



In September, 2022 DOTAC (DIAKONIA of the Americas and the Caribbean) sponsored the Seminar Series:

Mondays in September

A study of the World Council of Churches Document: ***Called to Transformation: Ecumenical Diakonia***  
From August 31-September 8, the World Council of Churches met in Karlsruhe, Germany. The important document “Called to Transformation: Ecumenical Diakonia” was presented for discussion. DOTAC decided to offer an on-line Zoom study group of the report. Three presenters began each of our three sessions. All of them are attending the Assembly:



September 12: **Reverend Dr. Matthew Ross** as WCC Staff and editor of the report, shared background surrounding the document and the history of its development. His presentation can be seen at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfQWLZI02As>



September 19: **Reverend Marianne Uri Øverland** as representative of DIAKONIA World Federation and President of DIAKONIA Region Africa Europe, shared an analysis of the document that offered respectful critique of the focus on diaconal agencies without connecting to congregations and communities of faith. To experience her presentation go to:

[https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=marianne+uri+overland](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=marianne+uri+overland)



September 26: **Reverend Dr. Hyuk Cho** was a delegate to the WCC Assembly from the United Church of Canada. His presentation helpfully began with a sharing of his deceased wife’s, Jung-Hee Park, evocative article: "Why do I have a problem with the word ‘service’ and the image of ‘servant’ for diaconal ministry?" Hyuk’s presentation can be found at:

<https://youtu.be/iQk4NpiDolc>

The document he referred to by Jung-Hee Park can be found at:

<https://www.ducc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Park-Jung-Hee-image-of-servant-for-diaconal-ministry.pdf>

Each of the speakers were asked to share in their brief presentations, from their perspective

- [What does the report mean to you?](#)
- [What are the most important elements of the document for you?](#)
- [What aspects of the Assembly’s discussion and debate on the report stood out for you?](#)<sup>1</sup>

Following the presentations participants were randomly allocated to a small group Zoom breakout room. Each small group was assigned a chapter. Each week we tackled 3-4 chapters tracking along chronologically in the document. In the study guide, provided for the series, each chapter was outlined and/or illustrated with quotes from the chapter. The study guide also posed open-ended discussion

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World Council of Churches Document ***Called to Transformation: Ecumenical Diakonia***  
*Mondays in September* DOTAC Seminar Series – September 2022

questions. The lively interaction between and amongst the participants led to a deepening sense of connection to siblings in the international and ecumenical diaconate.

Each group will be asked to *briefly* report back to the plenary with one comment or insight that arose in the small group discussion.



Author of several books on diakonia, Deacon Dr. David Clark, shares a *reprise* of the report back from his small group in this video

<https://youtu.be/Bo1WE-wMQZI>

The “Called to Transformation: Ecumenical Diakonia” document can be found at:

[https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/Called%20to%20Transformation%20Ecumenical%20Diakonia\\_web%20Low%20Res.pdf](https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/Called%20to%20Transformation%20Ecumenical%20Diakonia_web%20Low%20Res.pdf)

## CHAPTER 1

### Small Group Introductions

- Begin your break-out group time with each person sharing their:
  - Name
  - Location
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### Chapter 1: Introduction

pages 13-21

This chapter offers a definition of ecumenical diakonia that includes two perspectives: theological and practical.

“...diakonia expresses a strong link between what the churches *are* and *do*. Reflection on ecumenical diakonia requires an understanding of both dimensions, their being and their joint action as worldwide communion of churches and Christians.” page 15

#### Discussion Questions:

How well do you/we integrate the two dimensions of *being* and *doing*

- in your own life and ministry?
- in your diaconal community?

This first chapter also lists contextual trends that challenge agents of diakonia:

- Changing development paradigm (from charitable aid to development to justice and advocacy)
- Shrinking space of civil society (repressive human rights records, restrictive laws)
- Rise of nationalism (xenophobia)
- Religion and development (oppressive religious leadership)
- Deepening socio-economic inequality
- Landscape of suffering, injustice and war
- Forced migration
- Children and youth (more than ¼ of the earth’s population)
- Ecological crisis

#### Discussion Questions:

What stands out for you on this list?

