

Churches in Europe as Agents of Welfare  
– England, Germany, France, Italy and Greece

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# Contents

<i>Martha Middlemiss</i> The Anglican Church as an Agent of Welfare – the case of Darlington.....	1
<i>Annette Leis-Peters</i> Protestant Agents of Welfare in Germany – the Case of Reutlingen.....	56
<i>Corinne Valasik</i> The Catholic Church in France as an Agent of Welfare – the case of Evreux.....	123
<i>Annalisa Frisina</i> The Catholic Church in Italy as an Agent of Welfare – the case of Vicenza .....	182
<i>Effie Fokas</i> The Greek Orthodox Church as an Agent of Welfare – the case of Thiva and Livadeia .....	218

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# The Anglican Church as an Agent of Welfare – the case of Darlington

MARTHA MIDDLEMISS

## Methods and materials

Individual and focus group interviews have been used as the main tools in the study, these have however been complemented by the collection of documents and statistics for both church and town, newspaper articles and informal fact finding interviews as well as observation in the form of tours of buildings at the disposal of both churches and other organisations. Interviews have been taped and transcribed.

The interview sample is split fairly evenly between representatives of the churches and religious organisations and those of the local authority, or other non-church institutions. Further, for purposes of analysis, the material can be split into five groups. Representatives of the Church of England; elected representatives of the local authority; employees of the local authority/public bodies; employees/volunteers of organisations within the voluntary sector and representatives of other denominations/ welfare organisations with a religious connection.<sup>1</sup> It is the first three groups that are of particular interest to this study, although the inclusion of the later two groups was essential in mirroring the situation in England. In the presentation of the interview responses here it is therefore the responses of Church and local authority representatives that will be analysed in detail, although the other interviews are not completely absent from the report. In some cases they have yielded factual information and in others provide additional reference points in the analysis of the core material.

On the Church side parish priests working in the town have been interviewed, of twelve interviewed only two are women. This mirrors the situation in the Church at large, although the focus on the clergy does mean that the large numbers of female volunteers in the churches are not represented as interviewees. The restricted size of the sample however led to the decision to cover all clergy in the area rather than selecting a mix of clergy and volunteers. In addition to these parish clergy, ordained representatives of some of the other main denominations of the town have been interviewed. On the non-church side elected and appointed representatives responsible for social and health questions were selected and here women were in the major-

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<sup>1</sup> Representatives of the local authority and of the Health service are included here. The Health service is technically not part of the local authority, but here the heading is used to include all providers of public services.

ity. Women are in a majority as employees of the public bodies in the town in the areas of health and welfare and this is reflected in the fact that this group of interviewees is entirely made up of women.<sup>2</sup> In this group an attempt was made to cover several areas of welfare provision and attention was therefore focused on those with managerial responsibility, although at different levels. In addition to those in the local authority representatives of the Darlington partnership and of important local voluntary bodies have been interviewed.

While the Church representatives all live in the town this cannot be said of the majority of those non-church representatives interviewed. The elected representatives live in their respective wards and have all been both resident in Darlington and active as councillors for long periods.<sup>3</sup> Employees in the public sector are more likely to live elsewhere and commute to Darlington to work. Their connection with Darlington is also likely to have covered only the past two or three years. Unlike the majority of the townspeople interviewees, both church and non-church, are well educated (the majority hold university degrees) and hold professional jobs (unsurprising however given that this was often a criterion for selection.) An age spread between mid 30s and pre-retirement is represented in the sample in both categories.

Table 1. Interviewees category and gender.

Interview category	Men	Women	Total
Church of England	10	2	12
Local Authority – Elected	1	4	5
Local Authority – Employee	0	4	4
Voluntary/ community sector	2	1	3
Other denominations	3	1	4
Total	16	12	28

Four focus groups were planned to gather the opinions of residents of Darlington. Practical problems meant however that only two were carried out. The focus groups were convened making use of contacts in the town and while this was practically the only way to proceed it brought its own problems. It proved difficult to communicate exactly what was needed to people, who while eager to help were naturally not fully aware of the needs of the project and of focus group methodology. Analysis of the material from the two groups that were carried out can therefore only provide an indication of attitudes that exist amongst some townspeople.

Documents collected include informal publications by the churches for internal use, publications by the Council, Partnership and health authorities detailing services provided and other initiatives. Other material includes statistics from the national Census and from the local authority. Newspaper articles have also been collected where relevant and available online, as subscription to printed versions of the local

<sup>2</sup> Local area statistics from the 2001 Census show that while men and women are fairly equally represented in the working population as a whole (20, 127 women aged 16–74 in work as compared to 22, 165 men). 38.1 percent of the female working population are employed in education, public administration and health compared to only 14.6 percent of the male working population.

<sup>3</sup> Wards are geographical units of division of the town for electoral/ bureaucratic purposes.

newspapers was not possible. References to the churches in the local newspapers are largely notes of events and services, rather than commentary on the role of the church. The Darlington Northern Echo does have one weekly column covering matters relating to the Christian churches, this too though concentrates largely on reporting from liturgical events and the reporter covers the whole of the North East.

## Interviews

The interviews have been carried out using a semi-structured method and interviewees were told as little as possible about the content of the project before being interviewed. Interviews have taken place in the interviewee's home or office, according to their own preference and took about an hour on average. In a number of cases the interviews were preceded or followed by a tour of the church building/ hall/ premises and a chance to ask additional factual questions.

An interview guide was followed in all interviews. The guides were however adapted according to the individual situation.

Generally the questions in the English interview guide represent a direct translation of the Swedish guide, although some were adapted to the national and local context. The main addition involved an explanatory sentence preceding questions relating to the value and or extent of voluntary participation as to many within in the English context questions of this nature appear absurd given the reliance of the system on voluntary work. It was therefore necessary to point out to interviewees that this itself is interesting and that a description of the role it played in their work is vital for the comparative study. Similarly, following a short explanation of the focus of the study on the majority church in many interviews it proved more productive to include all churches in questions of the role of religion, rather than concentrating solely on the role of the Church of England.

No questions were added to the interview guide although it is important to note that a question focusing on issues of cooperation between Church and state was automatically interpreted by the interviewees in a particular way which had to do with the local context. A formal partnership exists in the town between local authority, businesses and voluntary organisations, described in detail below, and perceptions of this colour responses relating to issues of cooperation across sectors.

The use of a snowball effect in determining candidates for interview proved both vital, in terms of using local knowledge to ascertain who key people are in the field and in terms of gaining introduction leading to interviews with people who might otherwise have refused given scepticism regarding the focus on religion in the project. The weakness of this method is, however, that it strengthens the tendency, already naturally present, for certain well known individuals to come to the fore, risking the marginalisation of less prominent voices.

The strength of the material lies in the individual voices that have come through and the variety of groups in the town that it has been possible to include in a relatively small sample. The weakness however also lies in the size of the sample. Given the fact that the study is qualitative and the methods used to gather interviewees the material can only provide a snapshot picture of the situation in one town in England.

## The Town of Darlington

The case study has been carried out in Darlington, a medieval market town in the North East of England. On the trade route north from London to Newcastle and Edinburgh the town was well placed during the industrial revolution and the railways, with associated heavy industry, played a large role in the growth of Darlington to an industrial town in the 1800's. During this period the prominent families in the town were all members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).<sup>4</sup> They used family and business connections with other Friends around the country in building up iron and engineering industries and as Gillian Cookson notes with reference to sources from the period: 'The Quakers, it was said, ran everything in town apart from the Anglican Church, the Licensed Victuallers Association (founded 1859) and the trades unions'.<sup>5</sup> This combination of religious and economic history is important to the current study, firstly because the perception of the town from outside is that it is a particularly pious area, given its Quaker past, and indeed the town's football team is still called the Quakers. Secondly, given that the Quaker families had such a prominent position, they also acted to a large extent as the benefactors of the town as far as welfare provision for workers was concerned. An awareness of the pivotal role of a free church, rather than the Church of England in the historical development the town is therefore important background to the study.

The town has however undergone significant changes during the late twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> Although once a manufacturing town, 80 percent of those in paid employment have jobs within the service sector and the average wage in the town is low reflecting this.<sup>7</sup> The Local Council is the single largest employer (5,100 employees), followed by the telecom company Orange (4,500) and then Darlington Memorial Hospital (2000).<sup>8</sup>

Of 5,100 people employed by the Council the majority are women (70.8 percent), but 83.5 percent of these work part-time. Only 16.5 percent of male Council employees (29.1 percent of the total) work part-time.<sup>9</sup> Unemployment is at 2.8 percent in the town, although the figure is much higher for men (4.2 percent) than for women (1.4 percent).<sup>10</sup> It must however be noted that traditional perceptions of gender roles may play a part in this difference in that many women not active in the labour force have chosen to look after family and home on a full-time basis and are therefore not registered as unemployed. In the UK as a whole, for example, in a survey in 2001, 33 percent of women of working age, but not active in the labour

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<sup>4</sup> For further discussion of the influence of Quakers on the town see Cookson, Gillian, 2004 and Orde, Anne, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Cookson, Gillian, 2004, 134.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed description of the history of Darlington's townscape see Cookson, Gillian, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Figures from Tees Valley Joint Strategy Unit (JSU) relating to 2002. Darlington Borough Council, September 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Figures from September 2004. Darlington Borough Council, September 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Darlington Borough Council, September 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Figures from August 2004 JSU/ Office for National Statistics. Darlington Borough Council, September 2004.

force stated that they did not want a job because they were looking after family and home, while only 3 percent of their male counterparts gave the same reply.<sup>11</sup>

Today the town has a population of 98.210.<sup>12</sup> Nearly 20 percent of the population is of retirement age and over, a figure that is slightly higher than the national average.<sup>13</sup> Correspondingly the numbers of young people in the town are slightly below the national average. There has been a small population increase in the town since the 1990's mainly as a result of the ratio of births to deaths in the region, migration into the area is a marginal factor in this growth. Population density is above average at 5.0 in the town compared to 3.4 in England and Wales as a whole.<sup>14</sup> The proportion of ethnic minorities in the population is below average at 2.1 percent compared with a national average of 9.1 percent.<sup>15</sup>

While Darlington has much in common with the rest of the surrounding Tees valley region<sup>16</sup> it also contains some noteworthy differences. It has a more elderly and more stable population than the surrounding area and while unemployment is above the national average, mirroring the situation in the wider region, unemployment levels in Darlington remain above the regional average. These figures must however be seen in the light of a more detailed analysis of the local situation.

Statistics which break down the town into its 25 administrative and electoral districts, called wards, show that far from being a homogeneous unit the town mirrors the national situation as regards huge inequalities in health and wealth. This is an imbalance which hides the full extent of deprivation in some areas of the town if only the mean figures for the town are taken. In the national index of multiple deprivation, for example, the average of the ward scores for the whole of Darlington places Darlington as 90<sup>th</sup> most deprived of 354 authorities nationally. However of the 25 wards in Darlington the lowest ranked, (where 1 is the most deprived), has a national ranking of 261 while the highest has placing 7370 of 7932 wards in total.

Government rankings which divide the town into even smaller units for statistical purposes show this even more starkly. The least affluent area in Darlington, the South side of Park East ward is amongst the worst 1.4 percent nationally, while the most affluent on the West side of Hummersknott, is in the best 7.8 percent nationally.<sup>17</sup> In practical terms these scores represent significant differences in life expectancy, financial stability and quality of life for the inhabitants. So while some in Darlington live in comfortable circumstances 44 percent of the residents of the town live in wards that are in the 25 percent most deprived in the country.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Expodata/Spreadsheets/D7679.xls> 15 September 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Mid 2003 estimates ONS. Darlington Borough Council, September 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Retirement age Females 60 years, Males 65 years. Total retirement age and over 19,284. Mid 2003 estimates ONS. Darlington Borough Council, September 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Population density measured in people per hectare, 2002. Darlington Borough Council, September 2004.

<sup>15</sup> Figures from Census 2001. Darlington Borough Council, September 2004.

<sup>16</sup> Figures from Census 2001. Darlington Borough Council, September 2004.

<sup>17</sup> The Tees Valley Region is the administrative sub-region of the larger North East Region in which Darlington is located.

<sup>18</sup> Darlington Borough Council External Funding Team, November 2004, 8.

<sup>19</sup> Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2004 and Census 2001. Darlington Borough Council, September 2004.

Providing a clear and concise account of the way that the town is run and how different bodies interact in government and provision of services is no easy task, as the system is not a streamlined structure ultimately accountable to one elected body. The figure below attempts to give some indication of the bodies involved and the ways in which they are connected. Some further explanation of the key bodies is however needed.

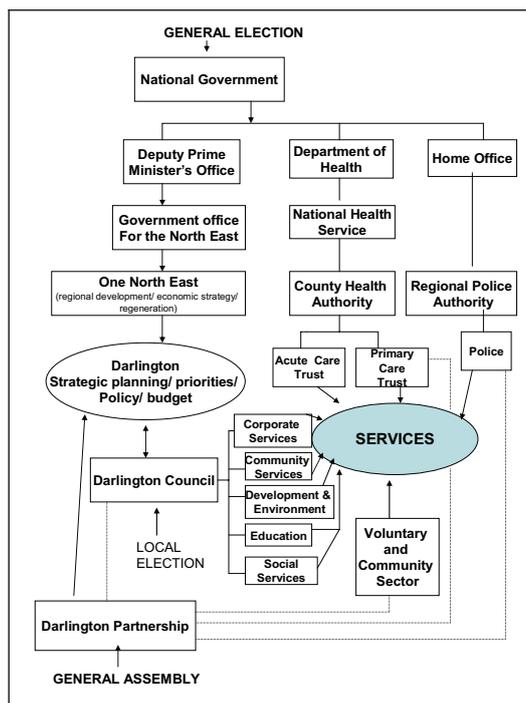


Figure 1. Figure showing in basic terms the bodies involved in the provision of social services and the relations between them.

Local elections held every four years elect representatives to Darlington Borough Council. Darlington has been a unitary authority since 1997, which means that it has responsibility for all services in Darlington that were previously provided by both County and Borough councils.<sup>19</sup> The full Council in Darlington, sitting in a parliamentary style chamber, decides on the budget and policy framework for the local authority. An Executive of nine members is responsible for detailed decision making and individual councillors take on responsibility for particular areas of work, following the portfolio model of national government ministers. The services of the Council are then provided through a department structure staffed by professionals, with five departments under the supervision of a chief executive.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> This two tier system with two separate decision making bodies at local level still operates in some parts of the country.

<sup>20</sup> At the time the research was carried out the council structure was, as stated, with five departments: Corporate Services, Community Services, Development and Environment, Educa-

The deprived North East is, in political terms, traditionally a Labour stronghold and this is also true of Darlington although the presence of both Conservative and Liberal Democrat representatives on the Borough Council, alongside the Labour majority, witnesses to the mixed social composition of the town. Following Council elections in 2003 the 53 seats are held by 35 Labour, 16 Conservative and 2 Liberal Democrat elected representatives. These councillors, as with all elected local government representatives in England, serve as unpaid representatives. This means that the Council also contains representatives of a variety of professions and business and social interests in the town.

Decision making at local level is, however not completely separate from national government in Westminster. In 1999 national government made a decision to support the development of regional strategies for the nine regions in the country. In practice this means supporting the development of economic strategies which cross several local authorities. These nine regional offices form part of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and provide a regional presence for national government carrying out functions for several government departments. The relevant body for Darlington is the Government Office for the North East and under its direction the regional development agency 'One NorthEast.'

'One NorthEast' is responsible for implementing a regional economic strategy and business development, regeneration and improvement in the North East region.<sup>21</sup> This body develops key priorities for the region in consultation with councils and businesses and is responsible for co-ordinating strategies for development of the region as a whole. As a result they have a direct impact on the workings of local government in Darlington, on priorities that are set for the town and the investment of funding from central government in the infrastructure and services of the town.<sup>22</sup>

Last but not least the running of the town is significantly influenced by the existence of a local strategic partnership, called the Darlington Partnership. This is a formalised way of coordinating the different interests in Darlington to work towards a common goal to improve the quality of life in the town. When the Partnership was set up in 2003 wide reaching consultations resulted in the development of a community strategy. This now forms the basis of all strategic goals in the development of the town, be that budget priorities set by the Council or grassroots action by voluntary bodies. One aim of the partnership is to encourage collective responsibility for the development and wellbeing of the town. The Partnership's website states:

Darlington Partnership brings together public, private, voluntary and community sector organisations – such as those in local government, health, education, crime reduction, businesses, and local community groups – to collectively achieve our ambitious vision for the Darlington area, contained in our Community Strategy. Our aim is to offer everyone the chance to be involved in moving Darlington forward – we believe it essential to our success.<sup>23</sup>

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tion and Social Services. ([www.darlington.gov.uk](http://www.darlington.gov.uk) 30<sup>th</sup> September 2003). Following a restructuring programme the Council, however now provides services through four departments: Community Services, Corporate Services, Development and Environment and Children's Services. ([www.darlington.gov.uk](http://www.darlington.gov.uk) 09<sup>th</sup> October 2005).

<sup>21</sup> [www.onenortheast.co.uk](http://www.onenortheast.co.uk)

<sup>22</sup> [www.go-ne.gov.uk](http://www.go-ne.gov.uk)

<sup>23</sup> Darlington Partnership website: [www.darlington.org.uk](http://www.darlington.org.uk) 23 March 2004.

The Partnership is controlled by an assembly that meets bi-annually to discuss basic strategy and develop the community strategy. This assembly is made up of representatives of community groups, public, private and voluntary sector bodies. The Partnership is then governed by a board elected by this body, which has responsibility for implementing the strategy, here councillors, local community groups, businesses and the churches are represented.<sup>24</sup> The Partnership is not a service provider in its own right, but works through the activities of individuals and organisations in Darlington to reach goals prioritised in the community strategy. Themed groups are an important part of the structure, taking responsibility for the delivery of specific areas of the strategy. The figure below, showing this structure and the chairpersons of the themed groups is itself a good indication of how the interaction between public, private and voluntary sectors works.

Partnership between different kinds of organisations is a key factor in understanding the provision of services in Darlington. What is not shown in this table is the variety of agencies and independent groups (public, private and voluntary) represented across the range of themes. The community safety group is, for example, chaired by the Chief Superintendent of Police, but the themes that this group works with involve cooperation with voluntary bodies that work with issues of drug misuse, local neighbourhood watch schemes and groups representing the interests of pensioners.

The very existence of the Partnership is dependent on the strong voluntary sector in Darlington. There are over 500 voluntary organisations and community groups in the town with over 10,000 volunteers.<sup>25</sup>

Table 2. showing the themed groups within Darlington Partnership, their areas of responsibility and chairpersons.

THEMED GROUP	COVERAGE	CHAIRPERSON
<b>Health Improvement and Social Exclusion</b>	Health improvement, promotion and preventative initiatives, acute and community health care, social services and housing	Director, Supreme Care Homes
<b>Learning and Skills</b>	Education, training and development, life-long learning and skills, early years provision	Principal, Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College
<b>Community Safety</b>	Tackling crime and disorder, anti-social behaviour, youth offending, drugs, public protection, licensing and enforcement issues	Chief Superintendent Durham Constabulary
<b>Economy and Environment</b>	Economic development, town centre, jobs, environmental protection and enhancement, culture, regeneration	Relationship Manager, Barclays Bank

In light of the importance of the Partnership it is interesting to look more closely at the priorities outlined in the community strategy. The vision for a better Darlington out-

<sup>24</sup> Darlington Partnership website: [www.darlington.org.uk](http://www.darlington.org.uk) 23 March 2004.

<sup>25</sup> Darlington Partnership, April 2003, 10.

lined in the strategy adopted in March 2003 is structured into four visionary goals and eight connecting themes and these areas set the agenda for the priorities determined by the Council and the budgets allocated to different areas of work. This strategy was adopted as the basis of the Council's prioritising, in the words of its corporate plan:

In recognition of the reality that public services are delivered by a range of agencies and following government guidance<sup>26</sup>

That there are a range of agencies involved in the provision of welfare is clear and they are all affected by the Council's budget, which is in turn influenced by the community strategy. The Goals and themes can be seen in the tables below.

Table 3. Showing the four visionary goals which form the basis for strategic planning in Darlington. Source: Darlington Community Strategy, April 2003, p.18.

An area creating and sharing prosperity	A location for learning achievement and leisure	A place for living safely and well	A high quality environment with excellent communication links
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Table 4. Showing the eight connecting themes which form the basis for strategic planning in Darlington. Source: Darlington Community Strategy, p.18.

Improving the local economy	Raising educational achievement	Promoting community safety	Enhancing the environment
Promoting inclusive communities	Stimulating leisure activities	Improving health and well-being	Developing an effective transport system

Three areas have been highlighted as priorities

- a) **Improving the local economy** – in recognition of its importance to all other aspects of improving quality of life
- b) **Raising educational achievement** – to bring about the desired long-term investment and improvements for the area and life chances for individuals.
- c) **Promoting inclusive communities.** – ensuring everyone has the opportunity to live active lives, participating in and contributing positively to all aspects of the community.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, while working with these aims, both the Partnership and the Council intend to target efforts on three groups of residents: the elderly, children and young people and those living in the most deprived wards.<sup>28</sup> All of these priorities are directly related to issues of welfare in the eyes of the Council. The motivation, for example, for a focus on improving the local economy is the impact that it has on

<sup>26</sup> Darlington Borough Council Corporate and Best Value Performance Plan 2004/5, 12.

<sup>27</sup> Darlington Partnership, April 2003, 18.

<sup>28</sup> For further details of Council strategy, goals and priorities see *Striving for Excellence* Darlington Borough Council Corporate and Best Value Performance Plan 2004/5.

quality of life. The Council's spending also reflects the focus on priority targets. Of a total expenditure of £160,469 000 in the revenue budget for 2004/5, £22,673 000 is allocated to social services and £53,469 000 to education. In addition capital spending plans for the same year allocate £24 million, £7.0 million of which is allocated to education, £5.5 million to housing and £1 million to the Sure Start programme targeting families with young children in areas of deprivation.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to the cooperation which the council has with a number of bodies, including the police, within the partnership, welfare provision is influenced by cooperation with the Primary Care Trust and the Acute Hospitals NHS Trust. These organisations have responsibility for general local health care and hospital care respectively and do not come under the jurisdiction of the Council. Rather they are independent statutory bodies accountable to the county statutory health authority and the public through a board consisting of both professional and local lay people. The PCT had an expenditure of £111,693 000 for the financial year 2003/4 of which 6,479 000 was used to commission services from non-NHS bodies.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, it is important to mention the local community partnerships in the town, which are both one result of the goal to promote inclusive communities and one way in which the Council and the town partnership seek to improve welfare services and quality of life in the most deprived areas of Darlington. There are currently eleven such partnerships, each covering one ward. They represent people who live in the ward and get involved in projects that will improve the lives of residents. They are run as "Stakeholder" partnership and partners include both local residents and organisations. Partners in North Road Community Partnership, for example, include local residents, ward councillors, Sure Start, local churches, residents associations, housing associations, local schools, police, Youth Service, uniformed wardens, Friends of the Park group, local community groups and voluntary groups.<sup>31</sup>

## The Religious Situation in Darlington

Statistics relating to religion from the 2001 Census show that the proportion of the population of the town who define themselves as Christian is above the national average at 79.8 percent. Figures for affiliation with other religions are on the other hand below national average, 0,6 percent identified themselves as Muslim, 0,1 percent Hindu, 0,3 percent Sikh, 0,3 percent replied that they had some other religion and 11,4 percent that they had no religion.<sup>32</sup> The category 'other' in this case includes both Buddhism and Judaism as well as those others mentioned with the national statistics.<sup>33</sup>

The above statistics seem to indicate large numbers of members of the churches in the town. Unfortunately for their sake, however, this picture is somewhat misleading of both membership and influence in the town. As with the situation at national

<sup>29</sup> Darlington Borough Council Corporate and Best Value Performance Plan 2004/5, 105–7.

<sup>30</sup> Darlington Primary Care Trust Annual Review 2003/4, 32.

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.darlington.org.uk/Home/Community+Partnerships/North+Road+Community+Partnership.htm>, 19 September 2005.

<sup>32</sup> Census 2001, Office for National Statistics Question asked 'What is your Religion?'

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.teesvalley-jsu.gov.uk/private/Cencard/atceth.htm> 7 February 2004.

level the Census results only show where individuals say that their sense of affiliation lies and are not membership statistics. The nearest that the Church of England comes to membership records is the electoral role, which individuals actively sign up to if regular attendees wishing to be able to vote in Church elections. Many more people however make use of the services of the Church in the parish in which they live for weddings, funerals and baptisms. The following table for the diocese of which Darlington is a part shows clearly that these figures are well below the numbers who identify themselves as Christian, but closely reminiscent of the situation at national level.

Table 5. Table showing numbers who make use of the Church of England nationally and in Darlington. All figures from Church of England statistics for 2002.

	Durham Diocese	England (total for 44 dioceses)
Population	1,435,000	49,800,000
Electoral role	24,000	1,206,000
Electoral role as % population	1.67 %	2.42 %
Weekly attendance	22,600	1,166,000
Weekly attendance as % population	1.57 %	2.34 %
Marriages	1,320	60,700
Funerals	7,440	224,200
Baptisms and thanksgivings	4,970	158,000
Baptisms per 100 live births	250	181

This difference between feeling of affiliation with and actual attendance at, or use of the services of the Church may go some way to explaining why the Church is frequently ascribed no particular role in the social sphere, but rather seen as one actor amongst many, while representatives of the Church see their role in a different light.

## Welfare Issues in Darlington

The priorities outlined by the Council and Partnership give an indication of the most pressing welfare issues in Darlington. In addition to this social issues mapping, which charts the existence of a range of social issues used to calculate indexes of multiple deprivation, indicates welfare issues that are particularly pertinent and also shows starkly the significant differences in standards of life between the different areas of Darlington.

The social issues map compiled in 2004 shows, for example, that in addition to being a low wage economy in general the situation is particularly bad for women. The average weekly wage for women in Darlington is very low in comparison with the national and also the regional average, as the following table shows.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Darlington Borough Council External Funding Team, November 2004, 5.

Table 6. Table showing average weekly wages for those in full-time employment working and living in Darlington, the North East and Britain.

Average Weekly Wages for Full-time Employment	Darlington as place of work	Darlington as place of residence	N.E Region as place of work	N.E Region as place of residence	Britain
Men	£438.50	£423.80	£437.80	£436.20	£525.00
Women	£298.50	£340.30	£347.30	£349.90	£396.00
All	£382.80	£390.80	£402.10	£402.90	£475.80

The fact that Darlington has a low wage economy and that this is an important issue as regards the welfare of the individuals who live there can also be seen in the reporting by the local media of investment in the town. For example, reports that the national retailer Argos is planning to locate a new distribution centre in Darlington, a development which would create around 700 jobs, (albeit on a large scale in this instance) generate much comment as to the development prospects for Darlington.<sup>35</sup>

One further issue which is important for welfare in the town and which also receives a considerable attention in the local press is that of crime and vandalism and youth crime and delinquency in particular. This includes debate both surrounding the quality of life and feelings of security for residents in the areas where it occurs and also into the causes of crime and prospects for young people. One article in a local newspaper following an incident which angered the local parish priest and pushed her into contacting the media resulted in greater public debate of the issue in the area, renewed interest in community development and was the catalyst for the local councillor to contact the priest in question. This first contact has since led to increased cooperation between the councillor and parish church and to the church being seen as a valid partner in conversation and action.<sup>36</sup> This said, it must be noted that rates of crime in the police region of which Darlington is a part are below national average. Figures from 2004/5 show a household crime rate of 2,555 per 10,000 households compared to an average for England of 3,000.<sup>37</sup>

One other relevant welfare issue to which also highlights gender divisions in welfare is the issue of lone parent households. Figures from 2002 show that lone parents with dependent children make up 7.1 percent of households in the region (compared to 6.5 percent in England as a whole).<sup>38</sup> Nationally women are significantly more likely to become lone parents than their male counterparts and this is also the case in Darlington. The Census in 2001 revealed 249 lone parent households in Darlington headed by a male and 2742 headed by a woman, furthermore employment statistics for these households show significant differences between men and women. 4.2 percent of male lone parents were in part-time employment in 2001 and

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.onenortheast.co.uk/page/newscentre/index.cfm#736>, 27 April 2004.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Christine Blakesley, March 2004 and Article *The Advertiser* 22 April 2004.

<sup>37</sup> *Crime in England and Wales 2004/2005*, Sian Nicholas, David Povey, Alison Walker and Chris Kershaw, Home Office Statistical Bulletin, July 2005, 56, Table 6.01.

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Expodata/Spreadsheets/D7679.xls> 19 September 2005.

52.21 percent in full-time employment compared to 31.29 percent of the female lone parents who were in part-time employment and 18.53 percent working full-time.<sup>39</sup>

Over and above these issues it is relevant to note a couple which recur frequently in the local press. One such is health and the provision and quality of healthcare. Often such articles can be linked to other issues such as quality of life for the elderly, community development and the role played by voluntary and community groups. In fact the reporting of the activities of local voluntary and community groups takes up much of the local newspaper. This provides an insight into the importance of such groups to welfare services in the town. It is not, for example, uncommon to read reports of fund raising events organised by individuals or groups including activities to raise money for local schools to fund 'extras' which tight budgets mean that they could otherwise not afford.<sup>40</sup>

Finally here it is important to highlight one further issue, not included in measures of deprivation, namely homelessness. It was both frequently mentioned by interviewees and is a focus of several projects with origins in the churches or with connections to the churches. The official measure of homelessness in the UK is the number of households accepted by local authorities as being unintentionally homeless and in priority need. Figures collated by the charity Shelter show that, using this measure, homelessness increased by just over a third nationally between 1997/8 and 2003/4. When broken down by region however the implications for Darlington are significant. In the North East the percentage change in numbers homeless between the same dates was nearly three times the national average at 91 percent.<sup>41</sup> This represents a considerable number of homeless individuals in Darlington, many of whom have multiple problems over and above their housing situation of alcohol or substance misuse and/ or mental health.

## The Anglican Church in Darlington

Darlington is in the Anglican diocese of Durham, one of two dioceses in the North East region. At a local administrative and pastoral level the Parishes there are part of the deanery of Darlington, one of 16 deaneries in the diocese. The Bishop has primary pastoral responsibility over the Diocese and is aided by a suffragan Bishop and 3 Archdeacons. Darlington is in the Archdeaconry of Auckland and the deanery is centred round the town with its southern border as the river Tees, which also marks the diocesan boundary. Of the 22 Parishes which make up the deanery 10 are in the town of Darlington, while the remainder are rural country parishes. At a deanery level the Area Dean, himself a parish priest, has pastoral and administrative responsibility for the parishes and clergy in the deanery.

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<sup>39</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/Expodata/Spreadsheets/D8352.xls> 10 September 2005 (figures are for parents with a dependent child living in a household with no other parents (whether related to that child or not).

<sup>40</sup> For local news see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/tees/news/> Local Radio: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/england/radiocleveland/> and local newspaper: [http://www.thisisthenortheast.co.uk/the\\_north\\_east/darlington/news/](http://www.thisisthenortheast.co.uk/the_north_east/darlington/news/)

<sup>41</sup> Shelter, 9 December 2004.

Since 2000 the diocese has also been working with the concept of ‘localities’ and Darlington is divided up into four such areas where parishes work together and share resources for mission and ministry.<sup>42</sup> Some of these localities contain a mixture of town and rural parishes. The Parishes themselves in the town of Darlington are geographical entities and closely related to ward boundaries. They therefore differ considerably both in size and social make up and consequently in their particular problems and priorities.

## Financial and human resources

Given the complex nature of transactions between local and national church it is difficult to give a clear picture of the financial situation at local level without presenting detailed financial records parish by parish. It is however possible to give some indication of the situation at a diocesan level. Seen at national level funding to support the work of the Church comes from two main sources, income from the assets of the national church managed by the Church Commissioners and independent giving, other small amounts come from fees taken for services such as weddings and funerals.

This means that the local Church Council (PCC) has a huge responsibility annually to meet the costs of running the church and targets for the sum which they are required to pay to the diocese. This ‘parish share’, funds the stipends and housing of the parish clergy and support costs of diocesan staff. How much each parish pays depends on a number of factors such as size of parish and number of members on the electoral role as well as the relative wealth of the population, rather than being directly related to the number of clergy employed.

Rising pension costs, in particular, have been a major issue for the Church in recent years and cuts have been made and restructuring taken place so that the Church can cover these costs as well as continuing with other ministry, without eating into capital. One element of this restructuring entailed the transfer of responsibility for pensions from the Church Commissioners to the dioceses, which resulted in increased parish shares. Campaigns followed to encourage church goers to increase the percentage of their income which they give to the Church and to give this in planned forms, which enable the Church to recover the income tax paid. Nationally, planned giving in 2002 increased by 5.9 percent on the previous year and raised over £235 million, which almost covered the combined costs of the parish shares.<sup>43</sup>

At parish level this means that any other costs which the parish has have to come from other sources, generally fundraising, collections at services and other giving such as bequests. In 2002 the total recurring income for PCCs in Durham diocese was £ 8,295,000, 82 percent of this was income from voluntary donations which is a weekly average of £4.75 per electoral role member, per week. This is below average for the country as a whole where the weekly average is £6.20. This however tells us little about the relative wealth of the Church in Durham diocese as average giving figures are affected by population density as well as average income, to name but two factors.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Information on the localities system in Durham Diocese can be found on the Diocesan website <http://www.durham.anglican.org/>

<sup>43</sup> The Archbishops’ Council, 2004, vii.

<sup>44</sup> The Archbishops’ Council 2004, 36.

Of more interest is how the income figures for the churches relate to expenditure. Total recurring expenditure for the PCCs in Durham Diocese in the same year was £8,463 000, six percent of which was charitable donations with the remainder funding running costs. This means that the Church was running at a deficit despite increases in giving. Nor can it be said that the Church has extravagant costs, although priorities in expenditure can always be questioned. Nationally the costs of funding full-time ministers account for about 44 percent of the Church's expenditure,<sup>45</sup> which translates as only 0.65 of a clergyperson per parish, 0.17 per 1000 residents. Durham diocese is slightly worse off with 0.14 stipendiary clergy per 1000 inhabitants, although this does equate to 0.80 of a minister per parish.<sup>46</sup> Neither can it be said that clergy pay is extravagant. Parish priests in Darlington are paid stipends in line with national guidelines. Given that parish priests are provided with housing, it is not easy to compare clergy remuneration with that of others with similar levels of education. If a notional cost for housing is added comparisons with other professions then show that clergy receive slightly more than the national average non-manual wage, but considerably less than those in other professions with similar levels of responsibility. The starting level salary for a primary school head teacher in 2001, for example, was £36,470 in 2001 while a Church report calculated the notional value of the clergy remuneration package to be £26, 338.<sup>47</sup>

No empirical study was undertaken of the numbers of individuals giving their time as volunteers to the churches in Darlington and as the churches themselves collect no statistics for this the extent of voluntary activity in the work of the churches is hard to measure. All parishes in Darlington, as elsewhere are run by a Parochial Church Council (PCC) comprising the clergy of the parish and elected lay members. These lay representatives and the two lay Churchwardens who have particular responsibilities for the running and fabric of the church, give their time without reimbursement. In addition, interviews with clergy in the town reveal huge levels of voluntary activity essential to the running of the Church and to its outreach work. Volunteers hand out hymn books, serve coffee after services, clean the church and grounds, arrange flowers, organise fund raising, run Sunday schools and other activities for children and young people and form visiting committees who visit the sick and bereaved in the parish, to name but a few activities. In short, the many activities of the churches are completely reliant on the existence of volunteers. The figures that do exist at diocesan level confirm this impression, a national survey in 2002 showed that 800 adults were working through the parishes in Durham diocese with young people aged 11 to 25. Even given the fact that one or two parishes may have employed lay youth workers, with 249 parishes in the diocese this leaves an average of just over three people per parish giving their time to work with young people.<sup>48</sup>

None of the parishes in Darlington employs staff over and above the ordained ministers, apart from a nominal number of hours work given to caretakers in a couple of parishes where the church has a community hall. Nor are the stipendiary clergy thick on the ground, with an average of only just over one per parish in the

<sup>45</sup> The Archbishops' Council., November 2001, 3 § 6.

<sup>46</sup> The Archbishops' Council 2004, 3.

<sup>47</sup> The Archbishops' Council, November 2001, 19–20.

<sup>48</sup> Provisional: statistics for mission 2002 – <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/papers/2002churchattendance.pdf> 8 September 2005.

town including curates in training posts. Even here, in terms of the pastoral and liturgical tasks performed in the parish which require a licensed minister, volunteers play a not inconsiderable role. Lay readers, Non-stipendiary clergy and retired clergy are an important part both of the regular life of the church and of cover for clergy holidays and interregnums.

This study is not one of parish ministry and therefore in the following report of the social actions of the churches in Darlington a general picture will be given as opposed to a parish by parish account. It is however central to an understanding of the situation both in Darlington and England to recognise the centrality of the parish system to the way in which the churches work and interact with both individuals and authorities.

While the churches cooperate, each is responsible for those citizens who live within the parish boundaries, so initiatives undertaken by the parishes are clearly focused on their own area. The lack of paid employees also means that the focus of the parish is often steered by the interests, enthusiasm and churchmanship of the parish priest, resident in the parish and, to a greater or lesser extent, the churchmanship and tradition of the parish and influential members of the congregation. In order to illuminate this aspect and provide the necessary background to the interview material the ten parishes in the town are shown in the table below and a brief sketch of each of the parishes follows.

Table 7. Church of England parishes, their church buildings and geographical location in the town.

<b>Parish</b>	<b>Church(es)</b>	<b>Group Ministry affiliation</b>	<b>Location in the town</b>
Blackwell All Saints and Salutation	All Saints, Blackwell	Darlington Group Ministry	South West
Darlington Holy Trinity	Holy Trinity	Darlington Group Ministry	West
Darlington St Cuthbert	St Cuthbert	Darlington Group Ministry	Town Centre
Cockerton	St Mary		West
Darlington St Hilda and St Columba	St Columba		South
Darlington St James	St James		North East
Darlington St Mark with St Paul	St Mark		North
Darlington St Matthew and St Luke	St Matthew		West
East Darlington	St. John St. Herbert	East Darlington Team Ministry	East
Haugton-Le-Skerne	St. Andrew Whinfield (Churchplant)		North East

These parishes represent amongst themselves the breadth of churchmanship in the Church of England as a whole. St James' is perhaps the most easy to define, it being

a church aligned to the Forward in Faith movement, which rejects the ministry and authority of ordained women and is set further apart from the other churches in the town in that it is under the Episcopal authority of one of the Episcopal visitors, the Bishop of Beverly, rather than the diocesan Bishop.<sup>49</sup> In line with most churches on this wing of the church its liturgical practice is high church and traditional.

St Cuthbert's is the ancient church in the town centre, although the creation of the parishes of Blackwell and Holy Trinity in the 1990's has meant that the church now basically serves the town centre and the population resident in the parish is minute. For this reason many worshippers choose the church for its strong musical tradition. It is moderate catholic/liberal in churchmanship, but with a mixed congregation. Holy Trinity is Anglo catholic/ liberal with a small congregation struggling to maintain a historic church building. The size of the congregation has to some extent been influenced by the fact that the present incumbent is open and outspoken on the issue of the acceptance of homosexuals by the church and some worshippers, feeling that this issue has taken over church life have sought elsewhere for regular worship. The third parish in the group which coordinates resources and services is All Saints Blackwell. Situated on the more affluent west side of town this mainly middleclass parish has a thriving congregation, the largest in Darlington. The vicar, who was curate at St Cuthbert's before moving to his present position, is also the Area Dean. In terms of churchmanship it is fairly liberal/ evangelistic with worship that is middle of the road, erring on low-church. The church has a lively strong social network with lots of youth work much of which takes place in the new Millennium centre built by the church, but used by many groups. There is, for example, a parents and toddlers group held there every day.

St Marks is a modern church building with a High Anglican theological and worship style influenced by the past (female) incumbent who has converted to Roman Catholicism following recent retirement. The congregation is devout although not numerically large. St Andrews Hawton is a little old church in an area that used to be a separate village and retains its village atmosphere although it is now part of Darlington. The parish also contains a church plant on the Whinfield housing estate served by a priest in charge. St Andrews has a low-church charismatic congregation, although the current rector, a biblical scholar, is taking it in a more liberal direction. The parish is large and has the highest parish share of the parishes in Darlington (followed by St Cuthbert's).

On the east side of Darlington the churches of St Herbert's and St John's form a team ministry mainly made up of deprived areas of the town although the two vicars retain responsibility for a particular church each. St Herbert's is the most easterly church in the town. The congregation is not large and has a middle to moderate

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<sup>49</sup> This arrangement was one of a number of concessions made, towards those who oppose the ministry of women, at the time of the vote in the General Synod of the Church of England in 1992 to allow women to be ordained as priests. These Bishops have Episcopal oversight over those priests who feel that they cannot accept the ministry of women and the authority of those bishops who ordain women. Other measures put in place at the time gave parishes the opportunity to adopt certain resolutions which mean that they can refuse to consider women for appointment as parish priest. This has in practice led to a system of church organisation running parallel to the mainstream system, with clergy in such parishes opting to form their own deanery and diocesan groupings rather than participating in the forums which exist locally. For further discussion see Jones, Ian, 2004.

catholic worship style and theology. The parish is large and includes the town's industrial estate. St John's, like its partner has a moderate catholic style. This church is the older of the two and receives the majority of requests for pastoral services from parish residents. The locality of which this team ministry is a part also includes the churches of St Columba and All Saints Hurworth (which is outside the town). St Columba's is moderately Anglo-catholic. The church began as a new plant in a residential area and has maintained the approach of an outward looking community church. A new hall has been built, a joint venture in partnership with the community association. Meetings of the joint committee are chaired by the vicar and the committee contains members of the community association committee and of the PCC, a model also in use in a number of the other parishes in the town.

St Matthew's is perhaps the parish in the town with the poorest residents although this is not always evident statistically as ward boundaries for this area were altered in recent years, combining deprived areas with more wealthy districts and thus hiding deprivation. This church too has worked actively with the local community in recent years in setting up a community centre in the parish.

One single parish, St Mary's Cockerton, which also has a moderately catholic stance, covers the north west of the town. This is the largest in Darlington in terms of geographical area and has ca. 18000 inhabitants. Consequently the vicar performs many weddings, funerals and baptisms. The parish contains a large housing estate which continues to be developed and there are hopes for a church plant. To this end discussions are underway with the Kings Church, a charismatic free church in Darlington, who is considering starting activity there. The primary school in Cockerton is Church of England controlled giving, amongst other things, the local vicar the position of Chair of governors to the school. In total there are 5 Church of England schools in the Darlington Deanery, four controlled and one aided although not all are in the town itself and within the scope of the study.<sup>50</sup>

### **Ecumenical links**

Although none of the parishes in the town is part of a formal Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP) considerable cooperation across denominational boundaries exists both in individual parishes and in the town as a whole. The Churches of the Darlington Group Ministry, alongside those churches and chapels of other denominations with premises in the town centre form the Town Centre Churches Group.<sup>51</sup> This group jointly organises a number of events and services throughout the year, they also, along with other churches and chapels in Darlington make up the larger umbrella body, Churches Together in Darlington. This includes The Roman Catholic Church, Methodists, The United Reformed Church, The Religious Society of Friends, The Salvation Army, The Eastern Orthodox Church, the Traditional Anglican Communion, Baptists and a number of non-denominational Free Churches. In addition to the Christian churches in the town there is also a Carmelite convent.

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<sup>50</sup> Church Schools in Darlington Deanery: <http://www.durham.anglican.org/information/churchschools.htm#Darlington>

<sup>51</sup> This Group includes the Anglican Churches in the Darlington Group Ministry, Northgate United Reformed Church; The Religious Society of Friends, Skinnergate; St Augustine's Roman Catholic Church. Grange Road Baptist Church; Salvation Army, Northgate; Bondgate Methodist Church.

## The Church as agent in welfare

### Actions

In a recent questionnaire based study of social action by faith communities in the North East region, the Churches Regional Commission lists social action by the faith communities under a number of headings for each of the towns in the region. Their figures reveal the extent of the work, both in terms of quantity and areas covered that the different religious groups provide. Their headings are not the same as those used in this study and their remit in terms of geographical area and coverage of faith communities is wider than that of our study, but it gives an indication. In the Darlington area they found 23 activities or projects focused on children, 18 on the elderly, 36 on families including parenting, 6 related to employment and 74 to community support. These figures represent only more formalised and larger project based activity and a response rate of just over 50 percent.<sup>52</sup>

The actions of the Church as welfare provider vary considerably from parish to parish. It is however fair to say that all organise activities for children and for the elderly which could be described as welfare services. For children this is often parents and toddlers groups, in the case of one parish a shopper's crèche and for the elderly both activities in the church building such as luncheon clubs and home visits are common. In addition some churches run jumble sales, the primary purpose of which being to provide low cost clothing to those who need it rather than to raise money for the church and similarly in a couple of places a weekly coffee morning provides a meeting place for those who need it.

In all parishes the clergy are actively involved in the local primary school and often sit as chair of governors, whether they sit by right (in a church school) or whether elected. In fact, in most parishes the schools in question are not church schools. In this capacity clergy have an important role to play, alongside other governors, in appointing both head teachers and other teaching staff and supporting the head teacher in setting both budgets and teaching plans for the school. They also regularly visit the schools to take morning assembly or assist with the teaching of religious education.

The clergy also carry out what they define as welfare work visiting parishioners in their homes, either in person or organising rotas of volunteers in the parish. One priest also runs a 'surgery' at a local supermarket once a month, where he is available for anyone who wants to drop by and talk to him. Many priests when interviewed also noted the fact that much of the social work of the church is done by individuals in their capacity of individual Christians who are part of the church community. Many churches organise volunteers to visit patients in the local hospital, for example, and many clergy said that they often hear of informal networks for social help and support within their own parish that they have not been aware of before.

The churches also make their buildings available to a wide variety of community activities for which they are not responsible, but which could not take place without the availability of the building. In a number of cases what was the church hall has been converted into a community centre with a joint board of church members and local community members. These initiatives often got off the ground thanks to initiative taken by the local church and have led to improved resources being available to the local community. In one parish the community hall now includes a computer

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<sup>52</sup> Smith, Kath, 2004.

suite and co-operation with the local college means that local residents can undertake basic computer courses there.

By far the most active in the social field in the Baptist church in the town centre, which runs extensive programmes for the homeless and those with drug addiction in the local area, this includes a volunteer run cafe and soup kitchen as well as blanket/clothes handouts. In addition the church has set up (and the minister acts as chair of the committees that oversee work done by professionals) projects in co-operation with the local authority to help homeless people back into accommodation, short term shelters for both men and women and a project where volunteers take homeless minors (those under 16) into their home for a night.

Table. 8. Table showing the activities organised by the church and cooperation with other bodies in the social sphere in Darlington.

Church activities	<b>church based activities</b> Social gatherings related to worship Healing services Choirs Women's/ men's groups Groups for children and young people Parent and toddler groups Shoppers Crèche Drop in centre/ Cafés lunches, House calls/ support for bereaved/ hospital visits Jumble sales/ Thrift shops Soup kitchen for homeless	
Church interaction with the public sector	<b>The Church present in the public sector</b> Hospital chaplaincy Arts centre chaplain College chaplain Police Chaplain Worship, visits and guidance for the personnel at geriatric institutions Assemblies/ visits to schools/ priest as chair of school governors.	<b>Publicly financed activities run by the Church</b> Primary schools
Other forms of cooperation/ activity	<b>Other forms of cooperation/ activity</b> Priest available for 'consultation'/ chat at local supermarket Use of church buildings by community groups/ uniformed organisations Financial contributions Relationships between personnel in the parish and other actors Free use of local authority equipment for, e.g. carols in town square	<b>Joint ventures between the church, the public sector and other organisations</b> Emergency-counselling Town Partnership/ local community partnerships Drop in centre for homeless Housing schemes for homeless Joint church/ community halls

As regards larger projects First stop, a one stop shop set up to provide on the spot advice and assistance to the homeless and unemployed was set up a few years ago at the initiative of the then town centre vicar and his successor continues to sit on the committee, while the Mothers Union (a church affiliated women's group) collect and sort clothing and bedding for the shelter. There are two credit unions in the town which various churches were involved in getting off the ground in the early 1990s and which make use of churches in the town as collection points and a scheme collecting and redistributing second hand furniture is run from another. The following table gives an overview of the social action of the churches and where this involves interaction with other bodies.

### **Welfare Projects/ organisations in the town with a Christian ethos/ organisation or background**

In addition to the work done by the churches there are several organisations in the town that have a Christian ethos, organisation or background, which influences the work to a greater or lesser extent. First Stop for example, mentioned above, is an independent registered charity and run completely independently of the churches, although it was on the initiative of a churchman that it was set up. Neither is this the only organisation working with the homeless in Darlington with such connections. The Salvation Army runs a hostel in Darlington providing accommodation and support for up to 36 men at any one time. This organisation is staffed by professionals and funded by the Salvation Army centrally and project funding, so is in no way directly dependent on the local corps for either funding or human resources, but the Christian ethos in general and of the Salvation Army in particular is clearly built into the way the centre is run, from ethical guidelines for staff to daily services in the chapel and the opportunity for residents to have contact with the chaplain (the local Salvation Army Officer) on a regular basis. The manager cooperates both with local churches and other public and voluntary sector organisations.

In addition to the health care services in the town provided by local authorities there is also a hospice providing palliative care for the terminally ill. The Hospice was originally able to get off the ground through a donation from the Carmelite convent in Darlington, which funded the first building and for this reason it is named after the convent's patron saint, St Teresa. The hospice is run and staffed by professionals and is not a church organisation, although local ministers from all denominations are welcome and organise a regular visiting rota. Although medical and nursing staff at the hospice are professionals many tasks are undertaken by volunteers from administration, fundraising and cleaning, to sitting with patients.

Finally it is important to mention one organisation with both a Christian ethos and connections with the churches in Darlington, the Town Mission. It was formed in 1838 as an ecumenical body, funded by donations from members of a number of denominations within the town. Its aim was and is to help the poor, the sick, and the lonely. At one point it employed as many as five salaried Town Missioners though at present there is only one, who is assisted by a small number of volunteers. The Mission does not seek or receive grants and no office is run so that funding from the original bequests along with some gifts funds the salary of the Missioner, expenses of the volunteers and charitable giving to others. The Mission aims to visit all who contact them regardless of age, gender, race or religious convictions and outline

what they can offer. There are about 100 people receiving the services of the mission, but needs vary greatly so while some receive regular visits others are more infrequent. Emphasis is put on providing a listening ear, though they will pray with people if requested. The Mission also organises worship services in some residential homes, assists with worship in the local hospital, arranges group outings and will accompany individuals to the hospital or doctor. The Mission co-operates with the Social Services, other churches and chapels in town and with other caring organisations.

### **Opinion former**

Prior to the last election the churches in the town centre jointly organised a local hustings meeting and prepared questions for the candidates on a series of important issues. The discussion was then chaired by one of the local clergy. This process, coordinated by the Churches Together in Darlington has been repeated in advance of the General Election May 5<sup>th</sup> 2005.<sup>53</sup>

The general election in Britain is a particularly interesting forum as regards the church and politics as it combines both local and national concern and involvement. The candidates are elected to parliament representing particular political parties, but they are also elected to serve a particular geographical area. The Labour party have held the seat since 1992, but prior to that there is a history of both Conservative and Labour winning in the area and therefore initiatives which awaken interest in and reflection over the issues in the election are not unimportant to the national political scene. Of particular interest to this study is that the Labour MP until the 2005 elections, Alan Milburn, sat in the Government as Secretary of State for Health (1999–2003).<sup>54</sup>

The group set up a website with the aim

Not to promote any particular party or national political agenda but instead to allow us all to reflect upon how we may best work together towards the common good in our town.

A document entitled “Grounding the Common Good: A challenge to the prospective parliamentary candidates of Darlington on the eve of the 2005 General Election” was then prepared setting out fundamental principles, areas where Christian concerns lie and a number of questions to the candidates.<sup>55</sup> This document, the theological reflection behind both it and the whole process and the answers of the candidates have then been published on the website. While the aim is to stimulate debate rather than take any one political line, it nonetheless takes a clear and strong line on a number of issues. The project was publicly launched in the Marketplace in the town with the candidates present and a public meeting was held at one of the local colleges, formed as a ‘Question time’ for the candidates.

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<sup>53</sup> <http://www.grounding.org.uk/index.htm>

<sup>54</sup> [www.labour-north.org.uk/](http://www.labour-north.org.uk/) 17 April 2005.

<sup>55</sup> “Grounding the Common Good: A challenge to the prospective parliamentary candidates of Darlington on the eve of the 2005 General Election” Produced by the Christian community throughout the town of Darlington.

Many members of local churches have been active in the anti war campaign since before the outbreak of the Iraq war and have taken part in manifestations in the town.

In addition many clergy felt, and this was backed up by council members and others with influence in the local community, that they were able to influence decisions and question policy by taking up issues with individuals both formally and informally. One clergyman represents the churches in Darlington on the board of the Darlington partnership and many felt that they had been able to make the voice of the church heard by contacting individuals on the council who they knew were sympathetic, by keeping up relations with local councillors (e.g. meeting for a beer occasionally) and in one case by persisting in forging relations with a hostile member of a community hall committee.

## Theological Motivation

Very little has been put on paper by any of the local churches as regards theological motivation for welfare actions. However interviews with local clergy often revealed a particular theological understanding of church involvement in the field of welfare closely connected to understandings of Ecclesiology and individual Christian responsibility. In particular many questioned Diocesan strategies, which advocate a movement towards ministry in localities and away from the strict parish model. Many clergy highlighted the church's involvement in the local community as an important aspect of ministry which can be backed up with a theology of the church both rooted in its own community and ministering to those outside the immediate church family. Further discussion of these issues is included in sections 4.2.9 and 6.

## Gender issues in the church

The local churches have no common gender equality strategy and neither is there a common course of action/line in this area. The points of view available are therefore often those of the individual clergymen and women working in the parishes and here a variety of theological positions are represented, which in turn influence the situation in the parish concerned. Given that the clergy are often the only paid employees in the church (one or two parishes have curates as well as the parish priest and one parish recently employed a paid lay worker whose salary was covered by external project funding. This has now come to a close.) they therefore influence considerably the work that is done by the parish, the roles taken on by volunteers (through delegation and encouragement) and also the leadership they enact in both preaching, chairing church councils and personal example. One parish in the town does not recognise the ministry of ordained women and here in particular a theology which distinguishes between male and female roles both in church and in life in general is evident.

As there is no statistical documentation of volunteers and therefore no gender statistics, equally there is no quantitative evidence of the participation of men and women in decision making processes or their use of the services of the churches. Commentary in this section relies therefore almost exclusively on information from interviews.

There are more women than men involved in the social work of the churches, but in addition the men who do get involved concentrate on very specific tasks. As with national figures for unpaid carers there is a clear gender divide in the types of work that male and female volunteers do within the context of church welfare activity. Generally speaking there are more women than men involved in the social work of the parishes, though many of the clergy feel that this is representative of the gender demography of their congregations. Those men that do get involved however tend to take on practical tasks connected to care of buildings or churchyards, providing a taxi service to and from lunch clubs and other events and/or fund raising. Significantly more women are involved in work with children and visiting of the elderly/bereaved. An example of this from one of the interviews:

I think women have always been greater in numbers, not only numerically in the congregation, but also in the participation in the life of the church. We have a good stalwart group of men, but they are in the minority still and many of the men act as taxi drivers for the women ... the men are often in the background actually. We have though a very good group of men who look after the church building. It does tend to be the men who do the jobs around. Putting new locks on doors and making sure windows are mended and graffiti removed and all the rest. So in fact we have got a good group of men involved in that way, but women tend to be still [...] probably are involved more actively in the organisations of the church and in quite a lot of the workings, yes. (19, m)

In addition to this division of labour at a practical level there is the issue of the leadership of the parish. In Darlington only two of the parish priests are women and as the priests are, with few exceptions, the only employees of the parishes they naturally have a leadership role.

The question of who uses the services of the churches also has a gender dimension. As one priest comments the Church has a history of being better at domestic ministry and therefore of ministering to women:

Because the church is in the domestic environment, this is almost entirely a residential area, people go out of [the area] to work, so because this is where we live and minister the people who are here most of the time is mums and children and the elderly and that I suppose has been the problem of the Church since the industrial revolution, [...] I mean it is changing now, we have always been better at domestic ministry than workplace ministry and the opportunities to meet with people who are working are limited and the opportunities for them to worship are limited because of working patterns now, so for a whole variety of reasons there is more for women than men, I think. (8, m)

So women use many of the services that the church provides because they are those who are responsible for the care of children and are at home during the day. Interestingly most of those interviewed refer to their parents and toddlers groups as Mums and toddlers, in the words of one 'we did have one man come once'!

Lunch clubs and other groups meant for the elderly are, it seems, far better attended by women than men. This is no doubt, as many interviewees point out, partly because there are more elderly women than elderly men. However this is not the whole picture and it seems that church services of this sort appeal more to women than men, or at least that women choose to go along to a far greater extent. Several interviewees from both church and local authority argue that, as is the case in

healthcare, men are less likely to go looking for help and support. And/or if they do take the initiative they are less likely than their female contemporaries to turn to the church. This raises interesting questions as to what extent the absence of men in these groups is connected to the fact that these are church run groups. Is it the format or the connection to the church that is attractive to elderly women and if it is the case, as the statistical projections suggest that there will be more single elderly men around in the future, how will the churches respond to this different need?

In terms of the church's services for the poor the pattern is less clear, though this may be because of the hidden nature of much female poverty, for example, provision for the homeless in the town is used more by men than by women, not least because men are more likely to be on the streets than women. As a public authority representative from Darlington put it:

Arguably females are under represented in the homeless figures because females tend to be roofless rather than homeless, males tend to be homeless rather than roofless. (16, m)

Women, in other words, are more likely to be spending nights at relatives, friends, or in bed and breakfasts than sleeping rough. This means that they are not seen in the same way, but are as vulnerable. This means that the churches' involvement in such issues has to be evaluated at a more individual level. Some indicators can be gained though. At the thrift shop that is run by one of the churches (run not as a fund raising event, but in order to provide cheap second hand goods for residents of a local estate) it is the women from the families on the estate who queue down the road.

## Cooperation between the Church and other organisations

Cooperation between the majority church and the social authorities can be said to happen on three levels. Firstly the Church is represented on a number of committees and boards which have an impact on welfare in the town. As noted above, the Church is one of a number of organisations represented in the Darlington Partnership and thereby involved in strategic planning for the development of the town. The majority of clergy also chair the board of governors of their local school and in this way play a significant role in the development and implementation of local educational policy.

Secondly some church buildings and community halls, run in partnership between church and local community are used by the social authorities, not least because these buildings are often the only space available to gather groups together within the residential areas of the town. Sure Start is one such activity held regularly in one community hall, where it is important for the success of the project that it takes place in the community where the families live. A further example of such cooperation is the computer courses run from one community centre in cooperation with a local college. Here it becomes clear that the premises of the churches are a valuable asset to the town. Connected to this is the issue of cooperation at the local level, that is to say between individual church and local parish residents, rather than directly with the social authorities. The Council has clearly prioritised working with local community partnerships in recent years and there are now 11 such partnerships in the most deprived wards of the town. These partnerships are a clear attempt to

increase the engagement of residents in their local community and the churches play a role within these. In all cases the local parish priest sits on the committee although the nature of the role he or she plays varies from individual to individual.

This leads on to the third level of cooperation, individual contacts, arguably the most important of the three levels. Interviewees from both the Church and local authority stressed the importance of personal relationships and individual contacts both within and between spheres in a town the size of Darlington. Representatives of both sides knew people who they could contact in particular situations, or as was the case with one or two from the local authority noted the absence of such contact which they felt had been more evident a few years ago. One example of the results of individual activism on the part of clergy is First stop. This was set up in 1999 on the initiative of local clergy and today one of the parish priests in the town sits on its management board alongside a local councillor, amongst others. The day to day running of the organisation is however independent of both Council and church and is dependent largely on external grants.

At an individual level it is also clear that the churches cooperate with the social authorities to a considerable extent. The clergy regularly visit old people's homes in their respective parishes and also have a visiting rota at the local hospice. Many had also been involved in contacting the social or healthcare services on behalf of parishioners and both they and some representatives of the local authority could see a role for the church and the clergy in particular as something of an in between point, informed so that they can help individuals reach someone who can help them within the local authorities' systems and in the other direction as a resource among others in the voluntary sector as an organisation to which, for example, a district nurse can recommend that a lonely pensioner turn for support and companionship.

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

### Views held by the public authorities

#### **Welfare**

Both employees and representatives of the public authorities define welfare in one of two ways, or in some cases both. Many refer to notions of care or looking after both from the point of view of society in general and the individual. The second aspect that is common throughout are references to essential needs or a basic bottom line, here connections are made to the notion of welfare as a social construct and system. The negative connotations that the word can have for many, particularly older people in Britain are mentioned and some indicate a broader understanding of the term *“It is all embracing”* (14, f) and *“it is how we look after people. Not just their mental health and physical health but spiritual health as well. You have to look after the whole person...”* (3, f)

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

Many feel that the system functions pretty well in Darlington. Often particular mention is made of the circumstances that make Darlington different from some other areas, its size and the fact that it is a unitary authority impact on delivery of welfare in several ways, it is felt. Several mention the fact that this combination of size and system make for ease of communication and although resources can be stretched the town is not swamped with the social problems typical of larger cities. Size, several feel, also means that the role that individuals, networks and personal relationships play has a considerable impact.

Failures in the system are however not absent from comments, inequalities both in standard of life in general and in welfare provision are highlighted as is the existence of groups who are hidden or who fall outside the system. Finally, there is a sense that expectations have advanced more quickly than the services that are on offer, meaning that services have to perform better than before in order to be judged as acceptable. One role of the public sector from this perspective is therefore to manage expectations.

The essence of the comments of this group can be summed up in the following quotation

I think it functions as well as it does anywhere, if not better than some places although it is never perfect and it serves some people very well, but not all. (21, f)

### **Role of the church**

The vast majority of the interviewees feel that the Church has, or should have a role to play in welfare. Some however choose to qualify this with the comment that it has no greater role than other groups in society. For some the Church is one of a number of voluntary organisations in this respect although one councillor defines the Church as a public servant alongside the public authorities, because of its established nature. A cautious note is also struck by a few respondents who are firmly of the opinion that, although the church has a role to play, provision should never be connected to a demand to believe or participate in religious activities and similarly that the actions of the churches should never be allowed to compromise people's ability to choose how to live their lives.

There is a feeling that the Church has had a greater role, but that it is declining. The generally positive comments that the church as a role to play are therefore echoed in follow up comments that the church needs to become more engaged both with the authorities and the local community. It needs to show people what relevance and knowledge it has if it is to be taken seriously. Many feel that there is a role for the church in partnership with the authorities, but that if this is to work the church has to become more engaged. This attitude is clearly connected to issues of the size of the town and the considerable role that individual personalities play, some feel that the role that the church can play depends on the situation in the local area and not least the clergyman or woman in post. There is a role for them to take if they want it and if they have the competence, in other words.

Despite this feeling that the Church in Darlington has lost a position that it once had, there is a clear feeling that the churches have good local knowledge in some areas of the town, which can be capitalised on. The church is also perceived to have

expertise in particular areas, these include providing spiritual support, space for reflection and support to individuals, but also helping and supporting the vulnerable and deprived and on issues surrounding families.

### **Church and social work**

Only one of the respondents is of the opinion that the church should not carry out practical social work and later on in the interview the same interviewee goes on to say that the church should have a hands on attitude. This at first seemingly contradictory attitude is in line with the opinions of many others who say that the church should provide practical care. There is a wish to distinguish between social work, which should be left to the professionals and extra services that the church can provide.

Many see a role for the church in providing services for those who turn to the church, but want there to be alternatives for those who would not be comfortable with church based care. In line with this attitude to the church as a complement there is again mention of the church as a partner amongst others. The church should do what it is comfortable doing and what is appropriate in the local context, but should know its limitations and has a role to play, in that it has good contacts with the local community at grassroots level, in informing people of the services available to them. For many the legacy of the church's involvement in welfare is something positive that the church should strive after today, although it is no longer appropriate for them to provide the services that they used to years ago. Finally there are several areas of welfare that it is felt it is particularly appropriate for the church to work with, the elderly and listening/counselling.

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

There is little evidence amongst the responses of the old maxim that religion and politics should not be mixed. All feel that there is a role for the church in the public debate on welfare issues. The church can say what the public sector can not and act as an independent voice speaking for the community at both national and local level. As one interviewee expressed it

Every organisation needs checks and balances ... And I think that the Church and faith groups have a role to play in providing some of those checks and balances against the state. ... We all need critical friends and I think the Church can, that is one of the roles that faith groups can occupy. (26, f)

The Church should speak out/ campaign alongside other pressure groups and faith groups. This is not to say that people do not have reservations as regards the church's role here, the church should make sure it is informed and that it has something to say before it gets involved and should be engaged with society/ local community if what it says is to be taken seriously. It is not insignificant that several interviewees mention particular occasions or individuals in the church who have spoken out on social issues and express admiration for those individuals, while there clearly exists scepticism towards the Church as an organisation, not least because of obvious internal disagreements. A difference is made between this and individuals within it who are seen in a positive light.

Similarly several interviewees comment here that they feel that the Church of England should no longer be established and that its presence in the House of Lords is outdated, while at the same time critical letters from the Archbishop to the Prime Minister are seen positively. Part of the criticism of the Church's place in the House of Lords is clearly grounded in a feeling that the Church is out of touch at some levels and it maybe that it is the levels of expectation of what the church should be that lead to such harsh criticism. As one interviewee said when reflecting on the Church

... you just look and think Ghandi was right – I like your Christ and I don't like your Christians. ... I like the Church of England, but Anglicans irritate me. ... Not all Anglicans, the idea of the Church [...] I think that there were always strong individual voices that strove to be heard, it's how do you reconcile the difference of opinion and then the difference of activity, but you know if we can't have high expectations of the church, what else can we have high expectations of? (3, f)

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

The perception of those interviewed is that the role of the Church has changed gradually over a period longer than ten years and that its role has, in the main, diminished during this time. It is seen by many as distanced from society today and failing to move with the times. While most respondents said they knew little about the church personally apart from the odd attendance at weddings etc. most said they had noticed locally or in media reports fewer priests, empty churches and elderly congregations. While some mention issues such as internal rows in the church over homosexual clergy and scandals over priests and the sexual abuse of children as giving a view of the church as a secularised flawed institution. Finally the growth of the evangelical wing of the church and the fact that this form of Christianity has both marketed itself and been increasingly visible in recent years was mentioned.

### **Wishes for changes of the church**

While some feel it is not their place to comment on the role that the church should have, but that this is an issue for those who are involved there was nonetheless a clear wish for a more outward looking church, in touch with the issues that concern ordinary people and able to act as a support for the community. The opinion that the churches ought to capitalise on the interest in spirituality that exists in the country was also expressed and this, as other comments is connected to a criticism of the Church as preoccupied with internal issues and/or where it is in touch with society as ineffective in communicating this outside its self. There exists a wish for the church to express opinions and create policies around issues of social justice and social welfare and to get better at communicating these and then translating them into action. The following comments are a good example of this.

I'd like to see the church have at least a coherent, and maybe it does and I don't know, but a coherent policy on social justice and social welfare, that that is made known ... Possibly the problem is that we are all working in silos and we haven't got a clue what's going on in that church silo and what I might ask for is there, but what has actually happened is although there is a rosy glow from those that have developed them, that know they are there, they haven't hit the likes of me. [...] I think that I should have been aware and that maybe that it is my failing ..., but my sense still is that a vast amount of this is down to how individuals in local areas carry the message. Of course the other thing is walking the talk as well as talking the talk, you know. (1, f)

from the outside looking in I would like to see them working in a way that people like me could see, much more openly around areas like engagement and inclusion than they do [...] I am sure they have got policies, I am sure they have got procedures, I am sure they have got strategies, that are filling filing cabinets and floppy disks ad nauseam, but I don't see a lot of evidence of it. Right here, right now in the middle of Darlington as your average person, I guess, I don't see a great deal of evidence and if I don't see it I wonder if other people don't see it either. (26, f)

Finally it must be mentioned that here, as elsewhere, in connection to answers to other questions the issue of the disestablishment of the Church is raised and in particular the role that the Bishops play in the House of Lords. While many feel that the Church has a role to play it is clearly increasingly seen as one amongst a number of organisations and religions.

### **Significance of gender**

Interestingly no matter what the interviewees' opinion of the church and its role in society in general they express the view that the church ought to have an input in the public debate on gender equality. Some feel that the Church needs first to address internal issues of the role of women within its organisation and speak through actions by reforming its hierarchies, before it can be taken seriously, while others emphasise the fact that if the church were to speak out more on issues such as gender equality, equality in general and equal pay it could give itself a more significant role in society by proving that it is interested in issues relevant to people's everyday lives. By not getting involved in such debates, in other words the church makes itself irrelevant.

In terms of the significance of gender to the services provided by the churches in the welfare area, two issues of relevance appear in responses. The first is a feeling that just as women are more likely than men to access health and social services provided by the public authorities, not least on behalf of their children, they are also more likely to access services provided by the churches. Interviewees interpret this in two ways, firstly that women are more proactive in seeking help in general and are more likely to be prepared to ask for help and secondly that women are more likely to have an interest in spiritual matters and to seek help from the churches on this front. Thirdly some note that as the elderly are one major group with significant welfare needs and that as this age cohort is dominated by women, there is also a significant chance that church provision will be dominated by women as the church is seen as appealing to older generations. The second issue is related to the perception of church hierarchies as discriminating against women, the church as an organisation is therefore perceived to some extent as having an inbuilt gender imbalance which may affect the way it delivers services, not in a conscious way, but because of the way the structures are organised.

it all comes down to individual practice and organisational ethos and I think that there can be individuals within organisations who can struggle to deliver what they consider to be equitable against a background of, this is the foundation, bureaucracy. I don't think that church as commissioners fundamentally discriminate in a front of mind kind of way in how they deliver services, but if you have already sorted out the back of mind. ... that is one I would have to think about a bit more. (1, f)

### **Attitudes to provision run by the majority Church**

For both politicians and employees involved in the local authority, services provided by voluntary and non governmental organisations are integral to the welfare system of the town providing services that the statutory bodies cannot provide, in a way that would be impossible for them given the bureaucracy of the system. Where the Church provides such services or is involved in their provision this is seen in a positive light, although provision by the churches is not seen as any better or worse than that provided by other bodies. In connection with this it is also clear that little or no differentiation is made here between services provided by the majority church and those which are run by other denominations. The local Baptist church, for example, which runs and is involved in several projects for the homeless in the town, was frequently mentioned in this context. The fact that this service is provided is appreciated and the authorities are willing to work with them as long as they do it professionally and do not combine service provision with a mission to convert. The fact that it is a church that provides the service is a secondary consideration. In the words of one politician

Yes, I don't have a problem as long as they are clear about what they are doing. I have always got a suspicion of people who come in and do it because they care, or whatever, I am a social worker and it says nothing in my job description about caring. [...] the reality is they should be providing a professional service, if they want to care on top of that it is up to them but I don't pay them to care... I don't have a problem with it and they can do it in one of two ways. If they don't like my attitude they can provide whatever services they choose to. Over and above the plat du jour that we provide they can provide a la carte. But it is important that we provide a minimum service that says wherever you come from, wherever you live, whatever your circumstance this will be the bare minimum that you receive. If you happen to live in an area where the church has decided it is going to do other things then fine, ... So if the church wants to do it that way, wants to remain separate from and abide by its own rules then fine that is ok, but if it wishes to be part of the mainstream provision then it has to play by the rules and those rules are that you can't discriminate against people because they are atheists or Catholics or because they are Jews or whatever, they can not do that, it is a business. I don't have any problem with them providing. (16, m)

### **Expectations of the local authorities concerning welfare services provided by the Church**

Representatives of the local authority have quite high expectations of the Church as a provider of welfare services in as much as they think of it as one of a number of voluntary organisations which can provide services over and above or alongside that which can be provided by the public authorities. They stress however that it is up to the church how much it wants to get involved. If it makes the effort and attempts to build up partnerships or provide services then they expect the churches, as other organisations to act in a professional manner and are happy to work with them. However, it is also clear that the churches are not particularly high up on the agenda as regards partners for both practical cooperation and consultation on a day to day basis. In the words of one respondent

I have to say that the church, religion in general, is almost never mentioned. Whenever we talk about partnership working and the need to involve public, which is a huge part of our agenda, ... we have to consult the public on almost everything we do..., it is statutory now ... I suppose occasionally when we are talking about who do we go out to, who do we ask, one area of

reaching people is through the churches and that is all. It is not mentioned at all in strategic thinking, operational, anything. (14, f)

It is clear though, that both in the past and at the present time individual relationships have played a considerable role and many mention individuals within the churches who they have been happy to work with and who they did or would think to contact if a particular issue was pressing.

The comments above focus on the practical issues of welfare provision and partnership, however it is also interesting to note that there is a second level of expectation which is usually not formulated explicitly. Even for those who argue that the Church should be disestablished there is an expectation that the church will exist on the ground, know the local community and make itself, and its priests in particular, available to individuals providing pastoral and spiritual care.

I think the best of them would be working in the communities and I do know one or two who sort of walk the talk and certainly. ... if they really are genuinely in touch with the community then yes the pastoral role is incredibly important and it is not something which here, for example, GPs should be expected to do, but of course if priests and clergy don't do it then I think society is in trouble, you know breakdown of society sort of total structure and the extended family all that sort of thing has created huge problems and people just don't know who to talk to. (14, f)

## Views held by the church

### **Welfare**

Generally speaking the clergy interviewed in Darlington choose to define welfare in very broad terms. Several use the term spiritual welfare, understanding the term to encompass this aspect as well as physical and material concerns. Others use the phrase "*wholeness and holisticness*" in much the same way. This focus on wholeness and wellbeing is also connected for many to an understanding of welfare as related to the wellbeing of communities of people. It is in other words seen as inferring the total wellbeing of both individuals and communities, encompassing physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing. For some it is a word which evokes the idea of caring while others refer to the political/ governmental system of a safety net. It is not insignificant that mention was made of the fact that the word can have negative connotations, not least for some older people. In the words of one interviewee

If you had asked my Grandparents what welfare was they would probably have said the Dole and means testing and stuff, very, very bad word to use in those days, very bad word to be on the welfare meant poverty, so it has changed very much. (4, m)

Welfare can, in other words for many older people be a word associated not only with poverty, but also with the stigma attached to being forced to seek help.

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

There was a general consensus amongst those interviewed that the welfare system functions fairly well in Darlington although there was disagreement as to whether it is currently better or worse than it was a few years ago. Most indicated that their

comments are not the result of comprehensive knowledge of the system but based on personal experience of health care services, or experiences of family of parishioners. In relation to this several noted that isolated incidences can be used to prove both the functioning and malfunctioning of the system. This mixed picture of welfare is connected by many to an interpretation of the system as unnecessarily complex and bureaucratic and not designed for those who need it most. One further common thread in the statements is comments that the underlying philosophy and structure of the system is adequate, but that the system is stretched and that resources do not always exist on the ground. This also ties in to the expectations that the interviewees have of the public sector, they expect those providing services in the welfare sector to do as much as possible for people in need with the resources available, but being aware that these are limited, acknowledge that this will never meet need in full.

### Role of the Church

All the clergy interviewed answered yes to the question: Does the Church have a role to play in the welfare and the well-being of people? Their answers in terms of what this role is are however diverse and complex and while there are a number of common factors a summary of the answers requires a level of analysis which draws discussion into the later sections of this report. I will therefore introduce a discussion here, which will be developed later on.

