

MEANING AND PRACTICE OF MISSION IN EUROPE TODAY
An urban rural mission perspective

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MEANING AND PRACTICE OF MISSION IN EUROPE TODAY

CHAPTER 1 : Some Central Insights on Mission

A: process of reflection on Mission in Europe

The Europe Community and Justice Circle has carried out a process of reflection on mission in Europe, what it means and how it is being practiced in different contexts.

This was carried out during the past two years, at the request of the WCC-URM (World Council of Churches, Urban Rural Mission of the Mission Commission of WCC).

It started with a session of discussion and sharing on the theme at a regional meeting of the Europe Circle, held in a rural village in Hungary.

The document, 'Some Reflections and Questions on Mission in Europe Today', was written and discussed by members and their groups, encouraging their reflection on the meaning and practice of mission in different contexts in Europe.

This document included these **questions for discussion and reflection:**

- How do you work with people and communities to empower them and build alternatives in the face of fragmentation and breakdown of community?
- Has it been possible to build relations of solidarity and support with people who have been marginalised and who struggle for justice ?
- Are there examples of healing and reconciling processes which are at work in communities and society in your region, showing alternatives are possible?
- Have you created spaces for solidarity, healing and reconciliation? how ? have these involved people of different faiths, or cultures, or classes ?
- What is the place of story-telling in this and what does it mean to people?
- How do you and your group understand God's Mission in Europe today ?
- Have you (your group, church, community organisation), been able to feel you have been a participant, in some way, in God's mission and the proclamation of life in fulness ?
- How have you been able to assist, work with or encourage Churches in your region, to show solidarity with people who have been marginalised ?
- Has your work influenced mission ideas or practice of European churches ?

- What changes do you see in how mission is understood or done, in Europe ?
- Do you have resources and visions to share, from grassroots communities, to foster spirituality and empowerment, to promote healing and reconciling?

The next step was to arrange a number of visits, of teams of one or two members of the Europe Circle, to spend some time visiting the work of URM related groups or communities, in different expressions of mission, in different parts of the region.

The purpose was to gather some experiences and draw some insights about Mission in Europe and if possible use the questions as a help in doing this.

There were six exchange visits which contributed to this process and some other contributors who shared their reflections on the basis of the questions.

Results were gathered, from these visits and from the discussions in the Circle held during 2003 to 2004, leading to the following perspectives.

B: The Meaning of Mission in Europe

a) 'Mission' in Europe; the very word today evokes a wide, complex range of reactions. There is a constant challenge for us when we use the terms

Urban, Industrial, Rural Mission, to explain clearly what we mean. Because of

Europe's very complex and ambivalent past history associated with 'Christian Mission', we often need to first explain our views about what Mission is NOT. We would rather explain from a positive starting point.

But we find the waters troubled by this 'traditional' concept of mission as 'Europe sends people out to save, rescue, help, convert'. Especially as in past centuries it often became mixed up with 'to colonise, enslave and exploit'.

When we say our understanding is the opposite: mission is 'to be in solidarity, share struggles for justice, work together and empower', we realise this is a demanding vision to practice and realise. Yet it is a part of God's Mission.

We still find many people and Churches in Europe, where Mission means nothing else than 'sending out', to other continents. There is yet another group who see Europe as a 'new mission field' for evangelisation and converting of people of other faiths and those of no faith. A minority are interested in social issues as well. Others have as their main aim to increase the church membership and to counter the decline in numbers and income.

We find another strong reaction among some community and justice organisations in Europe, ones who are allies of URM work. They say: 'We do not want anything to do with the word mission. It has too much of a

poisoned history, too much association with Europe's colonial and mercantile past'.

Even a number of groups created decades ago by UIRM work, eg in Industrial work in some countries, have abandoned the link with 'mission' and are uncomfortable about using it. This has recently even become a serious factor in cutting funding for our work, as Mission bodies have been absorbed into 'development' agencies and have their Mission associations weakened.

Yet another group avoiding the word 'mission' are those whose aim is to engage in inter-religious dialogues and community inter-faith cooperation.

We also find that the history of European missions in the South is 'coming back home' in complex ways. Migrant workers and refugees from former colonies are creating churches and communities in Europe. The URM works closely with them in some European countries, building solidarity with them.

Their response to 'mission' is sometimes initial caution, but soon this is replaced by confidence once they understand the mission as URM practices it.

However, associations of the past run deep and do need to be countered. In a number of countries in Europe, URM has built good contacts with migrant workers and with their own churches. These churches were formed because of migrants' need for community and spiritual empowerment, given the difficulty in locating this within Europe's already existing churches.

We also find cases of a mirror-image of mission as sending outwards from Europe. Some migrants come with a strong 'calling' to be missionaries to the European 'mission-field'. Mainly from African and Asian backgrounds, they form their own churches here, often starting with few resources and with members who are poorly paid and sometimes vulnerable, without documents.

Not only do they create functioning christian communities against all odds, but they feel convinced of their calling to 're-christianise' and convert European societies. They see much of Europe as being secularised, somewhat corrupted by consumerism and individualism and in need of evangelisation.

In the context of diversity of meaning and practice of mission in Europe there follows some of the essential dimensions of mission, from the perspectives of people in struggle, as it reveals itself in Europe, East and West.

b) Building Inclusive Communities is a central part of mission in Europe.

The building and organising of communities, (within the perspective of the Reign of God) is, at the same time, carried out in the context of globalisation. Some of the forces it unleashes do damage to rural and urban communities.

The word 'community' does not have one agreed meaning across Europe. For some it still refers to a local group, living nearby. For others, community must include nothing less than the whole of society; Others think first of organising their own cultural or ethnic group; Or those who labour together or share common interests; for others it is more a network which is in communication, maybe through common ideologies; for some it begins with a shared faith.

New methods of community organising need to be shared in Europe. Some of these methods can be applied to re-building broken communities, especially in marginal parts of many European cities (as in examples from Wales, Scotland, France, Romania, Belgium, England etc.). Other new methods are needed for multi-cultural communities and others for poor rural areas. Some methods also are relevant for re-building churches in marginal, poor places.

c) Solidarity with people struggling on the margins of society.

This form of mission is present in most urban rural mission programs. In many European situations the process of organising of communities is in a preliminary, tentative stage. The forces disintegrating communities and their economic and social fabrics, are so strong, that mission requires firstly to just express solidarity with the victims of these forces. In parts of central and eastern Europe, these forces result in high unemployment and poverty for workers, as the free market and global competition eliminate the old economic and social structures. New investment and TNCs bring hard rules, selecting only those workers who are willing to conform.

In western Europe, regions with manufacturing and ship-building have been severely damaged by the forces of globalisation. Their people have strong professional, labour and community traditions which have now been eroded.

Solidarity with the workers and their communities, in their struggles to resist, to fight unjust closures or to accept the inevitable, are critical mission actions.

Pastoral support and economic and political analysis often go together here.

Standing beside has moved to taking sides and identifying with the struggle.

This mission also means solidarity with family farmers and rural workers in most countries of the EU, where industrialisation of agriculture is forcing many family farmers into crisis. They are forced to take on debts

to grow big and industrialise, or are forced off their farm, a very painful choice.

This crisis will be multiplied in coming years, when East and Central Europe joins the EU and many family farmers will become victims to market forces.

In recent years solidarity in rural mission has been essential when farmers faced the terrible plagues of Foot and Mouth, Fowl and Swine Pest. The conditions allowing these to occur were caused by industrial, intensive farms and were worsened by the way animals are treated. The markets force farm-animals to be treated as economic commodities. Many Christian farmers and communities were devastated by these experiences and have not recovered.

d) Resistance is another aspect of mission and is present in different ways.

Resistance, for example, against the destructive and dehumanising forces of Globalisation; Resistance against Commodification of so many human, natural and community resources in Europe which do not belong in a market-place. Some Orthodox Christians in Eastern Europe see the growing phenomenon of Globalisation in their societies as a profound Mission challenge. Idolatry of markets and money needs to be resisted at the roots, with Christ as life's centre and the emphasis on community and not on money and possessions.

