission of Drammen was founded in 1996 as a response to an initiative taken by the municipality. The Church City Missions in Norway are affiliated with a world wide association of Church City Missions.

<sup>36</sup> Drammens Tidende 22 November 2003.

<sup>37</sup> Web presentation of the Blue Cross Norway. Source: <http://www.blakors.no/Default.asp?CatID=1069>

<sup>38</sup> Kristent Interkulturelt Arbeid, web site: <http://www.kianorge.no>

immigrants in Norway. The association's activities are not widespread in Drammen, but it should be mentioned as one of the few voluntary activities organised by the church directed at immigrants, especially those with non-western background.

### **Parish activities**

On the basis of how the parishes describe their own welfare activities their orientation may be characterised as traditional. The activities most frequently mentioned are directed towards children, youth, and elderly people. Parishes run kindergartens as well as activity centres for the elderly ("eldresenter") but most of the activities are not linked to specific physical structures. For children the parishes organise Sunday schools, which may be seen as religious education and social activity, children's choirs, and scouting, organised for children as well as young people and adults. For young people, much of the same types of activities are organised as for children, in addition to various forms of youth clubs.

The type of activity most often mentioned for adults is gatherings for mothers and young children ("mor-barn-treff"). In some of these activities baby singing is an important element. In one of the parishes a men's association, named "The Welfare" ("Velferden") is active. In the interviews with church representatives, this particular association was mentioned by several of the interviewees as a popular and significant social institution. In addition to the mother-and-child gatherings mentioned above this is one of very few gender specific welfare activities mentioned by the interviewees.

For elderly people, almost all parishes organise meetings and various other activity oriented arrangements. In addition, on a less collective basis, visiting services are widespread. The parishes are also involved in running groups for the bereaved, in some cases in co-operation with municipal agencies and other voluntary organisations in Drammen.

One of the social and cultural institutions established in Drammen in recent years is an international week. The purpose of the institution is social integration of the various ethnic groups in the town, not least to give the ethnic minorities an opportunity to present themselves, their cultural heritage and its forms of expression, to the ethnic majority as a way for each group to become more familiar with the others and, thus, reduce chances of social tensions between the groups. The parishes of the Church of Norway are actively involved in the arrangements, both religiously and by providing other activities with premises.<sup>39</sup>

This means that the parishes, through their organised activities, provide welfare especially by way of engaging volunteers in social activities, bringing people together, arranging for opportunities for people to meet, talk, and share. It is worth noting that several of the parishes engage in musical activities, both as a vehicle for social community and as a way of communicating esthetical values. The parishes seem to a lesser extent to be involved in sustained welfare activities requiring professionally trained staff. In Drammen those kinds of activities are the domain of the church-based voluntary organisations.

A high ranked publicly employed person expressed some critical views of the priorities of the Church with regard to who was in focus of the care activities and

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<sup>39</sup> Source: Drammen municipality, web site: <http://www.drammen.kommune.no/>

who seemed to be out of focus. The interviewee characterised the target groups of parish social care as the “nice guys” and asked for a commitment to the mentally handicapped and mentally ill. What this seemed to imply was a wish to see a public commitment on the part of the church – or the parishes – to work for the interests of these groups which do not cry out loudly themselves or have proponents who stand up for them in the public sphere, to give these groups a public voice.

## The importance of the church-based activities for the overall provision of welfare services in Drammen

The importance of the church-based activities may be assessed in qualitative and quantitative terms. Quantitatively, overall, the contributions are not significant, except in the care for people with substance abuse problems. The in-patient clinic run by the Blue Cross is the only professional rehabilitation centre in Drammen.<sup>40</sup> This is not an untypical situation in Norway. As reported elsewhere,<sup>41</sup> at the national level, faith-based organisations provide about 50 percent of the beds in in-patient centres for substance abuse rehabilitation.

Qualitatively, the contributions of the church may be seen as important through their character. Their significance may be elicited by applying the categories constructed by Ralph Kramer<sup>42</sup> describing the functions of voluntary organisations in the welfare state that has constructed them. Kramer distinguishes between the *vanguard* role, the *improver* role, the *value guardian* role, and the *service provider* role as his main categories. In discussing the latter, Kramer introduces three sub-categories of relationship between the voluntary agencies and the state, three types of provider roles of voluntary agencies: the primary, the complementary, and the supplementary provider role. As a *primary* provider the voluntary organisations are alone, or almost alone, in providing the service, i.e. there are at most only a few public providers. As a *complementary* provider to the public sector, the voluntary agencies provide services that are qualitatively different in kind from those provided by the former. Thirdly, voluntary organisations provide *supplementary* services if these are similar in kind to those provided by the public sector, “some of which may offer an alternative choice or serve as a substitute for a governmental service”, as Kramer puts it.<sup>43</sup> It is to be expected that the church has different roles in its service provision.

The welfare activities organised by the church serve several functions in the welfare state at the local level. The institutionalised efforts in the care for people with substance abuse problems serve both primary and complementary functions.<sup>44</sup>

For instance, the usefulness of the efforts of the CCM was expressed in a short article in the local newspaper where two substance abusers were interviewed about their life situation in Drammen. They said that one of the two things they had to go

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<sup>40</sup> There are other institutionalised rehabilitation activities run by faith-based organisations in Drammen than those mentioned here. They are organised by religious organisations outside the Church of Norway and fall outside the scope of this report.

<sup>41</sup> Angell 2000; Angell 2004.

<sup>42</sup> Kramer 1981.

<sup>43</sup> Kramer 1981, p.234.

<sup>44</sup> Kramer 1981.

on was the café run by the CCM.<sup>45</sup> A sign of the trust and appreciation that the organisation enjoys in the local community is, that the local bank that provided the loan needed to finance the premises in which the organisation runs its activities, decided to relieve the organisation of its debt (€ 210,000).<sup>46</sup>

The church is not the only collective, voluntary actor present on the scene, but its significance, both quantitatively and qualitatively, is clearly recognised and appreciated by the representatives of the public sector interviewed in this project.

### The local church as contributor in the public discourse on welfare

The church in Drammen has not engaged extensively in actions or strategies to influence local public opinion. From analysis of local newspaper editions it seems that the leader of the CCM is the only person who has taken or uses the opportunity to act politically, in the sense of trying to influence public opinion and political decision making. From the statements presented in the newspaper, an important part of his public message seems to be for people and the political system to acknowledge the dignity of all those who live in the community, be they “straight” citizens or poor substance abusers. The responsibility of the municipality or the public sector to secure the basic welfare of its citizens is often underscored. With the local newspaper as the source the leader voices his message in various public contexts, and the newspaper seems to serve as a willing channel. Other church persons, especially parish priests, may be sceptical of taking this kind of a public role.

Opportunity, practice, and the role the church should take as a former of public opinion may be exemplified in the following citation:

[W]e need to have two legs to stand on; we are obliged to help people in need; at the same time we must be outspoken about injustice. I am a columnist in the local paper every fourth week. We must confront the authorities. We must use the media and our political contacts. (m)<sup>47</sup>

### Theological motivation of church-based activities in the field of welfare

The local church has no formal statements published on the theological motivation of its activities in the field of welfare. It is reasonable to interpret this lack of explicit theological reflection in the form of written statements as an expression of the taken-for-granted character of the engagement. Two to three decades ago certain types of church-based welfare work were questioned by socialists and social democrats on a national level, and also among welfare professionals some scepticism came to the surface.<sup>48</sup> This scepticism faded away and church-based involvement in all sorts of

<sup>45</sup> Drammens Tidende 14 April 2005.

<sup>46</sup> Drammens Tidende 24 March 2004.

<sup>47</sup> (m) at the end of the quotation indicates that the respondent is a male. Correspondingly, (f) refers to a female respondent.

<sup>48</sup> See e.g. Angell 1994a; Angell 1994b.

welfare activity is accepted and to some extent encouraged, both by the state and civil society.

Formal theological motivation has been more in demand in church-based voluntary organisations than in the church at large (in the parishes). One of the reasons for this may be that voluntary organisations, church-based organisations not least, need to legitimate their position in the welfare state,<sup>49</sup> among other things, on the basis of their organisational identity. Vis-à-vis the state the rationale of the organisation, its value basis, goals and objectives are central. For instance, the organisation's ideological system may be an important integrating mechanism in professional (welfare) organisations.<sup>50</sup> Such a clarification of value basis has been undertaken in both church-based organisations mentioned above, operating in the field of substance abuse care and rehabilitation. In the CCM the whole family of Church City Missions in Norway shares value basis. As a first statement they claim that

Our goal is to meet people with love and respect. We are present in town on behalf of Jesus Christ. In all our activities where other people are involved our view of man is the most decisive factor influencing how we behave. [...] Our view of the person provides us with a view of society which commits us always to talk and act on behalf of the lowest ranked people in society.

In a later section the document reads:

The message of the church bestows power and dignity on the poor and those that in different ways are segregated from human community. Solidarity means to stand together with others in relationships characterised by mutuality and equality. However different people may be the welfare of each and every one is of equal importance. The CCM will work in solidarity with the weakest in our society.

## Co-operation between social authorities and the majority church (and organisations affiliated to the church)

Co-operation may loosely be conceived as social interaction between two or more actors in the service of a common purpose. Conditions for co-operation are each party's awareness and, at least some, knowledge of the others, some shared areas of interest, some shared conceptions of that part of the world which the shared areas of interest refer to, and mutual respect and acknowledgement with regard to each part's possible contribution.<sup>51</sup>

Generally, the interviewees representing the church and the public sector in Drammen do not report much in the way of systematic and regular co-operation. In the field of substance abuse care and rehabilitation the church-based, institutionalised activities are integrated in the public schemes and co-operation is institutionalised. The public responsibility for in-patient care and rehabilitation belongs to the region or a higher level of government but in-patient centres are required to co-operate with the municipalities where the users are resident, thus co-operation between the municipality and the centres exists, related to each user individually.

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<sup>49</sup> Angell 1994a; Angell 1994b.

<sup>50</sup> Mintzberg 1983.

<sup>51</sup> See Knudsen 2004.

On the basis of the information provided by the interviewees it seems that one of the few areas in which a regular co-operation between church and public sector exists is in the field of care for the bereaved (“sorggrupper”). In this field of activity parish deacons collaborate with the municipality, the Red Cross and the Norwegian Humanist Association. A somewhat related area of co-operation is the municipal crisis team. Such teams are common on a municipal level around the country and the church is regularly represented in the team.<sup>52</sup> The crisis team is called on in cases of major accidents and comparable incidents in the community. Typically, the police and the fire service are also represented in the team.

Another area of co-operation is care for the elderly. The extent to which the church and the municipality interact varies among the parishes. In some parishes there is a tradition for the parish to co-operate with the municipal home-based care services, in other parishes no such tradition exists. One of the social institutions for the elderly about which co-operation occurred is the day care centre. There are several day care centres for the elderly in Drammen. Two of them are owned and run by parishes, alone or in partnership with other organisations.

In general, the interviews left a complex and partly unclear picture of the status with regard to co-operation between the public sector and the church. In many cases the situation seems to be that the church has contacts at several public care facilities through their visiting services, but without any real mutuality in the relationship. In some cases staff or leaders take contact on behalf of users; in most cases it seems that initiatives are taken by the church, strengthening the impression that the contact primarily has the character of visiting service.

There may be various reasons for this situation. One reason seems to be lack of knowledge on the part of the municipality of the work of the parishes.<sup>53</sup> This was mentioned by several interviewees, both representing the church and the municipality. One of the public employees expressed:

You feel that the church is a bit invisible. [...] We know it's there, but you don't know what it has to offer if you have no knowledge of it. (f)

Related to this, on the condition that knowledge of potential partners in co-operation is available, the day-to-day situation for the staff and the managers of the public welfare activities may be too busy to provide them with time to sit down and think about possible partners and resources outside the public sector. In such a situation it will be left to the church agents and agencies to initiate contact and convey information about possible issues of common interest and ideas of possible co-operation.

The conditions under which the study was carried out did not allow for further investigations into these conditions. However, the information collected through the interviews may be interpreted in a way that points to a possible lack of interest on the side of the public sector of co-operating with other agents or agencies. This relates to the views of welfare and the role of the public sector, the voluntary sector, and the church in welfare provision.<sup>54</sup> It should be noted that the law on social services requires that the local public welfare services co-operate with voluntary or-

<sup>52</sup> For the situation at the national level, see Angell & Selbekk 2005.

<sup>53</sup> This is developed further on the next pages.

<sup>54</sup> We will return to these issues in the following sections.

ganisations working in the same field, with the same tasks, as the public welfare services.<sup>55</sup>

From what is written above co-operation between the church and the public sector generally seems to be of little importance for the overall provision of welfare services in Drammen. In some areas where co-operation between church-based welfare provision and the public sector is institutionalised, as in the care for substance abusers, the co-operation is basically contracted at the regional level of the state and not at the municipal level. On the other hand, at the municipal level, it seemed that formal co-operation was rare and that informal co-operation was sporadic. Thus, as provision of welfare services was organised and carried out co-operation was not important for the provision.

In principle, a complicating factor might be that the Church of Norway as a state church is not a voluntary organisation, but rather a statutory body. On the other hand, no prescriptions exist for the regulation of the welfare activities of the church. In this way, welfare activities organised by the church, may be regarded as voluntary, or third sector, activities. This way of looking at church-based welfare activities has been the way these activities have been categorised in Norwegian welfare research.<sup>56</sup> It should be noted, though, that it is not self-evident that diaconia, organised by the Church of Norway as a statutory body should be classified this way. It has been disputed on a formal, legal basis.<sup>57</sup> In the study of welfare provision in Drammen this distinction was never made topical.

## Views held by the public authorities

### Welfare

Basically, welfare is associated with security, to have basic needs satisfied and to be taken care of in a dignified way if or when the need arises. By most of the interviewees welfare is associated with specific elements in the public welfare system, primarily related to the National Insurance Scheme. By those that describe welfare more specifically it comprises an economic (food, clothes and shelter), a social (work, social network, social activities), and a psychological dimension (to be satisfied, happy). If we take the range of associations as a starting point the concept is used by the respondents to cover both “welfare” as a resource concept<sup>58</sup> and “well-being”. All answers were brief.

### Function of the local welfare system

Overall, Drammen as a “welfare municipality”, i.e. the welfare system in Drammen, seems to work well. As already mentioned (see p.95) the main concern in the public discourse is the care for the frail elderly. This is reflected in the interviews with the persons affiliated with the public sector, be they politicians or employees. What the interviewees bring up, in addition to the description of the situation, is its association with the general financial situation in the municipality and the need to regain bal-

<sup>55</sup> Lov om sosiale tjenester § 3–3.

<sup>56</sup> See e.g. Lorentzen 1995 and also Yeung 2004.

<sup>57</sup> Sagatun & Eide 1998.

<sup>58</sup> See e.g. Allardt 1975.

ance in the finances. According to leading politicians and high ranked officials, the less than satisfactory situation in the care for the frail elderly is transitory and improvements have already been observed during the previous year. Interviewees with experience from other municipalities claim that the complaints about the situation for the frail elderly in Drammen should be seen against the background of local, popular expectations arising from adaptation to a standard clearly above the average in Norwegian municipalities as a whole.<sup>59</sup>

The municipalities have certain tasks imposed by law. Other tasks are usually attended to, but strictly speaking, they are voluntary in the sense that they are tasks which may or may not be attended to according to local decisions. Such additional tasks may be services to people in need over and above what the legal framework requires. In times of financial problems the municipality must give priority to the law imposed tasks and additional services may be withdrawn. In difficult times, people with psychiatric problems may suffer. Psychiatric care is primarily the responsibility of the regional level. The care system has been subject to much criticism. At the municipal level primary care for people with psychiatric problems has been organised, but since this care is not imposed on the municipalities by law, it is liable to be affected by fluctuations in the financial situation. This has in fact been the case in Drammen. During periods of “recession” psychiatric care has been one of the fields of care that has suffered. This fact was mentioned (and deplored) by several of the interviewees affiliated with the public sector.

### **Role of the church**

In most interviews, the impression was that the whole issue of the role of the church as a welfare provider had not been thematised before, and that the interviewees were unprepared to answer questions about this role. This interpretation would be consistent with the interpretation of attitudes among interviewees concerning co-operation between the church and the public sector presented above (see p.106).

The church has mainly two roles to play in the welfare state, as described by the interviewees, a complementary role and a supplementary role, to use Kramer’s categories.<sup>60</sup> Two aspects of this complementary function were included in the answers from the interviewees; contributions through engaging volunteers, and contributions through the ideological character of the church as a religious organisation.

Overall, the public authorities in Drammen are not of one voice in their views of the role of the church in welfare provision. Position in the public system may have an impact, and so may political orientation. Though several interviewees left the impression that the church plays a marginal role, others saw it differently. For instance, one of the politicians with a central place with regard to health and social policy in Drammen expressed his opinion as follows:

This [the role of the public sector, the voluntary sector, and the church] is a strongly inter-locked relationship. The public sector cannot function well without the voluntary sector, including the church. (m)

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<sup>59</sup> The role of shifting expectations is dealt with on p.124.

<sup>60</sup> Kramer 1981.

The statement is formulated in such a way that it may be interpreted as an evaluation of the current situation. However, to make it more consistent with other statements about the current state of affairs it may also be interpreted in a more normative way, as an ideological statement or a statement about how it ought to be in the future. If so, it would fit well with current government ideology on welfare provision, which may be captured by the term “welfare pluralism”.

At the municipal level there is little indication that plans are developed or discussions going on concerning future co-operation between municipal authorities and the church in the field of welfare provision. On the other hand, at the rhetorical level both the church representatives and the public authorities interviewed appear positive to (future) co-operation. Such co-operation is at the basis of the ideology espoused by the present government and popular trends in the welfare discourse on the national and international level.

### **Church and social work**

None of the interviewees questioned that the church should carry out practical social work. In nearly all the interviews the answer was given without having to be posed explicitly. The position of the interviewees on this issue may be interpreted and explained in different ways. The church has a long tradition in providing welfare in Norway, as long as the history of the institutionalised church goes. Moreover, the predominant ideology in welfare policy in most parts of Europe today is that of welfare pluralism. This ideology (re)opens space for a plurality of welfare providers, including the church.

One of the expectations from the public authorities to the church and other non-governmental organisations is to contribute to increased efficiency in the provision of welfare, i.e. “more welfare per krone [NOK]”. The objective, as it was expressed by leading politicians in the field of welfare policy, is not to provide welfare services at the lowest possible costs, but to provide services as efficiently as possible. Outsourcing and quasi market adaptation are thus parts of the political strategy in line with what is usually called New Public Management strategy in public welfare provision.

With regard to what types of welfare provision the church should engage in, the question presupposes a level of intention and reflection which did not seem to match with that of the interviewees affiliated with the public sector. The question probably presupposes a welfare model where the church is supposed to have a more central place in provision of welfare than is the case in the Nordic countries in general and in Norway in particular. To the extent that Esping-Andersen’s models of welfare systems<sup>61</sup> may be applied the social democratic welfare regime is characterised by the comprehensive role of the state both institutionally and in providing welfare services. The state of mind among the interviewees on the questions of the role of the church in welfare provision may reflect both the predominant ideological position on welfare in this country and, on the other hand, a possible tendency in the direction of convergence of welfare models in Europe. The latter is related to the concept of “welfare pluralism”.

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<sup>61</sup> Esping-Andersen 1990; Esping-Andersen 1999.

Generally, the interviewees expressed no strong opinions on how the church should contribute. This may reflect the fairly marginal role of the church in welfare provision today. Among the resources associated with the church, committed volunteers were the most frequently mentioned. An interpretation may be that the comprehensive role of the public sector in welfare provision is taken for granted by the public authorities and that the church's main contribution is to complement the public sector where it cannot provide the resources necessary to fulfil the demand for welfare services. This interpretation would be in line with other statements made by representatives of the public system. A centrally placed employee criticised the church that it was too much oriented towards implementing its own ideas and too little interested in viewing their work in relation to that of the public sector.

If the church or church-based organisations came to us and said “We would like to do something” it would be all right. What I experience is that they insist on doing what they have already decided for themselves. If they want money it must be to do what we think there is a need for. We cannot come up with money just like that. It seems difficult for them to understand. [...] It would have been better in this situation if they said: “What is important to you now? Is there anything we can contribute?” (f)

The quotation may illustrate ideas in the public sector about conditions of possible co-operation. It is reasonable to understand it as an expression of the central position of the state in welfare provision in the minds of the public authorities, but it may also be considered reasonable given that the public sector is entrusted with the overall responsibility for the welfare provision in society (though not to be the exclusive provider of welfare services). On the other hand, an attitude to co-operation as illustrated in the quotation may not be the most fertile ground for such co-operation from the perspective of church-based agents and agencies.

Another person described co-operation with the voluntary sector and the church and their role in the following way:

Some of the tasks the municipality takes on are imposed by law. Of course, we have to carry out those tasks. But a municipality will limit its activities as much as possible to operate within the boundaries set by the financial resources. What the voluntary organisations [and the church] do is to contribute where the municipality stops. [...] It is a question of co-operation. We discuss the problem with them [the voluntary organisations or the church] and say: “This is as far as we are able to go. Are you willing to add the little that remains?” It happens today. (m)

These quotations illustrate the idea of the church – and the voluntary sector more generally – fulfilling complementary and supplementary functions in their contributions in welfare provision. This may be satisfactory as seen from the position of the public authorities. On the other hand, the question remains whether this description or prescription of the role and the contribution of the church are shared by the church representatives, and if so, how they appreciate it.<sup>62</sup>

On the basis of the views presented above it was only to be expected that there seemed to be few expectations of the church as to its contributions to provision of welfare, by the public representatives themselves as well as by the general public as

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<sup>62</sup> We have already presented elements of a critical reflection on such a situation above (see p.119).

their expectations were interpreted and mediated by the public authority representatives. The following statement by a local politician may be indicative and a summary of the views presented in the interviews:

I do not think there people have expectations that the church should contribute. I think that when you actually see how the church contributes, you are positively surprised. In principle, the state is supposed to take care of you from cradle to grave. At least, that is the way I have perceived that people think about these things. (m)

In a condensed form this statement may sum up the responses given upon direct inquiry. More indirectly, summing up how the interviewees reflected more specifically upon the issue of the role of the church in welfare provision, their expectations may be understood to be more specific and nuanced. In this connection we would emphasise the complementary function of the church – and, more generally, the voluntary sector. This function is related to the church's command of volunteers, unpaid workers, and the significance of this resource in care for the elderly, children, and substance abusers. The foundation for such an interpretation of what the interviewees communicated may be e.g. the quotations presented above. The "thin" descriptions provided in the answers to the direct question about expectations from the church may reflect the prevailing ideology concerning welfare provision in a country like Norway, just as it was expressed in the quotation above, referring to the ideology inherent in the social democratic welfare model.<sup>63</sup>

### **The church in the public debate**

Among the public authorities there is an almost – but not totally – unanimous view that the church should participate actively in the public debate on welfare issues at the local level. When it comes to experiences, the interviewees held the view that the church, with a few exceptions, is relatively invisible in the public discourse, and some interpreted the silence as an expression of fear, i.e. that the church is afraid of engaging in public and political debate. The reasons given by the interviewees for their views tended to be related to the idea of participatory, political democracy. A typical view would be:

The more participants holding an opinion [on matters of welfare], the better for society. A public debate is important. (f)

Some of the interviewees also had as a premise for their view that the church is supposed to be the voice of the voiceless or a spokesman for the weak and marginalised.

Among public employees the view was stated that such public voices may serve as a corrective to the public welfare system in the sense that the professional welfare workers may well be blind or restricted in being part of an authority system which requires obedience and strict adherence to the regulations set for their activities.

### **The particular role of the local Church City Mission**

One of the church-based actors stands out as of particular interest, the Church City Mission in Drammen (CCM). We have already described aspects of its role in

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<sup>63</sup> See p.109.

Drammen.<sup>64</sup> In this context the focus is on how the representative of the public authorities conceives of its role in the provision of welfare in Drammen. In 8 of the 11 interviews with representatives of the public authorities the CCM and various aspects of its role in welfare provision are mentioned with no prior question being posed by the interviewer to that end. We may take that as an indication of the organisation's central position in the minds of the interviewees when the subject is the role of the church in welfare provision in Drammen. It is revealed in the interview with the leader of CCM in Drammen that the initiative to establish the organisation in Drammen was actually taken by the public authorities,<sup>65</sup> who addressed the rural dean. From the comments given by the interviewees to the role of the CCM, one must conclude that the initiative had been successful, first of all in that a local CCM was established and, then, in the work performed by the organisation. No critical comments to the work of the organisation are raised in the interviews with the public authorities; on the contrary, the CCM in Drammen is unanimously praised for its performance.

The way the representatives of the public sector describe and evaluate the work of the CCM, may be categorised using Kramer's categories.<sup>66</sup> It is not clear from the comments given if they consider the CCM to have had a vanguard function. But such an interpretation is reasonable taking into consideration that the frame of reference is Drammen and the welfare activities organised there. The CCM started work for the benefit of people with substance abuse problems which had not been organised before. In that sense, the CCM had a vanguard role. Statements like

The Church City Mission has taken on work that no one else would do. (f)

The Church City Mission takes care of those that fall outside every [public arrangement]. (f)

What I can say, is that the Church City Mission shows the way. [...] People say it's so good that someone does, that someone demonstrates [in action] models of how things can be done. (m)

may also be interpreted to indicate the organisation's vanguard role. These statements may at the same time be indicative of the organisation's value guardian role. The organisation demonstrates in its activities its solidarity with those at the bottom of society, and it speaks up for those at the margins of society through its role in the public discourse on welfare. In addition, in its regular way of working and its relationship with the municipality, it performs a service function in the community.

No other church-based agent, agency or activity is described and evaluated as favourably as the CCM. It is tempting to interpret the statements of the interviewees as an expression of the organisation's symbolic function in the town. A support of such an interpretation is the role the leader of the organisation plays in the local news media.<sup>67</sup> The extensive use of the leader as a voice in matters of morals and ethics re-

<sup>64</sup> See p.101 and p.103.

<sup>65</sup> The initiative was taken in 1996 and the new branch of the national CCM family, in Drammen, was established the same year. According to the leader of the CCM, the municipality first approached the Salvation Army, which did not take interest in what the municipality suggested. Then the Church of Norway was approached. It is not a unique situation. In Bergen too, the municipality invited the CCM to undertake welfare work in the town.

<sup>66</sup> Kramer 1981.

<sup>67</sup> See p.104f.

lated to the diaconia of the church and the welfare state, as a kind a local moral authority in such matters, may be interpreted as an expression of a felt need for a social ethics in welfare policy, a need that the labour movement once fulfilled and to a lesser extent, the church. Recent trends in political and ideological thinking about the welfare state, e.g. represented by New Public Management, with an increased emphasis on efficiency and economic aspects of government, perhaps at the expense of an emphasis on the ethical dimension of welfare management, may have left a void in the public discourse on welfare policy. The voice of the CCM and its leader in Drammen may contribute to filling this void, not only by the words spoken, but by the deeds which form a basis for the significance of the words they accompany. This function may be related to Charles Taylor's analysis of the "malaise of modernity" or "the ethics of authenticity".<sup>68</sup> An authorised, taken for granted, shared set of norms and values is by and large missing in modern society, and according to Taylor there is a demand put on the individual to fulfil oneself, based on the moral ideal of being true to oneself, of authenticity. This moral ideal of constructing one's own personal identity is not something that can be done by the individual in isolation. "The making and sustaining of our identity [...] remain dialogical throughout our lives", according to Taylor.<sup>69</sup> In this process we need partners, either through a genuine dialogue or someone to relate to indirectly, e.g. through mass media. The leader of the CCM, through his visibility in the media, may be perceived as such a dialogue partner.

The voice of the CCM may be perceived as trustworthy and authoritative because the activities organised by the CCM, as they are evaluated by the interviewees in this study, speak in congruence with the words. This is in line with the leader's definition of "diaconia":

It is easy to resort to the phrase "the body language of the church". To me diaconia is to make the love of Christ visible. The diaconia of the church must be visible. Diaconia is underestimated as a way of preaching. To be loved is more important than verbal preaching. (m)

The church may have taken over some of the critical function which the labour movement traditionally had in the public debate on welfare. In this context it is interesting to note that a recent study on power elites in Norway concludes that the church elite appear to be the most radical elite in Norwegian society,<sup>70</sup> based on, among other things, the values they espouse. The radical profile among the leaders may have to do with the value tradition of the church, the social background of the church elite and possibly its lack of power in society.<sup>71</sup> In such a context and with few vested interests related to their power position it will make it easier to maintain radical principles. Analogous reasoning may be applied to the position of the CCM in Drammen. As it is, it is without strong ties with the public sector, but, on the other hand, with strong ties to the national CCM family<sup>72</sup> and its ideology and values. In addition, the public role of the organisation has made it popular with the public, which puts it in another power position in the community. As the leader expresses it:

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<sup>68</sup> Taylor 1991.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. p.35.