Opinions amongst the clergy as to what the role of the church is in the welfare and wellbeing of people can be said to represent one of three ideal types, although some individuals cross the boundaries of two typologies. The most easily defined of these types is what I have chosen to call the *spiritual*, those who fit within this category stress the primary role of the church to be in providing spiritual support and nurture. The church, they say, has as its task to lead the people of God in the worship of God and assist individuals in building up their relationship to God, as from this relationship flows social concern. Individual Christians can, in other words, be inspired and encouraged to work in the community and the church can both encourage and in some ways act as coordinator in, for example, organising volunteers to visit in local hospitals. A typical response from a clergyperson in this category is the comment that a vicar is not a social worker without training and that the expertise of the church lie in other areas. One respondent illustrates this type well.

I think actually if you put the Good News first you get the social involvement as well ... In a sense yes we could devote a lot of time and energy to social things, but actually if we concentrate on growing and gathering more people into the one community with the one sense of purpose then actually we can do more for the community as the church becomes bigger and has a bigger influence on the society around it. We have looked at setting up groups for parents and toddlers, groups for the elderly, bereavement support, that kind of thing. There are some things that we have been able to do, but there are some things that we can't do because we haven't got enough people. So in a sense the bums on pews thing is actually part of the church's social involvement because the more bums you have got the more things you can actually do and the more things you can organise. (8, m)

The respondents of the second type *community voice* emphasise the presence of the church in the local community and to some extent nationally as well. The fact that the Church has a parish system that covers the whole country is seen as important as

the church then becomes a body with responsibility for representing the vulnerable in society. At a local level this can come to expression in campaigning activities either at collective or individual level with the church and its representatives raising their voices and being active in ensuring that no one is neglected. Here the focus is on speaking out and the prophetic voice of the church, but there is also a feeling that the church cannot leave the provision of practical care to others. The church, it is argued here has a responsibility to show society how it should behave, act as an example in the creation of a caring society.

The third type can be entitled *pragmatic provision* those respondents who fit in here speak of outreach into the community to improve the quality of life of people as a central part of the role of the church. There is however a clearly voiced caution setting the boundaries for practical provision by the churches. Some speak of the need to work in partnership with other bodies, while others emphasise the need for provision to be tailored to the needs of the people in the area as well as the resources of that particular church. In terms of the church speaking out on social issues there is similar concern that the church and its representatives need to know their limits and refrain from commenting on areas on which they have little knowledge.

### **Church and social work**

The general opinion is that the church can and should carry out practical social work, but that how this is done depends on a number of factors. The time has passed where the church provided overarching welfare provision, but this does not mean that the church does not have a role in this field. Respondents are quick to stress that practical social work done by churches or church based organisations is best done at a local level where consideration can be paid to local context and needs and the abilities and resources of the church concerned. Some feel that there could in theory be a role for the church in specialised care, employing trained professionals, but that whether this is appropriate would depend on the situation and no one feels such work to be appropriate for their church today. This caution is not least because of an awareness of increasing legislation.

There is some agreement that the church is suited to making the kinds of contributions that are often connected with it and which provide care and support at an individual level, home visits, lunch clubs etc. There is also a feeling that this is appropriate as the workforce that the church has at its disposal is largely made up of community spirited volunteers who do not have the training or time for more specialised work. There is also a feeling for some that the church can continue doing what it has historically done, namely setting up projects which fill gaps in current provision, with the hope and aim that they will later be taken on by others, this attitude is often connected to a strong sense that the churches should work in partnership with other organisations.

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

That the Church should contribute to the public debate on welfare issues was common to all of the respondents, interviewees said more or less explicitly that the church must always be involved in politics in as far as this means speaking out on the issues of the day, although this does not mean taking a party political line. The church's role is to speak out on behalf of the poor and vulnerable, to bring Christian

values to the debate, act as a social conscience for the nation and to challenge discrepancies in public policy. Many choose to emphasise what they interpret as a clear theological justification for such action. The notion of challenging government at both local and national level is a common motif in responses, although there are different ways of doing this at different levels. The Church is seen as being an independent voice, but still with a connection to and influence on power structures which it should use on behalf of others, whether this be in public confrontation or in working more quietly in, as one respondent put it, the “kind of traditional Church of England way of doing it, behind the scenes”.<sup>56</sup> Both clergy and laity, not least informed professionals who can bring a Christian viewpoint to their working environment, have a role to play at local level, while at national level the role of the Bishops and in particular those who sit in the House of Lords was emphasised. Many feel that they have a natural platform which parish priests do not have and should perhaps speak out more than they currently do. Such comments are often connected with a feeling that they as individual priests cannot make much difference through speaking out, as the church is paid little attention in today’s society, this feeling was however not universal.

Interestingly, against the background conviction that the church should speak out, many of the clergy also expressed concern over the church’s ability to speak out and be heard. The Church, it was felt, has credibility problems both because of scandals and the fact that it has got bogged down in issues such as human sexuality and the role of women in the church where it is seen as inward looking and out of touch with society. The church needs to address this if it is to be heard, it was felt and it also needs to speak with a united voice to a greater extent than it manages to do today. Many feel that internal disagreement damages the church’s ability to speak out in a credible manner as do examples of representatives of the church speaking on issues without being properly informed. The call for a united voice for the Church is therefore connected with a call for better internal communication with the grassroots informing the Bishops who have a voice which can be heard.

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

For many, ten years is too short a period in which to be able to identify a change in the Church’s role in society. They refer instead to a more gradual change over a longer period. The Church is perceived as being more congregational than in the past and those congregations in turn are seen to be both smaller and older. The Church has diminished financial and therefore also human resources. These changes are also connected to a sense that the Church has lost influence and credibility that it once had and is now seen as somewhat of an irrelevance. It is still used by many for baptism, marriage and funerals, but while some see this as positive others note a decline even in the use of the church for these events and argue that the church is seen as a last resort in the eyes of many. There is a perception that the Church is seen by society at large as a guardian of heritage and buildings in particular while the church itself sees itself as having a larger role. The more optimistic prefer to say that although the church may no longer be central to people’s decision making, that it retains a role here too, while others see in the same patterns a situation where the

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<sup>56</sup> Interview 13, Male.

media has taken over the role that the Church used to have as the social conscience and moral voice of the nation. An attitude connected to a sense that the media in general has a negative attitude to the Church and deliberately portrays it in a bad light. Politicians may still wish to see the Church as a social conscience, but mainly as one which provides the moral justification for the economic policies it has decided upon. In relation to this several emphasise the positive in the fact that the Church itself has moved on in a number of questions, such as the remarriage of divorcees and is more in tune with society here than it was a few years ago. The fact that the evangelical wing of the Church has turned its focus more towards social engagement over the past twenty to thirty years is mentioned, as is a sense that in some respects the Church has become more confident in speaking out, at least in areas where individual Bishops have particular expertise.

Several wish to stress that there can be a difference between how the Church is portrayed at national and local level. The Church may have lost influence at national level, they claim, but locally it has been possible to build up a good reputation built on personal contacts and commitment to the local community.

Finally two comments are of particular interest from a theological perspective. Two respondents use the term managing decline, but with radically different opinions grounded in different theologies. The first argues that the Church focuses too much on a model of “managing decline rather than of excitement at the possibility of this gospel meaning change for the good of all”.<sup>57</sup> The second argues instead that the Church spends too much time trying to talk things up and pretending that the Church has not shrunk when it should be engaged in managing decline as

there is perfectly good theology that you can go to in terms of decline and maybe you can think about death in one part and new life in another.<sup>58</sup>

### **Wishes for changes of the church**

The wish list for changes to the Church’s current role in society is long, but contains several common elements. A number of respondents were quick to say that one change that they do not want to see is disestablishment, the system of a state church in place in every community in the country is seen as positive and something which the Church should make more of. Moves away from this system to one of working in localities are seen as negative and there is a clear wish to be able to continue working with the parish model and a hope that this can be strengthened. At the same time an awareness that society has changed and the resources of the Church have reduced, means that many clergy in saying what they would like to change, or not change, note that if this is not what society wants then it may not be possible for the Church to retain this role much longer. There is also a wish that the Church move away from focus on matters such as its own financial security and find a common voice instead of constantly becoming tied up in internal debates. The Church may not have the resources to do all it wants to do, but there is a clear wish that it should focus on engagement with society. Here respondents say that they would like to see the church at the forefront of the development of a culture of care in society, providing an example of putting others first and building on the Christian tradition to build

<sup>57</sup> Interview 9, Male.

<sup>58</sup> Interview 25, Male.

a caring society. One respondent expresses this sentiment in theological language arguing that it would be good to see the Church developing

a ministry based model of mission rather than an evangelistic model of mission. Both as a more effective way of reaching people in society and as being faithful to the example that was given to us, that is what church is all about. I believe it will be more effective but actually that doesn't matter, what matters is that we faithfully follow the way that Jesus gave us. (18, m)

On a practical note a couple of interviewees say that they would like to see resources from the state to finance the upkeep of historic church buildings so that the Church could concentrate its own resources on outreach and care.

Finally one comment deserves particular attention. Struggling to express what it is that he would like to see change one clergyman comments on the role of the institutional church.

I think that where as perhaps 10 years ago ... one would have wanted to argue with people about how the institutional church was still really important, that it was worth fighting for, that even though they had been hurt by it and felt that it wasn't meeting their needs they needed to stick by it instead of looking for anything else. I don't think we would bother arguing now. You know if the church is stopping them doing whatever it is that gives life meaning, their dance or their music or whatever, well maybe they need to pursue that and maybe what the church, what they imagine the church is saying to them doesn't matter so very much. There is a kind of a more real, more... that there is an invisible church. I think that we were always told that that was just some kind of heresy really, but I think that maybe that is the case, that maybe there is a church there that is people meeting together, where they happen to encounter one another as Christians that is the church and I think what one perhaps wants to say to people, well if you are meeting with your fellow Christians and if you love God and Jesus then that is fine, do that, that is the church and don't worry about the Church of England and all its trimmings. (25, m)

### **Significance of gender**

Questions posed in interviews as to the role of gender in the life of the church proved to be difficult prompting either automatic or defensive responses, not necessarily in terms of the question being interpreted as an attack, but rather because of an awareness of what was expected. This means that it is not easy to get at attitudes. In response to questions of men's and women's involvement in the parish, for example many give an automatic response that both men and women are involved in decision making in the parish on equal terms, which does not necessarily say very much. However some answers wake interest, while requiring further analysis. In several cases interviewees talk about lay involvement and common decision making but clearly see themselves in the driving seat. The vicar is, for example, chairperson of the church council and in the following clip from an interview we hear the assumed implication that one purpose of such meetings is for the priest to hear what people have to say.

Take the PCC for example I think that everyone has an equal voice on there, but like any group of people sometimes the most vocal could be female or could be a man. I have two particular people in mind one is male and one is female, both are very vocal and both need a little control from the chair and there are two or three quiet ones and I want to hear what they have to say so I encourage them to come forward. It is a question of even handed chairmanship, which I hope I provide, yes I would say so. There are probably people who would argue with me, but the way I see it yes. I would hope so. (4, m)

In addition to commenting on services provided either for or by women or men interviewees also commented on whether they felt issues of gender equality were important for the church to get involved in, in society. With one notable exception those who commented here feel that it is important for the church to address issues of equality in society in general and that gender equality is one such issue. This however is qualified with the caveat that equality should not mean sameness, equal but different. The church is seen as having a responsibility to speak out on this issue, but not in militant terms, rather in terms of assisting individuals and families to find their identities and roles. As one put it with reference to the gospel

I think that there is an ugliness there that cannot be upheld by the gospel in both directions. The repression of women is not spiritual, neither is unreasoned hatred of men either, but I don't think we can avoid the issue. (4, m)

And a second with reference to the church's understanding of individuals made in the image of God

Yes, I think there are big issues about roles because there is a lot of, I mean you come across everything up here from traditional male provider/ female child bearer roles through to house husbands and everything in between and I think just to help people unravel all of that [...] What are men and women supposed to be in the image of God, [...] I think equality is a very slippery concept, what is equality between men and women if one works and ends up in a higher paid job than the other does that mean that they are not equal? If one has got different gifts than the other does that mean that they are not equal? How do you give being a mum equal status to being a corporate executive? The whole thing of trying to put value on things. In a sense structural equality is all well and good, what we need is for all people to understand that they are unique and made in the image of God and precious to him and to treat each other that way. (8, m)

### **Theological Motives**

Theological motivation for both social action and speaking out, which surfaced in the interviews, has been mentioned above, but the interviewees were also asked to comment on their understanding of links between liturgy and the worship life of the church and the church's diaconal role.

For many the role of the church in social action is connected with an understanding that it is the social duty of individual Christians to involve themselves in welfare work in society, with the liturgical gatherings of the churches seen as support, strength and inspiration in this. The organised worship of the church is therefore important in itself as the church's central task. In the words of one cleric "*to lead the people of God in the worship of God*",<sup>59</sup> but also to bring the church community together so that in this gathered form the church can be inspired, enthused and energised to go out and minister in its scattered form. Here interviewees emphasise both the need for the church community to gather and for the church to provide opportunity for those who are not regular attendees to worship. For some this means providing themed services or services for different organisations, while for others the emphasis is on bringing different communities together, but the common tone is one of the worship services of the Church of England as a resource for all.

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<sup>59</sup> Interview 9, Male.

I try in that sense to involve everyone together, so that we all come bringing our own thing, muddle it all together give it to God, get it blessed and get it sent out again. So I think the worship services can become this huge resource because in that sense you can provide neutral territory which everyone can come together and I think that again is the great advantage of the Church of England. That at its best is seen as the best possibility of neutral holy ground. It belongs in that sense to everybody [...] come to the Church of England then everybody sees it as some kind of neutral ground, including the Church of England people. (17, m)

The worship that the church provides is also seen as helping bring shape and meaning to people's lives, both for individuals and the community as a whole, including those who do not regularly attend church.

I think worship operates at all sorts of different levels. Worship first of all is a community and a communal activity. It brings together a body, a corporate body of people [...]. It operates to provide, I think a sense of meaning and purpose in people's lives. If they feel they are worshipping a God who cares about them and who loves them then I think that is going to give a deeper meaning to their lives ..., we come together as a community believing that life has a focus, a goal, which is to serve Christ, to show Christ's love in the world [...] to glimpse something of the glory of God and show something of the glory of God here in this life in very practical ways, show ..., but also to know that there is actually a goal, a particular focus for the whole of our journey, pilgrimage on earth. ... and we also, I think give some shape and meaning to the course of the year because we have the great festivals and feasts like Christmas [...] Obviously there are the moments when we also articulate the sadder times in the year like ... the season of Lent. So we try and give light and shade to the year in that way. It is not just a monochrome dull existence there are the highs and the lows, the ups and downs are celebrated. And so I think that through prayer and drama and music and hopefully through sermons and so on we do try and give some variety and meaning to the different stages of the year, the Christian year, and also relate it to social issues that are going on. Obviously one example is when a major catastrophe happens, like the death of Princess Diana or the Twin Towers on September 11<sup>th</sup>. That kind of terrible catastrophe, you get a reaction and [...] A larger number of people in the community turn to the church. I think that we tend to be able to provide some kind of depth, of just listening, of just providing the space for people to ask those very basic questions, [...] What on earth are we here on earth for? What is life about? And I think that we should be ready to tune into those questions. (19, m)

In addition there are some examples of liturgical innovations which the clergy themselves see as an aspect of service to the community in welfare terms. One parish priest, for example was considering organising a service at St Luke's tide with a particular focus on healing and issuing invitations to this to the doctors and other health care workers in the parish. Similarly in several parishes regular healing services are held which are seen as part of the social and diaconal work of the church and more than one parish priest mentioned an annual All Souls tide service to which all the families in the parish who have had a funeral during the year are specifically invited back.

That is an important thing, to give people time to remember, to give thanks, to grieve, part of the grieving process, of letting go. (6, f)

## Views held by the population

### **Welfare**

Discussions in focus groups revealed that, like the interviewees, participants associate the word welfare with a number of concepts. For many the connection with state provision and benefits is automatic, both with positive and negative overtones. The term is however also seen as having a wider meaning encompassing care and concern for others and for the self.

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

Speaking both from personal experience of welfare services and involvement in voluntary organisations, which have brought them into close contact with areas of the welfare system, participants say they feel that the welfare system works at a basic level, that most people have their basic needs addressed most of the time, but that the system does fail some and has gaps in some areas. The following quotation gives an indication of the tone of opinion.

I think that there are some individuals, you know and it is dozens not hundreds, but for whom the system doesn't work [...], but generally the many thousands who need welfare support in this town, from what I perceive get good support through the state and through communities of interest. But there are, I do agree there are notable gaps in it. (F1, m)

The homeless, the elderly and young families on low incomes were seen in particular as groups most likely to be failed by the system. It is felt that there are services available both in state and voluntary sector if you know that they are there and are able to fight for your right to them, a double problem which leaves many without.

### **Role of the church**

Discussion of the role of the church took place at two levels, the general societal level and the personal. Even those who are members of local churches and attend sporadically comment that they see the church as somewhere to go for spiritual guidance and would not consider it as somewhere to go if they needed help and support in other forms.

At a societal level, when talking about what the role of the church ought to be the general opinion is that the church has and ought to have a role in welfare, both in terms of providing welfare and speaking out. Opinion is, however divided as to whether the Church of England retains a particular role in contemporary society. For some the convictions of all people of faith give them a particular responsibility to act in society, they are expected to speak out and be concerned for those outside their own group, but the Church of England has no particular role. For others, while the question of whether or not the Church of England ought to be established remains open, the fact that it is currently the established church gives it both privileges and responsibilities which it ought to use for the benefit of all.

### **Church and social work**

Focus groups contained both non-churchgoers and churchgoers from a number of different denominations and of varying degrees of activity. Those who do not attend

church say that they have little or no knowledge of any activities that the church may run in the field of welfare and are in fact surprised when other members of the group mention some voluntary bodies as having church connections, which they had never even considered as having ties to the churches. Both categories of participants are however agreed on the fact that the churches can and should have some involvement in social welfare, either in their own right or in cooperation with other bodies and faith groups. The question is not one of whether the church should be involved, but whether it has the resources to be involved. While those who attend local churches feel that the churches do a lot that is not necessarily seen, both as organisations and through Christian individuals, people from both categories agree that the increasingly elderly congregations of most churches means that the churches lack the human resources to do as much as they or others would like.

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

As noted above there is a clear expectation that members of faith groups and churches speak out on behalf of those on the margins. In particular there is an expectation that the Church of England use its connections to the corridors of power to benefit others. Bishops especially are seen as having access to the media and using it to make points in public debate, which is something which is viewed favourably. There is no feeling that the Church or churches ought to stay out of such discussions, but rather a disappointment that they do not do more. Others, such as local councillors are seen as taking the initiative in raising controversial issues in Darlington where the church once used to be the most active voice. This is mainly attributed to the move from Darlington of some key personalities, who have not been replaced by others equally ready to take the lead. Both churchgoers and non-churchgoers comment on the particular role that the local clergy have here in line with that of the Bishops at national level. The clergy of the town are seen as representing the churches in a way that even the most active lay people do not and their leadership in raising difficult questions is both expected and desired, as long as they are speaking for the whole community and not just their church-going congregations.

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

Members of the focus groups comment that the average age of congregations in the town is getting older. Both churchgoers and non-churchgoers comment on declining congregations, ageing congregations and diminishing human resources in that there are now fewer priests in the area than there once were. Those who live in villages outside the town are particularly aware that their parish priest now has a much larger area of responsibility. Connections are made here between the lack of priests and the closing of churches and the fact that doctors and post office services are increasingly no longer available in the villages. In this way the Church is seen as just one more of a number of organisations centralising resources.

In terms of the impact of the church on the wider society it is also mentioned that general awareness of the church and the biblical stories has declined amongst the younger generations. Even the younger members of the groups, in their mid 20s, remember singing hymns in school and the predominance of the teaching of Christianity in religious education, something which they feel is different for younger relatives and children of friends in schools today.

### **Wishes for changes of the church**

While there is no desire expressed for a return to a society where the church has greater power over individual lives, it is clear that the Church, along with other churches and faith groups is seen as a potential force for good in the town and there is a desire expressed that the Church become more proactive in taking a role for itself, both in terms of making use of the opportunity it has for itself, and as a natural coordinator of all faith groups in the town. It is felt that if the church were to focus more on external issues relevant to the lives of ordinary men and women in the town that it could both do a lot of good and build up itself. Opinion is that if the church was more active both in the community and in promoting what it already does it could attract more members and win allies in the public sphere, so that when it does speak out it is taken more seriously.

### **Significance of gender**

Given the size of the sample it is difficult to perceive differences in responses along gender lines. Of the two focus groups one was numerically dominated by women and the other by men, but the broad themes emerging from both discussions are very similar. Neither does gender emerge as a significant factor in the content of discussions. What can be said however is that in contrast to comments by the clergy in the town, who talk about the church as a community of Christian individuals in society, questions about the role of the church are interpreted fairly narrowly as being about activities run or sponsored by the church and comments made by parish priests. Given that the majority of parish priest in the town are male it can therefore be seen that the expectation that priests will take the lead is also one that men will take the lead. Similarly the fact that the more high profile projects are the ones that are commented also shows that the more individual oriented care provided by many women is not seen outside the churches as a contribution to welfare in the same way as more large scale projects.

## **Sociological analysis**

### **The concept of Welfare**

Definitions and interpretations of the term welfare which appear in the interview material are similar for all groups of interviewees. All mention both material and spiritual aspects, although it is true that the latter is stressed more by the representatives of the churches. For the clergy this spiritual wellbeing encompassed by the term welfare involves the idea of a person as being made whole through a relationship with God. Other respondents do not see God as part of the picture, but rather stress the need to take into account all aspects of a person's life and needs when assessing their welfare. Nonetheless, there is clearly a shared understanding that the welfare of individuals and groups in society needs to be addressed in a way that takes the whole picture into account, both church and public authority representatives talk of holistic approaches and the need to see the whole person.

Understandings of welfare as encompassing notions of wellbeing and not simply material care are frequently connected with the expression of concern that society is

becoming more individualistic and that there is an ongoing breakdown in traditional family units, leaving individuals vulnerable at a number of levels. Rising levels of homelessness and increasing numbers of one person households and of elderly people in residential care are only three factors which provide some measure of empirical back up for these perceptions. In fact, the majority of issues expected to be the major challenges for the welfare system in Darlington in coming years are related to these significant changes in the make up of society in some way. There is no difference here between the ways that representatives of the local authorities and of the churches see the challenges to the system, the differences come rather in the roles which they see for the church in tackling such issues.

### **The role of the Church**

It is clear from the responses of the clergy in interviews that they see the church's involvement in welfare as a God given duty, not only this the fact that the Church of England is a state church, with each parish having responsibility for the welfare of all individuals within the parish boundaries is taken very seriously. Clergy refer frequently to the task of the 'cure of souls' in the parish conferred upon them at their installation in the parish and emphasise this general responsibility, while at the same time commenting that they are not social workers and that the responsibility for basic material care lies with the public authorities. The church may have been the first provider of general health care, they argue, but now there are others who are better qualified to do so and the church's responsibility is therefore to work alongside these structures, providing its expertise where necessary.

Representatives of the public authorities place the emphasis differently. They see themselves as having primary responsibility for the local community and see the church as one of a number of voluntary organisations with whom they can cooperate. Questions of this nature however frequently prompt comment along the lines that there are areas where the local authority could benefit from closer cooperation with the churches, but that this simply has not come up in discussion. The church is, several say, never mentioned in discussions over welfare provision.

The tensions shown above, along with the open attitude of those in the public authorities to the possibility of closer cooperation with the churches, shows that there is clearly room for a proactive church to take a role for itself should it so wish. The church representatives are however cautious in this respect, not least in terms of practical social care. Citing the restricted resources of the church, both in human and financial terms as well as the necessity of the church focusing on areas in which she has expertise the interviewees are careful to guard themselves and their institutions from taking on too much.

It is interesting that the discourse within the public authorities as regards both involvement of voluntary groups, faith groups and the general public in welfare provision is clearly influenced by national discourse and targets expecting or demanding a language and practice of involving faith groups and ethnic minorities. This means that any questions as to the involvement of churches are automatically met by responses encompassing all faith groups, although Darlington itself has only very small numbers of ethnic minorities and of faiths other than Christianity. It is true that those faith communities that do exist are often concentrated in the more deprived areas of town so public authorities are obliged to focus on these as a result of

explicit targets set to prioritise the areas of town with most deprivation. But despite this cautious language encompassing all faiths, in the majority of interviews an understanding that the Church of England and/or the Christian churches have a particular role to play emerged. This may not be desired, as many commented that all churches and voluntary organisations ought to be treated equally, but the fact that the Church is a state church and present in all areas of the town, along with its history as a natural partner for the authorities means that it is still seen as having a particular role, not least as a voice in public debate.

In contrast to the two groups of interviewees mentioned above the general public have a much less coherent perception of the role of the church in welfare. Nearly all feel that the church ought to have a role, given that it has the resources and consider that they might turn to their local parish priest for spiritual matters, but knowledge of what the church does do in Darlington varied greatly. Those who attend church on a fairly regular basis have a good idea of what the church does, both on its own and in cooperation with others, but those who have little or no contact with the church comment that they would not think to turn to the church if they were in material need and are not aware of what the churches do in the town. This ties in closely with the church representative's perception of the expectations that the general public might have of the church. Generally they feel that the population have very low expectations of the church in the area of welfare except, perhaps, following moments of personal crisis, such as bereavement.

### **Voice or Action?**

Both from the viewpoint of the Church and the public authority it seems that the church's role as actor and voice are seen as being intrinsically connected. Responses to a question as to whether, if the church has a role in welfare, it ought to prioritise practical action or speaking out, were generally that both are equally important and go hand in hand. This was not least true for church representatives, who argue that a church acting on the ground can then speak out more credibly. Representatives of the public authorities feel that both roles are legitimate, but given that the state organises provision of welfare services see a more important role for the church in acting as a critic of society.

This may also be true of other organisations, but the Church has networks in the community, contacts with councillors and still commands a certain amount of attention, plus the fact that it is still an established church. This means, many argue, that the Church has a duty at local level to make use of this opportunity, just as the Bishops in the House of Lords have a duty to make use of their position. But it is not only this, the Church is to a significant extent seen as an in-between point, a mediator between the population and those in power. The church has channels which it can use to speak out, but also, when it does do so it can speak as an independent voice. A parish priest and a social worker may, for example, be equally well aware of failures in the system, but a priest can speak out without fear for his or her job.

Representatives of the churches agree with this assessment and stress the fact that the church could be more outspoken than it is currently, although some comment that it is not always speaking out publicly that is the best alternative. Diplomacy behind the scenes is also important. Nonetheless, it is striking that the emphasis on the prophetic role of the church is not borne out in practice in Darlington at

the current time. Representatives of the public authority comment on previous vicars and clergy from other denominations, who were a force to reckon with in the town and who challenged them on a range of awkward issues. This, the general opinion is, is not the case at the moment and the church could take a much more prominent role for itself should it so wish.

This in turn highlights the importance, in a place the size of Darlington at least, of individual personalities and relationships for the role of the church in general and for its cooperation with other bodies too. There is considerable scope for one or two individuals to be a driving force for change in both town and church, but this also makes the processes vulnerable to the movement of individuals to and from the town.

### **Understanding of Church**

One clear tension evident in the material, which in turn affects the interpretation of other responses, is the understanding of what is meant by church. Representatives of the local authorities and of the general public refer solely to institutions and their official representatives when talking about the role of the Church or churches in welfare. Church representatives however make a distinction between the church as organisation and the church as Christians in the world.

The former view focuses attention on projects that the churches run and classes the church therefore alongside other voluntary organisations in society. Arguing along these lines representatives of the local authorities say that there is a place for the church to be involved in welfare as long as it is prepared to be professional in its provision of services and not mix the giving of care with requirements that receivers accept its doctrines. For the representatives of the churches, however this argument, while not irrelevant, is a side issue. The churches in Darlington have little desire to compete for funding for major projects, at least not at the present time, they accept that, should this be the case that they would need to follow the same rules as everyone else (something that recent strengthening of child protection legislation has made them only too well aware of), but maintain that the majority of the welfare work of the church is not carried out in this manner. They interpret questions asking about the role of the church as including the contributions of all Christian men and women to society as carers, volunteers and paid workers, not limited to the work which they do under the umbrella of a particular parish church. Part of the churches' contribution to welfare is, in this view, then a strengthening of social capital in the area.

### **Church in community**

It is evident that the clergy of the parishes in Darlington feel strongly that one contribution which they make to the town is the strengthening of local community, in the sense that there is a church and church hall in every area of the town. Where there had once been a doctor and a school teacher living where they worked in most deprived areas, the clergy are now often the only professionals who live in the parish and the church and parish or community hall are often the only communal buildings in residential areas where people can meet. Both practically and symbolically the church building can therefore play an important role at local community level.

Many church halls have now been turned into local community halls, where the church and local residents have jointly applied for money and share the use and running of the building. In these centres and in other buildings owned and run solely by the churches a large number of activities take place every week, which have nothing to do with the church, but which bring people who would otherwise have no contact with the church through its doors. In one community centre, which is used by over 400 people a week, for events as diverse as dance classes to uniformed children's organisations (such as guides and brownies) to baby massage, run by Sure Start, the parish priest has prioritised being around in the building as much as possible when such events are on and connects a trebling in the number of baptisms performed in the church last year with this policy.<sup>60</sup>

Amongst those in the local authorities the fact that the church is often at the centre of its local community with important knowledge about the residents, not least schools and the elderly is seen as something which could be capitalised on further and the fact that the local churches have often taken the initiative and got involved in local community partnerships is appreciated. However the connection made by those in the churches between involvement in the community and the importance of the church building is seldom recognised by those outside the church. In fact the opposite is sometimes, though by no means always, the case. While there is an awareness that the Church is not rich in terms of disposable income, the opinion is sometimes expressed that it could do more valuable work if it were to sell off buildings and land and use the proceeds for social projects.

## Theological analysis

The discussion above highlights the fact that church representatives see a natural role for the church in society in general and in welfare in particular and that this is shared to a certain extent by representatives of the public sector. Interestingly, where the representatives of the public authorities and of the general population express theological motives or reflections concerning the role of the church they coincide to a certain degree with those of the church representatives. Church representatives refer to the example of Jesus and occasionally to the gospels (as a canon of literature, or to more specific passages) as motives for church involvement in providing social care and speaking out on behalf of those on the margins of society. Where others indicate theological motives for the church it is also along these lines. The contrast is not, in other words in the theological motives highlighted, but rather the way in which they are interpreted, while for those looking in at the church from the outside these motives are seen as reasons why the church as a corporate body should be involved in society, for many within the church the focus is on individual Christians as the church in the world and the calling to Christians to care for the sick is as much to a nurse at work in a hospital, who serves God through her paid occupation, as it is to the church to organise hospital visits.

One clear difference in theological motives for the work of the church is the fact that representatives of the church frequently refer to the Old Testament and to the

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<sup>60</sup> Interview 6, Female.

Prophets in particular, where as representatives of the public sector, if they make any theological reflection at all confine their comments to references to the New Testament. The clergy, however name the prophets of the Hebrew Bible both in support of an argument that the church should actively work for the poor and that the church should speak out against the powers that be in society if necessary. It is clear that for the clergy an understanding of the church's mission to follow Christ is also embedded in a longer tradition.

Neither can it be said that the theological motives cited by the clergy for the church's involvement in practical social work can be said to be any different from theologically grounded arguments for the church as a social voice. Commonly the two are seen as complementary elements of the church's calling as the following extract from one interview shows.

I think they are both important, [...] we should have a voice which speaks to social issues and which is willing to speak out ... I can't believe that we should try to wriggle out of that one in the end, because I believe in a God who comes into creation in Christ and if the incarnation means anything it means actually rolling up your sleeves and getting on with things to do with the flesh, things to do with material wellbeing as well as the highfaluting spiritual issues. There is a spiritual dimension, in other words, to Christianity, there has to be if we believe God comes into the world in Christ. And I don't believe that I see Jesus as actually shirking those prophetic and political issues at all, he spoke out quite clearly, particularly against the establishment, the status quo of the day. (19, m)

Theological motivation for the social work of the Church and its role as a voice in the nation is clearly evident in all of the responses from the church representatives when each interview is read as a complete unit, but is most usefully read as whole against the background of the individual's general theological background. The priests interviewed rarely cite scripture or refer to particular theological streams in the life of the church, although, as indicated above, they do refer to scripture in passing, generally assuming theological competence on the part of the interviewer. To someone unfamiliar with the Christian tradition and scriptures and even with the theological tradition of the Anglican Church many references may seem obtuse, but nonetheless different motivations for engagement based on different theological understandings are evident in the material.

### **Theological Motivation and Churchmanship**

Theological motivation for the social work of the Church and its role as a voice in the nation is clearly evident in all of the responses from the Church representatives. The fact that a wide variety of motivations for engagement based on different theological understandings are evident in the material is perhaps not surprising given the historical background of the Church of England. Not only is the Church a broad church including many theological streams within the communion, but also the very tradition which binds them, stemming from Richard Hooker is an understanding of theological thought as encompassing a synthesis of scripture, reason and tradition. It is therefore not possible to say that any of the interviewees makes use of traditional Anglican theological motives to explain church involvement in society, but rather a number of streams can be seen here which relate to different types of churchmanship within the Church of England.

There is no room here for a comprehensive study of the understanding of churchmanship in the Anglican Church and the ways in which it has been studied, but a brief introduction is necessary to highlight the differences in the material. Kelvin Randall in his *Evangelicals Etcetera* argues that three elements that have to be taken into account in a study of churchmanship, the two axes of conservative/ liberal and catholic/ evangelical and a measure of degree of influence from the charismatic movement.<sup>61</sup> This study will not explore how the clergy interviewed fit the model of these ideal types, but the three models for the role of the church in welfare, outlined earlier can be dissected along these lines. Those who propose the *spiritual* model of the church are likely, for example to have a more conservative form of churchmanship than those who represent the models of *community voice* and *pragmatic provision*.

It is interesting here to compare these three typologies with four models of understandings of church state relations from within the churches, developed in the 1980s by Medhurst and Moyser. They make use of Niehbuhr's divisions, outlined in his *Christ and Culture*, to typologise the situation in England. The four divisions, Christ in culture, against culture, above culture or as transformer of culture can, they argue, all be found in the Anglican Church and represent the different attitudes to the church's role in society which can be found at the various intersections of the two scales of theological liberalism to conservatism and of interaction with versus isolation from the secular political realm.<sup>62</sup>

Christ in culture represents a view of the church as guardian of a tradition in a Christian country, this exists in both conservative and liberal forms, the former arguing for a Christendom model of society, the latter for a church which interprets secular developments in the light of theology. The model of Christ as transformer of culture is inspired by an incarnational theology associated with the high church wing of the church. Here theological arguments are used to justify radical political values. Christ above culture models, in contrast, argues that Christianity is a personal matter with no political implications and the church is expected to avoid political involvement. Finally the Christ against culture model, grounded in a theological pessimism regarding the sinful nature of humanity sees no possibility for interaction between church and secular institutions. If these were the models evident in the Church twenty years ago, it is interesting that they do not equate to those that can be seen in Darlington today.

At the end of their summary of the situation in the 1980s Medhurst and Moyser comment on ongoing theological shifts caused by increased interaction across internal doctrinal divides. Not least they mention a renewed focus on the 'Kingdom of God' influencing those of a more catholic persuasion to see the world rather than the church as the focus of divine involvement in the world and those from the evangelical wing of the church to move towards more corporate understandings of Christianity and away from a more personal focus.<sup>63</sup>

It is certainly the case that none of the church representatives in Darlington expressed an understanding of the role of the Church as separate to, or even in opposition to society. This study is not longitudinal, so there has been no opportunity to

<sup>61</sup> Randall, Kelvin, 2005.

<sup>62</sup> Medhurst, Kenneth and Moyser, George, 1988, 356–357.

<sup>63</sup> Medhurst, Kenneth and Moyser, George, 1988, 358.

study changes in Darlington, but if this brief comparison can tell us anything it is an indication that the theological models of church evident in the Church of England have altered over time as its role as a state church has become increasingly questioned.

### **Tensions between theology and practice**

There are some noticeable differences in the tone which the Church representatives take when presenting theological arguments for the role of the church in society and even what they say that they do at a local level. Strong theological arguments are given that the church should be active in providing care for the needy, but when asked what is done in their parish in the field of welfare the clergy are cautious, arguing that it is not the role of the church to act as an untrained social service and that it does not have the resources to set up large numbers of projects, it must in other words be careful to tailor its coat to the cloth available. This said there is clearly a will to do more where feasible. Several of the parishes have recently, or are about to, carry out audits of time and talent (or gifts) amongst the members of their congregations, to see where the opportunity exists for the development of new initiatives.

In terms of the church's role as a prophetic voice there is also an interesting tension apparent. Interviewees argue that the church is called to be prophetic and to question the powers that be on behalf of those with no voice, but there is little evidence that the Church of England clergy currently in post take on this role on a regular basis, in fact local authority representatives contrast the current situation with that of a few years ago when the local church was more voluble. It may be that the climate is different and that there is more to be gained by taking a more diplomatic approach today, but it is obvious that while the church representatives argue in theological terms that the church should be prophetic, they are more likely to act as diplomats themselves.

## **Gender analysis**

It was evident from the replies of both church representatives and others to questions concerning issues of gender and gender equality that the accepted language of discourse in the public sphere in England today is one of equality in general, where gender equality is seen as one aspect amongst many. Rather than singling it out therefore interviewees both from church and not tend towards comments on the church as a voice in the debate on equality. Here there is agreement that the church can have much to say on this issue.

There is however some reservation on the part of those outside the church as to whether the church can speak with a credible voice when its own structures are so patriarchal. Church representatives do acknowledge that the church's chances of being taken seriously when commenting on gender inequalities has been damaged by internal conflicts, but do not seem to see the hierarchies of the church as they stand as an obstacle to such comment in themselves. Rather the clergy choose to focus on theologically grounded interpretations of human nature, as individuals made in the image of god, unique, but equally valued. This leads in many cases to a discussion

of people's uncertainty over their roles in family and society in the modern world, a discussion which does not appear in the responses from those outside the churches.

### **Gender determined roles and tasks**

It is clear that not only do men and women participate in varying degrees in the work of the church, but also that they take on different tasks. There are more women active, although to some extent this coincides with the fact that more women attend church too, but in addition women take on more caring roles within the life of the church. Those men who do give time to the church are much more likely to be involved in practical and traditionally male tasks. Alternatively there are a number of business men who will give their time to the church in the form of contacts for fundraising and take on the role of organiser and provider in this way.

Similarly the pattern of use of services, where women attend services provided with children in mind, such as parents and toddlers groups, is a replica of that of use of services in the secular milieu, where women are more frequent users of services, not least because they accompany with their children, mentioning their own problems while they are there. It seems therefore that the church in its provision of welfare services, and the population in the way that they use it, mirror to a large extent behaviour in society at large. Women are closely connected with family and the church in its provision of services makes little attempt to break this pattern. There is however little awareness of this on the ground. When asked about activities provided specifically for men or women few of the respondents make this connection, apart from to say that few fathers come to parents and toddlers groups.

### **Power and Influence**

In terms of power and influence in the local church it is clear that the male dominated hierarchy evident at national level is also in place at local level. This is not to say that there are not a number of women in significant positions in their local church as churchwardens or as members of the PCC, but the significant majority of the parish priests in the town are still men and as the only full-time employee in the majority of parishes they are in considerable positions of power, regardless of whether or not the individuals concerned have made active attempts to involve lay people in the running of the church.

Interviews with those representing the local authority, other organisations and the focus groups show that the parish priests have a symbolic value as representatives of the Church and are also the automatic contact point for those outside who may wish to cooperate with the church. In this respect the clergy of the town act as gatekeepers both physically and symbolically for the interaction of town and church, an element of power and influence that is easily underestimated by those concerned.

### **The ordination of women and issues of gender equality**

One area which has had a considerable influence on responses to questions connecting the Church and gender issues in England is the issue of the ordination of women. The fact that this is such a heated and well known issue means that there is often, on the part of the priests, a certain defensiveness or caution in an interview situation, making it hard to get at opinions. In interviews with others it also quickly became clear that this issue has had an impact on perceptions of the church. Some of these responses have

been noted here, however I intend to address the impact of this ongoing internal debate on the Church's theology and gender issues related to the church in general.

If I had been expecting anything it was that a model of churchmanship would shine though here with attitudes to equality equating to a large extent with attitudes to women's ordination and authority in the church. The following model illustrates this relation in terms of ideal types. While there are exceptions to the pattern illustrated below there are clear links evident in the Church at national level between churchmanship and attitude to the ordination of women. The issue of churchmanship has already been discussed, here the issue is simplified taking into account two key elements, conservative/ liberal attitudes and high church/ low church theologies. An individual or congregation describing themselves as high church conservative would on this scale therefore be likely to be opposed to the ordination of women and would be likely to base their arguments on the traditions of the Church. A low church conservative from the evangelical wing of the Church would share this opposition, but focus arguments on biblical interpretation.

The clergy interviewed were asked to describe their churchmanship and this information along with attitudes to the ordination of women expressed (no specific question was asked however) allows them to be placed in the following model.

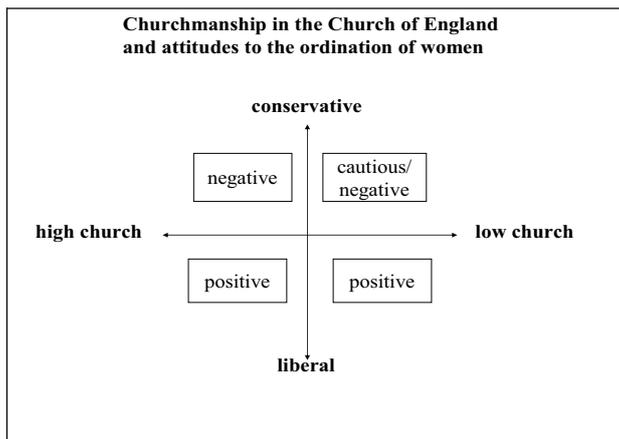


Figure 2. Ideal types model illustrating theoretical relationship between churchmanship and attitudes to the ordination of women.

However it is interesting that this did not divide the interviewees in terms of the language that they used to speak of gender equality. Practically all of the Church representatives interviewed who referred to this issue stressed one aspect – difference. In terms of the Church speaking out on gender equality the general feeling was that this was important, but mainly within the framework of calls for equality for all ethnic minorities, faiths etc. as well as gender. In the words of one parish priest

I think it is an area amongst others. I mean the church has to say something about equality. It also has to say something about difference. By equality we don't mean sameness, I think that could be a problem, but yes the church is called to speak out on equality just as it is called to speak out on injustice and equality of gender is just one facet of equality.(18, m)

Interestingly this coincides with the opinions of the non-church representatives. Gender equality is often seen as part of a wider equality debate, possibly because in the current media and political climate the overriding rhetoric is one of general equality, in contrast to Scandinavian countries where the issue of gender equality is more frequently set aside, and even has its own terminology.

To return to the Church however when the interviewees refer to their own situation, personal or local they place emphasis on 'equal but different'. It was felt that men and women have different ways of serving the church or carrying out social work in the name of the church. In other words the differences in opinion as to the valuing of men's and women's contributions are more subtle than might first be thought. This can be illustrated with two examples from the material. One a woman and parish priest in the town, the other also a parish priest, a man who has responsibility for a parish church in the town which rejects the ordained ministry of women. She uses the expression equal but different in defining her ministry in relation to that of male clerics,

I think having a woman here has been, and it could have been any woman I don't mean me, has been important, [...]. I would want to say ideally to have a man and woman in a parish would be perfect because they both offer something different just by their nature and I think that when the last vicar was here we made a good team in as much as there were two people with whom we had contact and he had ministered to them for about 5 years, both women, but he didn't know that they had been abused as children. They told me in the first year I was here, but they hadn't told him. That was just because he was a man, wasn't because he was X. (6, f)

Earlier on in the interview separate from the discussion of gender, she comments

I make it my business ..., you will probably only hear this from one of us ..., I make it my business to serve teas, coffees and refreshments at the thrift shop. People know that I am there and I have made a lot of contacts with people. Some come for a chat. One lady now comes to church, just through chatting over the hatch, having a cup of tea. I get up at some unearthly hour in the morning to do scones etc. [...] and I suppose that is the bonus of having a woman, but I would see that as part of my role and my contact with this community. (6, f)

When asked if it was because she is a woman that she could and did take on that role she replies

It might be but I see no reason why a fella shouldn't do it. They would perhaps do it in a slightly different way, but maybe I do it easier because I am a woman and that kind of thing comes easier. (6, f)

In contrast the male interviewee here sees clearly defined roles for men and women within the church, or more accurately does not see a place for women as priests. In response to a question as to whether there is a role for the church to play in discussions over men's and women's roles in society his reply is

The Church has got itself into women priests and all that sort of thing and of course we have nothing to do with any of that. (9, m)

He is however at pains to stress the balance in his congregation, the fact that women have important roles to play in the life of the parish and shows a photograph to prove his point. He comments further

This is not an issue for me at all, you can see it is a balance, from my own experience it is just a ... I don't know what all the fuss is about.

He too stresses the need for balance and for different roles for men and women. It is however important to note, in this context, the defensive nature of his stance, no doubt because of his role in internal Church debates, and he was more open in discussions once the tape recorder had been switched off.

## Main findings and concluding reflections

### **The role of the Church in welfare – An open and local question**

Some of the most interesting aspects of the material are the indications of processes of change and the tensions evident between church and society and within the Church.

Reading between the lines of interviews with representatives of the public authorities it is clear that there is a discrepancy between what they feel ought to be the role for the church in welfare, given a neutral starting point, and what is expected, given the current situation. Many express the opinion that the church ought (and is in many respects) treated as just one of a number of voluntary organisations in the local area. The accepted official discourse is one of cooperation with faith communities in general. However, this is coupled with an expectation that the Church should speak out and act on welfare issues, both because of its ideological and theological foundation and because it remains the state church. There is, in other words a clear tension between what is expected of the Church in theory and what is expected in practice, given its historical legacy. The opinion that the Church ought to be seen as just one voluntary organisation is not seen to be at odds with the understanding that the churches have unique knowledge of their local communities. Something which could be utilised more, by nurses and social workers supporting the elderly, for example.

In Darlington there is also an awareness that the church had a stronger position in the past as the result of activism by a couple of clergymen in particular. Even those who argue that the church should have no particular role, note that this independent voice is lacking in Darlington today. They argue that there is a role for the church there for the taking, if only it were more proactive.

If these observations can say anything at a more general national level, it is that there remains an openness on the part of the general public and many of those who work within the public sector towards the church as both actor and social voice. Partnership with the churches may not be sought actively, but there are opportunities for the church if it wants them. In light of this it then seems that the future for the church's role in welfare could look very different in different parts of the country. The extent of church involvement at local level will depend hugely on the individuals on the ground and in positions of power in different localities.

### **Internal tensions – sociological and theological**

If the Church's future role in welfare is, to a large extent, dependent on how churches at local level respond to the unarticulated challenge before them, then tensions within the church will play a significant part in the development of this role. Interviewees from within the churches see a clear role for the church in welfare and defend this with much the same theological arguments as they defend the position of the Church as a state church. Many are ambivalent towards establishment in itself, but nonetheless argue strongly for a parochial model where the church has responsibility for the whole community. This is, not infrequently, connected with an understanding of the church, not as an organisation, but as a community of individual Christians as part of society however, which fits with a more congregational model and this is where difficult questions for the Church as an organisation are raised.

An understanding of the Church as existing for all both active and passive, in the parochial model, is defended with the same arguments as the freedom and conscience of individual Christians, to work in the community and to choose the worshiping community that suits them best. The major question for the Church therefore lies in the issue of how to reconcile the ambiguity of the parallel existence of a formal parochial model and an informal congregational model of church. This fundamental tension in the Church combined with the existence of such a wide variety of theological models and liturgical styles, as the case of Darlington shows, highlights the fact that the Church's role in welfare stands to become increasingly varied at a local level. Theological divisions evident at a national level play a part in this, but at local level the issue is not one of whether the different theologies support different attitudes to the Church's role in welfare. In general these are very similar and all see a role for the church as both voice and actor. The point of tension lies in how different theological models are used to support a more active or passive role for the Church as a collective entity.

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# Protestant Agents of Welfare in Germany – the Case of Reutlingen

ANNETTE LEIS-PETERS

## Method and Material

The point of departure for the German case study has been the collection of documents about the city of Reutlingen, about the churches and about welfare in Reutlingen and analysing them. The two local newspapers and the local television station have been regularly checked. In addition, observations have been made and written down when visiting parishes or diaconal institutions. To find key persons for the interviews experts from the regional diaconal umbrella organisation (Diakonisches Werk Württemberg) have been interviewed. In 2004 the Diakonisches Werk Württemberg conducted a study on the role of church run social service centres (Diakonische Bezirksstellen) within the local and regional welfare system. One of the examples for the study is the social service centre of the Evangelical-Lutheran church in Reutlingen County. The study was completed in 2004. That research with a similar focus has been done in Reutlingen recently was one of the reasons for choosing this municipality. The study gave important background information for the German case study.<sup>1</sup>

## Material

Altogether the following categories of material and data have been collected:

- observations (e.g. of study visits in parishes, diaconal institutions or in services run by the municipality, visits of events and services organised by the municipality, the church or the church-related organisations);
- documents and statistics of the municipality, the churches, the parishes and the diaconal institutions like presentations, annual reports or information letters (printed and on the web): e.g. the regular newsletters of the parishes and the diaconal institutions were important sources of information, in the case of the municipality statistics and important information about economy and welfare are regularly published; minutes of the city council, the church councils and the boards of the church related organisations have not been used as some of the minutes are not accessible for research purposes;

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<sup>1</sup> Grözinger & Haas, 2004.

- information about and statutes of welfare institutions, foundations, social associations and regulated co-operations in the field of welfare;
- the two local newspapers (Reutlinger Generalanzeiger, Reutlinger Nachrichten) have been regularly read in the public library of Reutlingen and interesting articles in relation to the study have been collected;
- the local TV station (RTF) has been regularly checked and notes on some interesting programmes have been written down;
- thirty individual interviews (taped and transcribed);
- four focus group interviews.

### **Individual interviews**

From the beginning, twenty individual interviews were planned. By conducting these interviews new and complementary aspects and interviewees were discovered. Because of this ten more interview appointments have been made. The sample now consists of thirty individual interviews, fifteen with representatives of the churches and diaconal institutions and fifteen with representatives of the public authorities, of another independent welfare organisation and local politicians. This means that there is a fair split between the sample of the public authorities and the sample of the church representatives.

All interviewees were offered the possibility to remain anonymous. Some of the interviewees, both representatives of the church and the public authorities, not only preferred to remain anonymous, but expressed their expectation that a study would not publish the names of any interviewees. Because of this, no names and so as little information about the interviewees as possible is mentioned, especially in relation to quotations. Within the local context some interviewees would lose their anonymity if their exact function in church respectively in municipality were to be named. For about 25 percent of all interviewees this kind of anonymity was a precondition for participation in the study. Asking for the age of the interviewee also proved to be sensitive in some interviews, because of this no age is named in relation to individual interviewees.

The sample of representatives of the church and the diaconal institutions consist of the following interviewees: dean of the church district, director for a diaconal institution, two directors of the church run social service centres (Roman-Catholic and Protestant), director of the church based care services, deacon (working with children and young people), coordinator for welfare work within the church district (vicar), three parish vicars (two in the less wealthy municipal districts, one in a middle class municipal district), two leading elected chairmen of church boards on the city and on the church district level who are both responsible for welfare questions (lay), two volunteers in welfare activities of the churches, a former vicar running independent welfare projects.

Altogether, three of the interviewees are women and eleven are men. I had to search actively for suitable female interviewees. When asking outside experts or when using the snowball technique mostly male contact persons were pointed out. The age range of the interviewees is limited as younger interviewees in particular (from 20–35 years) are missing. The interviewees are between about 35 and about 70 years old. On the one hand this might be due to the long period of professional training within the church (especially for ministers), on the other hand I was looking

for interviewees who had some years experience within this field of work and within the municipality of Reutlingen. A third difficulty within the church sample was to split fairly between representatives of the parishes, representatives of the church district's social work and representatives of the big independent church-related welfare provider. From the German perspective this was a methodological problem for the study.

The sample of the representatives of the public authorities, other independent welfare organisations and local politicians consists of the following interviewees: two directors of the local social administration, a director for the county social administration, four managers of the local social administration, a social worker (youth work), a director for a local independent welfare organisation (not church related), a manager for the same local independent welfare organisation, a social expert for each of the five biggest political parties in the city parliament.

The gender distribution seems to be fairer in this sample as seven of the interviewees are women and eight are men. I didn't have the same problems finding female interviewees within the public sector and among the local politicians. Still, all the top managers of the social administration are men.

As in the sample of the church representatives there are no young interviewees, aged between 20 and 30 years in this sample, too. The interviewees have an age between 30 and 65. This might be due to the decision to interview representatives who work at the level of top or middle management within social administration. For the local politicians the precondition is that they have to be a member of the social board of the city council or otherwise have expertise in the field of welfare.

All the individual interviewees were contacted by telephone. Some of the interviewees wanted to know more about the study before agreeing to participate. In such cases I sent more information about the objectives of the study and about areas touched on in the interview guide. None of the interviewees received a copy of the interview guide in advance. Apart from a local politician who felt a lack of expertise in the field of welfare all persons contacted have finally agreed to participate in an interview. But some asked for some time to think about the project before deciding about participation. The interviews mostly took place in the interviewee's office or home, in the case of the professionals within the churches, the diaconal institutions and the public authorities in their offices, in the case of the politicians and the volunteers in the interviewee's home. I met two volunteers in the house of the church district.

The interviews have been conducted as an open conversation on the basis of the interview guide, with the interviewer controlling if all the questions of the interview guide have been touched upon. The focus of the interviews differed as I tried to bear in mind the special expertise and the different experiences of the interviewees. The interviews were initially planned to take about 75 minutes. I always let interviewees know if the time was up. But most interviews took about 90 to 120 minutes as the interviewees found it interesting to discuss this subject. All the interviewees were given the option of receiving the transcript of the interview. Only three of them asked for the transcript.

An interview guide was produced for each of the two samples. Both interview guides are based on a translated version of the Swedish interview guide, adapted to the German situation and include the seven common questions. The seven common

questions in particular proved to be difficult to adapt to the German context as two test interviews showed. Especially question 3, 4 and 5<sup>2</sup> are quite different theoretically from a German perspective. To evoke more comprehensive answers and reflections than the confirmation of the status quo these three questions had to be embedded in a context. Because of this they are connected to other questions referring to problems or the general critique of the German welfare system in the German interview guide.

Compared to other countries the churches in Germany and the church related welfare organisations carry out a lot of social work on different levels and in different legal and organisational forms: parishes, church districts, independent diaconal institutions, private law associations, trusts, foundations, commercial law bodies or public law corporations.<sup>3</sup> The German interview guides had to make sure that all these levels and forms were taken into consideration. This means that some of the questions are addressed to different levels and forms. The interviewees couldn't be expected to include all these levels and to reflect on them by themselves. Therefore, the questions need to encourage the interviewees to refer to the different levels and forms when answering.

The complex structure of the German welfare system is not only difficult to grasp from the outside. It influences (and possibly complicates) the co-operation between different actors of the welfare system. Because of this, two sections in the German interview guides deal with questions of co-operation. This also includes co-operation between volunteers and professionals and between specialists and lay people respectively.

On the whole, the interview guides were used according to the individual situation and the expertise of the interviewees. All the interviews have been taped and transcribed. When listening to the taped interviews I took notes about interesting reflections. Some of these paragraphs have been translated into English and used as quotations in the following text.

### **Focus group interviews**

Four focus group interviews have been conducted. As all representatives of the church, the diaconal institutions, the other independent welfare organisations, the public authorities and the local politicians are at least older than 30 years, well-educated and belong to the middle-class I considered it important that in the focus group interviews the opinions of younger and less privileged citizens are included.

To organise the focus group interviews proved to be much more complicated and time-consuming than to organise the individual interviews. Originally I was planning to interview a group of unemployed people. But I did not succeed in finding a group willing to participate. Instead I decided to conduct two focus group interviews with students. Unlike the representatives of the church or the social authorities the persons or groups I contacted for the focus group interviews did not automatically

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<sup>2</sup> Does the Church have a role to play in the welfare and the well-being of people? Should the Church carry out practical social work? What type? Should the Church contribute to the public debate on welfare issues?

<sup>3</sup> More about the different levels and organisational forms of diaconal work in Reutlingen see the model in chapter 4. For a summary of different types of organisations within the German welfare system cp. Anheier & Seibel, 1997, 128–168, 139ff. and Falterbaum, 2000.

think that it is interesting to discuss the subject of welfare and religion. To win the interest of younger people I needed contact persons who helped me to persuade the students to participate. In all cases the contact persons were people I met through the individual interviews. For all focus group interviews I took contact with existing groups. The following four focus group interviews have been conducted:

Table 1. Overview of the focus groups.

<b>Group</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
Young adults who meet to exercise	7	29–36	2 female 5 male	all of them are employed by a local firm or within the public sector
German immigrants who came to Germany from the former USSR for 3 to 12 years ago	6	28–65	4 female 2 male	two have a (part time) occupation, four are unemployed
Students at the 9-year-elementary school	12	14–15	7 female 5 male	one more year to go in school, then they have to find a placement for professional training
Students at the 12 <sup>th</sup> grade at grammar school	17	17–18	10 female 7 male	two more years to go in school preparing for either studies or professional training

All focus group interviews were conducted at a place where the group meets regularly. The discussions took between 60 and 90 minutes and are taped and transcribed. While I was putting questions a colleague controlled the time and the recording of the discussion.

Compared with the individual interviews far fewer questions could be discussed in the focus group interviews as six to seventeen persons were involved in the conversation. Because of this the German interview guide for the focus group interviews is mainly based on the seven common questions. As explained above the seven common questions need to refer to actual problems or to concrete examples to provoke any discussion in the German context, especially questions 3, 4 and 5. Because of this I prepared every focus group interview separately using different examples and problems in relation to the different focus groups. This means that there is no common interview guide for the focus group interviews, but all the interviews follow the seven common questions although with different examples. Since the first focus group did not think of gender aspects by itself I tried to animate the discussion by mentioning gender related issues and problems. This caused a vivid discussion. Because of this I tried to stimulate the other focus group discussions in a similar way.

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

The individual interviews are a very strong and interesting material for the study. This is due to fact that the questions of the interview guides have inspired the interviewees to reflect critically upon their own work and the local welfare system. After

working with the results of the interviews they proved to be a direct way to get access to a critical evaluation of the actual state of the art of the local welfare from the inside. Otherwise it is quite difficult to get this kind of information. Firstly researchers in Germany do not naturally have access to minutes of relatively up to date board or council meetings. Secondly, presentations and publications of the parishes, the churches, church related welfare organisations or the social authorities are means of promotion and point therefore as a rule more likely to advancements. Self-critics do not fit in this type of publications. Media-reports on the subject welfare and religion can be quite critical, but tend to have a lack of differentiation. Because of this, the individual interviews are a quite unique source of information.

As mentioned above the seven common questions needed special adaptation (concrete examples) in the German context. Having the established position of the churches and the church-related welfare organisations within the German welfare system and society in mind especially question 3, 4 and 5 are too theoretically to be real questions for many interviewees. In fact, the test interviewee raised the question as to whether these questions could create any new knowledge in a German context. A strong motivation to maintain all common questions was the international and comparative character of the study. My experience when conducting the interviews was that the first part of question 3 to 5 (e.g. Should the Church carry out practical social work?) tended to interrupt the conversation as the answer "Yes" seemed to be too self-evident to the majority of interviewees. However, the second part of these three questions (e.g. What type of practical social work should the Church carry out?) helped to restart the conversation and resulted in a variety of interesting answers. I think it would be meaningful and profitable for future international and comparative research projects to develop the common research questions together and to test them at an early stage of the study in all participating countries.

Another important question concerning the method of the study is the choice of interviewees and how to motivate it. I have made many conscious (and unconscious) choices about whom to include in the sample of interviewees. The church sample illustrates this conflict. As the parishes, the church district and church related welfare organisations play an active role in the local welfare system there would have been many interesting interviewees. It wouldn't be possible for me to interview all socially committed vicars, deacons and all representatives of the church related welfare organisations in Reutlingen. This would have been much more than 100 interviewees, not to mention the voluntary workers who play a substantial part in the area of welfare, too. With my decision to choose some interviewees before others I influenced the results of the case study in many ways. This is true even though I have used the snowball technique and I have talked to experts on the local and regional level. In some ways these experts also influenced the results of the study. Still my sample consists mostly of professionals in leading positions. This means that more men than woman are included and in the sample of the church the vicars are better represented than any other professional group. This means also, that only a few people who do field work and only few volunteers were interviewed. Even the volunteers interviewed cannot be said to be ordinary volunteers as all of them have a distinct position among the volunteers. I think it is worth discussing these choices and their effects on the results of the study.

These choices are decisive for the results of the German case study as they put the focus on different aspects of the welfare system and the churches' contribution to it. Since the specialty of the German welfare system is the strong involvement of independent welfare agents like the churches and especially the independent, but church related welfare organisations I had to decide whether to concentrate on the independent welfare organisations, which are numerically much more important for the practical social work, or on the churches, that means on the church district and the parishes. I chose the second alternative to make the results more comparable to the other case studies in the project, but I included some interviews which took the independent welfare organisations into consideration. One of the reasons for choosing the city of Reutlingen was that a big independent welfare organisation, the diaconal institution named BruderhausDiakonie is based there. This had consequences for the choice of the representatives of the social authorities and the local politicians as the parishes mostly co-operate with the city of Reutlingen, while the big diaconal institution co-operates with the county of Reutlingen. In this respect, the picture drawn by the case study is necessarily incomplete.

The results of the focus group interviews are even more fragmentary. Again, the results are mostly based on the choice of interviewees. Compared with the individual interviews these choices are made very much by chance. At the same time the interviews are not representative at all as far too few interviewees are included. Therefore, the results of this part of the study are quite accidental.

Finally, Germany is traditionally a bi-confessional country which has no majority church, but rather two big folk churches: the Roman-Catholic church and the Protestant church. For practical reasons I was not able to include both the Protestant and the Roman-Catholic perspective into the German case study. To split fairly between these two church traditions would have meant carrying out two case studies and integrating them into one comprehensive study. This would have required double the number of interviews and an analysis (and maybe comparison) of two differing church structures. Being a Protestant myself I would not be a suitable person to conduct such comparative study on my own. Mostly for practical reason the German case study concentrates on the Evangelical-Lutheran church as an agent of welfare in Reutlingen. Never the less, I often talk about "the churches" instead of "the church". This corresponds to the language use of the interviewees who often refer to both folk churches when talking about welfare and religion. In all samples there are both Protestant and Catholic interviewees included. In the case of the representatives of the public authorities and the local politicians and the representatives of the population it is sometimes difficult to know which of the two folk churches the interviewees are talking about if they do not explicitly name one of the churches themselves. For some of the interviewees it is not important to distinguish between the churches.

## The City of Reutlingen

### Geographical situation and town history

The city of Reutlingen has about 110.00 inhabitants and is a part of the federal state of Baden-Württemberg. With its more than 100,000 inhabitants it is one of the 9 biggest cities in this federal state. Reutlingen is also the site of the district of Reutlingen (Landkreis Reutlingen) which has about 300,000 inhabitants. The town is situated between the region “Mittlerer Neckar” and a highland region called “Schwäbisch Alb”. The “Mittlerer Neckar” region along side the river “Neckar” is an industrial region where many big concerns and middle class firms have their sites (like the Daimler Chrysler Corporation, the Porsche Corporation or the Robert Bosch GmbH). This region is still one of the motors of the German economy. Even though not belonging to the region itself communications to and from this region by car and public transport are well developed. This is also true for communication to the capital of the federal state, Stuttgart, which is a 50 km journey away from Reutlingen. This makes the town an attractive place of residence to many commuters as the prices of housing are slightly lower compared with the prices of the extremely expensive Stuttgart region. The highlands of the “Schwäbische Alb” which drop steeply towards Reutlingen are a thinly populated, rural area with a beautiful mountain landscape. It is an area of recreation not only for Reutlingen but for the whole Stuttgart region. The city of Tübingen, where one of the oldest universities in Germany is situated, is a close neighbour to Reutlingen (only 15 km away).

Existing documents name Reutlingen for the first time in 1089, but archaeological findings show that there had been human settlement in this area as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> In 1180 Reutlingen was given the privilege of holding a market and about 30 years later the Emperor Friedrich II, gave Reutlingen the freedom of a city. Thereby, Reutlingen became an Imperial city, technically only obligated to the Emperor. As an Imperial city, even though a small one, Reutlingen was often beleaguered by the regional rulers in its surroundings. This strengthened the citizens’ identity of belonging to an independent city which is illustrated by the history of the reformation in Reutlingen. The town became a centre for the South-Western German reformation movement during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In 1524 the citizens of Reutlingen forced their government to officially introduce and maintain the new teachings of the reformation.<sup>5</sup> In 1530 Reutlingen was one of the two German towns which signed the Confessio Augustana. As a consequence of the Napoleonic wars Reutlingen lost its status as an Imperial city and was integrated into the kingdom of Württemberg. Economically this change had positive effects on the development of the city. The strict rules of the dominating guilds had become barriers, especially for trade.

Reutlingen was one of the cities in the kingdom of Württemberg which went through an early industrialisation. From the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century many successful family firms were founded, mainly in the areas of engine building, textile and paper fabrication. The connection to the railway network in 1859 furthered this development. Some districts still mirror this period. In the city quarter Gminders-

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<sup>4</sup> About the town history cf. Storz 2003, Stadtarchiv Reutlingen 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Brecht 1995, 237–268.

dorf, the textile firm Gminder built a whole quarter for its workers and their families. At the end of World War II the city was destroyed by several bomb attacks. Its industry became an objective for the Allies.

Today, Reutlingen is not as beautiful as historic city as its history might suggest. The destruction of the war and an early economic upswing in the 1950s and 1960s, which replaced many remaining old buildings with modern buildings, have left traces in the townscape. Only some historic buildings are left, among them the city church, Marienkirche close to the market place. It is the structure of the city with its pedestrian precinct and its huge market place in the city centre which is most reminiscent of the long historic tradition of the town, especially as the farmers from the surrounding areas still come to the city to sell their products three times a week.

From the city centre Reutlingen expanded mostly by incorporating many of the neighbouring villages. The first village was incorporated in 1907 and the culmination of this development was the territory reform of the 1970s when altogether 9 villages were incorporated. Because of this the different town districts have very different characters. Some are still like villages, others have become urban housing areas where people live close to each other in huge and anonymous buildings.

## Demographic, economic and social situation

From 33,000 inhabitants after World War II the population grew to 46,000 in 1950 and to 67,000 in 1961.<sup>6</sup> This increase can be explained by many refugees coming from the former German territories in Eastern Europe to find a new home in Reutlingen. From 1960 to 1970 the population rose again to 79,000. This can be traced back to the economic upswing which Reutlingen was experiencing. During this period many working immigrants from Southern Europe moved to Reutlingen. From 1970 to 1975 the population increased again to 96,000 which is mostly due to the incorporation of the surrounding villages. Since then the city has grown more slowly.

The typical German age structure is represented in Reutlingen. The numbers of elderly are growing while the birth rate is still low. Strongest in numbers among the population are people in their mid 30s. The statistics about material status illustrate an individualisation of life styles in Reutlingen. About 48 % of all inhabitants are married, 40 % are unmarried, about 6 % are divorced and about 7 % are widowed. In 47 % of all households there lives at least one child under the age of 18.

15.7 percent of the inhabitants of Reutlingen do not have a German passport. In numbers these are more than 17,000 citizens. The biggest groups among these citizens are the Turkish (more than 3,000) and the Greek citizens (more than 3,000). The share of citizens with foreign passport in Reutlingen is higher than in the federal state of Baden-Württemberg as a whole which has an immigrant rate of about 12 %. Another group of immigrants are the Germans from Eastern Europe and mainly from the former USSR. Since the end of the Cold War many thousands of people with German origins have come to Germany. Naturally they have German passports and therefore are not included in the statistics on citizens with foreign passport. At

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<sup>6</sup> For all the numbers and statistics in the following text cp. Stadt Reutlingen, 2003 and the website of the city of Reutlingen.

the same time, many of them face similar problems concerning language and integration as other immigrants.

At the moment there are about 48,000 jobs in Reutlingen which are subject to compulsory social insurance. The production industry still offers most of the jobs (about 41 % of all jobs), with a growing service sector (35.5 %) followed by trade and transport (23 %) and agriculture/forestry (less than 1 %). The municipality has about 1,900 employees, most of them in the area of social services (about 550). The BruderhausDiakonie, one of the big diaconal institutions in Germany, has its origins and its headquarters in Reutlingen.<sup>7</sup> The BruderhausDiakonie has about 3,500 employees in total and offers social and care services for young people, handicapped people, unemployed people and elderly people in 14 districts (Landkreise) in Baden-Württemberg. In the district of Reutlingen alone about 1,500 people are employed by this independent, church-related welfare provider, about 80 % of them are women.

After the decline of the textile industry in the 1960s engine building and electronics dominate the production industry in Reutlingen. The most important employers include:

- Robert Bosch GmbH;
- Reutlingen municipality;
- District hospital of Reutlingen district/Sana AG;
- BruderhausDiakonie;
- Stoll GmbH & Co. KG, knitting machines;
- Still Wagner GmbH & Co. KG, conveyor technique;
- Rieber GmbH & Co. KG, equipment for canteens;
- Wafios AG, engine building;
- Willi Betz, one of Europe's biggest transport enterprises.

Within the range of the production sector Reutlingen is competing with sites in Eastern Europe and Asia where the wages and the taxes are low. This became obvious when the Robert Bosch GmbH was thinking about transferring parts of its projector production to Hungary. Reutlingen still has a comparably low rate of unemployment (about 6 %). This is below the average rate of Baden-Württemberg (about 7.4 percent) and way below the unemployment rate of Germany as a whole (about 11 %). About 55 % of the unemployed people in Reutlingen are men and about 45 % are women. But both the schools and municipality warn at the moment of an alarming number of young people who do not manage to get into professional training or into work after their school exams. But this can hardly be seen in the statistics as most of the young people continue with some form of school education. As a consequence of this the number of pupils at schools with vocational courses is growing even though the total number of citizens between 15 and 22 is decreasing.

In Reutlingen most of the pupils attend state schools. Altogether there are 26 general state schools: 18 primary schools (grade 1–4/Grundschule), 9 of them with a

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<sup>7</sup> The Bruderhaus Diakonie was founded as an independent welfare initiative of the young theologian Gustav Werner in the middle of the 19th century. The literal translation of its name is: the house of brothers' deacony. The name relates both to the building where the diaconal institution started and to its original concept. The initiative started as Christian community where people worked and lived together.

continuing 9-years-elementary school (grade 5–9/Hauptschule), 3 secondary schools (grade 5–10) and 5 grammar schools which prepare students for further studies (grade 5–12). About 12,500 pupils attend these schools.

In Baden-Württemberg, the pupils and their parents are obliged to choose one of the three continuing school types after grade 4, that means when the children are 9 or 10 years old. Most of them try to get into the secondary or the grammar schools (70 %). The share of pupils with immigrant background at the 9-years-elementary schools is very high.<sup>8</sup> This is also true in Reutlingen. Because of this early separation into different school types schooling has a segregating effect. In addition, Reutlingen has 6 public schools for pupils with different handicaps (about 650 pupils altogether) and 6 private schools (about 2,000 pupils in total). The two biggest private schools are confessional: the Protestant school (about 800 pupils) and the Roman-Catholic school (about 500 pupils). The third important private school is a Waldorf school representing anthroposophist values (about 450 pupils).

In 1962, a university college for teachers and in 1973 a Protestant university college for social work were founded in Reutlingen. Both of them formed the social and cultural life of the city. In 1987, the college for teachers and in 2000, the college for social work were closed down. In their place a university college for international economy and export opened its doors in 1987. This proved to be a successful project. Today, the college has about 3,000 students, 25 % of them come from other countries.

## Political situation

Being an early industrialised city Reutlingen had, for a long time been a stronghold of the Social democrat party in the midst of quite conservative surroundings: From 1952 Baden-Württemberg has an almost unbroken tradition of conservative governments. A specialty of local politics in Baden-Württemberg is that not only the members of the town council are elected directly by the citizens, but the citizens also elect their mayor directly. Because of this, the person of the mayor represents in many ways local policy and is an obvious focus of the expectations and disappointments of the citizens. The first mayor of Reutlingen after World War II, Oskar Kalbfell, was a charismatic Social democrat who governed the city for almost 25 years. During the 1960s the political climate changed. The town was experiencing a period of wealth and prosperity. In 1968, the conservative CDU got the majority of votes in Reutlingen for the first time. In 1973, when Oskar Kalbfell retired from politics, a CDU-mayor, Manfred Oechsle, was elected. In 1994, when Oechsle retired, again the CDU-candidate, Stephan Schultes, was elected. Surprisingly Schultes wasn't re-elected in 2003. Instead an independent, female candidate who was supported by the Social Democrats, Barbara Bosch, won the second ballot clearly.

This election was preceded by a citizens' decree in autumn 2002. In Baden-Württemberg, a citizens' initiative can organise a citizens' decree if they strongly oppose a decision of local policy. In the decree, it is not enough to collect a majority against the decision, but it is also necessary that more than 30 % of the citizens entitled to vote participate in it. The decree opposed a huge and expensive congress and culture hall which the mayor and the town council wanted to build. The citizens'

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<sup>8</sup> Baumert & Schümer 2001.

decree succeeded clearly (more than 40 % participated). It was the first citizens' decree in Reutlingen to succeed in the period since 1945.

In the town council elected in 2004, the conservative CDU is still the strongest party (12 seats), followed by the Social Democrats (SPD) (9 seats). The remaining 18 seats are distributed among the so-called smaller parties including the Green party (6 seats), the Free Voters Association (FWV) (6 seats), a middle-class party only active on the level of local policy, the "We in Reutlingen-party" (WIR) which emerged from the citizen's decree in 2002 (4 seats) and the liberal party FDP (3 seats). Together, the CDU and the Social Democrats have a majority of votes within the town council. In some questions, it had become practice that the two big parties agree on a policy and push it through together in the town council. In the district assembly and in the federal state the conservative party is ruling together with the liberal party.

## General religious situation

Historically, Reutlingen, has been a Protestant city. Until 1802, one had to accept the *Confessio Augustana* to become a citizen of Reutlingen. After World War II the city became more and more denominationally mixed. Many refugees from former German areas in Eastern Europe and many working migrants who moved to Reutlingen were Roman-Catholics. Today, the Protestants are still the biggest religious group. But with 43.8 % of the citizens belonging to the Evangelical-Lutheran church this is no overwhelming majority. 24.3 % of the citizens are Roman-Catholics. Except the Roman-Catholics and the Evangelical-Lutherans, there is only a third group to be found in the public statistics. This group is called "Others" and is growing (at the moment 31.9 %). As the Roman-Catholic and the Evangelical-Lutheran church has the right to collect taxes it is the membership of these two churches that is well-documented. The group of the "Others" includes religious people and non-religious people, other Christian denominations and non-Christian religions. It is estimated that more than 5 % Muslims live in Reutlingen. They have three mosques cooperating in a friendly manner with the Evangelical-Lutheran and the Roman-Catholic church. Of course, there are also Jews, Buddhists and Hindus living in Reutlingen, but it is not possible to collect exact numbers.

