

# Diaconia Barometer 2018

## The many faces of loneliness

*Findings in brief by  
Päivi Isomäki, Johanna Lehmusmies,  
Päivi Salojärvi & Veera Wallenius*



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# PREFACE

## **Diaconal workers doing research on diaconal workers**

The 10th Diaconia Barometer differs from its predecessors in that the research was done by diaconal workers themselves. This was enabled by a collaboration agreement made by the Finnish Association for Research on Diaconia (Diakonian tutkimuksen seura, DTS), the Diaconal Workers' Association (Diakoniatyöntekijöiden Liitto, DTL) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland's Church Council (Kirkkohallitus) with the Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (Diak).

In August 2017, a total of 23 students with a bachelor's degree at a Finnish university of applied sciences (AMK) and at least three years of relevant work experience started in a Master's Degree Programme in Value and Community Based Development of Work. The focus of this Master's Degree Programme is on values, religions and the Church. The duration of the Master's Degree Programme is three semesters, and students start working on their thesis as soon as they begin their studies.

Four experienced diaconal workers chose the Diaconia Barometer 2018 as the topic of their Master's Thesis (YAMK). These included deaconess Päivi Isomäki, the head of diaconal work in the parish of Sääksmäki, deacon Johanna Lehmusmies from the parish of Tikkurila, deacon Päivi Salojärvi from the parish of Asikkala, and deaconess Veera Wallenius from the Finnish parish of Porvoo. Their theses were included in the thesis seminar led by Mikko Malkavaara, principal lecturer, and Jouko Porkka, senior lecturer, and titled "Changes in the organisational culture and improving the work culture".

The researchers did not work in isolation, but were supported by a specifically appointed steering group chaired by principal lecturer, Docent Mikko Malkavaara, DTh, and including the following members: Titi Gävert, ThM, deacon and senior specialist at the Church Council; Marko Pasma, deacon and ombudsman at the Diaconal Workers' Association; Jouko Porkka, DTh, senior lecturer at Diak; Docent Esko Ryökäs, DTh and senior lecturer at the Finnish Association for Research on Diaconia; and Veli-Matti Salminen, researcher at the Church Research Institute.

The main task of the steering group was to decide on the lines of study to be pursued. Diaconia barometers are published every two to three years, and in addition to questions repeated in each survey there are also questions that are only included in every two or three barometers, and questions on current issues. The combined skills and experience of the steering group were needed to assess the overall relevance of different topics, although the themes were selected based on the researchers' personal interests. Completely new themes included Veera Wallenius' research on diaconal work and communication, and - somewhat

surprisingly - diaconal work and spirituality which was one of the two themes researched by Johanna Lehmusmies.

In addition to selecting themes and focal points, the steering group also systematically developed and analysed the sets of questions compiled by the researchers. Most importantly, the steering group limited the number of questions to be included in the survey, so that the final version included less than half of the questions originally suggested by the active and enthusiastic researchers.

Researchers could discuss even preliminary results with the steering group, and everyone had the opportunity to comment on all of the work. We soon discovered that our highly skilled researchers had high work ethics and the ability to produce results despite the tight schedule for the Diaconia Barometer. Most importantly, the steering group came to understand what an asset these researchers possessed in being able to interpret their results through the lenses of practical experience in diaconal work.

In this Diaconia Barometer, the selection of focus areas and interpretation of results were based on everyday diaconal work. Some of the selected themes penetrate several chapters, including the main theme of this publication, namely, loneliness. In diaconal work, loneliness is present on many levels. On one level, diaconal outreach work is targeted at the underprivileged facing their troubles alone. On another, many diaconal workers find themselves very alone when meeting their clients on site. And thirdly, loneliness is also experienced in the work community by diaconal workers who attempt to target their own and their parish's efforts to those most in need. The 10th Diaconia Barometer is exceptional in that its foundations are buried deep in the everyday routines of diaconal work – the first-hand knowledge and understanding of the distress, anxiety and insecurity faced by the clients of diaconal work, and a genuine empathy towards them.

The ten successive Diaconia Barometers cover an impressive time interval enabling comparative studies and providing a reliable overview of changes both in diaconal work and in the thoughts, opinions and attitudes of diaconal workers over the years. This is a valuable tradition, and we most fervently encourage researchers to continue with this type of research.

For the researchers doing their Master's Thesis, this barometer provides an excellent opportunity to have their results published in a publication that will most certainly be read and whose value and importance are not questioned. We are extremely grateful to the Church Research Institute for agreeing to include the Diaconia Barometer in its publication series long before any of the results were available. We would also like to thank our partners in the steering group, and most importantly we wish to extend our heartfelt thanks to Päivi, Johanna, Päivi and Veera - the true authors of this Diaconia Barometer 2018.

In Helsinki on June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018

*Mikko Malkavaara and Esko Ryökäs*

# 1 BACKGROUND AND METHODS

*Päivi Isomäki*

## 1.1 Background

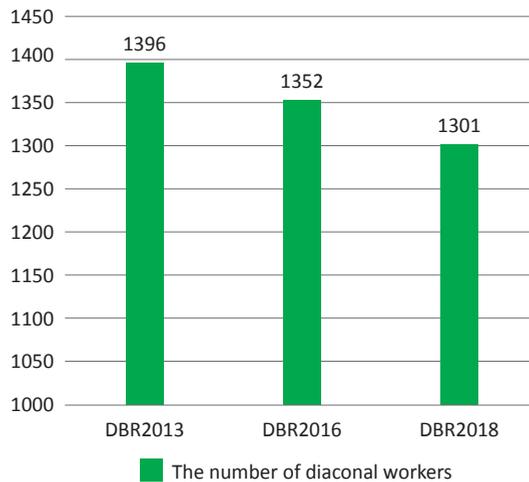
The Diaconia Barometer maps the experiences, views and opinions of the diaconal workers of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF). This report in English is a summary of the key findings of the tenth survey published in full in the “Diakoniabarometri 2018” (in Finnish only). The Diaconia Barometer complements the general picture of diaconal work carried out in the parishes of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland that is presented by the annual statistics published by the Church Council and the four-year report published by the Church Research Institute.

The Diaconia Barometer focuses on the views, opinions and experiences of diaconal workers and others who participate in the diaconal ministry of the Church. Thus, it allows the voice of the workers to be heard. In the Diaconia Barometer 2018, the survey results were grouped under five themes including diaconal work in the changing society, communications, digitalisation and making a difference, Christian faith and diaconal work, everyday diaconal work, and the structures supporting diaconal work.

## 1.2 The online survey

Data were collected in February 2018 using the Webropol online survey tool. Email addresses were retrieved from the Church Council’s diaconal workers mailing list. The survey questionnaire was accessible for four weeks, and two reminders were sent to the diaconal workers during the period of availability. A link to the questionnaire was posted on the organisers’ social media platforms.

**Figure 1.1.** The number of diaconal workers employed by the ELCF as shown in Diaconia Barometers 2013, 2016 and 2018.<sup>1</sup>



By the end date, 392 respondents had completed the online questionnaire, 38 in Swedish. The respondents comprised 377 diaconal workers, 6 theologians, and 6 respondents without appropriate formal education. According to the Commission for Church Employers, the ELCF employed a total of 1,301 diaconal workers in 2017. Thus, the response rate was approximately 30%. Since 2012, the number of diaconal workers has decreased by 95.

### 1.3 Demographic data

The respondents' age distribution corresponded to that of the diaconal workers employed by the ELCF. Like diaconal workers in general, respondents of the online survey also belong to the older age groups: over half of the respondents were over 50, and merely 3% were under 30. All of the respondents were experienced professionals. Nearly 40% of the respondents had over 20 years and 70% over 10 years of experience in diaconal work.

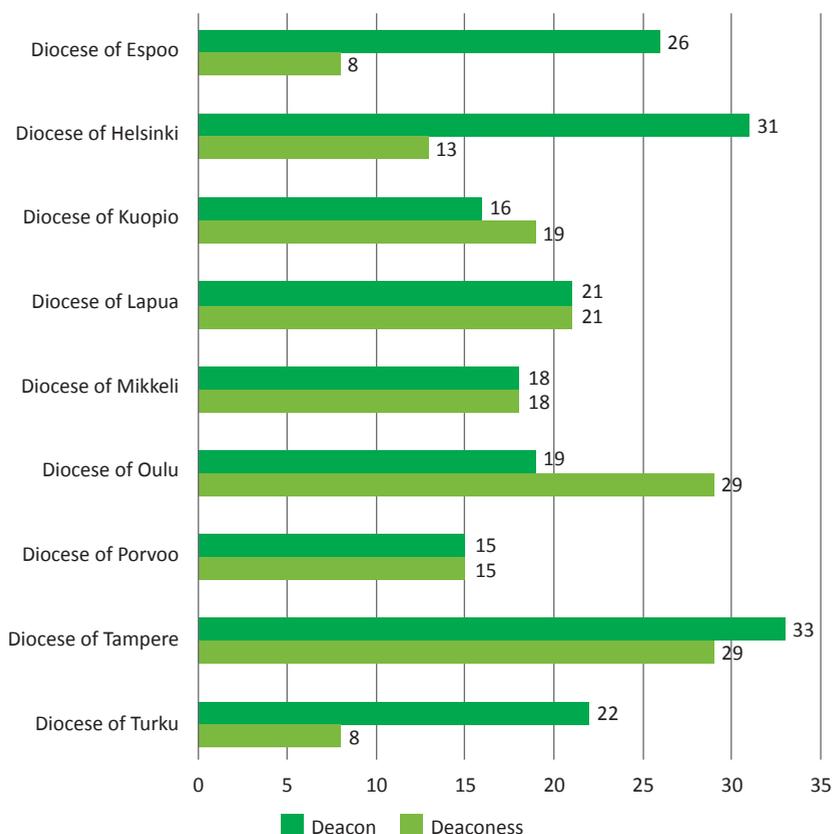
The largest groups of respondents were from the dioceses of Tampere and Helsinki, 68 and 51 respondents, respectively. Proportionally, the largest response rates - over one third of the total number of diaconal workers employed in the diocese - were from the dioceses of Porvoo and Helsinki. In most dioceses, approximately one in three diaconal workers completed the questionnaire. The exceptions to this rule were the Diocese of Kuopio and the Archdiocese of Turku

<sup>1</sup> Kiiski 2013, 14; Gävert 2016a, 14; Commission for Church Employers 2018, 16.

where the response rate was lower, approximately one fourth in Kuopio and less than 20% in Turku.