Are there areas that you feel your community is addressing well?

Do you see any directions that might shape the work of DOTAC?

### Report Back

As a group, decide what one insight/comment/concern from the group discussion you would like to *briefly* share with the larger group.

## CHAPTER 2

### Small Group Introductions (

- Begin your break-out group time with each person sharing their:
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### Chapter 2: The History of Ecumenical Diakonia

pages 22-35

In this chapter, the history of ecumenical diakonia is very quickly outlined. In the section on the Early Church, biblical records are explored in relation to diakonia (e.g. Acts 2 – sharing of goods in common, Paul’s epistles-- the Great Collection). The authors examine the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of 2 Corinthians and state:

“Paul connects the two concepts communion (koinonia) and diakonia, indicating the organic connection between what they are and what they are called to do in Christ. Sharing thus has both an ontological and a practical dimension; for Christians, it expresses our belonging together and our care for each other.” page 24

Discussion Question:

How well do you/we integrate the two dimensions of koinonia and diakonia:

- in your own life and ministry?
- in your diaconal community?
- as DOTAC?

In the sections discussing the history of diakonia in the ecumenical movement, the authors suggest shifts in understanding of mission and diakonia over the last couple of centuries. In their analysis, paradigms have transformed from aid and charity work, to development and empowerment perspectives, and then, to an emphasis on justice and advocacy.

Three dimensions of diakonia are proposed:

- ecclesiological – diakonia is fundamental to the church being the church
- prophetic – speaking truth to power
- holistic – not just doing but embracing the spirituality of diakonia as well

Discussion Question:

How might an understanding and embracing of these three dimensions affect:

- your own life and ministry?
- your diaconal community?
- DOTAC?

### Report Back

- As a group, decide what one insight/comment/concern from the group discussion you would like to *briefly* share with the larger group.

## CHAPTER 3

### Small Group Introductions

- Begin your break-out group time with each person sharing their:
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### Chapter 3: Diakonia in Today's Polycentric Ecumenical Movement pages 36-41

In this chapter, the changing positions in the church are discussed – particularly the changing relationship between the churches of the global South and North.

A WCC Conference on “Theology of Diakonia for the 21st Century” (held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in June 2012) suggested that diaconal action in the future needs to proceed from the perspective of the vulnerable and marginalized.

“...to re-imagine diakonia from the vantage point of those who are, in many cases, traditionally considered as recipients or objects of churches’ diakonia – the vulnerable and marginalized communities.” Page 38

Discussion Question:

How might an understanding of these changes affect:

- your own life and ministry?
- your diaconal community?
- DOTAC?

In the chapter summary, the authors state:

“The call to be a diaconal community maintains that diaconal action cannot be limited to being remedial; it must also be preventative and creative. It must encompass service to the needy, advocacy by speaking to power, and service and advocacy about creation. As advocacy for justice and peace, it should listen to the voices of the marginalized, engage in transformative and prophetic action, and address the root causes of injustice embedded in oppressive systems and structures. As care and advocacy for creation, it should seek to build alliances, in particular with people of other faiths, when addressing climate justice both at global and local levels, promoting sustainability and mitigation.”

page 41

Discussion Question:

How might an integrated understanding and embracing of justice and diakonia affect:

- your own life and ministry?
- your diaconal community?
- DOTAC?

### Report Back

As a group, decide what one insight/comment/concern from the group discussion you would like to *briefly* share with the larger group.

## CHAPTER 4

### Small Group Introductions

- Begin your break-out group time with each person sharing their:
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### Chapter 4: Theological Reflection on Diakonia

pages 42-52

This chapter challenges the traditional association of diakonia with service (and its relation to obedience, humility and self-giving). John N. Collins biblical scholarship is cited:

“{Collins} has documented that the *diak-* words themselves have no connotation with charity, or of self-effacing service of the poor. In ancient Greek diakonia rather means an assignment or a task as messenger or as go-between.” Page 44

Discussion Question:

How might an understanding of diakonia without the notion of service, and with more of an emphasis on messenger/go-between influence:

- your own life and ministry?
- your diaconal community?
- DOTAC?