<sup>70</sup> Gulbrandsen, Engelstad, Klausen, Skjeie, Teigen & Østerud 2002.

<sup>71</sup> Repstad 2004.

<sup>72</sup> See footnote 35, p.101.

The politicians would be afraid to do something to [harm] us. One of the things that has been said [among public authorities] is that “one of the things we could do, is to withdraw our support to the Church City Mission. But they are so popular, that [a withdrawal of financial support] would create big noise”. (m)

### **Changes in the past ten years**

The interviewees were asked to describe what they perceived as changes in the role of the church over the past decade. The question seemed to be difficult to answer. Most of the elements of the answers relate to the issue of an “open” or a “closed”, an “inclusive” or an “exclusive” church. The characterisations refer to discourses on moral values in church and society and, e.g., the extent to which people feel the church accepts changes in the ways people organise their lives, exemplified in the issues of cohabitation or marriage, formal regulation (institutionalisation) of cohabitation of homosexual persons, and abortion. A topical issue is the discussion in the Church of whether cohabiting, homosexual persons can be employed as parish priests or deacons. More generally, it pertains to the question of the church as a folk church or a church for only the “inner circle”, the “religious virtuosi”.<sup>73</sup> One interpretation of the answers, taken at face value, would be that the answers do not so much deal with the role of the church as with how the church defines and maintains its borders to society. At this level of interpretation there are two more or less opposite views expressed. One is that the church has become more open to every one. This was by far the most frequent position among the public authority interviewees. The other view is that the church has become more exclusive or closed than it was ten years ago. The seemingly contradictory views most likely refer to both the various standards and expectations against which people assess processes and changes, the various areas of concern on which the views are based and the locus – or loci – of reference (geographical, structural). The diversity within a majority church like the Church of Norway will prevent a simple description of processes and changes. It opens up for many church “realities” and descriptions, and, consequently, many evaluations.

Only one of the interviewees relates the question of changes in the role of the church to welfare provision. The view expressed by this person is that the church’s contribution is less today than it was ten years ago. The area of welfare effort mentioned as an illustration is the care for the elderly. On a national level and in the in-patient care, this is consistent with findings in a recent study on institution-based diaconia in Norway.<sup>74</sup>

### **Wishes for change in the church**

The question about what the interviewees would like to change regarding the role of the church in society was not posed in all the interviews with persons affiliated with the public sector as it did not always seem relevant or meaningful in view of what

<sup>73</sup> One of the contributions in this discourse is Salomonsen 2000. The issue of an “inclusive” or “exclusive” church is one of the lines of discussion in the discourse on the regulation of the relationship between state and church in Norway. For those that defend the existing relationship it is an argument that loosening the ties between church and state will increase the likelihood that the church will be “taken over” and dominated by an inner circle which will reduce diversity within the church and, thus, make it appear more “exclusive.”

<sup>74</sup> Angell 2000; Angell 2001.

the interview had already brought up, in cases of lack of interest or relevance of the church to the interviewees.

Expectations to and criticism of the church, involving a changed role of the church as a provider of welfare, have already been touched upon. In addition to what has already been presented, the interviewees' direct response to the question of what they would like to change about the role of the church in society elicited a dimension of the role of the church which was mentioned above, related to past changes. Again, the interviewees brought up the question of how "inclusive" or "exclusive" the church appeared in its preaching and public statements. What the interviewees unanimously communicate is a wish for the church to appear more inclusive of people of different dispositions and orientations. The answers may be associated with aspects of wellbeing or the "to be" dimension of welfare in Allardt's analytic scheme.<sup>75</sup> It may be said to be a quest for a more liberal orientation of the church in a more pluralistic society.

### **Significance of gender**

Gender was not brought up systematically in the interviews with the public authorities. The reason was methodological. The interview method is based on a phenomenological approach and understanding which has as one of its methodological pre-suppositions that the topics involved concern the life world of the interviewee. In this case, lack of knowledge and familiarity of church-based welfare activities made us consider it of little importance to try to elicit statements on gender in this context. On the other hand, indirectly, in some of the interviews views on gender equality in the church may be elicited, especially from answers to the question regarding changes in the past ten years. In addition to what has already been mentioned in the previous paragraphs, the situation of women (priests) in the church is alluded to with idea that equality of status and opportunities of women and men is valued. One of the reasons it is not more explicitly mentioned is most likely that the issue of equality of women and men in the church is not an issue in the news media like the issues described above. This fact may reflect that the position of women in the church is less controversial today than it used to be, that the position of women has changed and that the general interest in church issues in the media is rather modest.

## **Views held by the church**

### **Welfare**

There seems to be more or less a common understanding among all interviewees, be they among the public authorities or in the church, of the concept of welfare. No significant differences are observed in the response patterns between the two groups. It means that for the meaning of the concept among persons affiliated with the church it is sufficient to refer to the description and analysis on p.107.

### **Function of the local welfare system**

As an introduction, it is quite clear from the interviews with the representatives of the church that the prime responsibility of the welfare system belongs to the state or

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<sup>75</sup> Allardt 1975.

the public sector.<sup>76</sup> The main focus of the interviewees affiliated with the church is on the difficult situation in the care for the elderly. The question about how the welfare state functions at the local level (the “welfare municipality”) seems to be first and foremost associated with the problems and challenges connected to this field of welfare. It is interesting to note that, in general, those who are interviewed from the church give more detailed descriptions of the difficulties than the respondents representing the public authorities. The analyses of factors contributing to the situation do not differ significantly between the groups as far as the comparison reaches, given the selected methodological approach and its limitations.

Church representatives provide in some cases a fairly critical assessment of municipal policies, criticising some of the local, stated priorities. Opinions were that if implemented in accordance with stated priorities, the policy would have had a significant, negative impact on the life situation of poor people in the municipality. This criticism was reflected in the local media at some stage.

Two other groups are mentioned in the interviews, groups that are considered to have a difficult life situation, at least partly due to the difficult financial situation in the public sector: people with substance abuse and people with psychiatric problems. Especially with regard to the former, the contribution of the church, i.e. the CCM, is emphasised.

Though most of the answers are concentrated on problems and challenges the picture painted is not all black. Several interviewees give a more nuanced description of the situation. As one of them says as a first response: “I believe we have a very good welfare system”, before modifying that characterisation.

As pointed out, church representatives in general approve of public welfare services. One interpretation could be that the church representatives approve public welfare provision because it is constructed to fulfil the universalistic demand to take care of everyone in need. It is of a certain importance to notice that the rather dominant Norwegian welfare state is given a strong positive evaluation from church people. This means that church people are not engaged in any movement to build down the welfare state. From a Lutheran point of view this is also interesting because it confirms one way of regarding the welfare state from a Lutheran perspective. It belongs to the Lutheran dogmatic to give the responsibility for the sick and the needy to the “king” or the secular power. One of the significant aspects of Lutheran theology and practice during the Reformation period after 1520 was exactly to move responsibility for the sick and the poor from the church authorities to the King. This is still playing an important role in contemporary Europe. All Scandinavian welfare states operate in the context of strong Lutheran churches.<sup>77</sup>

In this historical perspective it is not surprising that local church people in contemporary Drammen still recognise the quality of the secular welfare state. In one way one could say that they want the welfare state to take full responsibility, but they see that there are unsatisfied needs to be met in the field of caring for frail elderly and children. Therefore the church has offered to engage in activities serving a

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<sup>76</sup> This is in correspondence with findings in a study of attitudes to the welfare state among power elites in Norwegian society (Gulbrandsen et al. 2002). The study shows that the church elite (as defined in the study), more than other elites, is in favour of a large public welfare sector (see also Repstad 2004).

<sup>77</sup> Knudsen 1995.

supplementary function in certain fields of care work. In this way, church people's approach to the public welfare system may be seen as a continuation of a very old and also a very important tradition in Scandinavian story of health care and social work. In so doing the church confirms that the public sector is supposed to take care of everyone, and it is approved of and supported by the church.

### **Role of the church**

There is no ambiguity in the perception of whether the church has a role to play in the welfare and well-being of people in the local community. But there is a surprisingly big difference as to why the church should play a role in the welfare and the well-being. As commented above and in the following, it often seems as if the importance of welfare provided by the church is not only that the amount of welfare in itself will increase, but that the welfare is provided by the church. By church representatives in Drammen, diaconal work is associated with "a way to meet people":

We can do many peculiar things in the community, but if we do meet people in a proper way, most of the other activities become meaningless. The whole of man is in the centre, having the best life possible. (f)

As church, we cannot disclaim all responsibility and leave it to the municipality. We, as Christians, have a responsibility. (f)

This is an interesting approach which is shared by a group of interviewees. The most interesting aspect of the approach is that it makes it more difficult to talk only of the church as welfare provider. The more elaborated interpretation of a welfare providing church or community is that of a church or community that simply takes care of people. The principle of charity or solidarity is more obvious than the term "welfare provider" suggests. This is a view shared by many interviewees, no matter their different position in community or in the municipality:

The church is to be where the needy are. (f, m)

The comments to the question above are of course also valid for this question. On the one hand, one can analyse the different opinions and motivations according to sociological theory. Kramer's functional categories are one way of doing it, and are used in the following regarding the voluntary work in the welfare state. But to have a more complete picture one has also to combine such perspectives with the more general observation that the welfare work is church-based. The importance of church-based work is not first of all that the work is profiled as missionary work. Some of the church interviewees mention this aspect, but they are not in majority. The tendency is more in the direction of granting the church a specific responsibility for taking care of all humans. Without it, the church's profile is not good enough.

Jesus was advocating for the defenceless, the weak, the outsiders ... We do not find a strong critique towards the Romans in Jesus, but there is a tendency in the message, a tendency towards the poor. Today the challenges come from the poor immigrants, from asylum seekers. (m)

Within this context one sees that perceptions about “the role of the church” varied among the interviewees. Taken together, the answers include types of contributions that may easily be subsumed under the categories of the functions of voluntary organisations in the welfare state as Kramer<sup>78</sup> has constructed them. Several interviewees mentioned the vanguard role as a traditional role of the church which is still relevant in today’s welfare situation.

I think that the role of the local church is related to traditional church activities. To me it seems more important to improve the public welfare system. The church may serve as a vanguard. This [...] would be the calling of the church. Then the public authorities may take over at a later stage. (m)

The value guardian role is emphasised in different ways. The church has something to offer through its view of the person, through having a keen eye on those who fall outside the welfare system. The church has a role to play as a watch dog to make sure no one is forgotten.

The church should be a prophetic voice in society. The church in Drammen is a bit toothless. [...] The church should speak up when priorities by the public authorities contribute to offending individuals. I attend Sunday services, but I feel the church should focus more on the public sphere. (m)

The service provider role has been touched upon earlier when describing the contributions of the church in current welfare provision in Drammen.

In situations when the [public] welfare system does not function optimally the church may show that it cares and attend to those who are being forgotten. This means a complementary role. (f)

The quotation may be interpreted to involve several of the functional categories of Kramer, not only the service provider role.

Doubts about this role are not explicitly voiced among the church-related interviewees. But the answers may be interpreted in a way that this role should not be taken for granted. As a service provider the church may serve various needs of its users. One of the interviewees put it this way:

I think that the most important contribution of the church in Drammen is to provide people with meaning and belonging. (m)

These functions may be taken care of by the church in its role as a service provider. On the other hand, it may be perceived a task for the church related to its mission in the world more generally. The most interesting aspect of this is the broader understanding of mission which comes from these answers. Mission is here not only, or almost not at all, the preaching of the gospel proper. Mission is conducted by practical actions, given the significance of ethical and ecclesiological signs.

This is, of course, most dominant in the interviews with the church representatives and not so much in the interviews with the public authorities. Their lack of

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<sup>78</sup> Kramer 1981.

knowledge of church-based activities is interesting in itself. But those few who knew about such activities, approved of them with most of the same motivation as the people representing the church. Here we see current examples of the left-wing Protestant tradition which we mentioned in the introduction on page 99. At a first glimpse, it seems paradoxical that both representatives of the church and the public authorities wanted strong social work in the church without at the same hinting at any form of decline in the municipality's responsibility for social work and health care, rather the opposite. The most fruitful way to understand this is within the context of Norwegian Protestantism. It is possible to combine adherence to the welfare state with a strong commitment to parish based social work.

### **Church and social work**

There are no doubts about the calling of the church to carry out practical social work. However, it is reasonable to interpret the answers to the questions about the role of the church within a framework where it was taken for granted that the public sector has the main responsibility for the provision of welfare services in the municipality.<sup>79</sup>

The interviewees do not specify certain types of practical social work in their reflections on the role of the church in welfare provision. A possible interpretation may be that they see no limits to the involvement of the church. In this connection it may be relevant to quote one of the respondents:

Every human being who is suffering concerns the church. (m)

On the other hand, the target groups most often mentioned are children and youth, elderly people, people with substance abuse problems, refugees, and immigrants. But the answers given to the questions about the role of the church in social work tend to be fairly general and do not go into detail about what or how.

Only one of the interviewees reflected with a critical perspective on the role of the church and the voluntary sector in the welfare state. One of the representatives of the church commented in an answer to the question about how to understand "welfare" and the welfare state that welfare is connected with citizens' rights. But, the respondent said:

There is, nevertheless, a discrepancy between theory and practice. As a church-based agent we move on a brink. We run the risk of ending up as nothing but operators compensating for society's betrayal [of the poor]. Therefore, we need to have two legs to stand on; we are obliged to help people in need, at the same time we must be outspoken about injustice. (m)

This brings us to the role of the local church in the public discourse on welfare.

### **The church in the public debate**

Should the Church contribute to the public debate on welfare issues? The answers to this question are unambiguous, and affirmative, among the church-related interviewees. A typical statement is represented in the quotation below:

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. p.104.

Yes, in principle the church should engage itself [in the public debate]. It should be active, speak up, be critical and creative. (m)

As they read, the answers convey an impression of enthusiasm about this role. It should be noted that the value guardian function most reasonably presupposes a willingness to take a critical position in the public discourse. It is interesting to notice this unambiguous attitude and to see it against the criticism raised by representatives of the public authorities that the church – when it comes to practice – tends to be silent and invisible. Some of the church-related interviewees claim that what we may call a spirit of co-operation may have blinded the church and made it overlook, disregard or play down circumstances worthy of criticism.

The interviewees appear to have only relatively vague ideas about how the church should contribute. The interpretation seems reasonable that in their response the interviewees have the use of mass media in mind. This is a way the leader of the CCM operates. He is frequently asked by the media to comment on topical political and ethical issues. A reading of the local press leaves the impression that he is almost the only audible voice of the church. The frequency with which he appears indicates that he is perceived as an important, i.e. relevant to the lives of the general public in Drammen, and reliable representative of the church.

In this context it is interesting to note that information collected from the church representatives also included indirect information on how public authorities made use of the church (selected church representatives) as their voice in matters of welfare where they did not have the possibility themselves to give public voice to their views. Cases were mentioned where welfare workers in the church had been contacted and provided with information to be used in the public debate on welfare issues in Drammen. For the church – or church representatives – to be entrusted with such a mission it/they has/have to have a record of performance, either through the message communicated in words or the message communicated in practical commitment. It demands visibility. In this way, a person inspiring confidence may do so as much in her/his personal capacity as in the capacity as a representative of the church.

The phenomenon itself, that public employees turn to people outside the administrative system and even to media to complain about a situation, on ethical grounds, when they feel they are not heard within the system or do not dare to raise the issue in question inside the system for fear of repercussions, is well known and is often termed “whistle blowing”.<sup>80</sup> While church representatives may not often be confided in for such purposes, local politicians are more often entrusted with relevant information.

### **Changes in the past ten years**

The church-related respondents do not have a clear view of such changes that have taken place in the role of the church over the past decade, or whether a change has taken place or not. Perhaps the following view is representative for the group:

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<sup>80</sup> There is a growing body of literature on the phenomenon, related to business (and public sector) ethics. See e.g. Alford 2001; Fisher & Lovell 2003.

I believe people listen less to the church today than they used to, and they know less about the church. (f)

This statement together with other statements may indicate a view of the church that it is perceived as one agent on the religious and ethical scene among many, as less integrated in the state. Among the perceived changes mentioned by the interviewees are the following: The foundation for a co-operation between school and church has become weaker, the church has become a more central partner in the public preparation for big accidents or crises, and the former bishop of Oslo<sup>81</sup> contributed significantly to increase the perceived relevance of the church in matters pertaining to the inclusiveness of the church in the Norwegian society, to ethical and political considerations in international relations and the like.

### **Wishes for change in the church**

A common denominator seems to be the wish to make the church more relevant, more visible and active in society, that it be conceived as more “inclusive”. One of the interviewees expressed it this way:

My wish is that people see it as natural to contact the church when in need, that the threshold is lower, that the church is more visible, is more out there where people are, is more offensive. (f)

The statement catches many of the statements expressed by the interviewees. By some the CCM is named as an example to follow for others in the church. Some relate their wishes that in the future to the church be more grounded in the word of the Bible; others relate their wishes for a more flexible church organisation; some emphasise the competence on and the use of mass media as a strategy.

### **Significance of gender**

The gender dimension appears in mainly two ways in the interviews, in the question of the distribution of men and women in various formal positions in the church, and in the structure of the roles, the activities and the tasks related to church work and practical diaconia. Most of the interviewees that have something to say about gender aspects agree that the majority of volunteers in the church are women. But they are also aware that the proportion of women is lower in higher ranked positions. Some (women) consider this situation a challenge; others (men) do not consider it a problem. There is no disagreement among the interviewees that equality of gender is an important issue, but opinions vary as to its urgency. The view seems to be shared by all that equality of gender has been brought a big step further over the past decades.

In a more structural way gender equalities and differences are expressed in the structure of welfare activities, in the expectations directed to men and women in various positions, and in the character of the activities organised by the parishes. The structural aspects of gender are – and have traditionally been – acknowledged as seen in the fact that in some of the parishes separate activities are arranged for men and women, implying e.g. that men’s groups and women’s groups are different in content, and on the basis of a presupposition that for some purposes it will be easier

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<sup>81</sup> He resigned from office on 1 March 2005 as he had reached retirement age.

for men and for women to relate only to persons of the same gender. On the other hand, some of the types of activities organised by the parishes seem to be gender biased by their names, even though they in principle are gender neutral, like when gatherings for parents (fathers included!) and young children in many cases are referred to as gatherings for mothers and young children (“mor–barn-treff”).<sup>82</sup> It is not “unnatural” to do so, since, in practice, those in the family who take care of the very young children are usually the mothers.<sup>83</sup> In some of the parishes these types of arrangements are termed baby gatherings to make them more gender neutral.

Several interviewees consider many of the traditional forms of voluntary welfare activities organised by parishes to appeal more to women than to men as volunteers, like groups for the bereaved, visiting service, and other traditional household oriented activities. But gender roles are changing, and more men participate in such activities today than was the case some years ago. A deacon put it this way:

[The tasks for the volunteers] are most suitable for women, I think. There is much coffee making, baking, kitchen service, and visiting service. Only women are involved in it [in our parish]. Men are not interested, and women may be more social. Diaconal activities are care work; typically women things. (f)

This statement may be taken to be a description of a situation which is changing and which is not representative of all parishes or all church-related interviewees in Drammen. A somewhat different view was expressed this way:

I am impressed when I have seen that males and females are not very specific about what kinds of tasks they engage in. They do what they are told, and males engage themselves in all kinds of tasks. [...] It has become more natural for males to participate in more traditional household oriented activities. [...] But females still make up the majority. (f)

A male interviewee expressed a view on the structural aspects of parish voluntary activities partly in opposition to the statements expressed in the last quotation:

I don't think it has been the tradition to ask people what they would like to do and what their abilities are, and adapt [their tasks] accordingly. [To a greater extent than men,] women are brought up to be obedient, to do what they are told, to take responsibility and to feel a sense of duty. It has been easier for them [than for men] to adapt to what has been worked out for them in advance. (m)

The statements cited above point to some structural aspects of traditional types of welfare activities in the parishes and the roles of volunteers, and these aspects have been related to more or less traditional gender roles. To some extent there seems to be a mismatch between parish activities and the traditional male role. But implicitly

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<sup>82</sup> See e.g. activities mentioned on p.102.

<sup>83</sup> In the Scandinavian countries (paid, wage related) parental leave has been introduced as an extension of (paid) maternity leave. In this way preconditions have been established for both parents to be involved in the care of very young children. But fathers turned out to be more reluctant than mothers to take parental leave. As a response, a certain period of (non-transferable) leave has been reserved for fathers. This “daddy leave” has proved popular among fathers. The “daddy leave” has gradually established a new norm for being a good father (Leira 2002).

at least, the interviewees notice that changes are taking place, in particular with regard to gender roles. What is less evident in the interviews is that even the structure of voluntary work and its organisation, at least at a societal level, is changing, e.g. in the direction of adapting tasks more explicitly to the preferences of the volunteers in the way it is indicated in the last quotation above.<sup>84</sup>

The structural aspects of gender mentioned above may – at least partly – explain the gender distribution in church-based welfare activities. Another, more general, factor that may influence this distribution is the difference in life expectancy between men and women. For persons born around 1945, women in Buskerud county, where Drammen is located, may expect to live until 83.5 years while life expectancy for men of the same age is 79.5 years.<sup>85</sup> This tendency is clear in the population distribution figure on p.91. It means that there is a tendency that females make up the largest group of both care givers and care receivers. This general tendency is most likely valid in church-based care as well, be it formal or informal care. Also on a national level females make up the largest group of formal and informal care givers and of receivers of formal care provided by the municipalities.<sup>86</sup>

## Views held by the population

### Welfare

“Safety” and “security” would be catch words to summarise the views presented on what welfare is about, by those that participated in the group interviews. The responses cover economic, social and psychological dimensions, both “welfare” in the sense of having access to resources, and “wellbeing” as an emotional state. The range of responses is wide. The term “welfare” is quite frequently associated with the economic transfers (institutionalised in the National Insurance Scheme) and services provided by the public welfare system, the welfare state, especially health and social services. Socially, welfare is e.g. associated with a feeling of safety when walking the streets of Drammen, not having to fear assaults of any sort. Welfare is also associated with predictability, that is, in cases of emergency, because of unemployment, disease or accident, one can rely on public schemes for support in such situations of distress. Several respondents in particular relate welfare to the existence of schemes to support and care for the most needy in society.

Two other perspectives on welfare may also be included in the analysis of the responses, integration and self-determination or self-fulfilment. One may interpret the responses both ways. The support offered by the welfare state may be seen as an expression of societal integration and a precondition for self-fulfilment. But this may have a special meaning to those whose social and cultural integration in society is not taken for granted. Among such groups are ethnic minorities. In the group interview with representatives of the Turkish minority in Drammen the issue of (societal) integration is explicitly a matter of welfare as they define it. In this context the following associations to the term “welfare” are given significance:

<sup>84</sup> See e.g. Byrådet i Oslo 2002; Wollbæk, Selle & Lorentzen 2000.

<sup>85</sup> Statistics Norway 2003: Life expectancy calculator  
<http://www.ssb.no/kommuner/forventet.cgi>.

<sup>86</sup> Vikan 2001.

Welfare is [...] to be integrated and in place. (m)

[I associate welfare with] Norwegian language courses. (f)

To include this group of citizens in the study helps epitomise certain aspects of welfare in Drammen which are more hidden or only indirectly addressed in the other group interviews.

### **Function of the local welfare system**

There is agreement in the groups that the welfare system works fairly well but with important weaknesses. To the extent that causal or circumstantial factors in Drammen are emphasised the main factor is scarce public finances. As an immediate response, most group participants tend to come up with deficiencies when asked how well the public welfare system functioned. This pattern may reasonably be explained by the logic of mass media. It may partly be described by twisting the old saying that “no news is good news”. In our context it would rather be “good news is no news”. What tend to be exposed by the media are first and foremost events of a “negative” value, crises, accidents, crime, misbehaviour, dissatisfaction, and the like.<sup>87</sup> On the other hand, several participants relate this more general view to personal experiences of shortcomings in the public welfare system, either in their role as users or family of users, or in the role as employees or acquaintances of employees.

The criticism may also be related to the high level of expectations directed to the welfare state.<sup>88</sup> It has been stated that the welfare state faces two main challenges to its legitimacy, failure and success. Success breeds new and higher expectations and, thus, paves the way for “failure at a more advanced level”, so to speak. Accordingly, in case there is talk about a crisis in the welfare state, this has been characterised as a crisis with regard to expectations as much as anything else.

The current situation in Drammen is characterised, according to the group participants, by insufficient financial resources, with impacts especially in the health and care sector, as the situation was perceived by the respondents. Shortcomings in the care for the frail elderly, people with mental illnesses or handicaps, due to shortage of staff are most frequently mentioned. Primary health care is among the services explicitly mentioned as well functioning among ethnic Norwegians. On the other hand, this seems to be less satisfactory as experiences were communicated by representatives of ethnic minorities. They distinguish between the function of the local primary services and the specialised health services. As regards the former they report experiences which they interpret as ethnic discrimination, but also slowness. The latter functions well, to their unambiguous satisfaction.

But the challenges of cultural diversity are in particular epitomised in the care for the frail elderly. The two main challenges mentioned by the respondents are language barriers and other related cultural differences, e.g. food and eating habits.<sup>89</sup> In the Turkish group a wish for a Turkish nursing home is expressed with at least improved recruitment of staff with relevant cultural (language and religion) back-

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<sup>87</sup> Mathiesen 2002; Shoemaker & Reese 1996.

<sup>88</sup> See e.g. Kalberg 1993.

<sup>89</sup> See e.g. Austveg 1994.

ground in ordinary inpatient care for the elderly.<sup>90</sup> This has been expressed as a challenge to the public sector in Norway as a whole, to increase recruitment to higher education and the welfare professions of people with ethnic minority background. Today recruitment to jobs in the health and care sector of people (predominantly females) of minority background, primarily involves persons without professional qualifications or only semi-skilled people.

### **Role of the church**

No one questions that the church has a role to play in the welfare and well-being of people in Drammen – and more generally, in Norwegian society. More specific thoughts about the role were more difficult to catch. Generally, the impression is that few thoughts had been given to the issue in advance of the interview. Most often, respondents talk about the role of the church in connection with the more general question of the role of the voluntary sector in welfare society, and they tend not to assign a particular role for the church. However, the religious character of the church made some participants problematise a possible role for the church as the main provider of welfare services in any area of welfare provision which is, in principal, the responsibility of the welfare state.

More common is the view that an important function of the voluntary sector – and the church – is the vanguard role.<sup>91</sup> The opinion is stated and supported that, historically, without this function of the voluntary sector many welfare activities, currently financed and/or run by the public, would not have been established. It seemed to be more or less taken for granted that it is in the order of things that structures and activities initiated by the voluntary sector and the church, later will be taken over by the public sector. A reasonable explanation for this way of thinking is that it represents the social-democratic welfare model which is (still) the leading ideology of how welfare provision should be organised in Norwegian society.

Concerning the specific role of the church in welfare provision, it should be mentioned that in all groups, part of the welfare activities in which the church is engaged is characterised as commitment to those on the fringes of society, “helping the helpless”. This is especially associated with the work of the CCM.

### **Church and social work**

In accordance with what has been written above there is no questioning of whether the church should carry out practical social work. It seems to be taken for granted that it is legitimate for the church to do so. Generally, the members of the interview groups do not express any particular views on what kinds of work the church ought to give special attention or priority to. But if we use the fields of work where current church-based engagement are approved of as an indicator, the explicitly mentioned areas of welfare activity are care for the elderly, the young, and substance abusers.

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<sup>90</sup> This issue has been the focus of several private and public reports during the last couple of years. Wishes and needs of elderly people of ethnic minorities in Oslo has been studied and reported by the local voluntary branches of the Church City Mission and the Norwegian People's Aid (“Norsk Folkehjelp”) (Magnussen & Johannesson 2005). On a national level resources and needs of the municipalities with regard to the same groups of people have recently been systematically mapped and reported (Ingebretsen & Romøren 2005).

<sup>91</sup> Kramer 1981.

In one of the groups the functional relationship between the public sector and the voluntary sector – including the church – is given special attention, the care for substance abusers. The assessment made by participants is that a shift in the distribution of practical functions between the two sectors seems to take place:

The voluntary sector more and more takes on what is the responsibility of the municipality, even though it is not intended to be so, e.g. in the care for substance abusers. (f)  
[...]