Of the respondents, 14% worked in small parishes which employ only one diaconal worker. Nearly 50% worked in teams of 2 to 5 people, and 38% in teams of over 5 diaconal workers.

**Figure 1.2.** The professional training of diaconal workers in the Finnish dioceses (numerical data based on the Diaconia Barometer). N=361.



The diaconal workers employed by the ELCF have received their training in either social sciences (deacon) or healthcare (deaconess). A total of 202 of the respondents (52%) were deacons, while 160 (42%) had been trained as deaconesses. Six of the respondents were theologians, and 15 were trained social workers of the Church. Six of the respondents were without appropriate formal education. The educational background of the respondents differed from previous Diaconia Barometers: in 2013, the majority of the respondents were deaconesses, and in

2016, there was nearly an equal number of deacons and deaconesses.<sup>2</sup> This change is most likely explained by an increasing number of deaconesses, who are also qualified as registered nurses, applying for work in the health care sector instead of looking for employment in the Church. This deduction is further supported by the fact that the respondents with training in social services (deacons) are equally distributed among different age groups whereas respondents with training in health care (deaconess) mostly belong to the older age groups. Among the youngest respondents (<35 years old), 35 were deacons and only six were deaconesses. Differences were also observed when comparing the proportion of deacons and deaconesses in the different dioceses. Deacons outnumber deaconesses in the southern dioceses of Espoo, Helsinki and Turku. In the dioceses of Lapua, Mikkeli, Tampere and Porvoo, the distribution is nearly 50/50. However, in the northern and eastern dioceses of Oulu and Kuopio, the majority of respondents were deaconesses. Furthermore, it appears that the proportion of deacons is greater in the urban parishes while the diaconal workers in sparsely populated areas are typically deaconesses.

The data collected is representative of the diaconal workers employed by the ELCF and the results can, therefore, be generalised to the whole population. Furthermore, the data correspond to the material collected for previous Diaconia Barometers and are, thus, comparable. In this Diaconia Barometer, the following abbreviations are used to refer to the three latest barometers: DBR2013, DBR2016 and DBR2018.<sup>3</sup>

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2 Kiiski 2013, 16; Gävert 2016a, 18.

3 Kiiski 2013; Kiiski 2014; Gävert 2016a; Gävert 2016b.

## 2 CHALLENGES POSED BY THE CHANGING SOCIETY

*Johanna Lehmusmies*

### 2.1 Inadequate social security puts a strain on the Church's diaconal resources

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) executes its diaconal ministry in ever-changing and deteriorating conditions, under the terms of the society and the everyday lives of its parishioners. Over the past few years, the immigration wave, the recession, and the policies of the current government affecting the income of those with low income, in particular, have burdened the ELCF's diaconal resources. In some cases, adapting to the new situation occurs immediately, while in others, finding the appropriate response requires a longer time span.

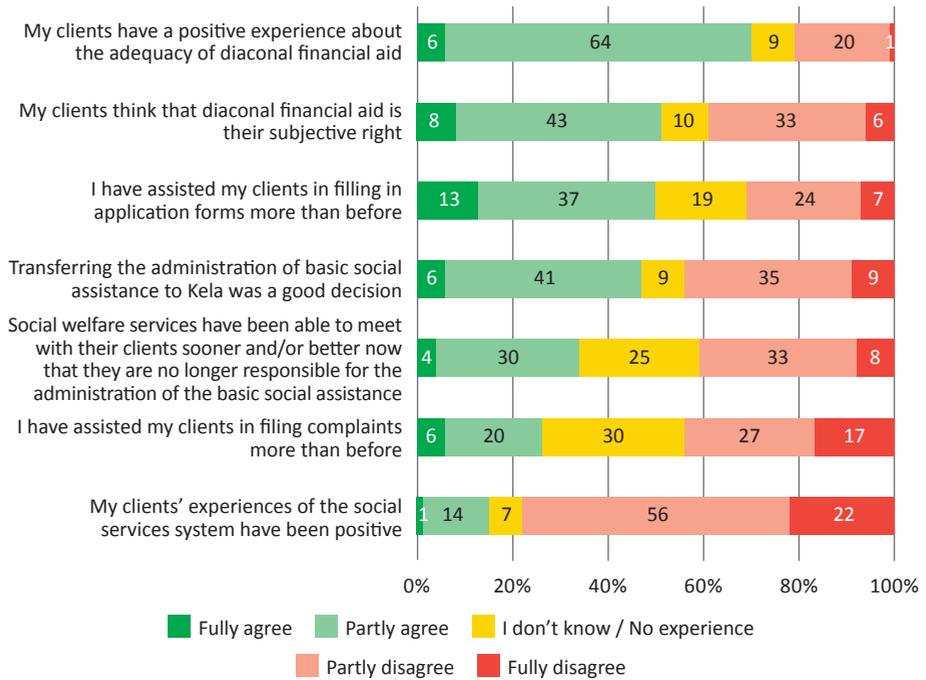
One of the most recent changes burdening diaconal workers in Finland is the transfer of the administration of the basic social assistance from municipal social work to the Finnish Social Insurance Institution, Kela, in the beginning of 2017, or "Kela transfer". Once the transfer had become effective, the offices of diaconal work were crowded with people waiting for their benefits, and in some localities, this continued for several months.

According to Kela's own estimates, the launch of the basic social assistance reform failed, eroding the clients' trust in Kela. According to an external assessment, the legal reform on basic social assistance was not yet completed, when Kela took over its administration. Furthermore, in addition to faults in the information system, Kela was understaffed by 300 employees when the transfer became effective. Kela will know the exact number of employees required to ensure the fluent administration of applications for basic social assistance sometime during 2018.<sup>1</sup> For the clients of the ELCF's diaconal ministry, Kela's inadequate resourcing resulted in the accumulation of applications pending decision and, in some cases, erroneous decisions.

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<sup>1</sup> Basic Social Assistance 2017, 27–28; Itkonen & Väisälmi 2017, 14.

**Figure 2.1.** The diaconal workers' experiences of the Kela transfer, social security, and material assistance provided by the ELCF's diaconal work. N=381–384.



Less than half of the respondents were of the opinion that the transfer of the administration of basic social assistance from the municipal social welfare administration to Kela was an ill-conceived solution. The Kela transfer has burdened the diaconal workers in various ways. Half of the respondents had more often than usual helped their clients in filling in application forms, and one in four had helped in filing complaints. Two in five noted that the municipal social welfare offices have not been able to provide assistance to their clients any better nor any faster than before the Kela transfer.

According to the diaconal workers, approximately 75% of their clients were not satisfied with the current social services system. However, assistance provided by the diaconal workers was appreciated and considered adequate.

For diaconal workers, financial aid was a part of comprehensive support, but not without reservations. In most cases, dissatisfaction stemmed from the imbalance between available resources and the people's actual needs. For many clients, their annual income has been insufficient for years, and the modest financial aid granted by diaconal workers did nothing to change their situation. Diaconal work is no longer merely assistance in life's crisis situations.

*The purpose of financial aid granted by the Church is to help people in life's crisis situations. But this is seldom the case. The same clients visit you year after year, and their situation doesn't change or get better no matter what you do.*

Deaconess, Diocese of Kuopio

According to Juntunen and Rättyä, diaconal workers view financial aid positively when it has an impact on the society and helps to find people who have fallen through the gaps in the Finnish social security system. Financial aid is regarded negatively when it is needed to complement inadequate social security.<sup>2</sup>

More than half of the diaconal workers said that their clients seemed to think that receiving diaconal financial aid was their subjective right. Compared to the situation in 2013, the increase is staggering. In the Diaconia Barometer 2013, merely 16% of the respondents felt that their clients considered themselves entitled to receiving diaconal financial aid.<sup>3</sup>

## **2.2 Diaconal workers emphasise the importance of hope and personal contact**

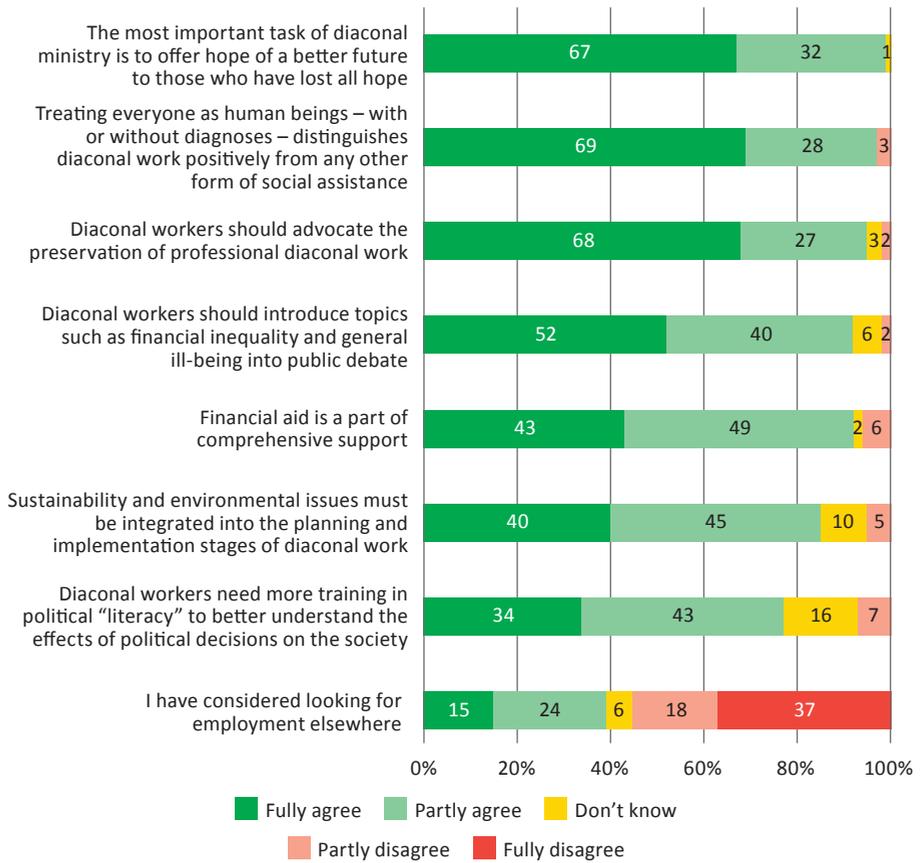
It is obvious that there is demand for diaconal work in the Finnish society. Diaconal ministry reaches the perimeters of the society unseen by the eyes of the government and municipality which focus on efficiency and productivity. In the marginals, there is also room for hope, love and good deeds - not merely material deprivation. On this, the diaconal workers who completed the online survey were in agreement.