Other Christian denominations contain the growing group of Orthodox Christians (from Greece, Russia, the former Soviet Union and Serbia). The biggest group among them, the Greek Orthodox Christians, has a church with a regional hinterland in the area. Altogether about 3–4 percent Orthodox Christians live in Reutlingen. The Protestant free churches are traditionally strong in Reutlingen, especially the Methodist church which has its theological college and several parishes in the city. The Methodist church cooperates closely with the Evangelical-Lutheran church. Other Protestant free churches, like the Baptists, the People's Mission and diverse free evangelical parishes are also represented in Reutlingen. Finally, religious groups like the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of the New Apostles and the Christian's community (the anthroposophist community) have members and parishes in Reutlingen. Their cooperation with the established churches is unregulated and works only in certain areas.

While the study was conducted the following subjects were discussed vividly in the local media:

## The reforms concerning unemployment (Hartz IV)

The crisis of the German social state is currently high on the agenda in the local media of Reutlingen. The reform aimed at reducing unemployment (Hartz IV), along with the reform of unemployment benefits (Arbeitslosengeld II) are discussed in particular. In January 2005, social assistance and benefits for long term unemployed people were combined. This has many effects. The unemployment benefits paid fall much faster than before to the level of social assistance. It is no longer possible to retain savings and to get unemployment benefits. People sharing a flat and families have to pay for each other whether they are married or not. This is quite controversial as it even affects the middle class. Many cases and examples discussed in the local newspapers show that it will be more difficult to maintain social status under longer periods of unemployment. Many social experts predict a visible growth of poverty within society. The fusion of the social welfare offices and the labour exchange, which is also implied by these reform means a centralisation.

## The economic crisis of the social sector

Another frequently discussed subject is the economic crisis of the public sector. When being forced to cut down expenses the social sector is touched on all levels (national, in the federal state, on the district level and within the municipality). As the public sector is obliged by law to guarantee certain contributions and services mostly voluntary contributions, subsidies and services are cut down at the moment. These are often initiatives in the field of integration and prevention. In 2004, the federal state of Baden-Württemberg reduced its contributions to welfare services for immigrants, people suffering mental illness or the long-term unemployed. In Reutlingen, the church-based counselling service for immigrants was closed and the open services for people with mental illness had to dismiss staff. Because of this the BruderhausDiakonie took over the last named services as the church district which has been running these services before regarded this field of work as being to risky financially.

## Introduction of whole-day schools

The former national government promoted whole-day schools in 2005, which are still exceptional, especially in a federal state like Baden-Württemberg. Schools over the whole of Germany can apply for money for this purpose. As the need is obvious many schools in Reutlingen were applying. Only some (the first in line) got national contributions. Now, a lively debate is underway as to, how to introduce whole-day programs in different types of schools, with public contributions and without public contribution. Those schools which are not part of the national program but want to have a whole-day program anyway are reflecting upon doing this with the help of voluntary workers.

## Administration structure reform in Baden-Württemberg

Another reform introduced in Baden-Württemberg in January 2005, is the so called administration structure reform which aims to decentralise the administration of the federal state. In the social sector this means that the districts (Landkreise) now have the responsibility for guaranteeing and financing many social services (especially in the fields of help for the youth, help for people with handicaps and help for homeless people). As the districts are not used to these tasks and as the economic situation of the different districts is varied many expect a change for the worse regarding social provision and equality. The independent welfare providers (like the churches or the church-related welfare organisations) have to negotiate with new partners.

## The project “Social city”

A hopeful project which the media were often reporting about is the project “Social city” in the town district “Tübinger Vorstadt”. In this district, as in some others, social problems accumulate. There are more unemployed people, more people living on social assistance and more immigrants living in this area than in other parts of the city. Because of this, the municipality decided to invest in the social structure of this district, for example by opening meeting centres, youth clubs or integrating day-care service for children. The project even succeeded in becoming part of the EU-project “Social city”, which both the municipality and the media are very proud of.

## The economic crises of the Evangelical-Lutheran church

Finally, the Evangelical-Lutheran church in Reutlingen and its financial problems has been a common subject in the local media during recent months. The decline of members and revenues forces the church to change its work and to make painful cuts. At the moment it is the strategy of the church to sell buildings instead of cutting down church activities. The Evangelical-Lutheran church in Reutlingen has about 60 churches, parish homes and other buildings. Altogether the parishes in Reutlingen plan to sell or to close 11 churches and parish homes. In April 2005 the church announced the first church which the church council had decided to give up. This evoked many emotions visible in the lively debate in the media.

## Gender situation in Reutlingen

German politics and the German social state are still formed by a traditional family model which works with clear role models for men (breadwinner) and women (educating the children, keeping the house, social skills). It is difficult for many German women to combine an occupational employment and a family which might be one explanation for the low birth rate.<sup>9</sup> The supply of (public) day-care services for children is insufficient, especially in the two federal states in the south of Germany (Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg). This situation is well represented in Reutlingen. About 3,700 children of about 6,600 children aged between 0 and 6 years living in

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Meister-Scheufelen, 2004.

Reutlingen are offered a place in a kindergarten. 70 % of the kindergartens are provided by the municipality, 30 % by independent organisations, mostly by parishes. According to the law of Baden-Württemberg, these kindergartens are obliged to care for the children 6 hours a day from Monday to Friday. Services covering the whole day are rare. In Reutlingen there are places for 580 children. Almost all of the institutions covering the whole day are run by the municipality. As school mostly finishes at 13.00 the situation for working women does not improve when the children start school. Still the families, that means the mothers, are expected to provide lunch and help the children with homework in the afternoon.

The local statistics on the employments in Reutlingen are not evaluated from a gender perspective. Because of this it is difficult to tell exactly what the level of women's activities on the labour market in Reutlingen is. Women hold about 46 % of all employments which are subject to compulsory social insurance. This is somewhat higher than the German average which is about 44 % of all employments. But the statistic does not distinguish between full-time and part-time employments. The number of part-time employments is probably high. In the federal states in the west of Germany about 43 % of all employed women work part-time.<sup>10</sup>

Like in the rest of Germany in Reutlingen most of the elderly people are cared for at home, often with help of professional home care services. The care work is mostly carried out by women, partly because of the demographic development (women become older and care much more often for their husbands than vice versa) and partly because of traditional role models. Both the introduction of the care insurance (1995) and the Hartz IV reforms have effects on the situation of home care which are also obvious in Reutlingen. The care insurance made it possible for relatives to get paid if they are carrying out comprehensive care work. Growing unemployment makes it more difficult to find jobs. The Hartz IV reforms give many families much less unemployment benefits. In this situation caring within the family is an additional income source for the family. The professional home care services report that many families who are affected by unemployment cancel their contracts with professional services, while the women in the family take over this work. Even the new working legislation within the EU is influencing the home care situation in Germany. Some families hire women from Eastern Europe (mainly Poland) to care for the elderly. The women live in Germany for some months in principle caring for the elderly person all day. Because of the wage differences this is much cheaper than hiring a professional German home care service. As a consequence the wages of the German care professionals are under discussion (are they too high?), in some cases professional jobs are threatened. Caring as a professional occupation – a typical women's occupation – is getting worse paid and less attractive.<sup>11</sup>

The social sector in Reutlingen, as in Germany as whole, is dominated by women. Both within the municipality and within the diaconal social services more than 80 % of all professionals and volunteers are women. Women are well represented up to the level of middle management. But men hold the top management positions both in the municipality, the BruderhausDiakonie, the church district social

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, 2002, 34.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. for example Richter, Eva, *Erschwinglich sind oft nur illegale Pflegekräfte*, in: *epd-sozial* 2004, 23, 56f. and Caritasverband der Diözese Rottenburg-Stuttgart & Diakonisches Werk Württemberg, 2005.

services and the church. There is one exception from this rule: the mayor of the city is a woman.

Even though these aspects show that the gender question is far from being solved in Germany and Reutlingen, in the public discussion it is often connected to family and role models represented by immigrants living Germany. Representatives within the municipality and the church regard women with a Muslim background wearing a veil as a symbol for women's suppression. This view is confirmed by the legislation of Baden-Württemberg.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, prohibiting veils in certain public contexts is considered as an act of women's liberation. In Reutlingen Muslim educational employees are not allowed to wear a veil in kindergartens run by the municipality.

## The Evangelical-Lutheran church in Reutlingen

The Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Württemberg is divided into four regions (Prälaturen) and 52 church districts (Kirchenbezirke). The church district of Reutlingen, with more than 78,000 church members, is one of the biggest church districts in Württemberg. Altogether there are 16 Evangelical-Lutheran parishes in the city of Reutlingen. They have 43,000 members. 8 of them, together representing about 27,000 members, cooperate in formal manner even though they each of them have their own church council and take their own decisions. The remaining other 8 parishes (mostly villages incorporated into the city of Reutlingen) are totally independent from the other parishes in Reutlingen and only cooperate within the church district. This illustrates that the parishes in Germany and also in Reutlingen are relatively small, compared with Swedish or Finnish parishes. Most of them have about 2,000 members or less.

The parishes are governed by the vicars together with the church council. If a parish has more than one priest (because of its size) one of them is the governing vicar. In Reutlingen there are 28 parish vicars working full-time or part-time, two hospital vicars, one youth vicar and two student vicars and a vicar for the refugees in the church district of Reutlingen. In addition, 14 vicars and teachers work specifically in the schools in Reutlingen to teach religion. Beside the vicars, about 100 church employees work in the parishes, including about 8 deacons (mostly in the field of youth work), teachers in the parish run kindergartens, church musicians, administrators, property managers and sacristans. Many of them only have part-time employments and are increasingly replaced by volunteers.

A speciality of many parishes in Reutlingen is their mixed structure. They embrace both deprived areas with social problems and wealthy quarters at the same time. In this respect, the opportunities are good, for the parishes to become places of encounter for people with different social backgrounds. The Hohbuch-Gemeinde, for example, includes both a quarter with former barracks of the French military where many German immigrants from the former Soviet Union now live and the so called "million-hill-quarter" where the rich live. The parish plans to bridge these two quarters by forming a bankrupt restaurant, which is situated exactly between the two

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<sup>12</sup> Brockert, Heinz, "Helfen Gesetze beim Kopftuch weiter?", in: *epd-Wochenspiegel*, 2004, 13, 19.

quarters, into a centre of encounter. In that way, parishes with a mixed structure could contribute to social integration. But not all Reutlingen parishes use their structures in the same way.

The parishes in the Evangelical-Lutheran church in Württemberg are vicar-centred in many ways. The core-tasks of the vicar are often regarded as being the core-tasks of the whole parish. These are:

- services,
- baptism, weddings, funerals,
- teaching the confirmation candidates,
- teaching religion in school (at least 6 hours a week),
- work with children and young people,
- work with the elderly,
- pastoral care.

Church work is mainly financed by the church taxes which are tied to income taxes. As the parishes lose members (mostly because of the demographical development) and as the income taxes are reduced church revenues are falling. Once a year, the parish asks all its members who do not pay taxes (anymore), mostly pensioners, to pay a so called “church money” as a complement to the church taxes. This is a second important source of income for the church. Finally, the parishes become more and more dependent on offerings and donations.

Some of the churches in Reutlingen are quite old and classified as historical monuments, for example the churches in the city centre (Marienkirche, Nikolai-kirche) or in some of the villages (Betzingen, Degerschlacht). But many churches and parish homes were built during the 1960s and 1970s when both numbers of members and the revenues were expanding. These big estates are no longer suitable in a time of decline, especially as the church buildings incur continuous costs. Because of this, the church councils of the cooperating parishes in Reutlingen have decided to sell, or to close some of the buildings. But many church members disapprove of this strategy. Still, many of those who participated in the building projects of the 60s and 70s are active in the parishes. The church buildings are connected to personal celebrations (like confirmations, weddings or baptisms). That the church is willing to give up these buildings is seen as a betrayal. At the moment, the parishes in Reutlingen seem to be caught in this very emotional debate with the risk of always circulating around internal problems.

## Ecclesiological character of Evangelical-Lutheran church in Reutlingen

The Evangelical-Lutheran church in Reutlingen gives the parish, and especially the parish council a strong position. The priorities and the strategy of the parish are mostly decided by the lay parish council together with the vicars (of course within the administrative frameworks formed by church authorities).

Often the parish council and the vicar have a similar theological style as the parish council elects the vicar with a style that they like. This means on the one hand that the different parishes can have very different theological styles even though they are situated close by each other. On the other hand there is a risk that the core parish represented in the parish council dominates the theological style of the parish,

while the needs of other groups in the parish are neglected. When someone visits the services, listens to the sermons and reads the parish news letter it is easy to realise that some parishes in Reutlingen are very active in social projects and in cooperating with the municipality while the neighbour parishes prioritise spirituality or church music. Because of this people in a city like Reutlingen do not only engage in their own (geographical) parish, but they also choose their parish according to their own interests and priorities. In other words diaconal parishes and diaconal projects attract people with social interest in the whole city.

There are no common documents for all parishes in Reutlingen about questions of social welfare. But there are many documents within the parishes which could be analysed: sermons, services, articles in newsletters, minutes of the parish council (if accessible) or statutes of social associations founded by parishes. One could, for example, interpret the statutes of the social service centre run by the church district, or the statutes of the diaconal home service as a common document. But these are very formal texts which all the parishes in the church district (not only the Reutlingen parishes) agreed upon.

Like many parts of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Württemberg, Reutlingen has a pietistic tradition which often implies a diaconal attitude. As early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were many Protestant diaconal initiatives in Reutlingen, often started by lay-people. This is exemplified by Gustav Werner who founded homes for children, young people, handicapped people and a Christian factory in Reutlingen in the 1840s and 1850s. From these origins the huge diaconal institution “BruderhausDiakonie” developed. His motto was: “Everything not becoming an action some day is of no value.” (Was nicht zur Tat wird, hat keinen Wert“). In some way, this attitude is still found in parishes in Reutlingen, especially within the group of volunteers active in this field: “Let’s not talk and write about helping, but let’s help the people in need.” (CR 5, f) Today, many initiatives in the field of welfare are still grounded in the existence of volunteers.

## The church and the diaconal institutions as producers of welfare

The production of welfare services always implies different levels of church work in Germany. For the case of Reutlingen this is illustrated by a model of diaconal work within the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Württemberg.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The model is based on a graph of the Diakonisches Werk Württemberg which the public relation managers use to explain the tasks of the umbrella organisation in presentations.

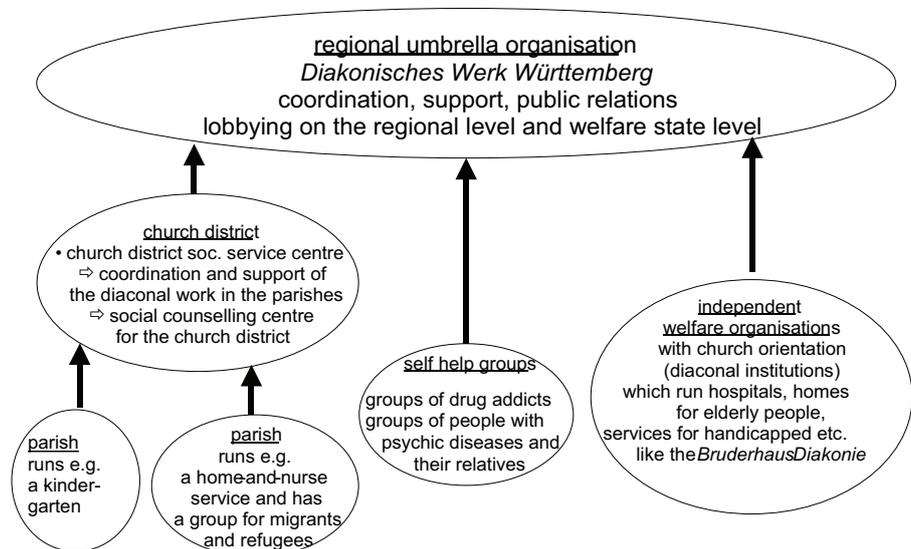


Figure 1. Structure and levels of diaconal work in Württemberg.

On the parish level, church welfare production is exemplified by self-help-groups, social associations or groups of diaconal volunteers. In Reutlingen all of these initiatives are represented in some of the parishes: self-help groups (groups of people who care for a sick relative, groups of bereaved people, groups of people with mental illnesses), social associations (like nursing associations which assist the diaconal home services to offer a holistic concept of nursing and assistance or the association “friends of the Hohbuch parish” which collects money to help people in need in this parish) and groups of diaconal volunteers (like wide-spread visiting services where volunteers meet to visit lonely elderly people in the parish or in some homes for elderly people or groups for volunteers who visit dying people and who help the relatives to accompany the process of dying). Eleven of the parishes in Reutlingen also run a kindergarten.

On the level of the church district the local church runs:

- A Christian home-and-nursing-service responsible for an area of about 25,000 inhabitants (five districts of Reutlingen). This service is mainly paid for by care insurance, people who buy services and by social assistance.
- A social service centre with the following services: social counselling, education counselling, family counselling, psychological counselling, counselling for refugees, counselling for women reflecting upon an abortion, counselling for alcoholics and drug addicts, counselling for women who have violent partners, services for elderly. In addition, the social service centre organises the project “the table of Reutlingen” which is run solely by volunteers. The aim is to collect all the food which the super-markets do not sell any longer and would otherwise be thrown away. This food is given very cheaply to people on low incomes.

- A centre for youth work offering retreats, holidays for young people and training/assistance for youth volunteers.
- A family training centre offering courses like preparing for the birth of a child, cooking, role models and ways to overcome them or bible seminars.

On the level of the independent, but church-related welfare organisation a great variety of professional activities have to be named as the BruderhausDiakonie is an important provider in Reutlingen municipality and Reutlingen district. This includes:

*- in the area of help for elderly people:*

- six homes for elderly people, especially people in need of care and nursing; one of the homes specialises in geriatric mental illness;
- two home care and home nursing services;
- two food services for elderly people;
- an open meeting centre for elderly people;
- a counselling centre for elderly people;

*- in the area of help for handicapped people:*

- a home for handicapped people;
- diverse assisted group livings for handicapped people;
- assisted living for handicapped people;
- mobility services for handicapped people;
- diverse assisted places of work for handicapped people;
- diverse assisting services for handicapped children;
- a counselling centre for independent living of handicapped people;
- a common leisure association of handicapped people and people without visible handicap;
- a service assisting families with a handicapped family member;
- a retreat centre for handicapped people and people without visible handicap;

*- in the area of help for young people:*

- two training centres for young people with difficulties entering working life;
- open services and help for young people;
- help centres for young immigrants;
- an assisted centre for young people to spend leisure time together;
- a bicycle centre run by young people;
- a integration- and competence centre for young immigrants;
- a general school for pupils with special needs and an occupational school for pupils with special needs;
- a kindergarten for children with special needs;

*help for people with mental illness:*

- two counselling services for people with a mental illness;
- a meeting centre for people with a mental illness;
- a supermarket run by people with mental illness;
- a factory offering jobs to people with mental illness;
- diverse assisted places of work for people with mental illness;

- diverse assisted group livings for people with a mental illness;
- assisted living for people with mental illnesses;
- a hospital for psychiatry and psychotherapy.

Finally, there are also actions of independent, but church-related associations in the field of welfare which have a high popularity, especially the so called “Vesperkirche”. Five weeks in wintertime (in January and February) one of the old churches in the city centre (Nikolaikirche) becomes a room for encounter for people with different social backgrounds and a living-room for homeless people, for lonely people and for people with bad housing. The church is opened from 9am to 6pm and offers coffee, sandwiches, cakes and a lunch (cooked by the BruderhausDiakonie). In addition, physicians and hairdressers offer free services for the needy. Programmes for children and cultural events are organised. The aim of the project is not primarily to give cheap lunches to needy people, but to encourage meetings between people in different living situations. The people working in the city centre are invited to eat their lunch in the Vesperkirche. Many follow this invitation. This project is run purely by volunteers and paid for only by donations.

From this project another association with the aim of giving homeless people a home emerged. This association is not explicitly church-related, but has many connections to the church and uses these connections. Many of the same volunteers are engaged in the Vesperkirche and this association. Founded in the mid 1990s, the association has managed to open five houses with flats for homeless people in Reutlingen until today.

It is difficult to say how important these activities are for the provision of welfare services in the municipality. Many of the social services run by the parishes, the church district or the diaconal institution are delegated by the municipality or the district. The church services thus don't complement the public sector but they offer their services on behalf of the public sector, according to the public rules and the laws and they are paid by the municipality or the district for their work. As they work on behalf of the state they are not allowed to choose their clients but have to be open for everyone. For example, a kindergarten run by the Evangelical-Lutheran parish is not allowed to prioritise Protestant children before Muslim children when funded by the municipality. If the church runs social services on behalf of the municipality and is paid by the municipality for its work it can in principle be replaced (by the municipality itself or by another independent provider) at any time. Of course it would take some time for the replacement to create the same infrastructure, but it would be possible. From the perspective of the society it is important that these services are provided and not which organisation is providing them.

Another case is the voluntary services, groups or associations (like the Vesperkirche or social associations within parishes) or initiatives which are only partly or not at all paid for by the municipality. These initiatives cannot be replaced or directed by the municipality. From the media's point of view these initiatives are an important contribution to welfare provision in Reutlingen.

The church has various opportunities to form public opinion:

The church can form opinion by teaching. This includes all ways of educating or training people, from the Sunday schools and teaching religion in schools or teach-

ing the confirmation candidates to education for adults like the family training centre run by the church district.

Another important field of public opinion formation is the services and the sermons. In Reutlingen various services on different subjects have taken place like “Losing home” (the situation of refugees); ecumenical diaconal work (church run projects in Africa, Asia and Latin-America); “Helping each other” (Diaconal projects in Reutlingen), “Caring for each other” (services for people nursing a relative at home), “To be mentally ill” (services of people who have a mental illness for people who have a mental illness and others). There are also services in Reutlingen focused on historical or political events, like services to remember the victims of the National Socialist regime or the end of World War II.

A third way to form public opinion is to organise events and discussion around social questions. The Hohbuch-parish, for example, has organised a series of discussions round the question of social justice and on the effects of the coming Hartz IV-reforms. Even well-known national politicians were invited and were actually due to come.

Also projects like the Vesperkirche are a way to form public opinion. People’s attitudes can be changed by the meetings they experience. This might be true both for the volunteers and for the people who visit the Vesperkirche (to eat, to have a place to stay or to meet other people). At the same time a project like the Vesperkirche responds to obvious and neglected needs in Reutlingen. This is illustrated both by the high number of volunteers who want to participate (200) and the numerous visitors (about 200 a day).

## Theological motivations

There doesn’t seem a big need to motivate action in the field of welfare. It seems, on the contrary, to be self-evident for the church to care about welfare. In descriptions of the welfare projects and social services the theological motivations are mostly quite short and refer to the neighbour in need (indirect references to the parable of the Good Samaritan). The diaconal founder Gustav Werner is an important person of reference when motivating church social work in Reutlingen. Frequent theological motives in statutes and missionary documents are (even though hardly elaborated):

- that social/diaconal work is part of the character and the service of the church;
- all human beings are created by God and therefore have the right to receive help;
- all human beings will find themselves in situations when they need help some day;
- all human beings are entities of body, soul and spirit, which has to be taken into account when helping each other. This holistic approach is said to be a special priority within the social work run by the church and diaconal institutions.

## Roles of women and men respectively within the local Church

In general, women dominate the Protestant church in numbers. About 57 % of all church members are women. There are much more women than men employed by the church. But clearly more men hold top management positions or are priests. In

the Evangelical-Lutheran church in Württemberg only about one third of all priests are women.<sup>14</sup> This proportion is represented in the church social work in Reutlingen as well. At the moment, 12 of the 28 vicars in Reutlingen are women. None of them has a governing position within the parish. Looking back it is interesting to note that when I was asking for parishes and vicars in Reutlingen engaged in welfare activities, no one named any female vicar. Having a closer look to the vicars and the parishes in Reutlingen it became obvious that female vicars are much better represented in the poorer parishes in the Northern districts of the city than in the wealthy districts and the middle class parishes.

The majority of the volunteers in the different social projects are women. This is true both for the Vesperkirche and for parish related projects like the visiting services. Within voluntary projects women and men take on different tasks. The women who are active in the Vesperkirche prefer meeting people from different social backgrounds while the men prefer organisational or practical tasks (like fetching the food, making a timetable). Because of this, a project like “the table of Reutlingen” which includes much practical work (driving to get the food, calling different food producers or supermarket) is especially attractive for male volunteers.

Within the parish councils in Reutlingen, also a field of voluntary work, the number of women is clearly increasing. This means that more and more women participate in decision-making processes within the church. A growing number of women are also taking on leading positions in this context. This is also true for the church parliament of the Evangelical-Lutheran church in Württemberg.

## Areas of co-operation

As the survey above illustrates, social authorities and church or church-related organisations co-operate in all areas of welfare in Reutlingen. If this co-operation is important for the provision of social welfare services is not easy to evaluate. On the one hand, one has to be aware of the fact that many of the social services provided by the church and the diaconal institutions on behalf of the social authorities and paid for by the social authorities are replaceable. Other providers could do a similar work. An exception from this rule is all voluntary initiatives and projects. On the other hand, civil society is strengthened and furthered by the value-based social services run by churches and diaconal institutions. It gives people in need the possibility to contact different institutions and to choose providers whose values they share. At the same time, church run social services give citizens the possibility to activate their own values and to relate them – in the case of the church – to Christian based social work (as professionals or as volunteers). This relation is of special importance at a time when social services are increasingly regarded as being technical processes with a certain output which have to be planned economically. In this respect, churches and diaconal institution are also seen as important partners for the municipality in discovering new needs and to initiating new projects (like the new houses for the homeless in Reutlingen).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Kress 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. the discussion in the local media and within the church, for example Mäule & Leis 2003, Diakonisches Werk Württemberg 2003.

The co-operation between the municipality and the churches or diaconal institutions has changed tremendously during the past ten years. This is due to the economic crisis of the public sector and the social security system in Germany and to the focus on economic issues in the social sector. Today, the concept and content of social services seem to be less important than the costs. As both the church and the diaconal institutions also have financial problems the co-operations are currently dominated by financial negotiations. This was for example the case when the municipality asked the Evangelical-Lutheran church to take over two kindergartens in 2004. The parish finally accepted the request when the municipality assured that it will pay almost 100 % of the costs. On the other hand, the church and the diaconal institution have to tender for contracts if they want to run certain social services, for example in the field of youth work. When doing so they are competing with other independent or private providers. The decisive criterion within this competition is often the price of the service. All providers have to calculate at a very low level to have a chance of becoming responsible for the service. This is a principal problem for the church and the diaconal institutions as low costs are often difficult to combine with holistic Christian values. An example of competition like this is the meeting centre for young people within the EU-project "Social city" in a deprived town district of Reutlingen. The centre for youth work run by the church district also applied to run this youth meeting centre, but didn't succeed. One of the reasons was that it couldn't meet the low costs of other providers. As a consequence of the growing focus on economic issues in the social sector the churches and the church-related welfare organisations are losing their former privileged positions within the welfare system. This is also obvious on the local level in Reutlingen.

There are still continuous discussions between the church, the diaconal institutions and the municipality concerning co-operation. One of the concepts discussed at the moment is a new strategy of the municipality to meet the growing needs and the expected growing poverty in some districts of the town. The municipality wants to develop different models and concepts for different districts to answer the different social needs flexibly. In this process of decentralisation and differentiation the parishes are important possible partners as they often have their own infrastructure in the districts. Realising a concept like this is difficult, as most of the parishes are quite middle-class orientated. The aim of the new concepts is to create meeting places for socially deprived groups in the society. The question is how the parishes would handle a situation where these groups would be entering their buildings.

At the same time this is a very interesting project for the church in Reutlingen. As its financial problems are founded considerably on the many buildings they have to care for, a common use of the buildings along with the municipality could be a quite attractive proposition. But the middle-class dominated parish councils have to take the decision as to whether they are willing to participate in the projects of the municipality.

## The churches and the church related welfare organisations as agents of welfare – opinion and attitudes

### Views held by the public authorities

#### **Welfare**

The term “welfare” (Wohlfahrt) is not used frequently as a technical term in Germany. When I asked for their understanding of “welfare” some of the representatives of the public authorities seemed surprised and slightly insecure. One of the interviewees admitted openly: “I have never reflected about the concept of ‘welfare’ consciously. But in my opinion it could be a correct summary for the subjects we are talking about.” (PA 5, f) That the term “welfare” is vague in a German context is illustrated by the variety of the answers.

In the German political debate, the term “welfare state” has had, and still does have, a negative sound as it is connected to a notion of a state with comprehensive competences resulting in too little responsibility on the part of the individual. Instead, the term “social state” (Sozialstaat) is used to describe the German model.<sup>16</sup> Some of the local politicians referred directly to this debate. Especially those representing more middle class-orientated parties shared the negative evaluation of the term. One of them explained “For me ‘welfare’ is only one aspect of the social state. Welfare is connected to social assistance. Formerly it was said ‘to live on welfare’. Today one would say ‘to live on social assistance’. ... But our social state contains much more than only welfare. Think of the pension insurance, health insurance and so on.” (PA 1, m) The representatives of the Social Democrats and the Green party found the term useful. According to them welfare means help for the most needy and the most marginalised in society and can be conducted both by the state and by independent welfare organisations.

Many interviewees, both employees of the public authorities and politicians, agreed that the term is old-fashioned. Some thought that welfare is similar to charity: the rich people give spontaneously to the poor people. For others the term reflects a hierarchical understanding of social work implying that the person who helps knows what is good for the person in need. The German term “Fürsorge” which is no longer used represents this hierarchical tradition in helping the needy. It is difficult to translate the term into English in a satisfactory way. “To care for” is probably not as hierarchical. The representatives of the public authorities in particular believed that it is difficult to connect modern concepts of social work to the term of welfare because of its historical associations. Welfare is helping an individual person in need, but doesn’t imply preventive work or community work. One says: “I am aware of the term ‘welfare’ and I even use it sometimes. But I would never call what I am doing welfare. I do social work.” (PA 8, f) Another reason to doubt that the term “welfare” is helpful today is the deep crisis of the social state in Germany. Some regarded as being cynical to use the term welfare in the actual situation. A politician formulated: “We should get rid of the term ‘welfare’. We cannot talk about some-

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<sup>16</sup> Alber & Schöllkopf 1998.

thing like that any longer. Remember, the term contains the word ‘well’ (Wohl). Makes one think of well-being. We can’t say that any longer.” (PA 3, m)

The diversity of the answers and prevailing negative perceptions of the term “welfare” pose the question as to whether there is a more suitable term in German. A possible translation we were thinking about when translating the seven common questions was the term “social security” (soziale Sicherheit). Some of the interviewees also pointed to this term. Nevertheless, we decided to stick to the term “welfare”. On the one hand the term “social security” is quite technical, closely connected to the “systems of social security”, that means the social insurances. On the other hand, the term “welfare” is interesting from a church perspective, as independent welfare providers, the churches and the diaconal institutions are closely connected to this term. They belong to the area of independent welfare work (Freie Wohlfahrts-pflege) and as umbrella organisations Diakonie and Caritas call themselves “welfare organisations”. With other words: They still use the term “welfare” to describe themselves. The answers to this question could also partly reflect how their work is perceived.

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

In principle, most of the interviewees think that the national welfare system works relatively well in Reutlingen. Compared to other municipalities the economic situation of the town still gives a certain elbow-room in the social sector. The size of the city is regarded as being an advantage. Reutlingen as a city can be seen as a whole and it is possible to know most of the social actors.

Looking back to developments during the last ten years all interviewees see positive and negative tendencies, but the negative tendencies are predominant. Asked to name concrete areas and examples the interviewees both refer to their areas of responsibility and to their personal experiences. This is especially interesting in the case of the local politicians, as all of them have a professional occupation as the political mandate is voluntary. For them, professional and private experience seems to be more decisive when describing the social situation.

Striking is the fact that all female interviewees (and even some male interviewees) think that the whole-day-care for children is insufficient. They hold this situation responsible for several social problems:

- the low birth rate;
- the lack of qualified work force in the German labour market (as the well-educated women are forced to stay at home to raise the children);
- the growing segregation in society (as some of the children get very much attention and stimulation and others very little and there are too few societal institutions to equalise this).

Many interviewees became very emotional when talking about this subject. One said: “We have far too less places for whole-day-care in a city like Reutlingen. Women can’t count on public help in this question. ... It is just not possible to put more responsibility on the families, because the families have the whole responsibility. In this area we are worst in Europe.” (PA 8, f)

Many interviewees observe a growing individualisation within the social system. For people with money and the competence to make the right decisions, this is an advantage. But there are other groups who do not know what to do or whom to ask.

This dilemma is illustrated by the situation of elderly people who need care. Those who lack caring relatives live in a worse situation. In a more and more individualised system one needs a case-manager to get the best help. Often relatives act as case-managers. But not everyone has relatives. In this context the role of the independent welfare providers, like the churches or diaconal institutions is criticised as well. According to some of the interviewees, they further the process of individualisation as they treat the people as clients. In some respects, the client-perspective excludes the perspective of the whole social context. At the same time, the social reforms force the independent welfare providers to see people in need as clients as the reforms intend to introduce a social market and competition among the different providers. For the local politicians it seems to have become self-evident that the social sector consists of different providers who have to compete for public funding. One of them said: “Every welfare organisation which wants public contributions for its projects has to lobby for it. There are no exceptions from this rule any longer. Even the churches and the church-related welfare organisations which used to have a privileged position have to do this today. And it is not enough that they come to a meeting of the town council. To be effective they have to come to every parliamentary group in the town council.” (PA 6, m)

The representatives of the social administration in particular state a lack of an overall-perspective. In addition to the planning and the direction of the local social policy this perspective should be the responsibility of the municipality. At least in some areas, the politicians demand a withdrawal of the public providers when independent providers are willing to take over the tasks. But not working in the field means losing the important overall-perspective. A representative for the public authorities says: “From my perspective it is not good that we hand over services and institutions run by the municipality to other providers. We lose our competence if we don’t have the experience of working in the field any longer. I think the municipality had a very important part in the coordination of care for elderly people some years ago. We brought all providers together and made them develop a model for how the resources in Reutlingen could be distributed in a satisfying way. There are only a few municipalities which managed to do this. All the providers accepted that the municipality could lead these discussions in a competent way. And this was due to the fact that we were well known and experienced in this field of work. Today the situation would be different. Soon, we will not run services and institutions for elderly people ourselves any longer. Then, our role will change.” (PA 5, f)

Another criticism of the interviewees concerns the different responsibilities and levels within the social sector. Help for the elderly, day-care institutions and schools belong to the responsibility of the municipalities, while institutions for young people, help for handicapped people or help for homeless people belongs to the responsibilities of the district. Many frameworks are given by the federal state or the national state. In addition the different independent social insurances are also levels of decision making, like the care insurance in the case of help for elderly people. From the point of view of the public authorities, the social system works badly if the grey areas between the different levels of responsibility are not clearly defined. In the case of a conflict, the municipality sees itself in a difficult position as it is the smallest unit at the lowest level. This is illustrated by the Hartz IV reforms. An interviewee says: “It is obvious that these reforms are made at a national level. Knowl-

edge about the local consequences of the reforms is lacking. The idea of the reform is good, but the realisation is not thorough. On the local level we have used our elbow room in the field of social assistance to create local solutions which fit the problems, the local resources and the needy. One example is the asylum for abused and beaten women ... I suspect that we will lose responsibility in this area as a centralised structure is furthered. But we know the people here in Reutlingen, their needs and their resources best.” (PA 4, m)

But within the municipal administration too the position of the social sector is weakened by the dominating economic perspective on the public budgets. An interviewee emphasises: “The social sector is not the only sector which needs a lot of money. The citizens demand better streets. The sectors within the public are actually competing.” (PA 1, m)

Some of the interviewees point to the social segregation in Reutlingen. In some districts the social problems are accumulating, which also can be perceived as a hostile and explosive atmosphere between the different groups within the neighbourhoods. Children and young people in particular who come from these areas have less chance of succeeding. Some interviewees consider that development as a failure of the (local) welfare system.

### **Role of the church**

There was no doubt among the interviewees that the church has a role to play in the welfare and the well-being of people. Some supposed that it is that role of the churches that makes many people remain church members even though they don't participate in church activities. One interviewee admitted that she made the same consideration when thinking of leaving the church. From her point of view it was the social network character of the parish which couldn't be replaced by any other organisation, an attitude among church members to care for their neighbours. (PA 2, f)

While all agreed that the church has an important role to play in this context there were different perspectives on the character of the role and how to evaluate the actual realisation of this role by the church. Some pointed to the professional services run by the diaconal institutions, by the church district or by the parishes. In this context, the church run social service centre with its different counselling services, the kindergartens and the diaconal home care services were named often. But the politicians and the representatives of the social administration admitted that their perception is, of course, influenced by their responsibility. As the financing of the counselling had been questioned by the federal state some of the interviewees emphasised the church's merit in fighting for and adhering to this services, especially in the field of counselling addicts.

Compared to other providers the services of the church are perceived as being orientated more towards the individual in need than to groups of needy, this is seen both as an opportunity and a limitation. On the one hand there is a huge and unsatisfied need in society to get attention as an individual. The parishes could be an important “communication” centre to fill a part of this need. On the other hand some think that the concentration of the parish upon the individuals close to them hinders them from seeing the problems of other people living in the district or the town, that means of the majority of people.

Another welfare contribution of the churches is to provide a home. By some representatives this is regarded being a very important task as many people are forced to move regularly for working reasons. For these families it is not easy to create a feeling of home, especially if they know that they have to leave the town in some years. For them parishes can function as bridges as they represent a well-known culture with their tradition (for example church songs) and offer occasions to meet people living in the same district. On the contrary, other interviewees think the churches are hindered by their traditions from taking a more active role in general welfare and well-being. According to them church culture mainly fits the middle class and the elderly. By valuing traditional church culture highly parishes never become places of meeting and integration of people with different social backgrounds. All groups who are not directly attracted by the middle class culture are excluded from the parishes. This includes young people and marginalised groups in society. One interviewee says: “The parishes could be places of meeting. We do need these places right now. But as I experience it, the parishes have no tradition in and no willingness to share. Instead, they want to separate and to protect their parish, their building and their members. Maybe it is a German habit not to cooperate, but to protect ones own area. It is a pity, because we need meeting places in the districts and the parish buildings are already built.” (PA 8, f)

Several interviewees also pointed to the possible role of the churches in filling the spiritual needs and existential questions of the people. They agreed that there is need in this area, especially among young people. But they were unsure whether the churches are the right institutions to answer this need. According to one interviewee young people are in principle interested in the spiritual and theological content of the church. But the church presents its contents in the wrong way. It chooses to talk clerically and morally instead of acting and living together with the young people. The Protestant interviewee most critical thought that the church is mostly interested in talking and preaching, not in doing and experiencing and that people are disappointed by that. (PA 6, m) The Roman-Catholic interviewee most critical to the church supposed that the church prioritised the liturgy and the rites too much while people expect clear words and a clear message. (PA 2, f)

Altogether, all interviewees not only thought that the church plays an important role but also expressed their wish that the church should extend its role in this area. Those interviewees describing themselves as church critics mentioned as one motivation for their criticism that the church does not take as much advantage of its role in the welfare and the well-being of the people as it could.

### **Church and social work**

This question actually caused most irritation in the interviews. Some interviewees didn't understand what I wanted to know. As most of the interviewees from the beginning were illustrating their opinions and evaluations with examples of practical social work run by the church the question seemed pointless to them. Because of that I stopped asking the question directly. Instead I asked what type of social work they thought the church and the diaconal institutions should do and what type of work they should prioritise. Then I added the question if there is any type of practical social work the church shouldn't do.

Even the last named question met a mixed reception. One representative of the social administration commented: "I think this is a strange question, especially in the situation we have to today. We are fighting to guarantee the provision of all social services we have to guarantee and you are asking if the churches should be restrained from certain areas of social work. For us the churches and the diaconal institutions are traditional and well-known partners and we won't hinder them from doing social work." (PA 15, m)

None of the interviewees could imagine any area where a church engagement could be questioned, or any reason why the churches shouldn't interfere in certain social areas. On the contrary, some of the interviewees think that the church abandons people in need when it withdraws from certain areas of social work. In this context, some interviewees referred to a decision the Pope made in 1998.<sup>17</sup> The interviewees criticised that the Vatican hindered the Roman-Catholic counsellors from accompanying their clients without evaluating their decision.

The representatives of the social administration emphasised that they profit by every parish or every independent association carrying out any kind of practical social work. One interviewee puts it like this: "Parishes and independent organisations conducting social work are supporting us in our social responsibilities and social tasks. The perspective changes if a parish is, for example, responsible for a kindergarten. Every church politician or vicar who is occupied with kindergarten questions only once a year because the parish is running a kindergarten makes a difference. They have to overcome the pure client perspective. Because of this they become our allies when social policy is concerned." (PA 4, m)

Youth work, day-care for children, creating meeting places in the districts and overcoming the barriers between the generations are areas which the interviewees repeatedly name when asked in which areas the church and the diaconal institutions should expand their activities. Surprisingly is that both the local politicians and the representatives of the public authorities name day-care for children while they report at the time that church engagement in the field of education sometimes meets with resistance. Some parents are concerned about their children being indoctrinated by the churches and forced to pray. Often this fear is not formulated by parents with another religion, but by parents being members in one of the churches. In contrary, there are some parish run kindergartens in Reutlingen with a majority of Muslim children.

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

This question was not as irritating as the previous question, but again all interviewees agreed upon the answer "Yes, the churches should contribute to the public debate". All of the interviewees had very high expectations towards the churches. Many regarded the churches as being one of a few societal institutions left which

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<sup>17</sup> The Pope decided that Roman-Catholic maternity centres in Germany were no longer to be allowed to attest pregnant women who want to procure abortion that they have used counselling because such an attestation is demanded by German law before being allowed to procure an abortion for social reasons. After this decision women choosing a Roman-Catholic maternity centre were forced to participate in further counselling at another maternity centre to procure abortion, cp. Deutsche Bischofskonferenz 1998.

could give and actually sometimes give important impulses in the public debate, both on the national and on the local level.

The interviewees could imagine different ways of contributing to the public debate: They referred for example to discussion rounds organised by the church. Discussions about family politics, about the situation of children in Germany living in poverty, about the future of the German social system or about the global economy and its effects were named and attested a high quality by the interviewees. Another strategy the interviewees suggested is that church representatives point directly to social problems. A social worker said: “When I say that there are poor children in a kindergarten and they need support no one listens. If the vicar talks about the same subject everyone listens. I am not insulted by this fact. I think, we should co-operate in this matter.” (PA 5, f)

Some interviewees even think that the churches and other independent welfare organisations should be more active in politics. This implies lobbying on different political levels. Representatives of the churches and the welfare organisations can demand to be heard, for example by the town council. Representatives of the social administration cannot. One of the interviewees suggested that representatives of the churches and the other welfare organisations should become members of parties to influence politics. It is on the political level the important decisions are made. The task of the administration is to realise these decisions. Because of this the churches’ lobbying should focus on the political level, not on the social administration. As the social sector has more and more to compete with other sectors in (local) policy (like culture, communications, etc.) the interviewees consider it important that more people who have practical experience in social work belong to the political decision-takers.

Social projects and initiatives can also be seen as contributions to the public debate. As example of this many of the interviewees name the “Vesperkirche”. This project is regarded as an important contribution to the social culture of the town. Three aspects are named to illustrate its importance. Firstly, the “Vesperkirche” manages to interest the local media and to launch important social subjects. Secondly, many volunteers are attracted to and activated by the project. It therefore promotes the civil society. Thirdly, the “Vesperkirche” places an emphasis on the encounter between people from different social backgrounds, not on giving food to the poor. This is a contribution to the dignity of the marginalised.

All interviewees welcome criticism by the churches even if it is directed at the work of the social administration. But the criticism has to be constructive, not polarised. The representatives of the social administration dislike criticism which is limited to demands towards the public authorities. Only with a real interest in the subject can criticism further development. Another precondition for meaningful criticism is the willingness to take over social responsibility, according to one of the interviewees. In this respect, the practical experience of the churches in the field of social work is seen as a precondition and an important competence when contributing to public debate.

Finally, some interviewees pointed out, that the churches can make important contributions to a public debate on values. Again representatives of the public authorities think that the churches are in a better position than the social administration. According to them, the churches can take a position while the public authorities

are obliged to maintain neutral. This makes the churches important partners in youth work and value-debates going on in this area.

It is surprising that the public representatives see such a high potential while they are at the same time stating that the societal influence of the churches is decreasing. One explanation could be that this evaluation mainly comes from their own experience of the social administration: They have more problems to make themselves and their social subjects heard. From their point of view the churches could be a “mouthpiece” in social questions.

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

The interviewees agree that the church’s importance and influence has declined over the past 10 years and the church has lost its privileged position.

The on-going debate about the economic crisis of the Evangelical-Lutheran church in Reutlingen and its plans even to sell church buildings illustrates this development. Some interviewees are astonished by the extent of the financial crisis of the church and by the radical reaction of the church. On the one hand some of the interviewees recognise a parallel situation with their own fight with the declining public budget and feel solidarity with the church. Others are unwilling to accept the situation. One says: “I was shocked. The church is closing churches. This is a real hard signal to society. You have to imagine what that means to church members. The church is closing your church, the church were you have been to all your life, the church you have celebrated all the important festivities of transition in.” (PA 12, f) Some interviewees think that the economic difficulties of the church have caused a concentration of the parishes on financial aspects. This makes them less interested in social work and quite demanding partners in all social projects as they are always eager to be refunded as much as possible.

At the same time, some interviewees think that the role of the churches and the diaconal institutions has changed because of the focus on economic issues in the social sector and the introduction of the social market. If the churches want to provide certain social services they have to compete with other providers. To be successful in the competition, the prices for the social services have to be as low as possible. Often the churches don’t manage to calculate as low prices as the others. As a consequence they don’t get the responsibility for the social services. One interviewee expresses that she pities this development. She would prefer smaller providers like parishes of diaconal initiatives. But in the competition the huge social providers, like the BruderhausDiakonie, are in a better position as they can calculate lower prices. The dominance of the big providers is expected to increase. To be successful on the social market, the church and the diaconal institutions need to lobby. The local politicians in particular stress that they have a clear expectation that the representatives of the churches and the diaconal institutions should contact them to lobby for their social services. Without this lobbying they are not willing to maintain the public funding of church run welfare activities.

Finally, some interviewees also point to positive developments within the church. The local politicians in particular state, that the church representatives have become more open and less hierarchic. They participate in all public events of the town and are looking for contact with the different groups and representatives in Reutlingen. From their perspective, the loss of privileges brought the church closer to the people.

### **Wishes for changes of the church**

Most of the interviewees mainly wished that the church could at least maintain its current role in society. As they are pleased with the church's engagement within the social sector some of them were afraid that the economic crisis in the church would cause a withdrawal of the church from several fields of work. As the public authorities would be obliged, in most of the cases, to replace the churches as providers the scenario is considered as being threatening. Already today the church can put pressure on the public authorities when announcing that it plans to give up certain fields of work.

If the interviewees proposed any changes regarding the current role of the church in society it mainly concerned areas of work the church used to be engaged in, but had given up. One area several of the interviewees pointed to, is the field of immigrant counselling. This might be due to the fact that the church run social service centre in Reutlingen used to have a regional counselling centre for immigrants, which was closed in 2004 as the federal state cut all contributions.

Another area in which some of the interviewees suggested changes is the area of family models and gender roles. The female interviewees in particular think that the church still very much sticks to a traditional family model, even though possibly unconsciously. This is exemplified by the kindergarten work of the parishes. One representative of the public authorities says: "The parishes still do not make any experiments in kindergarten work. They continue with the traditional model. In particular, they don't initiate any model of whole day-care or day-care for children younger than 3 years old. With the traditional model the church run kindergartens always attract the middle-class children. Even if they work in a very mixed district they manage to attract the middle-class children. This is also due to the opening hours of their kindergartens which are impossible for mothers working full-time. I sometimes have the feeling that the churches leave us alone with the difficulties. Because they take the middle-class children and we have to care for the rest. This is also a form of segregation." (PA 8, f)

Many interviewees also point to the fact that the work of the churches and the diaconal institutions is of course very dependent on individuals, if the vicar and the church council, or the management of a diaconal institution are interested in co-operation. If they only keep to their own business, the public authorities have to make their concepts without thinking of the churches as partners. According to some interviewees, the actual situation is quite mixed.

Finally, many interviewees hope that the parishes will play a more active role within the town districts. They see the parishes and their infrastructure as social resources for the districts and wish that the parishes would use their structure more consciously for the common good of the districts. At the same time they are afraid that the economic crises of the church will hinder new concepts in this field as they perceive some of the parishes as only focused on their own problems and overburdened with their tasks. Therefore they think that it is not very likely that they will be interested in new models.

### **Significance of gender**

Gender appeared as a significant factor. Most of the interviewees thought that the situation of the family and family policy is crucial in the welfare context. They also

agreed that women get too little help to combine family and work. Many guess that traditional family models and gender models still rule many decisions, especially as men dominate decision-making positions. The churches are connected to the traditional role models. Even if only few interviewees say it directly, the influence of the churches is held responsible for the persistence of traditional role models in German society. One interviewee says. "The churches have to understand that whole-day care for children is not an idea of Satan. There are many examples from other European countries which have done this before. And they survived." (PA 8, f) Anyway, the churches aren't considered to play an innovative role in this context. Some interviewees hope that the economy will change the traditional models.

## Views held by the church

### Welfare

Among the church representatives the perception of the concept of welfare is quite diverse. Only some connect it to the independent welfare organisations even though their official definition and name uses the term "welfare" (freie "Wohlfahrts"verbände). Actually, this connection is mostly made by the representatives of welfare organisations themselves. For them, the term "welfare" has a positive tone. Their definitions tend to be quite comprehensive: "Welfare is the sum of all social actions which individuals and institutions are engaged in to help others." (CR 1, m) Or: "For me welfare is a positive term. ... It describes well-being in wider meaning. It has no negative connotations at all." (CR 10, m)

Also some of the representatives of the parishes place significant value in the concept of welfare. They think that welfare is a more holistic concept than for example the concept of "social security". One of them says: "I would define welfare like that. That people like to live in a city ... that people are healthy, that contains the mental, physical, social well-being of people." (CR 4, m).

But even those who have a positive understanding of "welfare" state that the term is often connected to a traditional system of distributing social tasks in society. For all who consider this system to be old-fashioned or hierarchical the term "welfare" has a negative colouring. This is exactly what some of the parish representatives think: "... for me welfare sounds like something the state does to its subjects, in a patronising way. Welfare is simply an old term." (CR 13, m) Or: "... welfare is a term you do not use anymore today. It has its origins in a time when people were still talking about caring for others ('Fürsorge') and not about the responsibility which everyone has for himself." (CR 15, m) In general, the majority of the church representatives have negative associations (or no associations at all) to the term "welfare".

### Function of the local welfare system

Compared to the representatives of the public authorities, the church representatives give a more negative evaluation of the existing welfare system in Reutlingen. In particular the interviewees representing the parishes draw a pessimistic picture of both the national and the local welfare systems. They pity the poverty and social segregation in the town and they point to the growing poverty they perceive. Almost all of them name examples of people who suffer from the social situation and the

social reforms: "... I sometimes get scared when I think of the changes within the welfare systems. ... We can notice the consequences of the changes already today. It is obvious that more people come to us to beg for money ... not homeless people, people who live here ...." (CR 13, m). Some express their anger about the development: "It is a shame that the poverty is increasing fast while a Social Democratic government is in power. ... The individual is given more and more responsibility in welfare matter. No matter if he is able to take this responsibility or not. But he is responsible. The state has said good-bye to its responsibility." (CR 2, m)

Others emphasise their experience of the society becoming colder, as the economic situation has become worse for many people. But no one wants to talk about these problems, since every one tries to keep up appearances. "... people feel more and more socially insecure ... This leads to confrontations. The young against the old. And the old against the young. There is no communication." (CR 12, f)

Some of professionals within church social work and the elected representatives also stress that the social system has changed for the worse. This is exemplified by the social laws. "The social laws no longer focus on the person in need. It's all about money. Money seems to be the most important thing." (CR 6, f). Other professionals describe the changes within the local welfare system in a more differentiated way. On the one hand the welfare system has continued to expand during the last few years. This is especially true for the field of care. The care insurance which was introduced into the German welfare system in 1995, has given new resources for social services and initiatives related to the field of care. On the other hand the scarcity of public resources is becoming more and more noticeable. The public financiers try to save money by the marketisation of the field of social work. This has consequences both for the people in need and for the social services.

On the parish level, the shortage of public resources mostly concerns social projects and initiatives as the public financiers increasingly only pay for the social tasks they are obliged to finance. Some interviewees report the growing insecurity these projects and initiatives have to face. One says: "I think of initiatives and support associations for social work in schools. The public authorities encouraged them a lot to start their work. But now they leave them alone without financing, organisational support ... I think also of initiatives helping families with a bad economy for example by offering holiday programmes for the children. ... When I experience the elbow room of social initiatives engaged in preventive work, prevention of addiction for example, present in a city district ... They have a real hard time because of the economic pressure." (CR 9, m)

Some interviewees also notice positive effects caused by this development, especially the increased involvement of volunteers in all fields of social work: "Today, voluntary work is much more important than it was only a few years ago. ... I can see that when I think of my professional life so far. When I started ... for 13 years ago, no one wanted to involve volunteers in professional social work ... The professionals thought that the volunteers only disturb ... They wanted to protect the people in need from the help of volunteers as they believed that volunteers cannot help people with real problems. ... Today it is totally different. In my opinion the development is positive. I think it's problematic if a society gets rid of those of their members who have problems by establishing social services who care for them." (CR 14, m).

In the long run, all interviewees believe that the welfare system as a whole and the social expenses will be reduced: One summarises his fears like that: “If the actual development continues, which we can and have to suppose, the public welfare system will draw back and only supply basic social security. In some cases they will not even be able to guarantee basic social security. I am sure that we will see symptoms of misery, pauperisation and neglect in our society which we do not know today ...” (CR 10, m).

### **Role of the church**

None of the interviewees doubts that the church has a role to play in the welfare and the well-being of the people. Many think that the church could play a much more important role if it had the resources to answer only a part of the spiritual and social needs that are becoming noticeable at the moment. One example that the interviewees name is that the work of the parishes can meet the growing loneliness in society, even if only to a very limited extent. Many people long for more social contacts and wait for visits. This is true for elderly people, but not only for elderly people. In this respect church representatives experience that the churches are still institutions people trust in. A vicar says: “In all my years in this parish I have never experienced a situation where I wasn’t welcome when asking: ‘I am the vicar of this parish, may I visit you?’ It made no difference if the person in question was church member or not.” (CR 2, m) Sometimes it becomes obvious to the parishes that even public authorities think of the churches if they cannot handle existential loneliness. “The municipal authorities often contacted me if a person died who had no family and no one seemed to care about the death. ... They felt that there has to be something at the end of a person’s life. ... As they were not a church member I was not obliged to do some kind of ceremony. But I never answered no, when they asked me.” (CR 3, m).

Some interviewees believe that it is an important welfare contribution by the parishes that they can be places of encounter between people who belong to different social backgrounds and different generations. That the parishes actually function in this respect is shown by the reaction of the town district population when the parishes are now thinking of closing down parish homes to save money. Not only church members protest and are even willing to give money to maintain these parish homes: “It was quite astonishing for me. Now when it is about closing this building (the parish home), a building where much is happening and where many people come, not only Protestants, ... it is becoming more and more a kind town district centre. There has been an outcry. ... People say we want to do something about that. ... I felt a sound of solidarity, because there is a kind of togetherness which is happening in this building.” (CR 12, f)

Other interviewees think mainly of institutions and services run by the parishes or by diaconal institutions when asked about the role of the churches for the welfare of people. They point to the kindergartens run by the parishes, to all the events for elderly people which the parishes offer, or to all the diaconal homes and services. The representatives of the diaconal institutions in particular stress the fact that the parishes along with the professional diaconal services, contribute to the general welfare in a very special way: “As independent welfare actors we have a community orientation like the municipality, but our routines are not as ponderous as theirs. ...

Three things have to be connected. The laity structure of the parishes, the volunteers who often work within the parishes and the professional way of doing social work represented by us, the diaconal institutions.” (CR 10, m)

The representatives of the parishes often refer to actual examples when reflecting about the contribution of the churches to the welfare and the well-being in Reutlingen while the representatives of the diaconal institutions mostly name institutions and services and their daily work. It is the members of this last named group of interviewees in particular who think that the churches and the diaconal institutions contribute to the common good by being part of the formation process of the German social state.

### **Church and social work**

All interviewees agree that the church should carry out practical social work. Some of them admit that they have never thought about this question before. One says: “This is quite a principal question which has nothing to do with the reality of our daily work. When I started here, the parish had 13 kindergartens and a home care service. These activities had been developed sometime. It does not seem meaningful to give them up now.” (15, m).

Many interviewees stress that all parishes have a mission to work socially and diaconally. That the church should carry out all kinds of social work is not controversial, the questions are how the church should do this and who within the church should be responsible for this task. The professionalisation and the specialisation of social work have made it difficult for average parishes to run social services. Because of this, the parishes have partly delegated their social responsibility to common diaconal projects (like the social service centre of the church district) or to independent diaconal institutions (like the BruderhausDiakonie). Some of the interviewees think that the parishes make it too easy for themselves when delegating all social tasks to professional diaconal institutions. “Unemployment, poverty, we should be much more active in these questions. ... It is easy to delegate all responsibility to the diaconal institutions. But that’s what we do in particular in a city like Reutlingen, because there are many diaconal institutions.” (CR 12, f) Others believe that delegation is the right thing to do for the parishes as they would be overburdened by the demands of professional social work. They emphasise that this is not a delegation away from the church but a delegation within the church. The delegation of social responsibility also causes other problems. Although the parishes contribute at least financially to some of these professional services, they do not feel that they are doing social work. This is exemplified by the “Vesperkirche” which was once started by a parish related initiative. For practical reasons it is now run by the social service centre of the church district. As a consequence of this, many representatives of the parishes have a feeling that it is no longer “their” Vesperkirche.

Carrying out social work or not might even be a question of survival for the church. An interviewee puts it like this: “The church has to be close to the people. If we imagine that the church becomes vivid in the Sunday services only for a certain small part of our church, ... we have to be present in a city in addition to these Sunday services. And we are only present if we do justice to our diaconal mission. If we are no longer active in this context, we will disappear.” (CR 4, m) Other motivations for carrying out all kinds of social work are Christian anthropology or the mission of

the church: to preach the gospel to all people. An interviewee says: "You can't only preach with words. To preach is also to do social work. These two ways of preaching belong together. If you stay at home all day to study the bible and to prepare a sermon you have stopped being church. Everything the church is talking about must be exemplified by its actions." (CR 2, m)

### Church and public debate

There is an agreement among the interviewees that the church should contribute to the public debate on welfare issues. Many think that the Christian mission requires to contribute to the public debate. One cannot believe in the Christian god without caring about what is happening in society. A lot of the interviewees emphasise that the prophetic dimension belongs to the churches' essence as much as acting diaconally. Actually contributing to the public debate and acting diaconally can be the same thing. In this respect, some interviewees refer to the example of the "Vesperkirche" which started as an outcry for solidarity. One of the interviewees who is engaged in the "Vesperkirche" says: "After a funeral service for a homeless person who had frozen to death during the winter I had very strong feelings. ... No one should die like that, especially not in a relatively wealthy city like Reutlingen. It was the starting point for my engagement in this initiative." (CR 3, m)

According to some of the interviewees many people expect the church to participate in the public debate on welfare issues. Elderly people in particular believe that the church should be their advocate. "The elderly people wait for the church to act. They do no longer understand the state. And they hope that the church will take their part." (CR 6, f) Others think that it is just the other way around. People do not expect the church to be engaged in society matters at all as it is busy with celebrating Sunday services. Because of this they want the church to interfere in the public debate consciously and more often.

Many interviewees reflect more on the question *what* the church should contribute to the public debate. In their opinion the form of contributions is of lesser interest, though they mention a number of different forms from sermons to public seminars, from the presence of church representatives on the public scene to projects of practical social work. Nevertheless, many interviewees are more interested in the content of the contributions. An interviewee stresses: "The contribution of the church should not be like a reflex. It should be creative and relevant and it should relate to important issues, for example to family politics." (CR 9, m) Others think that the church should not behave like a "know-all" when criticising the state and the public authorities. On the one hand it is easy to criticise without having the responsibility. On the other hand not having the responsibility cannot be an excuse for not contributing to the debate at all. In general, contributing to the public debate is considered to be quite a complex task. A interviewee gives an example: "If the church points to the fact that for example Hartz IV is not compatible with the Christian idea of human being, it is answered: 'We know that, but in these times of globalisation there is no other solution. Or do you know what else to do?' And of course the church does not know what to do. Anyway, I think it is important that the church says: 'This is wrong!' Even without having an alternative solution. Because it is important to continue to think about alternatives." (CR 15, m)

In addition, some of the church representatives point to the fact that the church involvement in practical social work affects both the content and the form of the church contribution to the public debate. A representative of the professional diaconal work says: “It is not easy to delimitate from the social policy of the public authorities if you are closely connected to them by the finances. If I am dependent on public funding I am a partner and can criticise on a professional level. But to put my foot down by saying: ‘Not with me!’ That’s difficult.” (CR 1, m).

Summing up it may be said that all church representatives think that contributions to the public debate are an obligation of the churches and the diaconal institutions. The answers show that many of them have reflected a lot about the content and the effects of church contributions to the public debate on welfare issues. At the same time they question if these contributions really influence the public opinion and social policy.

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

When asked about how the role of the church has changed over the past 10 years, the answers of the church representatives are quite similar to those of the interviewees of the other samples. They state a declining influence of the churches in society and the loss of the privileged position the churches and the diaconal institutions used to have in the welfare sector. The interviewees experience that the public authorities treat the churches and their social services like any other social organisation in town, at least when it comes to the funding. “We more and more must beg for everything. Before the budgetary meetings in the town council or in the district assembly we go to the parliamentary groups to beg for funding ... For some years ago we wrote an application letter and that was enough. ... Today you have to beg personally ... Once we did not do that and as a consequence we got less money than all the others.” (CR 4, m)

The representatives of the parishes in particular mention the decrease of church members. The drop of numbers changes not only the position of the Evangelical-Lutheran church in the city, but also the economic situation. Now the parishes have to spend a lot of money to maintain church buildings which once were planned to give room for much more members. Like other institutions and organisations the church has to try to save money and resources. This causes an emotional debate not only within the church (which many interviewees refer to) but also in the society and in the media.

The organisational and administrative changes in the field of welfare which were implemented during the last years affect the activities of the churches and the diaconal institutions as well. The public level of decision-making has been more and more decentralised, that means it has been transferred to the districts and the municipalities. Because of this the churches and the diaconal institutions have to find new ways of lobbying. The church representatives have to establish contacts to new decision-makers. According to some of the interviewees this is a difficult task. The new people in charge are often not very experienced in the field of welfare. In addition, the welfare expenses have to compete more directly with other public expenses on the decentralised level of the district and the municipality. This means that well-tried agreements are suddenly questioned.

But the voluntary church workers among the interviewees in particular point out positive effects of these structural and economical changes as well. Because of the changed economic and power situation the professionals within the churches and the vicars in particular, are much more dependent on the work of volunteers. This explains why volunteers have often a much better position today than they had for ten years ago. Today, volunteers get the responsibility for some of the welfare activities of the church and they make decisions on their own. Instead of controlling and ruling their work the professionals try to support them. All parish kindergartens are for example supervised by a lay member of the church council and not by a vicar. An interviewee says: "People think less hierarchic in the church than before. The ministers are much more open and human ... and they are thankful for ideas and impulses. They say: 'If you think this is a good thing to do and if you are willing to engage for it you have my support ....'" (CR 5, f) Some interviewees even believe that the wealth of the churches during the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and partly in the 1990s was more problematic than the scarcity of the resources today. According to them it is more reasonable to build the church on people's commitment and not on money and buildings.

There is an agreement among the interviewees that the churches have less power and less privileges in society. The parishes in particular have to deal with a situation of decline and reduction. Some of the interviewees stress that this implies not only problems but also changes for the church.

### **Wishes for changes of the church**

Many of the interviewees find it difficult to answer this question. They think that the church is forced to change because of the economic problems. But not all of these changes are desired. Some church representatives feel torn between the increasing social and spiritual needs and tasks on the one hand and the declining resources on the other hand.

The voluntary church workers in particular want the churches to expand their engagement in practical social work. "I hope that the church can be an example, not only in preaching but also in acting. That means that the church should take on more social tasks, whenever it is possible." (CR 7, m) One of them compares the churches and the diaconal institutions with seismographs. They should observe the social situation in society to find out what the people need and who is lacking help. Then they should start exemplary social projects to draw the public attention to these needs. (CR 11, m) Some of the volunteers stress explicitly that the welfare commitment of the churches and the diaconal institutions should not depend on the economical or political situation. Therefore they hope that the churches have the courage to engage in this field regardless of the declining resources. In general, the voluntary workers seem to be more optimistic than the church professionals. They believe that the church will be able to realise more social projects in the future. As a precondition for this they suggest an improved public relations work to let the population know what the churches are doing in the field of welfare.

Some of the professional church workers stress that the conditions of church work have changed radically. They hope that the church is able to adapt to this changed situation. This means that painful decisions have to be made and church activities have to be reduced. Otherwise they foresee an economical breakdown. But

even this group of interviewees wants to prioritise the welfare activities of the church. Some suggest to close or to sell church buildings instead of giving up social services. According to them, the church and the parishes in particular are too busy with keeping buildings at the moment. They should concentrate on the growing social and spiritual needs instead. One says: “We have to get rid of church buildings. We have too many church buildings and they cost a lot of money and energy. But the church does not need buildings, we need people. ... If we don’t get rid of some church buildings now, we will not have any elbow room for new projects in some years. I really hope that the people in the parishes understand that.” (CR 2, m)

Several of the professional church workers stress that they long for more elbow room in their daily work. They assure that they would use this elbow room to focus on social problems. They think for example of the growing poverty in society. The church could not only start help projects, it could also help people to talk about poverty. According to other interviewees, the church orientates too much by middle-class families with small children and by elderly people. But there are other groups who wait for the church to offer them services and activities. With more elbow room it would be possible for the church to address these groups, like singles living in the city centre or single parents.

The majority of the church representatives want to change the church in a way that strengthens the welfare activities. But they have different strategies to achieve this goal. Some think that it is most important at the moment to develop a social vision and to try to realise it. They choose not to focus on the difficulties, but on the commitment of the people. Others believe that it is the responsibility of the church to take the changed conditions into consideration. They consider themselves to be housekeepers who are responsible for the ensuring of the future elbow room of the church. This requires unpopular decisions today. The interviews show that there is a conflict among the church representatives about the best strategy to prepare the church for the future.

### **Significance of gender**

None of the church representatives mentions the gender perspective on his own. In contrast to this the difficult situation of families in today’s society is discussed by several interviewees. The interviews give the impression that there is no homogeneous position concerning this question. On the one hand the interviewees think that the family model is changing and they want to support women to combine family and work. On the other hand one could feel a longing for the traditional family with the traditional role models which is also related to Christian values. To me, this tension seems to be more an emotional than a theologically motivated one. As all interviewees directly agreed that women and men should, according to the bible, have the same rights and tasks. I could find this contradictory attitude in the interviews with both male and female church representatives. One practical consequence of this non-uniform standpoint is that church run kindergartens maintain the traditional model of day-care (six hours a day) instead of introducing an innovative whole-day model allowing women more flexibility in their occupational work.

When asked to refer to the gender perspective the interviewees react differently. Some of them, mostly the women and the younger interviewees, are interested in the subject. Others react almost bored as they think that the church has already dealt

with these questions in satisfying way. To illustrate this they point to the fact that there have been discussions in the church about the question of equality of women and men and feminist theology for decades. These discussions have resulted in structures, routines and institutions which supervise and guarantee the equality of women and men within the church. A third group of interviewees seems to be indifferent to the subject as they neither are interested to talk about gender questions nor feel challenged to defend the church.

The period when the interviews were conducted was a special period with regard to gender perspective in the church. It was the time when the former Pope died and a new Pope was elected. During this time the church was a major subject in the media. This includes the issue of women in the Roman-Catholic church. The public debate is reflected by the answers of the interviewees. Many of them refer to the position women have in the Roman-Catholic church. They think that the Protestant church has got far compared to the Roman-Catholic Church and stress that the Evangelical-Lutheran church in Württemberg has had female vicars and women's ordination since 1970. Others emphasise that more and more women hold top management position in the Protestant church today. In the Evangelical-Lutheran church in Württemberg there are female deans and a female regional bishop. Even one of the two candidates for the election of the new bishop is a woman. Some of the interviewees point to parish activities to illustrate that the church is active in gender issues. A series of sermons of women about women in the bible and groups only for women or men, girls or boys are named as examples. The representatives of the professional diaconal work admit that men still hold most of the top management positions in the diaconal institutions. But they believe that this will change soon. They point to the fact that there are many qualified women in the middle management of the diaconal institutions who can take on top management positions.

As mentioned above I had difficulties to find female interviewees who hold a responsible position within church social work. This illustrates that the question of gender justice is not solved in the Evangelical-Lutheran church in Reutlingen. Some interviewees refer to this problem. They think that the church could be an example for the rest of the society. But there are still too less women in (top) management positions. One says: "When I talk with girls I realise that they often think in traditional role models. ... They need female examples, which means women in leading roles. ... Female priest could be examples like that." (CR 12, f) Several interviewees point to fact that the majority of volunteers in all social projects are women. Because of that they think about designing new voluntary projects which are attractive to men as there is a growing number of older men who have the time to do voluntary work. Others criticise that traditional role models are still dominating in the parishes. But they do not think that it is possible to change these models as long as the society as a whole is maintaining them as well.

It is difficult to draw a conclusion as the interviewees give a variety of different answers. They refer to different levels of church work and to different experiences. In general, it is noticeable that the interviewees often relate to personal experiences when reflecting on this issue.

## Views held by the population

### **Welfare**

The direct translation of the term “welfare” – in German “Wohlfahrt” – does not seem to mean anything to any of the focus group interviewees. Some of the older students and the young adults think of it as a technical term in the field of social policy or social work. One comment made by a student is quite typical for all interviewees who at least recognise the term: “Welfare? I know the welfare organisation ‘Arbeiterwohlfahrt’.”<sup>18</sup> They do some kind of social work. But I am not sure what welfare really means. To me it sounds quite old-fashioned.” (FG 4, m)

The younger students and the Germans from the former Soviet react rather helplessly and tend to ask me to explain when asked to comment on the term. Altogether, the discussions about the concept of welfare are neither long nor vivid. Some interviewees get more involved in the debate when we start to talk about the concept of “social security”. Discussing the concept of social security is the starting point in all focus groups when talking about the German welfare system.

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

With both the international and the national discussions about the crisis of the German social state in mind, the general evaluation of the German welfare system in Reutlingen is astonishingly positive. All interviewees think that the system still works very well. One of the older pupils says: “I am sure, that no one has to starve here in Reutlingen when he is in need.” (FG 4, f)

The immigrants from the former Soviet in particular point to the fact that many of their fellow citizens and neighbours may not know how privileged they are having a developed welfare system like this. One of them says: “In Kaszachstan where we lived before no one cared if you lost your job. They have just started to form a kind of welfare system there. There it is your own and your family’s responsibility to cope with the situation of unemployment. The state won’t help you with that. Here in Germany you have a welfare system to rely on. Sometimes I think people here are spoiled. Often it doesn’t pay to work. You have the same income no matter if you work or if you are getting unemployment benefits. That’s not good.” (FG 2, f)

Even the German interviewees have a feeling of living in an area where the economic situation is relatively favourable which also influences the good state of the welfare system. One of the older students says: “I think the welfare system works better here in Reutlingen than in some other German regions, for example in the Eastern parts of Germany where it is more difficult to find a job.” (FG 4, f)

When discussing the existing difficulties within the welfare system the interviewees mostly refer to the problem of unemployment. The students of the 9-year-elementary school who have only one more year to go before entering the labour market express that they perceive unemployment as an existential threat. One of the students thinks: “For me the most important task of the welfare system is to help people to find a job. It isn’t easy to find jobs today. I expect the German social state to help me to find a job!” (FG 3, m)

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<sup>18</sup> Arbeiterwohlfahrt is the workers’ movement’s welfare organisation.

The older students at the secondary school who have two more years to go and are undertaking a more advanced school education qualifying them both for the labour market and for further studies at university feel better prepared for the future competition for jobs than those “who only go the 9-year elementary school” as one of them puts it (FG 4, m). Nevertheless, they also believe that unemployment is the most serious social problem within the German welfare system. One student says: “In my opinion, long term unemployed people have it worst. If they have not been able to work for several years, they lose contact to the labour market and the chances to get a new job become worse and worse, especially if they are older. There is no way for them to come back to the labour market and to society.” (FG 4, f)

The young adults with an occupation in particular consider unemployment to be a threat for the German welfare system. Those working in the private sector in particular think that German wages are too expensive in an international comparison as both the employers and the employees have to pay high rates of social contributions. One says: “We can’t afford our welfare system any longer. It is actually made for full employment. But we now have a high rate of unemployment for about 20 years. As long as the German wages are as high as they are we won’t get any new jobs. And the wages are high because of the taxes and the social contributions we have to pay. I am aware of the fact that it can be very cruel for unemployed people if we minimise the unemployment benefits as it is done at the moment. But I do not see any other solutions. We have to reduce our social benefits and limit our social system.” (FG 1, m)

Though all of the interviewees think that the German welfare system still functions well in Reutlingen, some of them are not so sure if the system is worth trusting even in the future. Besides the problem of unemployment the question of justice between the generations is mentioned as a second serious threat to the welfare system, especially by the secondary school students and by the young professionals. One of the students puts it that way: “It is much more difficult to get a job today than it was for ten or twenty years ago. It was much easier for our parents to enter into the labour market. ... In addition, one can really doubt if the pension system will still work until we get old. Probably we have to pay a lot of social contributions when we start working and during our whole working life. But it is not sure if we get something in return. Maybe we, the young generation, are the big losers within the German welfare system.” (FG 4, m)

### **Role of the church**

As for most of the other interviewees it seems quite natural to all participants in the focus groups that the church has a role to play in the welfare and the well-being of people. One of the German immigrants from the former USSR says: “The church needs to have social activities. Otherwise it is no longer the church.” (FG 2, m)

For some of the young professionals the welfare activities of the church and the work of diaconal institutions like the BruderhausDiakonie is one important reason to remain a member of the church and to pay church taxes. One says: “Every year when I am doing my tax declaration I am thinking of leaving the church. It is a lot I am paying for church membership. What do I get in return? I don’t participate in any church activities or services. One important reason for not leaving the church is all

these diaconal activities of the church. Society would be colder without them. Especially today, when the state has to reduce the social expenses.” (FG 1, m)

Mainly four areas of activities are named in the focus group interviews when asking for the role of the church in the field of welfare and well-being.

1. Mostly the interviewees refer to those welfare activities of the churches they know. This can be social church projects like the Vesperkirche which attracts the interest of the local media and therefore is quite well known in the city. This can also be professional diaconal services like the diaconal home care service or services of the BruderhausDiakonie. Several interviewees explain that they know about these services because one of their family members uses them. A third area of reference are the social activities of the local parishes like parish lunches for people with little money, day care centres for children, church counselling centres for migrants or parish involvement in hospice initiatives. Again information about these activities is often imparted by family members, neighbours and friends.

2. The students in particular think of the church as an institution which encourages the giving of donations and money for welfare activities and for people in need all over the world. Some of them remember when they themselves were collecting and giving money for church welfare projects while preparing for their confirmation. Others refer to the big Christmas campaigns for people in poor countries (Brot für die Welt). That the churches collect money for certain welfare projects and give people the possibility to donate money for these purposes all of the students consider being extremely meaningful, much more meaningful than paying church taxes.