We [the voluntary sector] should not take over the functions of the municipality, but we should reveal the needs. Later the municipality is supposed to take over. But that is not the way things work. It works the other way. (m)

In this particular case the reference made to the “voluntary sector” includes the church, even primarily so. The statement is put forward in the context of the question of, more generally, the role of the voluntary sector and the church in the welfare system in Drammen. It may possibly epitomise the embrace of the voluntary sector in welfare provision which has been a trend in Norwegian public policy rhetoric the last couple of decades. As an ideology and a policy this “welfare mix”<sup>92</sup> has been less important in Norway than in many other European countries and more pronounced on the national than the local level. A possible shift in the practical relevance of the combination of public and voluntary (private) in Drammen is not expressed so explicitly in any of the other interviews. We have not had the chance to go deeper into the question of the validity of the statement. Nevertheless, it is interesting that it is stated as clearly as it is in the group, and that the shift is connected to the care of substance abusers, which is the care for a social category with a position on the fringes of society, more so than frail elderly, children and young people in general. The statement met with no opposition in the group.<sup>93</sup>

In one of the interviews participants refer to local co-operation between church-based agents and a voluntary organisation and terms on which the co-operation is based. Among the basic principles of the voluntary organisation is the principle of religious neutrality. According to the information provided, the discussions in the group of partners in co-operation concluded that practical work should be based on religious neutrality. Such terms of reference are also likely to govern co-operation between church-based actors and municipal agencies in the field of welfare.<sup>94</sup>

By some of the respondents the church is described as having the potential to fulfil a need in its position as a religious organisation. The function mentioned is that of what in church terms might be called spiritual counselling. By some of the participants it is described as something “in between a priest and a psychologist”. They understand this as a need which is not easily fulfilled by other types of agencies. The function may be seen as pertaining to the question of meaning in life.

The responses are reasonably interpreted as an expression of a more general view that the church – as well as other agents in the voluntary sector – is welcome to

<sup>92</sup> The mix of public and private welfare provision, see e.g. Pestoff 1995; Wærness 1998.

<sup>93</sup> It is worth noting that church-based agents are in control of half the in-patient capacity in this area of care work in Norway, as a contrast to their quantitative significance in other parts of the health and social care sector (Angell 2004).

<sup>94</sup> See e.g. Sagatun 1998.

engage where there are needs to be met. The church, in particular, has a role to play both as a provider of welfare services with a supplementary function,<sup>95</sup> what we may call a secular role, and a particular role in its capacity as a religious organisation, a religious or spiritual role.

### **The church in the public debate**

Public opinion, as it is recorded in the group interviews, had it that the church has a legitimate role to play in the public discourse on welfare. However, it is a general impression among the respondents that the church has been rather passive in this role. It is argued that the church has a role to play and a contribution to make on the basis of its values. By some of the respondents this is related to the need for the church to make it more visible in society in general and in the local community.

### **Changes in the past ten years**

The group participants do not seem to have a clear perception of the role of the church in a 10 year perspective and possible changes during the period. There is a more or less unanimous view that that role of the church in society has become weaker. Emphasis is put on the adaptation of church to changes elsewhere in society. An impression is communicated that the church has become more liberal in its orientation, less judgmental, more tolerant, perhaps with an exception for issues related to homosexuality. This change seems to be appreciated by the respondents. It means that the church has become, in a sense, more open.<sup>96</sup>

### **Wishes for change in the church**

This question was not posed in the group interviews. But some opinions were raised, with relevance to the question, during the discussion of other issues. In this way, what is described in this paragraph may be of little significance due to lack of representativity in the population at large. In one of the groups attention is given to the role of the church in the general socialisation process in Norwegian society and in Drammen. The participants express the unambiguous attitude that they would like the church to get a more central role in young people's lives.<sup>97</sup> They think young people are more "religiously confused" in contemporary society than they used to be when the church had a stronger position in society. They consider the confirmation rite and preparation phase to be important and wish for the church to put more energy into developing its confirmation programmes and its contact with teenagers and school children. These views may be seen in connection with the overall significance of "safety" and "security in the group discussions"<sup>98</sup> on welfare. The opinions referred to in this paragraph may be interpreted in the context of existential security<sup>99</sup> and wellbeing, concerning how people struggle with the challenge of funda-

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<sup>95</sup> Kramer 1981.

<sup>96</sup> Compare this with the issues of "openness" or "closedness", "exclusiveness" or "inclusiveness" on p.114.

<sup>97</sup> The age of the participants in the group ranged between 25 and 40, and they were half males, half females.

<sup>98</sup> See p.123.

<sup>99</sup> As the human attempt to make sense of this world, i.e. in the psychological meaning of the concept. The concept is used with different meanings in social science. Another use of the

mental human insecurity and uncertainty e.g. within the context of globalisation, how they attempt to make sense of the world and to find their place in it, in relation to family, community, society and the wider cosmos (the transcendent dimension) through processes of meaning and signification.

### **Significance of gender**

The issue of gender in church-based welfare work was not raised in the group interviews for the same reason as it was not raised in the interviews with the public authorities.<sup>100</sup> No relevant information came up during the interviews.

### **The role of the CCM**

If one combines the tendency to see the church's responsibility for every suffering human creature with the positive attitude towards the welfare state, one gets a deeper understanding of why almost all the interviewees agree on a remarkably positive evaluation of the CCM project. In a quantitative context, the activities of the CCM are few and limited in scope, even if they do contribute to the caring of people with substance abuse problems. But still, the organisation is regarded with great respect, both by church representatives and others. It is interesting to formulate the hypothesis that the CCM in Drammen in one way has developed further the specific left-wing Protestant tradition in Drammen, but adapted to a post-modern society. Elaboration of the hypothesis and its testing would require more information material than it has been possible to collect in this limited study. But there are tendencies in the material which are interesting in this connection.

One interviewee with a lifelong trade unionist (Railway union) background was asked:

“Do you want the church to do health care and social work?” The answer, of an almost symbolic character, is:

I am a little divided. ... If the church is to do it, it must be without any conditions. The church must not choose to give help to one person and not to another. This is very important, and I am not sure if the church is able to live up to it. (m)

From one point of view this person reflects the ambiguity towards church-based social work. Based on the principle of mercy and not on the principle of justice, it gives only to the “chosen” and leaves the others to the municipality. The trade unionist does not trust the church and is anxious that it still keeps to the principle of mercy. But implicitly, from another point of view, the trade unionist says that if the church steps out of its tradition and develops the unconditional social work, then he would approve of it.

It is more than possible that this is an interpretation on the basis of which the massive support expressed in favour of the quantitatively small CCM should be understood and reflected on.<sup>101</sup> Unconditional social work seems to be a basic value,

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term is to capture physical and material security (see e.g. Norris & Inglehart 2004), analogous to Allardt's “to have” dimension of welfare.

<sup>100</sup> See p.115.

<sup>101</sup> See also p.112.

both for the support of the welfare state and for the support of the continued faith-based social work and health care. This may be why so many interviewees approve of the CCM in Drammen. It is seen as a concrete symbol of the much approved unconditional social work. And this principle is not a principle limited to what is going on in the church. We may suspect that even the municipality is lacking something in this respect. The quotations on pp.104 and 119, with reference to the leader of the CCM, are once more relevant, here in an extended version:

Every human being, independent of his or her economic situation, has the right to food, shelter and education. There is, nevertheless, a discrepancy between theory and practice. As a church-based agent we move on a brink. We run the risk of ending up as nothing but operators compensating for society's betrayal [of the poor]. Therefore, we need to have two legs to stand on; we are obliged to help people in need, at the same time we must be outspoken about injustice. I am a columnist in the local paper every fourth week. We must confront the authorities. We must use the media and our political contacts. (m)

The aim of the CCM is to give unconditional help and to force the municipality to do the same. In sum, the CCM is more engaged in unconditional assistance than in the question of the ownership of the social work agency. If it is church-based and unconditional, it is good. If it is run by the municipality and is unconditional, it is also good. We see then a common view, shared by both the trade unionist and the leader of the CCM. They have in this context the same engagement towards the so called "unworthy needy". To be on the side of the unworthy needy seems more important than the ideological motivation for it.

In this way the CCM develops the egalitarian tendency which characterizes both the social democratic movement and the Haugian, left-wing Protestantism. Both types have been traditionally strong in Drammen, and both see the CCM as their symbol of renewal. But the interesting thing is that this hope of renewal is not a hope that the welfare municipality in Drammen shall be reduced in its scope and size, in favour of the icon the CCM. This would be a misled conclusion. A more interesting conclusion is that the CCM represents a challenge both for the church parish and the welfare municipality. Both are urged to take a stronger stand for the people on the margins, and both want the caring for the people on the margins to be of high ethical quality. The challenge for both is to develop more of what Alasdair MacIntyre calls "social practice".<sup>102</sup> This is a practice aiming at the good life for everyone in a practical context where the tendency to technological instrumentality is reduced and the tendency towards recognition of the lifestyle of the neighbour is increased. This may be called an interesting local sign of the late modern Lutheran ethics of vocation.

## Sociological analysis

The information material is limited and it is difficult to know whether possible differences observed in the material are systematic in the sense that they reflect corresponding patterns in the interview population, or by chance. Upon inspection, it

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<sup>102</sup> MacIntyre 1981.

seems that the response pattern is a bit different between males and females. On the other hand, there is a systematic difference in the position held by males and females in the church and the public system respectively. A tentative interpretation of the response patterns may be that the approach to the concept of welfare is contingent on the position of the respondent. Those who are close to recipients of welfare services tend to perceive welfare more in terms of provision of certain goods and services, while those further away from “street”, tend to approach welfare in more general terms. Interpreted this way, the understanding of welfare may be said to reflect the life and work contexts of the subjects. In this respect no (systematic) differences were observed between those affiliated with the public sector and church representatives.

With regard to the role of the church in the public sphere, as a voice in the public debate on welfare issues, the opinions of the public authorities and the church representatives are similar. With one exception, the CCM, the church appears to be fairly silent. With regard to the role of the church, in the sense of the expectations from the church, the view that the church ought to be more active, more voiced in the public debate, is widespread among all groups of non-church interviewees. It is reasonable to interpret this as a support of the idea of deliberative democracy<sup>103</sup> in which all kinds of participants in the local community are welcomed in the public debate in order for political decisions to be made on a better informed foundation.

But again, with the exception of the leader of the CCM, the church representatives themselves are less clear on what the role of the church should be. This lack of clarity may have various reasons. First, the leader of the CCM holds another type of position than do most of the other church representatives interviewed. A leader of an organisation has as a mandate to work to the benefit of the members or the users of the organisation. In this way, the scope of the CCM is narrower than that of a parish organisation. The latter, by definition, “belongs” to all its members, irrespective of social and societal position and political orientation. Consequently, representatives of the parish organisation may feel it improper to involve themselves in political debates for fear of excluding proponents of a position opposite to that of the organisation or its representatives, i.e. having people feel excluded on grounds which are far beyond the core of the identity of the organisation. A similar explanation may be that church representatives hesitate because they fear they would be taken as representatives of the church on issues where they feel they would not legitimately represent the church and its members. Other possible explanations may be that church representatives integrated in the formal church structure may socially be integrated in networks of loyalty or interests that may make it difficult for them to stand up with a critical voice. This may be combined with the view that political discourse belongs to the political system, and that church people should channel their political engagement accordingly. These issues have been debated in the church several times over the years. Basically, it may also be connected with classic Lutheran theology, which emphasises welfare, health and social security as the domain of the state.

What has been written above about the church in the public debate places the church as one organisation among many, equal to other organisations in society.

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<sup>103</sup> See e.g. Eriksen & Weigård 2003.

Further analysis of how the church is conceived of as an organisation requires a more nuanced description.

The extent to which the church is described as of the same sort or different from other organisations in society with respect to its welfare functions seems to depend on the position of the interviewee and function in question. The representatives of the church, generally, think of the church and its functions both in secular and religious terms, something which has been discussed thoroughly in the report. The religious character of the church and its significance within the welfare context is also focused on, especially among the “general public” in the group interviews. We have pointed out in discussing the role of the church in the public debate that the basic ideas and values of the church may bestow a special role on it. On the other hand, the voice of the church in public space is approved of by many interviewees with no distinction between the significance of the possible contributions of the church and other organisations, as in the context of deliberative democracy. With regard to the role of the church in welfare service provision, the same ambiguity is expressed: on one hand, the church is perceived along with other voluntary organisations; on the other hand, the religious character of the church implies a special role for the church. This ambiguity is expressed by interviewees representing the church, the public authorities and the “general public” in the group interviews. The special character of the church in some cases brought forward a certain scepticism concerning its excluding effects. The reverse side of this worry is expressed by some as an emphasis that the church be “open” and inclusive, that their care be for every one.

## Theological analysis

The reflection above might also explain why more of an identity interest was seen when it came to how the church thought about its own welfare contributions. As mentioned above, there was a tendency to be more interested in the church-based work as an identity factor in the development of the profile of the church, than as work with only secular welfare importance. One can think that church people were more interested in the ecclesiological aspects of the church-based welfare, because they tended to be more interested in public welfare provision. Public welfare is of highest importance and should be approved. When the church still has to engage in provision of welfare, the ecclesiological aspect is more important than the amount of work done from a secular perspective. The reason may be that when the church has to involve in welfare activities, even if it was the primary task of the public authorities, the most engaging aspect was the profiling of the church through a welfare initiative.

In this way the material from Drammen confirmed the thinking of Wendland.<sup>104</sup> Wendland argued in favour of a diaconia turning itself outside, towards society. The diaconal work in Drammen corresponded to this way of thinking. At the same time the Drammen material also supported the Lutheran diaconal thinking of Wyller,<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Starnitzke 1996 p.51.

<sup>105</sup> Wyller 2000.

giving preference to the diaconal work as a work building the welfare state, and not primarily as an effort to build the church proper.

On the other hand, the material did not altogether confirm those two positions. The tendency to regard the importance of the diaconal work more as a work profiling the church than a work contributing to the welfare state is interesting. One might be tempted to call this a more narcissistic tendency, but this interpretation would not do justice to the information material. The fact was that also church people approved of their contributions to the common welfare among elderly and children. Therefore, it would be more correct to say that the information material opened up for a two-fold conclusion. On the one hand it showed a typical Lutheran position, contributing to the building of the welfare municipality. On the other hand, the church people approved of the building of the welfare municipality as a contribution to the building of the church profile. This seems to be the “double strategy” demonstrated in the Drammen material.

This conclusion, however, must be revised when we also take notice of CCM’s activities. In the CCM context the “double strategy” is of another kind. Both from the perspective of the people in the municipality and from the perspective of church people (in the parishes and in other Christian organisations), the CCM is different. It is no doubt a complementary contribution to the welfare community, while most of the community work for elderly or children is supplementary. The tendency in the material is to interpret the CCM as an organisation which performs a more unique and important contribution, both from an ecclesiological and a sociological perspective. The contribution of the parishes is a contribution to a general public welfare, which also could have been done by the welfare municipality. But the CCM, according to the interviewees, does something which the welfare municipality does not do, and perhaps would not do even if it had the possibility. Here, then, is a competing tendency in the material. Instead of being the traditional supplementary contribution to the more or less prosperous welfare community, the CCM criticizes the municipality, and at the same time, the church also. This is confirmed by the material showing the leader of the CCM as the only really active participant in the local media from the side of the church. Most of his media activity consists of critical comments to the different local tendencies in the municipality, especially the standard and number of institutions for drug-addicted people. One might coin this “an alternative double strategy”.

The first “double strategy” was the tendency to look at parish based social work as a supplementary function on the one hand, but as community profiling on the other hand. In the case of the CCM the strategy is still double, but here the complementary role is dominating. The CCM does something which the municipality would not do, but the work is done in such a way that one sees the more true church in the practical work of the CCM. This leads to a very complex and interesting perspective of a new way of diaconal work in the Scandinavian countries. This is the work which reforms the welfare state and the church at the same time. The paradox is that there are still no hints in the material saying that the CCM does things which the municipality should not do. On the contrary, the CCM does things which the municipality does not do and perhaps will not do. But this does not mean that the CCM people hope that the municipality people will stop doing it for good. The CCM criticises the municipality for not being good enough, while waiting for the

municipality to recover, they do the work themselves. So there is no support for the hypothesis that we see a new tendency: the church as a positive new, alternative welfare provider. The CCM uses the situation and performs professional, well done work among people with abuse problems. Most of all it urges the municipality to care. At the same time a new picture of a more inclusive and church in solidarity is painted. This leads to the conclusion that in both versions of the “double strategy” the church’s positive approach to the welfare state is confirmed.

The analysis of motives has been conducted above. In this paragraph we prefer to reflect a little on what the motives and church-based welfare in Drammen mean. From our point of view the understanding of the “motives” etc. needs a broader theological context to be communicated and fruitful. One basic result of the Drammen research is that welfare for elderly and children are the two areas where the parishes are most frequently active. The activity is appreciated by the municipality, even if the municipality is either surprisingly ignorant of the community activities or sometimes also reluctant to accept a broader initiative from the community. Still the impression is that church-based work for elderly and children is well grounded in the tradition in Drammen. It is not something which has been developed recently. This is work conducted through many decades, especially the work for elderly. On the other hand, the interviewees also show that the welfare state has massive support also from the community people. There is a dominant opinion that the main responsibility for all weak groups shall be taken by the municipality. If the community acts, it is most of all taking a supplementary role (p.108).

This is a situation which urges for a theological comment, even if it transcends the question of “theological motives”. One could generally say that the findings in Drammen correspond to a more general picture of the relationship between church-based practice and social and health care practice paid by the municipality or the government. In the last generations church leaders and leaders of diaconal institutions have been positive to the welfare state and the universalistic conception of it which one finds in Norway. There have, of course, been critical voices like bishop Berggrav in the early 1950s, but generally speaking the tendency has been a dominant positive attitude towards the welfare state.

“A serving church does the good deeds it has learnt walking in the footsteps of Jesus.”<sup>106</sup> It is to devote its life and resources to the service of people, to charity and justice. It is a task for the church to understand the world from the position of the weak, insecure, and hungry. For the Church of Norway diaconia is the “body language” of the church, necessary to maintain its credibility in society. Love and care are consequences of the gospel. Among the special challenges in contemporary society the strategic plan mentioned to safeguard the dignity of every human being. This requires people who commit themselves to fight injustice and oppression, who dare to speak up and who are willing to take responsibility. Among other things, this means that the church is to be a critical voice in society at all levels. “In all this, the church must seek partners in co-operation among all good forces in the local community and the larger society.” As we have already noted the church in Drammen was not experienced as a critical voice except for the CCM.

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<sup>106</sup> Strategic plan for the Church of Norway 2002–2005.

## Gender analysis

The areas of religion and care are traditionally women's spaces. This is thought to apply to both informal and formal care and to lay religion. Religious professionals have traditionally been male, but the male dominance is gradually being reduced.<sup>107</sup> It is clear that the majority of users of e.g. outpatient care services are women.<sup>108</sup> On the other hand, studies on informal care giving in Norway are not conclusive with respect to differences between women and men. Some studies show that women provide more informal care than men; others indicate that gender differences are negligible.<sup>109</sup>

Changes in gender roles, especially since the end of the 1960s, may, in their social and cultural consequences, be said to represent some of the most basic changes taking place in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>110</sup> Gender differences in the local church structure in some respects parallel those of the larger society, in other respects less so. We have noted that male priests make up the majority in Drammen as do female deacons. In the lay structure females dominate. There are more female than male parish council leaders and members. As noted, the lay structure has provided a space for women within the church to exert leadership and power.

Aspects of gender within the church were only explicitly focused on in the interviews with church representatives. Both gender differences and gendered structural features in the welfare activities of the local church are acknowledged. Some (women) consider this a challenge; some (women and men) do not. Gendering processes in society as a whole make separation of men's activities and women's activities in some cases useful, like in the case of the so-called "Velferden" where men gather to engage in what is supposed to appeal more to men than women. But this gendered structure may be seen in a generational perspective and reflect traditional male and female roles. If that is the case we may expect that such kinds of institutions as the "Velferden" may not have any particular function to serve for future generations and that parish diaconia will be less gender structured or gender structured in new ways. Because even though gender roles have changed considerably it does not mean that male and female social roles in the future will become identical.

The question of the extent to which local, organised diaconia may be considered gendered in its structure is not so easily answered by the interviewees. On one hand it is agreed that many activities concern what is traditionally the domain of women either as they belong to the household sphere, or in the form of taking care of more affective functions as in the visiting service.<sup>111</sup> In this way there has to some extent been a mismatch between the distribution of men and women in the parishes and the structure of the voluntary activities offered to the parishioners to engage in. On the other hand changing gender roles in society have implied that men and women e.g. share more of the reproductive functions in the family than they used to do. In society as a whole, men spend more time on household activities than before while

<sup>107</sup> See e.g. Angell 2004.

<sup>108</sup> Helsetilsynet 2003.

<sup>109</sup> See e.g. Kitterød 1996.

<sup>110</sup> Frønes & Brusdal 2000.

<sup>111</sup> The traditional gender roles and the ensuing distribution of tasks at the parish level are well described in Kirkerådet 1979. For a comparable analysis of the role of women in the labour market see e.g. Skærbæk (2003).

women spend less time.<sup>112</sup> In the church the interviewees claim that men increasingly take part in activities traditionally associated with the household and with women. In this way corresponding change processes seem to be going on in society and church.

The interviews left the impression that the interviewees were not always “happy” to talk about such issues. In some of the interviews we experienced a tacit resistance, what was felt as an unwillingness to talk about and reflect on the situation in the church or in the parish. The unwillingness was not related to gender in the sense that if there was a difference at all between female and male interviewees women were less prepared to involve themselves in critical reflection on the current situation and recent changes than men. None of the interviewees considered the current situation in Drammen a particular problem or challenge though there seemed to be generally acknowledged that women make up the majority of volunteers in the church and in the parishes in Drammen. To the extent that differences between the roles of men and women were acknowledged in the field of care and voluntary activities in the parishes, the impression was conveyed that things are changing and that men and women are becoming more equal in what they do as volunteers. None of the interviewees disagreed that gender equality in the church is an important goal. But they did not seem to assess the situation in Drammen in such a way that it demands urgent action. It seemed to be a shared view that gender equality in the church has been brought a big step forward over the past decades. The lack of engagement in gender equality issues today may be seen as a consequence of the more or less parallel development in the church and the rest of society. In this way the interviewees may have felt that the church has little to be ashamed of in this respect, that they do not experience that the church is lagging behind compared with the changes taking place in society as a whole in the direction of gender equality. Obviously the issue of gender equality had not been a topic of reflection and discussion in the parishes or the deanery for a long time. On the national level, the study of Norwegian power elites<sup>113</sup> shows that the church elite does not distinguish itself favourably in the support of pre-specified measures to promote gender equality in the church. Church leaders, together with leaders of the military defence sector, tend to be more willing to take measures to promote gender equality in other sectors of society than in their own. It turns out that this tendency among church leaders reflects attitudes of male leaders. Among female church leaders the pattern of attitudes is the opposite<sup>114</sup>

This difficulty in handling the issue of gender in the church in the interviews may in part be a consequence of the approach taken by the researchers in the interview situation. It may also be a consequence of relying solely on interviews in the data collection. Participant observation might, in a fruitful way have extended the basis of data collection and also created a more common frame of reference for the interviews, especially in a situation where the interviewees appeared not to be prepared to enter into a conversation on the subject. As the research was conducted in Drammen participant observation was not adopted as a method, mainly due to limited resources.

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<sup>112</sup> Statistics Norway web site [http://www.ssb.no/ola\\_kari/tidsbruk/](http://www.ssb.no/ola_kari/tidsbruk/)

<sup>113</sup> Gulbrandsen et al. 2002.

<sup>114</sup> See also Repstad 2004.

## Main findings and concluding reflections

As we have pointed out, one of the key words used by the interviewees in describing welfare was “security”. Another potential keyword, often associated with the purpose of the welfare system, is “freedom”. Self-fulfilment may be interpreted as related to freedom in its meaning, and many statements about welfare may be interpreted as a way to talk about self-fulfilment. This may be related to what Charles Taylor calls the ethical ideal of authenticity, which he sees as a central aspect of individualism in modern society. In this connection, welfare, as conceived by the interviewees, may be interpreted as a resource concept, as referring to the “secure basis” on which self-fulfilment may be struggled for.<sup>115</sup> One of the main findings is that it is seen as a task for the state at various levels to secure this resource basis on which individuals may fulfil themselves, not least for those who are not capable of providing enough of or the right types of resources and, consequently, are at risk to become marginalised or excluded. Even though the idea of welfare pluralism may have become influential in the public discourse on welfare as part of the ideology of the new liberalism, the new public management, in welfare provision this idea so far seem to have gained little foothold in the minds of the public authorities and the church representatives in Drammen. The church representatives support more or less unanimously the primacy of the public sector in welfare provision. On the other hand, with a church willing to support the legitimacy and the primacy of the public sector, the public authorities showed little knowledge of and interest in the church as a complementary or supplementary provider. Though some interviewees emphasised the importance of other welfare providers to complement or supplement the public efforts, and the church among them, the situation on the ground seems different. The impression was left that a closer cooperation between the public sector and the church depends on the church’s initiatives. For the church, not least in Drammen, the dominant theological tradition is conducive to a supportive attitude to the primacy of the state in the field of welfare provision.

For obvious reasons the role of the church in welfare may be related to the wider question of the role of religion in contemporary society. In line with Niklas Luhmann Peter Beyer sees modernisation and globalisation as involving processes that relativise particularistic identities and marginalise religious communication.<sup>116</sup> According to many theorists of modernity, and Luhmann among them, a central feature of modernisation is what we may call institutional differentiation and secularisation, i.e. the autonomy of the functionally differentiated societal subsystems, especially from the influence of religion.<sup>117</sup>

The way the subsystem relates to society as a whole, which has to do with what Luhmann calls function, is to be distinguished from the way the subsystem relates to other subsystems, which Luhmann analyses in terms of performance. For religious function more specifically refers to what organisational theorists call the system’s

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<sup>115</sup> The sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman has paid much attention to the *tension* between security and freedom in the welfare state, see e.g. Bauman 2000. From the answers to the question about welfare, it seems that the majority of the interviewees are more concerned with security than freedom. As a consequence, the tension between them was not made topical in this context.

<sup>116</sup> Beyer 1994.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Casanova’s three dimensions of secularisation (Casanova 1994).

domain, i.e. the basis for its autonomy in society. Performance, on the other hand, involves communication of religion's service for other subsystems, how religion may contribute to mitigating or solving problems created in other, non-religious or secular, subsystems but not solved there. Performance is thus the applied version of religion, its relevance for the "profane aspects of life".<sup>118</sup>

A theoretical proposition in this framework of sociological analysis is that the solution to a functional problem for religion is performance, i.e. to find applications of religion in order to counteract or re-establish the public influence of religion in society. This process is by some sociologists linked to what is termed "deprivatisation" referring to what is seen as the refusal of religious traditions to become privatised and marginalised, a position given them by sociologists of religion.<sup>119</sup> A relevant question will then be how the church's contribution to welfare in Drammen may be analysed in terms of performance and how to interpret performance in this case.

How does the church perform through its welfare activities? Generally, the Lutheran context is relevant since we may claim that Lutheran ideology or theology contributed to institutional secularisation through the doctrine of the two kingdoms, whereby state (and science as well as other institutions) is granted autonomy from the church as opposed to the doctrines of the medieval European theology. The privatisation of religion may be taken as a premise in this context, thus religion is threatened with marginalisation despite the status of the church as a state church.<sup>120</sup>

The information collected shows that the church commands resources that are considered relevant to the state. Relevance in this case must also include legitimacy in the sense that even though the church may command (aspects of) resources which are considered relevant to the service of solving problems created in other subsystems, application of these resources may nevertheless be considered illegitimate by those that might benefit from the use of the services. This issue has been of clear relevance in recent history of Norwegian social policy. The information provided shows that services offered by the church are considered both relevant and legitimate in the welfare state. Thus, within a communication frame of reference, the church's provision of welfare represents performance.<sup>121</sup> The activities of the church as analysed in terms of Kramer's categories, may be interpreted as accommodated to the operation of other functional subsystems which are served through the welfare activities, the autonomy of the church in these matters is conditioned by the co-operation in which the church is involved. In a communication perspective, the church has to adapt to the requirements and modes of operation of the other subsystems to serve these subsystems. As Luhmann points out, the performance may, through the interchange with and adaptation to the operations of other subsystems, run into trouble and tensions with the function relationship. However, as remarked above, in a Lutheran context, this may be less likely than in the context of other religious traditions. Since, then, function and performance are not to be identified, and may not easily be brought smoothly into operational harmony, it is uncertain whether the performance contributes to strengthening the function of religion, or the

<sup>118</sup> Luhmann 1982.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. e.g. Casanova 1994.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Luhmann terms this performance for other subsystems "*Diakonie*" (Luhmann 1982 p.58).

public influence of the church or of religion, in Casanova's terms. More directly this also applies to performance in the form of the church's involvement in the public discourse.