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2 Juntunen 2011, 88; Rättyä 2009, 56.

3 Malkavaara & Ryökäs 2015, 118.

**Figure 2.2.** Changes in the society and within the Church from the diaconal workers’ perspective. N=381–384.



Amidst a crumbling society, diaconal workers considered spreading hope as their most important task. Personal encounters are at the heart of diaconal ministry and, according to nearly all of the respondents, is what distinguishes diaconal work positively from any other form of social service. This might explain why 95% of the respondents found it necessary to advocate professional diaconal work.

Many considered having an influence on the society and the public opinion an important aspect of diaconal work. Nine in ten were of the opinion that diaconal workers should introduce topics such as financial inequality and general ill-being into public debate. The integration of sustainability and environmental issues into the planning and implementation stages of diaconal work was important to 85% of the respondents.

Approximately eight in ten felt that they would need additional training in political literacy to be able to better understand the changes in the society. A better understanding of the dynamics and consequences of political decisions would enable diaconal workers to anticipate their effects on income and living conditions providing an opportunity to better allocate the resources of diaconal work.

Two in five had considered changing careers. According to some, the Church with its diaconal ministry was like a sinking ship, and you should abandon it while you can. Thus, many had prepared for this by doing further education by actively looking for employment elsewhere. However, the majority of respondents were happy with their job and felt supported by their calling.

### **2.3 Diaconal workers are concerned about the accumulated disadvantage and supported by their faith**

Diaconal workers have exceptional insight into the Finnish society. They work in the lower strata of the society where disadvantage accumulates.

When asked which aspects of the well-being of the inhabitants in their respective areas worry them the most, the responses were similar across the country. Poverty, unemployment, substance abuse, and loneliness were a concern everywhere irrespective of the population size.

In addition to the above, the diminished availability of social welfare and health care services was a concern in areas with a population below 30,000. Services have moved to larger centres, distances are great, there is no public transportation, and the quality of the remaining services has decreased in several ways.

In addition to the above, social and financial inequality was a concern in areas with a population of over 30,000. Furthermore, high rents were an additional concern in cities with a population of over 100,000. There is not enough reasonably priced accommodation, and when calculating basic social assistance Kela does not use the actual rental costs. Social workers share this concern with diaconal workers. Approximately half of the social workers are of the opinion that the norms used to calculate the costs of accommodation for basic social assistance are inadequate, and more than half criticise the insufficient number of reasonably priced flats for rent.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to their concerns, diaconal workers were also asked how they maintain hope. In all age groups, Christian faith and putting their trust in the Lord, close personal relationships, and prayer comprised the key to maintaining hope.

*My faith in Christ gives me hope and direction. And that it is meant to be shared with others whether they be colleagues or parishioners. Hope is built on the certainty based on faith that evil did not have the first word on Earth, and it will also not have the last word. There is no reason to give up and be discouraged.*

Deacon, Diocese of Oulu

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<sup>4</sup> Näätänen & Londén & Peltosalmi 2017, 41–46.

In addition to the above, taking care of one's own well-being was among the five most common responses among the over 36-year-olds. An active spiritual life was among the top five responses only in the age group of over 55-year-olds. Collegial support was among the top five responses in the under 36-year-olds group and in the over 55-year-olds group. The under 45-year-old respondents, in particular, maintained hope by reading the Bible.

Hopelessness had been experienced by respondents in all age groups. Diaconal workers who had experienced hopelessness mentioned also depression, bullying at work, extreme work loads, fear of climate change, and frustration with the government decisions.

### 3 COMMUNICATIONS, INFLUENCE, AND DIGITALISATION IN DIACONAL WORK

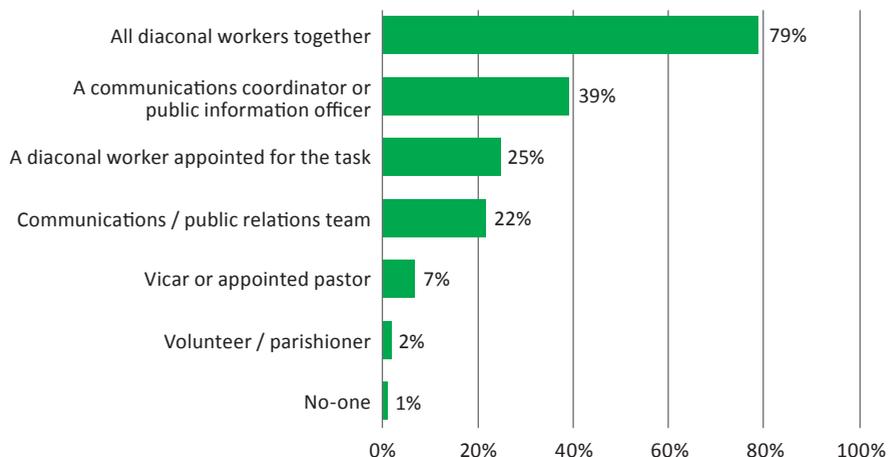
*Veera Wallenius*

#### 3.1 Diaconal workers are responsible for communicating about diaconal work in their local parishes

In this section, we provide an overview of the status of communication in diaconal work and the digitalisation of services in the ELCF's diaconal ministry. This is a new research topic, and much effort was put in formulating the survey questions.

Fundamentally, the task of the church is to deliver a message. How this is done in practice varies depending on the size of the parish. In many congregations, however, specific employees have been appointed to communication and public relations positions. To map how information about diaconal activities is communicated, the respondents were asked to define the person(s) responsible for communication regarding diaconal work in their respective parishes. According to the vast majority of the respondents (79%), communication and public relations is typically the shared responsibility of all of the diaconal workers. Additionally, 39% replied that the parish communications coordinator or public information officer was responsible for communications either alone, or together with the team of diaconal workers. Approximately one in four replied that a diaconal worker or a communications team had been appointed for the task.

**Figure 3.1.** Persons responsible for communication and public relations in diaconal ministry. Respondents could select more than one option. N=386–391.



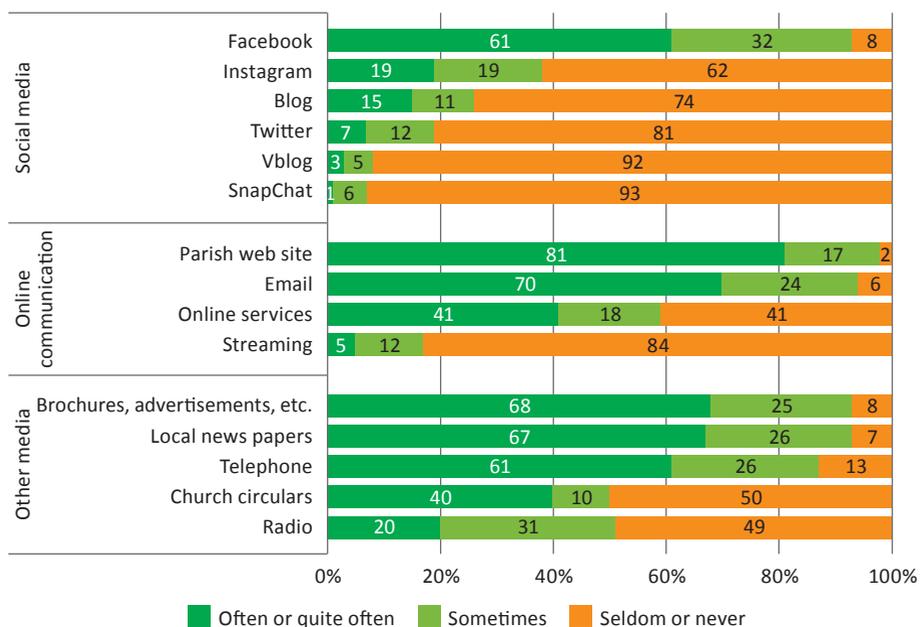
Three in four parishes had prepared a crisis communications plan. Slightly more than half (54%) had prepared a general communications plan. The larger the population size, the more likely the existence of both a communications plan and a crisis communications plan.

With the increased popularity of social media, the need to prepare a communications plan specific for diaconal work has become relevant. Based on the replies, approximately one in ten parishes (12%) had prepared a communications plan for diaconal ministry. However, as of yet there is no systematic communications strategy for diaconal ministry, and furthermore, the statistical data available on diaconal work have not been used when communicating about diaconal work, although this could improve the current position of diaconal work and impact decision-making in both local parishes and the larger context of the ELCF.

### 3.2 Multiple communication channels are used in diaconal work

The Web site of the local parish, email and traditional media including brochures and advertisements were typically used in communicating about diaconal work. Facebook was used by nearly all of the respondents (93%), but using other social media platforms was significantly less common. By age group, Facebook was most commonly used by those under the age of 45. The larger the city, the more active the respondents were in social media in terms of frequency of posts and the number of platforms.