Many programs, rural and urban, do involve resistance to forces which are breaking up communities. They count their work as effective if it can simply impede or slow-down the processes of fragmentation and destruction.

e) Creating alternatives to the dominant market economy;

Globalisation, through forces in the markets, manipulate people as consumers who depend on the markets for the needs of their life. The choices available are being narrowed and we are being pushed into accepting ways of life which we ourselves do not choose and may not want. The creation of alternatives to the markets, is a rare, but important aspect of Mission in Europe. In the midst of marginal situations of struggle there are some alternatives being created, ones which reflect inclusive community and the economics of solidarity.

f) Opening spaces of sharing and circles of healing is also mission;

This expression of mission is much needed in Europe in the present context.

People become marginalised in Europe through a complex combination of factors. One common factor is consumerism and the effects of globalisation, which divides and dehumanises all people, to a greater or lesser degree.

One effect is withdrawal into individualism and a move toward virtual contacts between members of society. Direct contacts and experience in the context of community become scarcer and some people seek 'virtual emotions', by way of technologies and identification with lives of celebrities and TV soap stars.

Another factor is the advent of new communities and cultural expressions, present throughout societies of Western Europe, with millions of migrant workers from Africa, Asia, the Mid-east, Eastern Europe. There are refugees and asylum-seekers too, from many parts of the world. There are significant groups following Islam and many other religions beside Christianity in Europe.

There are very few places where people from all these diverse groups can sit together, share and learn about one another. This is a preliminary to living together and to eventually building new, inclusive communities together.

All these groups seem to live so far in separate boxes or compartments and there is misunderstanding and tension, especially where Islam is concerned.

There are fortunately a number of good examples in URM and ecumenical work where spaces of sharing and healing have been created, some on the initiative of migrants and their self-organisations, others on the initiative of intercultural and inter-religious ecumenical groups.

For example, the African migrants and their women's organisations in Germany started the Racial Justice Sunday, a space of healing and empowerment, where Germans from diverse back-grounds come to share stories, support, worship and food with African people.

Story-telling is a promising method of promoting this sharing. Also there are some good experiences with multi-cultural bible- reading circles.

g) Contributing to dialogue on Mission with Churches in Europe;

This is a mission-related task for the URM in Europe. It involves linking to and supporting the work of Centres and Mission Bodies which have the task of preparing Churches in their mission. It includes participating in dialogues about mission with the Churches. For Mission is back on the agenda of many churches in Europe, as shown by some recent meetings

where mission in Europe was discussed, including in CEC (Conference of European Churches).

CHAPTER 2: Understanding and Practice of Urban Rural Mission in Europe

2A: key words; mission, people, community

Undergirding URM's work, in Europe as well as globally, is a particular understanding of these key words: **mission ; people, community**. The search for community in the context of globalisation and the destruction of communities (both urban and rural), constitutes a central **mission issue of today**. The Bible witnesses to God who calls into being a people out of 'no people'; reconciling scattered, isolated, marginalised people to God, and building them up into new, inclusive communities, affirming their identities and empowering them.

This means URM understands mission in a wholistic way; it is about people's empowerment, which has spiritual, social, cultural, economic and political dimensions, woven together in one fabric. The weaving thread is solidarity.

URM endeavours to be a **movement**, to keep moving forward and to follow the Mission of God, where His Spirit is active, transforming and empowering. It is work which starts with **people**, from the local, grass-roots situation, as they are and who they are. It considers important that people are **made in God's image** and therefore are to be **subjects** of their own history (and of mission) and are to be treated at all times as subjects, not objects.

In URM we believe too that people **belong in community**. It is the matrix for people to become fully human and nurture the creative powers all people have been given by God.

When URM talks of 'people' it refers specifically to the oppressed, the vulnerable, the people of the grass-roots; In different places in the world the URM may be working with a wide range of different groups, depending on the local contexts and histories.

They include urban and rural poor people; small farmers or landless; indigenous people; unorganised labourers, unemployed or migrant workers; women who organise together; children; racially discriminated and minority groups.... URM aims to build relations of solidarity with them.

At the same time URM aims to encourage and equip the churches in the WCC to see this work as an important part of mission, of the **churches' mission**. This is why theological reflection based on practical realities and on struggles of people, is important in URM; 'Spirituality' is a source of strength and support in URM, and we want to share experience and insights with others in the churches.

2B: Mandate and Self-understanding: 'Mission in solidarity'

The search for inclusive communities constitutes a central mission issue.

Participation in people's struggles for justice and human dignity, against those forces which deny and damage life, belongs to the essence of proclaiming the Gospel as 'Good News to the poor'. Therefore URM sees its mandate as encouraging, assisting and supporting Churches in an understanding and practice of mission; a mission that involves them in solidarity and community.

In practice, URM works to empower communities of marginalised people, through community organising, training of leadership and transformation. The purposes are to become instruments and subjects of God's Mission; to build human communities based on God's justice and righteousness; to collaborate in ultimately reconciling humanity and all of creation, with God's Reign.

URM has grown into a movement that is also a network of committed facilitators, organisers, advocates, and leaders for community building. Today URM sees itself also as a form of 'extended family', forged by this common mission and commitment, bonded by struggle, suffering and faith in God, seeking to live out the calling to participate in the Mission of God.

2C: Europe Regional Objectives

In Europe, this mandate has been translated into the following Objectives:

It can be seen that Mission is involved in all of these objectives.

The Community & Justice Europe program has as its overall, long-term objectives:

- To contribute to the building, throughout Europe, of inclusive, sustainable communities, based on justice and in the perspective of the Reign of God;
- Encouraging more just relations within Europe and between Europe and other regions of the world, contributing especially to just relations with the South.
- Assisting Churches in Europe to show solidarity with victims of global forces which marginalise and oppress diverse groups of people; to develop and strengthen a practice of mission that is wholistic, with spiritual, economic, political and cultural aspects - thus participating in what we understand to be central to God's Mission in Europe.
- Empowering marginalised people and communities to become subjects, of their own history, life and mission. To discover their innate powers (image of God); to create societies founded on economic and social

justice, integrity, and respect for cultural, religious and ethnic differences.

Specific Regional Objectives in Europe

The programmatic objectives are the following five:

- 1) Actively seek to discern the Mission of God in people's struggles for empowerment and justice; in local communities, in the diverse contexts and cultures of Europe today, east, west, north and south.
- 2) Develop and deepen contacts with grassroots people throughout Europe, as URM understands them: the exploited, oppressed, marginalised people; to listen to them, encourage solidarity and support for their empowerment, developing leadership and organising of inclusive communities.
- 3) Encourage and help equip the churches and mission bodies in Europe to know and support people's programs for justice, self-empowerment and building of inclusive communities in all parts of Europe.
Encourage biblical and theological reflection, based on grassroots communities. Enable sharing of resources which foster spirituality in struggles of people for community, life & justice.
- 4) Facilitate programs of training/formation for community organisers and leadership and for church and mission workers, relevant to diverse contexts in Europe. Special emphasis shall be given to such programs which are rooted in the context of East and Central Europe, with appropriate responses to local needs and wishes of people and groups.
- 5) Creating spaces for sharing, reflection and building solidarity among grassroots people, leaders, church and mission workers and those of other faiths who search for a common vision and ways to work together. Emphasis shall be given to building up and widening a Europe-wide Community & Justice/ URM Circle, which shall become a 'table of sharing', diverse and multi-cultural. Participation of women, migrants and minorities and of people from east and central Europe shall be especially encouraged.

2D: Reflections by the urm circle, on mission in Europe today.

Regarding **mission of the churches in Europe today**, the stories and experience shared have confirmed the insight, that a major missiological challenge in Europe is the building of inclusive communities, in the perspective of the Reign of God. The churches, working together with community and people's movements, are important participants in this task.

As those with linkages to communities and movements, we need to explore ways to encourage and assist the churches in Europe in their search for new understanding and practice of mission. Programs aimed at understanding and being in solidarity with groups who are marginalised or oppressed in Europe, need to be developed.