With the perspective of Casanova, we may take the interesting fact of the central position of the leader of the CCM in the local mass media as a starting point and ask to what extent his central position may be interpreted in terms of public influence of the church or religion in Drammen. Taken at face value the role of the leader in local media may be seen as a potential source of considerable public influence for an actor representing both the CCM as a church-based organisation and the church in a wider sense. However, the interview with the political editor of the local newspaper contributed to modifying this interpretation. The role of the leader of the CCM is connected with the view that he represents more general ethical values, values which are considered to be shared by people at large, irrespective of religious orientation, values that the newspaper finds it worthwhile supporting and promoting. The role of the leader of the CCM in the local media, thus, seems to have little to do with his religious affiliation. On the other hand, since the leader represents a church based organisation, and since it may be difficult to distinguish this very small organisation of the CCM from its leader, as agency the leader's role in the local media points to the public role of the church in the community. Through the public role of the leader of the CCM religion takes on a public role.

In the introduction to his book on religion and globalisation, Peter Beyer poses the question: if people of a certain religious tradition achieve higher social status within a social system, will not the religious tradition associated with this group of people rise correspondingly? His answer is no, or not necessarily. Beyer's contention is that modernisation in the form of globalisation involves processes that relativise particularistic identities and marginalise religious communication, as already noted (p.136). As a preliminary analytical approach to the data at hand, Luhmann's and Beyer's theory of religion in late-modern society seem fruitful. Combined with Casanova's analysis of religion we may conclude that even though religion takes on a public role through the public actions of religious agents and the actions gain support and increase the legitimacy and the public status of the organisation, this does not mean a strengthening of religion in society in terms of increased support for and adherence to the basic religious tenets, that which may be associated with the term function in Luhmann's theory.

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# The Finnish Lutheran Church as an Agent of Welfare – the case of Lahti

ANNE BIRGITTA YEUNG

## Methods and Materials

The Finnish case study is based mainly on church documents, a survey and interviews with the individuals working in the local church and those working in local municipal welfare services, as well as group interviews with the local public.<sup>1</sup> All in all, the Finnish case study includes the following categories of material:

Table 1. Categories of data in the Finnish case study.

CATEGORY OF DATA	N
background interviews	7
survey data on church employees	100
person-to-person interviews	41
group interviews	6
observation of groups discussion event	3
going through local church documents and year books	(2000–2005)
going through the newspaper archives of the parish union	(1985–2005)

Of the 41 person-to-person interviews, 29 were conducted with church representatives (four elected officials, 25 employees), ten with municipal authorities, and two with other experts (one in social policy research – including Lahti<sup>2</sup> – and one on gender research<sup>3</sup>).

The Finnish face-to-face and focus group interview guides were planned to be as simple as possible, in order to allow natural discussion. This approach also seemed to work well in data collection. Although the subject-matter of the group interviews followed the seven common WREP questions closely, they were somewhat more detailed, and the subject of church buildings has been added. All the face-to-face interviews and most of the group interviews have been both taped and fully transcribed.

<sup>1</sup> In addition to the WREP colleagues, I am grateful for the discussions I have had on this report with Leena Tervonen-Goncalves, Eila Helander, and Raija Pyykkö.

<sup>2</sup> Professor Antti Karisto, interviewed in 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Eeva Raevaara, a researcher, interviewed in 2005.

## Background survey

Before conducting the interviews, I conducted a background survey among all Lahti parish union employees in order to establish preliminary answers to the core WREP project questions and to recruit interviewees. In the planning meetings and consultations with the church authorities (including a background interview with six of the highest representatives of church welfare work and administration in February 2004), a clear majority considered that the research should be directed to the paid staff of the church, not the elected officials.

The survey was posted in March 2004 to 343 people. Altogether, 100 people answered the survey (29.2 percent). Priests and youth workers, for instance, were not eager to answer the survey. Social workers and family counsellors, however, were much more active. Out of all the 100 respondents as many as 56 (56 percent) responded affirmatively to the invitation to be interviewed, as indicated by the following table:

Table 2. Lahti parish union worker survey.

Questionnaires ( <i>N sent</i> )	Returned		To be interviewed?		
	( <i>N</i> )	(%)	<i>NO</i>	<i>YES (N)</i>	<i>YES (%)</i>
priests (37)	9	24.3	3	6	67
pastoral counselling (4)	3	75.0	1	2	67
family counselling (6)	5	83.3	0	5	100
musicians (11)	2	18.2	0	2	100
social workers (35) <sup>4</sup>	20	57.1	7	13	65
youth workers (21)	3	14.3	2	1	66
child workers (66)	26	39.3	14	12	54
administration (51)	14	27.5	6	8	57
graveyard personnel (41)	5	12.2	2	3	60
estate personnel (71)	13	18.3	9	4	32
<i>Total 343</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>29.2</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>56</i>

## Interviews with representatives of the church and municipality

I began the interviews first by assembling the data on the church representatives. The actual interviewees were selected according to their appointment and gender from the church survey respondents who had expressed their willingness to participate. Age had not been covered in the survey, and was thus not used as a criterion. In the selection of the interview respondents, the emphasis was on appointment and field (welfare and theological work) as well as position of authority. The intention was to cover all four Lahti parishes, both from their vicar's and social worker's viewpoint.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> In this entire text, I use the concept of "church social work" and "church welfare work", as well as "social welfare work of the church", interchangeably to refer to the church's social and welfare services (diaconal work, in Finnish, *diakoniatyö*) and "[church] social worker" to refer to its paid staff (in Finnish *diakoni*, *diakonissa*, and *diakoniatyöntekijä*).

<sup>5</sup> In this report, the concept "vicar" is used to refer to priests with leadership responsibilities (*kirkkoherra* in Finnish). In Lahti, as elsewhere in Finland, there is always one vicar in each parish.

The number of church or other interviewees was not decided beforehand, but the data collection was continued till sufficiently various, even saturated, answers were obtained. All in all, 25 paid church worker representatives were interviewed, most being church social workers or counsellors (seventeen interviewees), or priests and vicars (six interviewees). I also interviewed the administrative manager of the Lahti parish union. In addition, one estate person was included among the interviewees as a result of providing exceptionally lengthy and interesting questionnaire answers. The gender distribution of the interviewees was almost equal. Their age range also turned out to be considerable, both female and male interviewees ranging from 20–30 years to 50–60 and in between.

I also interviewed four elected officials of the church although they had not been included in the survey of church representatives. The elected officials became my interviewees through the snowballing technique; I met them at such occasions as the public value discussions or church training sessions where I introduced this research project. The elected officials interviewed included three women and one man, ranging in age from their 30s to 60s.

After collecting some Lahti information (such as municipal and church documents) and conducting a few of the church representative interviews, I began to plan and concentrate on the municipal interview data collection. These interviewees were not very easy to find, locate and contact. The Lahti municipality has undergone massive and thoroughgoing organisational and administrative changes recently. This created three challenges in particular: 1) the church representatives did not always know the names of their present co-operators, 2) not even the municipality representatives always seemed to know the relevant people to contact; that is, the snowballing technique was not easy to use, and 3) the municipal representatives seemed stressed and exhausted by all the extra work with the organisational changes – added to the present economic challenges – which may have effected their overall willingness to participate. Four of the public authorities, a doctor-administrator, head of the office of welfare and health (short, ad hoc interview conducted later on), the director of finance, and the director of day care never replied or replied negatively to my interview appeals.

The municipal interviewees were selected primarily according to their appointment (emphasising social work and, specifically, position of authority). The ten municipal interviewees came to include directors and project managers in education and culture, social services, specialised social services, health care, and services for the elderly. They also include two social workers specializing in services for immigrants. Altogether, seven of the public authorities interviewed were women, three men. Their age ranged from the 30s to 50s.

I first contacted all the interviewees, both church and municipal representatives, by phone or e-mail. I offered all the church representatives the possibility of conducting the interview either at their offices or in a general meeting room of the church administration building. Both were used. The municipality representatives all invited me to their offices. The average length of the interviews was little more than an hour.

I constructed the Finnish interview guides based on the seven common WREP questions. However, I added more detail to each of the seven subject areas. For instance:

□ *In your view, what is the role of the church in the welfare of Lahti?*

Is this role relevant and good?

What are its motives and rationale?

How should it differ from municipal and other work?

What are its priorities and challenges?

Which worker groups are represented?

What are the gender differences?

What areas should the church not be involved in?

What is the role of other churches?

□ *Does the church in Lahti take part in public discussions and debates?*

How? What are the welfare themes?

Should its role change?

What about the national church?

What are the most important issues?

Are there either gender or equality issues?

I included also questions concerning the societal role of church buildings and their possible relation to norm and value promotion. I also added more analytical, searching questions about whether the increased Finnish church social work indicates strengthening or weakening of the church institution. Altogether, the approach that I chose for the Finnish interviews is closer to the thematic interview approach, not a list of precise questions.

I have offered all the interviewees the opportunity to remain anonymous. Four, mostly church social workers, have preferred to do so.

## Group interviews

I conducted and participated in nine group discussions, six of which were focus group interviews and three larger, more general group discussion events, as in the following table:

Focus groups 1 and 5 relate to each other; I visited this existing group of elderly men, and they liked the topic so much that we organised further discussion, for which the men also wanted to prepare little presentations beforehand. Some people are in both groups. Focus groups 3, 4, and 6 were also existing groups I visited. However, group 2 was invited by me and the project manager of *Takatasku*. These people consist of individuals at this *Takatasku* meeting point (meeting point and centre for potentially marginalised individuals).

All in all, the focus groups were chosen according to age (especially the group of the elderly, 6, and to some extent groups 1 and 5) and gender (especially male groups 1 and 5, and women's group 4). Furthermore, the women's group (4) represents immigrants particularly. The *Takatasku* group presents a variety of people: men and women, the elderly and youth. This group also mostly includes potentially marginalised people.

Table 3. Group interviews.

FOCUS GROUPS	SIZE (appr.)
1. The “Red rotary” male group	10
2. Takatasku centre, a mixed group	9
3. A group of students at Lahti Polytechnic, Faculty of Social and Health Care	23
4. The “Mamuset martat” women’s group	7
5. The “Red rotary” male group	5
6. The Joutjärvi parish, the church’s club for the elderly	25
GENERAL GROUP DISCUSSION EVENTS	
1. Strategy day discussion, Lahti parish welfare work	40
2. The “Value seminar” on health, public discussion	150
3. The “Value seminar” on social welfare	100

I participated in planning general group discussion event 3. This group discussion, together with group discussion public 2, represents an interesting series of public discussions (from January 2004) initiated by the church representatives; they invited local people, public authorities, and church representatives to have a public discussion on the values and well-being of Lahti. Group discussion event 1 was part of a planning seminar on welfare work. Participants consisted of church welfare workers, volunteers, and elected officials. One of the topics of the group work and shared discussion arose from the preliminary research findings I presented at the beginning of the day’s working session.

All the focus group discussions were taped and notes made, and only notes made of the general group discussions.

## Evaluation of methods and material

As a whole, the data was surprisingly varied and rich. Specifically, the church interviews have been lengthy and diverse – very interesting data indeed. No specific issues on the local/national religious or other media appeared to affect either the data or the interviewees’ willingness to participate.

However, the response rate of the parish survey was disappointingly low, the priests and vicars particularly so (24.2 percent). We have since thought, together with the head of church social work (*diakoniajohtaja*), that the motivation letter for the survey should probably have been signed by the vicars, not the recently appointed administrative manager. I have tried to compensate for this by more interviews with the church representatives, including interviews with all vicars.

One crucial point is that I started to collect the interview data with the church representatives, at which point I encountered an intriguing conceptual challenge. The Finnish concept of *hyvinvointi* – which I used in all the church interviews – is actually much closer to the “well-being” concept. Even the concept of the “welfare state” has been translated into Finnish (*hyvinvointivaltio*) as “well-being state” which is actually a translation error. In Finnish we actually lack the specific concept of welfare separate from “well-being”, which would emphasise social benefit and

social security. Research-wise, this actually makes the Finnish case quite interesting as the concept of well-being *per se* does not refer to its agents or to public structures. The same concepts have been used in the municipal and public opinion interviews as well.

## The town of Lahti

Lahti is located in Southern Finland, 104 kilometres from Helsinki, the capital of Finland. The population has climbed from around 3000 in the nineteenth century to almost 100,000 (98,132 in 2003), making it the seventh largest city in Finland. Lahti is the regional capital of the *Päijät-Häme* region, which has a population of ca. 222,000. The medieval church of Hollola bears witness to the long history of a large parish in the Lahti area, but there were already settlements in the area at least 9,000 years ago. Lahti is a young city of entrepreneurship. Rapid industrialisation began in the 1870s in the wake of rail connections, the Vääksy waterway and a lake harbour. The population grew particularly during the 1960s and 1970s (65,210 in 1960, 94,864 in 1975).<sup>6</sup> During the late 1990s and between 2000 and 2002 the population grew by approximately 500 a year.<sup>7</sup>

Lahti has industrial traditions, particularly in carpentry, and now has a diversified industrial structure. The private business sector has always played an important part in the economy, with a remarkably small percentage of jobs in the public sector. For instance, only 6.3 percent of the sources of livelihood in 2004, was in education, social and health care services.<sup>8</sup>

In 2004, almost half of the sources of livelihood (44 percent) were in the whole-sale and retail trade or other services for business life. Almost a fifth of sources of livelihood (19.1 percent) were in construction. Altogether, small and medium-sized enterprises make up the largest percentage of businesses, and 15 percent of the workforce is entrepreneurs. The city is still the centre of the Finnish furniture industry, while the service sector and high technology companies are growing in importance. Industry and construction employ about 35 percent of the working population and services 64 percent. Flexible subcontracting is an important resource of the Lahti business sector. Design, quality and environmental technology are the main sectors attracting development and investment. Most new jobs are in the service sector. The location of Lahti is logistically advantageous, 1.5 million people living within 100 km of the city. The Helsinki-St. Petersburg railway passes through the centre and the new motorway link to Helsinki makes Lahti easy to reach.<sup>9</sup>

The majority of the employees of the Lahti municipality consist of social and health care workers:

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<sup>6</sup> Lahti, status and area, population and development 2004; Lahti 2005.

<sup>7</sup> *Lahten kaupunki, talousarvio 2004 ja taloussuunnitelma 2004–2006*, 7.

<sup>8</sup> Lahti, status and area, population and development 2004; Lahti 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Lahti, status and area, population and development 2004; Lahti 2005.

Table 4. Lahti city corporation personnel (1 January 2005).<sup>10</sup>

	Permanent staff	Employed personnel paid by the month	Employed personnel paid by the hour	Overall total	%
General administration	30	106	-	136	3.0
Social and health services	328	2094	-	2,422	53.4
Cultural and educational services	709	504	68	1,281	28.2
Technical and environmental services	78	138	-	216	4.8
Real estate services (business enterprise)	3	10	59	72	1.6
City real estate administration and maintenance	7	29	-	36	0.8
Food services	2	124	-	216	4.8
Cleaning services	1	124	29	154	3.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,158</b>	<b>3,219</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>4,533</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The Lahti Region Educational Consortium, providing education for about 10,000 full-time students, includes the Lahti Polytechnic and several colleges and vocational institutes. Units of Helsinki University and other universities of technology in addition to the Päijät-Häme Summer University provide tertiary level courses in Lahti, but no higher-level academic institution (university or equivalent) is located in Lahti. This is partly the reason why the education and the income levels of Lahti inhabitants are below that of the average Finn.<sup>11</sup>

Lahti offers events all around the year. For instance, every year the Lahti Ski Games attract the best Nordic ski athletes and tens of thousands of spectators to the Salpausselkä ridge competition. Opportunities for exercise and recreation are excellent throughout the year.<sup>12</sup>

The Lahti town council has recently (2000–2003) been dominated by social democrats (20 seats in the municipal election in 2000), and second, the coalition party (17 seats). In the recent election (October 2004) the same parties dominated, the social democrats increasing their seats by one (33.3 percent) and the coalition party maintaining their representation (30 percent). The present city government (2005–2006) has 12 seats, half of which are held by women. Interestingly, a crucial election

<sup>10</sup> In 2002 the proportions of social and health services were very similar at 53.9 percent. Lahti, administration 2005; Lahti, finance 2004; Lahti, administration 2005.

<sup>11</sup> *Lahten kaupunki, talousarvio 2004 ja taloussuunnitelma 2004–2006*, 7–8.

<sup>12</sup> Lahti, status and area, population and development 2004.

theme (2004) for the social democrats was maintaining the services produced by the municipalities themselves, not by outsourcing to the private sector.<sup>13</sup> All the parties defended the welfare role of the church, as elsewhere in Finland.<sup>14</sup>

The following table illustrates the Lahti city corporation expenses and income by main sectors (in 2002):<sup>15</sup>

Table 5. Lahti city corporation expenditure and income.

	Expenses, € million	Income, € million
General administration	23.5	11.8
Law enforcement	12.6	6.5
Social and health services	219.9	27.9
Education services	60.2	2.2
Culture and recreation services	29.7	5.1
Technical administration	30.6	31.6
Business enterprises	21.9	21.0

In 2004, the majority of the social and health services budget was spent on special hospital care (25 percent, 64.1 million €), special health care services (20 percent, 52.9 million €), local area social services (18 percent, 46.3 million €), children's day care (15 percent, 39.5 million €), and special services on social care (11 percent, 29.8 €). The last includes services for the handicapped (both mentally and physically handicapped) (58 percent), intoxicant addicts (10 percent), and immigrants (6 percent).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Lahti 2005; Lahti, administration 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Helander 2005. An example of nation-wide newspaper articles, e.g., "Majority parties agree" (Kotimaa 29.10.2004, title translated into English).

<sup>15</sup> Lahti, administration 2004; Lahti, finance 2004.

<sup>16</sup> *Toimintakertomus 2004*, 61–62.

The following table summarises the social and health care services of the Lahti municipality (in 2005):<sup>17</sup>

Table 6. Lahti city corporation social and health.

Social service centres	5	
Health centres	5	
Child welfare clinics	15	
School and student health care agencies	34	
Dental clinics	21	
	clients	visits
Child welfare clinic	6,196	20,007
School health care	15,597	39,438
Student health care	4,036	7,579
Family-planning clinic	5,192	8,339
Family clinic	1,880	10,942
Home help services for families with children	320	5,204
Youth reception	406	2,915
Child protection: open welfare	1,421	
Children and youth in family placement	362	
Households in receipt of subsistence subsidies	6,229	
Services for the disabled	2,738	
New immigrants	93	
Special care for the mentally handicapped:	434	
Non-institutional services for the elderly		
households	2,151	
visits	265,343	
service housing	367	
in receipt of home health care subsidies, over 65 yrs.	359	

Overall, the municipal social welfare and health service expenditure<sup>18</sup> is among the lowest among larger Finnish towns. This is particularly so in special health care and

<sup>17</sup> Lahti, social and health services 2004. No specific changes have affected earlier figures (the source reporting the figure for 2002).

<sup>18</sup> In Finnish, *sosiaali- ja terveydenhuolto*.

the care for the elderly. The social service costs<sup>19</sup> have, however, been a little above the national average. Lahti has been innovative in social and health care; the open public health care services<sup>20</sup> of the town centre were recently outsourced. This contract is budgeted at approximately €2 million. The official reports conclude that the model has started well.<sup>21</sup>

### Issues concerning welfare currently high on the agenda

The recession of the early 1990s had a substantial impact on the traditional industries in Lahti. During the height of the recession (1994), 26.8 percent of Lahti inhabitants were unemployed.<sup>22</sup> Even now unemployment remains higher than in Finland on average (14.7 percent in 2003, 10.3 percent in Finland). Furthermore, the portion of long-term unemployment in Lahti is above the Finnish average.

The “Future package 2004” of the Lahti municipality and other official documents underscore following challenges in particular:

- 1) The **economy** of Lahti faces serious problems. Meeting the economic objective approved by the Lahti city council (2003) would demand, at the minimum, boosting revenue by €20 million by the year 2005. This means a 5 percent increase in revenue and /or budget cuts. However, expenditure is in fact rising. The tax and state budget revenues are below the planned levels.
- 2) The average **age** is rising.
- 3) The **workforce** is decreasing.
- 4) **Unemployment** continues to rise: the prognosis for 12/2004 is 17 percent.
- 5) Concerning **health**, the inhabitants of Lahti suffer from depression more often than the average Finn. Men of the baby boom generation suffer more often from diseases such as diabetes than women.
- 6) **Open care** in social services and health care does not have sufficient resources.<sup>23</sup>

In fact, this pessimistic prognosis concerning unemployment has turned out not to be justified, unemployment in Lahti remaining at the same level (15 percent in 2004).<sup>24</sup> A particular challenge that does however remain is ageing, Lahti being one of the most rapidly ageing larger cities in Finland. According to the latest prognosis, the proportion of those over 65 years of age will rise from 16,684 in 2005 (total population 99,025) to 22,854 in 2005 (the total has risen only to 102,886) and to 25,527 in 2020 (total only 104,404).<sup>25</sup> Apart from care for the elderly, psychiatric care is considered one of the two top challenges in the future for social and health care services.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>19</sup> In Finnish, *sosiaalihuolto*.

<sup>20</sup> In Finnish *avoterveydenhuolto*.

<sup>21</sup> *Toimintakertomus 2004*, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Lahti, *tilastoja ja kalvoja 2005, Lahden työttömyysaste 1990–2004*.

<sup>23</sup> *Lahden kaupungin tulevaisuuspaketti 2004; Lahden kaupunki, talouden seurantaraportti 2004; Lahden kaupunki, talousarvio 2004 ja taloussuunnitelma 2004–2006*; Liukko 2004. Interestingly, the church and parishes are not even mentioned in these documents.

<sup>24</sup> Lahti, *tilastoja ja kalvoja 2005, Lahden työttömyysaste 1990–2004*.

<sup>25</sup> Lahti, *tilastoja ja kalvoja 2005, Lahden väestöennuste 2004*.

<sup>26</sup> *Toimintakertomus 2004*.

More specifically, the income level of the elderly people in Lahti – thus their future retirement allowance as well – is particularly low. In the future there may be more and more people in Lahti very dependent on the social welfare system. The municipality has recently invested in the issue of the elderly, coordinating an ongoing project on creating a well-being program for the elderly in the city.<sup>27</sup> This project is a good example of the welfare networks in Lahti, being directed by various municipal and third-sector actors, including the church. The project aims at innovative styles of co-operation in which the first stage was that each participant had to formulate their tasks and aims as well stipulate means of assessing these aims. Furthermore, the project will create a network and large chain of services for the elderly, the aim being to offer services at the beginning of the chain (that is, to focus on preventive help).

Lahti also has positive and innovative examples of municipal social and health care. There are new and indeed pioneering innovations such as the Santra Service call centre (*Palvelu Santra*), and the “District godparent” project. A few projects also build on previous EU-funded social projects, for instance, the “*Liipola social entrepreneurs*”, which has also extended to other cities.

Furthermore, one very interesting emphasis in the latest local documents on welfare and social and health care is the strategy of increasing mutual responsibility; the ideal that we do not need – or have sufficient money for – experts in everything in welfare and health. The head of social and health care services concludes that: “*In the future broader responsibility for welfare will move to local people and their communities. This is cultural and value-related change which aims to strengthen the willingness of local people to support and help each other when needed. Municipal social and health services will concentrate on their core functions in producing services that the local people will then complement with services they acquire themselves.*”<sup>28</sup> In the Finnish rhetoric of strong public welfare services (or as strong as possible), this view is indeed quite radical.

## Other nationalities and religions in Lahti

Lahti is a relatively international city. There are 2650 immigrants living in Lahti (31.12.2004), which makes 2.7 percent of the total local population (average 2.1 in Finland overall), the ninth largest among the Finnish municipalities. Although there are more women (1415) than men (1235) among the immigrants, the difference is not very marked. A substantial majority of Lahti’s immigrants (1189 persons) come from Russia but there are also many people from Estonia, Iraq, Sweden, the Ukraine, and Thailand (74–248 people from each, most from two first mentioned). Most immigrants coming to Lahti are returnees from Russia’s former Finnish areas; for instance, 103 people returned in 2004. Lahti has agreed to take 20 new refugees each year, most coming from Iraq and Iran. All in all, there are as many as 86 different

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<sup>27</sup> Material of the project: *Ikäihmisten hyvinvointiohjelma*, 2004; *Lahden kaupungin vanhusten palvelujen nykytilan kuvaus*, 2003. Also related material: *Ikäihmisten palveluopas*. 2004.

<sup>28</sup> *Toimintakertomus 2004*, 1; see also Liukko 2004.

nationalities living in Lahti today,<sup>29</sup> making it a relatively popular place of residence among the foreigners living in Finland.

No extreme racist or racism-related reactions have occurred in Lahti, at least such as would have attracted attention in the local or national media. The municipality offers a variety of services, as well as targeted projects for the benefit of immigrants. The services of the Lutheran church are also included in the official municipal reports.<sup>30</sup>

The majority of the population in Lahti is overwhelmingly Lutheran. Some Lutheran revival movements are also active in the Lahti area, one group of the Laestadian movement (*Esikoislestadiolaiset ry*) having their offices and main prayer room in Lahti.<sup>31</sup> The largest of the Finnish Laestadian movements, *Vanhoillislestadiolaiset*, (organised as *Rauhanyhdistys ry*) also has its own branch in Lahti (*Lahden Seudun Rauhanyhdistys ry*), with 400 members. No specifically Laestadian welfare service is organised in Lahti.<sup>32</sup> The Evangelical Lutheran *Kansanlähetys*-movement also has its regional headquarters in Lahti, organizing activities including youth work, men's and women's groups, most of which meet in Lahti parish union churches and premises. The evangelical revival movement, *Suomen Luterilainen Evankeliumiyhdistys*, also has a prayer room in Lahti, but runs no social services.<sup>33</sup>

The Free Church in Lahti (*Lahden Vapaaseurakunta*), with approximately 500 members, organises child and youth work and Scout activities, and maintains their own private day care. They also arrange some welfare work, especially for intoxicant addicts.<sup>34</sup>

There are also other smaller faith groups working in Lahti. For instance, Pentecostals organise various services in addition to religious services, such as children and youth work and international activities. Most of their social work, however, concerns street mission and prison work.<sup>35</sup> The Salvation Army organises both spiritual services and day care and halls of residence (housing) in Lahti.<sup>36</sup>

Lahti has also some activities arranged by the Orthodox Church,<sup>37</sup> Advent church, Baptists, Methodists, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses,<sup>38</sup> but none maintaining active social welfare services.

<sup>29</sup> Lahti, *tilastoja ja kalvoja* 2005, *Lahdessa asuvat ulkomaalaiset; Maahanmuuttajien kotouttamishjelman seurantaraportti* 2004, 2, 4; *Toimintakertomus* 2004, 49.

<sup>30</sup> *Maahanmuuttajien kotouttamishjelman seurantaraportti* 2004. The various projects include OSUMA (apprenticeship contract training for immigrants) funded by the EU's Euroopan Social Foundation, and LATU (various tasks, including fostering employment of immigrants and building co-operation with agents helping immigrants; project years 2000–2006), partly funded by EU as well as the Lahti parish union.

<sup>31</sup> *Esikoislestadiolaisuus* 2005.

<sup>32</sup> *Lahden Rauhanyhdistys ry* 2005.

<sup>33</sup> *Päijät-Hämeen Ev.lut. Kansanlähetys* 2005; *Suomen Luterilainen Evankeliumiyhdistys* 2005.

<sup>34</sup> *Lahden Vapaaseurakunta* 2005.

<sup>35</sup> *Lahden helluntaiseurakunta* 2005.

<sup>36</sup> *Pelastusarmeija* 2005; *Suomen Adventtikirkko* 2005.

<sup>37</sup> *Lahden ortodoksinen seurakunta* 2005.

<sup>38</sup> *Lahti, kirkot ja seurakunnat* 2005.