**Figure 3.2.** Communication channels used in diaconal ministry. N=83–323.

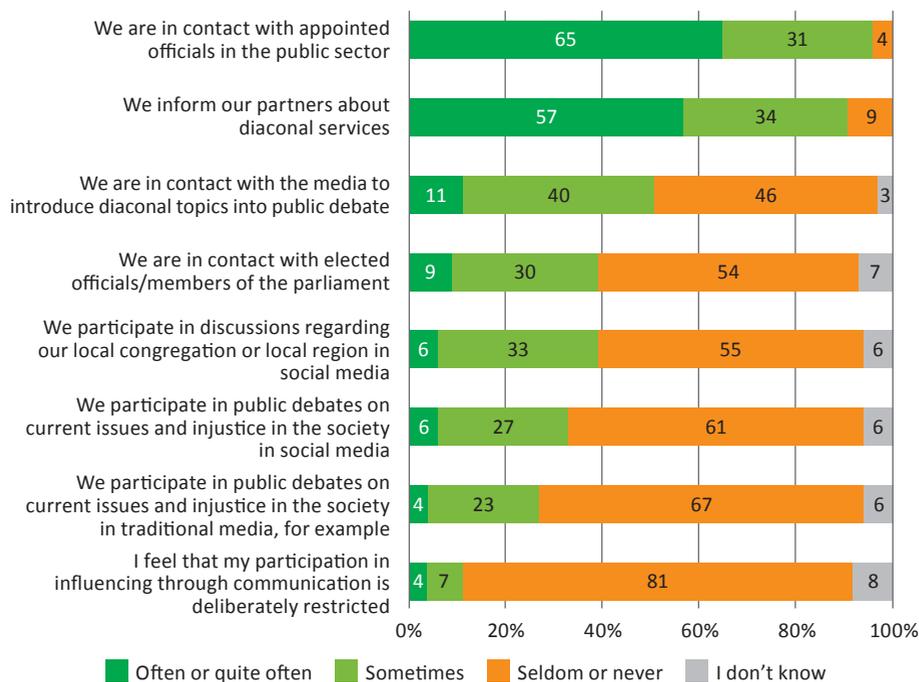


The questionnaire included an open-ended question to elaborate on the use of other media. The most often reported alternative media was the “jungle/bush telegraph”, i.e. communication via word of mouth. Personal contact was considered by many an effective means of communication as was having diaconal workers participate in events other than those organised by the Church. Digital screens such as the ones seen in shopping centres, for example, were one example of the new media channels in use.

### 3.3 Communication to advocate human dignity and to reach out to those in need

Diaconal workers actively keep in touch with partners and multiprofessional networks. Nine in ten respondents had contacts in the public sector and informed their partners about diaconal services. More than half (59%) of the respondents replied that discussions on local online forums were actively monitored, although somewhat fewer (39%) took actively part in those discussions.

Figure 3.3. Influencing through communications. N=386–391.



All of the respondents seemed to agree on the most important goals of using communications to make a difference. The top three goals included advocating human dignity (very important to 81%), reaching those in need (72%), and cultivating a diaconal attitude, i.e. inspiring people to do good (64%).

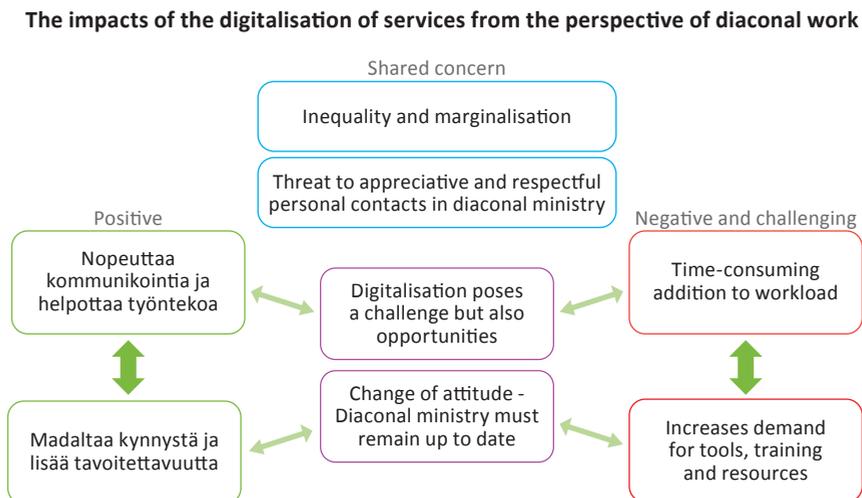
Actively influencing decision-making is one aspect of the current vision of diaconal ministry. The Bishops' Conference has suggested that the section on diaconal work in the Church Rules of Procedure (KJ 4, 3§) should be altered to better reflect the current situation. Such a change would very likely elevate influential communications among the key areas of diaconal ministry.<sup>1</sup>

According to half of the respondents, communicating about diaconal activities was considered important in their parishes. Despite this, 11% felt that their participation in influencing through communication was deliberately restricted. This should be analysed in more detail in future studies.

### 3.4 The impact of digitalisation on diaconal work

The respondents had approached the question of digitalisation from various aspects. Some had focused on the tools available to modern day diaconal workers, while others had contemplated the challenges posed by digitalisation to their clients. Using the ATLAS.fi software, the replies were grouped according to eight main themes: inequality and marginalisation, threat to appreciative and respectful personal contact, time-consuming addition to workload, eases communication and workload, lower threshold and easier access, a challenge and an opportunity, increases demand for tools and resources, and a change of attitude - diaconal ministry must keep up to date.

**Figure 3.4.** The impacts of the digitalisation of services on diaconal work. Themes observed in replies to open-ended questions.



<sup>1</sup> Missiology 2018, 28.

The impact of digitalisation was assessed differently when approached from different perspectives. Inequality and marginalisation were the greatest concerns diaconal workers had regarding the digitalisation of services. According to the respondents, many of their clients did not possess the skills nor the necessary equipment to use digital services. Many emphasised the importance of not allowing online tools to replace personal contact feeling that personal encounters are the very essence of diaconal ministry.

In everyday diaconal work, digitalisation is present in the tools that ease the workload of diaconal workers and facilitate communication and administration. The tool most commonly used by the respondents was the client information register, which is in use in most of the parishes. Online counselling, giving advice on available services online, and pastoral care via instant messaging was rare. Only 7% of the respondents offered advice on the available services regularly online, and as few as 4% regularly used instant messaging to provide pastoral care.

In terms of improving the Church's diaconal ministry, digitalisation offers promising opportunities. Many of the respondents emphasised that diaconal ministry should keep up to date - as digitalisation sweeps over the society, diaconal ministry can not afford to be left behind.

Digitalisation facilitates both internal and external communication including contact with partners and clients. The digitalisation of diaconal services, including booking appointments online and presence in the social media, has lowered the threshold to contact diaconal services and improved the accessibility of diaconal workers. However, some found that this was time-consuming and increased their workload. Social media and contacts via social media have further obscured fine line between working hours and free time for diaconal workers who do not have fixed working hours.

Diaconal workers implore their employers to discharge their duty to provide adequate tools and sufficient training. According to the respondents, having to use faulty, outdated or inadequate electronic devices was an unnecessary and time-consuming addition to their workload.

Currently, being active online is often not recognised or acknowledged as proper diaconal work. Are the communication needs of diaconal ministry understood by the superiors? Is the diaconal workers' experience acknowledged and used to advance communication and the development of online counselling? Do diaconal workers have enough motivation to engage in more communications when already their job description is fragmented, and meeting 'face-to-face' is considered the essence of diaconal ministry?

The advances in digitalisation and the subsequent rapid changes challenge the professional competence of employees. Digital technologies will continue to have an increasing effect on the Church and its activities. Diaconal workers are experts in their field with an up-to-date understanding of the current social situation and the skills required to correctly interpret their working environment. However, in

addition to their professional skills, diaconal workers will in the future be needing a new set of skills to master communication and interaction. Digitalisation provides ordinary people with opportunities to influence their communities. This results in a lowered threshold to communicate and publish content in the social media. For decades, the diaconal ministry of the Church has been able to respond to the phenomena and injustice present in our society. Are we prepared to rise to the challenge of digitalisation?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> A Differentiating Church 2016, 40; ELCF Committee for the Future Report 2016, 33.

## 4 CHRISTIAN FAITH, DIACONAL WORKERS, AND THE WORK COMMUNITY

*Johanna Lehmusmies*

### 4.1 The strong presence of spirituality in the personal and working lives of diaconal workers

Spirituality was strongly present in the personal and working lives of diaconal workers who participated in the survey. The most effective spiritual tools used in diaconal ministry included trusting the Lord and prayer. To enhance their spiritual life, diaconal workers asked for the Lord to bless their working day, for example. Reading the Bible was more common than receiving the Holy Communion or attending services.

In diaconal ministry, deeds - not words - are used to spread the Gospel. Nearly all of the respondents felt that they practiced their Christian faith through their work, even if they did not mention the word "Jesus". Spirituality was seen as a core competence evident in the diaconal worker's attitude and the way in which they approach their clients. Christ was seen in every client, and His love belongs to all.