In this chapter of the WCC *Ecumenical Diakonia* report, His Holiness Aram Keshishian, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia is quoted:

“The church does not ‘have’ a diakonia; it is diakonia, namely a continuous and committed discipleship to Christ for the rebuilding of world community and re-creating the fallen world according to the plans of God.” page 52

Discussion Question:

How might this understanding of diakonia affect:

- your own life and ministry?
- your diaconal community?
- DOTAC?

### Report Back

- As a group, decide what one insight/comment/concern from the group discussion you would like to *briefly* share with the larger group.

## CHAPTER 5

### Small Group Introductions

- Begin your break-out group time with each person sharing their:
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### Chapter 5: Changing Landscape of Diaconal Action

pages 53-66

In this chapter, it is argued that a diaconal agenda needs to move from development aid to transformative practices towards justice. Priorities are articulated for focusing on:

- *migration and refugees*  
“In times when the basic rights of migrants and refugees are threatened, churches and diaconal agents must engage in advocacy and public action, as part of their calling to defend human dignity. Their action must include practices of welcoming and accompanying, of sharing and celebrating the multiplicity of gifts that migrants and refugees bring with them.” page 58
- *economic justice*  
“Eradicating poverty is not just about addressing symptoms like the lack of income or material assets held by individuals. It is also about addressing the systemic and structural factors essential for overcoming poverty, factors that deprive women and men of their dignity, rights and entitlements.” page 60 -quote from ACT Alliance
- *climate justice*  
“...climate justice has become a key concern for ecumenical *diakonia*, affirming that churches and Christians are called to speak out and act when creation is threatened, as an expression of their commitment to life, justice and love.” page 61
- *gender justice*  
“Ecumenical *diakonia* affirms the fundamental importance of gender justice, ... Working for gender justice presupposes critical analysis of social, cultural and religious power structures, envisaging equity in the way women and men share power and responsibilities, at home, in the workplace, and in the wider community.” page 62
- *health justice*  
“Health is not just a matter of making diagnosis and providing medical treatment. It is also an issue of wellbeing and of enjoying the gift of being. Health justice therefore also includes advocacy for persons and groups that are discriminated against because of their physical or mental health.” page 65

Discussion Question:

How might these priorities be reflected in:

- your own life and ministry?
- your diaconal community?

### Report Back

- As a group, decide what one insight/comment/concern from the group discussion you would like to *briefly* share with the larger group.

## CHAPTER 6

### Small Group Introductions

- Begin your break-out group time with each person sharing their:
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### Chapter 6: The Distinctiveness of Diaconal Practice

pages 67-77

This chapter states:

“It is questionable if one single term can fully express the goal of diaconal action, be it development, transformation, change or renewal. All of them express the need for responding to burning issues, for defending human dignity and promoting a vision of a more just and peaceful world.” page 69

Discussion Question:

How is diaconal action named or identified in:

- your own life and ministry?
- your diaconal community?

In this chapter, the authors encourage:

- *Identification of diaconal assets*  
“Within development work, there has been a shift of focus from a needs-based to an asset-based approach, which means emphasizing local resources and competence rather than what is lacking.” page 73
- *Articulation of diaconal language*  
“... there are many reasons for developing a diaconal language. It will help to strengthen the ability to articulate the distinctiveness of *diakonia*. And help to give a fuller account of its assets, its strengths and weakness. It will provide a terminology that will facilitate communication, both internally among churches and diaconal agencies and in their relation to external partners.” page 75
- Development of diaconal professionalism and competency  
“Diaconal competence requires attention and training. ... It remains a shared responsibility for all actors with ecumenical *diakonia* to establish plans for diaconal competence, and in particular encouraging training institutions to offer study programmes within this field.” page 76

Discussion Question:

How might these encouragements be reflected in:

- your own life and ministry?
- your diaconal community?
- DOTAC?

What other encouragements might you name?

### Report Back

- As a group, decide what one insight/comment/concern from the group discussion you would like to *briefly* share with the larger group.