We heard how in former socialist countries, many people see the churches as one of a few bodies they can trust, looking to them to build new community. This is a big responsibility as they seek new methods and resources for this, and they need support and the space to search for the appropriate answers, in ways that are sustainable and based on their own cultures and histories. Thus there is need for churches to develop skills in organising communities and knowledge about how globalisation works and methods to enable resistance to it.

In many **rural communities** the integrity of rural life is at risk and the challenge is to defend and strengthen communities against (global) forces which fragment and exploit. In East and Central Europe, rural poverty is increasing while rural traditions and cultures are under threat from industrial agriculture rapidly taking hold from the west. In western Europe too many family farms are disappearing and rural life is fragmenting, confronted by the global markets in food and agribusiness.

Dangers of factory farming have become more clear recently, with a series of food and ecological crises. For decades, family farmers were marginalised and forced into debts by EU policies and unjustly low food prices.

Small farmers must again become valued participants in economic life and be supported in facing the realities, dealing with all the stresses and making good choices.

In **industrial and urban mission** work, in both east and western Europe, people are confronted by restructuring of industry and damaging inroads of the 'free markets'. In many places workers are threatened by the closure of factories. We heard stories of resistance of workers and of struggles of unemployed people. When combined with the withdrawal of social safety-nets, vulnerable groups become marginalised and suffer effects of social exclusion. Many old urban communities become hollowed out and completely new forms of community have to be built up to replace them, involving new elements, but based on limited outside resources and therefore slow to gain strength. Sometimes churches are one of the few community structures remaining and they seek to gain the skills and method needed to meet the urban challenge. But in a number of countries in Europe, church programs for industrial mission were drastically cut or stopped all together, despite great needs in this area.

In many parts of Europe, **migrants, minorities and asylum seekers**, face a big struggle to find their place, with dignity and with justice. Within new communities which are emerging in many urban contexts, migrants still have to struggle for recognition and acceptance as full members, though they have much of human, spiritual and economic value to contribute and share. We heard of their experiences of struggle against mistrust, racism and prejudice and of how migrants are working together to organise their communities, become empowered and make valuable contributions to Europe.

Encouraging stories of empowerment were shared from African migrants in Europe, which also had many things in common with those shared from the Filipino migrant workers. The women who work as domestic helpers ('Modern heroes, Modern slaves') are victims of globalisation at its most exploitative. Yet

their energies and creativity to organise networks of support in Europe, are a real sign of hope for all.

Dialogue and working on mission with churches and mission groups, is seen

as being part of urban, industrial, rural mission practice in Europe. Centres for Mission in Europe have influence on how the churches see and practice mission and their readiness to discuss it. URM finds it important to be in dialogue, contact and collaboration with them as a way of participating in discussions on mission today.

The purpose is mutual learning and URM, as part of the ecumenical movement, also needs this as a 'reality-check' and a chance to reorient its methods if needed.

The organising of 'people's forums' where church and mission leaders can have a direct encounter with people in struggles for justice, is a means which has had some positive effects; dialogues on mission with missiologists and theologians likewise.

URM wants to facilitate biblical and theological reflection, from the perspectives of marginalised people and those who struggle for community and justice, reflecting the diverse social, political and cultural contexts of Europe. In Europe, where theology is still mainly seen as for experts in universities, this way of practicing theology, which URM has pioneered in other regions, still remains very tentative.

Some steps have been made in this direction and more creativity and patience is required to take this practice of mission further. The results can be a resource for inspiration and empowerment for migrants and their faith communities.

The Mission to Filipino Migrant workers is developing resources of migrant spirituality using the contributions made by their migrant worker groups throughout Europe.

2E: Mission in Europe Today, from perspectives of people in struggle

During a meeting of the Community and Justice Europe Circle, held in a rural area in Hungary in June 2002, a discussion on Mission in Europe took place, aiming to view it from the perspective of people in struggle.

People are confronted by fragmentation and contradictions

We observe fragmentation of societies along class, culture, religion and gender lines.

Marginalised people are torn between forces in contention for control.

In all these areas of contradiction there are winners and losers.

Some of the areas of tension and contradiction affecting people in Europe are:

- Growth of extremism and fundamentalism against democratic forces;
- Globalisation and market domination against people-centred alternatives;

- Enlarging the EU, NATO against preservation of national identity & sovereignty;
- War on terrorism against respect for Civil society & Human Rights;
- Strengthening position rich countries against development of Third world countries;
- Increasing Power of capital against putting people at centre of work and ownership;
- Priorities for Urban vs attention to rural life and communities;
- Agribusiness TNCs against small and family farming;
- Fortress Europe against respect for migrants, refugees seeking asylum;
- Environmental misuse and destruction against respect, preservation and care;

We realize that thinking in contradictions, in 'dialectics', as in this framework, does not do justice to all situations and cannot fully describe realities. This is not meant to be a judgemental framework, but rather was put this way to help clarify different forces which will determine possible futures within Europe and have profound effects.

Concerned about expanding EU power, we affirm also life-sustaining values which underlie the movement to build a peaceful and united Europe, during recent years.

What responses do we see ?

Churches: some show withdrawal from and denial of present realities in Europe. A minority seek solidarity with social movements and grassroots people in struggle.

Some seem to understand Church as a forum or platform, a neutral place for discussing contradictory positions, but not taking sides.

There is also the understanding of the church as a platform, in a positive sense, opening up spaces for talking and sharing together, among faiths and cultures.

Churches can have roles in civil society and communities but are more than NGOs.

Will the European churches become part of the problem or of the solution ?

Peoples Movements: Some show signs of hope, as sparks of resistance and affirmations of life. Some examples are workers movements; anti-globalisation and anti-war, anti-violence movements, which are multi-cultural and broadly based.

Mission best involves both Churches and peoples' movements together and they can creatively collaborate in building communities in urban and rural contexts.

2F: Call to mission in Europe today involves:

- Reaching out to and standing in solidarity with the poor, marginalised, oppressed, announcing and celebrating thereby the Reign of God.
- Giving voices to the voiceless, faces to the faceless (most vulnerable are women, children, undocumented migrants and unemployed);
- Enabling churches to be partners of people in proclaiming the Reign of God in Europe (the liberating aspects of solidarity with the oppressed).

- Encouraging recognition and deepening of Spiritualities in Europe, as life-sustaining, Trinitarian and ecumenical resources for Communities.
- Recognising the good relation of Spiritualities and Cultures and affirming the good spiritual values long present in Eastern Europe.
- Building Inclusive Communities while challenging globalisation.

The Biblical bases for the call to mission is to be found in Matthew 1:38; Luke 4:16-21 and in John 10:10, referring to Life in its fullness, embracing Shalom.

The perspective on mission from the grass-roots communities needs to always be reflected by the participation at our table, of people belonging to these communities

2G: Some challenges and questions for urban rural mission:

-URM understands mission as "Proclamation of Life in Fullness for all People".

-We realize there is continuing fragmentation of human communities and increasing marginalisation and exclusion of whole communities.

-We see many people searching for orientation and for solidarity.

-What are our visions, spiritual roots and real alternatives to globalisation?

-How do we define the relationship between the local and the global in our thinking and acting?

-How do various agents of mission: churches, movements, communities of the poor or of marginalised people, relate to each other, in reality and vision?

-How can we affirm and renew a holistic understanding of mission? How can people be empowered to participate in God's mission?

-In which ways can we connect classic URM approaches such as community organising with those of pastoral care and counselling? How to connect capacity building and political action for justice with healing and celebration?

-How can we develop new social expressions of our faith, new forms of harbouring communities of solidarity and justice ?

-We want to discover and deepen life-sustaining, ecumenical spiritualities.

-We are aiming at creating "places of hope" through the sharing of biblical stories and our own stories.

2H Some statements on mission in Europe from earlier workshops

"Mission today means passing on the accounts of transformation and renewal that we receive from individuals, groups, communities and churches. The point is to exchange spiritual experience and discoveries that will lead to liberation and keep us from relapsing into old habits and resignation".

"A real chance for renewal of the Church in Europe will consist in siding with the poor and marginalised and facing up to the conflicts, reflecting God's life-affirming power".