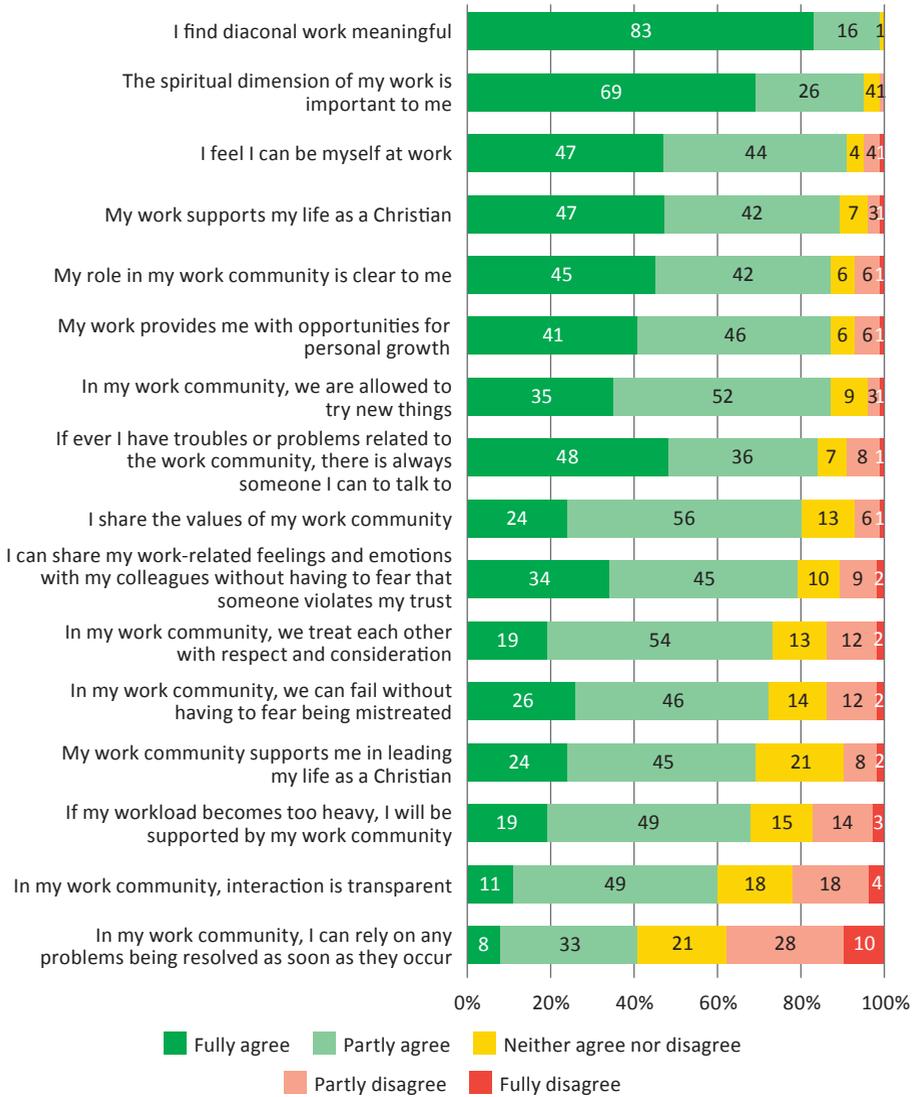
One in three initiated discussions about spiritual topics with their clients. Praying for one's clients was more common in the absence of the client than in their presence. The most active were found in the over 55-year-olds group - nearly seven in ten prayed for their clients almost always or often. One in three sang when meeting with clients. Using singing as a tool was preferred by diaconal workers in smaller towns with a population size of under 10,000. Of them, more than half sang when meeting with a client almost always or often. The Bible was seldom used as a tool when meeting with clients.

Christianity, or spirituality, in the workplace is visible in the way the community operates in relation to its own values, in the mutual support, trust, kindness and reciprocity between employees, and, on a personal level, in experiencing that one's work is meaningful, that it provides opportunities for personal growth, and offers a sense of connection with others or a higher power.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Marques & Dhiman & King 2007, 11–12; Gothoni & Juntunen 2016, 53–56.

**Figure 4.1.** How diaconal workers experienced Christianity at the workplace. N=383–385.



Diaconal ministry was considered meaningful and its inherent spiritual dimension was considered important. In general, connecting with God and colleagues was regarded positively, and diaconal workers typically shared the values of their workplace.

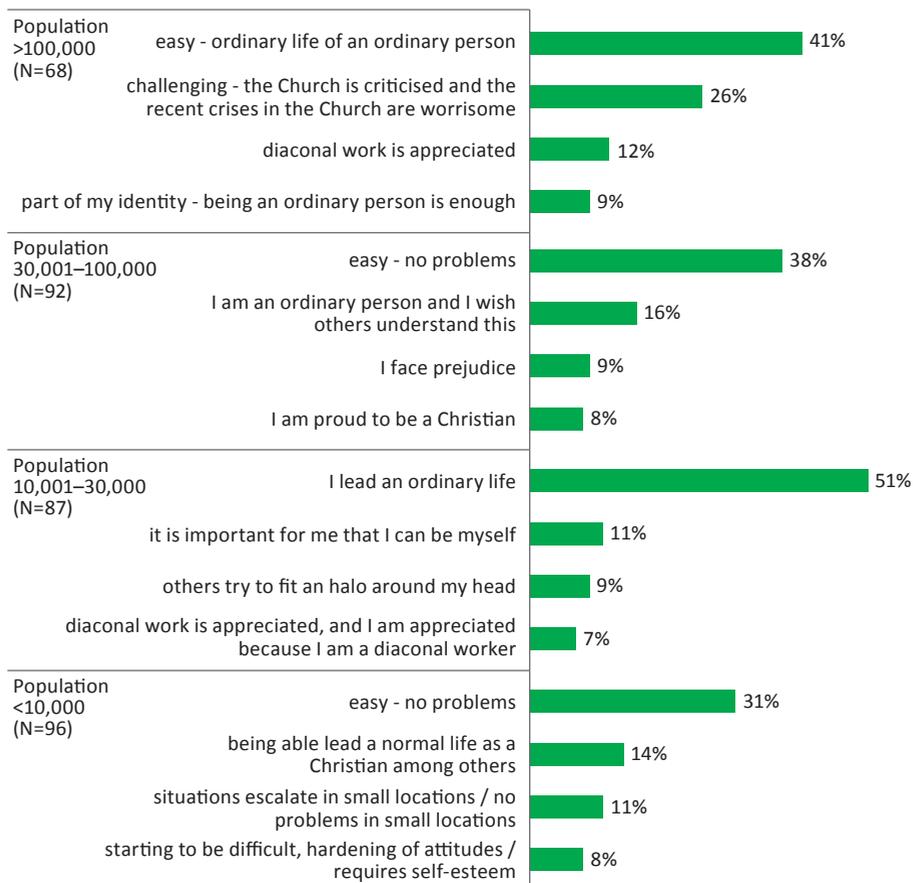
Many a workplace would benefit from addressing problems more efficiently. According to the respondents, unsuccessful interaction, uncertainty about whose responsibility it is to intervene, and even bullying, eroded trust between diaconal workers.

The deaconesses viewed their work communities more positively than deacons. This is more likely explained by the deaconesses' longer careers and higher age resulting in more experience, than by educational background. Differences were observed in understanding one's role at work, in identifying opportunities for personal growth, and treating others and being treated with respect and consideration.

## 4.2 Leading a publicly Christian life

People employed by the parishes of the ELCF are publicly Christian in that their employer is a publicly religious organisation and others expect them to share the same faith as their employer. Leading a publicly Christian life affects one's work, leisure time, family life, and attitude towards the Church. This was examined by comparing the respondents' replies with the population size of the location where they work. The majority of the respondents in all groups shared the opinion that leading a publicly Christian life was an ordinary, uncomplicated, unproblematic way of life.

**Figure 4.2.** Diaconal workers' experiences in leading a publicly Christian life. N=343.



Positive aspects of leading a publicly Christian life included having the experience that the diaconal ministry of the Church was appreciated and diaconal workers well respected, taking pride in Christian faith, feeling that Christian faith is part of one's identity, and being able to lead a normal life as a Christian among other people.

Prejudice, criticism against the Church, and the recent crises in the Church presented a challenge, while negative aspects of leading a publicly Christian life included being "stigmatised" by others as a better person, and the hardening of attitudes.

In small locations with populations under 10,000, leading a publicly Christian life had its upsides and downsides. Some felt under constant scrutiny by others, even when shopping for groceries. For others, living and working in a small town where everyone knew their beliefs, was a relief. On the upside, being publicly Christian provided opportunities for spontaneous spiritual discussions. On the downside, people would sometimes start talking about their problems at very inconvenient moments.

For some of the respondents, it was important to keep discussions about leading a publicly Christian faith going, and to express how faith is visible in their everyday life. Because diaconal workers are publicly Christian, they have an impact on how the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland is perceived by others.

## 5 EVERYDAY DIACONAL WORK

*Päivi Salojärvi*

### 5.1 Loneliness underlies disadvantage

The survey questionnaire listed 19 areas of disadvantage and deprivation. The respondents were asked to indicate how often they came into contact with people falling into the listed categories.

In 2017, the diaconal ministry of ELCF had a total of over 400,000 client contacts.<sup>1</sup> Typically, the clients whom diaconal workers meet are lonely and struggling with financial hardship. Nearly 70% met lonely elderly people every week. The number of these encounters has increased significantly in comparison to the results of the previous DBR2016,<sup>2</sup> and are typical in smaller locations, where the older population groups tend to be larger than other age groups.

Loneliness affects people of every age. Nearly half of the diaconal workers met lonely working age adults and close to 40% lonely young adults every week. In larger cities, one in two diaconal workers met lonely working age adults every week. In smaller cities, the corresponding number was one in four.

Loneliness is a subjective experience. It prevents a person from having a meaningful life and achieving one's life goals. It has a more powerful negative effect on well-being and health than any other single factor. Thus, loneliness is regarded as the root cause of deprivation. Urbanisation and the changed family structure may explain the increase in loneliness. Currently, one in five people live alone in Finland. The number of men living alone has doubled over the past 20 years. Working age adults experience loneliness when a personal or employment relationship ends, their spouse passes away, when on parental leave, and when moving to a different location.<sup>3</sup>