3. Another important aspect which all focus groups mention is the churches' role as a meeting place. The younger interviewees believe that the churches mainly fulfil a social function for the older generation. According to their interpretation elderly people not only participate in church events because of the religious content but also to meet people of the same age and in the same situation. At the same time the students do not think that the churches and especially their local parishes are a meeting place for young people and for themselves. This is mostly due to services, groups and events arranged by the local church which they perceive as too traditional and too orientated towards elderly people and families with little children. Not all of the students do principally reject the use of the churches as a meeting place. One of the students says: “What I like best in the church is if the church organises events where young people from all over the country can meet and participate in different programmes, discussion groups and seminaries, like the Youth Days of the Evangelische Landeskirche in Württemberg in Stuttgart or the Kirchentag (Church Day).<sup>19</sup>” (FG 4, f)

For the immigrants from the former USSR the local parish is an important meeting place as they experience German society as quite individualised and segregated into different groups which hardly meet. One of them says: “In the parish the other

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<sup>19</sup> The “Deutsche Evangelische Kirchentag” (German Protestant Church Days) is a big meeting of groups connected to the church with between 100.000 up to 200.000 participants. It is organised by a lay ruled independent committee and takes place every second year in one of the big German cities which have a fair. Every other year the German Roman-Catholics meet in a similar way for the so called Katholikentag (Days of the Roman-Catholics). The Church Days attract many young people. In 2003 the first ecumenical (Roman-Catholic and Protestant) Church Days took place in Berlin.

inhabitants of this city district realise that we also live here, that we belong to this community and that we are here to stay. Otherwise the social life is organised according to groups. We ourselves mostly meet families who come from the former USSR as well. It is hard to make contacts with other people. Only the children make easier contacts. I would like the church to offer more groups where children with different backgrounds can meet. It feels safe to send my children to the church to make contacts.” (FG 2, f)

4. Finally all interviewees think that the Christian message of the church and the Sunday services play an important role for the welfare and the well-being of the people. But most of them add that they doubt if this is true for themselves. They rather think of people in need and in situations of existential crisis like people who are ill or have fatally ill relatives, people who are lonely or refugees without social contacts. The students in particular believe that the confrontation with a nearer possible death makes the churches and their message more interesting for elderly people.

### **Church and social work**

Even for most of the focus group interviewees it seems to be a quite absurd question as to whether the churches should carry out practical social work. In the opinion of all participants of the focus groups it is quite natural that the churches are involved in social activities. At the same time most of the interviewees obviously neither do know how social services run by independent welfare providers like diaconal institutions or the churches are financed nor that diaconal institutions are both organisationally and financially independent of the churches. Both the social services carried out by the diaconal institutions and those carried out by the churches and parishes are perceived as church activities in the field of welfare. Moreover, most of the interviewees assume that all the welfare services run by the churches or diaconal institutions are also paid for by the churches, by diaconal foundations and by donations. Nobody seems to know that these services are funded like similar services carried out by organisations of the public or private sector, which means mainly by taxes or by the money from the social insurances. Welfare activities of the churches and diaconal institutions are considered to be additional services enriching the general welfare supply. One of the students says: “Now, when both the municipality and the state are running out of money it is good that the churches are active on the social field. They can offer services where the municipality is forced to close.” (FG4, f)

The focus group of German immigrants from the former USSR wants the churches explicitly to carry out more practical work. In their opinion parishes should offer all kind of social counselling or at least function as guides within the local community. They experience the German welfare system with all its different actors as confusing and believe it would be easier for people in need to make welfare contacts via the parish and not via social authorities.

None of the interviewees can imagine that there are welfare areas where the churches and church related organisations should not interfere. In principle the church can carry out all kinds of services. Asked for possible limitations of church engagement in the field of welfare it is mainly the students who are unsure if the churches and church related welfare organisations really are competent in all fields of social work. Within both student focus groups there emerged, for example, a

discussion about the question as to whether the churches and diaconal institutions have the expertise to help unemployed people effectively or if it is better if only the responsible social authorities focus on this task, in this case the labour exchanges. In both groups male students tend to express the opinion that the churches and the church related welfare organisations might lack the competence to help the unemployed while female students point to the fact that they could offer another kind of help because they are independent of the social authorities.

A question which catches all the groups' interest is *how* the churches and the diaconal institutions should carry out practical social work (not *what type of work*). There is an astonishing consensus in this question. All the interviewees commenting on the issue want the churches and the diaconal institutions to be open-minded and not missionary when carrying out practical social work. They should not have any expectations or preconditions when helping people in need. All people should be welcome no matter whether they are believers or not. In addition, the interviewees think that the social services offered by the churches and the church related organisations should follow the public standards and the general rules. But at the same time many interviewees say that the church run social work should differ from other social work. Asked for the differences mainly two aspects are mentioned: Firstly, the interviewees believe that it is easier for church related welfare services to recruit "good" personnel meaning employees who are both professionally and religiously qualified. The religious motivation in particular is regarded as improving the quality of the social services. Secondly, some interviewees think that the social services run by the churches and the diaconal institutions answer to peoples' needs in a more comprehensive way. By including the religious dimension they already offer more than the general (public) standard. The younger interviewees do not have big expectations with regard to the "religious dimension" of the welfare work. For them it already makes a difference if, for example, a social service has close contact with the representatives of the local parishes or not. A student says: "Social services run by the church should not be used to persuade people of religion. But it is natural that many people choose church run services because they are interested in religion. They want the social services to make contacts to the priest. The diaconal services should do this, but they should never force anyone to contact the church." (FG 4, m)

The additional questions I have posed in the focus group interviews concerned the structure of the German welfare system and the gender perspective. When asked if they know whom to address in a situation of need all interviewees in all focus groups react in a perplexed way. In the case of the young professionals and the two student groups some interviewees explain their reaction by their lack of experience. Except health care services and day care for children they can hardly remember to have ever used welfare services. One student says: "I have no idea where to go, I mean I was never forced to think about that. I suppose I would go to the labour exchange if I don't get a job. But I am not sure if they really can help me there." (FG 4, m)

The German immigrants feel confused by the German welfare system because of the experiences they have of the system when looking for help. One of the women refers to the example of her disabled daughter. It took her more than a year to find a suitable welfare service for her daughter as she did not know the structure of the welfare system. As a rule the interviewees in this focus group perceive the structure of welfare services as being more intriguing the more centralised they are. They

explain that they would prefer decentralised welfare services in the town districts. One reason that they want the parishes to be more active in the field of welfare is the fact that they work on this decentralised level.

Although there is an agreement amongst the interviewees that the welfare system is quite complicated all of them welcome the activities of the churches and the church related organisations. No one thinks that the welfare system would become easier to understand if there were fewer organisations and actors involved or if everything was run by the public sector. On the contrary, many interviewees believe that additional welfare actors like the churches are synonymous with additional welfare services which means more help for people in need.

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

Again, all interviewees in all focus groups in principle agreed on the opinion that the churches should contribute to the public debate on welfare issues. More interesting is what kind of contribution they think of. Neither public statements of church representatives, nor discussion papers formulated by the churches, nor sermons or services are mentioned. One student imagines that the churches might organise demonstrations for the socially excluded. But in general the interviewees seem to have only a limited interest in public statements made by the churches. One of the young professionals puts it this way: "For me it is natural that the church stands up for the poor. As Christians they have to do this. Everyone expects that. There is nothing surprising about that. ... Sometimes I ask myself if the priests know that they are in a privileged position. I mean, it is easy for them to stand up for the poor because they live in another reality. It differs from the reality of economy. It is easy to tell others how they should act if you are not the one to take the unpopular decisions." (FG 1, m)

But the indifference of the interviewees to public statements made by the churches about social issues does not mean that they believe that the churches have nothing to contribute to the welfare debate. On the contrary, almost all interviewees in all focus groups think directly of practical social work carried out by the churches when asked for possible contributions of the churches to the public debate on welfare issues. According to them contributing to the public debate is more about acting socially and less about talking about welfare issues. The churches are evaluated quite positively in this respect. The majority of interviewees state that there is already a relevant contribution made by the churches to the welfare debate. At the same time they agree that the churches could and should expand their activities in this field. Two fields of activity (or of the welfare debate) are named in several focus group interviews: unemployed people and help for refugees and other migrants. In these welfare areas the existing social services are experienced as insufficient and/or diminishing. If the churches start welfare activities for these groups this is considered to be an important contribution to the public welfare debate.

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

This question is difficult to answer for all focus group interviewees. Both the students who are between 14 and 18 years old and the German immigrants from the former USSR feel that they cannot compare. Either they are too young or they have been living in Germany for a period shorter than ten years. The only interviewees who can actually compare are the young professionals. But they point to the fact that

their picture of the church might be different today because their relationship to the church has changed. Ten or fifteen years ago they still went to school and met the church mainly in a teaching situation when attending confirmation and religion lessons. Today they have only minimal contact with the church. They experience the church mostly from a “consumer perspective” when participating in a baptism, a wedding or a funeral. If they are satisfied with the church’s performance on these occasions their picture of the church tends to be positive and vice versa. In general, they believe that the church’s importance in society is decreasing as the society is becoming more pluralistic and open. One of them says: “It is no longer natural that everyone is member of the church. Actually I know a lot of people of my age who left the church, mostly to save the money for the church taxes.” (FG1, f)

Even the students and the German immigrants share the view that the church’s importance in society is shrinking. Several of the students think that the older generation was more influenced by the opinion of the church and the local vicar while the majority of the young generation is not interested in church viewpoints at all. Having lived in a society in which the churches were suppressed the German immigrants from the former USSR had quite high expectations of the churches’ role in German society when coming to Germany. Some of them still feel disappointed at the limited interest of many Germans in the church.

Most interviewees think that the shrinking importance of the church is not due to church activities (or the lack of church activities) but due to changes within society. In other words: for the churches there is not much to do about this! In the opinion of some interviewees church activities are even more persuasive today than earlier. This also includes the field of welfare. As mentioned above the existence and the quality of church activities in the field of welfare is, for some of the interviewees, an important reason to remain church members. Never the less the majority of them believe that the church will continue to lose importance because of the growing individualisation and autonomy of people in religious issues.

### **Wishes for changes of the church**

There is no doubt among the interviewees in all focus groups that the churches could and should change. In the focus group discussions many ideas and suggestions come up as to in what way the churches should change. But only few of these suggestions concern the field of welfare directly. Many interviewees want the churches to develop in an area which is of interest for themselves. This is most obvious in the case of the student groups. According to both groups, the churches should offer more activities for the youth. At the moment they perceive the churches as orientating themselves mainly by the needs of elderly people and possibly young families with small children. The wish for more youth work by the churches is expressed very strongly in both groups though some of the interviewees admit that they are not sure if they would join church activities for young people any way. One says: “I assume that most of the young people still believe in God somehow. But maybe they do not believe in God the same way the church teaches it. In my opinion, you do not have to go to the church to believe in God. I am not sure if I would go to the church more often if there were more events for young people.” (FG 4, m)

Nevertheless, all focus groups are interested in discussing possible changes within the churches which could lead to a changed role of the churches in society.

No matter if the interviewees characterise themselves being close or distant to the church, all of them like to reflect on this question. The younger students start to imagine what kind of events should take place in church buildings to make the church a meeting place for young people. The young professionals discuss how the churches could improve their services and their ways of meeting people asking for services. The most fundamental debate emerges in the group of older students. The interviewees start to discuss how important it is for the churches to keep up traditions. While some of the students think that the main problem for the churches is their long tradition as it hinders them meeting today's people, others believe that tradition (like old church buildings) is something positive which people are longing for. The male interviewees in the group tend to be more critical towards tradition while the female interviewees more often emphasise the value of tradition. But the opinions about tradition are only divided as long as church buildings, services and teaching activities of the churches like religion and confirmation lessons are concerned. To have experience in the field of social work is always evaluated positively. Tradition in social work is considered to be synonymous with having experience in this field of work which is again regarded as being synonymous with having competence in this field of work. With other words: For some of the interviewees the welfare tradition of the churches and the church related organisations is hence a precondition for the good quality of their welfare work.

The German immigrants from the former USSR express explicitly their wish that the churches should be more active in the field of welfare to influence their role in society. They connect this statement with their personal situation and their own experiences. On the one hand they feel that they (still) are in need of help in many ways and are therefore thankful for every organisation offering help and counselling. On the other hand some of the interviewees have positive experiences of non-bureaucratic help by parishes or church-related organisations. One of them says: "When Hartz IV<sup>20</sup> came, my neighbours asked me: 'Do you know what to do?' I told them, that I have hardly understood anything, but that I have got help from the migrant counselling of the parish. They said to me: 'We need help, too. Why is there only counselling for migrants and not for us?'" (FG 2, f)

Being in need themselves the German immigrants have a keen ear for other people with social problems. Most of all focus groups they emphasise that there is a need for additional welfare services and that they would like to see the churches taking this responsibility. They think of the churches in the first place because they trust them. At the same time they believe that the churches could improve their position in society when increasing their commitment to welfare issues.

### **Significance of gender**

Starting from the seven common questions gender did not appear as a subject by itself. But when I posed a question including the gender perspective, for example how to characterise the churches as producers of welfare services and as formers of public opinion from a gender perspective, the interviewees in all focus groups picked up the question enthusiastically and spent quite some time discussing it. In

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<sup>20</sup> Hartz IV is a contraction for the new law on unemployment benefits which came into effect on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2005.

two of the groups I even had to interrupt the discussion in order to have enough time for the other questions. Gender is thus a subject of much interest for the representatives of the local population.

One could conclude that this is due to the sample of focus group interviewees as two of the focus groups consist of teenagers. To reflect a lot about gender issues might be especially likely when looking for ones own identity as a soon to be adult. Actually, the two student focus groups discussed the gender issues most intensely. But one could also claim that the search for ones own gender identity can lead to a close observation of the environment. In this respect, it is quite interesting that there is an agreement among the interviewees in both student focus groups that women have a worse position in the churches (both the Protestant and the Roman-Catholic church) than in the public sector. The students suppose that it is more difficult for women to get access to positions of power within the church as most of the leading church representatives and most of the vicars they meet are men. In school, most of the teachers of religion are women. Also in this question, the personal experiences form the perception of reality. But it is only to state that the perception of almost all the representatives of the churches and the diaconal institutions differs most from the perception of all the other interviewees as far as the gender perspective is concerned.

For the German immigrant women from the former USSR gender injustice is a problem for the whole society. As they seem to find it difficult to formulate harsh critique against the German society a time becomes the symbol for their critique: half past twelve! At that time which is repeated by several of the interviewees the local day-care for children closes, a time which makes it impossible for mothers to work in a lot of jobs. This time illustrates that German society is formed by other gender models than the socialist respective post-socialist society they are coming from.

Finally, one could reflect about the focus group interviews themselves from a gender perspective. The distribution between men and women is more balanced than in the church sample. This is true for the participants of the focus groups in general and for discussions. There is no interview in which the men or the women dominate totally although there is a noticeable majority of men in the group of young professionals and a noticeable majority of women in the group of German immigrants. In all groups a special mood emerges when discussing these questions. It is as if both men and women compete to be most persuasive when presenting their position. But they do this in a playful and humorous way. In addition to the gender issues there are some more questions on which the men and the women in the focus groups have divided opinions. An interesting example of divided attitudes is the older students' discussion about tradition. The female students have fewer difficulties appreciating church tradition than the male students. This is astonishing since it might be exactly these long church traditions which hinder women from gaining access to positions of power in church as easily as men do.

## Sociological analysis

The complex structure and the different levels of church social work in Germany influence the results of this study. The interviews show that most of the interviewees reflect within their structure and on their own level. References to other structures and levels are hardly made. This is not only true for the representatives of the church but also for the representatives of the public authorities who mainly think in terms of the welfare services which they are responsible for. Having the actual construction of the German welfare system in mind this means that the representatives of the municipality refer to the parishes and the church district in the first place, while the representatives of the district mostly refer to the diaconal institutions. To make a fair division between the perspective of the parishes and the church district on the one hand and the diaconal institutions on the other hand a larger and more detailed study and analysis would have been necessary. The German case study chose to concentrate on the level of the parish and the church districts to make the results comparable to the other case studies, which focus on this level as well. Another reason for this decision was the character of the Swedish interview guide which presumes a parish perspective. From a German perspective this focus is not natural as the diaconal institutions are numerically much more important welfare agents. Altogether, the different levels of welfare provision seem to be a difficult but important question, not only within the church. How are the responsibilities divided between the different levels? How does co-operation and communication between these levels work? Who is responsible for the coordination of co-operation and communication between the levels? These questions were not subject of this study. But they seem to be urgent as they repeatedly appear in the material, mostly in a problematic way.

## From the inside and from the outside

From the perspective of the local population no one questions the welfare engagement of the churches. But the majority of the interviewees do not seem to reflect about it either. Many of the basic questions diaconal insiders deal with in their every-day-practice or in their professional debates, like the financing of diaconal work, the problems of co-operating on different levels and with different organisations or the difficulty of forming social work in a Christian way though being ruled more and more by public standards,<sup>21</sup> are not of interest from an outside perspective. For many it seems to be enough to know that the churches are engaged in welfare issues. This engagement is taken for granted and often forms a positive attitude towards the church. In this respect, many of the answers correspond with the studies about church membership. Welfare activities and diaconal work are relevant reasons to remain a church member.<sup>22</sup>

The perception of the welfare engagement of the churches seemed to be formed by the local situation and by personal experiences. In their statements, the representatives of the local population often refer to their local parish, or to relatives or friends who use church run welfare services. In a city like Reutlingen where the

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. for example Grözinger & Haas 2004; Degen 2003.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Kirchenamt der EKD 2003.

churches are relatively active in the field of welfare and where a big diaconal institution like the BruderhausDiakonie is situated people are used to churches and diaconal institutions as welfare actors. They play a strong role in local society and the local welfare system. It would be interesting to compare this with people in a German city where the churches are less present in the field of welfare.

One possible conclusion of the focus group interviews could be that the churches' contribution is easily overestimated in the German welfare system. Probably like many other people, most of the interviewees suppose that the churches and the diaconal institutions finance all the services they run themselves. This is an attitude the representatives of the social authorities meet as well. Because of this some of them suggest that welfare activities which are delegated to the churches by the public authorities and therefore mostly paid for by them should be labelled more correctly, like: "Run by the church (or a diaconal institution), paid for by public money!" On the one hand the churches in particular, but the diaconal institutions as well, profit by this general assumption since it contributes to a positive picture of the churches (and the diaconal institutions). On the other hand the assumption leads to huge expectations towards the churches which they have no chance to live up to. Having the huge expectations of the local population in mind the churches have much to lose when closing welfare activities. As the churches are forced to give up activities because of a shrinking economy they have increasingly to make decisions about which activity should be closed. From a church insider perspective it might be easier to give up welfare services as they are often not considered to be the core tasks of the churches. But those people who have a more distant relationship to the church might have a positive picture of the churches just because of these welfare activities. In some respect the public perception gives church representatives the feeling that the churches still have importance in society, at least in the field of welfare. If the churches struggle hard to maintain welfare activities one could ask if this decision is based on theological motives or on the positive perception held by the local population.

### Visionary or financial manager?

When comparing the different attitudes concerning the role of the church as a social agent in practical social work expressed in the interviews with the different samples the result was that there were more obvious differences within the different samples than between the different samples. One could not state that the representatives of the church have one role model concerning the church as an social agent while the representatives of the public authorities have another, and the population has a third attitude. There are representatives with a comparably high and a comparably low interest in the church as a social agent in all samples even though altogether those who represent a high interest are dominating. These results become even more varied if they are related to the main motivations named in the interviews.

On the one hand there are those who suffer from the actual social situation and who want to change society to improve the conditions for the poor and the excluded no matter whether they have the resources to do this or not. Their motivation and their aims are visionary. Because of this I chose to call them "visionary" in the model. Representatives of this attitude are found both among the representatives of

the church, the representatives of the public authorities and the population. But not all of the “visionaries” have a high interest in the church as a social agent. Among the representatives of the public authorities at least the attitudes are split. Some of the “visionaries” think that they are in need of every co-operation partner available to achieve their aims and they consider the churches to be important partners. Other “visionaries” are of the opinion that it becomes more difficult to achieve visionary aims in society if too many actors are interfering, particularly if the actors are as traditional, as powerful, as privileged and as conservative as the churches. They think that the municipality is a better platform as it is more neutral. When thinking of co-operation partners they would prefer smaller independent organisations focused on the welfare subject and not on an ideology. Among the church representatives none of the “visionaries” had a low interest in the church as social agent.

On the other hand there are those who focus on the actual conditions of welfare and on realistic concepts which take these conditions into consideration. This group is very aware of the actual economic limitations of the German social state and the church respectively and it tries to develop sustainable concepts of church and welfare work within these limitations. Their motivation is to manage welfare and church work as well as possible within the financial and social limitations. Therefore I chose to call them “financial managers.” The “financial managers” are also represented in all samples. And again, this motivation does not automatically imply a high or a low interest in the church as a social agent.

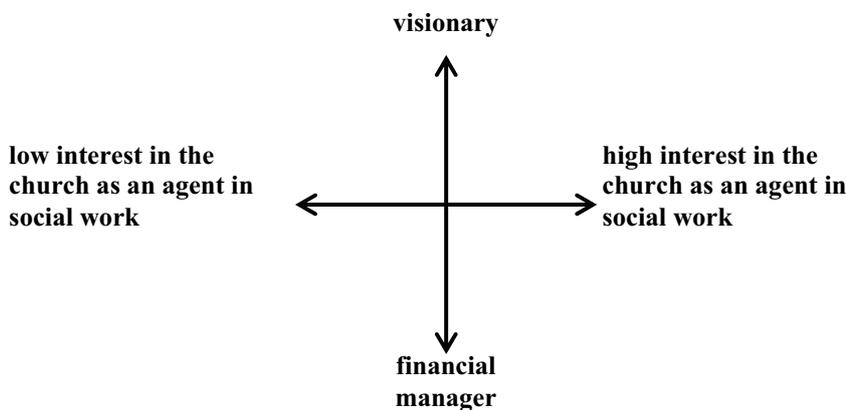


Figure 2. General motivation related to the interest in the church as a welfare agent.

Among the representatives of the public authorities there are those “financial managers” who are interested in every co-operation partner to be able to help as many poor and needy as possible. The churches and the diaconal institutions are interesting partners as they work relatively professional and as they can recruit for example supporters and volunteers easily. On the other hand there are others who think that the municipality has to pay for most of the welfare work anyway. To have many co-operations partners means for them to lose resources and energy as every co-operations partner demands (difficult) negotiations, especially the church parishes with their complicated democratic structure. Among the church representatives the attitudes are also split. Some of the “financial managers” want to focus on few wel-

fare activities to do these activities in a professional and convincing way. Others would like to co-operate in as many welfare projects as possible as this strengthens the society presence of the church. To be noticed as church seems very important in a time of shrinking member numbers and economic resources and the welfare sector seems to be a very suitable and advantageous sector to be connected to as church.

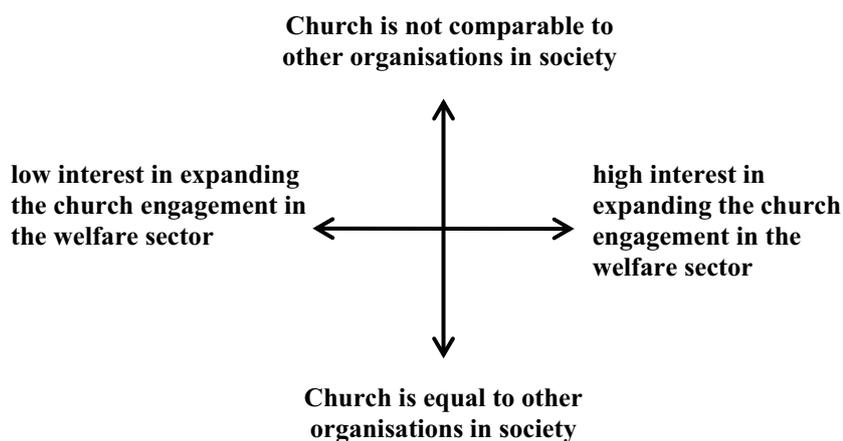
Altogether, quite different motivations can result in a high or low interest in the church as an agent in social work.

### **An incomparable organisation?**

Almost all the church representatives are of the opinion that the church is not comparable to other organisations while within the other samples the attitudes are more spilt among those who consider the churches being equal to other organisations and those who think that the churches aren't comparable to others. Arguments which were named to motivate the last named view are the basic origin, the foundation and the mission of the churches (church representatives), the value-orientation of the churches and the (former) privileged society position of the churches.

To see the church as equal or not to other organisations could result in very different strategies concerning practical social work. For the church representatives the special character of the church implies a concentration on "church tasks" which according to some not mainly lies in the field of welfare or – on the contrary – for others exactly lies in the field of welfare.

Some of the representatives of the public authorities wished an expanded engagement of the churches in the field of welfare because of their special character. Especially their value orientation seems to be of interest in the field of work with young people and children. Others wanted to avoid too much co-operation with the churches as their special character according to them mainly implied their (former) society influence and a conservative attitude. Those who considered the churches to be equal to other organisation were mostly quite neutral or quite practical towards an expansion of church activities in the field of welfare.



*Figure 3. Perception of the church related to the interest in the church as a welfare agent.*

No matter whether the church is considered to be equal to other organisations in society or not, the conditions, laws and rules of welfare work are equal for all organisations. The field of welfare becomes more and more of a market. To work successfully in this area requires a certain adaptation to the existing conditions. This includes an economic management and to be professional and a specialist in the field of welfare work. Even voluntary initiatives like the “Vesperkirche” have to adapt to these conditions, if they want to continue with their project in the longer term. The voluntary workers still do the work in “Vesperkirche” but the initiative is managed by the professionals in the social service centre of the church district. Working in the field of social services today does not only mean adapting to the ruling conditions, but also being influenced by them. This raises the question of how the church changes if it is running professionalised and specialised welfare services with financial management. Can parishes carry out practical social work not only as short-time projects, but in a long-term perspective? What does that mean for the organisation of the parish? Does this welfare engagement influence their way of thinking and reflecting? How does professional social work fit the framework of democratically ruled parishes? Is it more reasonable to delegate established welfare projects to professionals like the diaconal institutions from a parish perspective? The position of the churches within the welfare system in Reutlingen seems to be quite stable. The question is if the churches and the parishes in particular, will want to continue their welfare engagement if they realise that the welfare system, and the changed condition of the welfare system in particular, influences their own way of thinking and acting.

## Theological analysis

By way of introduction, the term “church” might be more intriguing in the German case study than in the other case studies as it comprises not only parishes, church districts and the level of the regional and the national church, but also independent diaconal institutions. How to relate the different levels and organisational forms of Protestant welfare activities to the term “church” and to an ecclesiological concept is a much discussed question within the German context.<sup>23</sup> Several of the interviewees point to this problem which may be characteristic of the German situation.

## The need of theological motivations in a changing welfare society

When analysing the documents, presentations, parish letters and interviews the first impression is: There does not seem to be a substantial need to motivate church involvement in the field of welfare. Everyone considers this involvement to be natural except those who want to reduce any form of influence by the churches. This natural position of the churches and the diaconal institutions is reflected both by the documents and by the interviewees’ answers. This does not mean that there are no local

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Schäfer & Strohm 1987, Schibilsky & Zitt 2004, Evangelische Landeskirche in Württemberg 1997, Evangelische Landeskirche in Württemberg 2005b.

documents which contain theological motives and motivations. But the motivations are often quite general. They state that the social engagement belongs to the essence of being church and of being Christian. They emphasise the Christian responsibility for the neighbour in need and they refer to Christian anthropology: There are different aspects of Christian anthropology which the documents and the interviewees point out. The Christian motivation of the unimpeachable dignity of every person, which is based on the biblical teaching that every woman and every man is created by God. Because of this the social engagement of the church addresses every human being in need regardless of her or his religion. The Christian anthropology also implies certain insights into the character of human existence. On the one hand human life is always vulnerable. Every human being risks getting into a situation of need at some time. On the other hand Christian anthropology leads to a more holistic approach to human life which includes both the physical, the mental, the spiritual, the social and the cultural dimension. Social work run by the churches and diaconal institutions aims to take all these dimensions into account, especially the spiritual dimension.

Except the reference to the essence of the church this is typical of all the motivations that they are intelligible to many people. A person need not automatically be a Christian to share these arguments. This open way of motivating the church involvement in social work characterises not only the presentations and the mission statements, but also the answers of the interviewees. There are only few interviewees both in the church sample and in the other samples who motivate church engagement in the field of welfare (or her or his expectations) explicitly in a theological way. One explanation for this could be that church and welfare activities are so closely related to each other that there is no need for motivating them theologically. There are at least two circumstances to back up this presumption: the number and variety of the welfare activities carried out by the churches and the diaconal institutions and the long tradition which the churches and diaconal institutions have in this field of work. It is simply a matter of fact that the churches run welfare services and it has been like that for long time. All the interviewees who have grown up in the area of Reutlingen and who have lived there since then (which is true for the majority of the interviewees) have not experienced any other themselves. Because of this it might be hard for them to imagine a church without welfare engagement, or welfare without church involvement.

At first sight it is astonishing that even the representatives of the church and the diaconal institutions do not feel a need to present more elaborated theological motivations in the interviews. Compared to the references to the financial situation and to the expectation of the population theological explanations play a minor role. Of course, this could also be traced to the long tradition and the number of welfare activities of the church, which church representatives are used to as well. A closer look at the interviews shows that almost all church representatives actually refer to theological motivations like the mission of the church, the essence of the church, or the Christian ideal of human being. But these references are often no longer than a subordinate sentence such as “according to the Christian ideal of men ...” or “it is our mission as church to do ...” One might interpret this as showing that it is so well-known within the church what the mission of the church in the area of welfare is about that no further explanations are needed. This presumption could be sup-

ported by the fact that there already exists a lot of material about theological motivations for social work carried out by the church, in addition to the presentations and documents on the local level. Both on the common level of all Protestant churches in Germany (EKD) and on the centralised level of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Württemberg committees and working groups have reflected on this question.<sup>24</sup> The welfare activities of the churches are also a subject within the professional training of priests and in religion and confirmation classes. Because of this a lot of teaching material has been produced.<sup>25</sup> The most relevant and well-known documents within the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Württemberg are probably the church law on diaconia and the mission statement of the Diakonisches Werk Württemberg, the umbrella organisation of all diaconal institutions and initiatives within the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Württemberg.<sup>26</sup> One could expect the interviewees to name these documents and to refer to more elaborated theological motivations, but this only happens in a few cases. Does that mean that the welfare activities of the churches and the diaconal institutions are such a practical and natural activity that the representatives on the local level do not feel a need to motivate them theologically?

A closer reading of the interviews of the church representatives contradicts this interpretation. The wish that the church and the diaconal institution should profile their social work in a typical Christian (or diaconal) manner is repeatedly expressed by them. To profile social work in a Christian or a diaconal manner requires theological motivations, as you need guidelines to form an activity in a certain way. One could interpret this as saying that the discussion about the special profile of social work carried out by the church and the diaconal institutions which is both vivid within the church,<sup>27</sup> and reflected by the answers of the interviewees, illustrates the need for more theological motivation. But it is doubtful whether this task can be fulfilled by experts on a more centralised level since the existing “motivation documents” are not mentioned very often by the interviewees.

To motivate the need to profile church social work in a special Christian way the interviewees often refer to the growing competition in the field of welfare. They think that a clear Christian profile would strengthen the position of the social services of the church and the diaconal institutions in the social market. Ironically, theological motivations seem to be necessitated by the competition in a market situation.

## Church social work and the concept of folk church

Another surprising result of the analysis of the interviews is that there do not seem to be any contradictory views about ecclesiology. To define the tasks of social work run by the churches and by the diaconal institutions always implicitly implies a certain ecclesiology. Should these activities address all the needy in the city regard-

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. for example *Evangelische Kirchen in Deutschland* 1998, *Diakonisches Werk Württemberg* 2002, *Diakonisches Werk Württemberg* 2003 or Haas 2004.

<sup>25</sup> *Evangelische Landeskirche in Württemberg* 1995b, *Diakonisches Werk Württemberg* 1999.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. for example Bejick & Thierfelder & Zeilfelder-Löffler 1998, Thierfelder & Büttner & Wild 1998.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. for example Haas 2004, Schibilsky & Zitt 2004, Degen 2003.

less of what religion they have, or should they focus mainly on help for church members? The first named view can be related to a folk church concept while the last named view is grounded in a congregational concept. The message of both the documents and the interviews is clear. The welfare activities of the church in Reutlingen have an open approach. They address everyone in need. That the documents express this view is not astonishing. The social services run by the church and diaconal institutions are mainly financed by public resources. It is not possible to get public funding if the social services are not open for everyone. Because of this it would be very risky with regard to the funding of the services to express other opinions in presentations and public relation documents. That all interviewees seem to share this ecclesiology is more surprising. The Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Württemberg is a stronghold of a conservative pietistic theology. In the last church elections the pietistic group with a strong congregational orientation has got the most votes. Many parishes are formed by a pietistic theology. This is also true for the Reutlingen region. For conservative pietism it is not self-evident that diaconal work should address everyone. Some of its representatives would like to limit the welfare services of the church to people who are related to the church, or are willing to establish a relation to it. In the 1980s there were intense discussions about these different approaches to church social work within in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Württemberg. The debate resulted in a study on the biblical motivation of diaconal work.<sup>28</sup> Because of this it is unexpected that one could hardly find conflicting approaches in the interviews. Everyone interviewed seems to share a folk church concept of church social work. Three explanations are close to hand. Firstly, no one dares to express another opinion, otherwise the public funding would be in danger. Secondly, to work in a responsible position in connection to church run social services requires an open folk church approach. People with a different theological orientation would not apply for such a job. Thirdly, working in this area can change the theological position towards an open approach. From this first analysis the question emerges as to whether the practical welfare engagement of the church leads to different concepts of the church which might influence ecclesiological reflections on a more theoretical level.

### Tradition and openness

Although the conflict between a more folk church and a more pietistic concept of church social work is difficult to find in the interviews, there are other contradictions in the interviews. Both the representatives of the church, the public authorities and the populations think that the church is needed as an open and welcoming meeting place in society. Some hope that church buildings can become places of encounter for people with different backgrounds in the city districts, in districts with social problems in particular. At the same time, some interviewees express the wish that the churches should stick to their traditions, because traditions can create a feeling of home in an increasingly globalised world. In addition, many want the church to be a critical voice in society, representing Christian values in an increasingly pluralistic and – as some put it – value neutral society. But to be both open-minded and wel-

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<sup>28</sup> Schäfer & Strohm 1987.

coming, traditional and clear and critical at the same time is quite a complex task. It would be interesting to study whether there are theological concepts which manage to unite all these different perspectives.

Altogether, it is important to stress that the declining resources and the pressed economy, on the one hand and the growing needs and expectations, on the other hand are discussed much more vividly by all interviewees. This dilemma occupies the interviewees' minds much more than theological motivations, even the minds of the church representatives. This might be due to the focus of the interview questions. But it might also partly be due to the fact that working in the midst of society (which actually all church representatives do as they were chosen because of their involvement in church social work) changes the way of reflecting about church work as well. Theological motivations no longer automatically come first. This could also explain why the theological motivations in most of the presentations of church social work have a quite general character functioning as publicity not only within the church, but in society in general. As the interviewees (at least the representatives for the church and for the public authorities) deal with economical questions a lot it becomes possibly more natural for them to think of financial arguments and motivations. Since practical social work is dominated more and more by financial questions the reflections about this field of work might be increasingly influenced by this way of thinking, no matter what kind of training the reflecting person has.

## Gender analysis

With regard to the gender perspective two events might have influenced the answers of the interviewees. Many of the interviews were conducted during the period when the death of the former Pope and the election of new the Pope were current in the media. As two of the possible candidates came from Germany there was an intense public discussion about the position of women within the Roman-Catholic church and the candidates' position on this question. This means that conservative role models of women within the church were discussed in public during the time of the interviews. At the same time, a debate on family politics was going on. The former federal government introduced a programme which aims to fund the establishment of day-care-projects in schools. This led to a huge discussion about the situation of families in Germany. That at least several of the interviewees refer to these events indicates that there is a connection.

## Gender or family affairs?

In comparison, the disadvantaged situation of families was mentioned much more often autonomously than gender questions. It would be too easy to explain this tendency only with reference to the current political discussion. Maybe it is more natural and less controversial to talk about family than to talk about gender from a German point of view. International comparisons of welfare systems point to the fact that traditional role models are still vivid in Germany as the German social state is

still based on the model of the male bread-winner.<sup>29</sup> The social teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and the principle of subsidiarity, in particular, still function as guidelines for the German welfare system. According to them welfare provision is constructed on the basis of the family, and not on the basis of the individual. Because of this talking about the problems of families could be the same thing as raising gender questions. This is what some of the interviewees actually do. In the context of the family discussion they name several questions which are otherwise often discussed in a gender perspective: poverty of families and of single mothers in particular, the difficulty for women in combining family and work, lacking day-care institutions for children of all ages, the difficulty for women in returning to work after their family leave, the difficulty of women in going to work while caring for elderly relatives, the situation for East European women who come to Germany to do care work in German families for low wages, the difficult situation for elderly women without relatives who help them, violence against women, ... But talking about the family instead of talking about gender could be a way of sticking to traditional ideologies and neglecting the gender perspective as well.

### Gender issues as a matter of conscience

Altogether, gender questions proved to be an emotional subject. Posing gender-related questions often led to emotional reactions on the part of the interviewees, at least compared to the reactions to other questions. Most of the women and the younger interviewees were very eager to discuss the subject intensely. This is also true for some of the middle-aged and elderly men. But some of the last named group seemed to be bored and slightly irritated by the questions. A third group clearly tried to say the right thing by answering in noticeably politically correct terms.

Regarding the gender perspective the self-perception of the church clearly differs from an outside perspective. The church representatives think that the Protestant church has worked a lot with questions of gender and equality. Some refer to the theological discussions about gender justice which were most vivid during the 1970s and 1980s and continue until today.<sup>30</sup> They mention institutions which were established as a result of these debates like offices for women's affairs. Others refer to the number of events and groups for women and men within parish work, like men's groups, women's breakfasts or sermons by women about women in the bible. In addition, some interviewees point to the fact that the gender situation is less problematic within the Protestant church, when compared with the position of women within the Roman-Catholic church. Because of this only a few of the male church representatives and mainly the younger ones among them think that gender injustice is still a major problem within church work. It is striking that the representatives of the public authorities and the population perceive the gender situation within the church very differently. Several of them state that the church is behind society as a whole in the case of gender issues. Some think in the first place of the traditional family model which they believe the church represents. They think for example that the church is not interested in innovative day-care approaches within its kindergarten work. Others

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. for example Poole 2001.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. for example Bartsch 1997.

think that the church in general has a very conservative idea of women. Some answers show that some of the interviewees do not differentiate between the Protestant and the Roman-Catholic tradition in this respect at all. Firstly, there are three possible explanations for the differing perceptions: Though there has been a lot of work about gender issues, the Protestant church is still behind society in this area. The progress that the church representative's state is limited from the perspective of society in general. Secondly, the evaluation of the representatives of the public authorities and of the local population is mostly based on the presentation of the churches in the media. As conservative role models within the church have been discussed in the media during the interview period their answers could be influenced by this reporting. The third explanation is closely related to the second one, but focuses more on the church. The view of representatives of the public authorities and the local population could also be caused by the fact that the Protestant church did not succeed in informing the public about its intense work with gender questions.

Even the society as a whole is evaluated critically with regard to gender questions. The German immigrants from the former Soviet in particular think that German society and working life is formed by very traditional role models. Though the church representatives think that the church has dealt a lot with gender question, no interviewee believes that all gender questions are answered in German society. Many problems related to the gender perspective are considered to be unsolved. Maybe this makes gender questions such a sensible and emotional subject. It is noticeable that some of the interviewees try to point to reasons beyond their own responsibility to explain existing gender injustice. Several church representatives even state, for example, that it is difficult for the church to change the traditional role models since these models are still represented so strongly in the surrounding society as a whole. Obviously there is no agreement among the interviewees as to whether the church cannot change the traditional role models because they are maintained by the society, or whether society cannot change these models because the church sustains them.

## Cemented role models?

The low number of female interviewees within the church sample shows that it was difficult to find female professionals and voluntary workers who have positions of responsibility within church social work. On the level of practical social work the proportion is the other way around. The overwhelming majority of all professional and voluntary social and care workers within the church and the diaconal institutions are women. Though it was easier to find female managers and social politicians within the public sector the proportion is, in principal, the same. The field work is done by women while men hold all the top management positions.

Having this reality in mind it might be easier to understand another result of the analysis. The majority of the interviewees are quite pessimistic with regard to gender justice. No matter whether they are older or younger, many interviewees think that the traditional role models are sustainable in Reutlingen and in German society. They think that neither the church, nor the public authorities are capable of overcoming these models. Interestingly, market economy is considered to be the most probable cause of change. If the traditional role models no longer fit the needs of market economy, they will change.

## Main findings and concluding reflections

In some respect, the case of Reutlingen proved to be what we were looking for. It is an example of the (West) German social system which is characterised by strong participation by independent welfare organisations, like the churches and the diaconal institutions. The documents, the interviews and the other material show that the churches and the diaconal institutions have been and still are important welfare agents. It is almost impossible for both the representatives of the public authorities, the church and the local population to imagine a scenario of local welfare provision without church involvement. Taking a look at the field of welfare, the position of the churches within German society seems to be very stable. At the same time most of the interviewees in all samples emphasise that the importance of the churches for society in general and for the individual person is decreasing. This makes welfare activities a high priority area for the churches in which church representatives can still experience the high esteem of the society.

Typical of the West German social system and the involvement of the churches and diaconal institutions are the different levels and organisational forms of the different (church-related) welfare agents. On the one hand this complex structure makes it difficult for the population to value the contribution of the different welfare agents to the system. On the other hand it is difficult to split the attention fairly amongst all levels of welfare involvement of the churches and diaconal institutions when participating in international comparisons. It is easier to compare the welfare activities run by the parishes, but in numbers the practical social work carried out by the diaconal institutions is much more important.

The material and the interviews in particular also illustrate that there are changes of principle going on within the German welfare system. The economic crisis of German society in general and the German welfare system and the churches in particular, is by far the most important subject from the interviewees' point of view. All of them comment on this issue in detail. They relate most changes within the welfare system to the shrinking resources. This is true both for those who think about practical solutions to solve the dilemma of growing social needs and decreasing welfare resources and for those who protest in principle against the dominance of financial motivations on the field of welfare. Even theological motivations of church social work and reflections about gender issues are related to the needs of the market.

In this situation, the churches face high, but diffuse expectations. In general, all interviewees want the churches to be more active in the field of welfare: According to them they should start more welfare programmes, they should open their church buildings to become social meeting places in the city districts and they should be a prophetic voice on behalf of the needy. But these expectations are quite theoretical and unrealistic as many interviewees point at the same time to the fact that the churches have financial problems and attract far fewer people than before. The expectations seem to be an expression for the feeling that at least one institution should fill the gap when public welfare resources and (as a consequence) public welfare engagement are decreasing. One could interpret this in terms of saying that these expectations at least prove that people still trust in the churches, as interviewees from all samples (and not only church representatives) think the church should fill the welfare gap. But the expectations put the churches into a difficult situation.

Though people have high and maybe flattering expectations of them, the importance of the churches in society is still shrinking. This means that the churches have to handle exaggerated expectations in a situation when shrinking resources force them to cut down their activities.

Furthermore, the interviews show that the churches are expected, by the representatives of the local population in particular, to carry out practical social work. For them it is not enough that the churches are a prophetic voice on behalf of the needy by making public statements, or publishing discussion papers. In other words: carrying out practical social work is a question of credibility for the churches in Germany.

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# The Catholic Church in France as an Agent of Welfare— the case of Evreux

CORINNE VALASIK

The religious situation in France can only be understood by taking into account the law of December 9, 1905 on religious denominations. This legislation, passed during a moment of conflict between the State and the Roman Catholic Church, was not a contract based on collaboration, but a unilateral action taken by the government with the objective of limiting the religious power of the Church over schools and the educational system. The opposition to the law by the Vatican, published in the *Vehementer* encyclical document of 1906, did not stop the application of the law.

The law of 1905 completes the process of “laicisation” that had originally started during the French Revolution. However, the notion of *laïcité* is not defined as such in the legal text, as only its principles are stipulated: “The Republic does not recognise, finance or subsidise any faith.” (Article 2); it must protect the religious freedom of each individual. Churches are no longer under the responsibility of the State; therefore the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) no longer has the right to intervene in politics. *Laïcité* applies to all public institutions. Referring to the law of 1905, the 5th Constitution of 1946 declares that France is a “République laïque” (laic Republic).

The actual application of the law of 1905 has been more flexible than the general principles that it stipulates: thus, all localities and the State lend free of charge all places of worship built before 1906 to the various Christian denominations and Churches. All members of the clergy are covered by the national health system and their pension fund is largely financed by contributions made by all citizens. Private religious schools can benefit from state financing if they meet certain conditions.

Following the controversy over young Muslim girls wearing their headscarf or hidjab in secondary schools and lycées, the definition of *laïcité* has recently been at the core of a divisive crisis. This debate led to the law of March 15, 2004 prohibiting all pupils and adults from wearing ostentatious religious symbols or clothing in all state schools.<sup>1</sup> This interpretation of *laïcité* aims to strengthen integration and grant equality to all citizens. In this context, following an initiative of the Interior Ministry, the French Muslim Council was set up in 2003, so that the Muslim community can have its own representatives and delegates to engage in dialogue with the State.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2004, there were 639 violations of the law of 2004, leading to 47 expulsions. By Autumn 2005 the number of violations dropped to only 12 cases.

## Methods and materials

During the first phase of the project and, in order to gain a general overview of the local situation, I examined written documents (statistics, activity reports, etc.), published by various institutions referred to in this research.<sup>2</sup> As far as the Roman Catholic Church is concerned, these documents are national, diocesan and local. State publications are mainly issued by the Regional Council and County, the Health and Social Action Ministry, the DDAS,<sup>3</sup> the DRASS<sup>4</sup> and the municipality of Evreux. I also collected information on local voluntary associations. Newspaper articles from *Paris-Normandie* (Evreux edition), *La Dépêche d'Evreux*, *le Courrier de l'Eure*, *Eure-Info* were also extremely important for researching the general situation before conducting the survey. I spent time becoming more familiar with the town during informal conversations with shop-owners and journalists during various local town gatherings. This helped deepen my understanding of the local context, situation and circumstances.

This first preparatory phase allowed me to carry out 29 interviews, which were all recorded and transcribed. The questions I asked the interviewees were drawn from the common questionnaire used in all the case studies of the WREP project, but were adapted to French situation.

## The Roman Catholic Church

I met and interviewed 9 people, some of which held positions of responsibility (6 men, 3 women) and 6 lay people with no responsibilities (4 women, 2 men). I first contacted those in charge of pastoral policies and activities and volunteer workers involved in the actual provision of social care, in order to obtain a more realistic and complete view of these sectors. I expanded my fieldwork to include people in charge of the diocese, who have a more global view of the situation and who are also aware of the problems in the daily life of Evreux, given their present or past functions. I selected volunteers according to the level of work they carry out in the association or pastoral life. I opted for people who were involved in this type of work for at least one year, so they can provide a more realistic view of their work.

Interviews with Church representatives were carried out in the main office of the Bishop of Evreux. This allowed me to meet again with people I had already interviewed in order to ask some additional questions (their answers were not recorded this time), particularly on the subject of Monsignor Gaillot, the former bishop of Evreux. Having the opportunity to meet certain individuals for a second time, even in an informal setting, such as during lunch, allowed me to win their trust and obtain more information.

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of *welfare* corresponds to the French notion of *Etat-Providence*.

<sup>3</sup> County direction of health and social affairs.

<sup>4</sup> Regional direction of health and social affairs (*Direction régionale des affaires sanitaires et sociales*).

## The municipality

I carried out a total of 8 interviews with elected members of the Town council of Evreux (5 men, 3 women). I encountered serious difficulties in meeting elected representatives. Their office staff filter calls and were immediately reticent and suspicious of the project. Since the Mayor of Evreux, Jean-Louis Debré, is a well known political figure, all enquiries concerning his activities are discouraged. After visiting the WREP project web site and realising that it concerned religion, the staff refused to offer me any assistance with the study. I sent a personal letter to each elected representative but they all refused to meet with me, because of the religious aspect of the study. This is very revealing of the situation of laicism in France! Municipal employees also refused to meet with me, agreeing to being interviewed only if previously authorised to do so by their superiors.

I, therefore, had to use more indirect means to conduct the interviews. Since many municipal deputies also work with Jean-Louis Debré (Mayor of Evreux and president of the National Assembly) in the Presidency of the National Assembly, I contacted their assistants and was able to obtain an appointment within three weeks. Assuming that the municipal councillors in the opposition party would be more favourable on this type of problem, I also interviewed 3 elected members of the opposition party. Finally, I was able to activate existing networks of contacts in Evreux, by indicating my difficulties to those I interviewed. They felt privileged in being able to help me and introduced me to their contacts (a situation that sociologically helps me to gain an inside view of the relationships between these people).

All interviews took place outside the Town Hall premises, for example in the offices of each political party.

## Voluntary and Third sector

I met 6 people in charge of voluntary associations: 3 Roman Catholics (2 men, 1 women), and 3 lay people (2 women, 1 men).<sup>5</sup> I chose to meet the directors of each association, who would be more likely to provide me with a clear view of the situation in Evreux. It was quite difficult to define and select which were the most interesting associations to contact. As the municipal guide of associations does not list all the organisations, I contacted all associations likely to be involved in the social sector that were listed in the telephone directory in order to obtain details about their activities. The interviews took place on the main office of each association, where and I also participated in some social activities: meals and festivities.

## Focus Groups

I organised 2 focus groups with members of the local population. One focus group included students and the other women. The first problem was finding a location to conduct the focus groups. Using a parish room had religious connotations and the municipality refused any co-operation. The only solution left was meeting in a pub-

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<sup>5</sup> The reasons that prompted me to study the associative sector are described in part 5.

lic place, such as a café. But conducting a focus group in these conditions was going to be problematic.

I, therefore, decided to organise these focus groups in already existing locations, such as retirement homes or women's' associations. The advantage was that the people already knew each other and there was familiarity between them. The disadvantage was the risk of having focus group participants behave according to pre-established patterns: for example, that of 'leader', or of 'complainer' ... My objective was, therefore, to try to manage this situation so that no one dominated the discussion by being careful, repeating as often as necessary that each person's opinion was valuable and addressing each participant individually if one person appeared to want to speak without leaving any time to others.

## The Town of Evreux

### The effects of the laws on de-centralisation on local social activity

Since the 80s, the French State has implemented a policy of decentralisation of action areas (*compétences*)<sup>6</sup> in order to make local and national democracy more dynamic. The term *collectivités territoriales de la République* (Territorial Collectives of the Republic) has been re-defined and since 2003 it applies to 36,778 localities, 96 departments,<sup>7</sup> 22 regions and the overseas territories that have a specific status. They have the same governing structure as a legislating assembly elected by public vote (for example, the Town Council) and executive powers.

There are two main components to french decentralisation policy. The first is a transfer of action areas from the State to local authorities that are independent from central government. Since the laws of March 28th, 2003 and August 13th, 2004, territorial collectives are financially independent and have the right to experiment with new solutions. Cooperation and collaboration initiatives are progressively being implemented at various local levels.

The second component has the objective to allow citizens to play a more active role in various territorial collectives (for example, elected minorities have rights within the Town council).

### The State and social activity

The State manages local social activities at two levels: at a regional level through the *Direction régionale des affaires sanitaires et sociales* (DRASS – Regional direction of health and social affairs) and at a departmental level through the *Direction départementale des affaires sanitaires et sociales* (DDASS – Departmental Direction of health and social affairs). There are 22 DRASS and 102 DDASS in France. These are two decentralised State bodies placed under the responsibility of the prefect. Their actions are focused on 7 areas:

<sup>6</sup> A *compétence* is an area of aptitude defined by law, covering an ensemble of social action areas. These are delegated to the collective that exercises its authority and is in charge of implementation.

<sup>7</sup> A *département* is a sub-division of France administered by a prefect.

- *Public health*: equality of access to healthcare (hospital policy), and healthcare safety and control of sensible usage of resources.
- *Social cohesion: fighting exclusion*
  - The DRASS directs and coordinates actions to fight exclusion
  - The DDASS defines and implements local policy on professional and social insertion and the fight against exclusion within a framework of partnerships and cooperation with multiple ministries. For example, the DDASS manages the housing solidarity funds and the funds for assistance to young people, social protection for foreigners and universal medical protection (CMU), etc.
- *Assistance to the elderly*:
  - The DRASS collects statistics on needs, sets up forecasts and allocates resources
  - The DDASS allocates financial means and human resources, defines the departmental planning of needs and surveys their implementation
- *Policy towards handicapped people*: tasks are similar to those for the elderly
- *Social sector professionals*: Only the DRASS is responsible for following up on social sector professionals, namely overall control and compliance of training centres and recruitment of social workers.
- *Social protection*: the DRASS assesses locally the results of social security agencies and audits their accounting and the conditions for granting benefits.

### Regional action areas

There are three main regional action areas (*compétences*):

- *Land management and planning*
- *Training*
- *Economic activity*

### Departmental action areas

Departments are responsible for the following action areas (*compétences*):

- *Urbanisation, infrastructure and equipment*
- *Culture and Education*
- *Economic activities*: direct or indirect subsidies to companies
- ***Welfare activities***: this is the domain that has seen the strongest decentralisation. Each department must define its welfare policy according to the main policy orientations set by the State. The department is in charge of granting benefits (the legal conditions allowing access to these services are defined by the State), except for family allowances that remain under state responsibility. The department manages 5 types of welfare activities:
  - Child welfare
  - Aid to handicapped people
  - *Revenu Minimum d'Insertion* (RMI) – Minimum Insertion Income (minimum income for unemployed people).
  - Aid to the elderly
  - Medical care

**43 % of the Eure department's budget is allocated to welfare, a figure corresponding to the national average.**

The National Employment Agency (*L'Agence nationale pour l'emploi* – ANPE) is a national agency providing assistance in job search; it operates at a departmental level and is available locally. Its mode of functioning is defined by the State.

### **Action areas by French localities**

There are two main action areas (*compétences*): traditional and those developed since the decentralisation process.

Traditional action areas include:

- *Registrar functions*
- *Electoral functions*
- *Maintenance of roads in a locality*
- *Public order.*

Decentralised action areas include:

- *Urbanism*: the Mayor has proposed projects for urban development and equipment according to the national urbanisation policy. The Mayor also grants planning permission in the name of the locality and no longer in the name of the State.
- *Schools*: the locality is responsible for primary state schools (construction, maintenance, etc).
- *Economic actions*: since 2002, localities can participate in economic activity by granting subsidies directly to companies and indirectly (through loan warranties). This contribution system has become more flexible and widespread following the law of 2004.
- *Housing*: a six-year plan must be set up by neighbouring localities in order to respond to the need for housing, refurbishment and social mixing.
- *Health*: the action areas of the municipality have been expanded. It can now offer vaccination and awareness campaigns according to an agreement with the State.
- *Culture*: the locality manages libraries, museums, music conservatories and some historical monuments.
- *Welfare*: it has been centralised under the authority of CCAS (*Conseil Communal d'Action Sociale* – Communal Council for Social Action) since 1986. Although legally independent it is financed by from the Town Hall. The council includes a board of administration with elected representatives appointed by the Mayor and representatives of associations. It is in charge of analysing welfare problems, managing childcare institutions, kindergartens and retirement homes, as well as, responding to requests for social assistance.

**A locality's finances** originate from 2 fundamental types of resources: local taxes and State financing. Since 1991 the budgets of all localities have suffered from an economic crisis, mainly due to a drop in indirect taxation related to economic activity. There has been an increase of loans and taxes paid directly by citizens. Since 1999 there has also been a strong increase of state funds to localities, thus easing taxation pressures. This funding system has a number of inherent risks, including limiting the autonomy of each locality. All localities must apply the principle of solidarity, according to which the wealthier must help the needy.

### **The greater Evreux area**

The law of July 12<sup>th</sup>, 1999 on the strengthening and simplification of cooperation between localities defined the action areas of the “*communauté d’agglomération*” (CA – agglomeration community). This group consists of a number of localities – one being selected as the central community – and represents a population of at least 50,000 inhabitants. Four mandatory action areas (*compétences*) have been defined:

- Economic development
- Equipping of communal areas
- Social balance in housing
- Town policy

Three other optional action areas must be selected. When the CA is set up, localities can transfer their know-how of these competence areas.

### **Of the impact of decentralisation on welfare**

The laws on decentralisation have enabled welfare to become more effective and closer to meeting social needs. However, there is still overlapping of social services between the State, the department and the locality. Thus, the locality continues to manage temporary housing centres, which is also a state action area. Thus, setting up partnerships is a complex process.

### **The present challenges facing the town of Evreux**

Evreux is the county town of the department of Eure. It is a pleasant town of 54,076 inhabitants<sup>8</sup> located in Upper Normandy, 100 kilometres north west of Paris. The town offers a pleasant quality of life while remaining close to the key decision making centres of Paris. It is an enjoyable town, with green spaces, including 550 hectares of woods, 70 hectares of leisure areas (parks, golf links and a race course). The river *Iton* flows through the town and the local economy has developed along its banks. The Cathedral of Notre-Dame dating from 1076 and dedicated to the Virgin Mary is located in the town centre. The town is geographically split into 3 areas: the centre is located in a valley between 2 plateaux. To the north lies the residential area of Saint-Michel and to the south is the Madeleine-Nétreville quarter. Housing in Evreux consists of 54 percent, council housing,<sup>9</sup> mainly situated in the Madeleine and Nétreville neighbourhoods, where most of the immigrant populations live.<sup>10</sup> Most of the housing is old and in poor condition and is due for refurbishment, a project that has resulted in a severe lack of available homes. Most social and welfare problems in Evreux are concentrated in these areas.

Although it is not the size of a university town, Evreux attracts 1,113 students, 636 at the Institute of Technology and 477 at the Science and Law annex of the University of Rouen. Most students come from the Eure department and up to 20 to

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<sup>8</sup> There are 80,000 inhabitants in the larger Evreux metropolitan area.

<sup>9</sup> This percentage is over the national average. In fact, according to the law of Dec. 2000 on Solidarity and Urban Renewal each agglomeration has to include in its own area 20 percent of low income housing. However, the majority of French communes prefer to pay penalties rather than develop low income housing.

<sup>10</sup> Buses taking citizens to the town centre are infrequent and stop running in the early evening.

30 percent come from low-income families who, if they were not able to pursue their studies in Evreux, would not be able to afford to move to another town and continue their education after the baccalaureate. There are 5 grammar primary or secondary state schools (5,582 pupils) and 2 private schools (998 pupils).<sup>11</sup>

### **Political situation**

It is important to fully describe the political situation of the town of Evreux as it relates to national French politics. The new Mayor of Evreux is Jean-Louis Debré,<sup>12</sup> a political figure of national importance. He is a member of the conservative UMP party (former RPR), as the President of the French Republic. Close to the current President of the Republic, Jacques Chirac, he was Interior Minister from 1995 to 1997. He had been the leader of RPR deputies for 5 years, when he was elected President of the National Assembly in 2002. Thus, he is the third most important political figure in France. His objective is to modernise and enhance the work of the members of parliament: the Assembly must fulfil the demands of the French people through legislative texts, in order to respect what people say, which he believes is the source of democratic legitimacy. He strongly supported the Law of March 2004 prohibiting ostentatious religious symbols in state schools.

Faithful to Jacques Chirac, he keeps his distance from the policies of the last 3 governments. He is opposed to the policy of decentralisation that the present government wants to implement, fearing the appearance of “a new feudal system”.

Although already a politician at a national level, this is his first municipal post but he has been a deputy for the Eure since 1986. In the municipal elections of 2001 he beat Roland Plaisance, the former communist mayor of Evreux since 1977. His electoral campaign was based on 3 themes, those of his political party: the fight against debt reduction in Evreux, decrease of local taxes and fight against insecurity (delinquency and violence). He claims he wants to change the look of Evreux. His network of contacts can help him in this project. Thus, he has obtained an assurance from the Housing Minister to increase state financing for the re-structuring of a district in Evreux. As Mayor, elected with an absolute majority, he is the first magistrate in the municipality and the head of the municipal workforce. He manages the budget and implements the decisions of the town council<sup>13</sup> over which he presides.

### *Relationships with other territorial collectives*

Evreux is the town located at the centre of the *Communauté d'agglomération* (Evreux community agglomeration), thus, named the *Communauté d'Agglomération d'Evreux* (CAE). It covers 37 localities, thus approximately 80,000 inhabitants. The community office is composed of 76 community councillors. The Executive Board has Jean-Louis Debré as president and 10 vice-presidents. Each heads one of 7 commissions, and a specific action area (*compétence*), as well as, the 4 sectors mentioned above that the CAE has chosen to act in:

- Water resources management

<sup>11</sup> State owned education: 19 nursery, 22 primary, 7 junior high schools (9440 pupils). Private education: 4 nursery, 4 primary and 2 junior high schools (2153 pupils).

<sup>12</sup> Born in 1944 in Toulouse.

<sup>13</sup> It includes 13 assistant mayors, 13 delegate town councillors, 7 town councillors and 10 town councillors from the opposition party.

- Protection and improvement of the environment and living conditions
- Creation, equipping and maintenance of roads

The CAE has also added the development of higher education as one of its goals.

Therefore, the town of Evreux has had to transfer a number of its action areas (*compétences*), for example economic affairs, to the community structure.

Since winning the election, Jean-Louis Debré has been in the opposition to the left, which won the regional elections in March 2004. For a long time, the General Council was conservative, mainly rural and in conflict with the town of Evreux, which was managed by a communist mayor. At present, the situation is the exact opposite: for the first time, the heads of the 3 executive bodies in the Upper Normandy Region (the President of the General Council of the Seine-Maritime, the President of the General Council of the Eure and the President of the Regional Council of Eure) have decided to set up a collaborative planning committee in order to improve the efficacy and rapidity of their actions. Priorities of the heads of the 3 executive bodies in the Upper Normandy Region are to fight inequalities and a policy of regional transformation.

**Gender perspective:** On June 28<sup>th</sup> 1999, the French Parliament passed a constitutional reform that grants equal access to electoral mandates and elective functions to both women and men. Thus, France is the first country in the world to pass legislation that permits parity. This reform is a real cultural revolution.<sup>14</sup> These new regulations were applied during the municipal elections in 2001.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the municipality of Evreux actually applies State directives.

### **Economic and social situation**

There are 2,300 companies located in Evreux, with about 32,719 employees. One of the features of Evreux is its very dense industrial area, which has been strongly affected by the present crisis. Up to 28 percent of jobs in the Eure are industrial, the national average being at 21 percent. Evreux has a number of advantages that attracted national and international companies during the '60s. It is close to Paris, and the quality of life is better, salaries are lower and it benefits from a good road infrastructure at this time. Furthermore, subsidies for decentralisation were granted to company owners. For these reasons Jeulin, one of the 3 global leaders in the creation of scientific and pedagogical tools, with a turnover of 41 million €, settled in the area, as did Glaxo Smith Kline, the most important private employer in the town, with 1,850 employees.

There are 4 main business areas that attract smaller companies (PME: small and mid-sized companies):

- *Pharmaceuticals:* Glaxo Smith Kline
- *Electric and electronic equipment:* Deutsch, Schneider and automotive industry sub-contractors
- *Paper and printing industries:* Atlas publications, Mecanic Brochage.
- *Conditioning and packaging activities,* in particular in the perfume industry

<sup>14</sup> For further details, see C. Valasik, 2004.

<sup>15</sup> The number of female municipal councillors has almost doubled in towns over 3,500 inhabitants: from 25 percent in 1995 to 47.5 percent in 2004.

**The most important problems that the municipality of Evreux has to face are partly the responsibility of the municipality and comparable to those experienced by similar size agglomerations:**

**Unemployment:** in 2002, there were 1,500 collective redundancies by companies with more than 10 employees; in 2003, this number reached 1,700. The unemployment rate is increasing each year: 8.3 percent in June 2002, 9.5 percent in 2003. The most frequently cited reason is competition from Asia, in particular China, where production costs are less.

The unemployment rate is 18 percent for women compared to 12 percent for men. Those most affected are women and young people under the age of 25. The number of women in employment grew strongly during the 90s.<sup>16</sup> Their employment is precarious, consisting of part time and short term contract jobs. Their employment is concentrated in 4 main areas: health and social work, education, administration and retailing. Employment rates among women over 59 years (due to early retirement) and young women are falling. In the Upper Normandy region half of paid working women are employees,<sup>17</sup> 83 percent work in the tertiary sector. At the birth of a third child most women stop working outside the home. There are economic and financial reasons for this because low income families receive social benefits and allowances if the mother is unemployed and stays at home to look after the children.

**Employee skills and qualifications to meet company expectations:** The local population has a good “industrial culture” but is not sufficiently qualified for current jobs vacancies. Young people and those who have lost their jobs need further training for re-conversion of their skills in order to meet new needs. This is why higher education has adapted to company needs and now courses are offered that correspond to local socio-environmental needs. The Biogenetic diploma (DUT, bac +2) was created to satisfy the needs of Glaxo. The creation of a degree (B. Sc) in Applied Biology and Biophysics, a Master’s degree in Health Engineering and a professional degree in Transport Law and Logistics follow the same approach. Quite rare in France, these courses now draw students from the Picardy and the Paris region. Despite these efforts, at present there is still almost no local recruitment for specialised jobs and executives.

**Council housing:** The lack of council housing is an obvious problem in Evreux. The future construction of the A28 motorway passing through the Evreux area may cause a rise in the price of housing. With the perspective of this economic development there is an increase in sales of land but the type of housing planned will be quite expensive, therefore not accessible to all.

The Madeleine district has been under renovation for over 20 years, and many problems still exist. Urbanisation was poorly planned, as 19,000 inhabitants, out of a total population of 52,000 in Evreux, are concentrated in this neighbourhood. Up to

<sup>16</sup> In Upper Normandy, the proportion of couples aged between 25 and 59 where both the man and the woman work outside the home has increased from 65 percent to 71 percent. Up to 84 percent of women living alone are professionally active.

<sup>17</sup> INSEE (*Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques* – The National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies), *Enquête sur l’Emploi*, 2004.

15 percent of unemployed people and those on welfare (RMI – Minimum Insertion Income) live in the Madeleine. The district is slowly closing onto itself.

The new municipality is planning to open up the area, to put life back in the shops and commercial areas and to develop public facilities. The proposal is called the Urban Renovation Operation (*Opération de renouvellement urbain /ORU*) and it includes 8 main components:

- Creation of a north-south road into the town centre
- A “green way” from east to west (landscaping)
- New green urban landscaping
- Re-structuring of the Maxime-Marchand school
- Opening up the F “island” (sub-district)
- Construction of sports facilities
- Destruction of 545 dwellings
- Moving the offices of the agglomeration Community to the Madeleine in 2004

At present, the renovation project is on hold. The allocated budget is 14 million € but approximately 45 million will be required. The Mayor, Jean-Louis Debré, has presented this project to the Minister of Urban Affairs, who is reported to be optimistic about the financial aid to be offered by the State.

Furthermore, because of the removal of asbestos and the age deterioration of housing blocks, some council housing has been destroyed, thus creating the problem of re-housing the families and building more housing facilities.

**Insecurity:** newspaper articles report acts of civil disruption and the feeling of insecurity among the citizens of Evreux. Delinquency has decreased between 2002 and 2003 by 5.4 percent and criminal acts in November 2003 were 15 percent lower than in 2002. In line with his party’s policies, Jean-Louis Debré has installed approximately 30 permanent video surveillance cameras in the town. The police force for the whole town has increased (from 9 to 18 policemen per police unit); there are more police patrols and identity checks, especially during the afternoons and the evenings, since the fight against illegal immigration is one of the municipality’s priorities. The CRS (special police forces) are called in more often. A new software program has been installed in the Evreux police station with a database providing information on delinquency statistics, district-by-district and road-by-road. This tool should help the police to be more effective. Obtaining information from local residents is also more frequently used. Conditions of people in custody are improving.

The opposition does not question the figures showing a fall in delinquency but considers that there is too much repression and insufficient prevention and support for victims.

**Evreux financial situation:** In 2000, the debt of Evreux was 100.6 million €, less than the 87.1 million € in 2003. The debt per inhabitant is at 1,780 euros compared to 1,260 € other towns of the same size. According to the opposition, this decrease is not real but the result of “creative accounting”. The town of Evreux has stopped managing the maintenance of public roads and other areas and higher education, which are now under the authority of the Agglomeration Community of Evreux (*Communauté d’Agglomération d’Evreux – CAE*). Therefore, the debt is now attrib-

uted to another organisation. The Town Council maintains a different version and attributes this decrease to a closer scrutiny of all operating expenses. The previous mayor was supposed to set up a system, where those working close to him benefited from certain advantages. The operating expenses at the time were apparently extremely high, telephones and cars were used for private reasons ... In order to absorb part of this debt, the Town Hall has restricted or decreased certain budgets. The opposition has proposed some alternative solutions.

**Insufficient road infrastructure:** there is poor road infrastructure causing many traffic jams, parking shortage, etc. and some companies chose to move their offices to other agglomerations offering better access. Road works to cut down the driving time between Paris and – Evreux should start in 2007. A deviation southwest of the town is being built to improve traffic flow.

**Healthcare for handicapped people:** France is the country with the highest number of sales of pharmaceutical products, a cause of health problems due to un-desirable side effects leading to hospitalisation or death. Evreux has been selected as one of the 15 pilot towns for health and well being, encouraging a balanced diet and sport. Various health study proposals are, therefore, being prepared in order to improve this situation, including local awareness campaigns among elderly people. One of the main problems is poor healthcare coverage during weekends. The provision of healthcare in rural areas is a real problem and has become one of the region's priorities.

**Education:** One particular difficulty is the long distance between home and school for some pupils. For some children, it takes more than 3 hours a day to get to and from school, which in addition to making them tired, it also makes it impossible for them to participate in any after-school activities. Therefore, the core question is that of equal opportunities. The State has the last word in this matter as, even if the region builds the facilities, it is the State that recruits the personnel. The current policy is more focused towards job reduction than job creation. Furthermore, if a senior secondary high school is not "overcrowded", then the local authorities see no need to open another one.

### **Redefining welfare activities**

In order to face this situation of economic crisis, the municipality of Evreux is trying to act on 2 fronts. First, it is trying to make the town more attractive to companies, for example by creating free zones (*zones franches*) and improving road infrastructure. Second, it is redefining welfare activities by reorganising the CCAS. The town of Evreux would like to make this organisation its real welfare driver. This project is based on 2 principles: adapt the organisation to the user needs and improve the efficiency of the public sector.

Six main objectives have been set:

- Modernisation of structures: moving premises, which are now all located in the town centre
- Improve the professionalism of intervention modes: recruitment of 2 social workers and the creation of a post of welfare analyst.

- Enhance working in a network by better defining the various partners and becoming the central office dealing with welfare in Evreux; for example, the creation of a group for reflection social / welfare issues
- Develop a management of proximity: 2 projects are being implemented: the creation of a medical centre in the same location as other health services (administrative, benefits ... but also medical care) and a social grocery store that should have opened by the end of 2005.
- Encourage the interaction and participation of everyone, from the population both internally and externally, with the local population.
- Implement a quality control approach

## The Roman Catholic Church in Evreux

The Roman Catholic Church in Evreux has one specificity in that it also includes a diocese.<sup>18</sup> The size of a diocese is equivalent to that of a department; there are 93 dioceses located in metropolitan France and 9 in the overseas French territories. Following the Parish Reform in 2000,<sup>19</sup> introduced by Mgr. Gaillot, the number of parishes was reduced. The diocese is divided into sectors and parishes. There are 30 parishes (each covering a number of localities) and 7 sectors. Evreux is in the central sector and has 5 parishes: Saint-Michel du Valiton, Conches-en-Ouche, Notre-Dame of Greater Southern Evreux, Evreux centre and, finally, Madeleine-Netreville. Two of these parishes cover a number of localities: 5 in Saint-Michel and 6 in Greater Southern Notre-Dame.<sup>20</sup> There are 684 structures in the diocese. The activity of the diocese is similar to the national average: in 2004 there were 4,414 baptisms, 1,423 weddings<sup>21</sup> and 3,444 funerals.<sup>22</sup>

The terms *laïc* has two meanings in French. The first designates state authorities free from church intervention (secular State, secular schools: *Etat laïc, écoles laïques...*). The second is specific to the Catholic Church and differentiates between believers (men and women) and members of the institution of the Church (priests, monks, nuns). The term lay people with responsibilities refers to people involved in implementing pastoral policies and activities; they are chosen and appointed by the Bishop for a renewable period of 3 years. There are also lay people who can work for the Church as paid employees but they do not have a pastoral mission. They are paid by the Church, for example, to work as secretary, treasurer, etc. Those who are not lay people are, therefore, the Bishop, the priests, the monks and the nuns.<sup>23</sup> The Roman Catholic Church uses the terms Catholic and Christian interchangeably.

<sup>18</sup> The diocese carries the name of the town, where the cathedral is located.

<sup>19</sup> This compensates for the lack of priests.

<sup>20</sup> The diocese seat being Evreux, bishopric actions have a directly impact on local parishes. For this reason, references are frequently made to diocese actions.

<sup>21</sup> In France a religious wedding ceremony alone is not sufficient for a marriage to be valid. It must be preceded by an official civil ceremony, which is the only act recognised by the State.

<sup>22</sup> *Le diocèse en chiffres*, Diocèse d'Evreux, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Only unmarried men can be ordained as priests or bishops.

## Organisation

### The Bishop

The Bishop of Evreux manages the diocese and all its parishes. He defines the general activities of the diocese and provides the main guidelines for its general pastoral action and more specific pastoral activities.

The bishop of Evreux is Jacques David. Born in 1930, he was ordained in 1956 and made a bishop in 1981. Four years later he was given the function of bishop of the diocese of La Rochelle and Saintes before being appointed to Evreux in 1996. He will end his function on January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2006 and will be replaced by Father Christian Nourrichard, at present Head Vicar in Rouen. The ordination of the new Bishop took place on December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2005, in the Cathedral of Evreux.

The former bishop of Evreux, Mgr. Gaillot, attracted national attention for a number of years. He was removed by the Pope in 1995 because of disagreements with the hierarchy that he widely publicised over the media. His removal was criticised in France by Roman Catholics, other religious people and non religious people. During his last mass on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1995, 20,000 supporters protesting his removal gathered in Evreux, and many more thousands in Nantes, Nancy, Metz and Strasbourg. There were more than 40,000 letters demanding his reinstatement. He is currently Bishop of Partenia, a diocese that no longer exists, therefore with no pastoral responsibilities, thus, excluding him from the Conference of Bishops of France. This position has offered him a number of solutions that would allow him to regain his former status but he has rejected all of them, thus, creating some uneasy feelings among his supporters.

In the diocese of Evreux Mgr. Gaillot had favoured the development of various study and action groups, such as the *Carrefour Rural* (Rural Crossroads), a group for reflection, innovation and proposals on social/religious/economic issues.

The first mission undertaken by his successor, Monsignor David, was, therefore, to try to recreate a unity within the diocese of Evreux.

### The Pastoral Diocese Council

The Synod Assembly voted the creation of the Pastoral Diocese Council (*Conseil Diocésain de Pastorale –CDP*) in 1991. It is presided by the Bishop and is representative of the diversity of the members of the Church in the Diocese. The council votes on the policies of the diocese and is in charge of their implementation.