"URM brings a specific contribution to the struggle and this springs precisely from URM's missionary consciousness. It is a kind of vision and conviction that the course of history is moving towards justice for the poorest of the poor, that they are the ones summoned to transform history and that this is not just a political strategy or tactic, but the will of God himself. This is what gives the strength for resistance, perseverance, endurance". (statements from 'People's Struggles..Unheard Stories').

Chapter 3: Community Organising as Praxis of Mission

Introduction

For most persons gathered here – being people from many countries who are related to Urban Rural Mission (URM) – it will not be surprising to make a link between community organising (CO) and mission.

Yet many people in CO - secular people as well as many liberal church people – would not think or speak of mission in this context. Often mission is perceived as a concept where people are being made objects, where a particular faith is to be brought to them – and this is of course a contradiction to the principles of CO which wants to enable persons to become subjects of their lives. In Europe even many people doing URM-type of work would not use the term mission.

On the other hand there is a growing number of churches in Europe where mission has become a priority on their agendas again. They experience reduction in membership and diminishing influence in society and they also see that there are even church members who know only little about Christian tradition. Therefore new emphasis is being put on Christian education and public information. Often the strengthening of personal faith and the development of more effective strategies and structures are seen as priorities, whereas social life, economic issues and political challenges are regarded as secondary challenges. They may pose an ethical, but not a missionary task.

In this context Urban rural Mission may contribute to an understanding of mission as proclamation of the fullness of life for all. I am convinced that our work of empowering people to give witness to God's promise of community and justice – while it stresses structural changes in society – also means a strengthening of personal faith and of the role of the church.

The mandate of URM is to „support people's struggles for justice and self-empowerment...primarily through local organizing of communities and coalitions of the exploited, marginalized and oppressed... This process is undergirded by

biblical and theological reflection...by the community itself. (The mandate includes to) encourage and support church involvement in people's programmes...(and to) challenge, inform and shape the mission understanding and practise of the institutional church." (Reflections, p. 22-23)

This mandate is described in "URM Reflections '93", a booklet which we should keep referring to and whose insights we should develop further. I shall use some headings from this booklet to structure my deliberations.

1. "The mission of God requires action."

In the ecumenical movement and in political work we have and we need speeches, declarations and documents. What is urgently required however is concrete action in order to make real God's rescuing presence and work. People in pain want to feel that the powers ruling their lives can be opposed and that glimpses of life in fullness can be brought about.

CO is a means of doing the truth and ways of god, not merely talking about it.

(comp. Reflections, p.14) One of the crucial texts from the bible URM is referring to is Luke 4. Jesus says: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people... This word of the scripture has become true today..."

We speak of holistic mission, of the option for the poor, of statements of faith against globalisation – what is urgently required is liberating action.

I do not want to promote blind activism – we do need analysis and reflection as well of course. See, judge, act is the ecumenical model of operating. We need to develop alternative models of social and political and economic life and we need to practise them – yet even with ecumenically and politically committed people sometimes there is a sense of hopelessness: It seems not possible to change our world for the better.

Regarding this situation I want to make three points.

First: I have learnt from the ecumenical theologian Dorothee Sölle that the attitude of a spectator often goes hand in hand with hopelessness and that new visions and hope grow in the course of action. Second: Sometimes when we do act we do this *for* the poor and marginalized – in political campaigns, in advocacy work –, but not *with* them. The concept of CO challenges us to rediscover the poor as subjects of mission. And third: Supporting people's struggles, organising communities involves taking personal risks. An organizer may experience opposition and disadvantages, even exclusion or persecution. The signs of life in fullness are precious and costly.

2. "The mission of God releases creative power."

"People are made in God's image – not to dominate or subjugate, but to enable the gifts of God's likeness to be shared. As such, the enormous potential for creative power is present in all God's people, even the victimized. Enabling the release of this vast potential of creative power is an integral part of the mission of God. URM is called to and actively participates in this work of the Holy Spirit, which enables 'the empowerment of people so that they can be free and responsible human beings, free to struggle for true community against all that dehumanises and fragments.'" (Reflections, p. 15)

CO enables people to discover their potential, their abilities, their power – it makes them rediscover and affirm their dignity. The poor, the marginalized, the excluded see and feel that they are subjects of their lives and subjects of transformation. Empowerment is a key word. CO is part of a concept in which participation of the people is crucial – grassroots' democracy we would call this in German. The people are to be subjects not objects – neither of evangelism nor of a particular political concept.

People are made in God's image. The poor are the agents of mission. What is at stake here is the dignity of persons.

Some years ago we had a URM meeting in Brazil, in a town near Sao Paolo. One afternoon we visited a camp of landless people who had occupied a piece of land. They had cultivated several fields and lived in small huts made of sticks and awnings. I perceived the living conditions as miserable. While it was pouring with rain we met in a shelter in the middle of the camp. There we met some of the members of the group. We introduced each other. One woman said: My name is Maria. I am responsible for the kitchen and for the programme with the young people. I have come here one and a half year ago. Before I lived in Sao Paolo in the streets. Our life here is difficult, but it is good to be here. I am part of a community and I have a contribution to make. We can shape our lives. I hope that the court will accept our claim to this piece of land. It will be a long struggle and we do not know if we shall succeed. What is most important to me however is that here I have discovered that I am a person with dignity.

In this encounter with Maria I have come to understand that dignity is the other key word in CO and in mission.

3. "The mission of God enables a common peoplehood of God"

"The agents of God's activity are many...URM works with people of other faiths and ideologies who share a clear vision (hope) of the coming reign of justice, the same conviction of the inevitability of the victory of life, and the same willingness to bear the suffering to bring that reign into being.' This inclusiveness is based on the conviction that God is present in all communities and cultures, both to enlighten and to judge. 'The Holy Spirit is sent to renew all... communities...so that people may be empowered to build just and caring communities.'" (Reflections, p.15-16)

In many places all over the world Christians and non-Christians work together in CO and in political movements. In URM Christians and Muslims and people of other faiths including indigenous religious traditions and various religious movements work together as well as faith based persons and secular persons. Inter-religious cooperation has become more and more important in CO. Friends from Asia are saying: We encounter one another in struggle and celebration, we see our plurality as a gift, we cooperate in mutual respect and mutual learning. In Europe the cooperation between Christians and people of other faiths is still quite rare when it comes to work for community and justice – dialogue is up to now more a dialogue of faith than a dialogue of life and of struggle. I feel we should further develop this field and at the same time carry on our co-operation with secular people. Yet it will not be easy to connect the two as the attitudes towards religion on both "sides" may be rather contradictory.

4. "The mission of God inspires a spirituality rooted in struggle."

"...the Spirit of God wills a new creation...which requires a personal, communal and social commitment. As individuals we make our commitment to a struggle in and for community, in the hope that, together with God's Spirit, we are enabling the renewal of a society which will be ordered fairly and justly. 'In the URM experience, spirituality finds expression and enrichment through encountering the Spirit of God in other people, through the courage and resilience of people in struggle; through their capacity for celebration and life in the context of the cross of suffering.' We have been deeply moved by the stories and experiences of struggle in community, and in humility we recognize the value of beauty in worship, meditation, and evangelical explication/interpretation of the Word." (Reflections, p. 16-17)

The interconnectedness of spirituality and struggle is not new to URM nor to the ecumenical movement as a whole. Yet we can see a new emphasis on spirituality in the work of CO and empowerment – and there is indeed a great need for this.

The neo-liberal ideology and practise that is dominating our lives and our societies is very much a spiritual challenge. It says: There is no alternative to the free market model.

And many people say: We cannot do anything about this. They feel overwhelmed and powerless. Where people overcome this attitude, where they get together to share their experiences and aspirations, where they start analysing the situation, where they develop alternative visions and models, where they act together for justice and community – there the Spirit of God is at work. Where people see the world in the perspective of the reign of God and where they are empowered to contribute to developing signs or glimpses of life in fullness and where they celebrate life – this is where spirituality is lived out.

In recent years in URM new emphasis has been put on healing and celebration. Story telling concepts like the one from Canada that we practised last night understand mission as accompaniment. The story telling aims at building community and restoring energy and hope. Where I have been able to tell my story and where I am listened to by a circle of people healing my take place. People in struggle, and organisers in particular, need such spaces. Many of us work beyond our limits, experience failure, frustration, defeat. There is the temptation to escape from the struggle and lead an easier life or to exercise power and try to own a movement.