## Welfare issues high on the agenda in the local media

No very significant debates on welfare issues took place in the local media in 2004 and early spring 2005.<sup>39</sup> However, a few “hotter topics” relate to the theme of welfare, such as co-operation within the municipality, particularly together with the surrounding municipalities, and dissension and insufficient planning in this area have caused media discussion. Second, many of the municipal services, especially in health care, have been outsourced, and this has caused many critical comments in the local media. Third, the Lahti council has experienced internal power struggles, some of which have been even reported in the national media. The recently elected mayor, who was interviewed for this study, has attracted lot of criticism over spending policy. It seems, however, that greatest mistrust and disagreement is between him and a group of elected officials. This all may also, in part, reflect the overall changing administration structure.

All positive issues relating to welfare have been dealt also in the media. Lahti celebrates its centenary in 2005, and many events and other matters have been prepared and reported in the local media. Lahti seems to have had a reputation and image – perhaps also a self-image – of being a young town without a history. The anniversary may thus affect the entire local image positively.

There are also other positive future developments; a new, much quicker railroad to the capital area, to be completed in 2006, is being built. The phases of this project have eagerly been followed by the local media; the project is conceived as having an impact on the future of the entire Lahti area. Other future projects monitored by the media include the Lahti area network university project. And last, but not least, as Lahti has a positive reputation in Finland as a city of sport and athletes, the media follows their success and failure closely. Positive results are happily reported in the media – just like the local people interviewed for this study.

According to the interviewees of this study, the church and parishes and their social work were hardly visible at all in the Lahti media during this period (in 2004 and early spring 2005) of time. In one group discussion (with “Red Rotary” male group), in particular, we talked about this invisibility. A few concluded that the main local newspaper, *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, is not very pro-religion overall. However, it was also noted as positive that the church itself communicates and informs the public quite well about its activities, as it has its weekly newspaper. Furthermore, it was underscored that if the church keeps up its good work, it is not news. It might be reported only if something negative happens.

Overall, the church in Lahti has been visible in the main local media during past years approximately twice a month.<sup>40</sup> Most newspaper pieces on the church have

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<sup>39</sup> This section is based on reading, every now and then at least, the local newspaper *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, and the issues on the Lahti region in nation-wide media (especially *Helsingin Sanomat*). More specifically this section is based on the discussion with the local interviewees of this study. Furthermore, the local media discussions were one specific theme in one of the focus groups of this study: the second meeting with the “Red Rotary” male group.

<sup>40</sup> Haarasilta-Repo 2004, which offers a summary on the local newspaper articles concerning the Lahti church and parishes. The main local newspaper *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* published 27 items on the church in 2004 (24 in 2003, 58 in 2002). Additionally, the local smaller, freely

recently concerned burials and burial payments, church elections, and cultural church events. Looking at the local media coverage concerning the church activities over the longer haul (1990–2004) indicates that the statements by the bishops, church social work (specifically, activities for the unemployed and food banks), and volunteerism have also been hotter topics in the local media.<sup>41</sup>

## Local situation concerning gender

Overall I have the impression that there are no significant divergences from the national situation concerning gender. It must be noted however that information on gender was rather difficult to find. For instance, the official Lahti statistics, some of which have appeared in this chapter, make no information available on gender division. Furthermore, on the municipality web page ([www.lahti.fi](http://www.lahti.fi)) where lots of information and statistics is available, searches using words such as “equality” (*tasa-arvo*) or “women” (*naiset*) yield no relevant information.

The importance of the role of women as care providers may be more latent (both in Lahti and elsewhere), both in the home, at church, and in other welfare institutions and programmes. For instance, a majority of Lahti single-parent families are parented by women (3,395 families) in comparison to men (475).<sup>42</sup>

## The Lutheran church in Lahti

### General characteristics of the local majority church

The majority church under examination is the Evangelical Lutheran parish union of Lahti, to which 84.2 percent of Lahti inhabitants belonged in 2003. The Lahti parish union has 82,765 members altogether (in 2003) in its four parishes. The biggest is *Keski-Lahti* with 31,348 members (31,448 in 2002), followed by *Laune* 20,001 (20,105), *Joutjärvi* 16,210 members (16,426) and *Salpausselkä* 15,206 members (15,501). Membership rates decreased in 2003 in all four Lahti parishes; 1,060 members resigned from the church, whereas the figure was only 383 in 2002. During 2004 this decrease slowed down (more than in any other Finnish larger parish union, a decrease of 39 percent in resignation), but 648 members still resigned.<sup>43</sup> The main

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distributed newspapers have published 87 pieces on the church in in 2004 (60 in 2003, 84 in 2002). These numbers include even very short news sections.

<sup>41</sup> Examples of the newspaper articles (in English): “Bishop Voitto Huotari: Too much responsibility has been moved to the volunteer activities of the church” (ESS 28.5.2001); “Plans to roughly increase the burial fees have made Lahti inhabitants leave the church” (ESS 13.11.2003); “Parishes have increased their social assistance” (ESS 26.4.1999); “Food banks have already distributed 10,300 food parcels” (ESS 8.10.1999); “Bishop Juha Pihkala is worried; to forget the unemployed is a sin” (ESS 11.2.2000); “Tens of thousands see Via Dolorosa street play” (ESS 26.4.2000); “At a vantage point of helping work. The head of church social work knows his town” (ESS 22.10.2000); “Lahti parishes send their staff to meet the people” (ESS 14.2.1992). ESS refers to the main local newspaper *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*.

<sup>42</sup> Lahti, *tilastoja ja kalvoja* 2005, *perherakenne*.

<sup>43</sup> *Lahden seurakuntayhtymä, katsaus vuoden 2003 toimintaan* 2004; *Tasekirja* 2003; *Kirkkoon kuuluvien osuus laski* 2005.

motive for Lahti inhabitants to leave the church seems to do with the plans to increase fees for church services, specifically burial services.<sup>44</sup> The church is clearly expected to serve its members, to be a service institution.

The Lahti parish union church statistics are quite similar to those of the average Finnish parishes. Only 3 percent of members participate in the masses weekly.<sup>45</sup> However, as many as 97 percent of 15 year-olds took part in confirmation schools (in 2003). The following table covers some of the latest statistics of the Lahti parish union in 2004 (2003 and 2002):<sup>46</sup>

Table 7. Lahti parish union statistics / rites and participation.

<b>Church rites:</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2002</b>
* baptised	842	829	889
* married	344	312	299
* church burials	868	874	862
<b>Participation:</b>			
* all church meetings	248,465	240,062	230,211
* main Sunday masses	62,679	63,570	63,197
* other church services	73,049	66,998	68,039
* music occasions, concerts	34,896	35,497	34,424
* Via Dolorosa – Easter street play	25,000	30,000	(in 2001) 20,000
* Sunday schools	1,906	2,264	2,260
* open day clubs for children, participation on average	610	590	504
* confirmation schools for young people	889	881	846

As can be seen, the participation rates have remained at relatively stable levels in recent years. However, the Sunday schools have lost a good deal of participation while other church services (not main masses) have increased in popularity.

The main source of revenue for the Lahti parish union is taxes (both membership tax and community tax). The members of Lahti parish union pay 1.5 percent of their income as church tax. On average, each member gives support of €24 for the family and child activities of the church, €21 for general parish work, and €22 for church social work. Information services (€6.4), youth work (€15) and confirmation schools (€6), counselling (€4.5) as well as missionary work and international social work (€8) also get their share of the church tax. All in all, most of the parish union incomes are spent on estates and property (15 percent), administration, general parish work, and church social work (each 12 percent).<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> These plans were made exactly during 2003, and quickly reported widely in the local media. Even if the church cancelled its plans to increase the fees for burial in a drastic manner, the media damage had already taken place. Many people reacted by resigning from the church. This was the interpretation backed up by both the local media and the interviews of this study.

<sup>45</sup> *Toimintakertomus 2002*, 5.

<sup>46</sup> *Lahden seurakuntayhtymä, katsaus vuoden 2003 toimintaan*, 2004; *Tasekirja 2001*, 8; *Tasekirja 2004*, 2.

<sup>47</sup> *Lahden seurakuntayhtymä, katsaus vuoden 2003 toimintaan*, 2004; *Tasekirja 2001*, 6–7.

Beside tax revenue (82 percent in 2001), the Lahti parish union finances its activities with activity incomes (15 percent) and investment incomes (2 percent in 2001). The parish union has no debts. In 2003, the parish union budget was €18.9 million. In the same year the parish union received €0.6 million less taxes than in 2002 (altogether €15.3 million). Community taxes decreased by €336,000 (made up of €1,035 million). Thus, the financial year of 2003 produced a deficit of €142,889 worth.<sup>48</sup> In 2004 the taxes from members increased (with 2.7 percent).<sup>49</sup>

The parish union provided work for 351 paid employees in 2004 (in comparison, 362 in 2002 and 350 in 1999). Most of them (298 people) have a permanent job, and a considerable majority is women (250 persons, 71.2 percent, which is slightly higher than national average for church employees). The average age of the parish union employees is 46 years. More than half of the workers (55 percent) represent parish activities (including priests and church social workers), one in six (16 percent) church administration, and one in five (20 percent) services and property (in 2002). Another 9 percent of the employees work in graveyards and gardening. Lahti parish union overall has more paid staff (4.3 per 1000 members) than the average for the Church of Finland (3.5).<sup>50</sup>

The organisational structure of the Lahti parish union<sup>51</sup> is illustrated next:

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<sup>48</sup> *Lahden seurakuntayhtymä, katsaus vuoden 2003 toimintaan*, 2004; *Tasekirja* 2001, 6–7.

<sup>49</sup> *Tasekirja* 2004, 1.

<sup>50</sup> *Toimintakertomus* 2002, 7, 52; *Tasekirja* 2004, 11; *Kirkon tilastollinen vuosikirja* 2003.

<sup>51</sup> *Lahden seurakuntayhtymä, organisaatiokaavio* 2004.

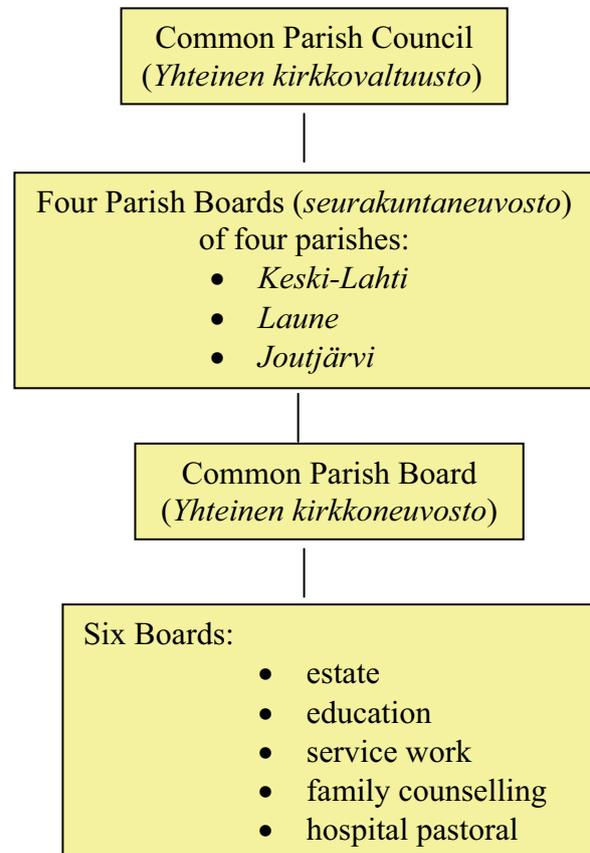


Figure 1. Lahti parish union organisation.

The main slogan for the Lahti parish union in its latest written documents is “bravely as a Christian – parish close to human beings”, and its core values are listed as love, holiness, mercy, openness, rightness, and responsibility. The core strategies of the parish union are summarised: 1) confession, connection, and mission, 2) serving, 3) education, and 4) resources, administration, and co-operation.<sup>52</sup> Both welfare work and a voice are clearly included in these visions, values and strategies, as will be more seen in more detail in what follows.

### The Church as social agent and opinion former

The Lahti parishes have a lengthy tradition of engaging in social work, in co-operation with the municipality and other organisations as well. The church social work of the union concentrated on six areas (listed in 2001):

- strengthening conversation and discussion, as well as counselling activities

<sup>52</sup> *Missio, Visio, Arvot ja Strategiat* 2004, 4–5.

- answering the challenges brought by work life and unemployment
- supporting volunteers
- identifying and uncovering worries and anxieties for individuals and societies as well as globally
- developing co-operation
- raising international responsibility.

The written core task (documented in 2004) of the Lahti parish union social work is to “promote Christian faith-based justice, participation, and neighbourly love in the lives of individuals and the society, as well as globally”.<sup>53</sup>

Social welfare work is strongly incorporated in the parish overall strategy of “serving”. The written documents summarise serving: “1) we help and support especially those whose distress is the strongest, and who are otherwise not helped, 2) we carry our common responsibility over the global Christian welfare work, and 3) we promote rightness and participation in everything.” These aims are very much in line with the national level documents on church social work. It also appears in Lahti documents, concerning the relation of worshipping and serving, that “serving, in its essence, starts from and returns to the divine service” (referring to masses).<sup>54</sup>

At present, Lahti church social work includes numerous activities ranging over fifteen fields listed in table 8:

Table 8. Lahti parish union welfare activities.

- |  |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) counselling and discussion<br/>(including also the “Serving Telephone” counselling<sup>55</sup>)</li> <li>2) mental health care and crisis work</li> <li>3) material helping (money, food, and other)</li> <li>4) work for the elderly</li> <li>5) activities for the unemployed (especially <i>Takatasku</i> centre)</li> <li>6) work with the handicapped</li> <li>7) activities for intoxicant over-users and criminals</li> <li>8) work with immigrants</li> <li>9) Mary’s Chamber volunteer centre and other volunteer activities (e.g., “substitute mothers”)</li> <li>10) activities for and together with the work places</li> <li>11) societal activities (e.g., nature protection program)</li> <li>12) recreation activities,</li> <li>13) fund raising (e.g., large annual and nation-wide <i>Yhteisvastuu</i> fundraising)</li> <li>14) international welfare work</li> <li>15) co-operation projects and research</li> </ol> |
|--|

At present, Lahti parish union and its parishes employ 36 staff in social welfare activities. All in all, a sizable majority of people involved in church welfare work, both paid and voluntary activities, is women. However, the person in the position of

<sup>53</sup> *Diakonia- ja yhteiskuntatyön toimintakertomus 2004*, 1.

<sup>54</sup> *Missio, Visio, Arvot ja Strategiat 2004*, 5, 8–9. The concept translated here as “global Christian welfare work” appears in the document in Finnish as “*maailmanlaajuinen diakonia*”.

<sup>55</sup> In Finnish, *Palveleva puhelin*.

authority is a man. Even if the number of paid staff is high, especially by international standards and national to some extent, the role of all parish members in serving is very much underscored in the written documents. “Serving is a matter of the entire congregation.”<sup>56</sup>

The abovementioned examples of church welfare activities are all active and quite visible, some more than others, in Lahti municipal life. Even if assessing the ‘importance’ of these activities is not a straightforward matter, it is clear that the church’s role is important and even crucial in some fields (e.g., crisis work, and work with the elderly) where the public sector offers less, activities or none. Furthermore, the activities of the local church, both welfare and other, are underscored during crises. For instance, during the tsunami crisis in late 2004, the churches opened their doors and premises, and offered various forms of counselling together with other professional agents.

The following table lists some examples of the statistics on the parish union welfare activities in 2003 (and 2002):

Table 9. Lahti parish union statistics / welfare activities.<sup>57</sup>

<b>Church social work activities:</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2001</b>
* client contacts	15,076	16,509	
* participants in recreation activities			2,357
* “substitute mother” volunteers work hours			6,004
* “Mary’s Chamber” ( <i>Marian Kammari</i> ) volunteers			309
* their visits to homes			5,852
* visits to “Maria’s Chamber”			10,686
* conversations in “Serving Telephone” counselling	1,927	2,683	3,152
* food parcels	5,860	7,039	7,300
* financial aid in euros	95,000	92,733	
* 15 flats and 12 support flats to rent			
In hospitals:			
*private conversations	2,221	2,028	
*piety hours	390	324	
*church rites	102	109	

The aims of the Lahti church social work have not all been met yet. For instance, the aim for client visits in 2001 was 18,000, yet only 16,385 were conducted. Overall, since the late 1990s, the total number of client visits has decreased. However, their number increased in 2004, as indicated by the following chart:

<sup>56</sup> Quotation from *Missio, Visio, Arvot ja Strategiat* 2004, 8. *Diakonia- ja yhteiskutnatyön toimintakertomus* 2004, 5. Of the 36 staff, 27 are church social workers (mostly permanent staff), three office personnel (permanent staff), and six working in projects or for a fixed term (e.g., a person hired for economic counselling for a few years, as well as kitchen and diaconal staff hired for the clubs for the elderly). All in all, the number of priests in Lahti parish union is only slightly higher than number of church social workers.

<sup>57</sup> *Toimintakertomus* 2002, 34–35.

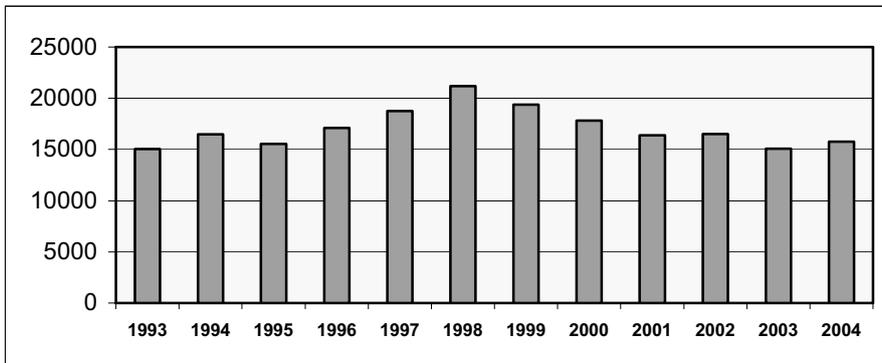


Figure 2. Lahti church social work client visits (1993–2004).

Even if the number of clients has been steadily decreasing for a few years, the church social workers in Lahti indicate that actually the problems of many of their clients have become increasingly difficult, as also applies to the national level statistics on church social welfare work. Furthermore, the main content of the client visits in Lahti has also altered: the importance of spiritual and faith-related topics, as well as human relations, have increased, while finance and budgeting have decreased. At the same time the amounts of material support have also decreased. The most important present challenges in Lahti church welfare work, going by the local documents, concern the activities with the immigrant, as well with the elderly and the intoxicant abusers.<sup>58</sup>

During the recession of the early 1990s, Lahti parish union was one (among other) of the most active and visible welfare promoters in Finland (both through helping behaviour, such as food banks, and through words, such as media visibility by the church social work personnel).<sup>59</sup> The Lahti parish union has also initiated innovative examples of well-being activities during recent years. For instance, much of the immigrant activity, specifically co-operation, has been initiated in Lahti by the church. The Lahti parishes developed an SMS counselling service for school children in 2002, which is currently spreading to other parish unions in Finland.<sup>60</sup> The parish union has also employed a church social worker focusing entirely on economic helping and assistance – very rare in Finland. Furthermore, Lahti parishes were the first in Finland to start to offer the services of priests and church social workers under the premises of municipal employment offices during the recession.<sup>61</sup> Some other Lahti innovations in church welfare work (e.g., day care club for the elderly) have also attracted national attention and even won a national prize for

<sup>58</sup> *Diakonia- ja yhteiskuntatyön toimintakertomus 2004*, 6, 9, 52–53. There are, overall, no corresponding statistics that would offer gender-related indications.

<sup>59</sup> E.g., material on food banks: Seppänen et al. [s.a.]; *Ruokapankkityöryhmän raportti ja kannanotto Lahdessa 21.4.1999*. Material on unemployment project: *Takastasku: Muuttuvan elämän monitoimikeskus Takastasku*, 2003; *Takastasku, toimintakertomus vuodelta 2003, 2004*.

<sup>60</sup> *Lahden seurakuntayhtymä, uutisia 2004*.

<sup>61</sup> Lahti parishes start to be on call in 1993.

church social work innovations (“*Diakonia-idea*”).<sup>62</sup> The head of Lahti social work has also been active both on local and national media in discussing issues such as social marginalisation. Altogether, the activities of Lahti church social work can be considered as a significant shaper of public opinion, particularly on the issues of altruism and care.

Lahti parish union has quite active volunteer work. Volunteer activities include “Serving Telephone” counselling, fundraising, church choirs, activities in education, assistants at masses, missionary clubs, elected officials, and work with foreigners. Altogether there were 2,300 volunteers in the Lahti parish union in 2003, 811 involved in church social work. The following year the number of volunteers in church social work had risen to 853. Following the confirmation school, 300 young people took part in the training for “big sibling” volunteers in coming confirmation schools. *Marian Kammari* (Mary’s Chamber) is an open house, café, and volunteer centre of the Lahti parish union in central Lahti, which includes a chapel. In 2003 12,000 people visited it, and the volunteers (275 in 2004) conducted 5,600 home visits.<sup>63</sup> Lahti parish union also has various and innovative specific well-being-related projects in which volunteerism plays a central role.<sup>64</sup>

In addition to volunteering, the Lahti church social work offers various arenas for social action and bonding. In 2004 there were altogether 139 different kinds of small groups (for the elderly, counselling, etc.) under the Lahti parish union social and welfare activities.<sup>65</sup>

## Co-operation

There is cooperation between the social authorities and the majority Church at a number of levels, and in various contexts. For instance, the afternoon clubs for school children offered by the parish union have recently been transformed into general afternoon activities: the parish union became a service producer for the Lahti municipality on 1.8.2004. The parish union and the municipality have signed a bilateral agreement on the matter, and the state covers part of the expenses. They also share, among other things, the costs of the *Takatasku* centre for the unemployed, which offers various activities for those in danger of marginalisation. Concerning the third sector agents, the church social work co-operates specifically with associa-

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<sup>62</sup> *Diakonia- ja yhteiskuntatyön toimintakertomus 2004*, 1; *Diakonia- ja yhteiskuntatyön toimintakertomus 2002*. Additionally, the fact that the social services of the Lahti parish union, as distinct from the parishes, which also have their separate social services such as special services for the handicapped, are located in the same premises may well increase the public knowledge of the church welfare services. This Service Centre (*palvelukeskus* in Finnish) is centrally and rather visibly located in central Lahti. It also incorporates the Mary’s Chamber volunteer centre.

<sup>63</sup> *Lahden seurakuntayhtymä, katsaus vuoden 2003 toimintaan 2004; Rohkeasti kristittyinä 2004*, 16–17.

<sup>64</sup> Examples of such projects include the *OIVA* project for the elderly, the *Takatasku* centre for the unemployed, and “good parent” elderly activities. *Toimintakertomus 2002*, 6; *Diakonia- ja yhteiskuntatyön toimintakertomus 2004*, 52; Seppänen et al. 2001; *Vanhustyön projekti v. 2000–2002*, 2002; *Muuttuvan elämän monitoimikeskus Takatasku*, 2003; *Takatasku, toimintakertomus vuodelta 2003, 2004*.

<sup>65</sup> *Rohkeasti kristittyinä 2004*, 16.

tions working for the elderly, the handicapped, the unemployed, the toxicant abusers, and issues of mental health.<sup>66</sup>

The church documents in particular indicated that there is some co-operation, even quite widespread, between social authorities and the Evangelical Lutheran church of Lahti. The municipal welfare documents are much quieter on this matter, but they also set out a few forms of co-operation, especially with the church crisis work and family counselling, also for immigrants.<sup>67</sup> However, since I wanted to see behind the written documents, such co-operation was the central theme in both the church employee survey and in interviews with the church and municipality representatives.

The survey data (N100) indicated that the degree of co-operation with municipal representatives varies, especially according to the profession of the church representatives. On a scale of 0–3 (0 = no co-operation, 3 = a lot of co-operation), the numerical average of all responses was 1.56. Most co-operation with the municipality representatives is indicated as included in the work of priests (including the hospital counselling and the family counselling), social workers, and in education. The co-operation, however, varies: for priests it mostly involves sharing information and (experienced) shared responsibility for education. The latter form of co-operation also concerns the education workers (e.g., youth workers), who also list “helping” as a typical form of co-operation with the representatives of the municipality. The social workers in particular have a variety of co-operation forms with the municipal representatives: helping the same clients, sharing information, education, etc. Some co-operation also takes place in administration (e.g., sharing information), but this varies a great deal among the church representatives. All in all, considerable co-operation is involved between church and municipality in education and helping, as also in information sharing, education, and events, and to some degree in budgeting and rooms.

The survey also showed that most cooperation with organisations and associations among the church representatives takes place in the work of priests (events, education, hospital counselling) and social workers (helping, events), and to some extent child and youth workers (education, events). Priests and youth workers, together with administrative representatives of the church, also have the most coopera-

<sup>66</sup> *Diakonia- ja yhteiskuntatyön toimintakertomus 2004*. The background of the *Takatasku* centre lies in a project funded by the EU. Lahti has had also quite a number of other EU funded social work related projects in recent years (e.g., the *LATU* project for the immigrants). The number of client visits in *Takatasku* were 76,421 in 2004, which is significantly increased from the previous year (66,518 in 2003).

<sup>67</sup> *Toimintakertomus 2004*, 25–26; *Maahanmuuttajien kotouttamisohjelman seurantaraportti 2004*, 7. There was recently a specific “crisis group” in Lahti, group concerned with crisis aid. The initiative came from the municipality and the views seemed very positive. The group coalesced well and everybody shared views hand-in-hand, on the same level. The highest aim, a shared 24 hours emergency service, was not attained because of lack of municipal resources, but the group did collect an information package that everybody can share. The package includes contact details of all the agents offering crisis aid in the Lahti region. The person who called the crisis group together (municipal representative) concluded in an interview that, in the end, the church seems to be the only agent offering a permanent emergency service, the kind of crisis work that the group was mostly concerned with. This frees the resources of other agents, including the municipality, for other activities.

tion with other religious institutions in the Lahti region. Most such cooperation includes events, education, information and PR, as well as facilities and rooms.

The survey revealed that most cooperation with private companies takes place in the parishes through the administrative representatives (information and PR, e.g., about concerts), child and youth work (events and material for them), and church social work (very different forms, such as visits, events, material, spiritual gatherings).

What was particularly interesting in the survey findings was that when asked how many of the respondents themselves as church representatives had initiated some form of cooperation with representatives outside the church, more than half (56 out of 100 respondents) answered affirmatively. This applied to various worker groups to large extent: social workers (e.g., helping projects), church musicians (e.g., events at schools), youth workers (e.g., education cooperation with schools), child workers (e.g., projects with schools), priests (e.g., events and projects in education), hospital counselling (e.g., projects in helping and social work). Even in administration and family counselling cooperation had been initiated, for instance, by offering space and shared PR. It seems valid to conclude that the survey findings indicate a relatively positive attitude in fact toward cooperation between the church and other actors.

Not all the experiences were positive, however: *“I tried to initiate this shared project in the Salpausselkä parish with the school, municipality youth work, congregation, local supermarkets, and parents, but after the initial enthusiasm nothing really happened. Then I changed parish in my work and no more natural and easy connections existed.”* (A child worker.)

One or two church interviewees in this study noted that Lahti has a colourful selection of religious revival movements and other faith groups. A few noted that some of them (including the Salvation Army and the Free Church) have also been involved in social welfare (such as food banks) especially during the recession. No specific co-operation between them and the Lutheran parish union has taken place. Some actually spoke of other faith movements rather negatively. The Lutheran *Kansanlähetys* and Laestadian *esikoislestadiolaisuus* were specifically mentioned by a few interviewees as movements that have made the Lahti religious life rather fragmented. However, the topic of other Lutheran or other religious groups hardly came up at all in the overall interview data.

Since the co-operation between the church and the municipality turned out to be one of the most important themes in the interview data, the last chapter (7) of this book includes sociological reflection on this topic.

## The church as an agent of welfare – opinions and attitudes

### Views held by the public authorities

#### **Welfare**

Most definitions of well-being and welfare used by the public authorities were similar to each other and included three core elements: social networks, mental well-

being, and health. The subjective nature of well-being and the “good life” was also emphasised: how do people themselves experience their personal safety as well as the overall level of caring in the community? However, well-being was also conceived as a *collective* entity, the interviewees underscoring societal ties, local community networks, and individual societal participation as welfare elements.

Municipal authorities quite often spontaneously utilised a service provider viewpoint in their statements on welfare; for instance, referring to value studies and noting that welfare must focus on security and health issues as these are what local people consider the most important to their lives. The idea thus seems to be that a good service-provider takes into account what the local people value the most.

