



Ladies and Gentlemen,

today I am bringing you the greetings of Rev. Sandy Boyce, Australia, President of DIAKONIA World Federation as well as of Rev. Marianne Uri Øverland, Norway President of the DIAKONIA region Africa-Europe. May the rich blessing of our Lord be with you and the 42th Kaiserswerther General Conference!

As you may know, the DIAKONIA World Federation connects diaconal communities and associations in over 40 countries across the globe. Within our association, the communities based on the Kaiserswerther tradition are the biggest sub group. Besides that we have orders, associations of deacons, communities of diaconal social workers, and diaconal ministers. The DIAKONIA World Federation is comprised of three regions, Asia-Pacific, Americas and the Caribbean and – the biggest region – Africa-Europe. On a regular basis, DIAKONIA sponsors worldwide or regional assemblies. For example, two years ago, around 500 people from all over the world gathered in Berlin.

Only a few weeks ago, 140 brothers and sisters from our community gathered for the regional conference of DIAKONIA Region Africa-Europe. We dealt with the question how to preserve valuable tradition but face the challenges of our present days at the same time. Much as you will do over the next several days. One of the key note speakers was Prof. Kjell Nordstokke, who named strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats diaconal institutions are facing today.

According to Nordstokke, strengths and weaknesses relate to each other like two sides of the same coin. Professional competence, extremely motivated personnel, and many already existing buildings are a curse and a blessing at the same time. Trust in the work of the institution has grown over the years as well as networks with other diaconal institutions or even into church, society and politics. This can give impulses, but can also hinder progress. It is always necessary to question your own identity and transport the values you want to keep into today's reality. Over time, diaconal institutions have shifted from a personal to an institutional approach. And it has become more and more difficult to show the connection between what this institution is, does and says, according to Nordstokke.

Along with the change of motherhouses into diaconal institutions a shift of emphasis happened with regard to the diaconal communities. In former times, deaconesses were the owners and motor of the motherhouses. Today their value for the diaconal institutions of Kaiserswerther tradition has declined, even to the point where they are recognized only as a cost center.

But the communities could help to identify the distinctiveness of a professional diaconal practice. I want to quote Kjell Nordstokke again, who names four important elements for diaconal identity:

1. Diaconal values, like compassion, justice, peace, and care



2. Diaconal narratives: the history of motherhouses with Kaiserswerther tradition are full of stories worth telling
3. Diaconal rites and symbols: even more than practical and intellectual work they offer structure and guidance
4. Prophetic diakonia: it has always been a basic task of diaconal ministry to be the voice of those who do not have their own for whatever reason.

The brother- and sisterhoods of your institutions have worked with these four elements intensely. They had to do it, because the communities – as members of the motherhouse – lost their original practical identity during the structural change from motherhouse to diaconal institution, as I mentioned before. So, if the question is to fill your own diaconal identity with life or to emphasize the core values, as stated in the theme of this general conference, the brother- and sisterhoods of your institutions have a lot to contribute. I want to invite you, to take advantage of these resources!

Because it is the relationship between values and commerce that will determine whether diakonia will be, become or remain a strong brand.

Thank you.

Deaconess Ulrike Kellner  
DIAKONIA World Executive Committee