People in struggle need healing and renewal. Creating such "spaces of hope", new social expressions of faith, where we share the biblical stories or stories from other faith traditions as well as our own stories is one of the crucial contributions that URM makes towards the struggle for life in fullness. At the URM consultation in Accra in May a friend from Asia said: "Mission is the celebration of life in fullness." And in fact along with training and organizing, music, dance, celebration, pastoral care for one another are gaining ground in URM work in many places. We have come to see that it is important to develop visions and alternatives to the ideology and system of neo-liberal globalisation - and that we have to practise living them!

People in CO are on a spiritual journey. African-American women have compiled a book with their stories and they have given it the title: "We are the ones we have been waiting for." Up to now I have talked about the challenges, the meaning and ways of spiritual life or spiritual empowerment. Now I want to turn to the values that can give us orientation and help us discern the spirits.

Last year Dr. Konrad Raiser presented a paper on "Spirituality of Resistance". This was in preparation for an encounter between representatives of WCC and of World Bank and IMF. In this paper he quotes the ecumenical teacher M.M. Thomas who spoke of "spirituality of combat". By this he pointed to the fact that the struggles for justice and human dignity have a spiritual dimension of their own. The struggle for justice very often is a struggle about true and false spirituality, about true and false worship or about serving God or an idol. M.M. Thomas added: "Let us not forget that the struggle is not merely against others but also against ourselves, not against flesh and blood, but against the false spiritualities of the idolatry of race, nation and class and of the self-righteousness of ideals which reinforce collective structures of inhumanity and oppression."

Konrad Raiser underlines the fact that spirituality and resistance go together in the Bible and today as the energy for life in all its fullness implies the commitment to resist all forces, powers and systems which reduce, deny or destroy life. He develops signposts for a spirituality of resistance in reminding us of the Ten Affirmations on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation from the World Convocation in Seoul 1990. I think this is a very helpful proposal for us in CO and URM as well. These affirmations are a clear witness to an alternative system of values and they offer specific criteria for the process of spiritual discernment. In his paper Dr. Raiser speaks of spirituality of resistance and refers to the parts of the affirmations which are saying: We resist... This was in the context of a meeting with representatives of the big international financial institutions. In the context of CO and empowerment I would like to suggest to speak of a spirituality of struggle, which includes affirmation, resistance and commitment. We need all three dimensions. And the Ten Affirmations from Seoul have exactly these three dimensions. I read one example: Affirmation I: We affirm that all exercise of power is accountable to God "We affirm that all forms of human power and authority are subject to God and accountable to people. This means the right of people to full participation...We resist the exercise of authority that monopolizes power and prohibits transformation...We commit ourselves to support the creative power of grass-roots- movements which struggle for human dignity and liberation and which aim at a just and participatory system of governance and economy."

The following nine affirmations say:

We commit ourselves to support those organisations or efforts which work for the abolishment of exploitation and oppression.

We commit ourselves to work against racism, ethnic discrimination and the cast system.

We commit ourselves to create a new community of women and men.

We commit ourselves to create opportunities for the marginalized to develop their capacities and to speak out.

We commit ourselves to overcome war and solve conflicts through active non-violence, at the same time we ask our governments to create an international order of law that serves peace. We commit ourselves to preserve creation.

We commit ourselves to be in solidarity with indigenous people as well as with landless people and poor peasants who work for a land reform.

We commit ourselves to support young people in their aspirations and commitments. We commit ourselves to be in solidarity with organisations and movements which work for the protection of individual and collective human rights.

These affirmations may function as signposts for our spirituality of struggle. They may guide us in our efforts to counter the spiritual challenge of neo-liberal globalisation.

Some conclusions

Finally I would like to underline some characteristics of community organising as praxis of mission:

- We live and work from the hope that God will give life in fullness for all people.
- It is important in our work to discuss and live alternatives. The struggle for community and justice is a political, ideological and spiritual struggle.
- Liberating action is required.
- Dignity and empowerment are key words. The poor and the marginalized are to be subjects of their lives.
- Training in CO is needed – in movements as well as in churches.
- We remind ourselves and our churches that we are called to do mission in the perspective of the reign of God.
- We try to create spaces of hope – new social expressions of faith.
- We recognize the importance of the personal factor:
The aspirations and the participation of people are crucial.
Personal transformation together with structural transformation is needed
- We commit ourselves to further explore and develop the ways and values of a spirituality of struggle.

Rev. Ulrike Schmidt-Hesse

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Sources:

Urban Rural Mission. Reflections 93, World Council of Churches, Geneva 1994

Konrad Raiser, Spirituality of Resistance, Paper presented at the WCC Internal Encounter of Churches, Agencies and Other Partners on the world Bank and IMF, Geneva, 2003 (see: www.wcc-coe.org)

Die Zeit ist da. Schlussdokument and andere Texte. Weltversammlung für Gerechtigkeit, Frieden und die Bewahrung der Schöpfung. Seoul 1990, ÖRK, Genf 1990

CHAPTER 4: Reports, Notes, Reflections on Visits to Mission Programs

4A Telling Stories – Building Community – Fostering Justice: The workshop on “Story Telling”

By Ulrike Schmidt-Hesse, Moderator Europe Circle, Community & Justice/URM

In June 2003, we had arranged a workshop in the Centre for Ecumenical Work, where delegates from Urban Rural Mission (URM) in Canada presented their concept of "Story Telling" and tested it together with the participants. The workshop was organized in cooperation with the URM Europe Group and sponsored by the WCC. Participants came from EKHN as well as from URM in Europe and the Middle East.

Storytelling is a characteristic of Urban Rural Mission – a mission for community and justice. Groups that work for better conditions at work and in life, for human rights, for justice – thus promoting self-organisation of poor and marginalized people – share stories about their commitment. URM practices a mission of accompaniment where people – particularly those "who have no voice" – can talk about what moves them, and can make the experience of being heard. First of all, this happens within a URM Group itself. Besides that, URM also fulfils the task of collecting and transmitting stories to enable support in churches and in the public for groups and issues that have remained unnoticed so far. The mission of listening then turns into a mission of publication. Sharing the stories helps to keep alive the movement for "life in fullness for all".

The Regional Group of URM in Canada has developed a special concept of storytelling that is influenced by traditions from the First Nations. In the sharing of stories in a so-called Story Circle, the participants from various social and cultural backgrounds get to know the others' respective situation of life and work, they develop interest and respect for one another, and a common basis for cooperation is being created.

One participant says: "The story circle creates community because it anchors us mutually in our life histories. It is a way of sharing with others the challenges, the obstacles and the successes in our commitment. Storytelling can become a process of healing, and it helps to communicate something to others, to teach them something." (1)

As a member of the Urban Rural Mission Global Working Group of WCC, I have repeatedly heard talking about the story circle of the Canadian group, and this brought me to the conviction that this approach could also be helpful for us in Europe. This is true in various respects: On the one hand, we need new social forms of expressing our faith, new forms of community. On the other hand it is very important for many people engaged in ecumenical, diaconal and socio-political activities, to have a space where they can share their experiences and draw hope. We need approaches adapted to our intercultural situation – That estimate the individuals and assist the evolution of their forces, their empowerment. In our workshop, the Canadian concept was practised for the first time in a different context.

Before beginning the story telling, there is a spiritual ceremony to open a special room. It is important here that the group finds a form suitable for itself. We have celebrated a Christian meditation where each participant laid an object in the centre, as a symbol for a commitment being important for this person.

After opening the circle, story telling begins. The moderator passes a feather or any other object to her neighbour, and the participants pass it along until one person begins to tell the own story. There is no time limit for the single stories, neither are there any comments or questions. No discussion of problems takes place. The group simply listens, offering comfort and assistance if this is needed. There is also no obligation to tell a story. Any woman or man may pass the feather. Everybody can speak as long as s/he wants.