- The Pastoral Diocese Council defines itself as: A council for the Bishop
- An observatory of daily life in the Eure (based on what members are experiencing in the field)
- Pastoral issues and proposals (the delegates are studying how the Gospel already inspires life).
- Evaluation of how the Diocese Church transmits the Gospel, in relation with the other councils
- Receiving comments and suggestions from the communities<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> After each CDP, it is possible to send a response via email which is then transmitted to the Assembly. It is clearly noted that this is not a forum but “a possibility for you to offer a comment to the diocese authority on a specific topic”.

## Personnel

The French Roman Catholic Church is known for its continual decrease in the number of active priests. This situation is a permanent concern for church leaders at a national level as it is a threat to the French Roman Catholic model, based on hierarchy and strong presence at a local level. In 2002 there were 23,542 priests present in France compared to 32,267 in 1990 and most of them are now elderly<sup>25</sup> To compensate for this problem, the role of deacons (whose activities were previously unclear and thus unknown) has now been strengthened. Deacons can marry and have children and have a professional activity. They are nominated by the Bishop and can also become ministers. They assist both priests and lay people in their work. They work primarily in 3 areas: charity, liturgy and Parole. In 2003 there were 1,850 permanent deacons with a ministry in France, compared to only 571 in 1990. The number of ordinations of deacons is constantly growing; from 70 in 1990 to 97 in 2003.<sup>26</sup>

The situation is similar for sisters, nuns, brothers and monks. The total number of nuns has decreased from 52,507 in 1998 to 42,648 in 2004, including 4,911 nuns leading a contemplative life. There were 9,409 monks and brothers in 2004 compared to 10,652 in 1998.<sup>27</sup>

The situation is similar in the diocese of Evreux. By Dec 31, 2004, there were 136 priests in the diocese of Evreux: 66 parish priests, 4 dealing with diocese administration, 11 chaplains, 12 having other functions and 43 retired and living as a part of the community or with their families. At present there are 22 active deacons. The missions of deacons are oriented towards those most in need: hospital chaplaincies, assistance to handicapped people and immigrants. Monks and nuns belonging to various orders<sup>28</sup> also take part in the diocese's pastoral projects. There are also 2 seminarians in training under the responsibility of the diocese (2 others gave up their vocation after a few years).

### *Employed lay people*

In the secretariat of the diocese of Evreux there are 10 full time paid employees. In the whole of the diocese there are 10 more part-time employees, mainly women with secretarial responsibilities, working in various parishes. The bishop does not want to recruit too many lay-people as he fears that he may not be able to maintain their jobs in the long term. The Roman Catholic Church cannot benefit directly from recruitment subsidies granted by the State. The diocese's financial director has therefore found another solution: having these people recruited by Catholic associations, which are allowed to receive these subsidies, and then modifying their jobs.

## Financial situation

Beyond the lack of priests, the Roman Catholic Church in France is confronted with financial challenges. Since the law of 1905, the RCC receives no money from the State, nor from the Vatican. Buildings constructed before 1905 are the property of

<sup>25</sup> *Annuaire Statistique de l'Eglise*, 2002.

<sup>26</sup> *Comité national du diaconat*, 2004.

<sup>27</sup> *Conférence des Supérieures majeures et Service des moniales*, 2004.

<sup>28</sup> There are 6 different orders, 5 monasteries of contemplative monks and nuns who lead a contemplative life, and 15 apostolic congregations.

the State or the locality, which maintain them. The Church is in charge of all operating costs. Any buildings constructed after 1905 are the responsibility of the parishes and the dioceses and are financed by churchgoers. Therefore, it was decided to make each hierarchical level financially independent. Diocesan accounts are managed and controlled by the Diocese Financial Council, which can be audited by state authorities. The dioceses must show transparent accounts to their members. Parishes also have independent finances and there is solidarity between them. Associations, religious congregations, communities of monks and nuns and charity associations ... are recognised by the State but manage their own finances. Some receive subsidies from the diocese.

Within each diocese, financial resources originate from the following types of donations:

- *Church offerings given to parish priests (previously called the “denier du culte”)*: this arrangement was set up in 1906 to allow financial support for priests who were no longer paid by the State. This is a voluntary donation made each year by Roman Catholics following an appeal from the diocese. It is also used for the general running costs of the diocese.
- *Individual donations*: Churchgoers offer a sum of money during services. Some donations are dedicated to specific causes. This is announced during the mass.
- *Group donations*: This is a request for a collective prayer dedicated to one particular person. For example, bishops will say a prayer for 14 euros.
- *Church offerings*: Those who use the Church for attending services and ceremonies, such as weddings and baptisms contribute money to help with the parish expenses.

Since 1996, donors can benefit from an income tax reduction equivalent to 60 percent of the donation, if this does not exceed 10 percent of their taxable income. The Church can also inherit property and funds (but under certain conditions).

These resources allow the payment of salaries to priests, as well as, employed lay people (about 60 percent of expenses): the average salary for priests and bishops (they receive free housing) as well as, employed lay people is approximately 1,000 € per month.<sup>29</sup> These funds help also finance pastoral activities and services as well as, the maintenance of church buildings. In 2002, the total funds of the French dioceses were 438,290,382 €, originating from the following sources:<sup>30</sup>

- “*Denier du culte*”: 182,631,188 €<sup>31</sup>
- Group donations: 60,052,601 €
- Church collections: 131,785,743 €
- Fees (*casuel*): 63,820,848 €.

The financial priorities of the diocese of Evreux are oriented towards young people (church gatherings, catechism, celebrations, etc.) and communication: diocese newspapers and the website. It also finances the internal synods of the diocese. In

<sup>29</sup> The minimum monthly salary (SMIC) in France is between 1,217 and 1,357 €.

<sup>30</sup> Administrative and financial department of the conference of French Bishops, 2004. (*Service administratif et financier de la Conférence des évêques de France*, 2004.)

<sup>31</sup> In 2000, there were 1,750,000 donating households, with an average donation of 100 € per household.

2004, *Church offerings given to parish priests* brought a total of 1,176,102 € for the whole diocese, that is 7 percent less than the previous year,<sup>32</sup> from 10,127 donors. This sum of money was budgeted as follows:

- 36 percent for paying priests and their expenses.
- 29 percent for seminary training and for pastoral work
- 16 percent for Catholic movements and services.
- 12 percent for general management
- 7 percent for managing the secretariat of the diocese

In comparison to others in France,<sup>33</sup> the financial situation of the diocese of Evreux is healthy. This permits the diocese to build a new centre that will bring together all the services that are currently housed in crumbling buildings. Up to 1854 m<sup>2</sup> have already been built and 400 m<sup>2</sup> will be added on, for a total estimated cost of 2.4 million €. The funding of this building is representative of how religions finance themselves in France, within the framework of the 1905 law. The land was given free of charge by the *Sœurs de Saint Jean* (Sisters of Saint John). The diocese sold a number of buildings which brought 694,000 €. It also benefited from 2 large donations from private individuals and took out a loan for 132,000 €. Parishes and chapels were asked to help and their donations at present amount to a total of 59,910 €. To complete the budget the diocese launched an appeal for funds and 1,312 people responded by donating 838 €.<sup>34</sup>

## The priorities of the diocese

### The main directions of pastoral action

Succeeding Mgr Gaillot during a moment of crisis that had been heavily covered by the media, Mgr David has defined two priorities:

- to serve the local population and those who are in need, taking into account all forms of suffering. Thus, social issues and welfare are at the core of his action plan. This definition of pastoral work has helped to maintain the link with the work done by his predecessor even if there are some differences.
- to allow believers to take a more active part in the life of the Church. First, he tried to understand the situation of Roman Catholics in Evreux, including church attendance that, as in all dioceses, has dropped sharply in recent years. He has focused his action on 2 priorities: involving more lay-people in church life and reaching out towards those who feel close to the Church but do not attend services.

The activities of parish priests must therefore follow this global pastoral vision. The bishop has also defined 3 more specialised areas for pastoral work.

**Pastoral healthcare:** this became a national priority for bishops during their conferences in 1980, 1981 and 1982, requiring each diocese to implement a health related pastoral programme. In Evreux, the person in charge of this type of pastoral

<sup>32</sup> *Le diocèse en chiffres*, Diocèse d'Evreux, 2004.

<sup>33</sup> In 2004 the diocese of Dijon declared itself bankrupt.

<sup>34</sup> *Le diocèse en chiffres*, Diocèse d'Evreux, 2004.

work is a retired nun who works part-time.<sup>35</sup> The budget allocated is 300€ per semester. The nun in charge coordinates a number of different groups, most often managed by lay people (upon the bishop's approval). These groups include hospital chaplains at Foi et Lumière, and the Evangelical Service to Sick People that visits old, handicapped and people living alone or with limited social interactions, etc. These are mainly occasions and opportunities when families with health problems can voice their problems.

The hospital chapel is one of the few places where religion can be present in a state institution. In fact, in institutions where in-mates or residents cannot leave the building to practise their religious faith (prisons, armed forces, hospitals), the State has set up chapels in each building. The person in charge of pastoral health care selects a lay person to act as a chaplain, presents him to the Bishop who gives his approval, and then presents him to the hospital, which recruits and pays him. At present in Evreux there are no chaplains for other faiths. The chaplain is assisted by a team of lay people who receive training for listening to people and their problems; this training is financed and provided by the diocese. When they are on hospital premises they must wear a badge marked Catholic Chaplaincy. They visit patients every day. Only the psychiatric hospital has a specific place where patients can go. The chaplain's presence is not always easy: a few years ago the director of the Evreux hospital wanted to remove the Catholic Chaplaincy, considering it of no use. It was after the psychologist, a strong atheist, who defended the chaplaincy and the chaplain who explained his duties to her, that the chaplaincy was maintained, thus indicating that the hospital was not at all familiar with the importance of the service it was providing to patients.

- **Pastoral care for young people:** The largest groups of young people can be found in the chaplaincies of state schools, Scouts, the Youth Eucharistic Movement and the Children's Catholic Action. While groups, such as Taizé, the World Youth Days (*Journées Mondiales de la Jeunesse / JMJ*) and pilgrimages attract more and more young people, as they tend to leave or stay away from parishes. The mission of the priest in charge of pastoral work for young people is to identify their needs and to try to bring answers and solutions. At present, a number of spiritual weekends are offered, alternating 'festive' moments, as at the JMJ, with periods of prayer and reflection. In collaboration with the parish priests, the priest in charge of this programme is trying to develop a more "attractive" liturgy for this young public.
- **Pastoral care for migrant populations:** it is jointly managed by a deacon and a priest and supported by a team of 8 people. Its first mission is to make Christians more aware of the situation of foreign persons in France, whether legal or illegal immigrants (with or without legal resident cards and work permits). It encourages making room for dialogue, for listening and for providing information. The second objective is to give this immigrant population more importance within the Church: liturgy, etc. ... Finally it supports the development of dialogue between various religions, especially with the Muslim communities; for example, arranging occasional meetings in the Madeleine neighbourhood that include local associations, representatives of state agencies, etc.

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<sup>35</sup>She receives no payment from the diocese; only her travelling expenses are reimbursed.

The general pastoral work and more specialised pastoral programmes must inspire the regular daily practice of all the parishes in the diocese.

### **Dealing with the deficit in the number of priests**

The lack of priests is an ongoing problem for the Roman Catholic Church in France. The answers proposed by this diocese show some originality.

- **Continuation and end of the 2000 Parishes Reform:** This initiative dealt with the decrease in the number of priests. However, the situation is deteriorating and the number of priests in charge of 2 parishes is gradually increasing. This double responsibility must not lead to a merger, as the identity of each parish must be preserved. In order to help the priests, the diocese encourages the creation of a secretarial post in each parish.
- **Closer and wider collaboration between priests:** Given these circumstances, an improved sharing of practices and knowledge is required of the priests, as well as, between deacons and priests. Priests working in a specific sector are considered accountable to the bishop for all activities and actions they implement. This leads them to discussing together actions to be taken before any important decisions. The Bishop and his counsellors spend more time with the priests during meals, prayers, etc. Finally, the Bishop asks retiring priests to reflect deeply on their future mission.
- **Development of local communities:** To ensure the proximity of the Church to local communities in a specific territory. In the countryside a local community can assemble a number of localities. In a town it corresponds, either to a neighbourhood or to a smaller area, depending on the density of the population. The forecast objective is 120 communities in the diocese, with about 30 parishes. Communities are defined as centres for life and evangelisation. Each community is managed by a local team (EAL) including the priest, lay people and Catholic associations and movements.

Since autumn 2002, the Bishop has asked each local community to select one concrete project for the year. This is in order “to renew the human fabric between inhabitants, to announce by very simple actions that Christ has really risen again and that this changes something in relationships between people”. In the Golden Book of Communities created in 2003, each community describes its initiatives and project: for example, a brotherly meal at Candlemas, mountain hikes with young people, creation of evangelical groups, for listening to people’s problems, gatherings including more parents– (in fact mothers around the altar) during the celebration of the First Communion, offering support to bereaved families, organising tea with the inhabitants of a village to help everyone to get to know each other, community prayers, a Catechism party (a show), monthly prayer assemblies inspired by the liturgy of the Hours, offering support to parents who ask for their child to be baptised, keeping company to people who are alone and/or to the elderly, etc. ...

***Implementation of shared responsibilities between priest and – lay person** The physical impossibility for a priest to be permanently present in his parish and even more so in the local community has led the diocese to develop the concept of “co-responsibility of the priest and the lay person in charge”. The latter takes charge of certain activities but remains under the priest’s authority. Once a month – and more frequently if necessary – there are meetings with the priest and consultations before*

*important decisions are taken but the priest retains the power of taking the final decision. The priest retains the responsibility of administering communion, offering spiritual guidance and missionary encouragement.*

These lay people, who are in charge, also have a responsibility in the local pastoral activity teams (*Equipe d'animation pastorale* / EAP) – at a parish level – and in the EAL for each locality. They give life to these communities and are striving to unite all believers in one area. The priest reports to the bishop on the work of these two teams. The priest and a person in charge of the diocese assess the work achieved.

### **Training of priests and lay persons in charge**

Jacques David has continued the training scheme initiated by Jacques Gaillot. The objective is to help priests, deacons and lay persons in a position of responsibility to better adapt to the current needs of believers.

- On-going training for priests: training on general topics, theology, the Bible, society, human relationships (transactional analysis), pastoral work, scientific topics, and spirituality in order to be able to understand ongoing changes in society.
- Training of lay people in a position of responsibility: they can benefit from training sessions to help them improve their work. These courses are financed by the Church and are offered a few weekends per year. For example, training for catechists, for lay people involved in the pastoral healthcare (e.g.; listening to sick people), for those participating in the liturgy and those who offer support to bereaved families, etc. The range of courses offered is very wide and changes according to needs.

### **Communication**

Given the 1905 law on *laïcité*, the Church of France hardly participates in public debates and, thus, in influencing public opinion. However, the Roman Catholic diocese in Evreux is trying to make its activities more widely known. Following Monsignor Gaillot's public discourse, which received strong media coverage, Monsignor David has decided to take advantage of this new image for a bishop and make the diocese better known through the following initiatives:

- Creation of a comprehensive internet site with information on the structure of the Diocese, its various activities and details of each person in charge. Parishioners can also e-mail directly to the Bishop but this option functions poorly, probably because people are not familiar with the role of a Bishop.
- Creation of a communication post, held by a paid lay person (a woman).
- A press review by the newspaper, *Eglise d'Evreux* (Church of Evreux), the official publication of the diocese, which is published every 2 weeks. The newspaper is conceived primarily as an information tool to help lay people communicate and share ideas. There is an editorial, a main section (examples of themes covered include liturgy, sects, being a deacon,), reports of the activities of the diocese and announcements of upcoming events, an article of reflection, notes on books television and radio programmes, etc. ... It is distributed to elected representatives and association managers.

### **The Church and social welfare activities: existing partnerships**

Jacques David has placed the problem of welfare at the core of his pastoral action. A Catholic must be attentive to all forms of exclusion and try to bring solutions. The Church has few financial means, a fact that restricts its capacity to implement actions. As a result, the Church is developing a number of partnerships with the following organisations:

- **Church movements and services**, such as Caritas (*Secours Catholique France* – French Catholic Aid), the *Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement* (CCFD – Catholic Committee Against Hunger and for Development), the Saint Vincent de Paul conferences, etc. These are lay, independent associations, movements or communities of local, national or international size and influence that are recognised by the Roman Catholic Church. They have their own objectives and pedagogical structures and develop a specific mission for the Church. The latter can provide material assistance (lending schemes) and grant financial subsidies. The example of the *Association Familiale Catholique* (AFC – Catholic Family Association) is an illustration of this type of partnership: the Catholic Family association (a national movement) helps married couples and those with problems in their family life and welcomes divorced and remarried divorced people. This association also has the mission to obtain information and provide feedback on the needs of families and undertake initiatives with local elected people (from politics, economics and social action groups) to find solutions. Three associations exist in the diocese, including one in Evreux. They offer their support to approximately 200 families, that is 800 people. The new communities related to the Charismatic Renewal or Revival are not present in Evreux.
- **Spaces within parishes**, where lay people can listen and have dialogue and discussions for specific groups: alcoholics, single mothers and handicapped people. These places allow such groups of people to get together and have discussions but rarely produce any concrete actions.
- **Non-Catholic associations** whose missions are compatible with those of the Roman Catholic Church. The collaboration is done mainly by exchanging information, organising meetings (for example, for illegal immigrants with no official documents) and meeting in a common space.

Therefore, there are 3 current challenges in the Evreux diocese: compensate for the lack of priests, allow laypeople to be more involved in the life of the Church (training, sharing of tasks) and maintain a balanced budget.

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

### **Views held by the public authorities**

The following quotations are taken from the interviews with 8 elected members of the Town council (5 men, 3 women, q.16–23). Their specific functions are not given in order to respect their anonymity.

As mentioned above, it was not possible to carry out interviews of Town Hall employees. Therefore, it seemed relevant to meet people in charge of a few non-religious associations working in welfare (2 women, 1 men, q.27–29).<sup>36</sup> The choice was based on a number of criteria: the association chosen had to be recognised by the State, which therefore grants subsidies, and the people in charge had to be paid by the organisation through state funding. Finally, they had to be well informed about the actions carried out by the Town Hall, either by being members of the CCAS, or by participating or having participated regularly in the work of these commissions. These criteria were restrictive and had limited possibilities. The Town Hall representatives I met did not know which associations I had selected.

### **Welfare**

All respondents agree on the need to distribute prosperity equally through the State and its services. Disagreements relate to the criteria for allocating benefits. Some interviewees indicate that financial aid should be granted to everyone: *“Even though nationwide solidarity is perverse, it is essential. Otherwise some people are going to find themselves in real misery, but there are some tools that can help people bounce back.”* (29, m). Others prefer the notion of return: *“It depends on the definition you give. I agree, if it’s an equal redistribution of wealth. I don’t agree if money is given to buy social peace without thinking of evaluation, assessment and effectiveness, of what is being done with resources.”* (16, m). One member of the Municipal team confirmed: *“You must not talk about productivity in welfare because that is frowned upon ... in that case, the Welfare State is a State that knows how to intelligently manage the resources it has at its disposal.”* (17, m).

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

Interviewees believe that the local situation in Evreux is difficult because the national economic crisis creates new demands for aid; Evreux’s debt also puts an additional strain on resources. *“We have a huge debt! For welfare we have a budget of 2,150,000 €, which is not bad but it is still not enough, and on top of that there’s 230,000 € of financial aid given directly to people.”* (16, m). It is the *Commission Locale d’Insertion* (Local Insertion Committee) that decides on the sum granted as aid to an individual after examination of the case presented by the social worker. The wish to evaluate effectiveness is once more highlighted in this commission: *“At a town level what we are trying to do is not assist but rebuild [...] we must first help those who need help and whom we can support.”* (16, m). This is an opinion confirmed by a colleague: *“The Welfare State as assistance is finished. I think everyone just about agrees on that. And whether you are left or right wing, even if everyone doesn’t voice it out loud, in the field, when you are at work, everyone agrees. We’ve had enough of assisting, even if those people do have the right to a minimum income. What has to be done first is to help those who have a project, those who are moving their butt.”* (17, m). This conception of welfare is also present among social workers, who may or may not enhance a particular case by adding personal notes on the individual applicant.

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<sup>36</sup> This choice is explained more in detail in the Sociological Analysis chapter, part 5.

For other interviewees the problem lies higher up, in the economy. They indicate that the municipality should do more: “The role of the State is to be more vigilant when companies are set up so that they do not leave after five years when the subsidies have finished. It’s strange, all of a sudden, there’s a bankruptcy. Are they all justified? Going abroad is a good thing for earning money but we’re making our own country suffer. There’s a haemorrhage.” (22, f). People who have been made redundant will most frequently require more welfare.

Respondents repeatedly view associations as competing with the welfare activities of a town: “Associations have taken over public missions that the State and public authorities had let slide.” (21, f) or again: “From time to time some associations tend to want to play the role of a filter between citizens and politics, it’s a real trend we must fight against.” This mixing of roles has led the town to reposition itself: “I think we need to get back to democracy, to no longer allow this filtering done by associations. We need to really get down to work but the elected people are regaining power over the citizens, and that is what is exciting at a local level. We have forgotten about listening to the people, we talk about public debate but we don’t really go to see what is actually happening. We must start doing that again, it’s our mission.” (16, m).

Paradoxically, the consequences of legislation on decentralisation are rarely mentioned. The interviewees also feel that they lack the ability to discuss this topic: “*The Mayor is the person who allocates the budgets, who manages all that. I deal with my own span of control, that’s all. If I need more money, I just ask and he answers yes or no.*” (23, f). Some interviewees also feel that they do not have enough experience, not enough time has gone by, to assess the impact: “*It’s too early to say if it’s working well or not. We’re still at the beginning. Action areas overlap, we’re feeling a bit lost; we really work on one individual case after another. Normally the RMI (minimum insertion income) is the responsibility of the department but we have been asked to deal with it by the locality. In fact, if you read the texts carefully, this is also possible. We’ll have to wait at least ten years to see the effects.*” (16, m)

### **Role of the church**

It was very difficult to meet town council members once they were aware that the research was partly focused on the RCC. Finally, all interviewees used the notion of *laïcité* to avoid answering this question. They never mentioned Mgr. Gaillot’s removal and refused to comment even after being directly prompted.

### **Church and social work**

Respondents are unfamiliar with the social welfare work carried out by the RCC. They approve financial aid to charities that are open to all people. “*What matters is the quality of the work done. That’s all. If the Secours Catholique just stayed still and prayed to God at each board meeting, we certainly wouldn’t collaborate*” (17, m). These associations are recognised as competent players in welfare and as independent from the RCC: “*Confessional associations are like us, the town councillors, they are close to the people. They know what the real problems are, what the population is thinking, where the problems lie.*” (23, f)

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

Interviewees believe that the Church should not intervene in public debates. They believe that giving it a voice could lead to new conflicts *“If French bishops start to intervene in politics I think this would lead to conflicts and tensions we don’t need, we have other things to do”* (16, m). RCC representatives can act in society but their opinion is not seen as legitimate: *“When needed, the RCC was there for asylum seekers with no housing. Should it have a position, a discourse? History has shown the risks ...”* (28, f). But *“Charity associations like Caritas should give their opinion, yes.”* (18, m)

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

Respondents consider the national and local economic slow down as of paramount importance. Fragile populations that were already precarious now feel even more insecure, especially since converting to the euro currency: *“Since the change to the € a whole economic approach has been forgotten. People don’t know anymore.”* (28, f) Health or medical implications are often mentioned: *“In France a litre of wine costs less than fruit juice! People buy pizza and no fruit, their health is poor and that is something that has social consequences!!!”* (29, m) *“They prescribe tranquilisers to unemployed people. They don’t need medication, it makes them feel guilty, what they want is a job and that is something society does not ensure.”* (27, f)

Housing problems, especially at the Madeleine, remain a concern: *“We have ‘parked’ people out there in buildings that are now decrepit, all piled in, far away from everything, we have left them to manage on their own and now we expect them to respect us (the politicians)?”* (21, f). *“We have destroyed tower blocks at the Madeleine but we have no other housing for them. Nothing has been planned. What can we do about it? And we expect them to become integrated ...”* (17, f). *“And also the population has changed. There are more and more immigrants, those of French origin have gone elsewhere. Even an association has been created called Land of Asylum (Terre d’Asile).”* (27, f)

The increase of “poor working people” seems to be a new problem: *“What worries me now is people living precariously, on the fringe. Those who still have a flat but cannot pay for it, who have children but have problems feeding them although they have jobs ...”* (16, m). *“It’s the fringe of the population that, in my opinion, feels the most abandoned. They feel we give more aid to people who are above them and also to those who are below them. I don’t think this is particularly new but this feeling of being abandoned is very strong at the moment. And if there is a risk of social implosion it’s here!”* (17, m).

The time needed to switch from one source of welfare to another is described simply as a way of accelerating financial insecurity: *“The biggest problem is the loss of rights. You cannot accept the fact that people are unable to feed their children for 1 to 2 months in the 21st century in France!”* (19, m). Political change in the council (formerly Communist and currently right-conservative) was rarely mentioned.

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

With no precise ideas of the RCC’s role, or wishing to avoid discussing this topic, interviewees expressed no opinion on the Church’s evolution.

### Significance of gender

According to all the respondents, men and women are entitled to the same rights in society. However, they acknowledge that with identical qualifications, a woman will earn less than a man, “*it’s part of French culture*”. They think that this will change. Some were as hesitant to discuss this topic, as they were to talk about religion. Many underlined the financial allowances and social benefits granted to mothers in France: “*In France, in 80 percent of divorces, the mother gets the children. That is also an inequality but the women don’t go into the street to protest about that!*” (23, f) and also “*We always find housing for single mothers, we don’t want to leave a child homeless, in the street, but if it’s a man he loses his children and he’s out on his neck ... I see cases like that every day*” (29, m).

Women are also described as the “future of our society”: “I think that the future of the cités (neighbourhoods) like the Madeleine depends on women. They are better fighters; it comes from their role as a woman but also as a mother. It’s not that men are indifferent but I think that women get more deeply involved in projects. In order to find a job, a woman will use all her resources, find a solution for looking after her children, leave them with a friend, a place in the kindergarten. Even the steps to take in town, at the Préfecture, the papers.” (27, f).

Respondents do not seem supportive of the principle of equality or parity: “Parity, yes, why not? Once more it’s a decision for top management so we can’t say anything. I regret that there are a number of competent men who have not been nominated.” (16, m) “I don’t mind working with women but it doesn’t change anything deep down.” (17, m). “I was against this law, more or less. If I’m on the council, it’s because I proved my worth a long time ago!” (23, f). Two other elected women said that they had no opinion on this subject.

### Views held by the Church

This section is based on interviews carried out with a number of Catholics in positions of responsibility in the direct or indirect provision of social care. Their functions are not indicated here to respect their anonymity. Interviewees include: 4 men, members of the clergy, one deacon, one layman in a position of responsibility, one nun, one lay woman holding a position of responsibility and one lay person who is a secretary (6 men, 3 women, q.1–9). The interviews carried out are with laypeople who are active in pastoral work (4 women, 2 men, q.10–15). There are also 3 people, who are in charge of Roman Catholic associations who work in welfare and are recognised by the Roman Catholic Church (2 men, 1 woman, q. 24–26) and have also made a contribution to this research.

### Welfare

The notion of welfare state (*état providence*) made some respondents smile because it includes a religious term, namely “providence”. “I find it amusing because in France we talk a lot about *laïcité* and here you have the word providence. It’s strange because providence is also a biblical word meaning help from God.” (1, m).

We can observe the same distinctions among the respondents, noted above. On the one hand, there are those who feel that the State does not fulfil all its functions: “*A welfare state means that it does try to help those who are in the greatest diffi-*

*culty or without resources. I don't think it is always provides given the way it acts. Providence, does that mean that when it gives unemployment benefit it has done its job? I don't think so. It puts pressure on some people so much so that they are unable to live.” (7, f).*

On the other hand, there are those who prefer a more liberal definition of the State: “I think that each human being must be responsible for himself and that providence does not always come from other people. We are in a society that is becoming more and more a welfare state; perhaps we are reassuring ourselves because we are becoming more and more individualistic. But on the other hand we want to feel reassured by being taken in charge by the State, by those in charge and by everything we feel owing to us. What the welfare state is doing is not a solution ... it's killing freedom!” (6, m)

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

Interviewees feel that municipal management of social welfare services is not adequate enough to meet new needs. “*Well, it seems there are intentions to do something about welfare but the real question is 'do we have the financing'.*” (7, f).

A recurring problem is unemployment. Respondents note the problem of training that could be solved at a departmental level by making use of certain professional filters: “*You choose a job where money is the highest denominator and which gives you presence, a social status. And that's a pity because there are things that no one knows how to do any more, the manual aspect has been set aside. Now we have queues of intellectuals at the job centres and alongside we have builders and stonemasons who have so many orders they cannot take everything on! We should follow the example of the builders of the cathedrals.*” (6, m). The lack of buildings to take charge of asylum seekers is frequently mentioned: “*In fact the most obvious problem is the lack of buildings. We help them [the asylum seekers] for a time and then we drop them. We're not far from Paris. I think it's great to let people in ... But if we do it to say to them 'come here', fine, but we've got nothing for you. I think there should be a real policy implemented ... First host them correctly before thinking about their insertion.*” (9, f).

Respondents question the new conditions for awarding financial aid to associations: “*We have decreased the aid given although these were people who were doing good work in poor neighbourhoods where there are problems. So has this decrease come about because their work is seen as useless or because it is in conflict with the objectives of the previous council?*” (8, f). The Madeleine area is often mentioned: “*That's enough with all this hypocrisy about the Madeleine! My son is at the university hall of residence in the town centre and his Judo classes are at eight in the evening at the Madeleine, so he doesn't go there. Something must be done, as it's not possible to stay in a place with no laws, the doctors don't dare to go there late in the evening, nor does the Police. Someone must say to Mr. Debré that putting surveillance cameras everywhere doesn't solve anything! There must be a climate of trust. There are people living there who need to be recognised and I think that's what is needed but it's difficult. Really difficult ...*” (7, f)

### Role of the Church<sup>37</sup>

According to the interviewees, the role of the Roman Catholic Church in society is essential, but always within the framework of the 1905 law. To face the present economic crisis, deepened by what they describe as an individualist trend, the Church must spread its message based on altruism and the respect of others. All interviewees base their responses on the Church's social doctrine: *"Money doesn't solve everything and I get the feeling that the welfare state thinks only about money. Then it feels better. People are made to feel guilty as well. But unemployed people need help. They need to be listened to. They need to have someone listen to what they have to say and that is something the RCC knows how to do. It knows how to pay attention to others."* (9, f). The Church must help people re-define themselves as individuals: *"Make room for the Gospel, that would be something! I'm interested in who you are."* (7, f).

Although enthusiastic when talking about the Church's social policy, respondents seem more reserved in what they say when discussing its possible influence in France. *"You mustn't get carried away, the Church isn't listened to very much. This comes from internal causes: the decrease in the number of priests, a quite strong separation from a society that has developed its own private views on sexuality, etc. and which does not accept that an organisation like the Church should have a word to say on people's private lives. There's a gap that has been there for about forty years ... In fact, on the religious and ethical aspects people agree to listen to it but for the economy or moral matters touching sexuality, it's not possible. That means we're in a world that separates the various topics and it wants to shut the Church in such a small space that the Church cannot fit into it. We cannot disconnect the religious aspect from life itself... So there we are..."* (2, m)

### Church and social work

Respondents indicate that the RCC has a role to play in welfare through its public discourse and financial aid to associations. *"The State must intervene in a certain number of domains and I think that the Church or the Churches have a part to play because the State doesn't ensure everything. If all of a sudden there were no more RCC welfare associations, the State couldn't manage! But people have problems seeing the link between the Church as an institution and the fact that the Secours Catholique helps thousands of people"* (1, m).

While interviewees appreciate the Church's social doctrine, they acknowledge that it is difficult to implement this at local level. Even a global pastoral vision is not of much use to them at ground level. The quotation below is a good illustration of this contradiction: *"The Church has a policy at global, national and international levels but not at the local Christian community level. In a diocese like ours we're not very well placed to say anything on these matters. Very badly placed. Because the discourse cannot come from the hierarchy, it can only come from Christians who are committed in the Church. Well, let's say that a plant is closing down in Evreux, 300 people are involved, if you can't find three activist Christians in there I don't know what you can say. Yes, things that suit any event, but ... words can only come from people who are living this situation, who set up the link between their faith and*

<sup>37</sup> The interviews were carried out before the death of John-Paul II.

*their responsibility. But if I can find an executive who is a Christian and an activist ... and then with them I can organise something on what we can say as believers in the present circumstances, that would be the real word, it would be different. We're trying to do this but it's very difficult because all the believers, as I was saying earlier, they have problems waking up ... and then we have been so used to getting the word from our hierarchy and not from a follower..." (2, m).*

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

Interviewees consider the Church as a rich, firmly held social institution which is a view that they would like to spread to the general public. The first barrier comes from a lack of communication by the RCC itself, an observation that has led to appointing a lay woman in charge of communications. The second difficulty is a strong social reticence when it comes to discussing this issue, which they criticise. *"A company was on the brink of closing down. Father David met with the trade unions. This was mentioned locally at a diocesan level and that's all. It didn't interest the journalists. There's a negative prejudice because it's the RCC. People are suspicious."* (8, f). A priest confirmed this opinion: *"I'll give you an example. I was invited in 1997 by the Rotary to talk about the JMJ. The Rotary Club is non-religious. Because I was a priest lots of people didn't come, on principle that they do not invite someone religious to speak. This didn't bother me! When I met the same assembly in Vernon, three quarters of them were people who attended mass on Sundays, so they were Christians!"* (1, m).

Links with the municipality are reduced to a minimum: *"The contacts with the elected members, I would like to say it's a sort of 'catch 22' because we are invited to events like the 8th of May and the 11th of November, we're on the lists, as official guests. And with our colleagues we try to share things so that someone is present, we consider it is important to be present."* (2, m). We note that elected council members did not mention these contacts. Interviewees believe that the RCC must not intervene in politics but respect the rules of democracy: *"But as I'm a priest, I agree with everything. That means I have to be very careful. I cannot campaign. I remind people that they must vote. As for me, it's a moral duty to vote so I mention it when preaching. It's my main participation in social and political life"* (1, m)

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

The removal of Mgr. Gaillot appears to be the most remarkable event of the past 10 years.<sup>38</sup> Some Catholics felt very shaken: *"I felt it was really unjust, let's say there was my first reaction and then another later. When it happened, my reaction was, well, if that's what the Church is, as Rome knows better than we do, I give up. Completely discouraged. My second reaction was: we let everyone against him act as they wanted to and did we, ourselves, speak strongly enough to Rome, saying we were happy as we were? So there's a sort of guilty feeling somewhere, we didn't do our job. We let others act for us."* (8, f)

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<sup>38</sup> The interviews were carried out before Denis Vadeboncoeur was convicted for the rape of minors in Sept. 2005. As the former Episcopal vicar in the diocese and a parish priest, he had already been convicted of paedophilia in Quebec. Mgr. Gaillot admitted that he was aware of this fact when he nominated the priest.

The so-called “Gaillot affair” focused the attention of the whole of France on Evreux for some time: “When there was the crisis ten years ago with Jacques Gaillot, on the SNCF [French Railways] on the leaflets was written: ‘Evreux, the town where Jacques Gaillot lives’!! Can you imagine?” (2, m). “Even now when you go somewhere and someone asks you where you live and you say in the Eure they reply: ‘Ah yes, where Mgr Gaillot was.’ It’s serious because in fact the media just said what they wanted to and I think they did a lot of harm.” (7, f). A priest, a seminarian at that time, talks about the tension and pressure he felt: “People kept on asking me what I thought about Mgr Gaillot. He is your bishop, he is appointed, and you do not have any thoughts. So people ask you to take sides but that gets tiring as that is not how the Church functions, it is not a democracy. There’s no vote!” (1, m).

The attitude of Mgr. David has played an important role in bringing these Christians back to the Church: “We gave Mgr. David a chance and now we are thankful to him; he is an open minded man, he listens and he has even praised what Mgr. Gaillot achieved. Always, always.” (8, f). “Since Mgr. David, there has been a desire for peace and brotherhood because we needed to rebuild a climate of confidence. It hasn’t been easy.” (6, m). But there are still traces of this crisis: “It was troublesome and probably many people stepped away from the RCC, not wanting to stay in contact with the RCC community.” (2, m) or again: “They were seeing the Church differently, with a different face, incarnated by Jacques Gaillot. But one has to be rational, was it the man or was it the message? The universal Church has a leader, the Pope, so either you are in the Church or you are not, it’s complicated.” (9, f).

According to the interviewees, Mgr. David has once more chosen to follow the priorities set up by the Synod. As a result, there has been no theological rupture, just a slight change in the way of functioning: “*Mgr. David is not as close to the media but in fact it’s the same type of presence.*” (3, m).

The development of local communities and the responsibility shared by priests and lay people are also viewed by the interviewees as a progression but they do not think that the consequences at present are perceptible yet. Training is the only area where success is really noticeable: “*It was one of Mgr. Gaillot’s strengths to have felt that. Today we are overloaded with training offered by the diocese and by the parish. After a certain touch of warmth, a social occasion, there is this need for training: who we are today. Why was it Mgr. Gaillot? He was a good person to offer training, so it was an area he was aware of. In all the dioceses there is on-going training now.*” (3, m). Training sessions help Catholics redefine their identity: “*Because we are in a society where the Christian faith is not easy, we are no longer in a Christian environment, I’m not deploring this situation, it’s a fact, I’m not even sure it’s a bad thing. Being a Christian is a choice, it’s not innate. There’s the saying of a priest in the Church during the first century ‘one is not born Christian, one becomes a Christian.’ And we have to work on being one, we are never totally Christian.*” (4, m)

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

Four main trends emerge from the interviews. First, is there a need to train the RCC actors for the future: “*We have to renew our actors. If we don’t, there will be no priests, nuns or committed laypeople. This is a priority.*” (2, m). Second, is the need to give the RCC new life, especially during mass: “*Give back some freedom, creativ-*

*ity to people, so they live their lives in the RCC faith. We must free energy. Even if it won't be easy to keep everything completely coherent, we will hold on.” (4, m). These two goals will only be reached if more lay people receive more training: “I am very surprised to see highly educated people with important human, social, associative, political responsibilities who say they are RCC and know nothing about the life of the Church!” (1, m). Finally, respondents hope that the Church will play a greater role in public debates but they are aware of the difficulties involved: “You know, a little booklet was published to help the fight against paedophilia. Then we contacted people, not only Catholics, by mailing about 300 letters, to ask them if they would like us to organise meetings, how often, and with which topics. Well, we had 4 answers out of the 300!! So we decided it was of no use. And then the Eure was affected and our Bishop was really involved in this matter, it was a first. No-one listens to us.” (9, f).*

### **Significance of gender**

The issue of complementarity between men and women dominates both among lay and religious people: “For example, it is said that there is equality between men and women, but what equality is there? I think equality for salaries and for some other things is a good thing but men and women are not equal, they are complementary by essence, by nature itself. It's a bit of a pity; a woman does not have the same equality, as she is lucky because she can carry a child while a man cannot. There are many words like that that are dangerous.” (6, m) Here specifically feminine qualities are valued: “Maybe they are more persuasive, they feel things better ... We were talking about being discerning, I think it's a pity that when the boys are chosen for the seminary that women are not allowed to give their opinion more: ‘That boy is not right for taking this path, he doesn't have the vocation.’ Most often the priests, the curates are confronted with this problem but I'm sure that a woman would have had more sensitivity and could have said: ‘No, this isn't right.’ And we would avoid making mistakes. I don't know if I have the right impression about women but I think they are more sensitive, intuitive, there's complementarity.” (7, f).

Women – traditionally more involved than men in Church activities – play a more important part in the diocese because of the implementation of the shared responsibilities between clergy and lay men. All interviewees acknowledge this fact: “*But in Jesus' day it was the same, there were the apostles but around the apostles there were women who dealt with many things. So since Jesus, the Church has given an important role to women, it is continuing, maybe it's even increasing. It's a pity to structure the Church, well, as it was structured at a certain era when it was really a cage. There were the Bishop, the priests, the convents ... now it's evolving positively.*” (3, m)

### **Views held by the population**

The following quotations are taken from the 2 focus groups. One group consisted of students in Law (2), Nursing (2), and 2 more who attended an Institute of Technology. Their average age was 22 (fg 1–6). The other focus group included women only: one medical secretary aged 30, 2 women between 40 and 45 years old, working solely at home and 2 unemployed women aged between 25 and 34 (fg 7–11).

## Welfare

When I asked what the welfare state is, interviewees immediately thought of social issues, but gave no precise definition: “*The Providence State, it’s everything social, well, everything to do with aid ... In fact I’m not very sure.*” (fg 1, m). Social issues are conceived as the defence and support of individual rights by the State, especially those relating to work, housing, health and education. “The State is there to protect us, at all levels, in all circumstances.” (fg 11, f). People in Evreux say they are strongly in favour of welfare but are unable to define it. “*Welfare is important, we must defend what we have won!!!*” (fg 3, f). Social welfare issues in France are linked to certain institutions (ANPE – Unemployment agency), CAF (Family benefits, etc.)...<sup>39</sup>: Respondents indicate that they are very concerned about welfare but acknowledge that they do not understand the laws that are presently being debated. They consider social welfare issues a complex domain, with its own jargon, removing it from reality so that only experts can understand it: “*All these logos, I don’t understand a thing, but I haven’t had any higher education, so ...*” (fg 8, f). This makes them sceptical towards any reform in this domain: “*In any case, all politicians are the same: they make reforms but they don’t ask our opinion. I’m against the reform of the pension system but what does that change? They’re all the same; I don’t believe any of them.*” (fg 2, m).

## Function of the local welfare system

Focus group participants are relatively unfamiliar with the national, regional or local welfare system. “Me, I’m unemployed ... well, the State doesn’t help me much. It gives me a bit of money but I can’t live on that. And the Town Hall, I don’t really see what it could do; there aren’t even any flats available in Evreux!” (fg 11, f) Thus, the welfare system in Evreux appears fragmented and with no specific form. “Welfare depends on the State, doesn’t it? Whether it is local or not doesn’t change anything. Apart from that, there are associations here but I know nothing about them. They help people” (fg 7, f). Overall, participants believe that the municipality should intervene more, in particular by maintaining jobs in the civil service: “The Town Hall, if it really wants to help people it could create some jobs. The State has got money, it mustn’t try to pull wool over our eyes but it is giving it to the rich. Because here, the companies are leaving and nothing is done to stop that.” (fg 10, f).

## Role of the church

Focus group participants view religion as part of private life, as a source of problems, particularly in the case of Islam. “*When anyone talks about religion it’s about terrorism, Islam, all that, there have always been wars, and in all religions*” (fg 4, m). Some people are indifferent: “*Religion, you hear a lot about it but what is it really for?*” (fg 3, f) and others have a positive view of the previous bishop of Evreux, Mgr. Gaillot: “*At least he, he was open-minded*” (fg 5, f). The fact that he was accused without knowing the reasons strengthened the respondents opposition to the RCC: “*The Roman Catholic Church is against everything: condoms, sexual relationships ... It’s not concerned by the fact that AIDS is rampant in Africa! And when there’s a good one, he gets fired!*” (fg 1, m).

<sup>39</sup> These institutions are State institutions that are present over the whole of French territories.

### **Church and social work**

Respondents have a clear concept of social welfare when it is linked to the role of the voluntary sector. Social welfare then becomes charity, helping people in need; it is identified through the visible actors in the local community. Interviewees do not differentiate between RCC associations and others: *“There are quite a few associations of all sorts in Evreux, I don’t know whether they are Catholic or not. If the members are open minded, that’s a good thing »* (fg 7, f). RCC associations are completely legitimate in the social field and their actions are recognised as useful to society. *“The congregation, ’is not the same thing as the Church, you see members helping homeless people. Those are the real Catholics.”* (fg 2, m). Respondents see no problems, as long as the RCC affiliation of these associations remains almost invisible and neutralised. The common assumption is that they should be state financed. They recognise these associations as providing a useful public service: *“If associations like that didn’t exist, nothing would be done! Luckily they are present; they’re doing the state’s job.”* (fg 4, m). Thus, one young woman, a volunteer with the Red Cross, regularly helping Caritas, said that she had never realised they were Roman Catholic. *“They work like us, there’s no difference. But if they start talking to me about God, I wouldn’t like that “*(fg 3, f).

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

Respondents have different opinions on the Church’s role in public debate. The Church must not intervene; if it expresses an opinion on these matters it enters the public arena and, thus, becomes a political player. They reject a political role for the RCC, in order to protect the principle of *laïcité*: *“Religion has no place in politics. It does its own thing in its own corner and we do our thing in ours. That’s all. I respect people who have faith, who believe, but it’s a private, individual matter”* (fg 3, f). Interviewees admit that they are not familiar with the Pope’s attitude towards social issues and welfare and do not listen to his speeches because of his position on sexuality. They adopt the same attitude towards any member of the clergy. *“Me, I had an abortion so when I see a priest on TV I change the channel immediately. I won’t even listen. They have no right to talk about my way of life.”* (fg 8, f). However, they say that they would willingly listen to members of Roman Catholic associations, talking about their experiences, as actors and observers of social issues, but not as Catholics. *“As I told you, I find that the Church is not tolerant, so it lacks legitimacy but the people who work with the poor, whether in France or elsewhere, have things to say, I’m interested in that. As long as they don’t try to convert me ...”* (fg 2, m).

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

Respondents attribute changes to the economic crisis. Young people have difficulty planning ahead for the future and developing a professional career that may turn out to be uncertain both economically and geographically: *“My life is here, my family, my friends. I don’t like Paris but if I want a job I don’t really have the choice.”* (fg 1, m). *“Me, I said to myself: I’ll do law, in that way I’ll always find some job. But we are hundreds who have thought the same thing. You get the impression the dices are thrown before you get to twenty. If you’re not among the best, if you haven’t chosen the best course with the best diploma, you know you’re in for trouble; it’s not going to be easy. I’m studying but I don’t know what I’m going to do. It’s hard to become*

a lawyer and now it's not well paid.”(fg 2, m). “Me, I decided to stay at home with my children. Because working for a low salary, not seeing your family and spending all you earn to pay a babysitter, is not reasonable, it does not make sense. Working like that, I don't miss it at all.” (fg 9, f). Some have a more fatalistic view: “I really like my job. And I'm lucky to have a job. If I had had the choice, I mean, if I wasn't worried about being unemployed, I would have liked to study medicine. But, well, in society as it is at present ...” (fg 7, f). They see no short or mid-term solutions: “It's quite simple, either you don't have a job or you have one and you are exploited. It's a caricature but it really is a bit like that. Either you keep going on the same track, or you start a revolution.” (fg 8, m). They have lost their trust in politics: “They talk and talk but in fact they do nothing. Politicians have ideas in the back of their minds.” (fg 7, f).

### Wishes for changes in the church

The role of the Church is not clearly understood so respondents make no suggestions and predict no changes. Some provocatively propose that the RCC should give its money to the poor or to associations.

### Significance of gender

Most interviewees are very reserved on the gender issue. They find it difficult to give their opinion on a subject to which they have obviously given little thought: “Quite frankly, I don't know, I think it's not the same as for my parents' generation, it's a complicated question” (fg 1, m). They have observed that orientation is different depending on gender: “You can already see it in the courses. The boys go and study law, business, economics, the sciences and we, the girls, we go into social work or psychology. There are no boys in my course (nursing) and my boyfriend is on an automotive course, there are no girls!” (3, f). They acknowledge that with the same qualifications a woman is paid less than a man. They criticise and condemn this discrepancy but they are unable to explain it. The older women underline the difficulty in reconciling their role as a mother and a working woman: “Bosses, they don't really like it when we get pregnant. I understand them; they have to find a replacement ... And then you have to find someone to look after the baby, you leave your job in a hurry to pick up your child, you hurry lunchtime to do the shopping, you're running all the time and you have the feeling you're doing everything badly.” (fg 30, f).

## Sociological analysis

As noted above, the management of welfare involves many actors: the State, the department, the locality, as well as, local State authorities, such as the DRASS, the DDAS and the ANPE. The decentralisation process that started in the '80s has led to a clarification of the action areas of each actor and has given more autonomy to the departments and the localities.

Until recently, the localities had a strong role in dealing with social or welfare problems, but their span of decision making power and experimentation was limited. Initiatives came mainly from the associative sector. This domain is very active in

France although, paradoxically it is rarely studied. As France is a very centralised country, there is typically very little interest in “intermediary structures” (*corps intermédiaires*), particularly as far as welfare is concerned. It is the welfare state that is supposed to deal with social or welfare matters. Thus, it is important to describe certain aspects of this type of attitude before continuing the sociological analysis.

## The associative sector in France

The republican ideal is based on the distrust of an intermediary structure or organisation that could possibly place itself in between the State and citizens.<sup>40</sup> Up until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the State refused to legislate on the freedom of association, fearing it would benefit the Catholic Church. In 1880, “ordinary” people acquired the right to group together into an association, but religious orders were excluded from this right. Trade unions were authorised to do so in 1884. The law of July 1st, 1901 stipulates the freedom to create an association in France; one of its objectives was to decrease the influence of Roman Catholic congregations. No formalities are required to set up an association, apart from a declaration at the Préfecture. This authority has no right to give an opinion on the proposed objectives of the association (unless they seem illegal). The members define the objectives and the articles, as well as, the internal rules and regulations of the association. Only those associations recognised as offering a public service (they can be associated to a religious denomination) and, therefore, recognised by the State, can receive subsidies from state funding. They are subject to a financial and legal audit by the State. Although his law is generally viewed as relatively liberal, it forces associations to submit to state control when they need funds.<sup>41</sup> In the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many powerful associations were set up: confessional (see part 6) and non-confessional associations, which were strongly encouraged by the State. Alongside traditional activities, such as charities,<sup>42</sup> new aspects are being developed, particularly in culture and leisure.

### Association members and beneficiaries

In 2002, 21 millions people over the age of 15 were members of at least one association, that is, one person out of two.<sup>43</sup> To become a member of an association each member must pay an average membership fee of 30€ per year but up to 20 percent of associations do not require fees from their members.

Associations offering leisure activities attract the highest number of members (37 percent); they offer various activities, such as sport (14 percent), culture, music, and clubs for seniors (elderly) (19 percent), etc. Then there are associations whose mission is to “defend common interests” (36 percent): parents of school children (7 percent), trade unions (8 percent), occupants of rented housing, humanitarian work (3 percent), parishioners (3 percent) and neighbourhood residents (3 percent), etc. Finally, there are associations that are more focused on organising social gather-

<sup>40</sup> For more details see J. Ion, 1997.

<sup>41</sup> J-L. Laville and R. Sainsaulieu, 1997.

<sup>42</sup> In 2002, 64 percent of French citizens over the age of 15 donated various types of household and personal items (toys, food, clothing, etc). Three quarters of these donations were organised by charities or humanitarian organisations.

<sup>43</sup> M. Febvre and L. Muller, 2003.

ings (27 percent). Members under 30 years old generally belong to sport and cultural associations.

The average age of an association member is 48 members that are over 40 years old tend to invest more time in associations. Men are more numerous in associations: 49 percent men compared to 40 percent women. However, there are more men than women members in parent and religious associations, as well as, in clubs for seniors. There is also a socio-economic disparity since people from higher income brackets are more represented among members of associations (57 percent).

Only 17 percent of members hold positions of responsibility in their associations and only 9 percent are in charge of running events. Very few are paid for their work. Persons in positions of responsibility are 60 percent men, except in parent associations. They have higher education diplomas and come from affluent backgrounds.

People who benefit from these associations do not have to be members of the association. Members of associations whose mission is to “defend common interests” offer assistance; they seem more active and involved than members of other associations but do not benefit from any themselves.

### **The fundamental role of volunteers**

Associations could not function without the support of volunteers, that is, people who participate in the organisation of association activities without receiving any payment. In 2002, there were 12 million people aged over 15 engaged in a voluntary activity, that is 1 person out of 4.<sup>44</sup> Up to 81 percent of volunteers want, above all, to “do something for other people”. They may also wish to meet other people or to acquire skills (especially students) and 28 percent want to defend a right or a cause. Up to 55 percent of volunteers are men, with higher education diplomas and, most often, professionally active. Volunteers generally offer their help from time to time, on average 2 hours per month; only 2 volunteer out of 3 spends half a day per week working for an association. Their contribution is often related to a specific set of expertise or skills they have acquired (accounting, writing, etc.) and 8 percent of them have followed a training course for the type of work they offer.

### **The welfare state and associations**

After the Second World War the French State became a welfare State and tried to combine economic development and social coverage. Progressively some associations that were recognised for offering a public service have become organisations working in cooperation with state institutions. More flexible in their way of functioning and in their structure, these associations were asked by the State to carry out certain missions: offer additional aid to under-privileged people or assist them in their administrative needs, etc. Progressively entire aspects of welfare management came under the direction of an associative sector controlled by the State. This collaboration was encouraged by a flourishing economy that allowed the State to provide regular funding to these organisations.

The laws of 1982 on decentralisation brought an end to State support of these associations. Monopolies of services offered by associations, such as home help and

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<sup>44</sup> M. Febvre and L. Muller, 2004.

child minding, were now questioned. These services are considered potential sources of employment and the State authorised private companies to enter this sector. For example, now parents could benefit from state aid (in the form of a reduction in income tax) if they employed a child minder and the associations would no longer receive subsidies. “Associations and companies are, thus, forced to compete in job creation.”<sup>45</sup>

At the same time, given the high unemployment rate and increasing exclusion, the State asks the associations to help professional and social insertion. National professional insertion policy and solidarity-employment contracts (*contrats emploi-solidarité*) allow people to work for an association as long as this job is not in competition with existing professional activities. These jobs are short term and are more appropriate for people in difficult financial and social circumstances. In exchange, the associations benefit from lower taxation and are exempted from paying social charges (*charges sociales*). But the State no longer has the same financial means as in the past and now state subsidies depend on the end results of these associations. Therefore, subsidies are now granted on a less regular basis and are also regularly reassessed by the State. Confessional associations can benefit from state funding, if their objectives are recognised as offering a public service and under the condition that they are not involved in proselytism.

Thus, associations that work in welfare benefit from state recognition but at the same time they are under tight control if their existence and work depend on subsidies.

## The world of associations and the welfare aspect in Evreux

Research has indicated that a large part of welfare and social problems are dealt with by the associative sector, including both confessional and non-confessional associations. This is why I decided to interview people in charge of associations. Some end-users wishing to obtain public assistance turn towards the associations to obtain information on the functioning of the public services (documents to include in an application, where to obtain a certificate, or a translation ...). The associations seem to allow easier accesses from a geographic (they are established in neighbourhoods with many social problems) and human (their reception is considered warmer) standpoint. They also turn to associations to ask for a regular support (financing, food, clothing, help on psychological and medical problems etc). Public services can also direct people towards associations, notably within the framework of a social insertion project (participation to sewing workshops, reading and writing courses, assisted employment etc). Lastly, certain associations can enter directly in contact with people, as in the case of the homeless (*SDF/sans domicile fixe*).

It has been quite difficult to obtain a comprehensive list of all associations present in Evreux, as the municipal directory is incomplete. Furthermore, there is little common knowledge about associations. Only large and recognised associations work in partnerships, and they are not aware of the existence of other smaller associations. This indicates a problem in the organisation of the associative world.

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<sup>45</sup> J-L Laville and R. Sainsaulieu, 1997, p.366.

There are numerous associations, some of which deal with the individual as a whole in a specific geographical area. For example, the same association can help a person in a very precarious situation, as well as, someone who is experiencing temporary difficulties and who does not know how to obtain social assistance. For those in very unstable situations these associations will be able to help them gradually: to re-integrate themselves into society by means of a re-socialisation process, such as asking them to participate in shared meals, to help them receive medical aid (help them re-establish their welfare rights by accompanying them to state welfare services, to a doctor's office and to groups dealing with alcoholic dependency), to help them apply for low-income housing (help them establish contact with other associations that own housing facilities, creating the necessary files for requesting council housing), provide clothing and help them in finding work (writing a CV, reading ads) renewing contact with the family, etc. These people will be helped by one association that will have set up partnerships with others in order to fulfil their individual needs. They can also offer other activities, such as sewing and cooking workshops for women of non-French origin who live in the Madeleine. During these meetings women gradually start talking about the problems they are facing and ask for advice from the volunteers: learning to read and write, support in helping their children with school, alcoholism, financial difficulties, etc.

This type of association work primarily on developing relationships between individuals and re-creating a social network among people living in the same neighbourhood. Their activities are long term and positive results are evident in the time span given. As for the activities they offer, there is no difference between confessional and non-confessional associations. Catholic associations welcome everybody and do not organise moments of prayer or a religious service. The fact that these associations are Roman Catholic is, we could say, kept invisible. This allows them to collaborate more easily with other associations.

Other associations focus on a specific type of problem, such as need for housing. They, therefore, deal with all persons facing this difficulty. Some associations, partly financed by state funding, help individuals apply for financial aid and find housing or play the role of a financial intermediary until individuals receive financial aid by the State. The most critical situation at present is the problem of emergency housing. As facilities in Paris offering help and temporary housing for immigrants and asylum seekers are scarce, this problem has spread to the whole of the Parisian metropolitan area, and especially to Evreux. The few structures existing in Evreux are managed by associations that find themselves confronted with a new type of population, namely political asylum seekers who now live side by side with mainly homeless people. This situation results in great misunderstanding between different groups in need and regularly leads to violence. Asylum seekers have gradually become the dominant population in these centres. The homeless prefer to gather in groups and are then supported by other associations set up to meet this specific need (or associations who add homelessness to the type of services they already provide). People who benefit from these organisations can be housed there from a few days to a few weeks,<sup>46</sup> long enough to find another solution. In fact, people in charge of these associations say they extend emergency housing time (by doing this they are

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<sup>46</sup> This depends on each centre.

violating state orders) or “transfer” a person from one centre to another so that this individual does not remain homeless.

These associations are therefore trying to find a solution for a specific problem in a short time span. In contrast to the other associations mentioned above, they do not deal with people already settled in a certain geographical area and do not have as their objective the setting up of a social network at a local level. While their services remain within a temporary approach, these associations also help a person obtain social and medical assistance, etc. Given the deterioration of the cases they face, some associations disregard state regulations and are questioning more and more the reality of their mission: “*The DRASS asks me to not keep [homeless] people for more than three months but what can you hope to achieve in three months? The people who come here are physically and psychologically exhausted, they’re at the end of their rope. That’s what an emergency is; give them space where they can breathe. It wasn’t like that before but now this is the type of cases I’m seeing. I’m not an institution, I’m a human being dealing with other human beings, and I can’t just put them on the streets because that is what the text says! No, I can’t, that’s not how I see my work! Other solutions must be found.*” (association manager, q29, h)

Therefore, each association has its own definition of welfare and undertakes actions to solve the above problems. This variety of approaches towards welfare can lead to paradoxical situations: identical services are proposed to the same population in the same geographical area by a number of associations. These apparently contradictory definitions of welfare activities can confuse certain users who have difficulty in perceiving the specificity of each association.

It also seems that the wide range of services offered encourages users to think of themselves as consumers choosing among the social aid available to them. Those in charge of associations deplore this new type of behaviour that they describe as incoherent and disloyal but it seems to result from local circumstances. With all the vagueness that surrounds the definition of welfare and social assistance, each individual pursues his or her own logic and without any feelings of allegiance to any specific organisation, as they are all able to provide the same type of service (the confessional characteristic of an association does not seem relevant in this context).

Therefore, the associative sector in Evreux fills in the gaps left out by some of the State objectives in social welfare. However, all the actors involved in social welfare work confirm that they face new challenges. In a situation of economic crisis they can no longer simply offer a complement with the objective of social re-insertion through work. Each association has to adapt its services according to what a person’s best chances of finding work. Welfare actors, therefore, need to redefine what re-insertion is and to decide which model to use with people whose “employability” is low or even non-existent. This explains why some end-users view associations simply as possible sources of financial aid.

## Civil society and the elusiveness of social welfare

Serge Paugam<sup>47</sup> has demonstrated clearly that the notions of social welfare and its end-users are partly defined by social workers, therefore, indirectly by the State,

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<sup>47</sup> S. Paugam, 1991.

which financially supports these individuals. This imposed meaning was clear during the focus group with members of the local population, thus representing civil society. According to the focus group participants, welfare is related to certain institutions (ANPE, CAF...) and is, fragmented, depending on individual needs, but has no specific form at a local level. Focus group participants believe that they are poorly informed by the media and admit that they are not very interested in problems qualified as social, as they find them too complex. They view welfare as a complex domain, with its own specific jargon that is removed from reality and understood only by experts. It seems that citizens feel a lack of knowledge and understanding of most of the laws and acronyms or logos used in this field. They feel an attachment to what is "social/welfare" but are sceptical towards any reforms.

Paradoxically, the concept of welfare becomes more precise when it is related to the role of associations and the Roman Catholic Church. Thus, welfare becomes charity, a form of help to persons in difficult situations. Welfare at a local level is then identified with visible actors that are present in the locality. Interviewees recognise and endorse the actions of associations, including confessional ones. Confessional associations are considered essential and complementary, as long as they "neutralise" their Catholic faith. In contrast, focus groups participants believe that official religious actors must not intervene as such in public debate, even to discuss social welfare issues; religion must remain in the private domain. This suspicion also spreads to politicians who seem to have lost legitimacy according to the participants. This relates to the ongoing political crisis among institutions in France, which are not being perceived by the public eye as conveying shared values.<sup>48</sup> The citizens I encountered seem to be in search of new types or expressions of solidarity.

## A return to politics

Interviews with elected town council representatives confirmed the dominant role of associations in the management of welfare in Evreux. When they took office in 2001, the new municipal team wanted to carry out an independent audit to learn more about the welfare activity of the town hall and the town's major social problems.<sup>49</sup> The audit revealed that associations were the main providers of welfare. Therefore, the municipality wanted to regain power of the management of welfare through the CCAS (*Conseil Communal d'Action Sociale* – Municipal Council for Welfare). A new policy of "contractualisation" is therefore currently underway, consisting of financially subsidising only associations that achieve results through concrete and practical projects. This political re-orientation caused numerous conflicts in the associative sector as certain members refused any form of assessment by the State. The association managers I interviewed question the criteria used by the state to grant them financial subsidies. According to some respondents, by granting more power to localities, the laws on decentralisation have indirectly created a new type of "clientilism"; they believe that only associations corresponding to the model proposed by the municipality receive funds, while all other projects differing from

<sup>48</sup> On the crisis of institutions in France, see Dubet, 2002.

<sup>49</sup> Up to 600 questionnaires were sent out to people working in the associative and welfare sectors. The 150 responses received revealed 5 priority areas: access (for handicapped people), geriatrics, housing, precariousness and young people.

this standard are barely considered. Local elected council members partly confirmed this situation; they refuse to run the risk of supporting a programme whose impact they cannot measure in advance. Catholic association managers often mentioned the decrease in funding of confessional associations or of those not working in the Madeleine. Thus, sewing and cooking workshops for women have been suspended, while community associations (for people of similar origins) receive subsidies because they are considered more likely to be able to maintain social peace within the community.

The municipality's second objective was to place the CCAS at the centre of welfare policy. It was structurally reorganised to deal with tasks that were previously dealt with by associations: help in setting up an application to obtain the RMI, etc. The CCAS has now placed itself in direct competition with associations. Two other important projects are being implemented: the creation of a health centre that will bring together in one building different types of health services (administrative, social assistance, and also medical care) and the opening of a social grocery store. At the same time, links with organisations, such as the DRASS and the DDASS, have been strengthened.

The elected representatives interviewed admitted they had lost credibility among the local population, particularly concerning social problems and welfare. They also acknowledge that they rarely visit areas like the Madeleine, except when campaigning for elections. This tends to limit their capacity to understand the local situation. They count on information provided by newspapers and by the small number of associations with which they are in contact (therefore, a minority). They have had no meetings on this issue with management in the Catholic Church.

Therefore, politicians wish to return to the centre of social action, namely act as the leader of projects, the actor harmonising different existing actions and the privileged and essential institutional speaker in charge of social affairs. This policy indicates the past lack of political involvement on these types of social questions; it is now facilitated by the personality of the mayor of Evreux, who is also the President of the National Assembly, which allows him to accelerate certain procedures.

### Are Church and State subsidiary partners?

As Robert Castel has demonstrated,<sup>50</sup> the welfare state finds itself poorly equipped for dealing with new risks. This survey has permitted us to demonstrate that public authorities rarely take the initiative to find innovating solutions for newly emerging problems. However, they are able to integrate into their organisation proposals by associations. The association *l'Abri* is a perfect illustration of this situation. Created in 1984 upon the initiative of the *Secours Catholique*, *l'Abri* hosted and accompanied persons finding themselves in very precarious circumstances. At the time, few associations offered this type of service. In 2001, the DDASS approved the opening of the Centre of Emergency Housing (*Centre d'Hébergement d'Urgence*): subsidies were guaranteed, social workers, who gradually replaced volunteers, were recruited and partnerships were set up with other institutions. In 4 years, *l'Abri* totally changed its structure: originating from aid provided by Catholic associations and

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<sup>50</sup> R. Castel, 2003.

managed by volunteer workers, it retains its status as an association but is now managed and dependent on the state and local authorities.

In Evreux there is a type of subsidiarity between the Roman Catholic Church and the State.

First, the local RCC materially helps new associations or new projects (through lending schemes by integrating them into existing networks and granting them small financial donations) that are often set up in emergencies in order to meet new needs (e.g. the current problem of political asylum seekers). This is direct but non-visible aid since it is only provided through an association.

Second, the council can provide funds depending on achievement the end results. The opening of the social grocery store is one example. Given the increasing impoverishment of part of the population, *Caritas (Secours Catholique-France)* decided to create a grocery shop, where basic products would be sold at lower cost, compared to consumer market prices. Only certain persons can have access to this service. While looking for funding, project managers submitted their proposal to the town council, which agreed to help and to also try to obtain funding from departmental authorities. From now on, this grocery store will be officially known as an initiative of the town council but its collaboration with *Caritas* is rarely mentioned. However, although the funding is public, *Caritas* still manages the organisation. In order to function the store needs 12 volunteer workers. The announcement asking for volunteers was not posted on the town's website, but on that of *Caritas*. It clearly states that volunteers must "adhere to the values of the *Secours Catholique*, which also provides social training.

Finally, if an association's objectives and its operating methods are assessed positively by state authorities in charge of welfare at a regional, national or even European level, then it will be recognised officially and be able to receive long term funding. The State, through its various institutions, therefore, is financially responsible for some of the associative sector's activities but this measure produces a change in the status and vocation of these associations. Public authorities demand professionalism in this sector. This corresponds to the need for associations to secure volunteer workers who can be reliable and commit themselves long term; a recurring problem among association workers is that most prefer to commit only for short-term activities. Moreover there is the added complexity of legal texts and regulations and different authorities managing welfare. This situation has been exacerbated by the laws on decentralisation. Finally, associations receive less funding than in the past. All these factors lead to a desire for professionalism in the sector in order to better respond to demands and to obtain funding.

Without intending to, some associations, therefore, find themselves under the control of state institutions. Furthermore, projects that do not correspond to the State model can receive little help. These projects are trying to re-construct a long term social fabric. There is an emerging question on the future status of these associations: is this a process of homogenising the management of social issues and welfare?

To conclude, the existing cooperation at all levels between Catholic associations and the State, is minimised or even almost kept as a secret.

## Theological analysis

In order to understand the current situation, it is necessary to include a brief overview of the challenges that the French Roman Catholic Church faces today. Quotations are taken from the interviews already conducted but no references are made in order to respect confidentiality.

### The relationship between lay people and the Church

The policy of *laïcité*, defined and applied by the French Republic in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and leading to the law of 1905, deepened a split among French Catholics. The majority wanted a return to the monarchy, where the Church would regain its past role, and were opposed to a minority of Catholics who desired a reconciliation of faith and democracy. In contrast to his predecessor, Pope Leon XIII strived for a peace-making policy between France and the Vatican and encouraged Catholics to “rally round the powers that be”. This attitude provoked incomprehension and anger among many French Catholics.<sup>51</sup> It is in this specific context that a specialised Catholic action developed in France; as change in political power was not possible, its main objective was to bring back Christianity (Roman Catholicism) to the French society. Specific movements from various social classes emerged gradually, involving both young people and adults. The Young Christian Workers (*Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne* / J.O.C.) was created in 1926 to re-capture the working classes; it was followed by the Young Christian Farmers (*Jeunesse Agricole Chrétienne* / J.A.C.) in 1929 in rural areas and the Young Christian Students (*Jeunesse Etudiante Chrétienne* / J.E.C.) in 1930.<sup>52</sup> Women’s groups were also set up alongside. The Church handed part of the apostolic work to lay people; they were to convert society, class after class, following the principle of “like unto like”.<sup>53</sup> These lay groups received a mandate by the Church: they represented the Church in the core of civil society while submitting to its authority. They were not free to associate with political parties or trade unions. In order to obtain a better understanding of the environment that they operated in, various branches gathered more information and carried out surveys.

From the ’20s to the mid ’60s these movements were able to draw together many Catholics, while at the same time going through moments of tension with the hierarchy. The first conflicts were on the definition of the role of laity. In fact, some lay people strongly defended the environment that they were supposed to “infiltrate” and got involved in trade unions. Starting from an apostolic action, these lay people reached a position where they got involved in secular situations. For them there was no contradiction between their position and the principle of their mandate as stipulated by the Church. They thought they were following the model they had been provided with, that is, to enter these various environments and respond to the demands and needs they discovered. But this reversal of priorities became a source of tension with the Catholic hierarchy. Other sources of conflict emerged: lay men wanted more freedom of action and argued that since their work have to do with

<sup>51</sup> For complete and concise analyses, see J-L. Ormières, 2002 and F. Lebrun, 1980.

<sup>52</sup> This list is not exhaustive.

<sup>53</sup> E.g. a young Catholic worker will try to convert other workers, a law student other law students, and so on ...

society rather than religion they should be free to have their own views (on politics, trade unions, etc. ...) they also wanted to be autonomous in their neighbourhoods. The Church rejected this, considering that their work was legitimate only if it corresponded to the values of the Church.

Gradually these movements disappeared or took on another form, more in line with hierarchical demands. This led to a strong decrease in followers. Therefore, a specialised Catholic action in France was for the most part based on a type of social activism that encompassed politics and social issues. The failure of these movements estranged from the Church people who were very committed and they turned more towards politics. The same tensions existed within the clergy and led to many priests, monks and nuns leaving the Church.<sup>54</sup> In 1975, the clergy abandoned the mandate of having lay people working in society in the name of the Church; they stipulated that lay people can enter politics privately but not in the name of the Church.<sup>55</sup> However, this real opening arrived too late.

At the same time, the Church was shaken by the Lefebvre crisis. Mgr. Lefebvre criticised the Vatican II Council and advocated for a return to the Catholicism of the Counter-Reformation by founding the Saint Pius X Fraternity (*Fraternité Saint-Pie X*). This fundamentalist movement set up a seminary in Switzerland with 13 priests and 13 deacons (4 of which became ordained bishops). Various condemnations by Rome had no impact and Mgr. Lefebvre was excommunicated in 1988, thus creating a split within the Church. Even if this movement only involved a small minority of Catholics, mainly from the extreme right wing, the crisis weakened the Church in France.<sup>56</sup>

Therefore, it is in this context of strong tension that a new generation of bishops, encouraged by Pope John-Paul II, tried to “recover” the Roman Catholic Church in France. Gradually a new type of priest emerged, characterised by the following features: “attachment to doctrinal orthodoxy, loyalty and respect of the Pope, incarnated by John-Paul II, paying special attention to liturgy, respect of standards [...], and concern for apostolic initiatives among young people but with the desire to regain and retain the essentials of tradition.”<sup>57</sup>

This brief summary provides a better understanding of the challenges that the Roman Catholic Church in France has faced for a century, more particularly on the relationship between laity and the clergy. I have highlighted lay people who wished to combine Catholic action with politics and/or involvement in trade unions, as this is the model of social activism that has gradually disappeared from the Catholic stage.

The lay movements that refused this form of social activism received more consideration and recognition in parishes. Often previously co-existing with the movements described above, lay movements that rejected an activist model have now become the norm, not because the number of members has risen, but due to a lack of competition. Their actions are more focused on social work, charity and catechism... Thus, we get a better understanding of the appreciation shown by young people of events, such as the JMJ and Taizé, as well as, the development of charismatic groups.

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<sup>54</sup>For more details on these movements see C. Valasik, 2001.

<sup>55</sup>J-M. Donégani, 1993.

<sup>56</sup>For more details see L. Perrin, 1989.

<sup>57</sup>J. Prévotat, 1998, p.248.

## Co-existence of two lay models in Evreux

An interesting aspect of the analysis of the Church in Evreux is the co-existence of two models: an activist laity shaped by the original movements of specialised Catholic Action, and a non-activist laity at a time when the bishop of Evreux calls for the involvement of lay people to compensate for the lack of priests.

### **Activist laypeople**

When Mgr. Gaillot arrived, social activist movements were encouraged in the diocese. The most revealing example is that of the Rural Crossroads (*Carrefour Rural*). Given the difficulties of rural areas about 20 years ago, a Catholic movement called the *Rural Mission* was created. It included a group of associations and movements originating from specialised Catholic Action, and permitted Catholics to unite, discuss their thoughts and propose solutions. The *Carrefour Rural* emerged from these concerns and is now 10 years old.

Its first action was to set up a press review, including information published both by the only regional daily newspaper, *Paris-Normandie*, and numerous small local newspapers with a very high circulation: “*Our idea was ... what do these papers talk about? They talk about things of interest to the population and they reflect what this population experiences.*” (head of the *Carrefour Rural*, m). Volunteers read these newspapers and select the articles. The whole newspaper article collection is sent to all Catholic lay people and clergy in positions of responsibility in the diocese: “*Be careful, if you do not talk about these things in your churches or in your associations, you’re out of touch with reality. As the population is taking about this, try to take these topics into account!*” (head of the *Carrefour Rural*, m). It is also addressed to politicians and association members in leadership positions. Gradually task forces have been set up to work on themes such as Europe, pollution, recyclable energies, etc.

The second action of the *Carrefour Rural*, is to deal with questions involving the life of the Church that are not taken into consideration by the diocese. People who had a religious wedding and then divorced cannot re-marry in the Church. The *Carrefour Rural* proposes a liturgy of faith so that these Catholics “still feel that God loves them”. Couples are received a number of times in order to organise a celebration, where each one will read some texts. This event will not take place in a Church but in a place, where priests will be present. All the priests in the diocese are familiar with this initiative and give out information to anyone requesting it. Thus, some priests, who oppose this celebration, will refer people to the *Carrefour Rural*.

This movement is also very closely linked to the World Social Forum (*Forum Social Mondial*) and implements local actions to spread these ideas: meetings on solidarity, fair trade, Third World debt, etc. Partnerships are set up with associations and movements that are detached from the Church: agricultural trade unions, associations in aid of immigrants, illegal immigrants, etc. All these movements are left wing, some of them extremely so.

This movement of rural origin has become a place for activist reflection for the whole diocese. In contrast to priests in the parishes, who must take into consideration the various sensitivities of their parishioners, this movement can clearly maintain its own identity: “*We assemble people who are mainly committed activists, who*

want to change society and we are more a network of actors. We're more of a church that will admit very varied players, believers or not, depending on the activities we are undertaking, and let them find themselves, nourish themselves, feel welcome. A crossroads! The name was chosen for this reason ... Of course it doesn't please everyone but no one is obliged to come!" (head of the *Carrefour Rural*, m).