## CHAPTER 7

### Small Group Introductions

- Begin your break-out group time with each person sharing their:
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### Chapter 7: Contemporary Challenges

pages 78-86

In this chapter, three areas are presented as ways to innovatively focus the diaconal response to contemporary challenges:

- *Resources*: the responsible stewardship of shrinking financial resources and the need to share resources and develop innovative practices  
“It is likely ... that less money will be available for ecumenical *diakonia* in the future. This is influencing the agencies and their ability to engage... This situation challenges all partners involved in ecumenical *diakonia* to strive for better coordination.” page 80
- *Cooperation*: networking and partnerships within and outside the family of Christians  
“Ecumenical *diakonia* will clearly benefit from connecting the competence of local churches and specialized agencies. The message from the [Lutheran World Federation] ‘Global Consultation on *Diakonia*’ held in 2008 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, claims that ‘new synergies and connectivity’ will make churches, agencies, and mission societies more effective in their work. It therefore called for ‘an attitude that embraces a ‘culture of listening’ to what is on the ground and builds on it in all forms of diaconal praxis,’...” page 83
- *Prophetic witness*: advocating for justice  
“Advocacy is an integral part of diaconal work. It cannot be limited to a possible extra concern depending on given circumstances. The distinct identity of *diakonia*, its biblical roots and Christian vocation, compels ecumenical *diakonia* to be prophetic, to side with the poor and marginalized, to unmask systemic injustice and promote human dignity, justice and peace.”

page 85

Discussion Questions:

How might the challenges of

- resources
- cooperation, networking, and partnerships
- prophetic witness and advocacy

be addressed:

- your own life and ministry?
- your diaconal community?
- DOTAC?

### Report Back

- As a group, decide what one insight/comment/concern from the group discussion you would like to *briefly* share with the larger group.

## CHAPTER 8

### Small Group Introductions

- Begin your break-out group time with each person sharing their:
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### Chapter 8: Ecumenical *Diakonia* in a Confessional Context

pages 87-96

Desiring a greater mutual understanding across the churches, this chapter outlines some of the similarities and differences amongst the confessions. Some selected highlights of the understandings of ecumenical *diakonia* are:

- |                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Orthodox</i>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Connection to divine liturgy</li><li>○ Deacons' relationship to the episcopate as the "hands of the bishop"</li></ul>                                                                   |
| <i>Lutheran</i>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Salvation not a matter of human deeds</li><li>○ Impact of the diaconal revival in the 19<sup>th</sup> century</li></ul>                                                                 |
| <i>Reform</i>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Diaconate is one of four essential offices</li><li>○ <i>Diakonia</i> responses are both institutional and individual, justice and charity</li></ul>                                     |
| <i>Anglican</i>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ <i>Diakonia</i> offers a foretaste of God's kingdom</li><li>○ Emphasis placed on the "diakonia of all believers"</li><li>○ Advocacy and not just aid; political confrontation</li></ul> |
| <i>Methodist</i>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ All are children of God</li><li>○ Communal assistance as an imitation of Christ</li></ul>                                                                                               |
| <i>Pentecostal</i>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Diversity within this global fellowship</li><li>○ Some, not all, challenge the political and economic causes of injustice and poverty</li></ul>                                         |
| <i>Baptist</i>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Deacons oversee local church</li><li>○ Vision of congregations with open doors and as havens of hospitality</li><li>○ Salvation in holistic terms</li></ul>                             |
| <i>Roman Catholic</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Rejection of proselytizing connected to diaconal action</li><li>○ Restoration of permanent deacon</li></ul>                                                                             |
| <i>African</i>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Rejection of colonial versions of Christianity</li><li>○ Liberative commitment to abundance of life</li></ul>                                                                           |
| <i>Peace Churches</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Emphasis on peace making</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                      |

### Discussion Questions

- What stood out for you in this chapter?
- What would an emphasis on deepening mutual understanding of other confessions mean for:
  - your own life and ministry?
  - your diaconal community?

### Report Back

- As a group, decide what one insight/comment/concern from the group discussion you would like to *briefly* share with the larger group.