Participants in our workshop were persons active in very different church and social contexts. We heard stories from political work in an urban district; from the vital illness of the life-partner; of inter-religious reconciliation work; about the death of a man whom nobody knows or wants to know because he had no legal residence status; of a professional crisis and a new beginning, and many other stories.

It was strange to listen for a long time silent. It was also unusual to be able to talk without a time pressure and without having to observe questions. Rather, one could totally concentrate on what was important for oneself. Many things happened in this sharing of stories: What we heard, stroke some strings in us – in listening attentively the varying stories intertwined. And it was powerful: It is a strong, empowering experience to be heard.

In such a way community is really built-up. Of course there are also stories constituting a hard test for one's patience, as the content or the way of telling are uneasy, or because you get the feeling that this story is now told in order to achieve a certain purpose in the group. It may also happen that experiences are being voiced which would require a treatment in a different context. Particularly in view of such limits of the story circle, it is important to have a good well-experienced moderator.

After all those present who wished to speak have done this, the theological reflector will initiate a conversation where the group shall consider the stories and their common themes in the light of their spiritual and theological meaning. After that, the story circle is ritually closed.

The participants in our workshop mentioned the following possibilities of applying this method in their own contexts:

Talks in a new church council; inter-religious meeting groups; encounters of German and foreigners' congregations; social and political working groups in the church or the district.

We have also in our workshop tried out the model of the Community Forum. URM Canada regularly organizes public meetings where a subject of public dispute is being treated by the method of story telling, for instance land titles or racism. The aim is here to get a public hearing for contrary positions, so that the respective other view is really being registered. One should develop respect instead of immediately entering into an exchange of strikes, and refute the other position or justify oneself.

This concept of story telling wants to promote Community Development. The aims and the fields of practical application can be varied:

Activists support each other, make publicly known some experiences and interests so far neglected, promote political action.

A community develops new forms of living together.

The cooperation within a group is improved.

Opposing interests in society enter into a real dialogue.

The experiences made during the workshop and in its evaluation show that it is promising to test this form of a "mission of accompaniment" within our context, and to develop it furthermore.

(1) Video (30 min.) and brochure: "This is our story and we live by telling it".
Storytelling as community development: URM Canada's Story Circle, Victoria 2002, 58 pages.

4B: visit to Glasgow region; Industrial and Urban Mission Work

The two visitors arrived in mist and rain with a very cool summer temperature. We were taken directly to visit a nuclear power station far along the river in a remote stretch of riverside, surrounded by sheep grazing peacefully. For those who never have seen a power station of this enormity, this was a powerful experience.

Rev Alister Goss, Industrial Mission worker for many years in this region, has built up very trustworthy relations with the workers, Union representatives and staff here at this plant. This allows him to enter the plant and to bring his visitors, led by a shop-steward, to the workshops and generating areas of the plant.

There are three gigantic towers where reactors are housed, but only one, the largest most recently built, is functioning for power generation. The others are closed and waiting to be de-commissioned, a process which will take years and is dangerous and

expensive. Nuclear power is proving much too expensive since the European energy market has been made free. The huge state investment will never be recovered. This means the future of this station is very uncertain and decisions are made far away, the local staff having a low level of participation in any decisions affecting them.

Options for positive growth which is good for the staff are very limited and this has a negative, dampening influence on the whole working environment. Combined with this is the effect of years of drastic cutting of jobs and pushing productivity to the limits, so that workers doubt if safety margins are sufficient, making the dangers of working greater than they have been before. Stress is a common complaint here.

In this context, Alister Goss has put a lot of effort into building relations which express solidarity with the workers in this difficult context, having to accept the realities while still putting the workers rights and values in the centre.

It was clear from listening to the workers, how important the Industrial Mission presence has been and will be in future. Being able to face and deal with stress has been just one good outcome of the program which has put the workers needs first.

Another initiative of the workers, supported and made possible by Ind. Mission, was the solidarity and practical help which the Scottish plant gave to the workers and people of Chernobyl, Ukraine, who suffered so terribly after the nuclear accident.

Through IM, workers, local Churches and communities in Scotland and in Ukraine, contacts of solidarity were built in the years after the accident, which still carry on.

As we passed through layer after layer of tight security, we could feel a little of the stress and constriction of movement which is the daily working context of the staff.

Later in the trip, we passed another enormous nuclear installation, again set in the midst of a curve of a deep inlet of very great beauty, this a nuclear submarine base.

This region of great workers' and engineers' traditions (the steam engine was invented here), has been through many waves of restructuring and loss of jobs. To keep even a little of what they once had, the region has been forced to accept these big investments of the military-industrial and nuclear sectors with their tensions.

We began the next day early with a ferry ride from which we could see the big extent of the industrial sectors along the Clyde and could see too, how many shipyards had closed. These ferries were also in the area of responsibility of Alister in Ind'l Mission.

The next visit was the last remaining large ship-yard in the region where a wide range of ships for the Navy and for commercial use can be constructed. The yard and its workers have been through very difficult times and have had a number of owners and a series of deep restructurings, ending now in the hands of BEA, the huge defence contractor. It was very impressive to be led around by a group of shop stewards and to appreciate the great and diverse skills which are present in the work force of this shipyard. The workers now have achieved a good degree of participation in the whole process of building the ships and it seems that the future is assured for a good number of years, though at the cost of being dependent on defence orders.

The workers and stewards were open about the huge difficulties they had been through, the years of struggle to keep the yard going and the workers together and the need for the whole community to be organised to support these struggles.

They also made it clear how strong the solidarity and support had been from Alister from Industrial Mission during the long and sometimes disheartening process.

This was a strong example of mission work which builds on long, patient pastoral work, with being present on a long-term commitment with and for the workers and taking a position with them in action and organising for economic and social justice.

Though the work takes place inside the yard, it has so many lines of contact out into the community, that it also makes a contribution to community-building. During the long process, the Ind. Mission also used its links to the Scottish Churches, political parties, community bodies and press, to explain the justice of the workers' demands.

Some of the fruits which grew out of the process of solidarity so painstakingly encouraged could be seen. We met workers confident in the value of their unity and able to participate much more in many areas in the shipyard. Also they had created their own structures of support, including a successful credit-union, which give them more skills and are factors of empowerment. Through all this the presence and support of Alister and Ind. Mission can be seen as a significant positive contribution.

Industrial Mission in Scotland has built up a real, worthwhile work of mission as solidarity which goes deep and has its links cast widely across Scottish working life.

It has close links with the Churches and spends a lot of time maintaining them, though the Churches often cannot follow them into difficult issues and are please to let Ind. Mission 'carry on' to do the difficult bits on their behalf, whereas Ind. Mission wants to see the whole church come around to understanding its mission in this way.

In recent years church funds for Ind. Mission have been greatly cut (from 13 to 4 full time Ind. mission staff). Wisely, some years back the Ind. Mission created the separate Scottish Ind. Mission Trust, to build up resources just for the purpose of starting and supporting new grass-roots work. This has proved to be a good plan as now, while things are difficult, they can manage to go on and still allow new responses to social and economic issues in Scotland, to take shape and gain a foothold.

One such interesting new response in which Ind. Mission has been instrumental in creating, along with others, is the Unity Enterprise, which we next were able to visit.

Unity Enterprise is an inter-church initiative addressing issues of social, economic and cultural exclusion by providing training, work experience, guidance and support, personal development, education, community support for young people and adults experiencing disabilities and/or social disadvantages.

The value statement of the group says: 'It is committed to promoting the ability of people for full cultural, social and economic inclusion within their community'. After a number of difficult years and false starts, this locally-based ecumenical organisation has now created some successful enterprises which empower those who find work in them, make a real contribution to the community and return income which is reinvested for growth and for new initiatives. We visited a

travel agency and small restaurant and a training centre for administration. Each year 500 excluded people are able to access and benefit from these services, getting training, personal development and work experience. They can tell many stories of empowerment.

This is an good example of an inclusive alternative to the market and its exclusion.

Glasgow Airport, from which we departed after these very encouraging examples of practical mission based on solidarity, houses another project of Unity Enterprise. It also has another small base of Ind. Mission and Alister Goss, who serves its workers on a part-time basis and extends there even further the creative and facilitating touch of Industrial Mission in this industrial, historic heartland of Scotland.