Interestingly, a few municipal representatives spontaneously also included spirituality in their definition of well-being and welfare. The role of religion was related particularly to education and the well-being of the elderly. One municipal representative even noted that she considers it a real pity that spirituality is not explicitly stated in “Lahti’s welfare program for the elderly” document. All in all, it must be noted that the notions concerning religion might be at least to some extent results of the municipal interviewees knowing the focus of my research was “welfare and religion”.

Overall, the basic view of the municipality representatives on welfare is that all citizens should be provided with basic services, and the main responsibility is the municipality’s. However, co-operation and assistance of other agents, as well as the role of local people themselves, were also underscored as welfare elements.

It must be also stated that defining welfare and well-being overall was not at all easy for the local authorities, the complexity of these concepts being emphasised. It seems that the more expert one is in social services, the harder it is to define them. For example, one research-oriented municipality representative refused altogether to offer her definitions of these concepts.

### **Function of the local welfare system**

Overall, the viewpoints of the local authorities concerning welfare in Lahti were strongly divided; some emphasised positive elements and the well-being, while others viewed the overall situation much more pessimistically and focused rather on welfare challenges. To put it crudely, the higher the interviewed authorities were, the more positively they viewed the functioning of the Lahti welfare system. One can only guess whether this trend reflects the role of the higher authorities as the key visionaries and positive thinkers, of the city’s development, or the fact that their work is too far from the grass-roots level problems of welfare to have a realistic picture. Perhaps their views are to some extent coloured by political expediency.

A strength noted by practically all the municipality interviewees concerning welfare in Lahti was its size: the town is not too big but “*under control due to its size. That is a real strength*” (m). Partially because of its size, Lahti was noted as having close co-operative networks both inside the city as well as with the surrounding rural municipalities in the construction of welfare and in economic and industrial life. The majority of Lahti inhabitants have moved there from elsewhere. Massive war immi-

gration<sup>68</sup> has given Lahti its characteristically diverse culture. The authorities mentioned both this and its “*spirit of free enterprise*” (m). Particularly before the economic recession there was explicit emphasis on Lahti as a strongly business-oriented town, “the business city of Finland”.<sup>69</sup>

Concerning welfare, municipal authorities underlined that Lahti has a good network of service providers; the Lutheran church and various third-sector social agents work particularly well in cooperation with the municipal agents. The municipal authorities emphasised that all these various agents promote the welfare together; municipal authorities could not manage their social responsibility without them.<sup>70</sup> Benefiting and further promoting these networks, Lahti has had several EU-funded and other co-operative projects on welfare issues. Furthermore, there have been, and currently are, many local innovations in cooperative welfare.

The benefit of the close networks is also related to another special local resource emphasised by local authorities. The county surrounding Lahti has short distances and the town is located close to many significant highways, as well as being close to both Finland’s capital, Helsinki,<sup>71</sup> and to Russia. This resource was seen not only in a national but European framework as well: “*Lahti as a European gateway to Russia*” (m).

Other special resources that the public authorities unanimously saw Lahti as having include closeness to nature and opportunities for sport and culture, as well as strong promotion of children’s sport and music education. Interestingly, investments in all these were also considered welfare work. However, as the resources are increasingly limited, the investment in sport and culture were regarded somewhat critically by a few municipality representatives.

Special challenges in the local welfare, according to the local authorities, particularly include “*the quite clear division between different social strata*”;<sup>72</sup> Lahti has numerous traditional, affluent entrepreneurial families, as well as a large number of low-educated people, many of whom are at present unemployed. This dilemma of Lahti welfare was also viewed as a particular future challenge; as Europe, and Finland in particular, is ageing fast, social welfare systems will be challenged. The public authorities clearly wished to emphasise, however, that this particular question of ageing is a *challenge*, not a *problem*. They also noted (even the specialists on care of the elderly) the positive fact that the elderly people are now in much better health than those of previous generations. The dilemma and challenge of social segregation and polarisation remains, however.

A very typical challenge mentioned by the public authorities included the fact that Lahti’s industrial base is relatively narrow. This challenge is further maintained by the fact – noted by almost every single interviewee, not simply public authorities – that Lahti is not a university town. Many also underscored the fact that the overall educational background of its inhabitants is low, resulting in longer-term unem-

<sup>68</sup> E.g., during the Second WW, large number of evacuees from the far east of Finland had to be re-located to other Finnish towns, and many went to Lahti.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with professor Antti Karisto, 2004; Karisto 1984.

<sup>70</sup> Other religious institutions, beside the Lutheran church, mentioned were the Diaconal Institute and the Free Church.

<sup>71</sup> A new, much faster train connection to Helsinki will open in 2006.

<sup>72</sup> This is yet not very visible geographically, district-wise, however, a few particular districts were mentioned.

ployment. A few noted that this inequality is particularly inheritable and cumulative, exemplifying longer-term, generational lack of welfare. However, many also noted that there are recent positive developments in aiming to build a network-university of which Lahti is a crucial member.

Furthermore, a few municipal interviewees mentioned the (lack of) leadership and negative political atmosphere as a particular welfare challenge in Lahti. The problem, in their view, partially derives from longer-term power structure, since there have been various very strong entrepreneurial families and their power persists. Some remarked that these challenges are critical at the moment, as the structure and personnel in the municipal administration is changing.

All in all, the views of the public authorities varied on all these issues and challenges, as we have seen. The more optimistic insisted that the self-image of Lahti inhabitants of the well-being and welfare of their home town is worse than its actual status and functioning. In other words, the hard experiences of the recession of the 1990s have remained in the shared local discourses and images. A few interviewees even noted that Lahti inhabitants seem to lack self-esteem. These optimists would like this image abandoned and forgotten. They emphasised that various national statistics show that the difference between other municipalities and Lahti is not all that large, emphasising that “*Lahti is not doing much worse.*” A fundamental assumption for them was that the basic services in social care and health are relatively well taken care of in Lahti. They also noted various positive elements in welfare, such as the initiative of the public “value discussions” in 2004. In their opinion, further positive trends such as rising communality, may well arise from such efforts. Even these optimists noted, however, that there are problems in the future for welfare services in Lahti since they may have to be cut. The emphasis of welfare services should also be, in their opinion, more on intensive medical care and care of the elderly. Furthermore, even these positive thinkers admitted that there is a lack of physicians in Lahti.

Public authority representatives who did not conceive the function of public welfare as positively noted that while the basic welfare services for local people may be covered at present, there is an obvious lack in all special welfare services, particularly for alcoholics and mental health care. Furthermore, these interviewees noted that local people are not equal in relation to welfare services; some actively seek public services, while others are too weak to do so, or become frustrated or depressed after being rejected or put off. These authorities also emphasised that they themselves feel powerless to advise people, as they know beforehand that help is unavailable.

Looking at the changes in the local welfare in the longer run, all the public representatives shared the view that, notwithstanding the economic challenges of the 1990s and the present, the overall living standard and level of welfare has risen over recent decades. However, the *experienced* welfare and well-being of people has also declined, both in Lahti and Finland in general. Interviewees explained this by claiming that Finnish values have become and are becoming harder and colder. Children are marginalised, for instance. “*We may be facing certain moral decay*” (m) which also clearly affects our well-being and welfare.

Almost all municipal interviewees noted two particular concerns over the future of welfare provision: first, *outsourcing*, and second, the new *strategy paper* of wel-

fare provision discussed in the background chapter. Both these challenges seemed to polarise the views of the public authorities. At the moment, many municipal social and health care activities have already been outsourced, mostly to the private sector. Some the municipal authorities stressed that this was a dynamic resource, while others regarded it as causing problems for welfare. Interestingly, although the church and the municipality have dozens of social welfare contracts, these seem not to be seen as outsourcing. Overall, the church seems to be considered much closer to the municipality than other third-sector agents.

The new strategy paper was referred to by the authority interviewees either internally as “*a direction worth developing*” (f), or much more externally as “*the strategy of our director*” (f). Those who favoured it noted that the welfare state period had negative, patronizing and passivising influence on people who should now be given more room and encouragement in expressions of free will and take more responsibility for their choices and well-being, including health care.<sup>73</sup> These liberal views were quite optimistic: “*I think this emphasis on personal responsibility is quite good – some people do want to use private services – those people who can pay for their welfare and health services might actually want to pay for them*” (f).

The less optimistic, however, considered this as bad for welfare services, emphasizing that “*A civilised, human society offers services for everybody. If people are encouraged to buy services from the private sector, the services of the municipality will soon be considered stigmatizing, service for the poorer class*” (m). Some municipal authorities emphasised that this idea does not reflect present-day society – individualisation has progressed too far – and that social problems should altogether not be seen as “lesser problems”. All in all, two contradicting welfare ideologies, socio-democratic welfare ideology and a much more liberalistic vision, are in apparent conflict.

### **The role of the church**

All of the interviewees considered that the church in Lahti should be involved in the construction of welfare. Most were also satisfied with the recent and present activeness of the Lahti church in this area.

Many municipality representatives underscored that the church has no legislative, statutory limits, obligation, or guidance for its social work and assistance.<sup>74</sup> Many municipality respondents thus mentioned the experience of other municipal workers

<sup>73</sup> E.g., people should do more sport. A few also underscored that smoking is a free-will habit which then may cause severe need of lung treatments. These views, however, did not go as far as suggesting that smokers should pay their costs themselves.

<sup>74</sup> In other words, the obligatory status that the church social work – diaconal helping – has in the law of the Church of Finland was by no means familiar to the majority of the municipality representatives of this study. On the other hand, they might have meant the general, secular Finnish laws which do not obligate the church to offer social services. The church has autonomy over its activities on this matter. Overall, as indicated in the earlier report of this study (Yeung 2004), the position of the church in Finnish society is regulated by the Ecclesiastical Act, which can only be amended on the church’s initiative. In any case, concerning the non-statutory and more spontaneous, flexible nature of the church services, a few municipal representatives noted that they had only recently learned that the church law actually does include the obligatory post of welfare services for each parish. One respondent pointed out that her surprise at learning a bishop visiting Lahti that the church is legally obliged to focus on the services that the municipality fails to offer.

being able to direct those in need to the church where municipal aid is not sufficient. In real need the church social work clearly may respond more flexibly than the municipality as they help freely and by conviction. Furthermore, as one municipal agent noted, the clients of municipal care “*may well feel that they have to beg for money from the shared bag, common funds. They may feel— I would in their shoes— that their aid comes out of other people’s taxes. In the church these people can get assistance which is not so far removed from somebody else*” (f). Overall, as this shows, the public authorities viewed municipal services quite critically and the church services rather idealistically. For the municipal authorities, church social work seems motivated by free will and neighbourly love.

In the eyes of the public authorities the church is perhaps the only institution which still preaches absolute humanitarian values. This may indeed be true. The municipality authorities saw this as a significant welfare element, and as a very welcome voice in the present-day context of a “*society controlled by the successful, a society of the apostles of efficiency and of productivity – and it is this side of the church that Jesus would choose if He lived today, side I am sure. He would not choose the side of these present apostles*” (m).

Public authorities consider that the special strength of the church in relation to well-being and people’s welfare derives particularly from the ability to confront people, to encounter them at deeper levels, and to get closer to the grass-roots. Another special resource of the church is membership and participation and volunteering. Volunteering in the municipal context was seen as very marginal. A few municipal representatives wanted the church to develop volunteering and activation of their congregations further.

### **The church and social work**

The views of the public authorities are uniformly positive about the practical social services of the church. To put it simply: “*the municipality needs the support of the church in organizing and offering services*” (f). It is generally strongly hoped that the church will maintain and extend its practical social welfare activities. In fact, most of the views of the public authorities on the church’s practical welfare responsibilities were extremely broad and holistic: “*I don’t know if any of the services for the citizens are strange for the church. They could be actually linked to everything. Well, maybe health care demands real special knowledge. And some special educational activities*” (f).

Overall, psychosocial matters were considered the remit of church workers; the ability of the church representatives to encounter people in their emotions and sorrows, loneliness and extreme life situations, underscoring its importance in transition periods and crisis situations. The role of the crisis work and counselling support is regarded as particularly important, as is work with the elderly and the handicapped. The emphasis on the psychosocial elements of church expertise means that a few municipality representatives even expressed their suspicion about the church social worker focusing solely on financial assistance, one rather unique feature of the Lahti church’s services.

Church education work (both in the schools and its own child and youth work) was also underlined by a few representatives, not so much as welfare activity but rather as productive co-operation with the church. The children’s after school clubs

were seen as natural tasks for the church. Furthermore, a few municipal representatives also mentioned special social services in which the church representatives are not professionals and should not work alone. Co-operation between the church and municipal actors might be the solution; for instance, in child welfare and protection services.

One interesting question is how various the public authorities imagine practical church social work is; do they know all its forms? Many of the public authorities actually described their surprise at the variety of the church welfare activities often during their careers. A few also strongly emphasised that the church should publicise and even advertise their services better, both to clients (local people) and to (possible future) partners in co-operation, such as municipal representatives. Furthermore, it was quite fascinating, notwithstanding the high expectations of the encountering role of the church, that it was almost never considered as a partner or agent in “harder-core” mental or other health care. It remains to be seen whether this is more because the authorities are unaware of all the services and professional skills the church has, or whether this relates to the medical nature of the services – beyond the reach of the church in their view.

Do similar municipal and church services differ in any respect? The answers offered by the public authorities struck a familiar note: the church’s role as a grass-roots institution encountering people. It was noted that even in similar services the church does this better. Interestingly, the municipal representatives spontaneously offered a more personal perspective: *“If I needed food money for my family, I think I would choose church social work over municipal agency. – I feel they work there more based on neighbourly love.”* (f) the local viewpoint was also quite often apparent. The idea of “not pushing spirituality” was emphasised in that services must be available notwithstanding the individuals’ need or willingness – or lack of it – to receive spiritual services.

The municipal interviewees also found purely economic assistance from the church a rather tricky issue. They asked whether there is any additional value in it. Most however concluded that the church should not only do things in its own speciality (spirituality and encountering humans as wholes). A few also noted that the special know-how of the church may indeed even inform financial assistance; for instance, while the municipality has very strict rules on its financial assistance, the church may take the whole life context of an individual into account and be more flexible.

The church was clearly pictured as playing a special role in countering loneliness. Church activities and volunteering were viewed as offering assistance and social ties for local people both as receivers and givers of welfare. The role of volunteers was seen as a unique feature of the church – something the municipality practically does not have at all.

Interestingly, most interviewees stressed – at times spontaneously – that church welfare work closely relates to spirituality, *“the core function”* (m) of the church. Many public authorities emphasised that religiosity and spirituality should be visible in all church activities. All in all, notwithstanding the importance of practical social work of the church, spirituality and religious activities are seen as more fundamental. However, this emphasis on spirituality appears in the statements about the en-

countering function: the church must also do charitable work. The “*inner circle of church, the divine services, are otherwise empty*” (f).

Thus, interestingly, the municipality representatives apparently view the church as having a double agenda encompassing evangelizing *and* serving. Quite a few municipal interviewees also reflected on the dilemma of an institution having such double agenda, some emphasizing that while the church is indeed doing good acts in social work, the church should also ponder whether “*it wants to turn more to charity or ask what the role of spirituality is ... what is the relationship between these two roles – what is this relation? In my view the church must have them both*” (f).

### **The church and the public debate**

Without exception the public authorities regarded the church as having and being obliged to have a clear role in all public debates. *The church should keep up the voice of the weaker as well as the shared spirit of “not leaving your pal who is in need behind”* (m); “*Indeed the church could comment on all matters and speak for all the people. This would be true love for one’s neighbour*” (f).

Most public authorities were satisfied with the present state of affairs overall; in their opinion the Lahti church representatives have acquitted themselves creditably in public debate and discussion. They respected the diversity of the public voice and visibility of the church. The “value seminars”<sup>75</sup> were also mentioned by most public authorities as particularly good examples of local debate and the church’s societal role. One interviewee, however, underscored that such discussion should be organised by the municipality representatives themselves, since they are the ones who should show to local people that they care.

Why specifically did the municipal authorities rate the public debate role of the church so highly? This related to their wish that the church should be active in social work, promoting the values of mutual responsibility and the spirit of caring for one’s neighbour.

As the public voice of the church is so welcome, what if it criticises the municipality? Most municipality representatives remarked that the church could actually do so more visibly. Still others thought that this should not be done publicly, as the media often exaggerates and deliberately puts things in a negative light; a better context for mutual criticism would be joint meetings.

It was also felt that the church’s public voice might be a double-edged sword if the church began to moralise. This would, according to the authorities, take us back to the patronizing society where a church need not accord individuals their freedom and responsibility. However, the church cannot remain quiet or invisible: “*It should remind us every now and then and criticise people*” (m). This is because “*the church is a central part of our society. It still is – we still see the church as provider of our guidelines for life. People do still listen to the church and its pronouncements*” (f). The church should ponder ethical matters generally, without accusing people. Altogether, most municipality representatives wished the church to be louder in public in the future.

<sup>75</sup> See explanation in chapter on Group interviews.

### **Changes in the past ten years**

Several municipal interviewees noted that in the longer run – as the time of shared, communal culture has broken down – the church has come to play an ever smaller societal role. However, while religious, spiritual matters have become less important to Finns, the local authorities thought that the welfare, serving role of the church had increased during the previous decade, which was considered by many municipality representatives as boosting the societal status of the church: *“the church has become a more central player in our societal game”* (m). This positive change was seen as creating both active social work and public statements by the church: *“The statements of the bishops have made the church of part of our everyday life. One could not have imagined, let’s say 15 years ago, that we would interview the bishop on general, socio-ethical questions and on some actual dilemmas in everyday life. And they are highly respected I believe”* (f).

Openness in particular was considered important and as having increased. The younger generation of priests was considered *“much more human”* (f), closer to the spirit of the grass-roots level. The diversity of church activities and the fact that the church accepts such different people (e.g., revival movements and foreigners) were also seen as encouraging.

Furthermore, the municipal authorities also claimed that the church had changed in nature, not merely its societal role. The church has turned, having from evangelizing and teaching to an emphasis on practical action. Most interviewees were very positive: *“if the church acts more and more with the sick and needy, well secularisation does not mean that the authority of the church would somehow have disappeared – people still seek the church to experience communality and safe and security”* (f). This internal change may not be easy institution; the municipal representatives considered that some church people might see this as secularisation. One pointed out that the municipality itself has undergone a similar process of increasingly becoming the service provider for the poor, not so much a communal entity as a financer of services.

### **The desire for change in the church**

Public visibility, as well as publicity and advertising were seen as desirable in developing church activities. Importantly, practically all municipality representatives underscored that the church welfare work will be increasingly needed in the near future. New needs for church social work were also noted including a 24-hour-phone-service run by priests, old people’s homes and houses for terminal care, and support for families.

Furthermore, the interviewees also wanted activities that would assist them as municipal employees; for instance “silence courses”<sup>76</sup> to promote their well-being at work. It was also noted that the municipality itself has many employees who often prefer to use the church for privacy and intimacy reasons; for instance, in marriage and family counselling. Such wishes obviously express deep trust in the church institutions.

Many authorities clearly stated that in those areas of well-being and welfare where the church’s activities are strong, the municipal social work resources can and

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<sup>76</sup> In Finnish, *hiljaisuuden retiriitti*.

should be reduced. Overlapping activities are considered undesirable, given stretched resources. For instance: *“We both [church and municipality] have the same responsibility to help the people in need. – Then the question is who has the opportunity and resources to help – in the future the services will be more and more limited. It is a resource question. – We really have to interact here with the church so that we do not have overlapping services. That we sort of both know where we are”* (f).

The idea seems to be that where welfare responsibilities are extensive and expanding, they should reflect the strengths, special know-how, and resources of the providers, although not all public authorities agreed: *“It really is added value when the churches conduct these social services. It brings new networks and we can find new support persons for individuals. – It is wrong to talk about overlapping services. They are parallel services which offer the people personal choice according to their own identity and value world.”* (m)

In addition, most interviewees underscored the role of joint negotiations; each agent has to know what the other is doing and plan co-operatively.

### **The significance of gender**

Gender elements were not very significant in the findings; specifically, no differences between categories of data were detected. Thus, all gender related findings have been left to the section “Gender analysis” below.

## **Views held by the church**

### **Welfare**

Most of the church representatives stressed that welfare has to be defined broadly and holistically. In most cases spirituality was not mentioned spontaneously but, when asked, each church interviewee included it in definitions of well-being and welfare.

Interestingly, the public authorities more often spontaneously included spirituality in well-being and welfare than the church representatives. Like the public authorities, the church interviewees also spontaneously covered both social and individual dimensions, incorporating both social ties and networks as well as individuality in their definitions.

Church representatives thought that if well-being covered mental and social matters – as in their opinion it should – then their own work was welfare. They also felt that the uniqueness of the church activities, even in welfare, was important to grasp. Many spontaneously compared the church and municipality welfare activities concluding that the church should see to the psychological, spiritual and social side of well-being, while the municipality should concentrate on basic services, sustenance and health.

### **The function of the local welfare system**

The church interviewees discussed this topic relatively positively, emphasizing that Lahti is doing better now than during the recession. Furthermore, they thought that peoples’ options had increased over the years. Another strength in Lahti welfare noted by a few church representatives concerned the local political atmosphere. Various parties (left and right wing) have long been equally represented (numerically, measured by seats) on the Lahti city council, making the political atmosphere

positive, argumentative, and dynamic. However, some also church representatives agreed with the critical municipality representatives who thought that there was too little turnover in local political life; “*there is a sort of good-brother, too much back-scratching, system*” (f).<sup>77</sup>

Inequality was the greatest local welfare challenge for both the church representatives, and the local authorities. There is a severe welfare-deficit caused by long-term unemployment and welfare is not distributed equitably. The church representatives expressed their worry quite insightfully: “*at the moment we have all this talk about Lahti’s success elements for the future. The new railway and all this. We must still not close our eyes to peoples’ pain and suffering*” (m). In other words, in addition to the locally positive, future-oriented discourse, the church interviewees clearly wanted to remind people that not everybody is doing well and that problems are heavily concentrated on two or three thousand local inhabitants.

A few other local well-being deficits noted by the church interviewees were the present-day life style and the number of social changes taking place. One counsellor put this insightfully: “*All these changes are too many, too soon. And it’s easy to talk negatively about ‘change resistance’ if one does not happily welcome these changes and join in. I think life should also include continuity. Perhaps we should rather talk about the assertion of staidness*” (m). In other words, both church interviewees and municipal representatives were worried about the local value-landscape.

### **The role of the church**

Everyone in the church survey (N100) thought the church had a role to play in welfare and people’s well-being of the. Most survey answers (90 percent) explained that everybody in need must get help, and that the church cannot be passive. Some of the survey replies even included the very holistic view that “*church social responsibility includes the whole lifespan of a human being*” (f).

The interview data was largely in agreement. Both data-sets also emphasised that the church, as a promoter of welfare, caring and communality, should remind people of their personal responsibilities: “*The basic task of church social work is to promote faith-based love and participation and justice in everybody, both locally and globally*” (f, social worker).

As already noted, the public authorities considered that the church’s ability to encounter people in welfare particularly was a special strength. How do the church representatives themselves view this? They also do indeed consider encountering people as the church’s special challenge. For instance: “*the participation and connection dimension is an increasing challenge for us. When people are suffering illness and sickness and despair, they soon lose their participation and link with their parish. We should encounter them. This encountering, participative dimension should intimately concern our supportive work and social work*” (m). The church representatives see the church as encountering the local people through such things as the sacraments. The church can also encounter local people through social work, however. Many interviewees also referred to the “*invisible misery which the society and municipal aid channels do not reach*” (m).

<sup>77</sup> Overall, one interesting question that seem to divide the opinions of the church interviewees is whether church employees should participate in local or national party politics. In Lahti priests have traditionally sat on local political boards.

Interestingly, however, views on the ideal ways encountering people varied greatly between representatives. Some considered that the church should participate in everyday life as much as possible. For them this was the real way *“to meet new people and to touch their hearts, and to open new doors even just a little bit. The faces of priests and other church workers would also be familiar to the people as they are so far from their parishes these days”* (f). They suggested such things as market-place happenings, participating in neighbourhood associations, the Via Dolorosa play in central Lahti, or simply priests walking around their neighbourhoods and offering to assist in car repair, for instance, or church social workers offering cleaning assistance for mothers at home. The emphasis clearly was on the needs and interests of everyday life.

However, some thought that the church should encounter people simply through ways involving spirituality or mental help; in other words, simply being close to people is not sufficient, and perhaps even harmful. The church should not act as a *“show producer or stage manager”* (m). Many reported that associations contact parishes asking them to *“organise something for this and that group of people”*. The most critical ones (both w and m, both priests and church social workers) considered that if the church co-operates in some event just to organise a moment of prayer, as often in sport or education, it is *“just messing around, organizing shows”*. Similarly, some considered that large annual fundraisers (such as the popular Joint Responsibility fundraising, and the Via Dolorosa play) *“may well be sorts of parties in vain, sort of just messing around. We could use our time much better to benefit people”* (f). Participation in neighbourhood associations, noted above in different terms, was also used as an example of unnecessary activity, rather drawing people away from the church. The church should concentrate on its basic work.

### **The church and social work**

Overall, many interviewees considered that the present role of the church in practical social work is good and could be developed and strengthened. The survey indicated that practical social work is favoured, especially by the social workers, child workers, and – quite interestingly – administrative personnel. For example: *“It is fundamental to the nature of the national church that the church lives by the side of all individuals. In my view the social responsibilities of the church should be increased because the welfare society has dramatically changed its services”* (m, a social worker). Obviously, this generally positive viewpoint coincides with that of the municipal agents who think that the church should be involved.

Many also thought that when economic help from the church was necessary and good, pointing out that all practical social work, including food and economic assistance, aids both present individual well-being and is a fundamental part of church’s own testimony. Social work is evidence that that church cares for all, including those who are not seen as *“useful”* (m) to society.

However, not all church representatives supported practical social work. Almost a fifth of the survey respondents (17 percent) mentioned that it could be less or even eliminated. The food bank and children’s afternoon club activities were most criticised. In the survey data, and to some extent the interviews, endorsement for practical social work was most divided among priests and estate personnel, some supporting it, others being more guarded or even negative. One priest concluded that *“We*

*should not have the present form of welfare at church at all in Finland! They should simply focus on spiritual work or on aiding third-world countries”* (m). These more critical replies saw the church’s task as defending the welfare state; practical social work being first and foremost the responsibility of the municipality.

The usual reason for reduced church social responsibility was limited resources, but quite different ones also appeared in the survey data. For instance: *“Should the church even have other than spiritual responsibilities? – Taking care of social matters demands information about human beings, society, economics, etc. and that is not belief and faith. It is hard to link and connect knowledge and faith”* (an estate staff member); *“The entire municipality institution was established (separated from the parish) in the 1860s in order to take social responsibility. This must be maintained”* (a priest). These interviewees were clearly critical of all practical social work by the church.

As the views on church social work are so divided in the church, an interesting question is whether it causes controversy in everyday working life or budgeting. The church workers themselves considered that the Lahti church has always valued their work. While they have not had to fight for resources, they do receive, or sense, criticism from other workers, especially when the budgets are tighter, as in the early 1990s and at present: *“Not everybody respects this [meeting place Takatasku], church employees and elected officials. They think these activities are not spiritual enough. I sense these sarcastic remarks “oh you are organizing dances, yes, let’s see what else you can come up with!” They seem to be asking “do we really need this place where these losers can hang around in peace” [laughing]. They seem to be thinking that we are sort of conniving their marginalisation and troubles!”* (f)

What seemed to be crucial, for those both supporting and opposing more extensive church social work, was the ideal that the church should be responsible for the weakest, those whom no-one else cares for. The church ought to aid the very deepest need and distress, to take care of the very weakest individuals.<sup>78</sup> The survey findings generally agree that children, the young, and the elderly should be aided by the church. Preventive work was also important. Later on the interviews revealed that not all work directed at the same target group is considered equally important; for instance, the children’s after-school clubs were thought of as *“being on the edge, considering the ideal of church responsibilities, if we do not get enough of our own content emphasis into it”* (a vicar). Obviously, the views of the church and the municipality conflict here to some extent. However, both parties (a majority from the church, all from the authorities) seem to agree that harder-core health care is something in which the church should not get involved.

To conclude, while the practical social work of the church is a good and worthy activity according to most church representatives, most also see the practical social work activities of the church as being temporary, not long-term. The ideal thus seems to be that the church should act as a reactive, flexible societal actor providing resources for unexpected needs. Only then might it maintain its social work ideal of being *“a prophetic voice, a cry for help, a sort of provocative yell, an exclamation mark”* (a vicar) in relation to other actors, specifically the local authorities.

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<sup>78</sup> This is very much in line with the traditional national church law. See Yeung 2004.