The characteristics of a social activist Catholic emerge in this brief presentation: he/she tries to understand the world of today and to bring answers inspired by the Church's opinions on a given problem. He/she is also trying to reflect on the internal evolution of the Church, such as celebrations for remarried divorcees. Inspired by specialised Catholic actions, the *Carrefour Rural* is at present marginalised. The lay people interviewed have the feeling that the priority of the diocese is at present more oriented towards a new definition of the believer, rather than towards reflecting on current social problems. The *Carrefour Rural* is supported by the Bishop of Evreux but not by all the priests, especially younger ones. Furthermore, lay people who have affinities with this movement are growing older, approximately 60 years old, and they can see no one to replace them.

However, young Christians do exist but I met them mainly in non-Catholic movements, committed to fighting against the perceived negative effects of globalisation, where they can work and commit themselves to a social cause. Although they admit their Catholicism inspires their values, they do not often attend church services or join parish movements. They feel totally Catholic but want to live their faith outside the institution.

### **A modern religious individualism<sup>58</sup>**

Given the lack of priests, lay people are asked to participate more in developing the life of the Church. However, they observe that believers have little desire to become involved or commit themselves to this end.

#### *The difficulty of long-term commitment*

It is difficult to find lay men and women who are ready to get more involved and take on positions of responsibility. Most refer to the lack of time: "*The people who are committed, let's be nice, they are over 45, I think they are older than that. Young people have problems in committing to very regular activities. You get the impression their lives are so all over the place that they have difficulty in doing anything for their faith but they are ready for the big moments, a bit like the students we see very rarely but who will be present if we offer them something very well organised, a big event. But you mustn't ask them for continuity.*" (q 7, f). As a result, it is the same people who regularly offer to carry out these functions. Often close to retirement or already retired, they want to pursue a social activity and transfer professional behaviour patterns to pastoral groups, for example. Many conflicts between lay people were mentioned during the interviews: generally a lay person in a position of responsibility behaves like a "company director" and imposes a mode of functioning he or she feels efficient but this leads to the de-motivation of followers, who gradually leave from these groups. For this reason, priests would like to find middle aged people (about 40 year olds), who still have a professional activity, to

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<sup>58</sup> This notion is inspired by the work of D. Hervier-Léger, see bibliography.

take over these missions. Apparently the older priests accept more easily this sharing, compared to the younger priests, who try to be as present as possible in lay meetings.

The difficulty in finding new lay people ready to commit themselves and get involved is reflected in the low regular presence of other lay men. For pastoral groups to function there must be a minimum of continuity and presence by the members but this faithfulness is falling constantly. This situation concerns the diocesans in charge and they are trying to find solutions to make organisations more flexible. Using the JMJ model as an inspiration, participation is requested more or less regularly, for example, once a month, and big events are organised, such as a whole day every 2 or 3 months, including both social occasions of conviviality and moments of reflection.

Leaving the Church also means church services with less and less followers, especially younger people. The lay people I met in this survey acknowledge that they do not always attend mass because of a variety of reasons, such as a family reunion, a long distance to the Church when one is tired, etc. They place practising a religion at the same level as any other activity. With the help of the EAP local pastoral activity teams priests are trying to bring liturgical innovations and to make ceremonies more individualised.

#### *A lack of religious culture*

Another reason that the lay people interviewed use to explain their reservation in committing themselves is their lack of religious culture, which priests also confirm. Older believers were socialised in Catholic groups, either in specialised Catholic action or in Catholic schools. Those who have retained their taste for social activism join movements, such as the *Carrefour Rural*, and are very little involved in parish activities. Others define themselves in opposition to this type of activism and expect the Church to help them nurture their faith. These latter needs reflect those of people in the following generations, who are concerned with how to define oneself as a Catholic. Therefore, lay people are searching for meaning, for Christian models. The transmission of the Catholic culture has reached a low level among people under the age of 40; they feel culturally deprived and have a desire, above all, to learn about the history and the gospel of the Church. They enjoy attending training sessions or meetings with a specialist speaker who can help them complete their knowledge. Their experience as a Christian is, therefore, more focused on a community sharing of moments that help them feel united, rather than an individual self-appropriation of the Church's message.

The desire of these people to appropriate their faith, to make it a personal experience, is strengthened by the Church but this still does not bring followers back to church.

#### *A lay discourse that is difficult to construct*

As well as the problem of religious knowledge, lay people do not express themselves in religious terms. Having been used to a dominating clergy, that produce the discourse, some feel they have no legitimacy to intervene as a Catholic. There is no real tradition in France of a lay Catholic discourse approved by the Church in paral-

lel to its own discourse.<sup>59</sup> French Catholicism has always been focused on a very strong hierarchical model, where the words of a priest had more weight than those of lay people. The multiple crises within the Catholic Action movements were indicative of this situation.

### **The French Church is faced with a paradox**

Thus, the Church expects laity to take on more responsibilities and propose innovations in the parishes, while the latter wait for instructions from the priests, even though they question their orders when they are too direct. In order to deal with this paradoxical situation, the training sector has been developed but it has not reached its initial objective. It is true that moments of dialogue and discussion between lay people are far more frequent in the parishes but the meetings that interviewees mentioned appear to be more social occasions than training sessions. Some priests try to be present and to transfer knowledge but they would like lay people to do some personal work “to catch up” first: *“Most of the time, lay people bring up questions they think are new for the Church while in fact the answers were given years ago! They don’t know very much, that’s the problem and what is more, they don’t realise it!”* (q 1, m)

This attitude among the laity encourages and comforts young priests who are more sceptical about sharing their activities with lay people in positions of responsibility or even with deacons: *“I would say, just between us, that there are far too many church services in my sector where there are young priests. There’s mass at eight thirty for the nuns, at 12 noon for four little old ladies because eight thirty is too early for them and while they’re doing that they cannot meet anyone else for whom a meeting that is not a church service could be important. I mean there are Christians in places other than just at the liturgical celebrations and we have to find a way of going out to meet them.”* (q 12, f). This is easily explained by the training they have received, which is more focused on spiritual aspects and a return towards tradition, in reaction to the previous period.<sup>60</sup> Older priests appear relieved to have some help even if there are obstacles to sharing responsibilities: *“It’s working better and better but it’s still difficult. A priest has committed his whole life, a lay person is appointed for three years, there’s a gap that means that one of them has committed his whole life but he has to share his responsibilities. He has to find his place and the lay person has to find his as well, that he’s not only an executive but also a support ...”* (q 2, m).

The role of deacons, although more and more visible, was rarely mentioned during the interviews. They seem to play an ambiguous role according to the lay people interviewed: *“We don’t really know what he does. It’s not very clear so I prefer to go directly to see the priest, at least with him you can’t go wrong.”* (q. 15, m). This confusion results in scepticism which is even more obvious among lay people in positions of responsibility: *“I know an old lady of 85 who told me that she was very disappointed by her son’s funeral, as there would be lay people. So I asked her why and she replied ‘Because I would have liked to have had a priest’. I asked her why? ‘Because for me ...’ ‘But what about your son, his belief?’ ‘No, no my son didn’t*

<sup>59</sup> While some lay Catholic authors/intellectuals have produced a Catholic discourse they remain a minority.

<sup>60</sup> See part 6.1.

*often go to Church'. And this little old lady was sweet enough to say to me 'You're right, it was a lovely ceremony, and I didn't think it could be as nice as that'. So we have to start with people we can talk to, who don't get annoyed, we have to reassure them by saying that we'll make the ceremony as you want it, the people who do this have been especially trained for it" (q 7, f).*

Following a period when the Catholic Church tried to bring people back to the faith at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, came an era when laymen who had been assigned this mission wanted to use the Church's discourse to change society. This caused many conflicts between the institution and lay people, even within the institution itself. The present situation is a result of this heritage. The Church expects lay people to participate more actively, to play a more active role (the definition of an actor differs between the older and younger priests), while lay people expect the Church to give them directions and help them find individual happiness. Apparently directions are provided but finding happiness remains a challenge. As for activist Catholics who are more likely to commit themselves in the Church, we have seen that they tend to remain distant and gradually join non-Catholic movements for reflection and/or action whose objective is to fight against globalisation.

### **A return to the Gaillot affair**

It seems easier to understand now why the "Gaillot affair" is still so relevant among the Catholics interviewed. As well as a feeling of injustice, it affects the core of what a believer really is, together with provoking a strong questioning of how the Church hierarchy functions. All the persons interviewed underlined the humanity of the previous Bishop but also his independence of spirit. By analysing these responses a fundamental criticism emerges: Mgr. Gaillot was not a team player (he did not practise solidarity) with, neither the other bishops, nor the priests in his diocese; he took decisions alone, which he publicised over the media. He opposed his charisma to the routine standardisation of the role of a bishop and deviated from established hierarchical rules.<sup>61</sup> Talking about issues, such as the marriage of priests, the ordination of women as deacons, the situation of remarried divorcees, while at the same time undertaking the fight to help for people who are excluded from society, he was able to reach an audience all the more vast benefiting from the advantages of television coverage.

His removal can, therefore, be explained more by the type of power that he opposed to the institution of the Church (contempt of the rules of tradition and a discourse close in style to a prophecy), rather than by the actual opinions he expressed. But for many lay Catholics he incarnated the model of an activist Catholic who intervenes in public debates (a position that provoked approval or disapproval, but not indifference). His departure, forced by Rome, deepened the hostility that some Catholics, who had been closer to the Church for a time, feel towards the Church.

The present challenge is to try to understand what is left by these events. In Evreux, some groups (e.g.: Partenia<sup>62</sup>) continue his fight but find little echo among the religious people. They have joined the network *Réseaux du Parvis* (the Parvis Networks). Created in 1999, these networks bring together 41 associations that

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<sup>61</sup> The notions of charisma and prophetism are borrowed from M. Weber, 1921.

<sup>62</sup> [www.partenia.fr](http://www.partenia.fr)

would like to help the Church evolve, each association working on a specific topic. Their creation and inspiration have no links with Mgr. Gaillot although they address many of the same questions. They are closer to the liberal Protestantist current.

To conclude, Mgr. Gaillot appears to represent a certain discontent both among some faithful Catholics and among some of the clergy but he did not succeed – or wish – to go beyond certain limits that would have terminated any contact between him and the Church.

## Laïcité, the Church and welfare in Evreux

### **An integrated *laïcité***

One hundred years after the law of 1905, *laïcité* is not questioned and its resulting principles have been internalised by French society. The interviews revealed that respondents (except for Catholics in leadership positions) have a somewhat vague notion of *laïcité* and its principles. They do not envision a change in the separation of religion and politics; they view religions as components of society that they do not wish to discuss. Religions are no longer seen as a threat for the Republic, even if some interviewees are worried about Islam. Interviewees did not want to give their opinion on the role of religions in France, indicating that they are rather indifferent to this issue.

Representatives of the Roman Catholic Church have completely internalised the idea that their religion plays no part in politics. They have accepted this situation and appear to have no regrets. The French Roman Catholic Church has indicated through Stanislas Lalanne, General Secretary of the Conference of Bishops in France (*Conférence des évêques de France / CEF*), that the principle of *laïcité* is satisfactory as it permits a balance between the State and the various churches. The RCC only regrets that some radical interpretations of the law of 1905 lead to restricting religion exclusively to the private domain. The representative of the Jewish Consistory in France (*Consistoire juif de France*) also shares this opinion but refuses any modification of the law. Requests for more flexibility come from the Muslim and Protestant communities, as they are confronted with more difficulties in constructing places of worship to practice their faith. Some local elected representatives are sceptical and refuse planning permission for the building of a mosque on their territory. There is also a problem of lack of funding to finance these buildings (mosques are partly funded by donations coming from abroad from countries like Saudi Arabia).

In this context, the Catholic Church no longer has the objective of converting society, nor even the wish to play any part in public political debate. In Evreux, it wishes that its experience and know-how in welfare and social problems be recognised and taken into account. We will examine this aspect below.

### **The Church: creating new social links at a local level**

Having observed that local solidarity has been deeply shaken and weakened by the economic crisis, the Church is trying to re-create social links between individuals through the local communities. By working at a micro-level, the Church hopes to revive the relationships that have been lost or severed between citizens. It is a question of learning to live together again in a society where the traditional reference points have gradually disappeared. Therefore, the urgency is, not to produce a dis-

course on social transformation but to help individual people re-discover the links that unite them, regardless of their differences. The Christian values highlighted are based on the notions of solidarity, sharing and listening. The Church does not propose a standardised framework to lay people but simply tries to encourage unity among the laity. From this point of view we can question whether the communities are not reaching back to the tradition of the specialised Catholic Action (*Action catholique spécialisée*). In fact some missions are similar:

- Taking into account the specificity of the population: social, economic, cultural backgrounds. Laypeople in positions of responsibility for a community must have the similar characteristics in order to facilitate their integration.
- Laypeople must be aware of the local populations' demands and adapt to its needs.
- Training of laypeople in positions of responsibility in order to preserve a certain homogeneity in spite of local specificities.
- Replacement of lay people in positions of responsibility in order to avoid any form of individual appropriation and thus any risk of a community becoming marginalised.
- Respect of other communities and a desire to develop actions shared by all.
- Laypeople in charge of parts of the liturgy.

The Church, by encouraging and stimulating close relationships, helps laypeople perceive the difficulties of the population they meet. This information is then relayed back to the various levels of the hierarchy. Catholic associations also have a first-hand knowledge of the field that is constantly updated by real, even if not official, partnerships with other non-Catholic associations working in welfare. The analysis of Catholic associations compared to the impressions of local communities and the experience of members of the clergy allow the Church to have, as a whole, an accurate view of the local situation. Lastly, the press review organised by the *Carrefour Rural* and distributed over the whole of the diocese permits the dissemination of all the information gathered. Thus, the interviewed Catholics in leadership positions appear to be more aware of the social problems in Evreux than some of the town's elected representatives.

As there is no collaboration between State and Church on these matters,<sup>63</sup> it is through the Catholic associations that some problems will be revealed at political level.

To conclude, according to the laypeople interviewed, religion is an individual matter. It is not necessary to have the 'stamp of approval' from the institution to consider someone as Catholic. The need to have faith, to believe, remains strong but lay people allow themselves to fill this need through sources other than the Church. As demonstrated by Danièle Hervieu-Léger, the Roman Catholic faith always encourages membership but is no longer at the centre of a person's life. This does not determine a person's political or social behaviour. So, it is the loss of power of the Catholic institution that is more at stake than faith itself.

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<sup>63</sup> The only cases of cooperation between public services and the Church are in chaplaincies.

## Gender analysis

As we observed in the first part of this research, it is only very recently that politicians have admitted the existence of social inequalities between men and women in France. The measures taken to address these inequalities are, therefore, very new and it is at present difficult to propose a pertinent evaluation of the situation.

One of the objectives of this study is to try to determine whether awareness on this issue is real among the interviewees. For this reason, it is preferable to present the results according to sector: the municipality, the Church and the associations. Respondents were reserved when speaking on gender issues, as they were in the case of *laïcité*.

## Gender relationships in politics

The strongest hesitation to discuss this topic was among elected representatives (men or women).

### **The expertise of elected members**

The law on equality is applied in Evreux and it is primarily women that occupy posts involving the family, solidarity, the handicapped, etc., while men are in charge of more technical positions: budget, transport... An interesting fact is that a man is in charge of social affairs in Evreux, a job most often given to women. Apparently he is the number two in the Town Hall not only because he would like social affairs to be included in all Town Council matters, thus making him the coordinator of all departments, but also because he works with the Mayor in the National Assembly, where he is a project manager for the health sector. Furthermore, he is reorganising the whole associative sector. Thus, a post seen as feminine becomes a seat of power when held by a man.

Women were mainly chosen because of their involvement in associations. In contrast to men, they had no important function in the local political party, some not even being members. Now they sit on the council and they continue defining themselves through these skills, as specialists and technicians, but not as politicians: *"I was chosen because I have experience in this domain, I had proved my worth in it. So when Jean-Louis Debré asked me to be on his electoral list I accepted, as I knew I could fill this function, that I could be useful. During council meetings I only speak on this domain, the rest is not my field."* (q 21, f). Thus, women will only speak out on their specific domain, thus running the risk of having to submit to a masculine type of decision making, even if men are in apparently less important posts: *"Men, it's true, talk more easily, even if it's just hot air sometimes. But they are more present on all topics, even mine, so there are conflicts. You learn to stand up for yourself, that's for sure. But I wouldn't like to go into politics."* (q 23, f). *"What is obvious is that the men on the council knew each other before, together in the political party so they have a past, a shared culture. Even the opposition, we know them, we argue. Not the women. It's true it can't always be easy for them, that side of things, but well ..."* (q 18, m). Politics are viewed as a masculine attribute, and more so by women than by men.

### **“Proving oneself”**

The men interviewed consider their contact with women as good. They are in favour of equality but always add that it could become a disadvantage for men who may be more competent for a particular post. The current Mayor had placed some men low on the list of candidate posts, which led to a number of resignations among those who felt that they had not been considered. So, women run the risk of being seen as not legitimate, a situation that leads them to want to prove their worth, in order to show they merit the job. This is an attitude that is less frequent among the men interviewed, who consider their nomination justified given their skills.

The arrival of women in such posts has had no impact on how typically feminine problems, such as childcare, are dealt with. Afraid of being stigmatised as women, they appear above all to want to integrate into the team, to prove their worth. They fear that these specifically feminine needs could decrease their professional worth in the eyes of their male colleagues. This tends to show that men/women inequalities are not yet perceived as a simple political topic and this view is also shared by the women who have benefited from the law on gender equality. There is a desire to neutralise the question of women, as being inherently full of divisions, and hypocrisy ... and in any case, not a legitimate issue.

### **A strategy of hiding?**

The women interviewed refuse to allow their work or responsibilities intrude in their private life. They take more care than men to preserve their family life. They underline the necessity to be oneself, not to enter into a power play. They talk about their involvement in making contact with the population, being more present, closer to the people, bringing practical, concrete solutions, not great, empty ideas: *“For me what is important is to keep time to meet people, to see if the decisions taken have had a positive impact, how people are living. It’s more interesting than the meetings that go on forever. And it’s the same for my private life. I want to see my children growing up, I discuss what I do with them a lot, and it’s their business as well.”* (q 21, f).

The place and power of women, therefore, depends of course on the State, as illustrated by the law on equality/parity, but also on the individual. It would be necessary to become more familiar with the internal decision making processes in the Town Council in order to be able to precisely define the role and influence of women in it.

## **Gender relationships within the RC Church**

The Church has no special discourse on inequalities between men and women in our society. It is not that these differences are denied (the French Bishops’ Conference praised the law on equality) but addressing them is not one of the Church’s current priorities.

### **Traditional feminine qualities**

During the interviews a traditional view of women and their qualities emerged among all the Catholic actors interviewed. When women hold positions of responsibility within the Church, they have posts corresponding to typically “feminine”

qualities: listening to people sympathetically, communicating, being open, helping the sick, etc. So women have taken charge of pastoral work for health and communication and dealing with lay people. But men retain the management of the press review, pastoral care for young people, training and accounting. Thus, we see the transfer of specifically feminine qualities into the public domain, which add value to the place of women in these functions.

Women are traditionally more involved in church work than laymen. Therefore, there are more laywomen holding positions of responsibility working with the priests and participating in taking decisions about the life of the Church. But once again we can observe the difference between the older and younger priests. During the interviews, women mentioned that some priests, in particular older ones, have difficulty in accepting this change but are quite happy to share their responsibilities with lay people. In contrast, young priests have no reservations about dealing with women but consider that lay people have too much weight in Church decision making. However, some old habits die hard: *"I heard about a young seminarian, who held a meeting with young people that wanted to be more deeply involved in mass and who said 'well, you girls do the flowers and the boys can serve at mass'. Both the mother and the little girl were upset and they were right."* (q 11, f).

### **Scepticism from the laity**

Some lay people are sceptical, as they prefer to see a priest rather than a nun, and a nun rather than a lay person: "I can see it with the chaplain in the hospital, people always ask for a priest. When I say I am a nun, things are easier but it would be better if I had a uniform. Whether I'm dressed like everyone else or not doesn't change anything, I am a nun, I don't hide my identity but it's not a bit of material that is going to change anything. No, on the contrary, I think that it has more impact like that and at the same time it's a choice. I have total respect for those who still wear their robe." (Health pastoral worker, nun).

According to the lay people interviewed the Church is essentially incarnated by men. The ambiguity surrounding the role of a lay person affects more negatively women than men. The latter are considered as "naturally" more apt to respond to religious demands than women, reflecting RC hierarchy. *"The Church, it's men, well ... priests. Yes, there are nuns but it's not the same thing. So I think people still mix things up, they feel a laywoman is less legitimate than a man. It's like a reflex. But society is changing, so the Church is as well, there's no reason it shouldn't."* (q 14, m).

Even if women are more numerous and more active than men, the present and future image of their role has for the moment barely evolved. Power relationships, therefore, appear to remain identical within the RC Church. Decisions are taken by men, who dominate the hierarchy. If there is any change, it is more symbolic than in the actual existing structures.

### **The "Feminisation of the Roman Catholic Church"**

The analysis must not be limited to one direction. As, finally, women fill posts involving openness and dealing with others, they are the ones who show, or represent the Church at a local level. This can be seen as a "feminisation of the Church", which is more and more often defined as listening and having empathy. So, we find

ourselves in an ambivalent situation, where women remain restricted to activities defined as specifically feminine. However, these specifically feminine activities also allow them to access posts of responsibility within the framework of the new image that the Church would like to project, namely that it is more open and prepared to listen.

## Gender relationships in associations

Through the interviews with people in charge of associations and with volunteers, one observation emerged constantly: the deterioration of the relationships between men and women in most impoverished areas, especially in the Madeleine.

### **Associations dedicated to women**

In Evreux, some existing associations focus only on women: one association is dedicated to marital violence and provides a place for obtaining information and offering help and legal information. The women who reach out to these associations are often in very difficult situations, including immigrant women. Frequently they do not speak French so volunteers in the association have to call for help from the community associations that have been created at the Madeleine and subsidised by the Evreux Town Hall: *“The community associations, I avoid them when I need information. Men mainly manage them. I phone to associations where I know there are women who can interpret and whom I can trust. So we have contacts, dialogues with those women, they act as interpreters when we meet women and also so that we can understand the culture of these women better. We have women from Senegal, Congo, Zaire, Benin and Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Turkey. So it’s important to be able to have a dialogue on a cultural level and to explain French laws.”* (q 27, f). The woman in charge of this association, who describes herself as a feminist, acknowledges that issues of women’s rights do not seem to interest many people, apart from students of History. ... There is occasional interest from time to time, but no collective analysis on how to deal with these problems.

Other associations offered services especially for immigrant women, such as sewing or cookery workshops. *“They are victims, like French women, ‘between quotas’ as some are victims of sexist discrimination and also racism, so there’s a double discrimination.”* (q 26, f). The municipality has stopped financing these activities, considering that participants had no need to learn what they already knew. Thus, the places that allowed women from different communities to meet and create a social network, have closed. But these places managed by social workers, mainly women, allowed the creation of dialogue. Thus, various problems, such as helping a child with his/her homework learning to read and write and helping each other were discussed during these workshops. It is true that these activities were based on topics considered purely feminine but they were particularly important in helping these women to get out of their homes and make contact with other women. Now these women are confronted with two possibilities: to join community associations that are financially supported by the municipality that wants to keep a “social peace”, or get involved in other types of activities such as framing workshops located in the town centre. The latter possibility only exists in theory because to access these places they must leave their neighbourhood, take the bus and enter structures where

they know no one. So, women who refuse to define themselves as part of a specific community are cut off from social life.

### **A crisis in masculine identity**

There is a crisis of masculine identity, mainly among working class populations that are currently unemployed. These populations are still dominated by a patriarchal model according to which the man brings in the family's financial resources. In these cases the men are not only confronted with unemployment but also their professional skills are no longer of any value. Thus, these men find themselves in a situation of inactivity that makes their masculine identity more fragile. In contrast to women they do not get involved in family activities but appear on the contrary to pull back: *"Men, we can see it clearly, they are ashamed to be unemployed. So they don't go out anymore. Their friends were their colleagues, they are working, they're busy or else they are unemployed like them and they avoid seeing each other. The women tell me about it, their men stay in front of the TV and that's all. They don't help them as much as they used to."* (q 28, f). At present, social workers do not know what solutions to offer, as they are confronted with a problem beyond their competence or control.

Lastly, this problem is amplified for young working class men: with no diploma or qualifications, unable to find work, they still subscribe to the masculine model. However, feeling dissociated from the world of work, they have turned into an overpowering authority over women in their neighbourhood and intimidate those who are not a part of it. The space for affirming their masculinity is the space around council housing. The development of community associations offer convivial places but young girls and women are rarely present.

It would be interesting to continue the research on the question of whether actors in the associative sector have different attitudes depending on their gender identity and that of their representatives. In fact, through this brief analysis, women are more frequently viewed as victims and men, especially young men, are considered responsible for their own situation. It would also be interesting to see if belonging to a faith changes these representations.

To conclude, the notion of gender cannot be understood unless men/women relationships and the way masculine and feminine identities influence each other are studied. The greater presence of women in posts of responsibility, even if it is still weak, can indicate an opening in symbolic representations. However, it is important not to over-estimate these trends, especially when studying the situation of women in the working place, and more particularly that of immigrant women. Therefore, the question of gender cannot be dissociated from analyses of social differences and international comparisons, allowing the researcher to also go beyond his/her own ways of thinking. The law of equality/parity in politics shows that even if the desire exists, it requires support to avoid getting trapped in existing social structures, where masculine domination is still widely present.

Finally, the feminist movements in France are in a phase of great crisis. Universalists or differentialists, all feminists agree that at present they are more dogmatic than innovative in their reflections on gender issues.

## Main findings and concluding reflections

In line with the principle of *laïcité*, there is no official cooperation in Evreux between the RCC and local authorities. However, actors indicate an existing informal subsidiary interaction. For many centuries, the RCC has undertaken social welfare work in France through its associations. This responsibility is still present nowadays and more obvious in the associative sector.

This observation must not lead us into thinking that Catholicism is the prevailing norm in society. It is true that religion is a part of private life now; belief is such a personal issue that it seems unable to inspire a collective social/welfare project, as French society is completely secular. But a fact that seems so obvious in fact hides a phenomenon that touches the whole of French society. As we have seen, French society is going through a very deep economic crisis that has shaken faith in state institutions that normally make living together possible. Even the capacity to think of being able to live in harmony together has been affected. The Catholic Church, aware of this situation, is therefore trying, above all, to rebuild social cohesion at the local level, either through local communities or through associations.

Thus, public authorities try to solve these problems by analysing the specific needs of various groups among the population (unemployed, the elderly, etc) for whom welfare programs are designed. At the same time, local religious organisations (modernising an ancient tradition of being active in the field) identify problems that they attempt to solve with local actions, through aid to associations. Confronted with “new social questions” these approaches are complementary. This typically French silence and non-cooperation are an obstacle to solving the current social crisis.

It is difficult to transpose what is happening locally to a national level but the responsibility of welfare needs is at the core of French society at present.

## The future of the question of social issues and welfare

Associations deal with the management of welfare even if the municipality is trying to regain a central role. We have seen that state funding – (essential for the functioning of these structures) implies a professionalism of the sector. Does this trend, leading to the disappearance of volunteer workers, run the risk of standardising human contacts thus, making them more distant, as demonstrated by Serge Paugam? Or, will it allow, as François Dubet<sup>64</sup> suggests, an evolution of institutional figures, making them more democratic?

Furthermore, state funding is awarded mainly to associations producing concrete short or mid term results. But the situation (especially in the Madeleine area) requires long term actions that will permit the rebuilding of a social network and allow a new type of thinking about the issue of social and professional insertion for all citizens in a period of unemployment. These long term objectives were the first victims of financial cuts, both at the local and national levels.

The urban violence and riots that broke out in France during the first 2 weeks in November 2005 also involved the Madeleine. These were the most serious incidents in the Eure region. The results were severe: approximately 30 cars, 3 stores, a police

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<sup>64</sup> F. Dubet, 2002.

station and telephone booths were burned and destroyed by the protesters. The fight between the police and about 100 young people (armed with base ball bats, pétanque balls, stones and metal bars) damaged a school and the town hall annex and some people were wounded.<sup>65</sup> The youngsters involved are mainly French citizens of the second or third generation of immigrant families.

The French Prime Minister, Dominique de Villepin, after taking the decision to impose a nationwide curfew,<sup>66</sup> admitted that the decrease in association funding was a mistake and promised to reinstate it.<sup>67</sup> The General Assembly of the French Bishops' Conference in Lourdes doubts that repression is the answer to the "dramatic tension of our era" and insists on the importance of the "daily work by associations and institutions in order to create relationships of solidarity so that all can live in harmony together".<sup>68</sup>

Welfare actors, unmotivated by this policy that brings about few solutions to the increase of social instability have trouble achieving their missions. Indirectly, it is the traditional figure of a social activist (conveying a social project) that is in crisis, for both Catholics and non-believers. This leads to a decrease in volunteer work in associations and social movements. This situation has contributed to the appearance of a new type of social activism in France, which has also been observed in Evreux. Some Catholic associations share with protesting groups, such as ATAC, the same questioning – under different forms – of activist campaigning: refusing a centralised functioning method, emergence of a newly concerned group (educated middle class and women), refusing power, new definition of the end-user, return of the theme of exclusion, transnationalisation, a new political culture that manifests itself in a special approach of involvement, regular actions, refusing and/or difficulties of thinking about the projects.

## Beyond the question of welfare

French democratic values are founded on the notion of equality of rights for all citizens. To be a French citizen is to be part of the Nation, without any notion of individual specificity. Belonging to a church and ethnic or linguistic differences, etc. are considered part of private life and not present in public areas. It is only step-by-step, under the pressure of social uprising and movements, that social inequalities are considered and possibly dealt with. The implementation of the Welfare State (*Etat-providence*) had the objective of bringing welfare to the most needy in order for everyone to have concretely equal access to opportunities and, thus, be able to become citizens with full rights. The same difficulties are found in the debate on equality between men and women. The recognition of social inequalities related to gender is both a long and recent process in France. This explains why some of the people interviewed (especially the elected town council members) were hesitant to discuss this topic. The present challenge, as indicated by the recent urban riots, is to ac-

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<sup>65</sup> "La Madeleine sous le choc", *Paris-Normandie*, November 7th, 2005.

<sup>66</sup> The law of 1955 imposing a state of emergency was applied during the war with Algeria and only used once since then in New Caledonia in 1984.

<sup>67</sup> "Dominique de Villepin choisit l'état d'urgence", *Le Monde*, 9 novembre 2005, p.10.

<sup>68</sup> Declaration by Mgr. Ricard, President of the Conference of Bishops of France, (*Conférence des évêques de France*, Lourdes), Novembre 5th, 2005.

knowledge that in France there are also inequalities related to ethnic and cultural origins. The political choice to fund community associations, to the detriment of other types of associations, has unwillingly deepened identification with culture of origin, rather than with the shared values of belonging to French society.<sup>69</sup>

Therefore, the scope of study goes beyond welfare and contributes to a better understanding of the present challenges for democracy in France: particularly participation and solidarity.

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# The Catholic Church in Italy as an Agent of Welfare – the case of Vicenza

ANNALISA FRISINA

## Methods and Materials

The Italian case study is based on individual interviews (18) and focus group interviews (4). This data is complemented by observant participation in local meetings of citizens' movements and analysis of various documents (for instance those published by the Local Social and Health Unit 6, by Caritas and others third sector associations).

The interviews are semi-structured and follow the seven common questions used in all of the case studies of the WREP project. Interviewees were asked welfare-related questions on various actors in the welfare system (State, market, third sector and the family) and different areas of social intervention (healthcare, education, etc.).

Interviews were recorded and carried out in the interviewee's office or place of work, which also gave me the possibility of "ethnographic" observation. Although I had estimated one hour for each, almost every interview I conducted took longer (the average time for each interview was approximately two and a half hours).

Researching the biographical profiles of the interviewees, proved useful in order to show the possible links between the various types of actors, in particular between State and religious actors: they often share a common cultural-religious profile, use the same social networks and tend to interchangeably use persons in different roles. Political and professional activities are often accompanied by activism within the Catholic voluntary work carried out. For instance, the head of the "Caregivers project" for the Veneto Region is also a volunteer for Caritas-Diaconia.

Moreover, considering the education and employment history of influential individuals in Vicenza can also provide an indication of the underlying power structures: for example, it seems that having a history of social work in Church-related organisations is a good way to achieving a certain social, political or professional status. "If you participate in Caritas-Diaconia, you are making a good move to become a town councillor or director of social policies ... It is a good place to start if you want other later appointments, because in Vicenza the Church is still considerably influential" (15, m).

The individuals I have interviewed are rather equally divided among the following groups:

- 6 representatives of the **state welfare sector** (individuals working in social care for the Social Services of the Vicenza Commune, IPAB<sup>1</sup> and the Local Social and Health Unit 6). Three women and three men.
  - 6 representatives of the **local Church** (representatives of the diocese and Caritas-Diaconia, and main local religious institutions). Three women and three men.
  - 6 representatives of the main **lay private social organisations** in Vicenza. Two women and four men.
- ✓ Three discussion groups with participants drawn from the **local population**.
    - Focus group 1: four women and four men.
    - Focus group 2: five women and five men.
    - Focus group 3: four women and four men.
  - ✓ One **women's discussion group on gender** issues, composed of twelve social workers (employed in third sector associations and social cooperatives) and one nun, who acted as the discussion group leader.

**Lay private social organisations** were included as an additional source of data, as they consist of individuals who have an innovative vision of both social work and the Church. As we will see, the most critical observations on the Vicenza welfare system and the role of the Church came from these actors.

For the focus groups of the local population, I followed the local press in order to identify a theme that has mobilised many citizens in Vicenza over the last few years: participation in public life. I was a participating observer at the first national convention on “Direct Democracy” which took place in Vicenza on 24 October 2004. I was able to meet people who are not particularly interested in welfare, but who are familiar with group discussions on issues of public interest. I was, therefore, able to gather for the first time a focus group on “welfare and church in Vicenza” by using a previously existing group that was formed to discuss “the participative budget” (which means the possibility for citizens to be involved at a local level in setting the social expenses of the public administration). Moreover, through “snow-ball” sampling I was able to meet a local group from the “Active Citizenship” movement (present nationwide, [www.cittadinanzattiva.it](http://www.cittadinanzattiva.it)) and contact a doctor who organised a second focus group. These two focus groups are composed of both men and women and are heterogeneous in terms of socio-economic levels (for example, office employees and professionals are both included) and age groups (the age range varies between 30 and 70 year olds). Thus, I selected two focus groups including citizens in order to gain a better understanding of the types of ideas on “welfare and church”, starting with those that have the resources and interest to “form an opinion” on such issues. In addition to these two groups of citizens, I also selected a group of young Padua University students from Vicenza, in order to examine if and how the generational dimension is relevant.

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<sup>1</sup> Institution for Public Assistance and Charity. One of the largest public organisations active in the provision of assistance to the elderly, endowed with considerable assets, including funds, art and real estate, inherited from historic local benefactors.

I also decided to include a focus group of women from the third sector, as they belong to a group which was the result of an initiative by a nun with an interest in reflecting on society within a gender-perspective.

Finally, throughout the study I have used the English term “welfare” since Italian terminology refers to a State-perspective: *stato sociale*, meaning “social state”. The English word “welfare” has become a part of the Italian language, to the point that there is a Ministry of Welfare, bearing the English term.

## The town of Vicenza

Vicenza is a small–medium town of 112,717 inhabitants (52.3 percent are women),<sup>2</sup> typical of the socio-economic and urban context of North Eastern Italy,<sup>3</sup> with its strong development and correlated social problems, including the progressive aging of the population.<sup>4</sup> There are 10,234 immigrants (46.2 percent are women) in Vicenza and this number has been progressively increasing over the last few years. The immigrants in Vicenza are 9.1 out of 100 in this area, while the national average is 2.3 out of 100. The nationalities vary significantly and the main countries of origin of these immigrant populations include: Serbia and Montenegro (2,355 residents); Morocco (692); Albania (614); Bangladesh (548); Ghana (525).

Vicenza is located in the Veneto Region, at the centre of a very successful model of industrial polycentrism.<sup>5</sup> This rich and strong industrial area is mainly composed of small and medium enterprises, which are spread throughout the province and which export up to 80 percent of their production. The Vicenza province exports alone as much as the whole of Greece, and together with Treviso (another medium-small town in the Veneto region) as much as the whole of Argentina.<sup>6</sup> The most important sectors of Vicenza’s economy are heavy and precision metalworking, electrical engineering, machines for processing wood, machines for leather tanning, machines for jewellery, and machine tools; and also textile, clothing and wool industry; jewellery (which dates back to the XIV century and which makes of Vicenza a productive system with the highest specialised concentration in the world) and finally handicrafts.<sup>7</sup>

This particular model of economic development is “socially constructed”<sup>8</sup> by small centres inhabited by peasant families. The development of small industry, with its productive and organisational flexibility, finds a fertile soil in a traditional society where the family-enterprise is the main source of solidarity; it is based on a “patriarchal authoritarianism projecting itself on the whole society and on the social rela-

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<sup>2</sup> All the data on Vicenza dates to December 31, 2003 and originates from the homepage of the statistics office of the region: [www.comunevicenza.it/ente/statistica/vedivicenza.pdf](http://www.comunevicenza.it/ente/statistica/vedivicenza.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> For an examination of the common features of North-Eastern Italy (e.g.: small enterprise, “post-fordism”, polycentrism, autonomy, internationalisation ...), see Diamanti 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Today Vicenza has 13.1 percent inhabitants between 0–14 years old, 66.2 percent between 15–64 and 20.8 percent over 65.

<sup>5</sup> Vicenza has a 2.5 percent unemployment rate, definitely lower than the national average.

<sup>6</sup> Pavanello 1999, 218.

<sup>7</sup> Pavanello 1999, 219–220.

<sup>8</sup> Bagnasco 1988.

tions it produces”.<sup>9</sup> In this diffuse economy, handicraft and other small enterprises are characterised by a heavy dependence on family work, on extremely flexible working hours and on lower overall expenditures. For this reason, in the Veneto region enterprise is “a model, a social identity and not only a means to production”.<sup>10</sup>

Vicenza has always been a traditional Christian-Democrat bastion and is now governed by a centre-right majority (*Forza Italia*, *AN* and *Legha*), which obtained 52.2 percent of votes in the latest elections. According to Messina,<sup>11</sup> in the Veneto region relationships with politics have always been instrumental: people expect politicians to defend the “traditional order” and to safeguard the interests of the local community. “Anti-state localism” tends to give politics a negative connotation, as a form of defence used by private citizens (socially or economically) and the traditions of the local community against the power of the central State.<sup>12</sup> *Legha Nord* finds here its fertile soil, becoming the main expression of this “anti-political territory”. In fact, “we no longer witness the socialisation of politics, the employment of territory as a landmark of political consensus, as a ground where parties can act and root. Territory and local realities become instead touchstones of identity. Sources of ideology, alternative to religion and class, are hence employed against the State.”<sup>13</sup> For these reasons, the Veneto region can be considered “an economic giant and a political dwarf, since the rapid expansion and success of the industrial districts have not been accompanied by an equally effective political development, neither on the cultural level, nor on the institutional, or on that of the local political class”.<sup>14</sup>

Policies, particularly social policies, are delegated by local authorities to third sector associations, which are very common in the Veneto region. According to an ISTAT survey (2001), 9.5 percent of all non-profit national organisations is in the Veneto region: 21,092 out of a total of 221,412 organisations. Contrary to general public opinion, 75 percent of the non-profit organisations active in the Veneto region do not have a religious orientation, against 61 percent on the national level. According to Brunetto and Longo,<sup>15</sup> this data indicates an “increasing professionalisation of third sector organisations, which are less and less ideologically oriented, and more and more connected to local administrations through the process of externalisation of services”.

Regarding the presence of women in third sector organisations 63 percent of paid employees are women and in the Veneto region this percentage is at 64 percent. The ISTAT national survey shows that areas with the highest concentration of women workers include: social care (more than 100,000 employees), healthcare (79,000) and education (71,000). In these areas men amount approximately to half the number of women, while in other areas, such as environmental services and international cooperation, the data indicates a more equal participation between men and women. In terms of volunteer work, 57 percent of the volunteers in the Veneto region are

<sup>9</sup> Dal Re 1999, 103.

<sup>10</sup> Del Re 1999, 104.

<sup>11</sup> Messina 2004, 31.

<sup>12</sup> Messina 2004, 32.

<sup>13</sup> Diamanti 2003, 60–61.

<sup>14</sup> Diamanti 2003, 33.

<sup>15</sup> Brunetto and Longo 2004, 66.

women. According to Messina,<sup>16</sup> women find in the associative-network “a privileged means of participation, also in politics”. However, De Leonardis<sup>17</sup> argues that work in the third sector is not a guarantee of political participation and can become mere “business”, in which particularistic interests prevail over a perspective of social citizenship. The predominance of women in this sector is ambiguous: it could indicate that they simply execute projects devised by the administration of the organisation or the Church, thus perpetuating a family-role of social care; alternatively, it could indicate that women contribute in some way to the development of a gender perspective in the welfare mix, for instance taking into consideration the phenomenon of the feminisation of poverty and providing special services for women in social distress.

## The Catholic Church in Vicenza

Research indicates that the Veneto region is historically characterised by a “white political subculture”,<sup>18</sup> organised around the Church and its related associations, like *Azione Cattolica*, *Coldiretti*, and the various Acli (Italian Workers’ Catholic Association).<sup>19</sup> “The importance of Catholic associationism goes beyond matters of faith and religion. It can be explained, in particular, through its contributions to the organisation and orientation of social life and the Church’s support to the fulfilment of local interests, the need for socialisation, social assistance and training. There is no area where the Catholic world is not present: schools (nursery schools and Catholic schools), free time, the socialisation process (in parishes, recreational and cultural organisations), and special interest groups (through associations offering trade union, enterprise and autonomous work representation). It is an offer of services and places of socialisation which, even when Church and religiosity lose influence on values and beliefs, preserves a solid and widespread presence in society.”<sup>20</sup> This strong cultural matrix can be found in most of the interviews.

The urban area of Vicenza comprises 36 generally wealthy **parishes**. Every parish constitutes a small welfare centre proud of its own welfare activities. Some of the parishes move their charitable practices elsewhere through the financing of hospitals and schools run by missionaries in Africa. Despite various attempts by the Bishop of Vicenza to give a centralised and coherent impression to the social work of the Diocese, each parish, with the support of its parishioners, tends to act individually without always realising it, both in financial terms (the economics of the Diocese really say more about fiscal evasion than about the Diocese’s finances) and in terms of areas of social intervention. This exaggerated local pride often clashes with the impossibility of managing numerous or complex cases. In this case, the parish helps spread awareness of the issue of social assistance to other local welfare agents, predominantly the local *Caritas* or *Diaconia*, an organisation, which is under the same authority as *Caritas*, and can therefore be considered as part of a single organisation.

<sup>16</sup> Messina 2004, 33.

<sup>17</sup> De Leonardis 2002.

<sup>18</sup> Trigilia 1986.

<sup>19</sup> Della Porta 1999, 116.

<sup>20</sup> Diamanti 2003, 33.

*Vicenza Caritas* defines itself “as a pastoral organisation, of social activity at the service of Christian communities. The goal of its existence is to promote solidarity towards people who are suffering from poverty and marginalisation.” *Caritas* exists principally because of the voluntary membership of people, believers and non-believers, whose intention is to actively carry out social work for the benefit of those who are less fortunate.

*Caritas-Diaconia* is the predominant player in debates and practices of social welfare in the Vicenza territory. According to the directives of the Italian Episcopal Conference (CEI), *Caritas* should not be an agent that produces welfare. As a result *Diaconia* was created on the local level, which allows it to legally receive generous funding from both the State and private sources. *Caritas-Diaconia* is the actor with the most visibility in the public domain and legitimacy in the eyes of local authorities and among Vicenza’s public opinion.

There are other religious institutions in Vicenza. The main ones are:

- The Ursuline nuns of the Holy Heart have their motherhouse in Vicenza
- The Pious Society of St. Gaetano (male religious order)
- The teaching Nuns of St. Dorotea (female religious order).

Many other organisations are involved primarily in education: they operate a variety of schools, but most of all nursery schools. They are often very expensive and are therefore considered as “schools for the wealthy”.

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

### Views held by the public authorities

Public authority representatives seem to value the social work carried out by Church-related actors in the Vicenza welfare system. The interviews reveal that actors such as *Caritas-Diaconia* operate in areas where state intervention does not reach. But why does the State does not “reach” these areas? The most common answer (given also by *Caritas*) is that religious actors are “in the frontline” and can discover new needs and report them to the state sector, which will then take care of them. Hence, direct management of social services by religious actors is temporary and bound to “emergency” situations.

Nevertheless, considering the case of a “town shelter” that stays open during the winter months, this has nothing to do with an “emergency”: it has now been in existence for almost 8 years and is essentially based on *Caritas* voluntary work. The state actor, the Local Social and Health Unit (USSL 6) is providing only ... the sheets and pillows! It is clear that the state actor is *implicitly* asking religious actors to take care of those segments of society which, because of certain *political choices*, are not part of its political agenda, such as many social problems concerning immigrants.

## **Welfare**

According to state actors, welfare concerns people's rights to social citizenship and is based on the principle that the community has to take care of those who are in need. There is consensus also regarding the fact that Italian welfare is based on a close and mutual relationship between public and private actors.

“This is the definition of welfare: a right of citizenship ... an acquired right. And so you get the specific case of Veneto and the even more specific case of Vicenza ... to ensure these levels we do not only count on our own resources but on all the resources of the territory, be they public or private, as long as they accept to become a part of the network” (3, m).

“It is a matter of civilization. People have the right to be assisted by the stronger parts of society, through all possible means, public and private.” (5, m).

In one case, attention is drawn to the fact that welfare is always “in progress” and that the swift transformations of society always need to be adequately interpreted in order to go beyond an emergency logic.

“Welfare is the common attempt –by the community, the State, local bodies and private social organisations – to jointly find a possible answer to people's needs, which, as we well know, are always evolving. But at the same time it is wrong to say that everything is new all the time, otherwise we will always work on emergencies and we will not be able to plan ahead” (2, f).

## **Function of the welfare system**

All interviewees refer to the internal heterogeneity of Italian welfare and believe that the Veneto region, and Vicenza in particular, are “fortunate” cases compared to other areas. There are variations even at a local level, as every regional district has its own plan for providing social services.

“Each territory in the end sets its own social levels of assistance [...]. What is written in the area plan becomes the “citizenship rights” for the inhabitants of the area.” (3, m).

Most of the interviewees deem the mix of public and private social services to be working properly. Except for one case (16, f), the interviewees think that it is not necessary for the public actor to direct and control the good functioning of welfare.

“Depending on the problem, the strings of the project can be pulled by a public or private body ... This manner of managing welfare is based on mutual acquaintance and trust [...]. And also on the values we share, the common cultural matrix, the Catholic one.” (3, m).

Interviewees are critical of the poor national standards of healthcare, which are said to be “dropping too low”, but in one case the Veneto model itself is specifically criticised: state actors are viewed as too weak and private social actors are not willing to cooperate, including those linked to the Church.

“The minimum standards we have to meet are those set 20 years ago, but the elderly we have today are worse off than in the past and so if you just keep official standards you practically abandon the elderly. The organisation chooses to hire more personnel than it was originally planned and decided by the region” (5, m).

“We are still in the phase in which some people think they are smarter because they bring in one more project, because they get more funding [...]. Right now some are still trying to say ‘it is only I that exists, I do it all on my own because this way I

gain visibility and people acknowledge that a certain social service belongs to me' ... I am talking about the Church too" (6, f).

The case of IPAB seems to be one of the main lingering challenges for the Vicenza welfare situation: this institution has important assets (more than what the local authorities own<sup>21</sup> in the area) and it must be managed more efficiently, it should become "modernised" and more politically independent.

"Nowadays IPAB boards of directors reflect the political majority of the region and hence respond more to party logic than to structural demands" (3, m).

### **Role of the church**

According to all interviewees, Church-related actors are undeniably very significant for the welfare system in Vicenza. According to some respondents, the Church plays this important role thanks to its social capital, for example its many volunteers; according to other interviewees, it is because of the Church's important economic capital, for example the facilities it owns, which can be employed for the good of the community; according to even other respondents, the Church has a precious cultural capital, namely the values that can motivate social commitment and engagement.

Among the most mentioned church-related actors, *Caritas-Diaconia* is generally viewed positively, as an innovative actor compared to others that are more traditional, as for example religious institutions.

"Caritas has its strength in all the voluntary work it attracts and in its vision. In the provision of welfare in Vicenza religious institutions are also important, as they own and control the facilities for the elderly and the majority of nursery schools, but they still have an assistive approach, they give their service only to those who need it. Caritas instead takes care also of what comes before and after its service" (3, m).

"The Church is a very strong actor, because of its organisational capabilities which are largely depending on its wealth" (6, f).

"We have nuns working in our facilities. They are paid as employees of the organisation, regardless of their age. Some carry out religious services and others do actual social work. They help us out in emergency situations, when we need somebody at the last moment. And they stay by the side of the dying, etc. ... They do both practical and spiritual work" (5, m).

### **Church and social work**

Interviewees consider the social commitment of the Church useful, and therefore wish it to continue its active presence, especially in areas where, for various reasons, the public hand does not reach. However there are also those who do not deny the fact that cooperating with actors, such as the diocesan Caritas, is particularly difficult because of its excessive protagonism.

"Public service cannot reach everywhere, and so voluntary work is set in motion, and this is a resource. In the Veneto region, more than anywhere else, the Church here still manages to attract many volunteers and intervenes above all in the sectors not reached by local government or state actors? For example, in the case of immigrants." (1, f).

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<sup>21</sup> Vicenza's IPAB is the most important in the Veneto region: it owns 200 apartments in the town centre and 1200 farming estates, besides shops, churches, monuments and works of art.

“We accept resources and proposals which have a certain quality and which represent something, because we are not interested in those who only represent themselves. We are not interested in physical persons, we are interested in legal entities? [...]. Unfortunately we do not have a formalised method of quality assessment. It is a matter of direct knowledge, experience, tradition, and things that have already been done. And above all it is a matter of what citizens think, their evaluation ... If I get a proposal from Caritas I am sure that it is a serious and interesting proposal which will be seen favourably by the citizens, because they view positively the services that Caritas is already providing” (3, m).

“As far as the town Caritas<sup>22</sup> is concerned, dialogue is constant and constructive... With the Caritas-Diaconia, relationships are held on a managerial, and even hierarchic and negotiating level [...]. The suggestion I would like to give to the Caritas-Diaconia is that it is impossible to know everything ... If there is somebody who is better than you at a certain service, then you have to cooperate. [...] On the territory there are resources which, like as social cooperatives, should not be wasted, because they have a great amount of experience and professionalism” (6, f).

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

According to some interviewees, the Church should help state actors in identifying emerging social problems and it should awaken the community to the responsibility of finding adequate solutions. According to others, the Church should contribute more culturally than politically, i.e. it should provide a set of values that promote solidarity.

“Yes, new needs should be reported, since pioneer work is being done” (3, m).

“There are many people, even among top figures in the Church, who believe that Caritas is only about doing ... No! Diaconia is about doing... It is true, they are the same people, but Caritas is something more, it has a cultural role of paramount importance to play, it has to awaken people, open their eyes and invite them to get their hands dirty.” (4, m).

### **Change in the past ten years**

Answers to this question are conflicting: there are some respondents who think that the influence of the Church has been steadily diminishing over the last 10 years, and others who instead see its power as constantly growing. In the first case interviewees are referring to institutional membership (for example, a decrease in the number of practising Catholics, above all among young people, or the scarce numbers of people entering the priesthood). In the second case respondents observe that Church-related actors now control a large amount of the Vicenza welfare system, more than they did 10 years ago.

Not all interviewees view the growing public role of the Catholic Church positively: “It is possibly a return to an assistive mentality, to charity” (16, f).

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<sup>22</sup> The “local Caritas of Vicenza city” is a different entity compared to Caritas-Diaconia association. The difference in management is significant: the former is more open to cooperation, while the latter tends to compete with the other actors in the local welfare system.

### **Wishes for changes of the church**

The majority of interviewees do not want to change anything, except in one case where a respondent expressed a wish for actors like *Caritas* to cooperate with other organisations, and if necessary to use legal means to achieve this.

“The limits of an approach such as the one used by *Caritas* can be remedied by public intervention. But this requires a political thinking capable of seeing into the future [...]. We need public authorities that are able to provide coordination and prevent overlapping and waste ... We have made a proposal to legislate on this ... It is very important. The time has come for us to accept institutional duties, there must be an obligation to become part of a network and work together with others, to seek the synergies that we are now lacking.”(6, f).

Moreover, in one case there is an emerging wish for the internal plurality of the Catholic Church<sup>23</sup> to be more consistently acknowledged, and not to associate social commitment inspired by religious values only with those who work in Church-related organisations, but also with state sector employees.

“I am not recognised as a believer, I have discussed this with *Caritas* which only sees me in my administrative role ... But I am the “Church” too, I am a Catholic who has walked on a path of commitment [...]. For the common perception, only *Caritas* means a ‘Church committed to social issues’ ...” (6, f).

### **Significance of gender**

None of the interviewees raised any strictly gender-related issues. In general, they do not consider gender to be a particularly relevant dimension in the interpretation of the Vicenza welfare system and its evolution.

On the other hand, they all acknowledge the fact that those who work in the social sector often are women. For instance, the head of IPAB remarks that the personnel of his organisation is definitely mostly consisting of women (“we have 88 employees, of which 85 percent are women. They are nurses who work mostly with the elderly”).

### **Views held by the church**

Interviewees representing the Church believe that it is engaged in strengthening social solidarity. In some cases they are critical of the political and economic context in which the services provided by the Church are becoming more and more necessary.

“Due the economic crisis of North-Eastern Italy linked to the relocation of enterprises and also due to the lack of new social policies, the poor are becoming poorer, the middle class is disappearing. The wealthy remain rich and if they feel like it they do some charity work [...]. For us who believe in a Christian message it is important to share resources, to create synergies, to promote solidarity rather than charity” (12, f).

### **Welfare**

Discussing welfare, the interviewees have used the following defining terms: “citizenship rights”, “fight against poverty”, and “redistribution of wealth”.

<sup>23</sup> Garelli, Guizzardi e Pace 2003.

In general, assistive approaches are criticised as something obsolete and damaging to people's dignity.

"Welfare must be carried out with the aim of promoting rights, rather than assisting, so that a person can re-access his/her own resources to solve his/her problems"(12, f).

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

All of the interviewees were critical of the Italian welfare system, particularly the one in the Veneto region. The most frequently cited reasons are: the steadily ongoing privatisation having a negative impact on the quality of services; the state sector's inability to recognise and promote the professionalism of private social actors; the fact that the principle universality of rights is not guaranteed.

"If it goes on like this we will end up with a more and more 'North-American' welfare, privatised, dedicated to charity; and welfare with a big heart and no brains will grow, in which volunteers are required not to think [...]. Bank foundations are and will be the main backers of the new welfare state." (10, m).

"In Vicenza institutions do not value enough those who have already been working in the field for a long time and create other organisations, giving them visibility and resources ... This is why there often is overlapping, and sometimes conflict." (9, f).

According to some respondents, even among religious actors, the same self-serving interests which hinder the proper functioning of welfare can be found.

"There is a strong individualism in Vicenza's religious welfare. A priest promotes a new project and does not tell his neighbour parish priest. As an entrepreneur he thinks that he has had a good idea which is only his own, and he should exploit it ... It is difficult to make people work together, there is a lot of competition, even in the social sector [...]. The Bishop can give directives, but then everybody goes his/her own way ... Even when it comes to showing balance sheets to the diocese, parish priests act like entrepreneurs and do not declare as much as they really have ... Yes, there is tax evasion in the Church too!" (8, m).

### **Role of the church**

Interviewees share a common opinion that the Church is playing a significant role in the Vicenza welfare system. Among the already mentioned actors, *Caritas-Diaconia* is acknowledged as the largest: according to some respondents, by doing this it is losing sight of its initial calling because it is becoming more and more similar to a company. Other interviewees still view *Caritas-Diaconia* as cooperative and reflective enough.

"Caritas-Diaconia has almost become a service agency. In the past it was only made of volunteers, nowadays it is a highly organised structure, and I say this as an objective fact, not as a judgement. And surely within Caritas there are also people who view this critically" (9, f).

"I think that Caritas-Diaconia has not become a company because its aim is to raise awareness to social problems, take action, and coordinate groups which may otherwise become antagonistic, ... its goal is not to do social work on its own" (8, m).

There are also respondents who emphasise the "added value" offered by Church-related actors: a kind of spirituality, which can hardly be found in state actors.

“We have a vast demand for our services because here it is not like a public office, it is not cold [...]. They ask us for something more humane, they come in need of a saviour (sic) and we help them. Compared to public service, here we have a different fund of human experiences and a different motivation” (11, f).

### **Church and social work**

According to the majority of the interviewees (with the only exception of the Director of the “Woman’s Presence” Centre) the Church’s involvement in the social sector is positive. However, this involvement has to follow certain criteria: it must be reflective, cooperative, and it must not become (once again) assistive.

“I work with slave-trade women, forced prostitutes, and I think that the kind of help needed should not provide assistance, but dignity and social re-insertion” (12, f).

According to the Director of Vicenza’s *Diaconia-Caritas*, it is a specialty of this organisation to “do things and make people think” and to pay particular attention to human relationships, instead of simply providing a service.

“Caritas-Diaconia has two faces: care and culture [...]. Caritas means voluntary work in relating more than in performing. This is its distinguishing feature, the thing that others lack” (10, m).

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

Interviewees generally believe that the Church should capture the attention of public opinion to mobilise the population and strengthen social solidarity. Some, however, think that this critical voice should be raised against the state sector, to call state actors back to their duty to work for the common good. It is above all the Ursuline Nuns who stress this last aspect, but in different ways. While the Director of the “Woman’s Presence” Centre focuses more on cultural involvement regarding gender issues, an Ursuline nun doing social-work for *Diaconia-Caritas* does not hide the fact that it is also a matter of political commitment with a very wide agenda.

“As religious congregations we were born between 1800 and 1900 in response to the primary needs of people, and hence with a series of primarily social activities. Probably our challenge will always be to re-invent our role in the social more than in the cultural system [...] If we want to be prophetic, because this is the characteristic of religious life, we must be ahead of our times. Exactly as we did with social services, we now have to work for a change of mentality, i.e. in the field of education and training, in order to access new means of interpreting reality and not running behind it” (9, f).

“I think that as ‘the Church’ it is necessary to exert pressure for the introduction of a minimum wage, for a change in immigration laws (people must have the right to move freely!), for a change in tax policies so that they are more progressive and the wealthy actually pay more than the poor, and for the struggle against tax evasion ...” (12, f).

### **Change in the past ten years**

According to the majority of interviewees, over the last 10 years the Church has been increasingly involved in social service. Only in one case, however, this new predominance of the Church was seen as a problem, as part of a process that may turn citizens’ rights into commodities.

“The welfare system is facing a crisis because the government marginalises a certain series of services. There is a demand to provide once again certain social services formerly offered by the Church as charity. Thus they will no longer be granted as citizenship rights. This is a huge problem, it is like losing some hard-won conquests of civilisation. Over the last 10 years, the region, provinces, communes and bank foundations have been willing to give more and more funding to religious organisations simply because it is convenient for them [...] Most of those who work in this sector are not aware of certain ongoing dynamics and, above all, of their consequences in the long term ...”(9, f).

### **Wishes for changes of the church**

According to most interviewees, the citizens of Vicenza are prisoners of their own material wealth. They occasionally perform acts of generosity but they seem unable to look critically at their own model of development. For these reasons, there are some respondents who believe that the Church can do much more to make Vicenza a more open and cooperative town, above all for immigrants.

“I notice that there is much more international than local solidarity. In this diocese a lot is offered as charity to distant countries, including large sums of money, and people join Catholic missions as volunteers. But when it comes to helping immigrants here, no way, people are closed. Work should be done to cause a change in mentality, a change regarding everyday life.” (9, f).

“Vicenza is a closed town towards immigrants, it is discriminating and women are often conservative. Through Caritas-Diaconia and my religious congregation, I work for people to get out of their small groups and get together ... Lots of work needs to be done on ecumenism, dialogue and work together with people belonging to different faiths. I would like to begin with women ...” (12, f).

### **Significance of gender**

Gender emerged as a significant dimension: in fact only women, the Ursuline nuns, referred, for example, to the feminisation of poverty, and in general to the negative aftermaths of the current Italian welfare model at the expense of women. One of the nuns is more culturally engaged and promotes public debates in a “Catholic and feminist, the other is a social worker and focuses mostly on women, while hoping that the situation will improve thanks to the increased involvement of women in politics.

“Poverty nowadays afflicts above all women: foreign women, divorced or separated Italian women, single mothers. The commune calls me and asks me to take care of them because it cannot reach them ... So we fund the nursery school network, the school refectories ... thus helping working women [...]. Unfortunately, women politicians are too few, and the few who exist get trapped in party logics and do not really work for the good of women ... But it is going to change, as soon as there are more women in politics ... you will see!” (12, f).

### **Views held by the population**

The majority of focus group participants believe that a more active state sector is necessary in order to guarantee more transparency in the allocation of funds, to

make interventions really effective and to grant social rights to everybody. The important contribution of Church-related actors in the Vicenza welfare system is acknowledged, but there is also a wish for a major growth of lay actors in the future. According to young people, it is progressive Catholics who have to play a leading role.

“More public intervention is needed. The Church is too influential because local politicians do not fulfil their duties... And more transparency in funding is needed, also when Church-related organisations are being funded” (focus group 1).

“The main problems of Italian welfare cannot be solved without the State ... But it is citizens, be they Catholic or not, who must demand the granting of rights ... for example the ‘Basic Levels of Assistance’”<sup>24</sup> (focus group 2).

“I think that progressive Catholics, like the ones who work in cooperatives, are those who work best. They do not turn religion into a facade, a name: They live by it, they do not parade it ... It is important in order to create common spaces, beyond cultural diversity. I hope that these parts of the Church will be the ones playing the leading role” (focus group 3).

## Welfare

Participants in the focus groups define welfare as “the well being of citizens”, and use “extended” formulations for both material and subjective needs. They value citizens’ participation in the process of defining needs and the means to satisfy them.

For instance, the “Participative Budget Group” (P.B.G.) wishes citizens to be involved at a local level in setting the social expenses of the public administration. It is interesting to notice that Vicenza is not an isolated instance: similar groups have surfaced throughout Italy, and some communes have actually introduced participative mechanisms to discuss certain balance sheet items together with citizens (see “New Municipality Network”).<sup>25</sup>

The “Active Citizenship” movement ([www.cittadinanzattiva.it](http://www.cittadinanzattiva.it)) has raised the issue of “human dignity”<sup>26</sup>: the way in which social services are provided is considered as important as the services themselves. The group has expressed criticism and disapproval towards approaches adopted by social service providers, which end up stigmatising and rendering those in need to passive individuals.

Only one out of the three discussion groups referred to the European Union: significantly it was members of the “Active Citizenship Network” who resorted to the EU’s “Bill of Fundamental Rights” in order to safeguard the social rights of Italian citizens.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> These measures attempted to guarantee equality among the various regions of Italy; however, at present citizens of southern and northern Italy do not have equal access to social rights.

<sup>25</sup> Moreover, after the recent and conspicuous cuts in social funding, several national social sector associations have organised a counter-information campaign to force the government to use state funding “for safeguarding rights, for peace and for the environment” ([www.sbilanciamoci.org](http://www.sbilanciamoci.org)). However, this initiative has received no visibility in the mainstream national newspapers or on public and private television.

<sup>26</sup> Regarding this issue, see Sennet 2004.

<sup>27</sup> The “Active Citizenship” movement, together with other actors of European civil society, presented in 2002 in Brussels a “European bill of rights of the sick”.

Young students repeatedly stressed that welfare does not only concern “social activities for the needy, but also cultural activities which can improve the quality of life in the urban fabric ...” Only young people clearly expressed the opinion that welfare involves “a certain way of developing the territory ... Not only economic but also cultural development. Welfare is important to bring people out of their TV-lit houses, to make them live together in peace ...” In other words, for young people welfare is also important for social cohesion and peaceful coexistence.

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

If all participants made critical remarks on local welfare, participants in all three focus groups share the opinion that welfare in Vicenza/the Veneto region is in a privileged position compared to other Italian towns/regions, particularly compared to southern Italy.

For example, within the healthcare system, several participants have criticised:

- the scarcity of territorial services (particularly family advice bureaus);
- the long waiting lists for seeing specialists;
- the difficulty in accessing adequate information regarding various therapeutic alternatives;
- the lack of attention to the treatment of chronic and especially terminal diseases.

According to the latest reports by Active Citizenship (“2004 Italy: Citizen Rights, Between Lights and Shadows. Investments and Accessibility, the Exposed Nerves”) and the report by the Tribunal for the Rights of the Sick (“PIT Salute, 2003–2004”),<sup>28</sup> Vicenza is not an exception. There are similar issues in many other Italian communes, even though these problems undoubtedly have grown more and more problematic in southern Italy. It is still common to see “internal migrations” of patients from southern to northern Italian hospitals in cases of, for example, radiotherapy treatments or particularly severe paediatric diseases.

According to focus group participants, it is not just the cuts in social funding, which have created great difficulties for local organisations. It is also the logic of corruption and the “money mentality” (“schei” in Veneto dialect) that is so widespread among the population of Vicenza and the Veneto region in general. Some have even reported recent local scandals, as in the case of bribes having been paid to a head physician in a Vicenza hospital. “Those who can afford to pay for it, always enjoy preferential treatment, even in public hospitals ... if you want a good doctor, you have to buy him” (focus group 1).

Moreover, focus group participants, who believe most in the importance of participation, are also the most critical towards what local politicians say about civil society.

“They count too much on voluntary work [...]. I witnessed the opening of a centre for the disabled, entirely created thanks to the efforts of families and volunteers ... And there was also the inevitable politician who had the nerve to declare: ‘I am proud of our people who have the strength to manage on their own!’ What a cheek... Of course, well done Veneto people, well done citizens of Vicenza! And so they [local authorities] don’t spend a single euro” (focus group 1).

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<sup>28</sup> Both downloadable from [www.cittadinanzattiva.it](http://www.cittadinanzattiva.it)

“Subsidiarity is ok if it means that only those directly involved know what they need, they know the problems in a concrete way ... But funding is needed! Because in the end, in North-Eastern Italy there is a good standard of living?, but these days less and less so, to tell you the truth. And also, there are areas that need to be managed in a homogeneous way at a national level [...]. The more one goes into smaller realities, the more professionalism decreases and the role of voluntary work grows ... And, moreover, we need people who plan, otherwise it simply amounts to gathering money here and there...” (focus group 3).

Based on their everyday experiences focus group participants identified groups that are most neglected by the Vicenza welfare system: the elderly, the disabled, young people, immigrants and working mothers.

In particular, the group linked to the “Active Citizenship” movement has stressed that the shortcomings of the Vicenza welfare system have an impact on women. An urgent problem seems to be the lack of crèches and nursery schools and opening hours that do not meet the needs of a working family. It is a common problem in the whole of Italy: according to a recent report by the “Active Citizenship” movement,<sup>29</sup> one third of Italian children is on a waiting list to enter a crèche or nursery school, and in the Veneto region accepted applications amount only up to 59 percent. Also in the Veneto region 50 percent of nursery schools are private and expensive, so much so that Vicenza is one of the 10 towns in Italy with the most expensive nursery schools.

### **Role of the church**

In general, focus group participants think that the Church can contribute to the well being of citizens but that it should not “boss around”. For example, young people believe that “there are certain areas in which the Church is the only available alternative ... For us young people, recreational activities are monopolised by the parishes ... if you want to do sports it costs. So you go to the parish centre to play soccer ... But if you want to organise a cultural event, whom do you turn to? I have the impression that politicians in Vicenza, no matter who they side with, are not interested in young people ... If you turn to the Church, it is obvious that the Church will demand to have a say on the content ... and then you do not feel like doing it anymore!” (focus group 3).

Many participants acknowledge the importance of an actor such as *Caritas* for the Vicenza welfare system, but some are also very critical.

“Here in Vicenza, Caritas monopolises 90 percent of state resources in matters of assistance ... above all when it comes to immigrants [...]. But those who work in the state sector acknowledge the professionalism of certain cooperatives ... they are beyond comparison because of their acquired experience and professionalism ... Nevertheless there are cooperatives and associations that receive no funding because they are considered to be too leftist ... And the money always ends up in the hands of the usual and well known organisations” (focus group 1).

If all focus groups participants share the opinion that the Church is very present in the provision of welfare, they attribute different meanings or actors to the term

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<sup>29</sup> “Cara infanzia 2005”, [www.cittadinanzattiva.it](http://www.cittadinanzattiva.it)

“church”. It is therefore difficult to extract from the discussion a general view on the activities of the Church in the social sector.

“In Vicenza the Church is important, it influences welfare. But the Church is made of different people ... Even some of us here are “church”, as believers and citizens who act in the social ... I would not know how to properly say it, there is a lot of heterogeneity ...” (focus group 2).

### **Church and social work**

According to participants of the P.B.G. (Participative Budget Group) the Church should provide social welfare but under state authority in order to safeguard universality of social rights. The State is seen as a guarantor to prevent the ongoing privatisation of social services and the “commercialisation of rights”.

“The Church should act in the social sector only if there are guarantees that its intervention really is public, that social rights are the same for everyone. The right to education, for example, should be above all a responsibility of the State ... Public intervention is lacking even in controlling the quality of the service ... If something works well it is only a matter of luck, or it is thanks to somebody who is working conscientiously ... But there is a risk that everything may become a commodity, even education. Here in Vicenza there are private schools for wealthy people with very low quality: “you pay and you pass!” They are run by the clergy, and these days they are even opening private universities here in Vicenza ...” (focus group 1).

Members of the “Active Citizenship” movement share a common view that it should be “lay believers”, rather than organisations directly linked to the Church, who should be involved in social activities. In other words, they want Catholics to work together with other citizens “from the bottom up” for the common good and for the rights of everybody.

Finally, young people note that organisations of Catholic inspiration, which are active in the social sector, must deeply change if they intend to provide a public service in a society that is growing more and more multicultural everyday. From this discussion emerges the need for a democratisation of Catholic-inspired organisations and this seems to be above all a generational concern.

“Yes, the Church will continue to be engaged in the social sector, it is right to do so. But it will not be able to require religious membership the way it has up to now ... Surely, not in all Catholic organisations, there are differences among Catholics [...]. For me, a criterion to tell conservatives from progressives could be the following: are there atheists or citizens of other faiths working in a social association of Christian inspiration? You see, following this criterion, Caritas is old fashioned [...]. And also, other criteria could be: how are decisions made within the association? How do they work? In my opinion Church-related social organisations are mostly conservative, because they plan interventions from the top, they do what THEY think is right, they do not listen to the real needs of those who receive their help ... There is at times sentimentalism, at times opportunism ... But there are young people like me, and younger organisations, who pay attention to these aspects ... we try to be more coherent, more radical, if you will” (focus group 3).

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

From the focus group discussions it seems that it is above all the “base” of the Church that should promote public debate areas (Privitera 2001) on issues of general interest.

“More than the Church as an institution, Catholics themselves should participate in encouraging the State to create a more democratic society ... together with other citizens” (focus group 1).

“The activism of citizens, believers included, is important to expose problematic situations and improve the services ...” (focus group 2).

According to young people, Christian organisations should contribute to the (inter)cultural development of society, but they believe they are still too conservative to play this role.

“Catholic associations in the social sector are still too narrow-minded, they do not seem, in my opinion, to accept diversity as a resource ... But more and more immigrants are coming into Italian society ... More open and intercultural organisations are needed ... Catholics should facilitate these changes ...” (focus group 3).

### **Change in the past ten years**

According to many focus group participants the Church has witnessed an increase in its social activities in the last 10 years due to the increasing shortcomings of the state sector. In terms of the Church’s strong influence on the cultural level, participants do not observe any great changes, except in the case of young people.

“I have the impression that the State has been doing less and less and that in the last 10 years the importance of associations has grown visibly ... Here where we live, the Church is still powerful, and politicians know it, be they left or right wing ... This is why nowadays it often happens that an openly Catholic association gets more public funding” (focus group 1).

“The Church no longer appeals to young people ... the more time goes by, the more they demand autonomous self-managed spaces” (focus group 2).

Participants in the young people’s focus group believe that the role of the Church in society has changed not only for their own generation. The traditional Catholic cultural matrix is no longer sufficient to guarantee sociality and solidarity.

“In the past, everyone believed more and the Church was a meeting point to spend time together [...]. Nowadays society has changed, I think about television, but also about work, more stressful lifestyles ... other factors. The Church is no longer enough to make us get out of our homes to have a look around, to look at each other, to help each other. Now it is no longer enough. There must be something else to bring us outside” (focus group 3).

### **Wishes for changes of the church**

Focus group participants wish for a progressive secularisation of Italian society and for Catholics to practice a more secular approach in collaborating with other citizens for the common good. It is above all young people who believe that these changes will become more and more necessary in a multiethnic and multicultural Italian society.

“I don’t know ... I hope that there will be more cooperation ‘from the bottom’ for example between parish priests and social cooperatives, and that the Church, with organisations like Caritas, will be less ... monopolising in the public.” (focus group 1).

“Rather than large organisations which are still based on an emergency logic, which in the end take care of the poor and do charity work, we would probably need a more wide spread activism among citizens, who may or may not be inspired by Christian values ... that way things change and welfare improves.” (focus group 2).

“Catholic groups, especially if they are traditionalist, receive more funding ... resources tend to always end in the same usual hands. More innovative approaches are penalised. We need more laity to live together [...]. For example, if only parishes organise recreational hours, what will children of different religions do? I do voluntary work in a multiethnic association and I think that society and the Church should follow this approach ... Religion can hinder contact between multiethnic youths ... Anyway it depends. There are groups, those we have defined as progressive Catholics, who do not parade religious symbols and so they do not offend believers of other faiths or atheists ... In my opinion it is not important if you work in the social sector for this or that religion,; what matters is how you work ... Because sometimes a good deed that is done in a certain manner can have the opposite effect, it can be offensive.” (focus group 3).

### **Significance of gender**

According to many of the focus group participants, politicians in Vicenza have generally conservative views towards the role of women in society and do not adequately support working mothers.

On the other hand, there is a shared opinion among the three groups that the burden of care-giving is still mainly on women, both inside and outside the family context.

It is interesting to notice how even young people (girls included) think that this situation can hardly change.

“I have heard with my own ears a Vicenza town councillor say the *tosi* [‘children’, in dialect,] stay at home with their mothers!’ in response to citizens requesting more recreational centres ...” (focus group 1).

“There is little consideration for the work of women. The issue of nursery schools is emblematic” (focus group 2).

“Welfare is supported by women ... Also because they are more predisposed to care giving ... Perhaps because of motherhood, perhaps because of culture ... We are talking thousands of years here! You cannot change everything that easily! I think it is very difficult that certain kinds of work will be carried out by men ... In the end, speaking for myself I would not leave my grandmother in the hands of a man ... I find the idea of a male caregiver a bit funny!” (focus group 3).

### **Views held by other private social organisations**

The representatives of **private social organisations** acknowledge the influence of some directly Church-related actors, such as Caritas. Many respondents feel that some church related actors represent “the other side of the Church”. They also believe that if Catholics, involved in social cooperatives (among them also priests and nuns), use a more secular and democratic approach this may prove much more effective in promoting the rights of citizenship guaranteed by the Italian Constitution.