4C: visit to Rural Mission work near Kaiserslautern, Pfalz region of Germany

This region is a very beautiful part of Europe, with well organised farms, picturesque villages, forests and nearer to the French border, vineyards as far as an eye can see.

The visitors were surprised to learn that all is not so good in the reality of the life of farmers as it would superficially seem. We first visited the office of Rev Rudi Job, who has many years of experience working with family farmers and with the issues of rural life in all its complex aspects, in his church in the Pfalz region between the Rhine River and the french border, an area full of history and of suffering caused by the many wars and conflicts which moved back and forth in this border area.

The family farms have been under a number of pressures for quite some time. One of them is the need to fight for income and economic survival in the market-place, one which is more and more exposed to globalisation. The farmer is forced to be an entrepreneur. To take onto himself and onto his family, more and more risk. Risks of the prices, of market uncertainty and risks of huge debts. The form of industrialisation which takes hold in rural Europe forces farmers to mechanise, to borrow and to increase in size and production. This puts immense stresses on the farmer and his family. Some manage these stresses quite well, but many undergo crises and too many are unable to solve the tensions by themselves.

There are therefore those who win and those who lose out in the process of globalisation of markets and those who struggle to hold on, to grasp and to adjust to reality.

It is within this context and among the difficulties faced by rural communities that the Rural Mission work of Rev Rudi Job has been developed over the years. We saw how closely Rudi Job is in regular and personal contact with farmers and their families. This is a detailed and time-consuming work spread over a big area and it combines building pastoral relationships, accompanying families

through painful problems and crises on the farm, or helping them to face realities and hard choices.

It results in deep relations of solidarity with rural people and their communities, something which is of great value and which is a clear example of creative mission.

It has helped Rudi to understand the life of small farmers that he comes from a farming family. It is not easy to win the trust of farmers anywhere and no less in Germany, but Rudi and his colleagues have put a lifetime of effort and care into achieving their trust and the fruits are visible. It is a form of mission which churches in Europe have not given much attention to, unfortunately. Maybe this is because the farming population has fallen to less than two percent and though the church is important to rural people, they have a small voice in it. Yet rural life and agriculture remains essential to the life of all society and it will be a disaster for all of us if rural life and the quality of food deteriorate. Also farmers are the ones who care for nature and help maintain the balance of life. Yet urban values and politics have often made farmers feel devalued and redundant. Rudi Job has been involved in programs to establish a just and understanding relation between rural and urban people, and the church can play an important role here.

Rural mission, we saw, is also about resisting in many practical ways, the breakdown of rural community life and the fabric which holds rural communities together. This is delicate and difficult work and it requires understanding which changes cannot be resisted and where real alternatives to the breakdown can be developed.

We heard how a farmers crisis phone had been started to offer pastoral advice and a listening ear to families struggling to deal with economic, relationships or other problems, run by protestant and catholic people, giving follow-up practical support.

We slept at a farm where we heard from the farmer how they had faced the difficult choices and in this process, had found alternatives to supplement their crops and cows, in this case a quality rural restaurant and small apartments for farm holidays.

We also heard about Rudi Job's work in rural mission in building networks of rural linkages from this area into Eastern and Central European rural villages, so solidarity and support can be given and received. This has also resulted in Rudi's work in building up a European network of rural mission workers, to learn and exchange with one another, to study and face up to problems of rural life throughout Europe and to combine efforts ecumenically in helping churches show support for farmers and take a stand on issues of justice, and to defend the quality of life and rural communities.

This is a natural extension of and inseparable from Rudi's local work of pastoral care, solidarity and practical advice and accompaniment, with the farmers in his own area.

4D: Notes and Reflection on the URM Team visit to Germany

by C.T. Taguba

Below are my notes and reflection (from my written and mental notes) on the team visit to Germany for consultations toward the writing of a URM-Europe paper on Mission. The Guide Questions were not strictly followed, nor did we have an opportunity to unite on our conclusions.

I. Situation/context: Agricultural Sector

1. While there are small independent farmers successfully shifting to other entrepreneur activities, it is assumed that many cannot and are therefore in the poverty level. (Good to have data on the ratio of success stories and failures; growth of agriTNCs).

2. The breakdown of traditional agricultural communities is bound to happen. The issue is its speed and scope. This is due to external and internal pressures. There will be pockets of state subsidized agric. communities for touristic purposes or residential of rich urban people.

3. Forward-looking alternatives (not retrogressive) should be worked out further.

- planned industrial-commercial-agricultural growth that is complementary
- others

4. While German/European farmers rightfully demand state subsidies and protection, its impact on 3rd world farmers should be in the agenda. Together, farmers in the north and south can work towards an alternative global system of agricultural production, distribution, etc. This means questioning the TANA (there are no alternatives) to TATA (there are thousands of alternatives). This questioning and denouncing mode has a prophetic aspect.

5. Contradictions confronting small farmers

- production cost vs. pricing system

- supply vs. demand

- organic vs. inorganic farming

- labor intensive vs. mechanized farming

- competition vs. solidarity (farmers in East Europe, 3rd world)

- agricultural vs. industrial & global family/community values

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6. Farmers are organizing themselves. On the global level, there is the Via Campesina. There are networks on issues on the national, regional and global levels.

(what is the role of the church in sustaining these networks at the same time respecting their character/integrity?)

7. The church's involvement in the agricultural sector ranges from agricultural or farming chaplaincy, exposure program of seminary students to the farming community, lobbying (national/EU), etc.

8. It will be beneficial to study the values inherent/growing out of small, independent farmers as expressed in their theology, politics and community life.

II. Situation/Context: Migrant Populace

1. It looks like the migrant community is the most marginalized in the whole of German society. With state cuts in social funds, their social situation can get worst.
2. Migrants are organizing themselves for empowerment (e.g African Women and its healthy/medical project; ADE, Europewide Festivals, skills training, mutual help, etc).
3. Projects/programs to uphold and advance migrant rights and welfare unites, cutting across tribal-ethnic, regional, religious lines. Common situation and common needs bring together people caught up in conflicts (e.g. Eritrea-Ethiopia, Sudan, etc).
4. Migrants combine the traditional healing and modern medical practice. There are however, sham and exploitative traditional healers among them.
5. In Germany and other European countries, there is the invisible migrants, the undocumented who are most vulnerable and are living in the margins of society.
6. There is a need to further combine direct service to migrants and their families and awareness building on the systemic/structural roots of forced out migration.
7. To avail of the resources of society and the government, migrants should know the language, how the system operates and skills to avail of the resources.

(The following notes come from Cesar and Ulrike):

8. The church's involvement in upholding migrant rights and welfare:
 - providing resources (funds, physical space, moral and institutional support)
 - Frankfurt Airport Project, which provides direct service for refugees and which mobilizes the community for understanding and support
 - Counselling Centers
 - Department for Intercultural Life Together (awareness building, advocacy, support services)
 - Recognition of migrant initiatives and organizations
 - Research and documentation

III. Conversation with people in Church and Church-related institutions

1. German society is in the danger of falling apart. The church document on "Wealth and Poverty" points out that there is a growing gap between the rich and the poor. Wealth is being concentrated in the hands of the private sector at the expense of the public sector. There is a continuing process of retrenchment, marginalization and uncertainty. Unless the situation is reversed, there can be outburst of social unrest.

URM-related persons initiated a church program which aims at promoting social justice and limiting social inequality.

2. Meanwhile, the churches are experiencing financial difficulties and are challenged to resolve them according to the criteria of justice and solidarity. All programs have been reduced. At present a discussion on priorities is taking place. Who determines the priorities? Is the process democratic and participatory? On the whole, the church is still not poor.

There are local churches that are committed to URM perspectives, yet others are in very difficult situations and feel not able to open up to political commitments – others do not want to. In some places the church members themselves are needy and weak.

3. There are contradictions and conflict situation in society. Under its “healing and reconciling” role, the church is too often in danger of applying plaster over these conflicts. Yet it must not forget that reconciliation needs justice and truth. In clearly exploitative and repressive situation, one must have to take a stand, to have a preferential option for the poor, deprived and the oppressed. We may also have to reconsider our attitude towards conflicts/contradictions, which often in church contexts are seen as negative.