### The church and the public debate

Interestingly, many respondents included public statements in their view of social responsibility of the church, for instance: *“The church has the potential to shape attitudes at various levels. Carrying the social responsibility has to be obvious in all forms of activity”* (a hospital counsellor); *“Being a mouthpiece is the task of the church”* (a priest). Thus the church representatives clearly think that public debates on welfare and ethical issues are a part of social responsibility. The church and municipality representatives seem to share similar views on this.

Furthermore, participation in public debates was particularly prominent, most church representatives seeing them as necessary and crucial. The church should increasingly, keep up *“the voice of justice, a voice against unconcern and indifference”* (m); *“the voice of speaking for the quiet ones who do not have a voice”* (f) in the media, and must keep *“matters of basic humanity”* (f) in the public media. In other words, defending human dignity was considered the most crucial public message of the church by many church representatives.

The church interviewees talked about the church’s public visibility, both national and local. The bishops in Finland have recently been active in public. Most church representatives spontaneously recalled their participation and documents. The voice of the episcopate is highly respected and appreciated. A few also recalled the criticism of the document *Towards the Common Good* by the economic authorities that the bishops had attracted a few conceding that this might have been deserved: *“Well, one always does get criticism if starts to present matters with insufficient knowledge and skill”* (m). Most, however, emphasised their admiration that the bishops dared to disagree with powerful economic agents more.

Interestingly, the local public statements were considered much more problematic. The church employees mention that it is easier for the bishops to be critical; if local priests criticised the local capitalist establishment, the criticism would be much more targeted, and surely alienate such people. Another priest noted: *“How could I as a priest say that the municipality should invest less in sport? It is the sport of these local people [emphasis], I cannot talk here in general terms”* (m). Then again, other church representatives opined that the church *“smells around too much, it sniffs the air and tries to locate the most popular opinions. The statements of the church remain too vague as we try to refrain from insulting anybody!”* (f). Another dilemma collective reticence, underlined by the fact that the Lahti church is a large entity and people find it difficult to determine who the real spokesman is. Who should use it, who should be the one commenting?

What was interesting in the church interviews was that the “public debate” was clearly not understood as taking place simply through discussion, but as including church values and beliefs expressed in deeds. In the interviews, many claimed that the role of the church in welfare and well-being in Lahti is profiled very much through its social work – as church social work. Other activities, such as hospital counselling and educational activity, are seen as *elements* of church social work. But the core consists of social assistance: *“deeds are our channel, our soft channel, to change peoples’ attitudes concerning ethical dilemmas, their values, their relation to us. After seeing our deeds, perhaps they will become interested more generally in church life”* (f). The practical acts of social work are considered an indication of the church’s credibility; words become deeds; they do not remain simply words.

The division of church resources is also considered a clear public message: “*The way in which we divide our local resources in parishes, this is of course the time and place where the value of human dignity becomes flesh, or does not. – People are frustrated with these church debates; e.g. on women priests, and I think they are right. Theological analysis is important and it is the church’s speciality. Others do not do it. But it has to concern relevant, societal matters!*” (m) Another example of such a “public voice without an actual voice” is that while in the *Takatasku* meeting place spirituality and the role of the church is not apparent, the workers pointed out (both church and non-church) that if people have good, positive, supporting experiences in their activities, this will affect their view of the church. Perhaps then an individual might also become involved in other church activities or approach other church employees. This may be a rather idealistic view, however, as the role of the church is not obvious, and few workers said that it should be more visible.

The church is not always visible to the public at large or the media, as a few church representatives pointed out. Several church activities are apparent only to the recipients. Some may even consider that the church does not do much. The church interviewees thus underscored that things like the food bank were excellent testimony that the church truly cares.

Even though the viewpoints of the church representatives seem relatively homogeneous, not all were entirely for public visibility – or at least *further* visibility. One vicar (m) noted that “*People expect the church to be more obvious in ethical debates. But it is problematic. It may give the wrong impression of the core message of the church – which is only mercy*” (m).

An intriguing final question is whether the public statements of the church should be uniform or whether its various viewpoints on moral, ethical, social and other issues should be public. Should there be one voice or various, even contradictory, voices? Some few church representatives pointed out that the church should first be unanimous before it participated in further public issues: “*we should not take the buzz of schism to the ears of others*” (f).

### **Changes in the last ten years**

The Finnish research discussions with church representatives covered both the perspective of the last decade and the longer time period. Two general trends appeared, similar to those noted by the public authorities. First, looking at the longer-term developments, most church representatives considered that some secularisation has indeed taken place. People now are not necessarily very interested in spiritual matters. Yet secularisation as such was not all seen as necessarily negative; for instance: “*The church should become more secular! It should increasingly get down to the real people, talk in their language, use their media*” (m). In other words, quite a few church representatives defined secularisation as the church having more to do than preach. They viewed recent developments very positively. Furthermore, the church representatives also pointed out that measuring secularisation is very difficult; how should one calculate people whom the church touches through social welfare acts, for instance, or calculate the value of various minor forms of activity, such as house visits to the elderly?

Second, secularisation is not, however, regarded as the trend of recent or present developments – rather the reverse. In the opinion of most church representatives, the

church has positive societal status at the moment: *“At present the church is really doing well. The atmosphere is extremely positive toward its activities. We are living in times of shared limitations on resources and the church is a welcome agent. Its help and action is much appreciated”* (m). In longer run, the change in value-basis was also emphasised, the church today representing “socio-democratic” values or caring, *“no longer white, right-wing”* (m). According to the church representatives, this positive status and public visibility has its roots in the 1990s and the public statements of the bishops and church social workers as well as the vigour of church social work during the economic recession.

### Desire for change in the church

Change was wanted both in the societal role of the church as well as internally. Concerning the former, further networking was particularly hoped for, especially in many survey responses. Such ideal networking would also include better sharing of information concerning other social activities, especially with the municipal authorities: *“If we in the church and the municipality know more of each other’s doings, this will help us to understand our acts in a wider framework and to work together better. That is how we will come to see that we all already bear now a large share of the responsibility for people’s well-being. This is a good road to continue on”* (a social worker). Some employees emphasised that the church could also co-operate more with other, smaller churches.<sup>79</sup>

Concerning the ideal societal role of the church, further information about the services of the church was also acknowledged and hoped for – as both the local authorities and people longed for. The church employees reported often needing to explain what church social work is, both to ordinary people as well as municipal or other social workers. People not knowing the level of expertise of the church was also considered a status problem for church social work.

There is a dilemma, however, since the church cannot afford to advertise its services much more. This challenge of unfamiliarity with church social work, interestingly, seems also to concern the church context itself; the priests do not always know what is happening in social work, *“as the priests just stay in their own groups so much”* (f, social worker). As a few church workers pointed out, simple lack of knowledge among the church social workers as well may well lead to needless overlaps.

In relation to the above, the hopes for internal change centred on two larger themes: the *public visibility* and *development of church social work*.

Many interviewees emphasised the need for a greater public voice, often a critical one – on the part of the church. The interviewees wished they had more energy to participate in discussions in the local media, on such matters as municipal planning: *“the church should chivvy the decision-makers a little more”* (m), as well as basically all possible public issues: *“I consider this discussion culture in the church, among the church employees as well, and this public discussion culture that we have as really weak”* (hospital counsellor, w). It was suggested, for instance, that the church *“could return to some of its older forms of activity, for instance, organizing peace marches as in the 1980s”* (m), and *“the church could well act as a counter-*

<sup>79</sup> Very recently, the Lahti parish union has initiated a local ecumenical group which invites faith groups and religious institutions into dialogue and organises visits to one another’s premises.

*force and counter-voice in the current media culture where humiliating individuals is considered entertainment, I mean all these reality TV programs”* (m). Others, however, even if hoping for a greater public hearing for the church, emphasised that it should only participate in discussions of its special-know: issues of human dignity, the meaningfulness of human life, and spirituality.

It was strongly emphasised the church social work should keep up with the times better, and develop its preventive work and new kinds of group activity, including youth activities. Many also noted that ideally church social work would develop further in spiritual work. If the municipality were able to take better care of basic welfare, the church social work could concentrate on counselling and spiritual work.

### **Significance of gender**

As already stated above, gender elements were not very significant in the findings and, more specifically, no differences between categories of data were detected. Thus, all gender related findings have been deferred to the later part of this report.

## **Views held by the population**

### **Welfare**

Local people's views of well-being were very similar to those the church and municipality representatives. Most important were social ties, physical and mental health (young people seemed to emphasise the latter, the elderly the former), sufficient economic security, and rewarding surroundings, such as the environment. People did however put further emphasis on individualistic perspectives as against authority (church or municipality); *“Well-being must include being able to be oneself – to do simply what one likes to do. Something that is not compulsory and necessary”* (a young woman). The foreigners interviewed emphasised the role of social networks in well-being more than Finns, also noting that welfare depends to a great extent on one's own initiative.

The elderly Finns provided views specifically on well-being and welfare. Life experiences clearly give depth and peacefulness to their viewpoints; well-being is *“thriving mentally – one stays brisk and lively”* (elderly, w), *“inner peace and a sunny, bright view of life”* (elderly, w), *“just being happy, being in a good state”* (elderly, m).

The importance of religiosity to elderly interviewees was apparent in their notions of the good life and well-being. It also came up spontaneously, without asking: *“Well-being is when faith carries and supports you spiritually. It brings great inner peace. Jesus Christ can give it”* (elderly, m). The elderly also emphasised the role of the church in welfare, yet not necessarily in practical social work. On the whole, interviewees, representing very different age groups emphasised the role of the public sector in the construction of welfare. As one elderly man put it: *“welfare means that the municipality can take care of all basic needs.”*

Overall, the basic view of local people is that the municipality should provide the basics of well-being and welfare. Only during crises should other agents be involved.

### Function of the local welfare system

The most important positive element in local welfare, mentioned by various age groups, was nature. Quite a few also noted local welfare projects, such as a joint project on improving life in the suburbs.

All in all, however, as against the church representatives, the people very often started to consider their views on this theme negatively, often because of unemployment. The lack of doctors and inadequacy of mental health care services were also noted by most interviewees. Many found it humiliating having to convince a nurse before getting a doctor's appointment. Another very prominent theme in the people's opinions was the disparity in local well-being, just as with the church and municipality representatives: "*You are either doing very well or very badly if you live in Lahti*" (m). The locals thought that too much investment is made in high culture and sports; people's basic welfare should be the priority. Many claimed that the local authorities "*are making the wrong decisions, they are far too removed from the grass-roots level of ordinary people*" (f). Quite a few were very critical of the "*old clans of the political life and mutual support system*". This was also held to explain the low voting turn-out in municipal elections. In other words, the politicians and authorities are too distant from the people, who complain about never meeting the authorities in person.

Many interviewees were also especially worried of the elderly, who are particularly low-paid in Lahti because of their education and work experience. It was frequently noted that sheltered homes and long-term care hospitals were desperately needed.

Young people that I interviewed were particularly concerned about the lack of meeting places. They also noted more often than older people the overuse of alcohol as a local problem; many alcohol over-users, mostly men, are visible in the streets. Young people were not emphatic about this, but saw it as a hazard of the local scene. The elderly had other wishes. For instance, we had longer discussions with many people wanting free bus tickets from the municipality. Elderly interviewees touchingly described the situation: "*loneliness starts to creep into our lives*"<sup>80</sup> (m) and "*one gets happiness and stimulation for so many days if one just gets to go somewhere just once*" (f). Furthermore, the elderly were worried and sad, sometimes even a bit angry, about the lack of home services: "*they basically are only allowed to come, and only have to time come, to check whether we are still alive*" (f). Overall, the elderly seemed to settle for much less in their welfare than younger interviewees. For instance, being able to get a doctor's appointment relatively quickly made them talk about these services with great gratitude.

### The role of the church

Without exception, all people interviewed thought the church had a role to play in welfare. For instance, "*Without welfare work the church would be like a barren cow. Sorry for this simile. But without social work the church could not produce spiritual fruits*" (elderly m). Notwithstanding this unanimity, the ideal role was portrayed differently. Some saw practical social work as necessary (see the next section). The majority, however, felt that the church's role was not in actual social work but in maintaining societal and individual morality, ethics and specifically the spirit of

<sup>80</sup> In Finnish: "*yksinäisyys tuppaa tulemaan sorkkimaan kuvaan*".

caring for one's neighbours. The interviewees underscored, however, the centrality of the municipality in the social welfare system. The elderly particularly thought that social work belongs to the municipality: *"it means a secure future to know and be certain that our society and local municipality is prepared to take care of us entirely, once one's own strength is not enough"* (elderly, m).

People justified the central role ascribed to the church in welfare – particularly in value and opinion-formation, as mentioned above, as well as actions – in various ways. Many pictured it as a right; many declared that *"the church should help since we pay taxes to it"* (m). Others emphasised its traditional roots and role in constituting Western and Finnish culture. For instance, a young woman pointed out that *"we have a centuries-long history with the church and most of us are Lutherans. The church has always belonged to our history. It roots us in a longer inheritance. The church is such an integral part of our culture that it is good it comes close to us in its actions."*

People also noted that there are processes underlining the need for the church to promote talk of welfare and the ethics of caring; they seemed quite familiar with the local welfare strategy of moving responsibilities towards lower-level social ties. Their view seemed to be that as there is insufficient funding to secure the level of services, services for the more affluent could well be cut. Many, however, were pessimistic: *"it is exactly these richer ones – these rich ones are the smart and educated ones who will find every penny and loophole in social security"* (m). People emphasised that the welfare responsibility has been moved from local, grass-roots ties to large institutions for decades. Now, the new direction is radical and difficult, but may be valuable. However, the church can and should help in this. The message was clearly that it should both remind the public sector of its responsibilities as well as people of their responsibility to others and our sense of communality. People felt that there was a lot to be done in Lahti in this respect.

### **The church and social work**

As stated above, the local interviewees emphasised the ethical, social, moral responsibilities of the church rather than social work. Others, however; underscored the church as a practical welfare agency. For instance: *"In my opinion, it is sort of a confession of faith that the church does practical social work. If the church is active in today's worldly questions, it lives sort of according to its faith, which is love your neighbour"* (man in his forties).

It seems that, particularly for the elderly, the need for the church to do practical social work would mean returning to the pre-welfare state era. Still, no interviewees saw the church as irrelevant to the structure of local welfare. In addition to its role in moral and ethical discussions and teachings, the church was seen to be active in social networks, psychological well-being, and the needs of special groups. In networking, respondents wanted the church to organise more meeting places for young people, foreigners, and immigrants, as well as for the unemployed and those at risk of marginalisation. The meeting places presently organised fully or partially by the church, such as Maria's Chamber and *Takatasku* were acknowledged positively by many.

The special objectives for the church as an active welfare agent are education in general (envisioned as welfare work), the unemployed and marginalised individuals, as well as combating overall loneliness. Work with the elderly was also stressed. The elderly are in fact very positive about the local church at the moment, being very happy

with the services they obtain. They particularly appreciated clubs, home visits, telephone counselling, and social work in general. The home visits were particularly valued; *“they are like one’s own daughters when they come by to visit”* (elderly man), a respondent who also longed for more. One elderly lady even quite angrily noted: *“why do they come so seldom and only on festivals? That is exactly when I have other people visiting. It is in everyday life that I am lonely. Why can’t they just come and ring your doorbell?”* Furthermore, the immigrants in particular mentioned being pleasantly surprised that the church offers food and money for non-Christians as well.

How much people know about the practical social work of the church varies a lot. For example, one parent (f) insightfully compared Lahti’s situation to the capital area: *“there the municipality invests more, the church less in family and child care. Here in Lahti it is the reverse. The church is very active!”* A few of the elderly also claimed that *“I really have this feeling that here in Lahti the church social work is one of the most active ones in the whole of Finland”* (m). Others knew much less. For instance, a social work student noted: *“It was my friend once who told me that the church also offers mental health care services and counselling. I was so amazed [with emphasis]. I was like, no way! I would have never thought!”* (f).

Overall, the Lahti findings and national-level opinion polls are at odds in that; the latter emphasise the responsibility of the church in practical social work much more. This contradiction may have something to do with the severe economic challenges that Lahti has faces. Perhaps Lahti inhabitants are greatly concerned with municipal welfare work because their basic security has been shaken.

### **The church and the public debate**

As noted before, contributing to the public welfare debate was viewed as the core of the church’s social welfare responsibility: debate, comment and speaking on ethical, moral and social issues, especially issues of local welfare system and the spirit and ethics of caring for one’s neighbour.

Overall, the people interviewed seemed relatively satisfied with the local church’s statements, and were even more satisfied and surprisingly familiar with the written public statements by Finnish bishops (*“Kohti yhteistä hyvää”*, for example, was very familiar). At the local level, people wanted more pronouncements: *“The church must be the conscience of our society. It must dare to be in opposition. It should walk in the frontline and wave the flag. At the local level, the local church here is lacking an intellectual leader. They should dare to oppose the clichés of the words and statements made by local authorities* (two elderly men, together). Overall, people hoped that the voice of the church would not only be heard but also be critical of other agents; people wanted the church to judge the decisions (the possible bad ones, in their view) made by the local municipality.

Interestingly, local people also spontaneously compared the public voice of the church to its other activities. The church’s investments in estate were particularly criticised: *“the church should not use its money on buildings, especially building and offices for its personnel. The church must be rather the spokesman of the truth!”* (elderly m).

Even the spiritual activities of the church were seen in a much more critical light than its public welfare pronouncements: *“church services are just tear-jerkers, I don’t want to go to them”* (woman in her forties). Furthermore, the church view on welfare issues was particularly important to public debate, not theological wrangling. A

few people stressed that: *“I think all these discussions on women priests and gays are idiotic. If one believes in God it is God’s job to decide what is right and what is wrong, not people’s”* (social worker, w). Such discussions were pictured by many as alienating them from the church. The discussions on women priests were criticised particularly heavily, both by women and men, younger and older people. People thought that the church should not allow its employees to reject women priests.

### **Changes in the past ten years**

The change in the church was seen positively in the long haul. The elderly in particular thought the church had become much closer to the grass-roots level; *“priests used to be so remote from the people, almost fascists, contemptuous”* (three elderly men, talking together). The interviewees felt that over the last decade and in the crises during the recessions it is that the had church offered its helping hand very positively. However, this concerned *crises* particularly; most considered that the church should not have to shoulder welfare responsibilities.

Like the public authorities, local people also greatly value the church’s increased openness. The church is permissive, positive and open. That the church makes no demands on people’s spirituality was considered good. That it now offers its services without asking about people’s faith and level of religiosity is also greatly appreciated.

The most important explanation of these positive changes was the church’s actions and particularly its statements on welfare issues; the church speaking for its people about their benefits. Some people explained such increased *“human-nature and humanity”* (m) through women priests and increased social work. The same theme of *“humanity”* also applied to desire for change in the church: the interviews evinced the wish for a stronger public voice. Additionally, the church could still develop its public voice more towards the grass-roots: *“the church should speak in a language that ordinary people can understand”* (elderly m).

### **Wishes for change in the church**

In comparison to this unanimous respect for the church and desire to hear it more clearly, the question of whether the church: should come closer to people in everyday life or not clearly divided people. It was of interest that, like some church interviewees, some local people strongly criticised the church’s participation in every-day events, such as local sport. For instance, an elderly man pointed out forcefully: *“How does our national church wish to live among its people? Does it want to run around, according to pleadings and fashion? Or does it want to offer something deeper?”* A middle-aged lady similarly pointed out: *“even if many people are not very religious today, they very much respect the fact that the church stands behind its words. The church should not listen to and follow public opinion very much. And it should not go into all mundane activities, like organizing discos. This undermines its credibility.”*

Others, however, wanted to meet and talk to priests and social workers at such events, as well as in the streets, although most did not want them to come to their door.

### **The significance of gender**

As stated already, gender elements were not very important in the findings and, more specifically, no differences between data categories were detected. All gender-related findings have been relegated to the section *“Gender analysis”* below.

## Sociological analysis

### Different ideals of the role of the church

Overall, it became apparent quite early in the data collecting for this study that there were larger differences concerning the ideal role of the church in practical social work and in public welfare issues than had been expected. Two larger questions in particular emerged from the data from the church representatives. First, what is the ideal role and mission of the church? Is it primarily, even exclusively, preaching the gospel and evangelising, or is it rather concentration on putting gospel into action — dogma into deeds, faith into flesh? Should all church activities reflect the theological essence — and what is that essence? Second, what is the ideal for the church's visibility in society? To be embroiled in the social action, acting, and commenting loud and clear, or acting as a silent background agent? I used these two larger questions to create two intersecting dimensions to describe the church interviewees' ideals of the church: spirituality versus social work and a loud versus a muted voice, illustrated in the following figure:

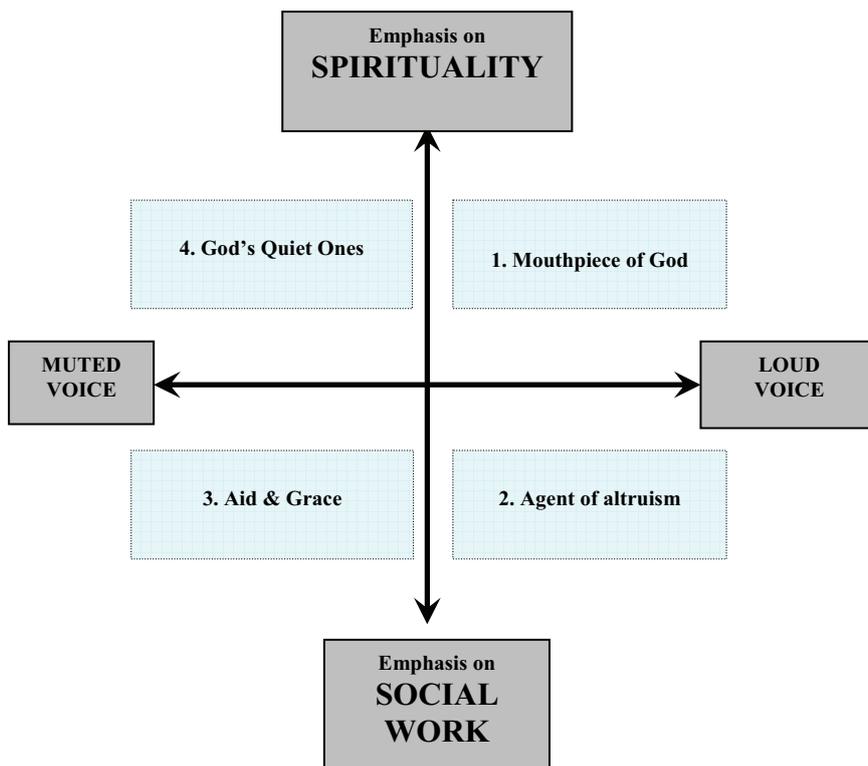


Figure 3. The ideal of the church.

Four different ideal orientations can be formed on these dimensions. Later on, I also tested the model with the data from the municipal and local population data, with whose views the model also seemed to work.

### **The mouthpiece of God & God's quiet ones**

These two ideal types describe some of the church representatives well, mostly priests and vicars. However, some social workers emphasised the spiritual than social aspects of their work much more. One social worker noted that *“The main thing and the essence must be in spiritual work. If my work and time and energy starts to go more into these practical matters, like getting walkers for the elderly, I have to sort of sit down and start to think whether am I in the right position and place”* (f). A few interviewees mildly criticised some of the “less spiritual” forms of activity in Lahti, such as the *Takatasku* meeting point and the food-bank. Many other workers, including those in these “less spiritual” activities mentioned having received both open and more veiled criticism from time to time. One must also note that workers emphasizing this spiritual orientation of the church even more are probably not included in my data at all, since they might not care to participate in a research project focussing on welfare issues.

It is necessary to underscore that these interviewees do not necessarily reject the church's social work role altogether but made it clear that parishes should get involved only temporarily, and only during severe crises. The ideal role of the church is in spiritual work; values and teachings are its unique basis. The church is, after all, *“the moral spine of our nation, the teacher of the deepest understanding of life”* (m, vicar).

A clear majority of the interviewees emphasised the “louder voice” direction. In other words, the orientation towards the “mouthpiece of God” typified the church representatives. Many also noted that church workers are much freer to participate in all public discussion and are not bound to be loyal to the municipal and state sectors, being *“outsiders, in a positive sense”* (m). However, those who seemed to represent the revival movement background espoused the “God's quiet ones” position more. Some others also noted that, even if they themselves do not support less involvement, there are those who do, especially in revival movements in the Lahti parish union.

The municipal representatives did not see these two orientations as ideal at all, the emphasis being much more on social work. The “God's quiet ones” orientation did not please the municipal authorities or local people at all. The majority of locals, however, see of the ideal of the church very much as “the mouthpiece of God”. The church should not have to do any social work but its voice should be loud and clear.

### **Agent of Altruism & Aid and Grace**

The two orientations focusing more on helping and social assistance typified the church social workers, as well as a few priests. These views clearly emphasised altruism: *“The church must first give food, before evangelizing. If one does not give food and offer help, it is really hard to start preaching. And corny if one does”* (elected official, m). One priest put it: *“The helping activity of the church reminds us of the human values of justice and hope and equality. This is true counselling for everyday life!”* (m). Social workers often emphasised the flexibility of the church institution and its altruism: *“What would be bad about the entire church sometimes emphasizing the social work dimension? I think it would be good. Our work and our helping should always be changing. Overall, the responsibilities of our social work*

*could be greater. Diaconal social work is at the heart of church activities. We must remember that the church is not simply expert in spiritual matters”* (m).

The nature of the church largely explained this orientation toward altruism; internal forces drive people to church social work even if they think that the municipality should do better. Quite a few interviewees also underlined that the church view of humanity is entirely different from that in the municipality: *“one cannot say “no” to a person in need. People are encountered as humans, not as clients. We do not work here based on a work position or anything like that, but based on a calling”* (f).

Those emphasizing altruism and specifically those focusing on increased public visibility often questioned the entire process of secularisation. One social worker (m) put it insightfully: *“Can secularisation actually take place at all? If it means that the church is more and more in the world, really from the bottom of its heart, then the church actually is increasingly spiritual.”* Overall, as exemplified by this comment, the emphasis on church social work did not mean that the interviewees consider spirituality irrelevant. As pointed out by an elected official: *“Helping is our big task and it has to be holistic. But we cannot leave out the gospel and Christ’s deeds. It is of course by nature, included in helping”* (m).

Clearly a majority of the church representatives emphasizing altruism also wanted the church heard on welfare issues; public debates were viewed as a channel for altruism and helping. Many interviewees were also sensitive to the expectations of other agents; for instance, one social worker recalled his experiences during the economic recession: *“we sort of presented the neutral voice in this political and social-policy debate, a sort of trusted, reliable, believable voice – we were the neutrality in a very broken, indented field”* (m). According to these interviewees, the church also today seems to be viewed as the expert on poverty, the specialist in grass-roots sorrow, by both the media and municipal representatives.

The municipal data verifies this view; the municipal representatives’ expectations for the church emphasised the “Agent of altruism” orientation particularly strongly. The ideal role of the church could be summarised as maintaining its value basis and caring for our neighbour in our public discussions, and aiding the municipality in practical caring tasks. Thus, the “Aid and Grace” orientation did not attract support from the public authorities. The same applied to ordinary local people, but their expectations of the church welfare role resembled the “Mouthpiece of God” much more than the “Agent of altruism”.

### **The mixed nature of welfare ideals**

As stated above, the dimensions illustrate differences in primary emphasis in all four orientations, and do not exclude each other. Most cases the interviewees could easily be described in terms of these the four orientations. While it was sometimes harder to use the model with the church data, the model reflected the municipal and local population viewpoint more easily. I also introduced the model to a larger group of church social workers in one of their training session in autumn 2004. The feedback was positive and quite enthusiastic. A few noted that it gave them means for thinking about their work environment and church teachings. However, some noted that the dimensions were very interrelated – which is of course true. The interview data from the church representatives also illustrated this interrelatedness. For instance, *“Nobody will have motivation, calling or energy, and perseverance for this social*

*work and social responsibilities if this spiritual aspect is not present. It is really difficult to separate these two” (f).*

Overall, my four-orientation model seems to coincide with the recent findings of a UK study by Smith that in faith-based organisations there are values and theologies which contradict the values of social work and social inclusion, an implicit dualism that separates the spiritual and material realms. Furthermore, the people’s perspective may tend to favour spirituality that does not engage with politics and welfare.<sup>81</sup>

### Co-operation as a welfare strategy

Co-operation was strongly represented in the interview data, specifically the municipal data, in relation to the welfare role of the church. This theme interestingly also relates to both uniqueness as well as similarities between the church institution and secular institutions. Sociologically, this theme clearly illustrates the welfare mix and hybrid approaches<sup>82</sup> that combine elements of state, market, and civil society.