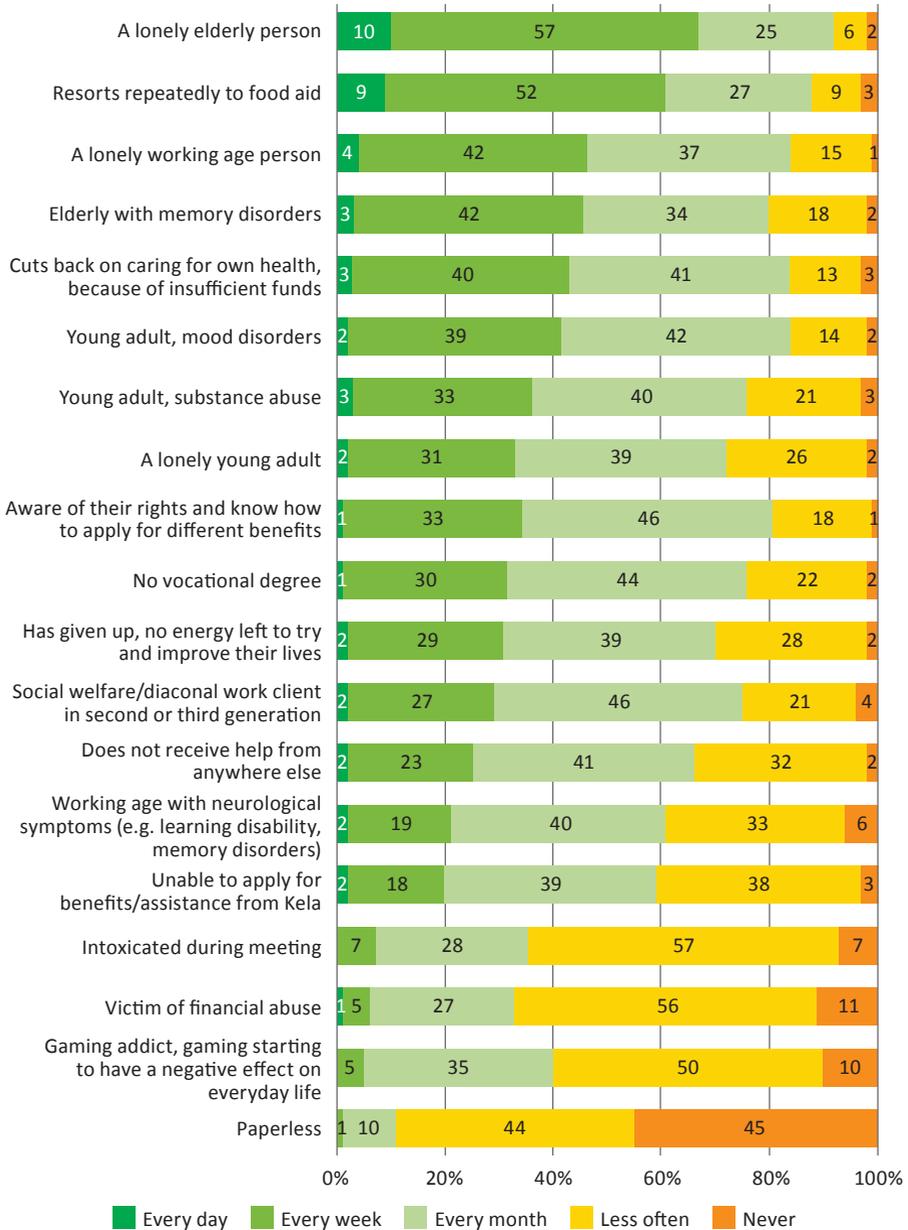
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1 Statistics on Congregational Activities 2017.

2 Gävert 2016a, 25–36; Gävert 2016b, 10–14.

3 Junntila 2018, 16; Saari 2016, 5–13, 131; Official Statistics of Finland: Accommodations and living conditions in 2016.

**Figure 5.1.** Diaconal workers' assessment of how often they met underprivileged clients (% of respondents). N=386–390.



According to DBR2018, diaconal workers were routinely faced with loneliness. People of every age need someone to talk to and someone who genuinely cares about them. However, diaconal work reaches only a fraction of the people suffering from loneliness. According to Saari, there is a direct link between feeling lonely and the amount of social relationships. Weekly meetings prevent loneliness whereas

meetings monthly or less often might, in fact, trigger loneliness.<sup>4</sup> Diaconal workers may criticise traditional group activities, because those in attendance tend to be financially privileged while the purpose of diaconal ministry is to reach out to the underprivileged. However, for many parishioners, attending these groups is the most effective means of preventing loneliness and marginalisation. Perhaps much of the responsibilities in organising group activities for the elderly could be transferred to volunteers?

Prisoners, and the elderly and seriously ill who cannot leave the confines of their homes experience loneliness most intensively. Outreach work to locate them could be the solution, but this would require additional workforce and resources. For its part, diaconal workers can contribute to communal activities, resident collaboration, and neighbourhood assistance.

Everyday diaconal work includes providing assistance and listening to people who are struggling to cope financially. Nearly one in two appointments were scheduled because of financial hardship. Diaconal workers met many of those who regularly need food aid, although the number of these meetings has declined by nearly two thirds since DBR2016.<sup>5</sup> This development might be explained by the altered attitudes regarding the expiration dates on food. Many stores sell food at a reduced price when their expiration date is drawing near. Thus, there is more food available at a reduced price. Additionally, many organisations distribute surplus food free of charge or at a very low price.

Food aid has been a part of diaconal work since early Christianity. Distributing bread to the poor is an age-old tradition even in Finland. The recession in the 1990s brought breadlines and EU food aid to Finland. However, what was intended as a temporary relief, has become a permanent feature that continues to grow due to the increasing inequality. Charity and humanitarian aid should be critically evaluated. Diaconal ministry can not be content with merely helping the less fortunate to cope, but must speak up for the underprivileged and influence decision-making. Diaconal ministry needs to create opportunities for its clients to be active and to enhance their self-confidence and self-esteem by improving their sense of belonging and providing peer support for people in different stages of life.

Nearly one in two diaconal workers came every week into contact with people who had been forced to cut back on caring for their health because of insufficient funds. Compared to DBR2016, the number has doubled.<sup>6</sup> This is an alarming development. Kela grants basic social assistance to cover the costs of necessary health care. In 2017, the administration of basic social assistance was transferred from municipal social services to Kela. Thus, cutting back on caring for one's health for financial reasons could, in part, be explained by limited knowledge of

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4 Saari 2009, 127.

5 Gävert 2016a, 25–36; Gävert 2016b, 10–14.

6 Gävert 2016a, 25–36; Gävert 2016b, 10–14.

the benefits granted by Kela, and partly by issues connected to the Kela transfer.<sup>7</sup> However, compared to DBR2016 there was no discernible changes in the replies to the question on inability to apply for benefits/assistance from Kela.

Being socially deprived for a prolonged time sometimes manifests in inappropriate behaviour towards others, including the people who are trying to help. According to DBR2018, one in ten diaconal workers faced aggressive behaviour every month, and 2% every week. Every week, nearly one in ten diaconal workers came into contact with a client who was intoxicated.

## 5.2 The work days of multitalented diaconal workers

According to DBR2018, 70% of diaconal workers spent a rather large proportion of their working hours providing financial assistance which included sorting out the client's financial situation, giving advice, and providing financial aid. Diaconal assistance was typically provided at the office, where the necessary tools were readily available, confidentiality easy to maintain, and the safety precautions in case of threatening client situations in place. According to the diaconal workers, they spent a rather large proportion of their working hours compiling statistics and recording entries: one in four spent a large amount and one in two a rather large amount of time compiling statistics and recording entries.

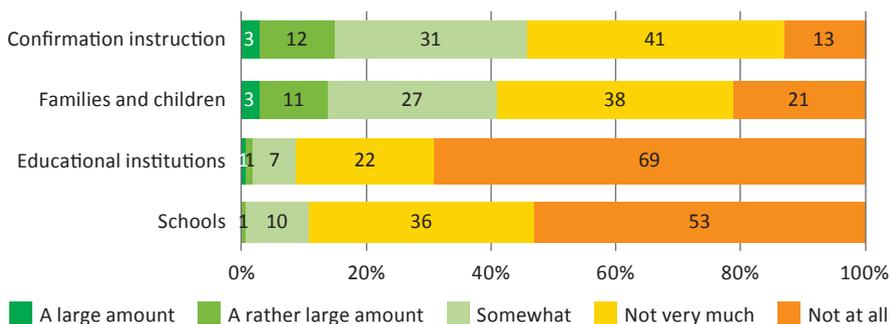
According to the barometer, meeting clients at the diaconal offices was most common in the under 35-year-olds group, whereas diaconal workers in the higher age groups did the most house calls. Close to one in two diaconal workers did a rather large amount of house calls. Diaconal house calls improve the Church's accessibility, because diaconal workers typically visit the clients who find it difficult to leave the confines of their home due to illness or old age, for example.

Over half of those who were the only diaconal workers in their parish organised a large number of diaconal events. In smaller locations with a population of under 10,000, one in two spent a rather large amount, or more, of their working hours organising communal devotions. In larger parishes, one in three diaconal workers never participated in the organisation of devotions.

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7 Basic Social Assistance 2017, 27–31.

**Figure 5.2.** Diaconal workers' assessment of how much time they use for cultivating a diaconal attitude in various contexts (%). N=388–391.



According to the barometer, 15% of diaconal workers spent a rather large amount of their working hours in confirmation instruction or in diaconal work with families and children. According to Nygård, cultivating a diaconal attitude is often considered a meaningful and positively challenging task offering respite from the more typical forms of diaconal work. Additionally, confirmation instruction supports the diaconal workers' personal spiritual growth. To achieve results, resources must be allocated to the preparation work and to learn new skills. Despite its importance, cultivating a diaconal attitude is often regarded as a secondary task and, hence, is allocated little resources.<sup>8</sup> Approximately 15% of diaconal workers spent a large amount or a rather large amount of their working hours in confirmation instruction, while 13% of the respondents spent no time at all in confirmation instruction. The latest Confirmation Instruction Plan encourages diaconal workers to re-think their attitudes. Confirmation instruction aims to create a connection between people and to deepen their understanding of neighbourly love. By enhancing the skills required for interfaith dialogue, it promotes world peace.<sup>9</sup>

According to DBR2018, one in ten diaconal workers spent a rather large amount of their working hours planning and assisting in worship. The task typically reserved for diaconal workers was intercessory prayer prepared either alone or together with a team of other professionals or volunteers. Other tasks for diaconal workers included reading from scripture, preparation of the table and assisting in giving of communion, and dispatching the congregation.<sup>10</sup>

A private communion with consecrated bread and wine given by a diaconal worker is gaining popularity. Giving of communion privately perfectly fits the job description of diaconal workers, because it involves a personal encounter with

<sup>8</sup> Nygård 2016, 65-67.

<sup>9</sup> Confirmation Instruction Plan 2017, 29–32, 53.

<sup>10</sup> Heikkilä 2012, 41-42.

someone who is unable to attend the holy communion together with the rest of the congregation.

The Church's diaconal ministry is versatile and ever expanding. Thus, the true challenge lies in prioritising. An important priority was to meet with those who are most in need of assistance. Currently, many diaconal workers work only part time, or their responsibilities also include missionary or instructional tasks. However, it is important to understand that we need to let diaconal workers concentrate solely on the diaconal ministry of the Church. The value of diaconal ministry lies in providing a time and a place for personal encounters and in supporting others in carrying their loads.