## CHAPTER 9

### Small Group Introductions

- Begin your break-out group time with each person sharing their:
  - Name, Location, and Diaconal community/association

### Chapter 9: Ecumenical *Diakonia* in a Regional Context

pages 97-108

“This chapter attempts to show how different socio-economic, socio-political, environmental, historic and cultural challenges can all affect approaches to *diakonia*. Issues such as conflict, political ideologies, natural disasters, wealth, poverty, the legacies of colonialism and the legal status of churches are some of the issues that can have a direct bearing on diaconal provision. The creation of a global ethic of ecumenical *diakonia* must consider such diversity, in the overall universal context of the love of God, revealed in Christ.” page 98

Some selected highlights of the factors affecting ecumenical *diakonia* are:

- Latin America*
  - Most Christian part of the world but most unequal
  - Is Christianity a part of the problem or solution?
- Caribbean*
  - Challenge to European theology “suffering brings great rewards in heaven”
  - Harsh historical foundations of poverty and violence
- Europe*
  - 19<sup>th</sup> century revival of diaconate – lead to diaconal agencies for public action, and a history of training for diaconal competence
  - Wide-spread secularism and decline of local church initiative
- Africa*
  - Rapidly growing churches
  - Exploitation of natural resources
  - Ongoing impact of colonialism
- Asia*
  - Christianity is a minority faith
  - China – post-colonial principles of self-management, self-propagation, and self-financing
  - East Asia – gap between rich and poor, environmental degradation
  - South Asia – impact of partition and religious violence
  - Australasia – environmental disasters and racial tensions
- Middle East*
  - Ethnic wars
  - Refugees and migration
- Pacific*
  - Impact of climate change
  - Extractive industries
- North America*
  - History of enslavement and racist policies
  - Decline in the church

### Discussion Questions

- What stood out for you in this chapter?
- What would an emphasis on deepening an understanding of global diversity mean for:
  - your own life and ministry?
  - your diaconal community?

### Report Back

As a group, decide what one insight/comment/concern from the group discussion you would like to *briefly* share with the larger group.

## CHAPTER 10

### Small Group Introductions

- Begin your break-out group time with each person sharing their:
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  - Diaconal community/association

### Chapter 10: The Way Forward

pages 109-115

This final chapter highlights the diaconal role of “go-between”. Diakonia is urged to:

- engage in innovative reflection and practice
- affirm *diakonia* as a shared vision and mandate
- affirm the diversity of gifts and assets, especially the gifts of ordinary people who reside on the margins
- affirm justice as a priority
- strengthen structures of shared action, partnerships, and collaboration
- strengthen networks and alliances of cooperation
- strengthen communication and a culture of relational respect
- strengthen diaconal capacity through training programs
- establish diaconal codes of conduct and raise ethical awareness
- explore the close relationship between *diakonia* and the environment

Discussion Questions:

Which of these urgings

- give you energy?
- confuse you?

How might these suggestions be lived out in:

- your own life and ministry?
- your diaconal community?

### Report Back

- As a group, decide what one insight/comment/concern from the group discussion you would like to *briefly* share with the larger group.

## ADDENDUM

### Small Group Introductions

- Begin your break-out group time with each person sharing their:
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### Addendum: The Diaconal Work of the Churches in the Context of COVID-19

pages 116-135

This addendum is arranged in two parts:

- An overview of the current situation in the midst of a pandemic -- (pages 117-129)
  - Structural economic and social injustices exposed during the pandemic – e.g. vaccines are not shared equitably
  - Need to develop long-term responses, including trauma and grief care
  - Concern that unemployment may increase and strain on services
- Stories of diaconal work from around the world during COVID – (pages 131-135)  
“While the need for succour and assistance have increased globally, the ability of churches and communities to act has been hampered because of restrictions on gathering, working, and responding. Nevertheless, this crisis has also offered inspiring responses from our faith communities to chart the way forward and bring healing and transformation with love, faith, hope, courage, and persistence.” page 117

Discussion Question:

- What has been the impact of the pandemic on?
  - your own life and ministry?
  - the work and spirit your diaconal community?
- What were the stories and examples from the second section of the addendum that stood out for you?

### Report Back

As a group, decide what one insight/comment/concern from the group discussion you would like to *briefly* share with the larger group.