The church was considered a crucial co-operator in welfare in Lahti municipality. Co-operation takes various forms including family counselling, children’s’ after school clubs, organizing babysitters, crisis work, and care for criminals. The parish union and Lahti municipality also share numerous outsourcing service contracts. In other words, the interviews with the municipal representatives revealed that the co-operation was more extensive than the municipal documents suggest. This contradiction is hard to explain.<sup>83</sup>

All in all, both municipal and church representatives view these municipality-church networks positively and as necessary. There is criticism, but it is a minority. Both parties also stress that the parties learn to know each other much better in the joint projects, which lowers the barriers between the parties and reduce prejudices – it is a positive cycle. Both parties also saw increasing co-operation to maintain the local welfare in the near future. Interestingly, interviewees often even talked about “our state church”; church and state (or the municipality) still being felt to be inter-related. The Church of Finland does not need to earn trust in co-operation networks as smaller associations might have to.<sup>84</sup> Overall, the Church of Finland and its social work interestingly occupies a position between the public and third sectors. Similarly, the church seems to act on – and is expected to – what organisational studies have called associational and non-associational models:<sup>85</sup> while the Church has a trusted position, large paid staff and massive resources, it is expected to encounter people at the grass-roots level and to act faster and more flexibly than public sector agents.

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<sup>81</sup> Smith 2004, 25.

<sup>82</sup> E.g., Lorentzen & Enjolras 2005.

<sup>83</sup> This contradiction might, naturally, have to do with the fact that the municipality interviewees knew my research interest to be focused on the role of the church institution.

<sup>84</sup> This is very different in the USA; Cnaan (2002, 239) has written that “if congregations help the community, then they will be treated as part of the municipality”.

<sup>85</sup> E.g., Harris 1998, 182 on the associational model. Others (e.g., Berger & Neuhaus 1996; Casanova 1994) have noted that congregations are at the boundary of the private and public spheres of activity.

Notwithstanding the fact that basically all the individual interviewees regarded the co-operation as positive, all in their own different ways, putting the individual perspectives together, revealed at least two larger dilemmas in co-operation. First, are the co-operation parties treated and considered as equal? Both parties emphasise equality, and the public authorities particularly stressed that the church is “an equal partner”. The church also seems to stress this equality and trust even though the municipality has been unable to honour all its contracts (the contracts made with the church), for instance, in family counselling. It thus seems to an outsider that there is a stress on equality but clearly it is like a bigger and smaller brother, the church being the latter.

Another co-operation dilemma concerns the spirituality. In the interviews we discussed whether there had ever been conflict because of this. While none of the municipal representatives had such experiences, a few reported having got negative feedback, or rather reserved attitudes, from other parties (such as third sector representatives in education). Such reservations seemed exceptional, however. A few others noted that even if they themselves do not object to the church’s spirituality even in co-operation networks, they know that some of their municipal colleagues (both officers and elected officials) regard the church somewhat suspiciously for this reason. In addition, many municipal interviewees noted that the church must maintain and demonstrate its value-basis in co-operation, but not too visibly, especially in such matters: *“in cooperation activities spirituality cannot be too visible, yet the church should not deny it, or anyways hide it, because the church does have its own mission. But there really is reason to think about what the golden mean in this might be”* (f).

In other words, when asked whether the spirituality might effect co-operation between the church and the municipality, the interviewees admitted that in co-operation projects the spiritual emphasis must not be obvious. The spirituality of the church had seemed narrow-minded and prejudicial when the church had refused to participate with municipal authorities in arranging an inter-cultural Ramadan or parties.

Overall, the public authorities see spirituality as a “deep-dimension” (f), and particularly the church’s values-basis as assets. While these must be visible, they should not be blatant in co-operation, not the primary focus. *“The church should be involved and act as itself, in its own territory, but if the church gets involved in something else or in co-operation with others, spirituality must not be too apparent. If the church says something, they must be spiritually involved in it”* (f). Overall, none of the municipal authorities seem to realise the extent of mixed expectations they are posing for the church institution: its spirituality and values are seen as essential and are valued extremely highly, but they should not be apparent in co-operation networks. Another layer of tension in this dilemma is offered by the fact that nobody, not even the church representatives, seem to regard this as a problem; things seem to be going smoothly. This would, however, be an intriguing matter to investigate further.

A few challenges for the future and development of co-operation networks in particular were observed. A few interviewees commented that joint projects involving various agents are not often ongoing, permanent work, nor do they change the structures and models of the local social and welfare work in the longer run. This

continuity was seen as a welfare challenge. Furthermore, as many of the authorities in Lahti have recently changed, and the organisation of the town council is under review, many noted the critical importance of maintaining co-operation networks. Others stated that present co-operation in their workdays is very client-based and that there could be more joint training courses. It was noted that this would further co-operative action as people would network and get to know each other better.

## Theological analysis

All parties agree on the very clear theological norm of charity and helping behaviour. The theological motives for practical social work are based on the teachings of Christ about helping those in need. Christian scriptural values are also considered fundamental. Values found in the present data correspond to those found in UK-based research on faith-based urban regeneration: community, peace, love of one's neighbour, and social justice.<sup>86</sup> My findings also seem to reflect the theological directives found in the welfare work of American churches: scriptural texts, response to God's love, and compassion. Another similarity was that political involvement was clearly not a preferred option.<sup>87</sup> The church must do welfare work and fight for justice, but it should not use party politics.

In the data of this present study, values in particular are used as sociologically very interesting legitimisation; both church and municipal authorities as well as local population regarding the value-basis of the church as its essential characteristic. No other institution has such an asset, and such shared treasure.

An interesting concept concerning the theological motives for both practical social work and public debate on welfare issues emerged in interview data was "the basic task of the church" (or, as some put it, "the church's own essence"). Many of the interviewees used these expressions. For instance: *"Everything that is done under the church, e.g., diaconal social work and child work, is in many ways meaningful and none is pointless. – But we have to ask: is it all church's task? How do all these activities relate to our basic task?"* (hospital counsellor, m) When I asked the interviewees to specify what they understand this "basic task" to include, the answers were quite various. However, most included three elements: preaching, pastoral counselling, and service. The interviewees often themselves commented spontaneously on the diversity of their own answers, for instance: *"well actually the basic task of the church itself is enormously wide and multi-dimensional"* (a hospital counsellor).

Overall, however, there were great differences over the "basic task of the church". In the church data the four orientations above also describe the theological varieties in the data well. Is the "basic task" and core of the church more in social or spiritual matters, and is the ideal social conscience of the church to be louder or more muted? Those representing the "Agent of altruism" orientation in particular appealed to the value of every individual; God has given us the task of encountering and assisting everyone. Precisely the same theological reason was used to legitimise

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<sup>86</sup> Smith 2004, 25.

<sup>87</sup> Cnaan 2002, 240–243.

the public voice of the church, public debates being one way of fulfilling God's teachings on charity. Words and deeds must come together. In other words, the "Agent of altruism" orientation was typical among the church representatives, not the "Aid and Grace" one.

By contrast, those in favour of the "Mouthpiece of God" or "God's silent ones" orientation emphasised rather the theological motives for the church *not* being socially extremely active. Those emphasizing the former orientation ("Mouthpiece of God") did approve and encourage the church to participate in ethical discussion. However, Luther's teaching on two regiments was used to explain why the church should not get involved in social work. They also used the same teaching to give theological legitimisation to the public debates, since the church must remind the municipality of its welfare responsibility. Those representing the "God's silent ones" attitude shared this theological standpoint on welfare activity, while preferring the church to focus on the media only on spiritual issues, not welfare discussion. These reasons, as already noted, were linked theologically to a revival movement background. Furthermore, as a pastors indicated, an active media role might also be considered heretical since the church must not teach that right actions bring people closer to God, which the media voice of the church may be construed as conveying. The classical Lutheran position distancing itself from the Roman Catholic tradition is obviously reflected in these views.

Other questions than that of whether to emphasise social work or not might also involve theological dilemmas. Some church representatives, especially theologians, pointed out that while church social work does increase positive attitudes and the societal status of the church, it should not be used as an advertising gimmick.<sup>88</sup> One interviewee, a vicar, even quoted the Bible and Christ's words: "*when your left hand is helping others, your right hand should not know about it*". The message seems to be that social work cannot be used instrumentally but has inherent value. Doctrinal considerations forbid the church to use social work for such ends. As with the findings among USA congregations in the provision of welfare,<sup>89</sup> proselytizing did feature in the social actions of the church.

Theological considerations thus led the church representatives to stress the importance of the church following and observing the tasks and services of the municipality. Second, the church always has to emphasise the depth dimension and spirituality in its actions. The theological vision of the church and the ideal of its basic task could thus be summarised as helping those in true need, and spirituality informing all actions. This overview, however, involves the dilemma of whether the church as an institution should be reactive or independent, the servant of the municipality or a free-spirited pioneer?

Most of the documents apply to the national level and, as noted elsewhere, one problem that arose was that the priests considered it easier to make a stronger statement at that level than locally. Although I also still have to go through some local documents to resolve this question fully, at the moment my firm belief is that there do not seem to be obvious tensions.

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<sup>88</sup> This is the same dilemma as that raised by the church social workers above, in the sociological analysis.

<sup>89</sup> Cnaan 2002, 243.

The extent of emphasis on social work in the data surprised me. An illuminating comment was offered by an elected official, (f): *“The time of church welfare has come. When we look at the entire Christian history, first 500 years were the time of St Augustine, then in approximately AD 1000 Christianity and Islam separated. Then there was Luther in 1500. Now it has become the time of social welfare. This is the era of social welfare! Actually the circle just closes as the church of the first Christians undertook a great deal of social welfare!”*

As noted earlier in the analysis on the four orientations, the authorities and local people see the ideal of the church differently. Naturally, this is not explained in such profound theological terms as by the church representatives. However, two interesting theological points rose from these categories of data.

The first that arises from public authority and population is the legitimation of the church’s social work and especially its public visibility: historical continuity of the church and its mission. The church as a theological institution has a particularly long history, which is understood to legitimate its active welfare role. The church *“has always been with us; it links us to a greater chain of history”* (young woman). The unchanged elements of the church, such as its liturgy, values, teachings, are often highly valued in a rapidly changing society.

Second, as pointed out earlier, it was thought that help from the church may be easier to accept than from elsewhere. People see the church work and acts of altruism as based on free will; thus individuals consider that *“they help me because they simply want to”* (f). According to classical sociological studies on altruism and gift-giving, all gifts are binding. For instance, Cnaan has noted that welfare services provided by a public agency may be easier to receive for this reason, as they are provided under professional aegis; people do not have to feel obliged. Congregations, however, may send the message *“please reform your ways and demonstrate values and attitudes that are in line with social responsibility”* with their social work.<sup>90</sup> My findings in part contradict this view. On the one hand, individuals seem to view the motivation of the church as more orientated towards free-will, which makes receiving help easier. On the other hand, local population and municipal representatives do see the helping acts of the church as *“maintaining values and attitudes that are in line with social responsibility”* (m). The church maintains overall solidarity and altruism through its actions.

## Gender analysis

Approximately half the interviewees included no reflections on gender, not even on being prompted. For instance, those challenges seen as the biggest facing Lahti (long term structural unemployment, accumulation of problems for the same people) were rarely related to gender issues.

It may well be that this lack of gender data reflects my inability as a researcher, as the gender viewpoint is new research for me. However, gender researchers in Finland indicate that it may well be particularly hard with Finnish data to get past

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<sup>90</sup> Cnaan 2002, 292–293.

the rhetoric of gender equality.<sup>91</sup> Finns are in many senses pioneers of gender equality, and the issue of gender was talked about and considerably developed, especially during the 1980s. My impression is that if the interviewees offered any hints on gender inequality, they would have to admit that we had failed to progress – or that we never were as good as we thought we were.

This section is an overview of all three categories of the data. Many interviewees did admit to some gender differences in the present status of welfare in Lahti. However, none of these emerged spontaneously during our discussions on well-being and welfare.

Taken all in all, the gender issue was rather marginal, as was shown by its never being mentioned as an issue in the church's pronouncements on ethical issues. Overall, people want the church to defend weaker people, which perhaps suggests that the gender situation in Finland is considered satisfactory. In other words, people seem to think that the problems of exclusion, inequality, and marginalisation are more severe than gender. This may relate to the conclusion reached by Esping-Andersen that the Scandinavian welfare model is well positioned to face both the present-day and approaching exigencies, since its de-familialisation of welfare responsibilities makes it the model well-placed to activate the full potential of the changed role of women.<sup>92</sup>

A few respondents did note that the gender issue is in their opinion somewhat passé, no longer a critical challenge. The atmosphere in most interviews seemed to be that gender equality is today considered such a basic value and to reflect the status quo that it would be "*harking back to the past*" (m) to mention ongoing, demanding challenges in this area. Thus, "no comment" may tell us a lot about the basic nature of gender equality.

Some of the interviewees were, however, quite perceptive on this issue as well critical. For instance, one church counsellor (man – one could argue that this indicates something altogether different gender-wise) noted that gender equality in Finland has progressed too far, since the demand for it in various working groups simply makes work and co-operation harder.

Furthermore, the particular question of whether gender separates or connects people of different culture was also raised. One church social worker (woman, previously in international church work and its pioneer) interestingly commented that co-operation transcending religious boundaries cannot very easily build on gender roles and issues or educational traditions since these vary too much between cultures. Yet religion – notwithstanding the fact that people do not share same religion – may then become a basis for co-operation in her opinion. However, in Finnish culture the issue of gender may be a connective element. One respondent noted that one way to approach people at the grass-roots level is through gender roles; gender may function as basis for communal spirit. She (church elected representative, w) specified that that the church could, for instance, "*organise happenings for women entrepreneurs and for men – not really social gatherings for men but for instance car repair courses*".

Another problem is the question of whether gender is an issue or rather a challenge. Despite my attempting to approach gender more generally than simply as a question of which sex is "doing better", a clear majority of the gender data con-

<sup>91</sup> E.g., interview with Eeva Raevaara, 2004.

<sup>92</sup> Esping-Andersen 2002, 14.

cerned particular gendered welfare and well-being challenges, elements the interviewees themselves were concerned about. Furthermore, it is interesting to ask what the interviewees see as gender differences. What I mean by this is that people might perceive some differences in welfare gender-wise but these do not arise when asked about specifically. For instance, one family counsellor (m), noted that only a third of their clients were men. He did not, however, include this as a gender problem or even a difference in welfare and well-being, but as a natural outcome of the fact that, first, women express themselves better verbally, and, second, *“marriage means a human relationship matter more in everyday life to women than it does to men”*.

There seems to be a slight tendency for the national-level documents to represent the ideal picture, while locally the picture might be more “old-fashioned”. For instance, while most church social workers are women, their director is male. Overall, the municipal social welfare system also seems to be divided on very traditional gender lines indeed. Even more interestingly, no interviewee suggested that this is a dilemma or equality problem.

Furthermore, the fact that I pondered earlier – that the lack of gender data might reflect the need to maintain the self-image of a gendered equality pioneer – might also relate to a conflict between the national and local realities. Since the national documents paint a rather idealised picture of gender equality, it might be intellectually impossible to admit that “we are not doing that well” locally. In other words, the national-level documents might encourage gender equality rhetoric even if the local reality is otherwise. Not even the local church might wish to shake this confidence or see past it – were there need to do so.

A few interviewees emphasised that the direction of altruism and social work has increased in the church since women were admitted as priests. One man (estate personnel) even noted in highly visionary style: *“Men could go on arguing about power, they could keep the theology. Women could take over the diaconate and social work entirely. We could even have a separate national-level bishop for the diaconate! The voice of the whole of Finland! I bet the voice and teachings of Jesus would be more visible in this way, through the diaconate. Church social work, like municipal social work, consists entirely of these reliable, faithful, hard-working, kind women. They work in such an altruistic manner.”* This reflects both positive views and high expectations of the social work of women, particularly in the church context.

One central conclusion based on the local population data and to some extent the municipality representatives is that the theological debates on women priests and the rights of homosexuals seem to erode credibility and trust in the church as a promoter of gender equality. The debate on women priests continues in Lahti (as in other Finnish parishes) – a fact noted by a few respondents, from both church and other contexts. Indeed, the interviewees saw the women priest debates very negatively: *“all these discussions on women priests and gays and stuff, it really is quite depressing to listen – it is like gosh, we have already moved on from the days when grandpa bought his first watch – don’t they get it?”* (young m). Overall, thus, it seems that on equality issues the church may not seem to be a pioneer and fighter at all.

The fact that a substantial majority of welfare workers and volunteer both in the church and municipality are women was not seen as a problem or a challenge. In other words, well-being and welfare work is considered a “women’s niche”. A few

church social workers (women) did emphasise, however, that they really are happy to have at least a few men working among them. They bring, in their view, versatility to the work, a little positive “spark” (f) between people, and lower the threshold for some clients to seek help from the church.

Beside the fact that welfare work appeared in the interview data very much as women’s duty, caring responsibilities in home contexts were much more the woman’s responsibility, sometimes entirely so. For instance, talk about taking care of children at home by the interviewees, including church representatives, was always about mothers.

There was, however, one interesting dilemma in the combination of femininity and caring; a few church social workers talked about some difficulty in combining their femininity with their work. For instance: *“I go there to help people, or to give these training courses, always as myself, even wearing make up”* (f). Such a comment might not appear in the municipality context; perhaps the church context further underscores the challenge of women having to prove their expertise to themselves and to others if they want to *“look like women”* (f).

As stated above, most data-determined gender viewpoints concerned specific challenges in women’s and men’s welfare. These are reported next.

### **Challenges in men’s well-being and welfare**

The one overall, shared gender difference theme in welfare noted by quite a few respondents was that it may well be easier for women to seek help, and particularly in mental care and counselling. For instance: *“I do think that a Finnish man is not doing well. And he has very high threshold for seeking help. – Men are much harder to motivate to find help – The overall starting point is much worse for men than for women. It sort of relates to the Finnish culture and the role of men”* (church counsellor, m).

Women, in the opinion of the interviewees, might also have better knowledge of aid channels (both in social and health care) than men do. The interviewees also claimed that men only seek help (such as counselling) when in extreme crisis – perhaps too late.

Furthermore, both the church and municipal representatives consider that women seem to have better social networks that assist them in times of trouble. Even though loneliness touches both, quite a few interviewees thought that women had closer social ties and networks than men. Specifically, it was noted that widowers and unmarried, middle aged men suffer from a lack of social ties. These groups were mentioned as *“kind of social orphans”* (church social worker, w). Related to this, the interviewees also pictured men as suffering from passiveness and lack of energy (or lack of activity, sloth) more than women. A young woman interviewee also pointed out that it is very depressing to see so many elderly drunk men *“all over the city”*.

Furthermore, unemployment may hit men harder than women, as the respondents thought. The data offers two grounds for such a conclusion. First, there may be gender differences in values: *“Unemployment might hit men harder as their world is structured around work much than the women’s world”* (church social worker, w). Another woman interviewee noted that *“The unemployed men might lack the energy and patience (or perseverance) demanded in volunteer work”* (church social worker, f). The church volunteer activities may be too feminine for men: *“Voluntary work of*

*the church might not be very appealing to men as the tasks we can offer fit women better – the kitchen, cleaning”* (social worker, municipality-church joint project, w). This reveals that traditional gender roles are still very apparent in volunteering.

All in all, men might lack certain basic skills of everyday social life – as pointed out by both church and municipal representatives. The respondents also thought that women might have better survival skills (for instance, knowledge of cooking), so that some church social services, specially the food-bank, were depicted rather as aid for men than for women. Furthermore, it seems to the respondents that the need to help men has increased during the last decade or so.

### **Challenges in women’s well-being and welfare**

Interestingly, the data reveals much a clearer shared view of the particular challenges in men’s well-being than women’s, no overall trends on women’s welfare being apparent in the data. There are however two points, each noted by from one to three respondents.

First, although the overuse of alcohol has traditionally been a male problem in Finland, a few interviewees noted a recent increased in heavy drinking by women. Second, one interviewee (w, church social worker) questioned whether women have worse work opportunities than men, particularly in education and social work: *“Do men find jobs more easily – in these traditional women niches?”* Somewhat similarly, another church social worker (woman) expressed her worry over the unemployed or very-low-waged women, many of whom are also single parents. Many interviewees actually mentioned that the present Finnish unemployment benefits make it very hard for an unemployed person to accept a short-term job without losing benefits. This, however, applies both women and men, and none of the interviewees saw this as a gender issue.

Overall, the two preceding sections show clearly that the interviewees were more concerned and worried about men’s welfare and well-being than women’s. In my view, two conclusions can be drawn. First, men really do have deficiencies in their welfare, and the church is considered as playing some a role in promoting their well-being. Second, however, this empirical finding may actually indicate between the lines that expectations of women’s survival and promotion of their own well-being – as well as promotion the well-being of other individuals and overall social networks – is higher. For instance, it could well be that widows are expected to survive better than widowers; we are more worried about the well-being of lonely men than of lonely women. One interviewee also contemplated the classical mother myth: *“We have long had this sort of mother myth. It stresses and wears out the working mums of today. Even though the myth was much stronger, let’s say two decades ago, it still persists strongly. For instance, women have their own particular impressions of how clean their homes should be. The men’s ideal is very different”* (f).

In other words, the expectations of the maintenance of social networks and welfare are higher for women. We may take it for granted that women take good care of themselves and of their close relatives and friends.

## Main findings and concluding reflections

Religion in late modernity faces difficulties but perhaps some new opportunities (or what can be regarded as opportunities) as well. Specifically, the role of churches is particularly important in the current social policy debates in both Europe and the United States.<sup>93</sup> As illustrated in the Finnish case study chapter in Working Paper 1 from the same research project,<sup>94</sup> the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland holds a clear majority position among the religious institutions in Finland. Thus, many of the activities of the Finnish church still today have a visible profile.

Furthermore, especially since the economic recession of the early 1990s it has become typical to view the church, particularly its welfare activities, as one of ‘filling gaps’ left by the state and municipalities. Today (at least) two interesting phenomena seem to be taking place, as has been played out in the above pages: first, co-operation between the church and the municipality is active and even increasing and, second, the church is expected to contribute to welfare activities, especially in areas where municipal resources are weaker, and its activities are highly respected. These two larger trends seem to, in a fascinating manner, *both* contradict *and* complement each other.

The core of this research is, to certain extent, what we understand by “welfare”. All in all, the definition of the good life and well-being were generally quite similar in all three categories of data. Furthermore, all parties conceived welfare as basically consisting of essential services. Both narrow and broad definitions of the term welfare service can be found in the literature.<sup>95</sup> The findings of this research seem to vindicate the narrower definition: provision of goods and services stated in public law.

However, understandings of welfare responsibility varied; the local people and church representatives emphasised the municipal responsibility, and the municipality representatives underscored co-operation and other agents. No gender differences appeared in the welfare definitions. However, older people seemed to define well-being and welfare using less ambitious criteria – being satisfied with less – and also emphasised the municipal responsibility more.

Overall, the findings seem to be well in line with the latest EU policy papers, even if none of the interviewees make this link explicit. For instance, conclusion of the EU’s Lisbon Summit referred to an “active and dynamic welfare state”. The emphasis then is on 1) the goal of activating people, 2) the state providing adequate social protection, and 3) the government conducting and managing social policy.<sup>96</sup>

The main findings of the Finnish case are summarised next, according to the three main categories of data:

<sup>93</sup> For texts analysing and reporting this, see e.g., Ammerman 1997; Beyond Charitable Choice 2001; Harris 1998; Cnaan 2002; Cnaan et al. 1999; Dionne 2000; Bäckström 2001; Carlson-Thies, 2003; Jeppsson Grassman 2001 and 2003; Solomon 2003; Yeung 2003. Majority of texts on this area have lately been on USA.

<sup>94</sup> Yeung 2004.

<sup>95</sup> Lorentzen & Enjolras 2005, 8.

<sup>96</sup> The term “active welfare state” was coined by the Belgian government in 1999. Vandebroucke 2002, ix.

### **The views of local public authorities**

- They consider all the agents promoting Lahti's welfare together; they could not manage their social responsibility without other agents such as the church
- Good network of welfare providers
- New strategies: 1) further outsourcing of services, 2) new welfare strategy emphasizing citizen responsibility
- The church in Lahti indeed has a role to play in the construction of welfare. Most interviewees were also satisfied with its recent and present activeness in welfare. The welfare work of the church will be increasingly needed in the near future.
- The "state-church" – image: contracts with the church are not considered outsourcing of welfare
- In practical social work: "basic services" from the municipality, special practical social welfare services from the church, especially in psychosocial services, crisis help, and work with special groups such as the elderly.
- Idealism: the church motivated by "spirituality, love and free will"
- Special church welfare know-how: 1) spirituality, values (especially, caring and communality), 2) the ability to encounter people better and deeper, and 3) voluntary membership. If the municipality and church offer the same services, these are evident in church actions, according to the municipal authorities
- The church should adopt a clear stance in welfare debates, even concerning municipal services, but not "patronise and preach". They understand this as promotion of welfare: maintaining the values of caring and spirit of solidarity.
- Double agenda for the church: spirituality *and* serving. Spirituality is viewed as a somewhat problematic issue.
- The church has recently become a more central, equal player in welfare; it has undergone societal and internal change.
- Wishes in relation to the development of church activities concern visibility and public visibility, as well as providing information and advertising the services.
- In those areas of well-being and welfare where the churches' activities are strong, the resources of municipal social work can be reduced; overlapping activities are viewed as unnecessary and avoidable. The fear of many of the church representatives thus seems to be valid
- The church may lose its critical voice on welfare in close, active co-operation. The church may also lose its distance from the municipality.

### **The views of the church representatives**

- The church has a role to play in welfare and well-being of the people, but views on this role vary
- The church should carry the responsibility of those people that no-one else looks after, the weakest. Many however consider that the practical social work activities of the church should be temporary, not long-term.
- The core of church social work could be stated as "keeping up with the times and needs"
- Views on activities vary; e.g., the work with the elderly is well respected and seen as to complement municipal activities. Counselling is also trusted.

- The church's responsibility is to remind all people of their personal social responsibilities; the church as a promoter of value of caring and communality
- While the church does, and should, encounter people well, there are also different views on the ideal way of doing so
- Public debates on welfare and ethical issues are one part of social responsibility.
- Public debate is not understood to take place only through discussion and words; a public voice includes putting the values and beliefs of the church into action (e.g., into welfare action)
- The division of church resources is also considered a clear public message
- Differences: public voice – one or many? And on which issues?
- Hopes for further networking and further information in social work

### **The views of the local population**

- All people interviewed saw the church as having a role to play in welfare, but the ideal role was portrayed differently.
- Forms of activity in which the church was viewed as having a particular role: social networks and meeting places, overall psychological well-being, and the needs of special groups.
- The majority, however, consider that ideal role of the church is not in actual social work but maintaining societal and individual morality, ethics and specifically the spirit of caring for one's neighbour.
- Contributing to the public welfare debate was seen as the heart of the church's social welfare responsibility
- Local people think that there are many present-day social processes underlining the need for the church's to promote the values of welfare and the ethics of caring
- At the local level, even more public statements and discussions on welfare were wanted
- The spiritual activities of the church were viewed much more critically than its public welfare debate statements
- Changes in the church have been in the right direction according to the local people, the church having become much closer to the grass-roots level and every-day concerns.
- Further grass-roots activity by the church divided views: some strongly criticised the church's participation in every-day events, while others very much hoped to meet and talk to priests and social workers at such events, as well as in the street
- That the church today offers its services without asking about people's faith and level of religiousness is highly appreciated.

If I had to capture the entire range of empirical findings of the Finnish case in one expression, it would be "encountering": *expectations of the encountering church*. In the data as a whole clear illustrations that there are elements in which the church is different and not comparable to other organisations. As stated in the above analysis sections, these elements included particularly the spirituality and value-basis dimensions of the church, its opportunity to encounter people at a deeper level, as well as its opportunity to make itself heard on such matters.

The essential expectation that could be characterised as "the encountering church" reflects what Harris has called the social integration and "care catalyst"

functions of churches: being able to identify people in need of care and to disseminate the information.<sup>97</sup> The four-dimensional model introduced above was initiated and built very much with this question of what the essential characteristic of the church is or should be in mind.

Overall, these high expectations concerning maintenance of solidarity values, a spirit of altruism and encountering people illustrate the social integration function of the church, since it is considered the voice of collective identity, the promoter of societal ties. In the sociological sense, there is clearly a classical durkheimian tone in the expectations imposed on the church.

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