## **6 STRUCTURES SUPPORTING DIACONAL WORK**

*Päivi Isomäki*

### **6.1 Factors burdening diaconal workers and the available resources**

In this section, we look for answers to the question “How do workload, personal resources and management affect the everyday work of diaconal workers?”. These structures are the building blocks of well-being at work and the key to improved quality of work. The survey questionnaire included a limited selection of examples that support occupational well-being.

Factors burdening the respondents included versatile and demanding tasks, low pay, difficult client meetings, the high expectations of their clients, and the constant lack of time. The replies were very much the same across all locations, big or small. Harassment at the workplace was rare, but the additional stress caused by the multidimensional nature of the work had increased significantly since DBR2013.

The respondents named faith in the Lord and family and friends as their most important sources of strength. Both of these were important resources to nine in ten respondents. Nearly an equal number of respondents was supported by the positive aspects of their work. Four in five mentioned a sense of humour and prayer. Instead of being an additional stressor, not having fixed working hours seemed to be a strength for diaconal workers. This should be taken into consideration when discussing the timesheet systems in spiritual jobs.

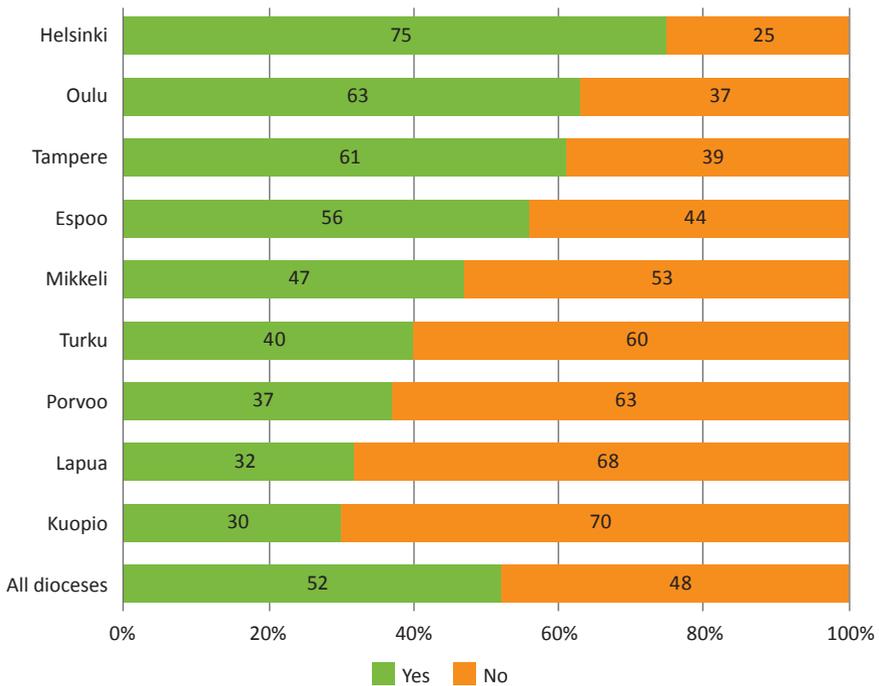
### **6.2 Management in diaconal work**

Diaconal workers form teams of experts where everyone is on the same level and a specialist in their respective fields or areas. Management is merely one of the tasks requiring specialist skills.

A total of 69 of the respondents (18%) were employed in senior positions with managerial responsibilities. 86% of those in senior positions with managerial responsibilities were women, and 88% had a background in diaconal work. The distribution of deacons and deaconesses among those holding senior positions was

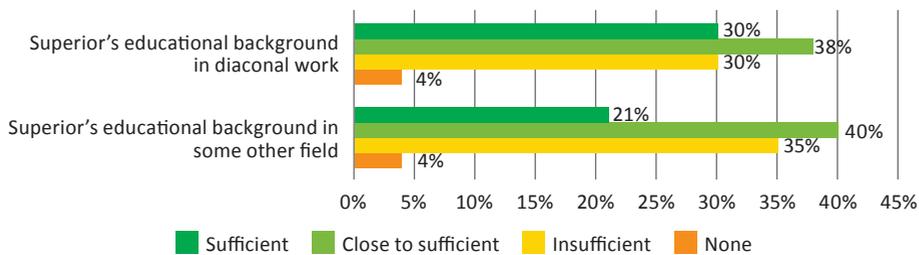
equal (approximately 45% each). 44% of those in senior positions with managerial responsibilities had over 20 years of working experience. On a scale from 4 to 10, the immediate superiors of diaconal workers received an average grade of 7.7.

**Figure 6.1.** The educational background of immediate superiors in diaconal work by diocese (%). N=367.



Just over half of the respondents' superiors had formal training in diaconal work. The number of superiors with formal training in diaconal work was the largest in locations with a population of 30,001–100,000 (72% of the respondents of these locations). In locations with a population of less than 10,000, the proportion of superiors with formal training in diaconal work was merely 24%. In the smaller locations, there might not necessarily be immediate superiors. Instead, the parish vicar is the superior of all employees in spiritual ministries.

**Figure 6.2.** Subjectively assessed level of support provided by superiors with a background in diaconal work and superiors with a background in other fields (%). N=322.



The proportion of those receiving sufficient or close to sufficient levels of support from their superiors has declined dramatically since DBR2016. As many as one in three felt that they did not receive sufficient support from their superiors. Compared to the results of DBR2016, the level of support provided by one's superiors has declined among those whose superiors have a formal training in diaconal work as well as those whose superiors have a different educational background.<sup>1</sup>

The number of annual meetings to discuss job descriptions has declined since DBR2016: 93% of the superiors with formal training in diaconal work held these discussions in 2016, but only 84% in 2018.<sup>2</sup> In the Diaconia Barometer 2018, nearly one in three stated that discussions about their job descriptions were not held annually despite being required by the employment contract.

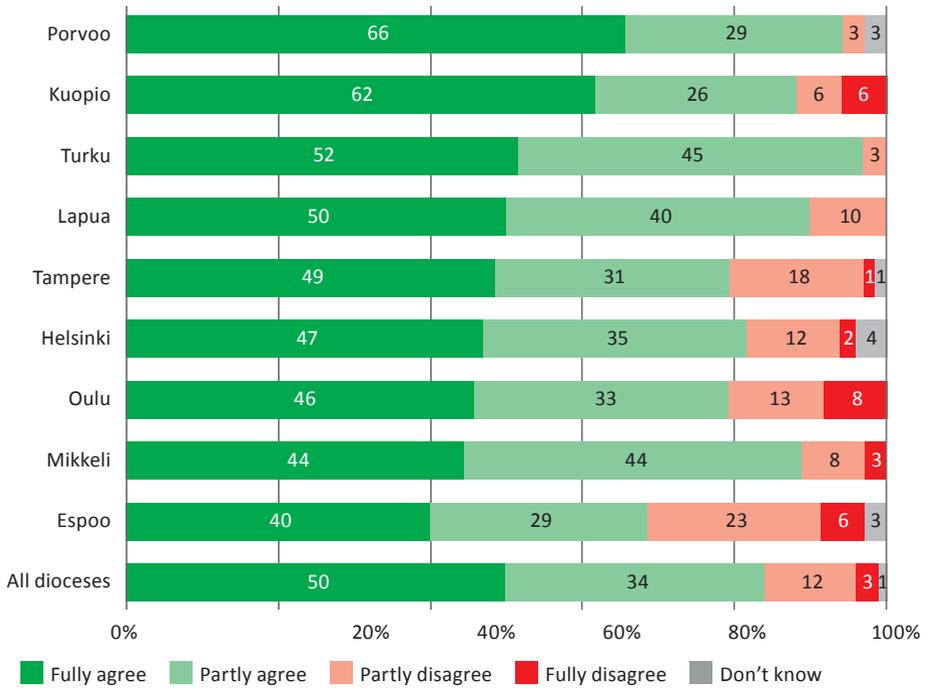
A discretionary bonus system (HAVA) was implemented in the workplaces of approximately half of the respondents. This question was most often ignored by the respondents, and 12% did not know whether their workplace paid discretionary bonuses, or not. According to the statistics published by the Commission for Church Employers, a discretionary bonus (HAVA) was paid by 62 employer units in 2016. A discretionary bonus was paid to 253 diaconal workers representing 19% of the total (1,301).<sup>3</sup>

1 Gävert 2016a, 79–81; Gävert 2016b, 24–25.

2 Gävert 2016a, 82–83; Gävert 2016b, 24–25.

3 Commission for Church Employers 2018.

**Figure 6.3.** Diaconal workers' satisfaction rates regarding their training opportunities, by diocese (%). N=378.



The respondents were happy with their training opportunities. More than four in five respondents fully or partly agreed with this statement. Respondents from the Diocese of Porvoo were the most satisfied, while those least satisfied were from the Diocese of Espoo.

The respondents of the Diaconia Barometer 2018 felt well-equipped to face changes and new challenges in their work. There were no differences between age groups.

**Table 6.1.** Distribution of responsibilities among diaconal managers (%). Respondents could select more than one option. N=384.

Tehtävä	Vicar	Immediate superior	A team of diaconal workers	Elected officials	I do	No-one
Manages diaconal reform	14%	49%	63%	13%	32%	4%
Distributes areas of responsibilities among the diaconal workers	24%	44%	57%	13%	23%	2%
Prepares the budget for diaconal ministry	9%	50%	43%	9%	28%	0%
Presents diaconal topics in meetings of the Church Board (Kirkkoneuvosto) / Parish Board (Seurakuntaneuvosto)	51%	47%	10%	5%	13%	1%
Holds discussions on job descriptions with diaconal workers	26%	61%	1%	0%	6%	11%
Offers support in work-related issues	34%	54%	58%	12%	12%	2%
Offers support in issues related to private life	14%	25%	37%	1%	29%	19%
Holds development discussions with diaconal workers	29%	63%	1%	0%	5%	7%

The immediate superiors performed many of the responsibilities of diaconal managers together with the team. Presenting diaconal topics to the Church Board appeared to be as much the responsibility of vicars as it was of the immediate superiors of diaconal workers.