“The former slogan by Caritas’s ‘promoting and not managing’ has been replaced with ‘teach by doing’. But indeed there is a large amount of administration. At

the present time in many local contexts Caritas is an organisation like many other cooperatives and associations, but it is stronger and at times even competitive ... Then there is a risk that because of scarce funding these dynamics will take over everything and there will be no room for critical reflection, for really becoming a civil economy of solidarity, differing from normal companies because of its public dimension, its transparency, and its attempt to work within democratic parameters” (15, m).

“Traditionally, Church related actors are quite suspicious of those who do social work within a perspective of citizenship rights and it is once again a custom to employ the bugbear of children-eating communists<sup>30</sup> ... Despite all the changes, there is a lingering attitude of paternalism, and if you fight for equality, then they call you a Trotskyist, even if you are a nun!” (focus group 4).

### **Welfare**

According to interviewees, welfare is “a project for society” aimed at guaranteeing “well being”, “dignity” and “rights” for all citizens. The first articles of the Italian Constitution are often mentioned, in particular article 3 regarding equality of citizens.

“Welfare is based on constitutional principles. Its aim is to promote actual equality among citizens, because, as stated in article 3, ‘it is a duty of the Republic to remove economic and social obstacles which hinder the full development of the person.’<sup>31</sup> It says ‘duty of the Republic’, hence also of the citizens who organise themselves in various manners ... But it is clear that it must remain an intervention for the common good. We, as social cooperatives, have this clearly in mind. However, other private actors in the social sector in Italy and in Vicenza only act as private organisations, they do not contribute to the common good of all, to the full development of all persons. Instead they only care about the well being and the dignity of some” (17, m)

“In our opinion, the rights of persons in need must be listened to, accepted and satisfied by the State, because these people who have problems are citizens. Not as a form of charity, not thanks to the good disposition of a group, which sometimes gives and sometimes doesn’t, but acknowledging that there are citizens like all other citizens, who, for a certain time of their lives, have difficulties” (16, m).

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

There is strong criticism against local welfare, mostly regarding the weak role of the state sector, the patronage system and the privatistic interests which cause a waste of resources and inequalities. Some actors have expressed their concern regarding the growing role of bank foundations, which, in their opinion, rarely distribute funding in a public and universal manner.

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<sup>30</sup> Politicians from the Italian government currently in power, and above all Prime Minister Berlusconi, portray the political arena as a battlefield where the forces of two opposed “civilisations” are clashing (“christian-liberals” vs “atheists and marxists”). They use in their discourse a tone that borders on the grotesque and the mention of the “communist menace” brings back memories of post-war Italy.

<sup>31</sup> Art. 3 “All citizens have equal social dignity and are equal before the law, with no distinctions of sex, race, language, religion, political opinions, personal and social conditions. It is a duty of the republic to remove economic and social obstacles which, actually limiting the freedom and equality of citizens, hinder the full development of the human person and the actual participation of all workers to the political, economic and social organisation of the Country”.

“We have always had faith in public institutions and we always behaved correctly, but we know that in Italy these things work more on the basis of friendship, and personal relationships with politicians [...]. Some of the procedures to obtain funding are official, as it happens when applying for funds from the Province or the Region. But on the private level, as with bank foundations, it is those who can speak louder who decide where the annual funding will go, those who manage to have a person in the council. And so it happens that public bodies or the diocese get most of the funds, and whatever is left goes to everybody else. Besides, it seems to me that it is a very bad sign that public bodies ask for funding from private organisations ... they should be autonomous at least when it comes to covering welfare expenses ...” (16, m)

Moreover, respondents noted that, although civil society is strongly involved, conservatism<sup>32</sup> remains strong and hinders the proper functioning of the welfare system.

“Here in Vicenza social commitment is very strong, but it is very sectarian, very closed. Everybody has his/her own turf, or his/her own enclosed yard. Maybe they run it perfectly and do marvellous things, but no news reach the outside world, when instead it could and should be an example for all. There is lack of communication even among people belonging to the same Catholic world, not to mention what happens in the secular world” (focus group 4).

Among other issues that interviewees mention, there is a recurrent problem: resources for the social sector become more and more scarce and this makes it more and more difficult to guarantee the universality of rights, both on a local and a national level.

Some respondents note that the negative consequences of this situation have an impact on the increasingly problematic conditions of all social workers. According to others, cuts in funding damage above all the actors who have a political project for the democratic transformation of society, as in the case of social cooperatives.

“Cuts in funding damage first of all training and education, the participation to all areas in which people are thinking, comparing experiences and planning projects. This means that the current management of welfare is problematic because it leaves no room for innovation ... and cultural criticism” (13, f)

“There is also the problem of those who want to marginalise social cooperatives because they think that they are ‘dangerous communists’ [...]. And also that of the flexibility of social workers, who are employed precariously only for the short-term, especially if they work in cooperatives” (14, m).

### **Role of the church**

Interviewees wanted to stress that both the “official/institutional Church” and the “Church from the bottom/the community of believing citizens” are present in the social sector. Respondents often saw themselves as members of the latter group.

Moreover, interviewees share a common opinion that “working for the well being, the dignity and the rights of everybody” is easier with a secular approach.

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<sup>32</sup> These aspects emerge also from a recent survey by Sciolla (2004), who has found, especially in Vicenza (one of the towns in her sample-), “high levels of civic-mindedness and low levels of libertarianism” and strong traditionalist views in expected roles for women in society.

Finally, discussing *the* “role of the Church”, they often mentioned the internal plurality of the Catholic world but refused to express a univocal judgement on this issue.

“The world of social cooperatives in general but also apart of Christian believers reflect on these issues because they experience them and feel that is a different world from the official reality of the Church ... There are Catholic institutions who rejoice in the failures of the welfare system because they can gain control ... and they can go back on a larger scale to an activity which was characteristic even centuries ago, charity” (16, m).

“You know well that there are many kinds of Catholics ... There are those who do social work in tightly institutionally Church-related organisations, such as Caritas. There are also those who are more secular, those who preserve a Christian inspiration but nevertheless work for example in social cooperatives and have brought the religious matrix within a more civic context” (14, m).

“I think one may speak of the social involvement of the Church in various ways ... As social cooperatives, we were born 30 years ago under the sign of laity. Nevertheless, in our history there are priests and many believers, but those who enter here, and more generally in the national board of shelter communities (CNCA),<sup>33</sup> do it, not because they are Catholic, but because they share the idea of a project for a society with more equality and solidarity. There are many different ways of being a “socially involved Church” and at times it seems to me that within the Church, in the strictly institutional sense, there is a prevailing desire to show that there is a strong actor which helps other weaker actors ... Just listen to the radio and TV commercials that the institutional Church had broadcasted to obtain the 0.8 percent [percentage of a person’s declared income which can be assigned to the Church or to other organisations]: it fits the old idea of charity for the needy” (17, m).

### **Church and social work**

According to interviewees, social work carried out by the Church must be directed and controlled by the State. They stress the necessity of developing professional competence to guarantee quality standards.

Cooperative-related actors can find ethical and civic inspiration in Catholicism but they view themselves, as like any other worker. They would like to see among more institutional Church-actors, the same willingness to cooperate within a perspective of constitutional rights to be guaranteed to all.

Some respondents believe that this change will take place only if public authorities push the parts of the Church that are still working within an assistive and individualist minded logic towards this direction. Interviewees are pessimistic regarding this possibility, at least for the short term.

“Professionalism is needed, love is not enough. But love is for free, and so it is convenient for public authorities to exploit this situation using volunteers even if they end up doing damage [...]. Some Christian associations, like “Our Family” which is very strong here in Vicenza, use, misuse and abuse the word ‘love’ in all possible ways. They tell the state sector that they need money, but then they refuse to discuss the way they manage it. We [social cooperatives], instead, believe that the

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<sup>33</sup> [www.cnca.it](http://www.cnca.it)

task of the state sector is always to plan, coordinate and control. Church-related organisations have to accept this too, if they intend to be a public service, that is to say for everybody. For example, we do not choose who we want to help, as if it was a matter of good will or because of the merits of others and not because of their rights. If a family comes to ask us for help, we tell them to first turn to the local healthcare office, because it is there that they should evaluate who has priority: that is the task of the state sector. Furthermore, we would never say that how we manage our workers is only our own business. There too it is important to have checks, for the dignity and for the rights of social workers. I do not share my faith with the workers, there are at most a couple of them who go to church on Sunday, but they all have great humanitarian values. My work in the social sector is a place where I am like all others, I do not have a different role just because I am a priest. I have been given my role by the members, not by Christians [...] There are those who say that they do social work for the love of Jesus. No, I do it because the person in front of me has rights! There are Christians, who see Jesus in those they help, but the people they help may see it as an offence, they want their individuality to be acknowledged! For a serious evaluation of social interventions, matters of faith must not be considered, we must face our commitments to real actual people. (16, m)

“The involvement of the Catholic Church in the social sector has changed slowly, by virtue of legal restrictions or other kinds of limitations ... I am thinking of retirement homes, institutions for minors with many children and not enough workers, if we define religious personnel as workers ... There are structures deriving from the assistive past of the Church which are in great difficulty, but there are also innovative and even prophetic realities, if one believes in them. Anyhow, those who feel they are part of the Church or who are institutionally linked to it and are doing social work must abandon meritocratic logics or other obsolete approaches. It is the Constitution, which tells us that it is in the interest of all, for example, to educate the young, because culture is a value which helps society grow and progress. And so we cannot send the children of gypsies to school thinking that we are doing them a favour and that they do not actually deserve it. As a citizen, I want them to obtain the means to give value to their culture within ours and to ours within theirs. It is for the common good, and the State cannot remain indifferent, it will have to improve its work in order for the situation to change.” (17, m)

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

According to the interviews, there is a common opinion that the Church should promote more areas for debates on issues of public interest, such as social rights, respect for legality, and more generally for constitutional principles, such as the rejection of war (art. 11), which are nowadays being violated by the government. In other words, the Church should promote a new civic sense and develop new forms of a broader solidarity.

“The issue of rights is a cornerstone of the social doctrine of the Church, but it is often left in the background and services are instead managed as if they were a matter of emergency. But there is no critical approach; help by the Church becomes structural and functional to a system that perpetuates inequality. The Church, institutional or not, should definitely focus mainly on the issue of social rights. Vicenza’s institutional Church is not critical enough regarding political approaches which exploit religion

to create exclusion, as in the case of Lega Nord, which claims the 'Christian roots of the people of Veneto' to deny immigrants access to citizenship rights. It is not enough to help immigrants the way the Church already does, we must raise our voices to tell politicians that welfare must belong to everyone." (focus group 4).

"I feel the need for the world to go through a vast, serious, moral revolution, facing certain things that are happening and of which we in the social sector are only a small part. [He is referring to the war in Iraq, to the increase in military expenses and cuts in social funding, to the growing inequality on a global and local level] I would like the Church to once again say 'Thou shall not kill and thou shall not steal' ... which here and now may for example mean 'no to military funding and wars', 'no to tax evasion' etc. I would like the Church to say that being a Christian and having faith means to live humanely and to respect legality, national and international rights. 'Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God' means also doing this" (16, m).

### **Change in the past ten years**

According to the majority of the interviewees, the Church is still a strong actor on a political, economic, cultural and social level, even if its power is not always visible. Regarding welfare, some note an increased dominance of the Church in the Vicenza welfare system during the last 10 years.

Some respondents have also tried to interpret ongoing developments and estimate that they may depend on a responsible choice by Church-related actors, but also by private social workers, to "do less" in order not to become functional to neoliberalism and to the disengagement of the State.

"Political and cultural influence is still strong, but it is not that obvious, not on the public scene [...]. Not to mention the fact that the Church in Vicenza owns a lot of real estate, many buildings in the town centre. The Church is still powerful even economically" (14, m).

"If 25 years ago a priest who left his normal functions to take care of social problems was defined prophetic from a believer's point of view, during the last 10 years the increasing disengagement of the State has favoured the establishment of the third sector and Church-related actors. And now? It may perhaps be prophetic, or simply visionary, to act so that the so-called private social sector operates within a perspective of public intervention ... If needed, a step backwards can be taken in order for the state sector to do its part. This is the current issue, regarding not only Catholics, but all those who are involved in social work" (18, f).

### **Wishes for changes of the church**

There is a generalised demand among interviewees for a laity, namely socially engaged Catholics. Respondents believe that the Church as an institution must accept this principle in order to do social work that safeguards the granting of rights to everyone. It is a slow process of cultural change, and for some, it is causing personal suffering due to lack of understanding from official Church authorities.

It is interesting to note that this demand for laity is at times supported through the use of a religious argumentation.

"People still prefer to have their own Christian things and not to give up the Christian label, while working as a believer in a state structure. To me, instead, the

gospel tells me to blend with the people, to disappear like the leaven to bring growth to the common good, because I care about human beings, about persons. The choice made by worker priests to live in the everyday reality of common people, to toil for their bread, has never been really understood or adopted by the Church. Priests still think that their job has to do with something sacred and that it should not be mixed with the profane, and so parishioners are forced to hear homilies which are unrelated to their daily problems ... This is what I hear people complain about regarding the Church of today. He who loves his life is ready to lose it, the Church has always told this to others ... But the institution refuses to die, it goes on ... ignoring the suffering of those who try to tread on new paths” (16, m).

“If formerly the experiences of ‘courage-priests’, of isolated voices of protest, of charismatic figures, were useful, it is nowadays time to change the approach of the social involvement of the Church. I think it is more important to remind everyone that we have a Constitution with fundamental principles. Perhaps nowadays it is more important to work together, (believers of different faiths and non-believers), on the issue of rights, and to compare our views on the idea of society that we are creating. I think that it is really not necessary to parade the flag of the Catholic Church in social and political work” (17, m).

### **Significance of gender**

Gender emerges in various discussions, particularly those regarding “subsidiarity” and the role of families in welfare. Comments by interviewees were aimed at stressing how care-giving is still a burden on women. Respondents also noted that by delegating large responsibilities to families, the Italian welfare system, ends up not only putting women at a disadvantage but also not being able to effectively face certain social issues.

“Nowadays the government is telling families that they are very important and there is a vast acknowledgment of the educational task of parents ... But it is a trap, because by doing this public authorities are dumping problems on families, that is to say on the women in the families. Keep this money, a little money indeed, and stay home with your children. There is a lingering idea that the family, and the mother in particular, still is the best thing for young people who are socially challenged ... But there are situations that are so bad that they work like time bombs ... And then very bad things can happen, things that could have been prevented. Other situations can become chronic, as for example when a disabled child and mother become dependent and they sleep in the same bed at night ... The government does not consider these things, it does not think long term, it is only concerned about the current year’s balance sheets. Enough! Judging from our work, [in a social cooperative for the disabled] it is clear that we must invest, for example, in residential structures, which are initially extremely expensive, but later on create the possibility for permanent and low cost interventions, avoiding explosive situations or outrageous tragedies. But there is no capability of such complex evaluations.” (16, m).

According to many interviewees, women find a favourable environment in cooperatives, where they can have responsibilities and where social care is equally shared with men. The condition of women in such cooperatives is not yet completely equal to men, but respondents agree that significant cultural changes have taken place, as opposed to what happens in Church-related organisations.

“Our person in charge of coordination for the shelter communities in the Veneto region is a woman. As opposed to what happens in the traditional world of the Vicenza province, in commercial companies, as well as, in politics or within the Catholic Church, here things are going better for women, even if we still need to change. The next challenge for the world of cooperatives is to work for full democracy, also within our organisations, and this too implies a significant cultural change ... It seems to me that here we are keeping tasks and relationships together, that is to say approaches to work are attributed to males and females; we give value to these aspects and do not think that social care should only be a woman’s task ... The Church still has great difficulties in looking at these issues in these terms” (18, f).

## Sociological analysis

In all of the four analysed categories of actors (public authorities, church representatives, local population and lay private social organisations) one can find the idea that **welfare is a concept related to citizenship rights**. Moreover, all of the interviewees often **condemn so-called “assistive approaches” related to “charity”**. Why?

In Vicenza, like elsewhere in Italy, there are still actors operating in the social field with a “paternalistic” approach, based more on “good intentions” than on professionalism, thus reproducing privatistic interests. One could suppose that the interviewees wish to distinguish themselves from the more traditionalist actors, in order to qualify themselves before the interviewer, and, in the case of church-related actors, criticising a charity is a means to clearly distance the present from the past. However, several specific traits emerged in the definitions of welfare by the various actors.

**In the case of the three citizen groups, the concept of welfare is a broader one** and it also includes “subjective needs”. Participants wish for an increase in the involvement of citizens for the identification of needs and for selecting the means to fulfil them.

Moreover, younger participants believe that welfare should also comprise (inter)cultural activities in order to favour peaceful coexistence in an increasingly plural Italian society.

**In the case of lay private social organisations** there is a more “militant” vision of welfare: it is a **political project** of transforming society towards greater equality, in accordance with the Italian Constitution, and in particular with art. 3. on the equal dignity of citizens.

All four types of actors agree that **the Church plays a significant role in the Vicenza welfare system**, particularly because of the predominant social work carried out by **Caritas-Diaconia**. Moreover, they all link the growing predominance of the Church during the last 10 years to a “withdrawal” of the State from the field. However, while the public authorities and the local Church representatives who were interviewed generally view Church-related practical social work positively, **citizen groups and representatives of lay private social organisation are more critical**. They state specifically that “the Church” is much more than Caritas-Diaconia, as it includes a multiple community of believers who commit themselves to social work without needing to publicise their actions under the banner of institutional Catholicism.

Citizen groups and lay private social organisations wish for the Church to be less involved in social work, and would like it to instead promote more public debate on crucial social issues, such as respect of legality, or solidarity among “strangers”,<sup>34</sup> i.e. among citizens belonging to different cultures and faiths. There is a clearly emerging wish for Italian society to become more secular and for welfare to be more widely managed by lay actors, such as social cooperatives.

“Some of us are Catholics, but when we participate we are first of all citizens who want direct democracy ... This is the role we try to play. It may be useful if other Catholics draw attention on other issues, like immigration ... Also because here we live in the homeland of Lega Nord” (focus group 1).

“The issues are many ... The important thing is that Catholics be active and critical citizens ... Then each and every local reality has its own exposed nerves[...]. In Vicenza, immigrants are not well accepted, but there are Catholic associations working a lot on this problem ...” (focus group 2).

“People from Vicenza are closed to diversity ... The younger generation of Catholics can contribute to the cultural development of the territory and the creation of an atmosphere of mutual trust among citizens ... to take them away from the TV screen!” (focus group 3).

Here is a schematic summary of the main points of view of the various actors taking into consideration the following parameters:

- Type of “Church” commitment to social work (official/institutional church vs. a lay church/community of believers)
- Prioritising tasks by the Church according to importance or need (practical social work vs. cultural involvement/public voice)
- Degree of public visibility that should be granted to Church-related social work (publicity vs. invisibility).

What emerges is a polarity between two positions: public authorities and local Church representatives, on the one side and citizen groups and representatives of lay private social organisations on the other.

	<i>Types of actors</i>			
	<b>Public authorities</b>	<b>Local church</b>	<b>Citizens’ groups</b>	<b>Private social organisation</b>
<b>a)Church</b>	official/ institutional church	official/ institutional church	lay church/ community of believers	lay church/ community of believers
<b>b)Task</b>	practical social work	practical social work	cultural in- volvement/ public voice	cultural in- volvement/ public voice
<b>c)Visibility</b>	publicity	publicity	invisibility	invisibility

There are of course conflicting opinions within the same typology of actors: for example, among religious actors there are those who believe that at the present time, the primary task of the Church should be more of a cultural nature. There are also individuals who think that cultural and social work should proceed side by side.

<sup>34</sup> Habermas 1997.

“I think that the Church is nowadays breathing the dominant selfish culture. Catechesis no longer works. When faced with difficulties people just cry on themselves. Many priests have no idea what a family advice bureau is, they do not know their territory, they do not get their hands dirty, and they stay within their parish grounds. This is why we must not limit ourselves to merely providing social services.” (10, m).

Nevertheless, the above chart indicates the most commonly shared points of view within each group of interviewees.

It is useful to once again note that public authorities and Church representatives are very closely tied to each other, to the point that, for example, the same person, who was the president of Caritas-Diaconia, is now in charge of a local health authority. These tight bonds facilitate the creation of a shared vision of welfare and favour trust-based relationships, which in some cases seem to lead to a “blind faith” in Caritas.

“This diocese is particularly enterprising ... this is matched by the resourcefulness of certain executives in the public service ... It is probably not irrelevant that I am director in a public service but also a Caritas volunteer. You can always trust Caritas, it is very easy to manage projects together ...” (3, m). Hence, social work by officially Church-related actors, such as Caritas-Diaconia, is valued and encouraged. Both public actors and local Church representatives do not view its “publicisation” as problematic.

On the other hand, citizen groups and other private social organisations do not hide their criticism towards the excessive predominance of officially Church-related actors and also express a clear demand for secularisation. According to these interviewees, being a good Christian means being a good citizen. For this reason they expect the Church to nurture the civic conscience of Italians, first of all regarding the respect of legality, as a founding principle of public welfare funding. Some stress that socially involved Catholics cannot limit themselves to managing services, they must also contribute along with other third sector actors towards a political project, aimed at transforming society in order to concretely achieve equality, as stated in the Constitution.

“Increased cooperation between lay and Catholic groups, which have a non-assistive approach, is necessary because the welfare state is already collapsing. The isolated voices of socially involved priests are not enough, we need awareness of a common struggle for rights. The Church could do so much more, not through the administration and provision of services, but instead by contributing to the creation of a public debate on welfare issues” (focus group 4).

Respondents therefore, believe that social work carried out by Catholics should not be publicised, but practiced within a shared democratic perspective with other socially committed citizens.

Citizen groups and other private social organisations finally expect the official Church to provide more of a cultural contribution, to promote a new solidarity among Italians. They view this as particularly important because they view the current point in history as particularly difficult because of unlimited individualism and growing inequalities created by the neo-liberalist model of development.

## Theological analysis

Why are individuals within the Church (official or lay people) committed and involved in social work?

The official answer is based on the Gospel and on the teachings of Jesus on helping those in need. However, close observation revealed that there are Catholics who are involved in welfare because they share a democratic vision. They respond to the question of why one should get involved in social work by referring to articles of the **Italian Constitution**, rather than to verses from the **Gospel**.

Together with more traditional actors, there are some progressive voices who criticise the Catholic Church “from within” and who experience spirituality more freely: there are, for example, those who find inspiration for their social work in the writings of Christian mystics related to Protestantism.

These critical voices raise two kinds of questions for the official Church:

- a) What is the relationship between **Church and democracy**?
- b) What is the relationship between **Catholicism and feminism**?

Regarding the relationship between **Church and democracy**, the significant experience of a worker-priest is relevant here. After having witnessed the word of Christ in factories, nowadays he feels the need to bear witness to the values of democracy within the Church as an institution.

“We, as worker-priests in Veneto, have painfully understood that we have nothing to bring to the table in a world torn by social conflict where trade unions are far ahead of the Church regarding people’s rights. We returned to the Church with the conviction that our frontier lies here: bringing into the womb of the Church what we have learned from democracy, from the joys and sorrows in the everyday life of people. They [the official Church] keep on talking about God and Jesus in their documents. We have rediscovered the whole of **mystical literature**, which finds no boundaries in institutional religions, and then we have learned how to work, and much more, for example how to manage conflict. We have discovered another way of experiencing and living our faith, of being believers, on an almost mystical level. The Church has never accepted mysticism because it brings the person in direct contact with God, without mediation. We worker-priests suggest a lighter kind of mediation, a democratisation of the Church ... But the Church as an institution is still enormously heavy” (16, m).

This priest believes that it is necessary to make the Catholic Church more democratic from within. At a certain point in this life he felt the need to live his faith in a different way, giving up “talking about God” and instead working side by side with those who daily try to create a fairer world. His relationship with God is now more direct and he would like the official Church to acknowledge this “other way of being Catholic”. His story is an individual case, but it would be interesting to examine to what degree it reflects the development of the Italian worker-priests movement: have they returned to working within the official Church, or are they instead committed and involved in social work. This issue remains an unexplored research field. This religious diversity requires a different model of social work: it is no coincidence that the worker-priest chose to work in a social cooperative, where decisions are made in a more participative manner. Social actors related to the Church as an

institution carry out social work within more traditional and hierarchic structures, as in the case of Caritas-Diaconia: having asked the head of the legal department of Diaconia-Caritas how the organisation works internally, for example the decision-making process, her response was accurate: the charismatic leader (the Director) “is more or less in charge of anything, because he has prophetic abilities” (11, f).

Regarding the relationship between Catholicism and Feminism, the study has indicated that (also) in Vicenza there are believers who are re-interpreting the history of the Church in a female perspective.<sup>35</sup> A typical example is the case of an Ursuline nun: she created a centre for gender studies within her religious institution and published a series of books on a “Christian feminist” from Vicenza,<sup>36</sup> in order to increase her visibility and to start a debate on the role of women within the Church. This very enterprising nun has also created a working group of women who operate within lay private social organisations and want to reflect within a feminist perspective (focus group 4): they organise jointly cultural events that are open to all citizens.

As we will see in the next section, this female work-group has brought to the surface certain critical reflections regarding the possible negative consequences of practical social work carried out by the official Church.

## Gender analysis

Interviews with all four kinds of actors (public authorities, church representatives, citizen groups and lay private social organisations) clearly indicate that social care is still viewed as a female task in Italy. Even younger people (focus group 3) have scarce hopes in the possibility of changing these traditional gender roles. Nevertheless in empirical analysis these dominant gender patterns are challenged both by female social workers in private social organisations and nuns. According to these women, it is the traditional idea of family (a male breadwinner and a wife-mother) that has to be questioned: the pluralisation of family forms<sup>37</sup> in Italian society demands changes in the welfare system. By continuing to take for granted the traditional family model, other family models are socially excluded including, for example, single-parent families, providing us with instances of single mothers reduced to poverty. This issue has been raised recently (September 2005), thanks to the proposal by the centre-left coalition to launch another debate on the possibility of introducing a law recognising civil unions, after the model of the French civil pact of solidarity (law n. 944 of 1999). The Italian council of Bishops (CEI) publicly intervened stating that a juridical recognition of de facto couples would be “morally unacceptable”.<sup>38</sup> Once again, the institutional Church has showed its traditionalist face, its lack of consideration to ongoing social transformations, despite the fact that

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<sup>35</sup> For an overview on a national level, see [www.teologhe.org](http://www.teologhe.org)

<sup>36</sup> AA.VV., *Il femminismo cristiano di Elisa Salerno e le sue prospettive*, Edizioni G.G.S., Vicenza, 1989.

<sup>37</sup> See Saraceno 2003 and Donati 2001.

<sup>38</sup> In the Italian juridical system, the prevalent or exclusive idea of family is based on marriage: any alternative model is usually considered “immoral”, to the point that, not so long ago, any out of wedlock patrimonial relation between two people living together was seen with suspicion, as if it were a “compensation for sexual services” (Grillini, Marella, 2001: 8).

a portion of the Italian Catholic world (as in the case of the nuns interviewed) demands a critical cultural reflection on family models and gender patterns.

During the interviews, both female lay private social organisation social workers and nuns were critical towards the possible negative consequences of placing practical social work under the authority of the official Church. According to respondents, there are officially Church-related organisations that simply try to fill in the gaps of the Italian welfare, thus perpetuating a system, which is unfair towards women. This criticism is particularly strong in the case of foreign caregivers.

“Regarding caregivers we cannot limit ourselves to favouring the meeting of demand and offer: we discuss together family models and the people who will provide social care. How much is shared between men and women? Why do women have to bear all the burden alone? Is it right to dump it on another [foreign] woman? This other woman also has a family ... it is a chain reaction ... can we break it? How? [...]. It is important to consider the consequences of this model of welfare on women, even foreign women [...]. Our current model is contributing to the disruption of the family structures of other countries, eastern Europe, for example, where women leave their children and their elderly to take care of ours” (9, f).

Adopting this global perspective,<sup>39</sup> women from the self-organised discussion group (focus group 4) wish to renew the debate and questioning of traditional gender patterns. This reflection stimulates a sense of social responsibility and solidarity that stretches beyond national borders. According to participants in the group, the emancipation of Italian women must not be achieved at the expense of women from other countries: for this reason too, it is necessary to change the way in which the Italian welfare functions.

## Main findings and concluding reflections

What is welfare? All interviewed social actors (public authorities, church representatives, local population and lay private social organisations) refer to citizenship rights and believe that *the way* in which social services are provided is as important as the social help itself. All respondents, including Church related actors, criticise “charity-approaches” that in the end prove humiliating. What alternatives do they have in mind? What types of social assistance are more *respectful*?<sup>40</sup>

Representatives of local population, especially young people, were very clear on this point: the most important thing is that those who are in the condition of needing social support should be able to view themselves as individuals enjoying their full rights, and not as subject to the charity of others; this implies that they must play a role in determining the forms of help they need. This also means that welfare should redistribute not only *goods*, but also *power*.<sup>41</sup>

Therefore, representatives of the local population manage to give meaning to something that would otherwise simply appear to be a modern and politically correct

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<sup>39</sup> Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2004.

<sup>40</sup> Sennett 2004.

<sup>41</sup> De Leonardis 2002.

slogan for citizenship rights.<sup>42</sup> However, according to interviewees working in lay private social organisations active welfare and citizen-empowerment can turn into a trap: people are encouraged to take more responsibilities, while the State remains more and more uninvolved. Social citizenship should therefore not be thought of as a romanticised opening to popular participation but rather as a “political project”, leading to a social transformation of the problems raised by inequalities.<sup>43</sup>

The concept of *subsidiarity* is also questioned, namely the idea that each and every individual should be in charge of his/her own social responsibilities and that the State should, therefore, intervene only when “strictly necessary”. According to interviewees from lay private social organisations, this often means that families are encouraged to manage on their own, even when they are not in the condition of doing so.

Moreover, the representatives of the female lay associations involved in local welfare believe that in Italy attributing responsibility to families amounts to putting the burden of social care on women.

“Let us not forget that within families there are women, and that these cuts in social funding bear primarily upon women. People are not sufficiently aware of this” (focus group 4).

Funding is a crucial issue: Italian social funding is among the most limited in Europe. While in 1990 its value compared to the Pil (Gross domestic product) was only 0,4 units lower than the European average, nowadays the negative gap is around 2 units; compared with France and Germany the gap amounts to more than 4 units.<sup>44</sup>

As public social funding decreases, funding by bank foundations increases. Interviews with lay private social organisations betray emerging concerns in this respect: does this constitute a return to charity?

Welfare has marked a process of democratisation of social policies: from the traditional paternalistic paradigm, according to which those who have resources must provide for those who don't, towards a modern paradigm, based on the idea of a universal and minimum quality of life standards. There is a concern that this kind of more and more influential actor may bring back the philosophy of assistance to the poor. And what about social policies and the role of the State?

This new blend of “welfare mix” (state, market and third sector)<sup>45</sup> might actually hinder the development of a collective identity, “a feeling of being a part of a system of interdependence”. If the aim is to create a welfare where there is room for respect, where people can feel they are all equal and experience their dependence on social welfare, as “a temporary phase” of their lives and not as their destiny,<sup>46</sup> new social practices are necessary. These practices must not deal with needs, deficiencies or inadequacies, but make use of individual *capabilities*.<sup>47</sup> According to interviewees

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<sup>42</sup> Participant observation of the services offered by the interviewees would be interesting in trying to understand the *practices* of this different mode of social work and allow comparisons with the type of care-giving offered by traditionally managed services, which are labelled as “charitable”.

<sup>43</sup> Procacci 1999, 16–17.

<sup>44</sup> Pizzuti 2005.

<sup>45</sup> For a general overview on the Italian welfare system, see Frisina 2004.

<sup>46</sup> Sennett 2004.

<sup>47</sup> Nussbaum 2003.

from lay private social organisations, actors, such as bank foundations do not share a perspective of citizenship as a political process of individual and collective social transformation.

Even among public authorities there are those who question the role of bank foundations.

“Foundations and enterprises see local bodies as something static and bureaucratic, and so they prefer to cooperate with external providers of service ... like Caritas, which responds faithfully ...” (6, f). This public authority representative reported the conflicts that she has personally had with the vice-president of the most important local bank foundation on who should be in charge of coordination on the evaluation of a project about to be financed, and even on preventing the exclusion of “traditional” actors, such as social cooperatives (“Caritas volunteers may be good, but in cooperatives there are people who live off that small income and there are instances of people who got out of alienation by working in the social sector ... we cannot ignore them”).

Bank Foundations are very powerful actors, who can even ignore the logics of a public and universal intervention. The process of selecting which projects to fund should be transparent and organised according to an evaluation of the proposed programmes in the areas of intervention. However, some interviewees (from local population, lay private social organisation and, in one case, even from public authorities) express a concern that in several cases patronage dynamics play a determining role: having “the right person” in the board of directors of the bank foundation, i.e. among those who evaluate the programmes. Due to limited time availability, I did not have the chance to develop a closer study of this issue but it is important to understand who the members of the boards of directors of the most important local bank foundations are, whom they choose to fund, and for which projects. Is it true that voluntary work is favoured to the detriment of professionalism? Is Caritas-Diaconia really a privileged actor?

The welfare-mix in the Vicenza territory is very complex and “porous”. There is a “frequent overlapping of roles between private, public, voluntary and professional work”, but this is generally not viewed as problematic.

“Even if it can sometimes lead to a waste of resources, it allows for great flexibility and the overcoming of many bureaucratic barriers ...” (4, m, public authority representative).

This kind of management also concerns one of the main sponsors of local welfare, a bank foundation, whose vice-president has “informal” meetings with the heads of the 4 local social-health units (Ussl) of the Veneto region in order to know their priorities and how to distribute funding.

Public and private are so tightly intertwined that the same persons can find themselves playing roles that would normally lead to “conflicts of interests” (as seen from looking at the biographical profiles). This is not viewed as a particular problem in Vicenza<sup>48</sup> but as a sign of the flexibility of the system and as proof that the “Catholic” cultural background is “still at work”, providing a solid matrix of solidarity.

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<sup>48</sup> Perhaps this would also exist in other Italian cities and towns. As shown by various research efforts, the culture of legality is still weak within Italian society (Sciolla 2004) and the current government does not seem to encourage it (one example is the repeated official pardons granted for violations of local building regulations).

Upon asking the Director of the Vicenza Diaconia-Caritas about the kind of control performed by the public actor and the board of directors of the bank foundation regarding the conspicuous funds given to his organisation, he answered that controls are performed by experts and technicians, and added that his organisation and these actors are “old friends”. Regarding balance sheets, they had the free choice whether or not to account to the public actor for their own expenses, as this was not required, thanks to the relationship of trust between the two parties involved. “It is Caritas which, believing in our transparency, chooses to let us evaluate it.”

Through an actor like Caritas-Diaconia, the Catholic Church plays an important role in the Vicenza welfare system. All interviewees acknowledge this fact, but they view it in different ways.

On the one hand, there are representatives of public authorities and local Church representatives, who generally encourage the predominance of Caritas-Diaconia and value the public visibility of the Catholic Church as a welfare actor; on the other hand, citizen groups and representatives of private social organisations insist towards an increased process of secularisation of Italian society, i.e. a socio-cultural transformation in which the Catholic Church will have to reduce its institutional and cultural role.<sup>49</sup> A paradigmatic fact is the frequent reference to the Italian Constitution by the aforementioned two types of actors when they discuss welfare and motivations for social commitment.

One of the most interesting results of this study is observing the plurality of perspectives, conceptions and practices of welfare within the Italian Catholic world.<sup>50</sup> The word “Church” means different things to different interviewees: for representatives of public authorities and the local Church there is an official/institutional Church, while citizen groups and representatives of private social organisations refer to a lay Church, a community of believers. This last conception reflects a demand for the *democratisation* of the Church, which is already silently in action. One indicative example is the case of nuns who have started a process of “criticism from within”, starting from a gender-related perspective up to the point of questioning whether the Church really wishes to be a “prophetic” actor, or will remain conservative.

This study has revealed the emergence of parts of the Church that are engaged in “pioneering” work, in having a critical stance towards the neo-liberal model of development, as a structural cause of inequalities: for this reason, it is not considered sufficient to simply “fill in the gaps in the welfare system”, but also to be involved in cultural criticism in order to promote social change. It is a “lay Church”, which shares the aspirations of a global civil society<sup>51</sup> and, as it struggles for the democratisation of welfare, it also seeks the democratisation of the official Church.

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<sup>49</sup> See Willaime 1996, 107.

<sup>50</sup> Garelli, Guizzardi, Pace 2003.

<sup>51</sup> Kaldor 2004.

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# The Greek Orthodox Church as an Agent of Welfare – the case of Thiva and Livadeia

EFFIE FOKAS

## Methods and Materials

The Greek case study is based mainly on interviews with individuals working in church welfare services, state welfare services, and private welfare services, as well as on interviews with the local public. Through a series of ‘background/mapping interviews’, I was able to identify the key institutions which should be included in the case study, and the people with whom I should conduct interviews in each. In the case of Thiva and Livadeia, there is a great deal of interconnectedness both between institutions and especially between individuals working in the various institutions. This interconnectedness proved quite helpful in the process of contacting potential interviewees. In seeking out interviews, I aimed to keep a numerical balance between interviews in church-run institutions and in state-run institutions. On this note, it is important to bear in mind that the Orthodox Church of Greece is a public legal entity, and its clergy are remunerated by the Greek state; in other words, the church-state distinction is not absolute in the case of the Greek welfare system. This somewhat blurred line between church-run and state-run institutions is reflected in the relations between individuals working in each (as illustrated below). It is also worth observing that in the Greek context the word welfare (*proneia*), which literally means ‘providence’, carries a number of connotations, including purely state-related welfare activity, the concept of well-being, or the theological term ‘divine providence’.

A third significant category (beyond those of ‘church-run’ and ‘state-run’) arose through this background/mapping interview process: that of ‘private institutions’ which are, however, still linked to the Church in some way, or to the Orthodox faith. These institutions have no formal or administrative relationship with the Church, but their members and leaders often describe them as ‘the Church’ – in other words, part of the body of believers which comprise the Church and, hence, are essentially indistinguishable from ‘the Church’. What this reveals is a clear notional distinction between church as institution and church as body/community of believers. Likewise, it may be interpreted as a self-distancing, on the part of these private institutions, from the Church as an institution. Such private institutions tend to be established at the initiative of one person or a small group of individuals with a special interest in and commitment to welfare provision.

Beyond this mapping process, I have conducted interviews with most of the individuals identified through that process. The interviews were semi-structured, and

based on the seven common questions used in all the case studies in the WREP project. Questions added to the Greek case study are explained in detail below.

I have also collected printed material from each institution, where available. This material includes news bulletins, pamphlets, and institutional statements of purpose. Such material is limited to only a few institutions, however. There is no statistical information relevant to this study (e.g., regarding welfare activities) available for the municipalities of Thiva and Livadeia. Most importantly, there is *no* printed material from the local Church which expresses a voice on social issues, or which expresses the Church's aim/role in terms of social welfare: *the local Church produces no such documents*. This is quite typical at the diocesan and parish levels of the Church in Greece.<sup>1</sup> In general, a great deal of the Church's theological expression at the local level is communicated *orally*, through the church sermons: these are a critical source of information about and encouragement toward welfare activity within the Church. Another significant source is simply word-of-mouth, particularly within smaller towns. However, what people outside the Church say about the Church, as compared with what the Church representatives say about the Church, has served as a useful means of cross analysis.

Furthermore, the research on Thiva and Livadeia includes two focus group interviews, as well as an ad hoc interview with two individuals.

The interviews were recorded, and most have been transcribed word-for-word. Whether they were transcribed word-for-word or not depended on the level of complexity of the interview: in cases where the interviewee was quite straightforward in his/her responses, I tended simply to jot down notes whilst listening to the recording afterwards. For the focus group interviews and the ad hoc interviews with the local public I simply took notes in shorthand; I did not record these, as people had already expressed a certain amount of discomfort with the concept, and I felt they might be more forthcoming with their responses if they were not being recorded.

The research conducted in Thiva and Livadeia includes 25 individual interviews (beyond, that is, the original 'mapping' interviews), two focus group interviews, and two interviews with the local public (i.e., 38 interviewees in all).

The sample of individual interviews includes individuals who either lead or work in church-run welfare institutions, state-run institutions, or private institutions. In terms of gender division, thirteen are female, twelve are male. In terms of age division, ten are in their 30s, three in their 40s, ten in their 50s, and two in their 70s. Education levels are very mixed. In general, those working in state-run institutions tend to have achieved higher levels of education; in the category of private institutions we find both the most and the least educated individuals of the entire sample.

The focus group interview research includes two focus groups, with a. a group of male senior citizens (mainly retired farmers), and b. a group of middle-aged house-

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<sup>1</sup> Exceptions are most likely a reflection of the given diocese's relative wealth, the education levels of the clerics there and, mainly, the result of individual initiative. According to a priest who is a diocesan representative in Thiva and Livadeia, such documentation about welfare activity would be superfluous: he states that people know what their calling is, as Christians, in terms of welfare provision. He also argues that the giving of material goods, time and energy to welfare activities are a matter of tradition, and it can be taken for granted that people are informed and do not require printed literature. Of course, the lack of printed literature – particularly in rural dioceses – may be related to an historical reality of relatively low levels of education (and of literacy).

wives. I chose to focus on these two groups as they seem to comprise a large part of the population of Thiva and Livadeia, and as I expected them to be relatively willing and available for the focus group interviews. These interviews were supplemented with two random interviews with the local public (conducted in a group of two): two unemployed men in their early forties agreed to be interviewed. This interview was conducted on an ad hoc basis (e.g., I did not know at the outset that these individuals were unemployed), but in retrospect this made the interview quite interesting, as unemployment is rated as one of the largest social problems facing Thiva and Livadeia.

## Interviews

The interviews with representatives of the Church and municipality were conducted as semi-structured interviews, in their respective places of work (in their own offices or elsewhere, where necessary for purposes of recording). Each interview lasted between one and two and a half hour (often including tours of the premises, introduction to interviewees' colleagues, etc). The number of interviewees representing the Church is seven; the municipality, fourteen; and the private institutions, four.

The interviews began with the seven questions common to all cases in the WREP project, and followed by an additional five questions. These are as follows:

- In your view, are there certain theological underpinnings of the social role of the Church? If so, what are they?
- What are the main social problems of Thiva/Livadeia, and how have these changed over time?
- What is the relationship between the social role of the Church, and that of the state?
- What are your expectations of the Church and/or the state concerning provision of welfare services?
- Who are the protagonists in the social work of the Church/state/private welfare sector (as applicable to the interviewee)? Are they predominately men or women, or of a particular age group?

These additional questions do not have a specific national or local contextual character. However, responses to them have been valuable in terms of adding one more level to the analysis (that of interviewees' own perspectives).

For instance, many interviewees from church-run institutions say quite a bit about theological underpinnings of their work before I reach the question listed as # 1 above. When asked explicitly about the theological underpinnings of their work, however, they sometimes seem to see the issue in a different light, and they give responses which differ from what they had expressed earlier in terms of theological motivation.

Also, with regard to the question about the main social problems in Thiva/Livadeia: this question is useful in the sense that peoples' response to the question helped me to discern the extent to which they are aware of social issues outside their own domain of work. In some cases people simply say that they do not know about local social problems in general. This fact then becomes important, I

think, when considering their analyses of how well the national welfare system works in their local context.

Finally, in terms of understanding the gender dimension, I thought that asking a direct question about this might yield interesting material if the interviewees went on to explain *why* there is a predominance of women in the domain of welfare provision (as is indeed the case; see below).

## Focus group interviews

The focus group interviews were planned to take place with a. a group of eight male senior citizens (most of whom are retired farmers), and b. a group of seven middle-aged housewives. I met difficulty in the implementation of these focus group interviews, as in both cases fewer people actually attended the meeting: in group a, five people attended, and in group b, six people. The people I approached for these meetings were all unfamiliar with the concept, and I expect this made them a bit uncomfortable. During the meetings however (once the first five minutes or so had passed), the interviewees seemed fairly comfortable. In both cases, the groups were formed with the help of one individual in each group, who I had met through the ‘mapping process’: I explained to this ‘key individual’ the concept behind a focus group, and they made the preliminary contact with people who were to be included in the groups.

Following the focus-group attempt, I proceeded to seek ad hoc interviews with the local public. A group of two men, both unemployed and in their early forties, agreed to be interviewed. Several people whom I approached (both on an individual basis and as groups) did not want to be interviewed and were clearly uncomfortable with the concept; some people suspected that I might be a journalist/reporter.

It is likely that the period during which the interviews with the public were conducted affected the local public in terms of their willingness to discuss anything related to the Church: the Orthodox Church of Greece went through a period of extraordinary turbulence in the Spring of 2005, with the uncovering (first by Greek journalists) of a web of corruption amongst much of the Greek hierarchy (involving both financial and sexual scandals, as well as drugs and human trafficking). The Archbishop of the Orthodox Church of Greece (Christodoulos) was himself implicated in these scandals, and the controversy reached the point of public calls for his resignation. This does not seem likely, and there is not – as yet – clear evidence against the Archbishop himself (whereas there is such evidence against other clerics, resulting in their resignation).

This fact has implications for the case study in Thiva and Livadeia, for Christodoulos and Ieronymos (Bishop of Thiva and Livadeia) were in competition for the Archbishopric, which Christodoulos won in 1998.<sup>2</sup> Since then there has been considerable tension between the two leaders, tension which rose again during this period of scandals in the Church when the Archbishop was increasingly openly ac-

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the structure of the Orthodox Church of Greece and on historical trends within the Church, see Molokotos-Liederman, Lina and Effie Fokas, ‘Welfare, Church and Gender in Greece’, in Ninna Edgardh Beckman, ed.: *Welfare, Church and Gender in Eight European Countries. Working Paper 1 from the project Welfare and Religion in a European Perspective*. 2004.

cused of misdemeanour. Accordingly, whilst prior to this period, individuals consulted for this study in Thiva and Livadeia made a point of distinguishing the local Church from the national Church, in the aftermath of this period a more radical disassociation between the local Church (of Thiva and Livadeia) and the national Church is quite clear in the responses.

The focus group interviews for this study were conducted in this post-Church scandals period. Through these interviews I was also able to detect a change in attitude towards the local Church, in so far as financial matters are concerned: in the scandal's immediate aftermath at least, people are less willing to trust even the local Church in its management of funds, and they state that they are thus less generous in their donations to the Church (mainly in terms of donations given prior to and during church services, for the purchase of candles and donations to the collection tray brought round the church during the service). It is difficult to predict how long such distrust will last, but for now it is clear that it carries implications for the social work of the local Church, inasmuch as it is funded through peoples' donations to the local Church.

I used the seven questions common to all case studies in the WREP project for these interviews with the local population (and not the additional five questions outlined above). This limitation in the number of questions served to keep the discussion more focused although, as expected, the discussion went well beyond the subject-area of these seven questions (e.g., with the male focus group in particular delving into party politics, church scandals, and theories to do with religion and politics).

## The towns of Thiva and Livadeia

### General characteristics of Thiva and Livadeia

The geographical area under study includes the cities of Thiva and Livadeia, the two largest towns in the prefecture of Viotia, and within the Diocese of Thiva and Livadeia.<sup>3</sup>

Thiva is built in a fertile, low-lying region, 85km from Athens. Its population is approximately 23,000. Thiva occupies the same space as ancient Thebes and, accordingly, boasts of many archaeological sites. Architectural renovation in the town is thus relatively limited, because excavation runs the risk of damaging sites of archaeological value. Besides its many well-preserved ruins, the city looks like a typical modern city.

Livadeia is the capital of the prefecture of Viotia and is built between two hills. The river Erkina runs through the town, thus making the surrounding lands fertile for agricultural crop. The city is 135 km from Athens, and has a population of approximately 20,000. Livadeia too has a heritage dating back to antiquity, though not as rich as that of Thiva and there are fewer, but well-preserved, ruins. Its more recent heritage, however, is especially well-preserved: in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the town was a centre of production of leather and production and dyeing of thread. These facto-

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<sup>3</sup> The organisation of the Greek Orthodox Church is divided into approximately 80 Metropoles, or dioceses.

ries closed in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, but the buildings have been renovated and are now fashionable cafés and restaurants on either side of the river.

Viotia in general has one of the lowest population density rates in the country, with 45.4 inhabitants per square km (compared to the national average of 77.7/sq. km). Approximately 39 percent of the area is farmland, 43 percent grazing land, 12 percent forests, and 1.4 percent wetland. The industrial sector represents 58 percent of the GDP in Viotia, thus making the prefecture the most productive in this sector in Greece. The majority of the population in Viotia either lives in rural areas (35 percent) or in semi-urban areas (36 percent). These percentages are far higher than the national average (28 percent and 12 percent respectively), and this is due to the fact that factories in the area are mainly in rural or semi-urban areas. The level of education achievement in Viotia stands below the national average (with 5.5 percent of the population holding University of Technological Institute degrees, compared with 8.6 percent at the national level), but the percentage of people who have completed compulsory education (12 percent) is higher than the national average (10.8 percent).

The main sources of income in Thiva and Livadeia (including the surrounding villages) are agriculture and industry. Because of its relative proximity to Athens, most of the factories in the region (approximately 120) are based in and around Thiva. Many people from towns outside of Thiva and Livadeia, and even beyond Viotia, migrated to the area in order to work in the factories. During the period of 1971–1991, Viotia experienced a population growth rate of 17 percent (similar to the national average); but the more significant population increase occurred between 1981 and 1991 (14.5 percent, whilst the national average was 5 percent). These population increases took place mainly in semi-urban areas (81 percent), due to the establishment of new factories there. In general, the populations living in cities may be categorised as bourgeoisie.<sup>4</sup>

Due to factory closures however (beginning in the 1990s), the unemployment rate in the prefecture is relatively high. In the decade of 1981–1991, Viotia saw a 184 percent increase of the unemployment rate (compared to 192 percent regionally and 102 percent nationally), and in the 1991–1994 period, a 62 percent increase (compared to 25 percent in the Region and 21 percent nationally). The tables below illustrate the percentages of unemployment according to gender<sup>5</sup>:

<sup>4</sup> In the prefecture of Viotia on the whole, the employment patterns are as follows: blue collar workers, technicians, machine operators, transport drivers (38 percent); farmers, livestock growers, foresters, fishermen (23 percent); scientists and professionals (9.4 percent); white collar workers (9.4 percent); retail-wholesale tradesman and salespeople (9 percent); and people employed in the service industry (8 percent). See <http://www.keyskills.org/greek/report.2.htm>, the website for Keyskills (alternatively called KeyNet), a European project, funded through the Leonardo da Vinci programme, which addresses competence development as a means to increase employability. Four countries are involved in the project: Germany, Greece, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The full report on the Greek case may be found at [http://www.keyskills.org/tep/tep\\_gre.doc](http://www.keyskills.org/tep/tep_gre.doc).

<sup>5</sup> The following tables and statistical information are drawn from the Keyskills Greek case study on Viotia and Livadia, the results of which are accessible at [http://www.keyskills.org/tep/tep\\_gre.doc](http://www.keyskills.org/tep/tep_gre.doc).

Table 1. Unemployment by age and gender, 1991.  
Source: National Statistical Service of Greece (NSSG) Census Bureau 1991.

	Prefecture of Viotia				Country Total			
	Number		%		Number		%	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
-19	363	394	17.5	23.0	24,742	28,975	14.9	19.5
20-29	1,100	947	52.4	55.2	82,072	79,984	49.5	54.0
30-39	301	238	14.3	13.9	27,852	24,134	16.8	16.3
40-49	152	81	7.2	4.7	15,769	10,095	9.5	6.8
50-59	148	50	7.1	2.9	13,091	4,560	7.9	3.1
60 and over	29	6	1.4	0.3	2,440	486	1.5	0.3
Total	2,098	1,716	100.0	100.0	165,966	148,234	100.0	100.0

Table 2. Recorded Unemployment in Viotia in recent years.  
Source: Manpower Employment Organisation (OAED), local office.

	Total	
	Number	%
<b>1/1/1997–31/12/1997</b>		
Male	901	49.2
Female	931	50.8
Total	1,832	100.0
<b>1/1/1999–30/10/1999</b>		
Male	1,627	45.0
Female	2,000	55.0
Total	3,627	100.0

Table 3. Unemployment of people who never held a job.  
Source: NSSG Census Bureau 1991.

	Unemployed Total	New Entries Unemployed	Men		Women	
			Unemployed Total	New Entries Unemployed	Unemployed Total	New Entries Unemployed
<b>Country Total</b>						
Total	314,200	168,416	165,966	81,320	148,234	87,096
%		53.6		49.0		58.8
<b>Viotia Total</b>						
Total	3,814	2,118	2,098	1,068	1,716	1,050
%		55.5		50.9		61.2

The above figure shows that it is more difficult for women to enter the labour market than for men: 61.2 percent of the unemployed women have never held a job, compared to 50.9 percent for males.

Table 4. Registered Unemployment by gender and age in Livadeia area, May 2001.  
Source: Manpower Employment Organisation (OAED), Livadeia office.

	18–25 years old			40–64 years old			Total Unemployment recorded
	Number	%	%	Number	%	%	Number
<b>Male</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>35.8</b>	<b>27.9</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>33.2</b>	<b>27.1</b>	<b>1,253</b>
<b>Female</b>	<b>626</b>	<b>64.2</b>	<b>25.7</b>	<b>682</b>	<b>66.8</b>	<b>28.0</b>	<b>2,436</b>
Unemployed Total	975	100.0	26.4	1,021	100.0	27.7	3,689

A factor relatively exceptional to Viotia, though, is that many farmers in the area who were employed in the industrial sector never left farming. Accordingly, factory jobs for them served as a secondary income and, when those jobs were lost, these people were not formally unemployed. Thus, it was the people living in cities (mainly Thiva and Livadeia) but working in factories who were more severely affected by factory closures in the area.

Besides unemployment, other problems facing Thiva and Livadeia are ethnic and racial discrimination. There are approximately 40 villages of Albanians living in the vicinity who speak an Albanian dialect (*Arvanitika*), which is rapidly dying out; there is a large population of Roma gypsies; and there is a refugee settlement where approximately 300 families are homeless. Also, juvenile delinquency and drug abuse are significant problems in these towns and their surroundings.

In terms of politics, there is no stable pattern of one party's success in local elections: at the local level, politics is based more on individual politicians rather than party membership. Accordingly, the distribution of votes along party lines varies significantly from election to election. At the prefectural level however (Viotia), the votes are typically evenly divided between the two main parties--the Social-Democratic Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK), and the conservative New Democracy (ND). Viotia is represented in the Greek Parliament by four MP's: two are from the PASOK party, and two from ND.

Viotia is a focal point of welfare activity at the local, national *and* international level. In terms of the latter, at UN initiative there is a program in Thiva for the amelioration of the living conditions and integration of Roma gypsies into society, and a program for the provision of prefabricated homes for them. Also, as part of the EU European Social Charter, a new hospital has been built in Thiva, and an employment promotion centre. Also, there are a number of EU programmes taking place in the municipalities of Thiva and Livadeia.<sup>6</sup>

In terms of national-level activity, the Greek Ministry of Justice has established a drug rehabilitation and detoxification centre for drug-addicted prisoners, on the outskirts of Thiva. Furthermore, the Greek Ministry of Health, Welfare and Social Security has established guest houses for the homeless in the prefecture, in the context of the European observatory on homelessness.

In terms of local welfare activity, in Thiva and Livadeia, as in most Greek municipalities, the bulk of welfare services are based in the Welfare Office (Dieuthinsi

<sup>6</sup> These programmes are typical of the EU's social programme in other member states as well: they tend to be short-term initiatives, funded by the EU for a set number of years, after which point they are, ideally, adopted by the municipalities as long-term local programmes.

Proneias) of the Prefecture.<sup>7</sup> The Greek welfare system is, in general, focused on the provision of benefits, and the prefectural welfare offices deal mainly with the provision of such benefits – to people with disabilities and the uninsured – and one-off allowances for emergency situations (e.g. natural disasters).<sup>8</sup> They also employ social workers who conduct research in the prefecture to identify people in need of care, and to direct them to the appropriate institutions. Finally, the prefectural welfare offices oversee the operation of church and independent welfare initiatives.

The municipalities themselves (i.e., the mayor's offices) do not have 'welfare offices'. In the municipalities of Thiva and Livadeia, welfare activity is carried out only on an ad-hoc and short term basis. However, in each municipality there is a 'Municipal Enterprise',<sup>9</sup> and it is here that various welfare services are based. The existence and role of municipal enterprises throughout Greece is explained as an effort towards privatisation of the system; however, several interviewees described the municipal enterprises as a 'loophole' through which politicians can more easily extend favours/jobs, without having to go through layers of bureaucracy, and without having to offer long-term contracts to employees. Much of the welfare activity at this level is, by extension, conducted on a *short-term* basis. Many short-term EU social programmes, in particular, are based at municipal enterprises.

## The general local religious situation

The majority of the population in Thiva and Livadeia is overwhelmingly Greek Orthodox. There are also small groups of Protestants, some Jehovah's Witnesses, and some Roman Catholics. For the most part, these groups are native Greeks. In terms of immigrant groups, mainly these are immigrants from Albania, Pakistan and India (all of which are non-Christian), and smaller groups from Romania, Bulgaria and Russia (these groups are mainly Orthodox). The total number of immigrants in Viotia is approximately 15,000 (figures specific to Thiva and Livadeia are not available).

In terms of the Jehovah's Witnesses, there was, in the past, a relatively sizable minority of Jehovah's Witnesses in Thiva (and less so in Livadeia). The latter had attempted to build headquarters of the Jehovah's Witnesses in the Balkans near Thiva in the mid-1980s: a large plot of land was purchased, and the buildings for the headquarters were built. However, the local populations reacted strongly against this, protesting at a mass level against the operation of a Centre for Jehovah's Witnesses in the area. By the mid-1990s, the plan was abandoned, and the land was sold to the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry of Justice subsequently used the land to establish a Rehabilitation and Detoxification Centre for Drug-Addicted Prisoners (a project partially funded by the European Union).<sup>10</sup> As for the Roman Catholics, most

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<sup>7</sup> The Viotia Prefecture Welfare Office is based in Livadeia.

<sup>8</sup> An allowance is given to people who have been ascertained to be '67 percent disabled', whether physically or mentally. The amount of the allowance varies in accordance with the disability and degree of disability.

<sup>9</sup> That in Thiva is entitled 'Municipal Enterprise of Cultural and Urban Development of Thiva' (DEPOATH), and that in Livadeia, 'Municipal Enterprise of Culture and Development of Livadeia' (DEPAL).

<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.ministryofjustice.gr/eu2003/prevention.php>.

of these came to the area to work at Alumina, a French-owned aluminium-making factory.

The immigrants in the area mainly work in the agricultural sector, but also in construction. Many of the Albanian immigrants came to the area because of the fact that *Arvanitika* is spoken there (a dialect close to the Albanian language). The *Arvanitika*-speaking communities date back to the establishment of the modern Greek state; today, few people under the age of 40 speak the language, although they tend to understand it. In terms of immigrants living in cities (and particularly in the case of Pakistanis and Indians), many of these own small shops.

In general, the local church maintains healthy relations with state organs, independent of the incumbent party. One exceptionally difficult period in local church-state relations, however, developed when the Church's request to use state school buildings to run Greek-language night-classes for the local immigrants was rejected (Pakistanis, in particular, had shown interest in this). Most likely, it was the local Greek population, rather than the state representatives themselves, who resisted the plan.

## Welfare high on the agenda in the local media

The main social problems in Thiva and Livadeia today (and, accordingly, those most reported in the local media) are as follows:

1. Unemployment
2. Financial concerns specific to farmers (whose status and subsidies vary according to state and EU policies, and whose livelihood is often threatened by poor weather conditions)
3. Integration, employment, and social inclusion of immigrants
4. Family-related problems (especially the care for the elderly)
5. Drug abuse

## The local situation concerning gender

There are no significant divergences from the national situation concerning gender. The importance of the role of women as care providers is conspicuous, both in the home and in church and state-run welfare institutions and programmes. Also, the gap in care for children and the elderly, which was created by the increase in female employment, is identified by many interviewees (without prompting) as problematic in and of itself, and as the root of many related problems (e.g., juvenile delinquency).

## The Orthodox Church in Thiva and Livadeia

### General characteristics of the local majority church

The majority church under examination is the Diocese of Thiva and Livadeia, which is currently headed by the bishop of Thiva and Livadeia, Metropolitan Ieronymos. Though the diocese covers a broader geographical range than these two cities (in-

cluding many smaller towns and villages), the focus of the study is the Church in these two towns. In other words, the following are examined: welfare activity carried out in these towns at the initiative of the diocese; activity at the diocesan level; and activity carried out by the monasteries. The entire diocese includes 110 parishes; this study is limited to those in Thiva (10 parishes) and in Livadeia (6 parishes). Furthermore, the entire diocese includes 22 monasteries (5 male; 17 female); this study incorporates those on the outskirts of Thiva and Livadeia.

The bishop of Thiva and Livadeia is well-known in Greece for his relatively open-minded and calm (non-confrontational) stance on issues relating to the National Church (e.g., the identity card issue, and the Church's relations with the Patriarchate). Meanwhile, the Diocese of Thiva and Livadeia has a relatively large number of young clerics, and of educated clerics (more than half the clerics have a degree beyond secondary education).<sup>11</sup> These factors contribute, to a large degree, to this local Church's relative activity in domains beyond the purely ecclesiastical and spiritual (i.e., activity in the realm of social welfare). The diocese has its own publishing facilities, and an international conference centre, both of which make the Church more open beyond its administrative borders. These facts may also be taken as evidence of its relatively sound financial standing (or, at least, of its careful management of funds).

In general, parishes are financially self-sufficient, and the welfare activity of each is financed from each Church's income (i.e., donations to the Church, monies paid for candles upon entry into the Church, and, where applicable, income from property owned by the parish, etc.). All clergy of the Orthodox Church of Greece in general are remunerated by the state. In the towns of Thiva and Livadeia, permanent (paid) personnel of the Church include the bishop, the priests and deacons in each parish, an accountant, an administrator, and a driver (the latter three are lay employees).<sup>12</sup> Beyond these, at each diocesan level paid employees include the chanters (*psaltes*) in each Church, and the *neokores* (the person/s who clean the Church and maintain the Church during services). The number of the latter two groups depends on the size of each parish. Furthermore, each parish has four church-wardens

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<sup>11</sup> This figure is relatively high for a diocese outside the Attiki area (that is, outside the 12 dioceses in and around Athens). In general, the education level of Orthodox priests in Greece is quite varied: priests ordained today may be graduates of primary level ecclesiastical schools (i.e., grades 1–6); of secondary level ecclesiastical schools (grades 7–9; there are 17 such ecclesiastical schools throughout Greece); of vocational religious schools (similar, in terms of entrance exams, to Greek Technological Educational Institutes, entry into which requires passing exams specific to the particular school); or of one of the 4 university programmes in theology (entry into which requires passing the National University Entrance Exams known as *panelinies*).

<sup>12</sup> Deacons in the Orthodox Church serve, much like in the Roman Catholic Church, as assistants to priests. They do not officiate a liturgy alone, nor do they administer sacraments. The word 'deacon' comes from the Greek for 'assistant', or 'servant'. Between the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> century, it was also common in the Orthodox Church to ordain women as 'deaconesses'. Their role was mainly to do with welfare provision and, like male deacons, they could not officiate liturgies (they could, however, offer the sacrament of Holy Communion to ill women, and they could baptise women who, in early Christianity, were being baptised at an earlier age). In terms of Church canon law, this possibility of ordaining women as deaconesses still exists, but it is not practiced within the Church (there have been rare exceptions since the 7<sup>th</sup> century). For more on deaconesses, see Protopresbyter Laurence Barriger, 'The Order of Deaconess' in *Souroz*, No.101, August 2005, pp.28–32.

(*epitropoi*). These individuals are nominated by each parish priest and elected by a Bishop's Council,<sup>13</sup> and they serve on a volunteer basis. Finally, the employees in institutions run by the Church (see below) are also considered Church personnel (their wages are paid by the state, but they are generally hired and managed by the Church<sup>14</sup>). In general, Church activity relies heavily on individuals who work on a volunteer basis. In terms of welfare activity, a majority of these individuals are women (approximately 80 percent; this is largely due to the fact there is a much larger number of women, as opposed to men, who do not hold regular jobs). All of the above facts, with regard to organisation and personnel, are typical of the Orthodox Church of Greece in general, and are not specific to the cases of Thiva and Livadeia.

### Church as social agent and opinion former

The actions of the local Church as producer of welfare services are many and diverse. They include (but are not limited to):

- Two homes for the elderly, one in Thiva and one in Livadeia.
- A third institution has recently been established in Thiva, for the housing and care for handicapped people and people with chronic illnesses (mainly, elderly people with difficulties in mobility).
- A spiritual and cultural centre linked to a parish church in Thiva ('Parish refuge')
- One large 'soup kitchen' (*sisitio*), in Thiva (this is run primarily by the 'Women's Association of Love'<sup>15</sup>).
- An International Conference Centre, which, in addition to hosting conferences, also provides housing for visiting scholars and students.
- Camps for Orthodox youth (these camps, generally held in the summertime, bring together Orthodox youth from Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, etc., together with Greek Orthodox youth; the camp sites are also used for short stays/youth retreats during winter).
- A publishing house which prints books on theology, cd roms about the individual monasteries, books on archaeological sites in the area, etc.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> This council is comprised of clergy, lay people and state officials (one judicial representative, and one tax representative). *Epitropoi* of all churches are elected in this manner.

<sup>14</sup> Employment details (such as whether employees are hired by the Church or by the state) vary from institution to institution. New measures now require that employees in such institutions attain their positions after having passed a process of examination competitions.

<sup>15</sup> Such associations exist in several parishes, but the largest (of approximately 100 members) is in Thiva. These women generally serve in diocesan 'soup kitchens', clean and decorate churches, and help to organise and run local religious festivals. The 'Women's Association of Love' has its own statutory charter.

<sup>16</sup> Beyond the aforementioned activities, the local Church also used to run two student dorms, and an orphanage. The student dorms housed students in the cities when many villages did not have their own schools; the dorms were rendered unnecessary when schools were built in the smaller villages and students could remain in their own homes. Likewise, the orphanage was rendered unnecessary when the children housed there became adults. There is still one orphanage in Livadeia which is not run by the Church but is closely linked to it (Agia Tavitha – one of the private institutions included in the interview research for this case study).

All of the above are organised and administered at the level of the diocese; beyond this, each parish has its own programme of activities. In some churches in Thiva and Livadeia, the Church has ‘soup kitchens’ for the feeding of the poor (again, operated for the most part by women).

The Church also runs several financial accounts for help for the poor (i.e., accounts to which parishioners can donate money to help the poor). There are also establishments called the ‘Associations for Women’s Love’ which operate in several parishes and which help the poor. There is a centre for Mission and Communication run by a particular monastery in Livadeia, and a Blood Bank run by a particular parish in Thiva. One parish also maintains a financial account for assistance to ‘resourceless’ young women. Finally, the Church runs a youth centre for individuals under 25 years of age.

The role of monasteries as centres of welfare (both in Thiva and Livadeia, but also within the Church in general) deserves special mention. Regardless of various welfare ‘activities’ which may be based in monasteries, their role as places of retreat and reflection, peace and solitude, worship and prayer serves what many in the Church identify as amongst the most important welfare needs – that of emotional, spiritual and psychological wellbeing. This is in keeping with conceptions of the person, and of the person’s welfare needs, as a ‘whole’ – beyond, that is, material and physical needs. This role of the monasteries, it should be noted, is not limited to people of the Orthodox faith.

The main priority of the Diocese of Thiva and Livadeia, according to one of its representatives, is worship and spiritual care for its flock.<sup>17</sup> Beyond this, however, the local Church has an especially strong focus on issues to do with psychological health; this fact is attributed to the work of a few particular priests in the area who have training in psychology and psychotherapy. Accordingly, the Church has hosted a large international conference on ‘Psychotherapy and Orthodox Christian Theology.’<sup>18</sup> Also, the Church initiated the establishment of a boarding house for the rehabilitation and deinstitutionalisation of the mentally ill (originally established as a boarding house for patients from the asylum for the mentally ill of the island of Leros).<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, there is a great deal of activity in the domain of psychological health at the diocesan level, in terms of groups led by priests for psychological help for young couples and for groups of men and of women; seminars where clerics learn themes in psychology and psychoanalysis as may be applied to pastoral care; a

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<sup>17</sup> Personal conversation with a priest who also acts as a diocesan representative, 23 August 2004.

<sup>18</sup> The conference took place on 1–5 October 2003. For more information, see <http://www.psyche.gr/congressgreek2003.htm>.

<sup>19</sup> For more information on this institution, see A. Augoustidis, ‘Cooperation of psychiatry and the Church in a deinstitutionalization project’, in *International Journal of Medical Health*, Vol. 30, No.4, pp.42–48. Fr. Adamantios Augoustidis is the cleric who initiated this project. Following the exposure in international press of scenes showing the terrible conditions in the asylum for the mentally ill in Leros (established in 1956), Fr. Augoustidis proposed to the Centre for Mental Health (which is affiliated with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare). The Church donated the building for the boarding house, and played a significant role in preparing the local population for the establishment of the boarding house. The institution is the first formal cooperation between state and church in the provision of psychiatric care. Today, the boarding house operates independently of the Church.

psychological-help clinic housed in the Thiva diocesan building<sup>20</sup>; and the regular meetings of one Thiva cleric with military officials (this is meant to be a support network for military officials, but it mainly serves to help them to better deal with young soldiers).

The aforementioned examples of church activities are the most obvious and observable. Less conspicuous is, for example, aid provided to economic migrants: many such individuals (often lacking formal rights to employment) seek employment in the Church which, due to its tax-free status, is able to employ them more easily than other institutions/agencies. One significant result of this fact is that such individuals are thus more easily integrated into society, as the local population tends to be more accepting of them once the Church has exhibited trust and acceptance of immigrants. Likewise, on an informal and irregular basis, money is given directly to the poor on the streets of Thiva and Livadeia (according to one source, the local bishop sometimes personally distributes funds to needy people in these towns). In many cases, people in need of financial assistance are sent to the Church by both state and private-run welfare programmes. Finally, the Church frequently collaborates with state and private institutions in short-term programmes, and on an ad-hoc basis.

Assessing the ‘importance’ of the abovementioned activities is not a straightforward matter. From one perspective, it is clear that the Church’s role is extremely important, insofar as *any* actions which help fill the major gaps left by the state are important, and since the Church in Thiva and Livadeia seems to fill many such gaps (more in some domains, e.g., care for the elderly,<sup>21</sup> and less so in other domains, such as help for battered women). But the question of ‘importance’ raises the further questions of ‘to whom?’ and ‘in what way?’ In the context of Thiva and Livadeia at least, the question of importance carries with it a degree of controversy: nearly all will agree that the Church offers much in terms of welfare provision. However, some (both state *and* church representatives) would argue that ought not to run such institutions, and that in so doing, it helps perpetuate a situation in which the state does not fulfil its responsibilities. Also, some question the motivation of the Church: for them, the Church’s involvement in the welfare sector lowers the level of quality of services.<sup>22</sup>

It is also difficult to assess the significance of the Church’s actions as a former of public opinion. In terms of the *effect* of the Church as a former of public opinion: for the ‘church-going’ population (who tend to make themselves known as such in the interview process),<sup>23</sup> the Church seems to play a *large* role, at least as a point of

<sup>20</sup> Two rooms are provided by the Church for use as counselling rooms for psychological therapy; the Church simply facilitates peoples’ access to psychological help, but the professional psychologists are paid by the patients (not by the Church).

<sup>21</sup> Particularly as there is no state-run home for the elderly in either Thiva or Livadeia. There are, however, three privately-run homes for the elderly.

<sup>22</sup> As is clear from the above, the question seems to ask for a value judgement, which I cannot easily make. If, however, we are simply looking for a *quantitative* judgement (ie, to what extent the Church fills gaps in welfare services), I can easily say (both on the basis of observation and interviews) that the Church plays a very important role.

<sup>23</sup> This term applies to 14 (of the 25) interviewees, if used loosely to include one individual who identifies herself as ‘of the Church’, but not a church-goer. Significantly, only 3 of the 14 interviewees from state-run institutions fall into this category; i.e., 100 percent of the remaining interviewees (all eleven of the interviewees from church-run and private-run institutions) fall into this category.

reference, for public opinion: that is, most church-going interviewees make some reference to the Church's stance on various issues, a small minority of which make a critical reference (i.e., 'the Church says ..., but I disagree', or, more commonly: 'the Church *fails to say* ...'). However, 'the Church' as an influence on local public opinion is, in this case, the *parish*, rather than the diocese as a whole. In other words, for the church-goers, their point of reference on social issues seems to be their parish/parish priest, more so than the bishop. For church-goers and non-church goers alike, the local bishop plays an important role as a former of *national* public opinion.

In terms of *actions* of the Church as a former of public opinion: the most conspicuous action of the Church at the local level is the communication of a message through the sermon. The local bishop does express a public voice, but mainly in relation to national issues and, particularly, to national church/political issues (again, it is important to bear in mind that Metropolitan Ieronymos stands out as a critic of the Archbishop (Christodoulos)). In effect, though, it seems that the main actions of the local church as a former of public opinion are just that: actions, rather than words/public voice.<sup>24</sup>

In terms of practical leadership, on the *surface*, the roles of men and women seem to be fairly equally divided: only two of the seven interviewees from church-run institutions are female, but this fact could, theoretically, be arbitrary. In terms of formal leadership, though, there is a clear difference between the sexes in terms of leadership: first (and most obviously), the fact that the clergy is all-male, and that there is relatively little lay-leadership within the Orthodox Church structure means that the *initiative* behind all church institutions will at least appear to be male-driven. Second, when one considers the institutions in which women *are* in leadership positions (homes for the elderly), it is clear that their leadership role in the particular settings reflects a gender bias: e.g., in this case, care for the elderly is a woman's job (whether because women are *better* at it or are *required* to play this particular role – opinions on this vary). Thus, access to positions of influence depends on the position under consideration.

In terms of those who *serve*: it is clear that women predominate, in terms of number, within the social activities of the local Church. There tend to be similarities in women's and men's roles only where both are retired/senior citizens (i.e., a couple may be involved in the same welfare activity). But even in this case the roles they play seem to be divided: men tend to help in completely different ways to women. Male activities include (but are not limited to): offering part of their crop to the soup kitchen (which entails *physically carrying* crops which they have tended); helping with the gardening at the newly established home for the elderly; and helping with technological/electrical problems in a given institution, etc. Meanwhile, women visit and help care for the elderly in the Church homes for the elderly; they volunteer to clean and decorate church institutions; and they cook for the soup kitchen (amongst other activities).

In institutions which are *private* but somehow related to the Church, these patterns are less clear-cut. For example, in some cases the board of administration of private institutions includes both men and women. Also, private institutions tend to have memberships (fee-based), and to host seminar series and other events – all of

<sup>24</sup> Again, it should be noted that this comment is based on the responses of 'church-going' interviewees.

which seem to engage both sexes on a more equal level. But certain conspicuous role divisions exist here as well: e.g., women knit robes (priestly and baptismal) to be sent abroad, and men tend the gardens.

Most of the people who *serve* in church-run institutions/programmes do so on a volunteer basis. Exceptions are the homes for the elderly, which employ trained nurses, guards, etc. Here both the staff and the administrator (all women) are paid. Again, most of the men involved in church-run institutions are clerics; clergy are not paid specifically for their welfare activities, but they are of course paid as clergy members (by the state; they are, in effect, civil servants). Finally, there is no perceivable difference between the access to influence and the decision-making power (within individual welfare programmes) of paid employees, on the one hand, and volunteers, on the other. Again, volunteers predominate in the domain of welfare provision, and it seems they are granted due authority.