The immediate superiors of diaconal workers and the other respondents had a differing understanding of the tasks and responsibilities belonging to diaconal managers. The immediate superiors of diaconal workers and the other respondents agreed only on the annual discussions of job descriptions. For all other statements, the immediate superiors of diaconal workers considered their tasks and responsibilities to be more extensive than the other respondents. Rights and responsibilities should be openly discussed at the workplace to ensure everyone is on the same page. The superiors of the immediate superiors have an important responsibility to provide support and to delegate the necessary rights. When this happens, the immediate superiors are well equipped to support their team members.

### 6.3 Vacancies

Vacancies for permanent positions were reported by 161 respondents, and the typical number of received applications ranged from 3 to 10. In two parishes, there had been over 40 applicants. Both of these vacancies had been in larger cities (population >100,000), although not in the same diocese. According to eight respondents, they had received no applications for open permanent or temporary diaconal positions in their parish. In one in two of the parishes represented by the

respondents, there had been no vacancies for permanent or temporary positions in 2017 (N=387).

Compared to DBR2016, there were significant changes in the number of applications received for vacancies. Fewer positions received over 40 applications, but fewer positions also received no applications at all. The recruitment situation remained difficult in the Diocese of Porvoo, although unlike during the previous barometer there has now been applicants to every permanent position. According to the Diaconia Barometer, the number of applications increased in the dioceses of Espoo, Helsinki and Tampere, in particular. The recruitment situation continued to decline in the dioceses of Kuopio and Mikkeli.<sup>4</sup>

In one in four of the respondents' parishes, there has been positions that have not been filled, or have been filled by temporary workers. In the parishes represented by the respondents, a total of 67 permanent positions had not been filled, and 54 permanent positions were filled using temporary contracts. Deliberately leaving vacancies unfilled and resorting to temporary arrangements was more common in larger cities.

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<sup>4</sup> Gävert 2016a, 83–85; Gävert 2016b, 25.

## 7 DISCUSSION

*Titi Gävert, Mikko Malkavaara and Jouko Porkka*

The results of this Diaconia Barometer reveal significant changes in the diaconal ministry, diaconal positions, management, and the Finnish society.

Being active in the social media and Facebook, in particular, has lowered the threshold for parishioners and the underprivileged to contact diaconal workers. Facebook is used by nearly all of the respondents (93%), and six in ten replied that discussions on local online forums are actively monitored. There are established practices in digitalised diaconal work, yet moving diaconal work to the web and other changes resulting from digitalisation require investments in the development of resources and skills.

Advances in digitalisation were regarded with conflicting feelings and even resentment. On the one hand, modern tools facilitate the performance of work-related tasks. On the other, many diaconal workers felt that although they were active in the social media, they should know more and be more active. In particular, diaconal workers were concerned about the inequality and marginalisation digitalisation leaves in its wake. People who do not have the tools and skills required to fully take advantage of digitalisation, are at a great risk of becoming marginalised. Both of these issues have already been addressed by the diaconal ministry: obsolete computers have been collected from companies and given to those in need, and volunteers have been recruited to provide guidance in navigating the digital world. Resources should be allocated to brainstorm for ideas on how diaconal ministry could alleviate and prevent digital marginalisation while simultaneously the number of digital diaconal services increases.

The Lutheran tradition of concentric secular and sacred matters is beautifully present in the results of the Diaconia Barometer 2018. Although the focus of diaconal ministry is on the secular, or earthly needs, seven in ten respondents felt that they practiced their Christian faith through their work almost always, even if they did not mention the word “Jesus”. Spirituality is present in the diaconal worker’s attitude and the way in which they approached their clients. Sources of strength include trusting the Lord and prayer. Most diaconal workers are not troubled by their role as publicly Christians, and often this was regarded as an asset. At work, the respondents are careful about introducing spiritual topics into the discussion and offering to pray together with their clients. Typically, diaconal workers pray for the people they meet in their absence.

The liturgical tasks are an essential part of diaconal work. Six in ten diaconal workers spend a rather large amount of time, or more, in organising communal

devotions, and approximately half spend a rather large amount of time, or more, in planning and assisting in worship.

The Diaconia Barometer reveals that diaconal workers are adept at detecting the social problems and concerns within their localities. They engage with people inhabiting the perimeters of modern society. Loneliness in all age groups and in all of its forms, and severe financial distress, in particular, are evidenced by the results of this Diaconia Barometer. Diaconal workers across Finland share the same concerns, namely: poverty, unemployment, substance abuse, and loneliness.

Loneliness and meeting the lonely emerged as the main theme in this Diaconia Barometer. Diaconal workers meet a large number of lonely people and understand the related problems. Professor Juho Saari and Helsingin Sanomat have reliably demonstrated the severe consequences of loneliness<sup>1</sup>, and provided diaconal workers with food for thought, and also appreciation for the decade-long work done to alleviate loneliness.

Somewhat surprisingly, the proportion of diaconal workers addressing multicultural issues and working with immigrants is rather small. In public debate as well as in the training of diaconal workers, immigration, asylum seekers and issues related to multiculturalism are extensively covered. According to the barometer, however, the related tasks are allocated to those who specialise in them while the vast majority of diaconal workers work with members of the original population only. This development should be followed in future surveys.

Diaconal workers hope to offer comprehensive assistance and meet with their clients without rush and preferably face-to-face. This is seen as the strength of diaconal ministry. By reputation, there is room for actual social assistance in diaconal ministry, unlike in the social services. In addition to the quantity also the quality of diaconal work merits further study. Furthermore, the strain on resources should be researched. When deciding on policies, it would be important to find solutions ensuring that sufficient time is reserved for meetings while at the same time enabling the provision of support and assistance to as many clients as possible.

The share of deacons appears to be increasing. For the first time, the majority of the respondents were deacons. It is very likely that the share of deacons in diaconal work continues to grow, because the deaconesses employed by the ELCF are significantly older than their deacon colleagues. Additionally, few of the younger employees are deaconesses. Despite the fact that the vast majority of the respondents had a background in social services, there was little variation in the content of responses between diaconal workers with different educational backgrounds.

The role of financial aid as a sort of “loss leader” to draw in clients could be viewed as a new development resulting from the change in educational background. Today, applying for financial aid has replaced having your blood pressure taken

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1 Loneliness 2018; Saari 2016.

as an excuse to visit a diaconal worker. From the client's perspective, applying for financial assistance could be a cry for help.

For diaconal workers, financial assistance is one tool in a set of a more comprehensive approach to providing support. However, there are also reservations which, in most cases, stem from the imbalance between available resources and the people's actual needs. In many cases, the client's annual income has been insufficient for years, and the modest financial aid does nothing to change their situation. Furthermore, the monetary value of the transfer and administration of small sums may, in fact, exceed the value of the financial aid.

Loneliness and meeting with the lonely are the two main themes in DBR2018. Loneliness experienced by diaconal workers in their work communities is one of the dimensions of loneliness depicted in the barometer. Diaconal workers expect to receive more support from their superiors and for their superiors to have a more determined approach to early intervention regarding problems at the workplace. The subjectively assessed level of support from one's superiors had declined since the previous Diaconia Barometer. However, the barometer does not provide any explanations as to whether this might have been the result of an addition in responsibilities, changes in the organisation structure, or an increase in the need for support. These questions should be addressed in subsequent surveys. In one in four parishes, vacancies in diaconal ministry have been filled using temporary arrangements, or positions have been left vacant. This must have an effect on the overall diaconal ministry of the Church.

On many occasions, it has been observed that the focus of spreading the gospel has shifted to ethics and love, in particular. This is an international phenomenon. However, preaching the gospel with deeds has not attracted similar emphasis. The diaconal ministry of the Church is performed by specially trained professionals - not as a joint effort of the entire congregation. In the open-ended questions, many shared their disappointment in diaconal ministry not having the kind of status in the parish life as one would expect. Are we giving up on the idea of spiritual life centred around a diaconal congregation and diaconal ministry?

Some diaconal workers have doubts about their future in diaconal work, and are considering changing careers. Two in five have considered changing careers, and one in four consider it likely. Compared to the results from DBR2013, there has been a staggering increase. More importantly, these feelings might be shared by other professionals employed by the Church as well. Further research is needed

to understand what has changed in the Church and in the prospects of diaconal work for diaconal workers to contemplate changing careers in such large numbers.

Influencing decision-making and the public opinion is considered an important aspect of diaconal work. Nine in ten are of the opinion that diaconal workers should introduce topics such as financial inequality and general ill-being into public debate. The integration of sustainability and environmental issues into the planning and implementation stages of diaconal work is important to 85% of the respondents. All of the respondents agreed on the most important goals of using communications to make a difference. The top three goals included advocating human dignity, reaching those in need, and cultivating a diaconal attitude, i.e. inspiring people to do good.

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Diaconia Barometer 2018 is the 10th successive barometer to map the opinions and experiences of diaconal workers. It complements the annual statistics published by the congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) and the four-year report published by the Church Research Institute. The focus of the surveys has varied over time to probe opinions on current issues. Thus, the barometers do not as such represent a continuum. However, the focus of all barometers has been consistently on the opinions and experiences of diaconal workers regarding the position of the underprivileged in Finland, and on the diaconal ministry of ELCF and the people it employs. The Diaconia Barometer is not an exhaustive representation of congregational diaconal work, but it does provide information that can not be found elsewhere.

Data for this 10th Diaconia Barometer were collected in January–February 2018. The survey questionnaire was grouped according to five thematic topics including communications and making a difference, everyday diaconal work, diaconal work in the changing society, structures supporting diaconal work, and the importance of Christian faith for the diaconal workers as a community and as individuals.

The survey was undertaken by the Finnish Association for Research on Diaconia, the Diaconal Workers' Association, the ELCF Unit for Diaconal Work and Pastoral Care, and the Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (Diak).

The Barometer comprises five research articles by deaconess Päivi Isomäki, deacon Johanna Lehmusmies, deacon Päivi Salojärvi and deacon Veera Wallenius. The published articles are part of their Master's Degree Programme at the Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (Diak).

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