## Co-operation between social authorities and the majority Church

From the outset it should be noted that in the case of Thiva and Livadeia, when it comes to cooperation between institutions, the institutions should not be divided between the state authorities, on the one hand, and the Church *and* church-related institutions, on the other: the church-related institutions ought to be treated as a separate category, because a. they are less defined by their relation to the Church than they are by their institutional independence and b. there is a great deal of discrepancy between church institution-state authority cooperation, on the one hand, and private institution-state authority cooperation, on the other.

There is cooperation between the social authorities and the majority Church on a number of levels, and in various contexts.

First and foremost to note (in terms of importance) is the significance of *individuals'* initiative: nearly all of the Church and Church-related initiatives examined as part of this study can be described as the result of personal *initiative* (in terms of its establishment; not in terms of its operation once established), rather than an outcome of firm and previously established institutional links, or of stable and long-term mechanisms.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, the cooperation between various institutions is a matter of personal/individual initiative.

In Thiva and Livadeia, cooperation between social authorities and the diocese is fairly widespread. Specific examples include:

- the Church's role in the establishment of the (state-run) boarding house for the rehabilitation and deinstitutionalisation of the mentally ill, and its donation of the building (see above);
- the newly established Centre for the Chronically Ill and People with Special Needs, built with 60 percent state funding, and 40 percent church funding;
- the coordination between the church-run soup kitchen and the municipality's EU-funded 'Help at Home' programme (the 'Help at Home' social workers pick up food from the soup kitchen on a daily basis and deliver it to people in their homes)

<sup>25</sup> The 'philoptoxos' (friend of the poor) coin box in individual parishes is as an exception, an institution/a practice common to all parishes.

Most of the cooperation, however, is on a less organised, more ad-hoc basis which, again, depends on the particular individuals involved. For example:

- the 'Help at Home' social worker in Thiva brings to the attention of the parish priest people in the area who are confined to their homes;
- a representative from the Prefectural Welfare office, two social workers, and a representative from a private institution all claim to direct people to the Church when they are in need of financial assistance;
- the hospital of Thiva's Director of Section for People with Special Needs will also be involved in the Church's project to provide recreation and, in the long term, housing, for people with special needs
- the Church played a very significant role when the Detoxification and Rehabilitation Centre for Drug-Addicted Prisoners, of the National Ministry of Justice, was first established, by sensitising the local population so that the institution was well received (there could have been much resistance from the local population). Church involvement continued with the Church bringing groups of people in coaches to listen to seminars there and to meet the prisoners. The Church's role is, according to the interviewees at this institution, very significant for the reintegration of these people in society, because of the stigma that normally follows them after release from prison. The institution has now established a relationship with one particular priest (more regular visits) who has studied drug addiction, knows about the various drugs, and acts as a support for the youth (all male).<sup>26</sup>
- Also, the Centre for Rehabilitation and Deinstitutionalisation, of the National Centre of Mental Health (Ministry of Health and Social Welfare) is the result of a joint initiative of church and state (proposed by a local priest, who is also a psychiatrist, and housed in a church-owned building). It is a boarding-house for the deinstitutionalisation of mentally ill patients (originally from the island of Leros; it now houses patients from Viotia, Athens and other parts of Greece.) Also, as in the case of the Detoxification and Rehabilitation Centre, the Church played a significant role in encouraging the local population to welcome the initiative.<sup>27</sup>

The consequence of such cooperation is great. The diocese and state authorities (at the municipal, prefectural, *and* national levels) have worked together on many projects, and over long periods of time (thus showing that co-operation is not limited by partisan politics). Furthermore, individuals from both church and state institutions tend to speak highly of the co-operation, and to offer examples. Finally, many interviewees pointed to the need for even greater cooperation mainly on the basis of successful efforts thus far in their local contexts.

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<sup>26</sup> It is interesting to note that what the Ministry of Justice bought was the former headquarters of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Greece: the local population had staged strong protests against the running of such headquarters in the area, and they built an Orthodox Church built just outside the property gates. Eventually, the Jehovah's Witnesses abandoned the project and sold the land and building structures.

<sup>27</sup> A similar initiative in another town in this region of Greece was undermined by local protests.

I cannot trace any change in this cooperation in terms of expansion or narrowing of cooperation: the Church's involvement with both state and privately-run institutions seems to have remained stable at least as long as the current bishop has been in that role in the diocese.

The following are some examples of discussions/plans for future cooperation:

1. The director of the wing of the General Hospital of Thiva for People with Special Needs (AMEA) will also help at the newly established (Church-run) clinic for people with chronic illness and special needs.
2. The Ministry of Justice's centre for rehabilitation and detoxification of drug-addicted prisoners has recently established an agreement with a particular priest for regular visits as part of the therapy (the priest has studied drug addiction); this agreement is a result of the prisoners' own request.
3. The Centre for Mental Health boarding house for people with mental illness will be moved to another, larger building (also a donation of the Church) so that they can house more patients; also, a local priest has agreed to help develop an occupational therapy programme for the patients.

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

### Views held by the public authorities<sup>28</sup>

#### Welfare

A majority of interviewees from public institutions make reference to the word 'care' when explaining their conceptions of welfare: welfare entails care for people who cannot, for some reason or another, take care of themselves. Also, most of them define welfare in relation to the state: welfare is a state activity and/or duty. For example: "Welfare is the state's caring for people's needs" (6, f); "*services offered by the state to people who have some need*" (2, f).

The etymology of Greek term for welfare, *proneia*, means to think ahead, forethought, providence. One interviewee in *this* category (more interviewees in other categories) makes reference to the etymology of the word, indicating that welfare means thinking in advance, so as to *prevent* a problem, rather than simply seek to heal it after the fact. Interestingly, the etymology of the word brings religion to mind, through the term 'divine providence', and for most interviewees who mention the term's etymology, welfare has some religious – or at least a broader social – conception. In this interviewee's case, however, even providence is conceived purely in terms of state responsibility: "[welfare] means] the state thinks ahead for me, is aware and prepared before a problem arises" (3, f).

One social worker describes welfare as "care for people who cannot care for themselves. It entails provision of basic needs, first, then assistance to the person in

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<sup>28</sup> The term 'authorities' is used loosely here: the material below is drawn from interviews with representatives of public welfare services, including mainly social workers and administrators, as well as one mayor and one director of a major welfare institution.

developing his or her character and, finally, economic assistance.” For this interviewee, welfare (as defined above) is the responsibility of the state (10, m).

However, not all interviewees in this category see welfare as exclusively the role of the state: “welfare means efforts, either public or private, to equalise all the inequalities” (5, m).

One interviewee refers to the term as if it were a dirty word: for her, welfare is a stigmatised concept, because it brings to mind blatant state failure (1, f).

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

Interestingly, two interviewees question whether ‘welfare’ exists at all (i.e., revealing that they conceive of welfare as a state project).

In general, respondents are critical of the national welfare system, both in general and at the local level. Most point to gaps in the system (e.g., in the entire prefecture there is no public psychiatric help, not even in the hospitals). Others (two) simply note that Greece is *far behind* other European countries in terms of welfare services.

Reasons stated for these weaknesses include: lack of funds (financially weak state); poor prioritisation on the part of the state; and the late introduction of the welfare system in Greece.

Most make some reference to the fact that the national welfare system is focused on benefit provision (i.e., government allowances), stating that this is an insufficient means of addressing problems (a couple of interviewees also noted that the amount people receive in benefits is too small to help much in any case). In other words, the system is shallow, and fails to help the person to help him or herself. For example: “here, as in the rest of Greece, it’s clearly a system based on benefits ... for me, this is wrong and should change. Yes, benefits should be given, but we should take care of the person more, and be involved in the development of the person’s character, and this will also bring economic and other development, career etc., and will improve the quality of life of the whole country.” (10, m).

One interviewee highlights negative developments in the welfare system, and places this in comparative context: “Elderly people do not have the support they used to have. Years ago, probably the “Help at Home”<sup>29</sup> programme wouldn’t have played such a large role. There was less stress, women stayed at home, etc. ... Compared to the past, the [welfare] needs are greater, and the state must have more people involved in social welfare. As a country, I think we are not doing well in this domain. In some other European country, I read, there is one social worker for 1–2,000 people; here, there is one per *thousands* ... I don’t think the unemployment benefits are what the unemployed person really needs. No, we will support him this way for a certain amount of time. From there on out we must help him to find work, or help him to solve his problems on his own.” (9, f).

Most people express a desire for greater cooperation between the various institutions dealing with welfare provision. New and better structures are needed, without gaps in them: “Gaps in the system limit the effectiveness of those institutions which *are* in place” (2, f), and the current grassroots cooperation needs to be raised to

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<sup>29</sup> An EU-funded programme providing assistance for people whose ability to move and to care for themselves is restricted. See reference to this programme above.

higher levels (i.e., in terms of power and administration), and more money needs to be put into the system (1, f).

### Role of the church

For most interviewees in this category, the Church plays a large role *because of* the gaps in the system left by the state. In this sense, the Church's role is an unfortunate necessity: the state *ought* to be providing for the needs of its citizens.

Those who are less critical of the state feel that the social problems are simply too many to be handled by the state.

Depending on the institution in which they work, it seems, and on the particular relationship between it and the Church (if any), some believe that the Church also plays an irreplaceable role. For example, people working in the two rehabilitation centres (one for drug-addicted prisoners, and one for the mentally ill) feel that only the Church could have been as effective as it was in sensitising the public and preparing them for the establishment of the respective institutions in the area. In both cases, examples were offered where the public reacted negatively to the establishment of such institutions elsewhere, so that the plans were sometimes abandoned.

Overwhelmingly, respondents feel the Church offers good services (whether they are viewed as good in relation to what the state can and should offer is a different matter). Most emphasise their respect for the local bishop and for his efforts in the domain of welfare provision. For example, "It [the Church] has developed a very wide philanthropic work, and I am envious of it for the state" (4, m).

Also, most note that the Church is a *significant associate/collaborator* in services/programmes offered by other institutions. For instance, the director of one particular institution claims that the Church played an irreplaceable role in the initial establishment and success of that institution, and continues to be an important partner in fulfilling the institution's goals (4, m). A social worker proclaims 'excellent cooperation' between her institution and the Church and that, together, the two manage to be much more successful in providing for peoples' needs (9, f).

The main strengths of church-run welfare services are identified as the following:

- people 'of the Church' offer love through their practices: they are more sensitive to peoples' pain;
- people tend to tell their parish priest their problems first, and so the Church is a critical link in the welfare provision chain: 'the person will go easier to the priest to tell his problems, rather than going to talk to a social worker or psychologist, because when something bad happens to us, we ask for help of the Church. We go to pray. We see the priest as representative of God. Religion is what leads us to have more trust' (1, f).<sup>30</sup>

The latter perspective is contradicted, though, by other interviewees who feel that people may *hesitate* to take their problems to the parish priest, or to church-run institutions, for fear that (in such a small community), their problems would become known (i.e., fear of gossip); or, in general, there is a sense that the facelessness of

<sup>30</sup> It should be noted, though, that there is not, in the entire prefecture, a state-run psychology ward.

state institutions is actually a benefit, particularly in small towns. Furthermore, the neutrality of the state is appreciated, as compared with the Church, which may have ulterior motives in its work: “the Church’s aim is to win over people” (10, m). The same interviewee notes that, though the Church does do good work in the realm of welfare provision (in terms of helping people), the state should take over this role.<sup>31</sup>

Also problematic for one interviewee is that the Church’s active presence in the domain of welfare provision “confuses matters: *one* institution should be in charge. Work in parallel can help but it can cause problems ...” (3, f).

### **Church and social work**

Considering whether the Church *should* engage in social work, most interviewees in this category would use the word ‘should’ in relation to the state first: it is the state which *should* carry out social work. However, given that there *are* major gaps in the system, they tend to believe that the Church should carry out social work because there is such a need. Most interviewees also state that welfare provision is a fundamental part of the Church’s identity; i.e., ‘should’ is simply an inappropriate word to use, as Church and social service are indivisible concepts.

For example: ‘Should is the wrong word: if you use the word ‘should’ it is no longer diakonia. It is part of the church’s *identity* to be involved in the problems of the people’. He then refers to an invitation he had received from the Church for the grand opening of one of its welfare institutions and notes that it says “Christ says whoever takes care of them takes care of me. Until a few years ago we had got used to believing that the Church should be outside the people. But I think now that it should be involved with the people, it’s its job to be involved in the problems of the people” (5, m). This particular interviewee is a self-declared non-practicing but believing Orthodox Christian. The same applies to another social worker, whose view it is that the Church should be engaged in social work because “I have in my mind that, in addition to teaching me this and that about how to be a good Christian, and about God, etc. ... I have linked [in my mind] the Church with philanthropy. i.e. ... if you who talk about love so much don’t come to help, who else should be expected to [offer help]?” (9, f).

One interviewee sees a basic level of commonality between, for example, his institution’s aims and those of the Church: “Here we try to instil in them [recipients of welfare services] a sense of solidarity, mutual appreciation and mutual respect. We try to instil a community spirit, and to stand against individualism, to try to help them see their personal interest as common with that of the community. This is the mentality of the programme, and it is also the communalism which the Church represents.” (4, m). He also notes that their job (in this particular state institution) is to treat the welfare recipient as worthy of respect and courtesy (something which many in Church and Church-affiliated institutions feel exists only in their institutions).

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<sup>31</sup> This interviewee also defends this argument by pointing out that most of the Church’s welfare activities are depending upon wealth and estates it has from donations made to the Church during under Ottoman rule: this was a way to protect the lands from confiscation. Many argue that this land should have been given to the Greek State established after the Greek Revolution in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century after independence. These church estates have been a perennial source of tension and conflict between church and state in Greece.

Beyond gaps *left* by the state, though, one interviewee notes that there are also social/welfare needs which the state *cannot* meet (e.g., elements of social rehabilitation) and here, she indicates: “only the Church comes to supplement the work of the state and also, unfortunately, to interfere” [in other words, there are needs which would be best met by the Church, and the Church does offer its services to meet these needs but it also, unfortunately, tends to interfere in the work of the state] (3, f).

Most also make some reference to the Church’s wealth/estates, and feel that the Church could and should do more simply because it *can*, financially.

However, there are also clearly negative views expressed. For instance, one interviewee emphasises that there are not enough volunteers (i.e., referring to Church welfare activity, which relies on volunteers) to tend to all needs, and the psychological support cannot be based on volunteer work alone. “For how long would that last? There must be a professional relationship in order to be able to help alcoholics, drug addicts, etc. We cannot rely on volunteerism, because there must develop a professional relationship between the patient and the healer. And so *this* limits what the Church can do. It’s easier and more practical (for the state to handle welfare)” (2, f).

Also, one interviewee raises as one negative side of Church social work the fact that “the Church expects something in return. It aims to bring you [welfare recipient] on its side. It pulls you in to save your soul. The state can and should offer help without expecting something in return” (4, m). It should be noted that this same interviewee is one of the most well-versed in biblical theology of all the interviewees (although a self-proclaimed non-practicing Christian), explaining that the reason why the Church, from its own perspective, should engage in social work is that the Bible says that we should love others: “love is not only expressed with feelings but with actions. Whoever has two should give the one [here he cites the verse in biblical, koine, Greek] ... social work is a basic element of the Church itself: the offering. ‘Give and take’. This is what we, too, do here. Christ brought wine, oil and bread. And the Church teaches, through its actions, that because we received [now through the Church, representing Christ] we too must give to others. Of course, there is a difference between the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church ...” [he goes on to note that the Catholic Church is more clearly social in nature and in its activities, something often viewed from within the Orthodox Church as a form of secularisation. The Orthodox Church’s role is more spiritual, he notes]. Beyond biblical references, he also cites philosophy, and notes that the Church ‘should’ engage in social work because it is, as Althusser has said, a social institution and an ideology producer: it is not outside society but in it, and so it has the right to play a role (4, f).

Finally, one social worker states emphatically that because the Church’s role is, or should be, *spiritual*, it should not engage in social work (10, m; it should be noted though that here he is speaking in terms of the ideal: in practice, he says, because there are so many needs the state does not cover, and because the Church has the necessary financial and human resources, it should help in welfare provision ... i.e., an unfortunate necessity).

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

The most common responses to the question of whether the Church should contribute to the debate on welfare issue are ‘why not’ and, even more common: ‘yes, but ...’ Most expressed some disapproval of a *politicised* voice (such as that which they

see at the level of the national Church). Also, they refer to the Church's voice as, ideally, simply one of many voices which characterise a democratic system (i.e., that it should not have disproportionate influence in Greek society).

For example, one social worker believes that the Church has a right to an opinion, but should not present it as "this is how it should happen [i.e., it shouldn't force its opinion on people], and that if this is not how we see it, then this is a sin, and we are worthy of criticism" (3, f). Another shows clear uncertainty: "maybe on certain issues it should have a voice, but on others no ... It depends on the issue. E.g., abortion: it's a delicate issue. The Church sees it from a different dogmatic point of view. I'm not sure if the Church could be unbiased on such an issue. But on such issues as poverty, I think it should express an opinion and propose solutions" (2, f).

Most popular is the opinion expressed by one programme director: "yes, but the Church shouldn't shape Greek politics. Our elected government should have the final say on social issues. The Church can express voice, but not force its opinion, as it tried to do with the identity cards"<sup>32</sup> (4, m).

### **Church in the past ten years**

Most interviewees in this category are unable or reluctant to offer an opinion on changes in the Church in the past ten years, as they do not have much contact with the Church. For example, one interviewee states that he does not know, because the Church is discreet and works anonymously (4, m).

Most, however, make some reference to the notion that the Church has adapted itself to changes in peoples' needs/social problems. Most describe this as a 'modernisation' of the Church, and they credit both the local bishop and the priests, many of whom are well-educated, for this modernisation.

### **Wishes for changes to the church**

Interestingly, two respondents say "I would change the state, to strengthen its role" (in other words, to diminish the gaps in the system), rather than proposing changes to the Church.

Nearly all interviewees, even those who feel the Church's role is an unfortunate necessity, think that the Church could and should play a larger role: "I would make the state more dynamic. But, when at the moment the needs exist, I would have that the church would offer more. First I would want the state to offer it, but if not the state, then the church. What I wish is for more welfare, even by the church if necessary" (10, m).

Another interviewee calls for more organisation in the Church's welfare efforts: "I think they could offer more organised social care ... There is a need for more cooperation and coordination between the various efforts [i.e., between public services and Church activities]. Because sometimes something is done by the municipality, something by the Church, by the prefecture, and by other groups, and there's

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<sup>32</sup> Here the interviewee is referring to a 'crisis' in church-state relations which peaked in 2000, when the government removed reference to religion from the national identity cards, against the will of the Church. The Church struggled to reverse this decision by trying to influence individual politicians and political leaders (e.g., the President of Greece) and the public, through mass rallies and the collection of signatures for a referendum on the issue.

no cooperation between us. We all do similar things ... it would be much better if we all worked together, in a more organised way” (9, f).

One director of a public social service expresses her dismay over the way the Church uses its money, wishing that it would be better directed towards social service: “I’m very much against the money spent on churches (decorations, etc.). Of course, aesthetics and harmony with the spirit of Orthodoxy and worship are important ... but at this stage [of social problems] these things don’t help. What is necessary now is for the Church to come closer to the person. It could, in *each* parish, have a soup kitchen. Or there could be a network, with soup kitchens in some parishes, and homeless shelters in others, etc.” (1, f).

### Significance of gender

Most interviewees are nonchalant about the predominance of women in the field of welfare provision. One interviewee notes, half-jokingly, that this is due to the fact that women who are just sitting at home simply look for things with which to occupy themselves and think “hey, I’ll go visit the sick!” [in other words, because of the greater levels of unemployment amongst women] (6, f).

If pressed to explain why there tend to be more women working in this domain (i.e., including paid staff), interviewees tend to make comments about ‘women’s nature’: because welfare has to do with care, and because care immediately brings to mind, for me at least, the woman, mostly women deal with it. Most psychologists, social workers, etc. are women. I would divide them probably into 70–30 percent, 60–40 percent something like that, women in the majority ... Without this meaning that men are emotionless, or that they can’t handle such work. It simply doesn’t suit them, it doesn’t come naturally (10, m).

It should be noted that such responses are fairly evenly distributed amongst men and women. For example, one female director of a social service states: “I think women are those who help mostly. Men help too, but mostly women. Here we have also the psychosynthesis of the woman: because woman is mother, wife, she is closer to the family. It is she who manages the things of the home ... it has to do with what each of us has learned from his or her family ... We see this in both young and older women, but older women tend to have more time and space in their lives ... Perhaps also because ours is a male-dominated society, we [women] have had our men a bit extra protected [i.e. spoiled], so that they are not used to providing such services” (1, f).

## Views held by the church

### Welfare

Compared to the representatives of state institutions, church<sup>33</sup> representatives refer to the etymology of the Greek term (forethought) much more in explaining their con-

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<sup>33</sup> Again, I would draw the reader’s attention to the fact that, unless noted otherwise, I mean by ‘the Church’ the Church as an institution. In the section below, I do not claim to represent a ‘holistic’ view of ‘the Church’ on the issues addressed: such a holistic view does not exist, as the Church as an institution is not a monolith. Rather, the views included below must be considered as the personal views of each of the interviewees cited.

ceptions of welfare, and they also make reference to *divine providence*: i.e., “our actions are inspired by God’s providence”. Also, many in this category make reference to church history (either early Christian Church history, or Byzantine times) to explain how welfare has always been a fundamental element in Christianity/Orthodoxy.

For example, one priest defines welfare as “thinking ahead. Divine providence. Not waiting for the person to extend his hand [for help]”. He refers to history, and to Byzantium in particular, to say that welfare has always been an important role of the Church. It is only in modern times, with the establishment of the modern Greek state, that welfare provision became part of the state’s domain (16, m).

Similarly, another priest refers to forethought, divine providence, and to Byzantine history, and goes further to say that welfare is “the caring of God, the maintenance of creation. And we, because we are icons of God, in performing acts of welfare, we show that we care for our people. What we have to give to our fellow human beings, in whatever form – not just provision of bodily needs) – could be for a trauma, filling someone’s loneliness, etc.” (21, m). Likewise a monk defines welfare as “thinking ahead, thinking of people and what we can do for them”.

One welfare programme administrator breaks from this tendency and defines welfare as *merimna*, or social welfare. She sees welfare as “care for people who cannot care for themselves, people who for some reason have been left alone, or incapable of taking care of themselves. And from that point either the Church, or state, or other institutions help these people, with whatever way possible” (15, f).

Several respondents emphasise a certain attitude/approach that one must have towards people in need: one must see the person as a *person*, and not as a case. (Both church and state representatives tended to point out that people in the Church have such an approach). For instance, for one programme director welfare means “to see a person as a person, and his needs ... not as state looks at the person, as a responsibility and as a faceless individual. *Not an individual, a person*” (18, f).

In this category, fewer see welfare as primarily a matter of the state (the two exceptions include a priest and a monk). As the priest says, “welfare is all those steps that should have been taken before a person reached the point of extending his hand to beg for help. It is primarily a state responsibility. As the system is now, all we can do is try to mend traumas, heal wounds. This is not welfare. Rather, welfare starts from birth ... [i.e., by supporting a person from birth in order to live well and not fall into such trauma]” (20, m).

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

Several interviewees in this category could not respond to this question, stating that they are not familiar enough with the national welfare system.

Most enter naturally into a comparison with church welfare services, stating that the state services are bureaucratic, and thus faceless/impersonal *and* inefficient.

Several argue that the national welfare system *cannot* work well, because civil servants will never offer generously of themselves to people in need. i.e., they are employees who are mainly interested in collecting their pay.

And one interviewee emphasises that a system focused on the granting of benefits could not work well: we need to prevent wounds, rather than merely seeking to heal them.

One priest declares: "I don't know [about the local welfare system]. I hear that it's very bureaucratic, and that it takes a long time for anything to happen. So people can get help from the Church in more simple forms" (16, m). He goes on to explain how this relative lack of bureaucracy in the Church is one of the reasons why so many people seek help from the Church: they simply do not have the time or energy to wait and keep knocking at the door of the state. In this sense, the Church is presented as more efficient in meeting people's needs (however, this particular respondent was not seeking to draw a direct comparison between Church and public welfare services and/or to promote those of the Church). Another interviewee working in a Church welfare programme is also hesitant to comment on the local welfare system, saying that "[she is] not in a position to say, I don't know enough. But if the employee is a civil servant, and if we judge by how the public system runs in general, it is more impersonal, more cold, more distant and foreign ... or that's how I imagine it" (15, f).

For one interviewee, it is quite clear that the local welfare service functions "terribly. It is based on benefits which are not enough to help in any case. And the contact between the state institution and the person in need is limited to this exchange of money. It is bureaucratic. For me, it's not welfare at all. No one [in public services] looks at the state of his [the welfare seeker's] life ..." (18, f). Similarly, one monk declares that "wherever there is civil servant mentality, nothing can work well" (17, m). And another priest explains that "People in the civil service have a strange mentality that comes with a 'job for life'. They don't care especially for what they do, or about what they do. We see this in the way they treat the people they are serving. It is not a good attitude, which would be different if they were not there for life: they would have to continue proving themselves at work" (21, m).

One priest feels that the local welfare system functions better in Thiva and Livadeia than in most places because of the Church's help. Also, he notes that a "village mentality" still prevails there so that people have a habit of helping one another (20, m).

### **Role of the church**

As to whether the Church has a role to play in welfare provision, the responses to this question are overwhelmingly positive. First and foremost, people note that the Church is love, and that people offer of themselves in the name of love. Thus, the Church is able to care for people much better than other institutions, because what people really need is love. For example: "the Church is love. People offer of themselves in the name of love. State institutions are not like this. The quality of service in Church institutions is much higher. The Church draws its strength from the faithful ... it comes in to supplement the state not only in terms of gaps left in the system, but in terms of weaknesses in the quality of service especially: the state can't offer what we offer ..." (18, f). Or as one monk says, "where there is will for offering and for love, there it [welfare] works. That's why Church institutions, where most are volunteers, run better than those of the state, and with fewer costs ... [In the Church institutions, people] are not looking at their watches waiting to get paid and to leave. They are close to the person, looking at the person as person, not as a case. They don't see you in terms of what they will get from you, but in terms of

what can they give? What's missing in public institutions is the heart. A warm heart" (17, m).

In a similar vein, another interviewee describes the Church and its welfare institutions as places which are "more sweet, more warm, more human", and more sensitive. As such, "it can play a very important role in terms of the relief of pain, of abandonment of such people" (15, f; she works in an elderly home, and so by abandonment she reveals her view – still quite common in Greece in general – of the concept of sending the elderly to live in homes for the elderly, rather than caring for them in people's own homes).

Some respondents argue that because the Church services are based on love, and this love will never run out, the Church welfare provision is more reliable (in contrast with, for example, EU funding for particular programmes): "Church services run on the basis of love, which will never run out. Funds for EU programmes will run out, or the municipality will lose interest in a programme. But the Church, and its people, will always seek to help others, out of love, will always offer what they can" (20, m).

The fact that Church institutions run mainly on the basis of volunteer efforts is identified as another major factor in the Church services' relative quality: people are there because they care.

One priest notes that the Church plays a very important role, but that this is not necessarily evident to all, because it does so "humbly and quietly". He goes on to say that, on the one hand, this is a pity, because more people might come to help others, or to receive help, if more knew about the services.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, though, he declares, "it is good that the left hand should not know what the right does". Furthermore, the Church plays other roles in welfare provision beyond those which are normally discussed – i.e., caring for the poor, elderly and ill: for instance, aesthetics is a large part of welfare, and tradition – the Church pays attention to people's such needs of places to "soothe their souls", and it significantly provides them with their tradition (*paradosi* – the passing on of heritage, from one generation to the next; not a function of looking back), linking them to this significant source of identification (16, m).

Another priest continues in this vein, suggesting that the Church plays an important role in welfare provision "through the different ways in which they [people of the Church] are inspired to help". And, returning to the difference between volunteer work and paid employment, he notes that because the Church work is based on that of volunteers, one can see a significant difference between state-run homes for the elderly, for instance, and those run by the Church: "it's a completely different mentality. For the person in the Church institution, they see as their responsibility to give well of themselves, as Christians. So the difference is faith: they feel for and care for the people in need ..." (21, m).

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<sup>34</sup> On this note – regarding whether the Church's role should be publicised – there is a significant discrepancy in people's, including clerics', views: it seems most feel that 'advertisement' is not necessary (if people really want to help and devote of their time and effort, they will seek out ways to do this, and if people need help, they can ask and will be directed to the Church), and that it is contrary to Orthodox tradition and to Christian belief (noting that the left hand should not know what the right does).

### Church and social work

Regarding whether the Church should engage in social work, most in this category emphasise that ‘the Church’ and ‘social service’ are indivisible concepts: social service is a fundamental aspect of the Church’s identity.

One priest notes that “‘work of Church’ and ‘social work’ are indivisible. In my mind, they are synonymous. For example, in the space where we are now [a parish recreation centre, mainly for youths, which houses a museum of icons, a space for iconography courses, computers for people’s use, space for lectures, etc.], I have no sense that what we offer is just ecclesiastical. It is social” (16, m).

Or, as one administrator of a Church-run welfare institution states, “Our church is based on offering [*prosfora*], sacrifice, self-denial – at least, this is what Christ taught us: love others as yourself. Not that we all Orthodox people or societies, or anyone, do this. But these are the prototypes of our Church, [to do this] without expecting something in return. From the moment that the Church means gathering of many people, always united in the name of Christ, and Christ is love, how else can the Church show its love other than with its offering, not just to the elderly but to everyone, to orphans, to many institutions” (15, f).

For another interviewee, “Should is the wrong word: there is no should about it. Church and social service are one and the same. Indistinguishable”. She refers to the early Church as well, and to the Church during Byzantine times, to emphasise that welfare activity, *proneia*, is a central aspect of the Church’s identity (18, m). Likewise, one priest says “not only should, but it must [engage in social work]. The Church can and does help, but it can’t and shouldn’t try to do the state’s job. The church must see the whole person, to work hard, to give, for the person. The church must help in the social offering, to help the state, to walk with the state to help the person” (20, m).

One more interviewee, a monk, picks up the theme that the Church should not act as a substitute state, but should simply offer of itself where it can and where it is needed: “the Church cannot, looking at the pain of the person with needs, just stand there ... But we shouldn’t identify the Church with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of Social Welfare of social services, because the Church is something else.” In general, he is concerned that the Church’s role in welfare provision perpetuates an unhealthy view of the Church as part of the state (17, m). Another priest offers his view of the ideal situation: “There could be a good cooperation between Church and state – that is, local authorities. The Church has volunteer work and love, and the state could offer the institutions” (21, m).

### Church and the public debate

Regarding whether the Church should participate in the public debate on welfare, here too (as in the case of public institution representatives), people express mixed feelings, mainly formulating their responses in terms of “yes, but ...” In what comes across as a criticism of the national Church (and mainly of Archbishop Christodoulos), people in this category say the Church should be discreet and avoid politicisation. Most indicate a preference for activity on the basis of its example (actions) rather than the voicing of its (the Church’s) opinions.

“I believe this very firmly. We do not separate the ecclesiastical problem from the social problem: they are one and the same. But sometimes there is a misunder-

standing. Sometimes we feel that the Archbishop, Christodoulos, speaks for the Church of Greece. This is wrong. He *expresses* the voice of the Church, and this he should do when he is invested the authority by the Holy Synod. The Church should always speak discreetly, so you never feel ‘oh, now the Church people are talking again?’ This ‘oh’ means the person has become tired of us. So we should speak only when it is needed, and where it is needed” (16, m).

Similarly, another priest thinks this is “a double-edged sword. Because yes, the Church should express a public voice, but it is easily misunderstood. And here I am referring to the administration ... it should express a public voice, but *very* carefully, that that voice will not be politicised, that it will always express its opinion when it sees something wrong, regardless of political stances. It happens sometimes, it’s human, it’s wrong, but it’s human for us to have our political and party stances. These we must put aside, and whenever we see something wrong, to say it. Rather than to resist just because it is a party/leader with whom you normally agree. The people need to know that they will hear the truth from the Church, no matter who is leading [politically], and not that they will hear the Church’s complaints only when the Church doesn’t agree with a given party/leader. Wrong, I don’t mean the Church, I mean some individuals in the Church administration” (20, m). This view expresses a clear dismay with the politicisation of the Church (and, based on this interviewee’s other statements, it seems quite clear that these views are directed mostly at the Church at the national level, where the political involvement of the Church is conspicuous).

Perhaps it is such pitfalls which lead others, such as the following commentator, to conclude “I would prefer if it [the Church] would mainly be involved with actions, rather than with words” (17, m).

For another interviewee, whether the Church should express a public voice depends on how it expresses itself. The Church has an opinion on everything. But the Church must go about its work with humility. It should put everything into practice, through its representatives (15, f). Likewise, one more interviewee notes that “Yes, the voice of the Church must be heard, from its representatives, whoever they are. But as long as it’s in a wise and low-key way. Its voice must be heard, and have an effect, as much as possible, on some important social issues. How should it express its voice? In sermons, in important announcements and statements of its representatives. But also by its example, not just words, but also acts, whether that’s on abortion or whatever. Also, through its children, volunteer work, visiting unmarried women, etc.” (18, f).

One priest continues on this theme of issues on which the Church should express its voice: “It’s a difficult question. ‘Social issue’ means abortion, and it means immigration [i.e., the range is big]. We need to narrow the bounds. The relation of the Church and ethnos in Greece is particular. But I think the Church should have a voice only in its domain, its space. In other words, it shouldn’t talk publicly about abortion. It should talk [on this issue] only to its people, within the Church [here he does not mean the Church as a physical space, a building, but as a body/community of believers. Significantly, he is not equating Greek/citizen with ‘the Church’]. Not all of Greece or Greeks are Christian and belong to the Church. I don’t think the Church should have a public voice on every issue ... this is not the nature of the Church. It is not the job of the Church to solve social problems. That’s the job of the

state. The Church can offer a voice, a view, but the Church person expressing a voice should a. be speaking for himself (just like any citizen), but not offer it as *the* Church voice – in other words, representatives of the Church should not speak with disproportionate influence; and b. the Church should speak publicly when it is asked to, by the state” (21, m).

### **The Church in the past ten years**

Interviewees in this category note the following changes that have taken place in the Church in the past ten years: modernisation; increased involvement with youth; more personal communication between the clergy and lay people; adaptation to continually changing social needs; and greater organisation of services (more systematic approaches than in the past).

More specifically, one priest points out that the Church is “heard a bit more” – it has a more noticeable presence in the community. Also, “there’s more personal contact and communication between clerics and the local population. People, youth especially, are seeking our advice. We’ve grown closer to the people”. When asked why this is the case, the priest indicates as one of the reasons that priests and the Church maintain an ability to win people’s trust, as compared to politicians, for instance, and perhaps psychologists (21, m).

Another priest notes that the Church has changed in accordance with changed needs in the town. This is particularly the case in relation to immigration: “the Greek state is not ready at all to absorb these people”, and the Church has developed the capability to help in this domain (20, m; the general view that the Church has adapted in accordance with changing welfare needs is shared amongst most in this category).

A monk comments that “something more systematised has happened, more institutions, and better organised. In older times, there weren’t the funds available either”. He also notes that there has been an adaptation, on the part of the Church, to new situations that have developed: he raises the example of school dormitories built and run by the Church when there were only schools in the cities, and children in rural towns had to travel back and forth. Most dioceses built such dormitories when they were needed, thus helping children to become educated. “Now this need has virtually disappeared. In the meantime, the need for homes for the elderly has increased significantly, and we have focused on this instead” (17, m).

Lay people provide similar responses. For example, “the diocese and parishes are much more involved in different things. The Church has modernised, and has more links with different institutions. For example, some women working on a volunteer basis in the Church’s homes for the elderly are planning to take nursing lessons” (18, f). Another interviewee states that she sees “a gravitation of the young people closer to the Church. Of course, this has to do with the particular representatives of the Church. In some places there are clerics who have the charisma to attract the young, with camps, catechism, trips, etc. and they attract the young to come closer to the Church. But I think in general the spirit of the last few years is an encouragement, and I think it has achieved a return of the young to the Church” (15, f).

Certainly the role of particular clerics is a common theme: “Our bishop is a person, a person first and then a bishop, who can sense the needs of people at different periods. The focus on elderly homes began with the change in the foundation of

Greek families. Before, it was clear that a grandparent would live and die at home. When this changed, with more people [women] working, the need for an elderly home appeared. Now, there is a great need for care for people with mental illnesses. The changing needs of the social whole, whether they are believers or not, are being tended to” (21, m).

### **Wishes for changes in the Church**

In this category as well, most feel that the Church could offer more by way of social services. They identify a need for expansion of services into new domains, and mainly for the strengthening of existing services.

In general, there is a sense that the Church *could* offer more, but responses vary in accordance with whether this capability is a matter of relative economic strength, or spiritual strength (which, again, has to do with its ability to gather volunteers).

One priest comments that “the Church does much, but it can do more. Also, there’s a problem of information and awareness ... It should deepen its involvement” (16, m). Another states that the Church “must continue to expand into different domains. Our indifference [on various welfare needs] is a sin. Christ’s command is to love. To love not only in words but with action, i.e., to sacrifice, to offer, to volunteer, and to carry one another’s burdens” (18, m).

Likewise, a layperson indicates that “As much as the church helps, I would say there is always need for more ... there is need for more care, more love, more giving of soul, and when I say of the Church, I mean of the people of the Church. Either priests, volunteers, people who want to give their time to help people ... We need more people involved so that the work of those already involved is less heavy” (15, f).

One monk notes that “the better is always better than the good”. But I would just want to emphasise that we shouldn’t see the Church as a branch of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. This is not its role, to develop dormitories, homes for the elderly, etc. This is mainly the role of the state.

Only one respondent expresses full satisfaction with the present state of services (21, m).

### **Significance of gender**

Respondents in this category, as in that of public services, take women’s active role in welfare activity for granted. The view that women tend to have “more time” on their hands is a prevalent one (emphasised especially by 17 m, 19 m, and 21 m). One priest believes that “women are more emotional. They feel the pain more. Not that men don’t feel pain, but they have so many things they have to do ... so many things on their minds, it’s difficult for them to get involved ... Maybe they think of it as a waste of their time. Whereas for women, part of their normal jobs and activities is caring. Paternal care [i.e., male bread-winning] always entailed the provision of basic needs so that women would be free to provide caring. There are different ways of providing ... women are acting out care” (21, m).

One woman’s perspective is quite similar, though she goes into greater detail regarding practicalities, as well as theology: “usually women are the ones who help. Men do different things. Someone came to help in the garden. This too is significant work, and also an expression of love. But a man will not come to clean the elderly.

The woman will: she has cleaned her mother, her grandmother, her children. The woman is more familiar with this type of work. And I think this is the diakonia of the woman in the Church. Which is also a liturgy, a divine liturgy [leitourgia – in Greek this term has dual meaning and refers both to a religious service – the Divine Liturgy – and to the word ‘function’]. This is the most important. A woman may not become a priest, but she can spread love through such activities. ‘Make love a divine liturgy’ [Kane theia litourgia tin agapi]. We are 95 percent women [in this particular institution]. In the old homes for the elderly [she works in a newly developed one], there is only one male nurse, and he refuses to clean the elderly. Only the women will. His role is different. And I think the elderly feel differently. Imagine a man going to clean an older woman. It won’t happen. But it’s more natural for them to come and work in the garden, to play backgammon with the elderly. This too is diakonia. To drink his coffee here instead of at a café. This is an expression of love.” (18, f).

## Views held by the population

### Welfare

There is a great deal of variation in response to this question between the three groups<sup>35</sup> interviewed: the male focus group, as well as the ad hoc interview with two members of the local public, reflect a definition of welfare on the basis of their negative perceptions of welfare provision – or the lack thereof – in their municipality. In these groups, welfare is basically defined as ‘non-existent’ and as something only ‘on paper’. When asked to speak more generally about the word welfare, they begin to list such things as care for peoples’ basic needs, including care for the unemployed and the elderly.

The women in the female focus group define welfare as caring for people in need (their definition refers more to the feelings of the caregiver – i.e., an offering of emotion as well as assistance).

### Function of the local welfare system

Overwhelmingly the response is that the system is insufficient. The male focus group describes this fact as a clear factor of the governing party’s (New Democracy’s) poor politics. Their criticism is very harsh, and is directed mainly at national level politics, rather than local level politics.

The two males in the ad hoc interview are less critical of the specific political party, but more so of the Greek political system in general. Being both unemployed, they emphasise the problems of a. little assistance for the unemployed and b. little effort to create new jobs.

The female focus group also has a negative view of the local welfare system, saying that there are too many social problems that are not dealt with at all. But their view is that both the public authorities and the Church do their best; the problem is simply that society has changed too rapidly and, accordingly, social unease has increased too rapidly. In terms of public authorities’ activities, their focus is on

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<sup>35</sup> For simplicity’s sake, I will refer to the ad-hoc interview with two members of the local public as a ‘group’ interview also.

cleanliness of the streets and of the municipality in general (in other words, matters to do with order in the municipality).

### **Role of the church**

All respondents feel that the Church should play a role, and that it should, and can, seek to help in all areas of social need.

They also all agree that the Church can do more to help (i.e., the Church has not reached its utmost potential in this area). The male focus group and the ad hoc interviewees emphasise a financial aspect of this (i.e., that the Church has a great deal of wealth it can apply more usefully in welfare provision), and one respondent emphasises the power aspect (i.e., that the Church has strength both at the local and national level, and can ‘pull strings’ where necessary to achieve the results it would like to achieve).

The female focus group emphasise that the Church is extremely active and good-willed, but simply that it can still do more.

Two of the female respondents, in particular, note specific examples of the local Church helping people in need, both financially and in terms of doing ‘favours’ (e.g., arranging for a ill person’s reception, accommodation, etc., when travelling abroad for an operation). The Church, they indicate, can and will pull such strings; the state will simply not be so interested.

One of the male respondents notes that if the Church does manage to help more than the state, this is because it is free of the many layers of bureaucracy which simply paralyse the state. Two other male respondents indicate awareness of cases in which the Church helped individuals seeking financial aid; they approve of such activity.

### **The Church and social work**

Individuals in this category feel strongly that the Church should be engaged in social work. Theological reasons are not mentioned, but rather that the Church is an institution which can help, and therefore should, and also that it is a social institution (i.e., to do with people mainly, rather than business-orientated, one can assume, as is the municipality’s welfare system).

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

Most of the respondents are reserved on this matter, mainly due to the issue outlined in Section 1 of this report, namely the scandal surrounding the Greek Orthodox Church at the national level. Interviewees speak a great deal about how this situation has coloured their view of the Church at large, but not of individual priests. They also distinguish between their local Church and the national Church.

The female focus group is slightly less reserved, with two women saying clearly yes, the Church should speak out in public debate on welfare issues.

### **The Church in the past ten years**

Most respondents agree that the Church has become involved in a broader range of activities over time, becoming more ‘modern’, in a sense, in keeping up with changes in society and the resulting changes in societal needs.

The female respondents are clearly more informed of details in the Church's welfare-related activities and could, accordingly, be more specific in their responses by indicated new areas of activity within the Church.

### **Wishes for changes in the Church**

All respondents more or less agree that the Church should do more. They do not get more specific on their own without prodding, and when I raise examples (e.g., 'do you feel the Church ought to be more active in the social integration of minorities?'), they respond 'yes'. The general feeling is that the Church ought to help in *any* area of need.

With reference to this particular issue especially (but to others as well), the interviewees often turn to the subject of the recent scandals within the Church. Regarding changes they would like to see in the Church, almost all interviewees make a remark concerning the damage made to the public's opinion of the Church by the corruption which has been uncovered.

### **Significance of gender**

As with other groups included in this study, these members of the local public take for granted women's greater participation in the domain of welfare provision. In this particular group, the women tend to be "less politically correct" than the male respondents in stating that "it's in our nature" and "men can't do this work" (indicating that men resist doing such work).

Most interesting, in terms of the gender dimension, is the quite strong distinction between male and female views of church and state. The women do not mention politics at all, and have relatively positive attitudes towards the church (in general, fairly uncritical); they are also able to raise specific examples of church welfare activity. Meanwhile, the men relate a pessimism towards both church and state, and they reveal a relative ignorance of church-based welfare activity.

## **Views held by representatives of private institutions**

### **Welfare**

In this category there are four completely different responses: Welfare is faith in divine providence; welfare is love, to follow Christ's exhortation that we love one another; welfare means helping one another as much as possible; and welfare brings to mind state failure to provide for its citizens.

Viewing welfare in terms of faith, an interviewee states plainly: "It is faith. There where you have nothing, someone will show up and offer you what you need. We are living a miracle. We are 45 people [people working and living in an orphanage], and there is nothing certain here. And yet, God takes care of everything. The kids eat well, are dressed, go to school, to university, to their private lessons, and yet God covers all the needs" (22, f).

Another interviewee defines welfare with reference to love: "Our religion is love. We must help our fellow human being in whatever way we can. God is love. Love came to us from Him. And we must give it to our fellow human beings. Christ said love others. We are called to extend love to all, both those who have and those who

don't, and people of all nations" (24, m). Similarly, one respondent notes "[welfare] means help, as much as possible ... it would be good if it were more" (25, f).

However, for one respondent the term welfare brings a negative image to mind: "it has a stigma. As do homes for the elderly. In the past, only people who were extremely poor and abandoned were taken to homes for the elderly, at the end of their lives. Now, it's not like that. Rich people come too: their children bring them, so they won't be lonely [because the women are working], and so they can have professional care. So, welfare carries a stigma: traditionally it brings to mind the person who was hungry, poor, etc. For me, it is to approach the person, drawing near to him or her. A young person needs your support, that is welfare. The person in pain needs your comfort. Welfare is helping someone who needs help to do something. Welfare is not something for me to pull out my wallet and give in the form of money. Someone is lonely, sick or needs a visitor. Exactly what the bible says. The word of God. There is nothing better than that: Christ has said it all. We need to follow Christ's example. Of course, what needs to exist is the power of love. If these things happen for love, so much the better. If they happen for some personal interest [gain] or in an offensive way, better that it doesn't happen" (23, f).

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

Only one person in this category expresses a strong opinion about the national welfare system: the state simply tries to mend wounds, and there are even major gaps in that effort. For her, the national welfare system is completely absent in Thiva and Livadia. She argues that the state reacts to situations, offering solutions after they have arisen. [It provides mainly in material terms, and most programmes are of a short term nature. She complains that there is no public programme for children in the town, or for the elderly. She notes that only for drug addiction is there some permanent public programme, but "this is not welfare; it is an issue of health" (23, f).

Two say that they do not know enough to comment on the national welfare system, and two express their sense that the state could offer more – that it should *at least* support (mainly financially) other institutions (both private and church-run), since on its own it cannot provide for peoples' needs. One interviewee states that welfare "exists", but "unfortunately, not to a great extent ... more could be done" (25, f).

### **Role of the Church**

All in this category feel that both the Church and private institutions have something important to offer. First, their services are run on the basis of love. Also, unlike the state, their aim involves also the spiritual wellbeing of the people they serve. One interviewee indicates that the Church's role is "the greatest ... it has the greatest strength. It has the capability to do many things. First, there is the sermon. This is a big element ... this really helps the person. For the Orthodox Church; regarding the other Churches, I don't know how much they can help, because they don't have the truth. The Orthodox Church has the truth. Let me tell you: we Greeks were so many years enslaved. Who led the revolution? By whom was it supported? [Here she is indicating her belief that the Church played a significant role in the Greek revolution, which led to freedom from the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the

modern Greek state. This role is widely disputed by historians. More importantly, her response reveals a linkage between her conception of welfare and, in general, the survival and progress of the Greek nation]" (22, f).

Another interviewee indicates that the role of the Church in welfare provision is different from that of other institutions [it should be noted that she conceives of the institution where she works as part of 'the Church'; she established and helps run a home for the elderly]: "Our aim is different; it is spiritual. In other words, we don't go into the practical matters, giving money, etc. We give people the theoretical and spiritual foundations; we try to lighten the pain of their souls. But I tell you, no state institution will ever run like those of the Church, the philanthropic ones. i.e., those which have the foundations which apply the word of Christ. I've been to a lot of institutions. Those which are state-run are impersonal. There they are institutions [with negative connotations to the word], institutionalisation. Here, it is a different thing. There, people work depending on how much they are paid" (23, f).

In a similar vein, another interviewee states that "wherever welfare is a product of private initiative, it is better. For example, in a [state-run] home for the elderly, the woman who is paid will try to get her wages, look at the clock and leave. The person who *wants* to help, will look neither at the time nor at anything" (24, m).

In general, representatives of these institutions feel that their programmes have great potential, but a. they need to become more organised, and b. a bit of economic assistance would help a great deal.

### **The Church and social work**

As to the question of whether the Church should carry out social work, all respondents in this category feel strongly that this is the case, and that the Church should serve in all domains, depending on the needs in a given context. The reasons cited are "religious" (Christ/Church history led us naturally to social service), but also practical (the Church should become involved, because it can, and because the social needs are many). For example, "a person of the Church who loves God and loves the person, can do many, many things". She admits that this may also be true of the state ["if good leaders get in and love the fatherland and see it as such and don't sell out, the state could also do much"], but in general she has higher hopes in people belonging to the Church (22, f).

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

Regarding whether the Church should have a voice in the public debate on welfare issues, only one interviewee (of all those interviewed) voiced an unreserved 'yes'. She feels that the Church is respected, and so its voice should be heard and can make a positive difference: "all of us need to hear it. We depend on it, all of us" (25, f).

The others in this category express reservations, with reference to the danger of politicisation. Also, two express the importance of actions over words. For example, "the Church should set an example with its actions. Not theory. Many just remain at the level of theory. We need to show it in practice. Our actions are what people judge us by. Yes, I think the Church must have a public voice, but the priests shouldn't talk politics, or criticise their fellow critics. These things are not suitable for public discussion" (24, m).

### **The Church in the past ten years**

On the question of how the Church has changed in the past ten years, one interviewee declares that there has been no change in the Church's role: the Church has always maintained a steady level of commitment to welfare (24, m).

The others indicate a tendency towards modernisation (the Church is "entering the world of today"). But this development depends heavily on individuals in the Church (the bishop and individual priests). For example: "I think the Church is entering the world of today. But this depends on its leaders and their strengths. I see that they try. They do contemporary things – for example an art exhibit, and now they even run a lending library. They also, before the end of the summer, have a big outdoor meal for everyone, with music, dancing, talks ... etc. i.e., they are escaping from the narrow – 'we're only about the word of God, confession, etc.' – perception that people have". (23, f).

One interviewee sees a greater degree of organisation within church welfare activities, which contributes to their effectiveness: "Now, people are more organised. For example, the 'women's circles', the Christian unions, all of these people are Church people, and they are more active. Also, people are more educated now, and more social; they follow courses that the Church offers, and they learn things that they can then use to help others later. So it's a chain, from the metropolitan to the priests to us, etc. ... For instance, last Sunday I heard the archimandrite asking: 'please, if any of you know of someone elderly who cannot come to church for confession, please let me know.' Now, isn't that an example of social work? I don't know if they [the Church] would have done that in the past ... so, I think things are better now" (25, f).

### **Wishes for changes in the Church**

All the interviewees in this category emphasise that the Church should give more, and should play a larger role. One interviewee feels that the Church needs to come closer to its people (she sees a major gap between the clergy and the lay people); only this way can the Church *really* know the problems of its people.

"I insist on more", says one interviewee: "much of what the Church has done here was in order to increase its visibility. I would like the Church to be more involved with the person ... more and more. They don't find the time to communicate with the people. And their problems have become so many, they have so much work and the hours go by so fast, they have no time to approach the person. If the person goes to confession, then good. But if the person doesn't go to confession, then you have to find the person, search to find him. To be there when things are difficult, and also at times of great joy. Here, you invite him [the priest] to bless your house and they don't come. They say they don't have time. I would like the Church to come into the homes, for the small child to see the priest in the house" (23, f).

Another response along the same lines: "The parishes could have a greater range of activities. First, they should know what people need. Of course, you might say we could and should do that too. But then there is 'the problem' of encroaching upon the 'territory' of the parishes. We work well with the priests. But I think it would be better if welfare started in the parishes. The priests should know the people, and their needs" (24, m).

This group also spoke at length about their expectations of the state. They tend to wish for financial support, and two out of four worry about the future of their institution, since during times of economic slump their work suffers.

### Significance of gender

As for their understandings of gendered social work, all respondents note that women are more involved, and they give similar explanations for this as people in the other categories. For example: “Usually men avoid such [emotional] work, they don’t much like it. But you’ll see that when we’re preparing for something, men will come too, and children” [in other words, they will help in certain one-off projects, but not on a day-to-day basis.] (24, m). Another states that “our work moves everyone, both men and women, but always more so the women” (22, f). Finally, one interviewee states, “we don’t need men. Of course yes, sometimes an old man will fall and we need help to pick him up. In cases like this a man is needed, but where would we find him? We can’t pay for more employees” (25, f).

## Sociological analysis

Sociological analysis of the material gathered in Thiva and Livadeia requires paying attention to some further information about the Church and the state in Greece, and the relation of both to the welfare system.

As illustrated in the Greek case study chapter in *Working Paper 1 from the project Welfare and Religion in a European Perspective*,<sup>36</sup> the Orthodox Church of Greece holds a privileged position within the Greek state compared with other national institutions (and certainly more so when compared with other faith groups). As a result, the Church has a relatively visible profile in the country (mandatory religious courses in the schools teach the Orthodox faith; national ceremonies are attended by, and often officiated by, Orthodox Church leaders, etc.). The level of visibility varies in accordance with the leaders of both the Church and the state in power at a given time. The current Archbishop, however, (Archbishop Christodoulos) is one of the most ‘popular’ of religious figures in recent times, and is certainly the most heavily involved in political issues. This fact carries a number of implications for the current study. First, concerning the visibility of the Church’s welfare activities: when compared to the general visibility of the Church, and its activity in the domain of politics, the Church’s role in the domain of welfare seems to pale in comparison. Second, with the strong presence within the Church of the Archbishopric in particular (with the Archbishopric being based in Athens, and the Archbishop acting as bishop of Athens), it is to be expected that individuals interviewed in Thiva and Livadeia (as in other dioceses outside Athens) would compare their diocese with that of Athens. This is more so the case in Thiva and Livadeia because of the fact that, as noted above, the local bishop (Ieronymos) was the primary rival of Christodoulos for the role of Archbishop. Relations between the two have remained some-

<sup>36</sup> Molokotos-Liederman, Lina and Effie Fokas, ‘Welfare, Church and Gender in Greece’, in Ninna Edgardh Beckman, ed.: *Welfare, Church and Gender in Eight European Countries. Working Paper 1 from the project Welfare and Religion in a European Perspective*. 2004.

what tense, and this division comes across clearly in people's perceptions of their local Church in relation to the national Church. And both of these above points significantly affect people's perceptions of whether the Church should have a public voice in matters of welfare: the Church is seen, by many, to have had too public a voice on too many issues and, accordingly, they are quite reserved on this matter. Finally, as noted in Molokotos-Liederman and Fokas,<sup>37</sup> the Church welfare system is not centralised: rather, local welfare programmes are developed individually in each diocese. This fact also facilitates people's tendency to draw a distinction between the local and national Church.

Also, a sociological analysis requires awareness of the fact that the welfare system in Greece is, in general, very underdeveloped. It is fairly standardised throughout Greece: the centralised system is basically replicated in all prefectures. Thus, the welfare system in Thiva and Livadeia may be considered to be 'as poor as' in most Greek towns, evidence of which is the fact that there are no state-run homes for the elderly, nor public psychology or psychiatry wards, in the entire prefecture of Viotia: at the same time, the Church and private-run homes for the elderly in Thiva and Livadeia have waiting lists. Thus, it would be difficult for the local population *not* to appreciate the activities of the Church in the domain of welfare, in the face of such dire need. Likewise, it is not too difficult for the local Church to shine in this context. However, when one considers the relative wealth of at least the national Church – as many interviewees do – it is then difficult *not* to criticise the Church, for its welfare activities, in relation to its financial capabilities, are assumed to be quite limited.<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, *because* of this close relationship between church and state, and of the tendency to see the Church's role as one of 'filling (some of the many) gaps' left by the state, it is to be expected that in people's assessments of the welfare system and of the role of the Church in welfare provision, they would tend to compare the state's role with that of the Church. The result is an interesting 'debate', as explained above, over whether the Church, or the state, is 'better' at welfare provision.

One of the significant elements of the WREP projects is an effort to understand differences and similarities in different majority churches' welfare patterns, and the extent to which these differences and similarities can be explained in sociological and/or theological terms. In the cases of Greece and Italy, there are certainly many similarities that can be explained primarily in sociological terms. First, in the Italian case of Vicenza, the research has revealed that "there is no area where the Catholic world is not present": as noted above, this is similar to the Greece case, as a result of religious education, as well as recreational and cultural activities. Also, in the Italian case, the Church's relation with politics has been significant. As has already been pointed out, this is clearly the case at the national level in Greece, but it is also the case in Thiva and Livadeia: the Church at all levels (most conspicuously through the bishop, but also through individual clergy members and even members of the laity)

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<sup>37</sup> Molokotos-Liederman, Lina and Effie Fokas, 'Welfare, Church and Gender in Greece', in Ninna Edgardh Beckman, ed.: *Welfare, Church and Gender in Eight European Countries. Working Paper 1 from the project Welfare and Religion in a European Perspective*. 2004.

<sup>38</sup> For more on this subject, see Anastasios Anastassiadis, 'Religion and Politics in Greece: the Greek Church's "Conservative Modernisation" in the 1990's', in *Questions de research*, no.11, January 2004. Available at <http://www.ceri-sciences-po.org/publica/qdr/htm>.

interacts closely with local politicians and civil servants, both in the execution of its welfare activities but also more generally. Key to this interaction is *personal initiative*: a great deal of the Church's welfare activity (and that of the private, Church-related institutions) is based on individual initiative, and on links formed between individuals (be they clergy-members, volunteers, politicians or civil servants). This has also been the case in Vicenza. In both cases in general, a great deal of the background work for welfare activity occurs "behind the scenes", and through informal, inter-personal means, rather than through rigid and formal lines of communication. Furthermore, it has been noted above that the public welfare system in Thiva and Livadeia is particularly weak in the face of mass immigration to the region, and that the Church has acted relatively well in this domain (in offering financial aid and employment, and an escape from the many and difficult layers of bureaucracy in the state institutions) as compared with the public authorities. This, too, has been observed to be the case in Vicenza.

Also, in the cases of both Greece and Italy, church attendance (in the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, respectively) remains relatively low, but the Church's activities, and visibility, in the domain of welfare has been increasing in the past 10 years. Meanwhile, the national welfare systems have been declining in their effectiveness. It seems to be the case that, in both Churches, the welfare domain is proving to be an important means for the Churches to maintain a presence and a relevance in contemporary society.<sup>39</sup>

Beyond these general points, some more specific points arise from the perspective of the researcher:

First, I expected to find a more stark division between perspectives of the 'secular' and the 'religious', and of those representing the Church or the state. I was surprised by the great degree of overlap in their responses: I sometimes heard nearly identical responses from, e.g., a priest and a very secular person (for example, the shared view that the opportunity provided to worship in a monastery ought also to be considered a welfare service). This suggests either a high level of 'indoctrination' of the local population in general (religious and non-religious, probably mainly through the education system, which still entails compulsory instruction in the Orthodox faith); and/or a fairly conservative perspective as might prevail in a medium-sized European town; and/or, finally, a respect for the role of the Church in welfare provision which has developed in that particular locality over the years.

Second, there are *major* discrepancies in views of the Church as either wealthy or poor, as deserving of help from the state, or as responsible for helping the state itself. This is especially important given that, in general and at the national level, the Church is indeed a very wealthy institution and, accordingly, peoples' expectations of its role in welfare provision are quite high (and, by the same token, their disappointment over how little the Church does, relative to its economic strength, is also quite strong).

Third, many stress the significant role of individuals, over that of institutions. Several interviewees clearly had negative thoughts about the Church that they were suppressing, saying they did not want to be negative or critical. They tended to be more open with their views of the Church after I had turned off the recording device.

<sup>39</sup> Although, as noted above, at the national level the Orthodox Church continues to be more visible through its politicisation, rather than through its welfare activities.

## Theological analysis

One of the most interesting results of the research, from a theological perspective, is the repetition of the same biblical verses by many interviewees, *and* the fact that this was not limited to people represented the Church (but also applies to people working in the public sector and in private institutions). As noted above, this fact could simply be a reflection of a high level of indoctrination of the local population, most likely through the public education system. In general, the references to the bible, to Christ and Christ's example, and to God's love, were surprisingly many – particularly when these were made independently of any questions I asked related to theological underpinnings of their activities. Also, there were many references made to Byzantine *history*, and to the *traditions* of the Orthodox Church, in terms of welfare provision; by comparison, there was very little reference made to Orthodox theology, as such (only one priest mentioned the work, example and writings of St. John Chrysostom).

The general picture that one receives, in the case of those who *do* make such reference, is one of people who are indeed religiously motivated in their welfare activities. However, there is little to suggest that they are motivated by Orthodox theology in particular. Rather, it is expected that the picture of religiously-motivated welfare activity in Greece, in terms of people's reflection on their own work, would resemble that in other case studies, and that a generally Christian sub-text will emerge, rather than a strongly denominational one.

The exception in this case is the extensive references to Byzantine history and tradition. This tendency may be explained also with reference to the Church's more general role in Greek society as a repository of Greek historical consciousness and

Greek national identity; it is not surprising to the researcher that history is frequently evoked, and in particular a pride in Church history.

Furthermore, in Orthodoxy there are two very important, but significantly different, concepts relevant to welfare provision: *philanthropos* and *philoftoxos* ('friend' of the person, and of the poor, respectively).

The distinction between these two terms is quite critical. The first suggests a constant, undefined state of giving which could correspond to any type of need or want, and which stems from nothing more and nothing less than love of one's fellow human being. The second term refers more specifically to *help* for the *needy*, and particularly for the *poor*; it suggests a state of giving which arises after a need has become known. In the Greek case study, I have sought to understand whether Orthodox Church welfare activity (as perceivable in the case studies of Thiva and Livadeia) consists more of *philoftoxos* activity or of *philanthropia*; I have also sought to understand the related implications from a theological perspective.

The findings in terms of theological underpinnings of the welfare activity carried out by the Church, and of the theological motivation of those who carry out the work, are – to a certain extent – contingent upon the type of welfare activity carried out by the Church which is, in turn, largely determined by the gaps in welfare provision left by the Greek state.

A long historical survey would be required for an understanding of how the Orthodox Church moved from being *the* leading institution in welfare provision, during Byzantine times, to a current role (in the Greek national context) of filling in gaps

left by the state. For our purposes, it should suffice for us to understand the role of the Church in its modern-day manifestation in the welfare domain. This manifestation is, indeed, largely determined by the weaknesses of the state welfare system, simply because these are so acute. The fact that the Church in Thiva and Livadeia is deemed (by the local population) to be a *relatively significant actor* in the domain of welfare means that the local Church meets (or, seeks to meet) the actual needs of the people (it should be noted that this is not the case for the Church at the national level: the Archbishopric's management of welfare issues is generally considered to be shaped in accordance with public relations interests, rather than the day-to-day needs which the state is expected, and fails, to meet).

Accordingly, given the fact that faith-based welfare activity in Thiva and Livadeia is mainly geared to meet major needs left unattended by the state, it is natural that peoples' explanations of their religion-based welfare activity will correspond to that activity. As a result, we do indeed find in Thiva and Livadeia a welfare culture of *philofloxos* rather than *philanthropos* – of helping the poor, tending to wounds, rather than a broader, more general giving towards one's fellow human being. This is in line with the fact that, though many interviewees defined 'welfare' with reference to the word's etymology in Greek – *proneia*, or forethought, providence and, for many, divine providence, none of the interviewees indicated that the Church (or Church-related institutions) was actually practicing *proneia* (forethought, providence). *Proneia*, in this literal sense, is considered the ideal. For most interviewees, it seems, the best one can hope of the Church in contemporary Greece is that it manages to fill some of the gaps left by the state. The only question involved is whether the Church could manage the state's 'responsibility' for welfare provision better than the state and (related to this) whether it *should* undertake this responsibility.

At the same time, most interviewees seem acutely aware of these differences between the 'ideal', and current trends in welfare provision: many give detailed descriptions of what welfare *ought* to be (providence; tending to the needs of the person, as a whole, before problematic situations develop, causing them to seek out 'aid' from either state or other welfare services; an expression of love for the fellow human being, etc.). Accordingly, perhaps a distinction ought to be made between theological underpinnings of people's *conceptions* of welfare, on the one hand, and the theological underpinnings of the work that they do, on the other, since in practice, this work is to a large extent determined by a situation of increasing welfare needs during a time of decreasing state welfare provisions.

One issue which can be considered in both sociological and theological terms is the existence of 'Church-related' private institutions, the representatives of which strictly claim their independence from the Church (Church as institution) and yet proclaim "we are the Church" (as the body/community of believers). The former is perhaps more of a sociological phenomenon – these individuals wish to distinguish themselves from the Church as an institution and they choose administrative freedom. In theological terms, though, they have a clear sense of belonging, of being on equal footing with the Church as an institution when it comes to membership of the body/community of Orthodox Christian believers.

In practical terms, these institutions tend to have good relations with the Church as an institution – involving clergy in their activities, making their activities known

through the clergy in the various parishes, etc. However, in general, representatives of these institutions also express some degree of disappointment with the Church as an institution, whether because of the latter's poor/insufficient utilisation of its substantial wealth for welfare purposes, or its failure to offer help to these private institutions, or the motivations behind the Church's welfare activities. Two of four representatives of these private institutions express some level of scepticism as to the Church's motivation (suggesting the motives of publicity, power, financial gain, acceptance in the community, support for the bishop, etc.; several other interviewees from within the public sector express such scepticism, though usually when off the record).

## Gender analysis

One of the most interesting elements of the Greek case study, when examined from a gender perspective, is that changes to the family structure – a fundamental change being women's entry into the workforce – are linked to many of the social problems in Thiva and Livadeia, and yet the people who play the largest role serving in welfare programmes are women. In the Greek case it seems clear that women's role of caring in the home is now being continued, but through various institutions (with either younger, employed women working as social workers or as volunteers, or older women who were never employed or who are retired).

One further interesting dimension, not captured through the interview research but perceivable through the researcher's observation in Thiva and Livadeia, is the fact that the gap left in care for the young and the elderly in homes is, in many cases, being filled by immigrant women. In many cases, these women, in turn, are creating gaps in welfare provision in their own homes; but the wages they earn working in Greece seems to make this practical and worthwhile for them. The same tendency can be observed in Italy as, perhaps, in other parts of Europe. It would be interesting to learn more about how these new gaps, in the immigrant women's households, are being filled, and the extent to which this is simply a problem moving eastwards and southwards.

Also especially interesting in the Greek case is the lack of hesitation with which interviewees tend to make generalised statements about "women's nature" as caring beings who are "better suited" to welfare activity and, by the same token, generalisations about men as "ill-suited" to welfare activity and simply less capable of handling such work. In people's descriptions of the roles men play when they *do* engage in the work of various institutions, there is a clear gender bias: men are useful for outdoor activities, heavy-duty and/or "messy" work (e.g., gardening), activities requiring strength, and typically (Greek) male social activities (such as playing backgammon and sharing an afternoon coffee with company at a café.)

Similar to stereotypes about Greek/Mediterranean households, it is also the case in welfare programmes too that women tend to be in leadership positions, but often informally rather than formally (implicitly rather than explicitly). I did not detect any tension within the various institutions over this fact and, in general, women and men (where the latter are present) seem to work well together. In many cases women are in paid positions within Church-run welfare services (and, of course, this is the

norm in public institutions): their sex doesn't necessarily preclude them from getting into positions of power. Nor do women seem to seek this out. However, it seems safe to say that they do seek out welfare activities with which to involve themselves in order to fill their time doing something they consider to be valuable. Female interviewees tend to express a sense of pride in their work, and I could detect no difference in this according to whether they work as volunteers or in paid positions: welfare activity is considered important, and their service to people in need is, for many working in the Church, an important role that they can play within the Church. In this sense, women working within Church welfare services may be considered to be functioning as if they were deaconesses (see above for information about the order of deaconesses), without any resentment that they are not official, ordained deaconesses (in other words, no one expressed any doubt as to the equal value of their work as compared with that of men in the Church, including that of priests; the roles are simply viewed as different, and complementary).

## Main findings and concluding reflections

Considering the interview research in retrospect, it seems that much hinges on interviewees' response to the first interview question: what is welfare? For some interviewees, the state immediately comes to mind: welfare is what the state provides, or ought to provide, for the well-being of its citizens. More than half of the interviewees refer specifically to the etymology of the Greek word for welfare – *proneia* – translated as forethought, or providence. And most interviewees note that the Greek welfare system is not characterised by such forethought; rather, through its emphasis on benefits, the system focuses on retroactive healing, instead of on prevention. Three respondents say quite simply that welfare “doesn't exist”, i.e., there is no state provision of welfare here. For them, ‘welfare’ as a term is stigmatised, because of how poorly the state system works.

Others who define welfare as caring (*frontida*) for people in need (in other words, for many, a more sociological rather than theological conception of welfare), feel everyone has an important role to play – church, state, philanthropic organisations, etc.

In light of the fact that most interviewees have generally critical views of state welfare provision in the local context, most welcome the role of the Church in the domain of welfare provision. One social worker describes the Church's role as an “unfortunate necessity”, since the state has left such gaps in social care. One parish priest echoes the same expression. The reasons why this is seen as unfortunate, of course, vary from interviewee to interviewee: for the priest, the church's filling the state's void makes many view the Church as a branch of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and, in other words, as part of the state. This worry – echoed by other clerics as well – suggests a healthy, critical evaluation of church-state relations and a desire to break away from prevalent conceptions of the two institutions as intertwined (conceptions which, again, are fed by developments within the Church at the national level, due to its considerable involvement in political issues). For the social worker, the Church's presence is better than nothing, but it *cannot* be sufficient: **professional** help is required, and we need to eradicate the mentality which, until

recently, has prevailed in Greece – that care for our physically and mentally ill requires only love, and can be given at home, or by the Church.

Clearly, though, the view that the Church's role is an unfortunate necessity reveals first an expectation that the state plays the primary role in welfare provision, and second a negative assessment of the state in terms of its performance in this regard, leaving a gap in welfare provision which must be filled somehow. For many, the Church is simply the institution which, to some extent, fills this gap: any other institution(s) could, theoretically, play the same role (e.g., national and international NGOs).

This leads us to another interesting question which arises in the research: **is the Church, or the state, better at welfare provision?** This question is important for our purposes inasmuch as 'better' is conceived in terms of the factors motivating those who serve: for many, those serving through the Church are motivated primarily by love for their fellow human beings, which they have through Christ's example. Hence, these people are more likely to offer 'better' services, rather than people who are hired by the impersonal state and who can expect to be paid for their services.<sup>40</sup>

Along these lines, many note that the Church does more with less money (a priest argues that, unlike the state, the Church doesn't distribute funds left and right in order to win votes). Furthermore, many interviewees state that the Church acts "from the soul", and that "the Church is love".

As an extension of this argument, some interviewees argue that EU funds may run out and state-run programmes may stop, but the love through which the Christian gives of his heart, time, and money will never run out. In other words, donations to Church institutions will not stop, nor the will of the people to volunteer their time and effort. *Admittedly*, I heard this perspective more at Church institutions, than from representatives of independent institutions, which tend to struggle more to make ends meet.

From both groups, though, there is a general sense that people who work in church or independent organisations (in these cases, either volunteers or people paid lower wages), care more about the people they serve. Furthermore, as several interviewees note (even from state institutions), people will tend to tell a priest their problems first, and are often reluctant to go see a psychologist, or a social worker, for example. In comparison with the Church, some say, the state is faceless, cold, and remote. Finally, one further argument made is that the Church can act more directly; someone does not need to go through 10 committees and levels of bureaucracy in order to be helped by the Church.

However, the opposite view is also well represented amongst interviewees. It consists of the following arguments:

- a) the state can/will offer services in an organised way and without expecting something in return; when the Church offers something, it "*wants you on its side*", trying to win over your soul. i.e., state institutions are philosophically neutral spaces.

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<sup>40</sup> Here it is important to emphasise that the majority of the social work within Church institutions takes place on a volunteer basis.

- b) volunteer work is not stable enough; we cannot rely on volunteers for matters of such importance as social care; payment (as is the norm in public institutions) is a source of greater reliability.
- c) furthermore, the aforementioned ‘facelessness’ is necessary: proper therapy requires a professional patient-client relationship; and in small communities, people may be ashamed to take their problems to church or church-related institutions, because it might become known.

However, several working in Church or in private institutions make the same argument in reverse, describing their work as discreet and emphasising that this is of utmost importance (the person receiving help *must be able to keep his dignity*). Or, as one representative of a private institution states, *material welfare requires subtlety, and emotional welfare requires confidentiality*.

A couple of respondents refer to the biblical verse stating that “the left hand should not know what the right hand is doing” ... i.e., they should be quiet about their work not only at the individual level, but in general: the social service becomes less trustworthy when it is advertised and, furthermore, advertisement is unnecessary (*whoever wants to know what the Church does will find out*). One priest says there is a fine line between publicity and awareness, and that the Church needs to be wary of this.

One of the perennial questions to which interviewees return is why does the Church not do more, since it has such wealth? Indeed, no one fails to praise those efforts already made by the Church in Thiva and Livadia, but there are few who do not also complain that much more could be done.

One other recurring theme in the interviews is the major **role played by the individual**, whether as individuals who establish programmes, individuals who volunteer, or individuals like the local bishop, for his specific way of running the church, and his exceptionally good relationship with the specific local authorities.

On the question of *why* the Church carries out welfare activity, we definitely see a discrepancy in the perspectives of people working in Church or church-related institutions, on the one hand, and those working in state institutions on the other: the former overwhelmingly referred to **love**, and to **Christ’s example**. Some note particular parables, or verses of the Bible. (the commandment “love your neighbour as yourself”, and “when I was sick, you visited me, when I was naked clothed me ...”), and many claim that ‘church’ and ‘social service’ are one and the same.

*Very reluctantly* (and sometimes off the record), approximately 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of interviewees expressed doubts as to the Church’s altruism, referring rather to what it has to gain in terms of money, publicity, and/or power. Here we begin to see quite clearly a distinction these people draw between their local Church and the Church at the national level.<sup>41</sup> We see even more clearly this distinction in relation to the question of whether the Church should have a public voice: only one person utters an unqualified yes. By far the most common response was some form of “yes, but ...”.

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<sup>41</sup> This has to do with the quite public tension between the local bishop and the Archbishop of the Orthodox Church of Greece: the two competed for the role of Archbishop in 1998 and, for many (not only those living in the diocese), the bishop of Thiva and Livadeia was much more qualified for the position. To date, the two hierarchs have very different ways of leading their flock, and the people of Thiva and Livadeia are acutely aware of these differences, and draw my attention to them in the interviews.

I have provided above a schematic representation of the views of religion and welfare which I gleaned through the interviews I conducted in Thiva and Livadeia. Based on the research as a whole, I close by noting that the question of whether the Church or the state is ‘better’ at welfare provision is, in my view, one of the most interesting questions arising today in Europe, as European welfare states continue to shrink and other institutions (including churches) increasingly fill gaps left by the state. In this context, it would also be interesting to compare the results of the comparative WREP project (including all eight country studies) with developments in the United States, where there has not been a concept of the ‘welfare state’ comparable to that which prevailed in Europe, but where faith-based networks continue to strengthen their roles in welfare provision, and increasingly with governmental support.

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