4. Need to have a comprehensive and thorough assessment/evaluation of the work of URM in Europe from the perspective of mission:

- many lessons have been learned in the churches and in mission agencies which have an impact on the shaping of the vision/mission
- URM's financial crisis and the issue of a church that is wealthy but dependent on economic and political developments (e.g. tax system, unemployment)
- many progressive Christians are working in secular organizations and often they have an important role in them (movements, trade unions, initiatives, political parties, campaigns). Younger people feel that there is a need to make clearer what the motivation for this commitment is: Give witness to the hope that moves us!

5. URM related persons work in the churches trying to give space to the voices of the people, their aspirations and suffering, thru: encounters with people who have been made poor or live on the margins, seminars, information, songs, liturgy, poetry, etc. as well as empowering the people, supporting them and their struggles.

In terms of the church as an institution, the image of small tug boats (URM and others) pulling the big ships/steamer (institution) to the open sea to a journey of discovery.

6. Mission is defined by the following key words/concepts

- empowerment, capacity building
- solidarity
- making available the resources of the church/faith to the people, especially the poor
- compassion
- accompanying people
- church/community as a place for sanctuary

-creating space for people in conflict, those needing healing and reconciliation; for those struggling for justice and peace
-in the political arena, call on the government to be the government and for officials to be responsible, which means: Politics has to steer society, not economy.

(note: there is the tendency for key words/concepts to be co-opted by the dominant forces)

7. Models of mission work

- Frankfurt Airport Work (combines various concerns, unites various communities: refugee services, chaplaincy, engagement in political issues)
- Initiative such as agisra or FiM (Work with Prostituted and other Women)
- Work with the Migrant Community
 - reading the Bible together
 - presence of more than 100 different migrant congregations in Frankfurt
 - see also II.8.
- Groups working on globalization and its impact (ATTAC)
 - issue of articulating the faith in a secular movement

8. Diakonia and Mission: URM related persons in diakonia work are aiming at connecting charity and work for justice, caring and empowerment.

9. Methodology: danger of the "burning issues" being in the hands of "experts"/special services to the relief or exclusion of the local churches. On the other hand, experts especially in community organizing are needed and can offer their skills to the local churches.

There is also the danger that people prefer to work with support institutions and advocacy programs, not directly with the poor.

Story-telling for empowerment and community building as devised by Canada URM is to be promoted by URM-Europe.

IV. URM financial crisis: Inevitably, this critical issue came out during the consultations.

Questions and issues were raised. Deep concern about its reason(s) and consequences was expressed. Immediate and long term solutions were proposed.

It will be helpful for URM to make a report on the financial crisis: rationale of the budgetary cuts; consequences; process of decision-making vis-a-vis principle of participation, transparency, etc. . Other pertinent issues can be clarified followed by a critical judgment .

The paper on the financial crisis, together with the comprehensive evaluation of URM-Europe work will be of great value as we plan for the future.

4E: Response to Questions on Mission from perspective of migrant ministry

by C.T. Taguba, Mission to Migrant Filipinos in Europe, written for URM Circle-Europe

1. Fragmentation, Marginalization and Exclusion –

A. This is inherent in a globalized monopoly capitalist system where the drive for profit fragments families, societies and nation-states; marginalize and exclude people, or treat them as commodities—mere instruments for profit. Migrants are pitted against the people of the labor-receiving countries. Among migrant communities fragmentation exist along religious, tribal, regional, class/social status lines.

B. The worst is still to come: more retrenchment; phenomenon of “jobless growth”, underemployment; cut in the social fund; rise of fascist/rightist groups; in the countries of the third world—massive poverty, increase in the gap between the rich and the poor; environmental destruction and armed conflicts among ethnic groups and the state and the people. All these will increase internal and external forced out migration.

C. On the other hand, there are sparks of hope rooted in the peoples’ struggles; a vision of a just society and the rallying call of “another world is possible”..

2. People in search of orientation and for solidarity: the dominant theme of migrants and refugees is escape from a de-humanizing situation of poverty and threat to life in their country of birth. On the other hand, while in Europe, they are

more often are victims of discrimination and inequality. They need solidarity to uphold their dignity and human rights.

On the other hand, there are groups/movements that are actively popularizing their politics and vision of society (from the fascist/rightist to the left; politics of negation, etc).

3. Migrant Vision: a caring society where people and their families are not forced to leave their roots due to the demand for survival; a society where people can develop their creativity and productivity in building a just and progressive society.

4. Relationship between local and global thinking: this is mutually inclusive; the global (systemic/structural) provides the context of local struggles. A migrant who attended a study session on globalization said “now,

I know the historical and social context of my situation. I also know my role in changing the unjust system”.

5. Relationship of churches, movements, etc: it is necessary, advisable and possible to establish a thread that runs through the churches and movements: that of affirming the sanctity and dignity of life and the need for solidarity. As a Marxist activists said, “we can unite with Christians on commandment no. 2.”

However, history shows that too often, Christians/churches are good in launching church-oriented movement to preserve its interest and to counter secular movements. In the Philippines the church organized farmers and workers unions to counter the peasant uprisings against a feudal system and the worker’s political struggle.

It would be good to study the issue of the relationship of the church and the people’s movement in Europe, where you find Christian political parties, trade unions, newspapers, etc.

6. URM understanding of mission: Proclaiming the Reign of God: Denouncing the forces of death, announcing the abundance of life-blessings for all people.”
A. How can Europe be a curse or blessing to the people of the 3rd world? Role of the URM to denounce the “curse” aspect and to strengthen the “blessing” aspect.

7. Connection between CO and pastoral care, capacity building and action for justice, etc. CO is an important component of community building. An organized community can have as a part of its program group counseling. Within the group, individuals can find strength, comfort and will have a arena to exercise his/her full creativity and initiative. He bonding developed thru struggle for justice is an antidote to individualism.
- there is an interplay of personal, inter-personal and social sins
- “in the personal is the political, in the political is the personal” dialectics

8. New social expressions of our faith, etc: The image of Yahweh leading His people to the land of promise by being a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night make us have a mindset of openness to new discoveries and a condition of continuously being motion as against dogmatism and insensitivity to the workings of the Holy Spirit.

9. URM identity:

A. Through the years, what was the identity of the URM in the church and in society? What aspect(s) of that identity is relevant for our situation? What new identity is shaping up? How would we define our identity?

B. What is the cost/price to pay for being faithful to our URM vision/mission?

C. What is the impact of our social standing on our theology, world outlook and methodology?

At any given time in history, there is a group/community that locates itself in the “cutting edges of history” to make breakthroughs, carrying the forward line and pioneering in new ways of thinking and methodology. Can URM Europe play this role?

10. Unresolved issue: there is a consensus among URM people that the western led-globalization destroys life. However, in the absence of a well-thought-out alternative on the systemic/structural level, we end up wallowing in reformism, co-optation by the system we denounce or retreat into a mythical past. At worst, it can led to theological and political paralysis and hopelessness. URM's claims of grassroot rootedness can be the basis to initiate serious study/reflection on a viable alternative social system.

This can be URM's unique contribution in shaping the people's and church agenda in this era of extensive and intensive globalization.

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4F: Visit to CBWCP & ADE and Rev Garnet Parris, Birmingham, UK
(Centre for Black and White Christian Partnership); ADE (African Diaspora in Europe)

Worship Experience - the Cherubim and Seraphim Pentecostal Church

Garnet didn't really forewarn me about what I was going to experience. Shoes removed at the door and shown into a vestry where Garnet was to dress in white robes along with the worship leader. To my amazement, the whole congregation- seven in number - were robed. Men sat on the left and women on the right. The service started with singing to drum music - in fact all the hymns were accompanied by the drums.

The order of service was a strange conflation of liturgies; although it seemed haphazard it was actually highly structured. The church was the first indigenous church founded in Nigeria and it obviously served the Nigerian community in Birmingham and anyone else who wanted to come along. It was a perfect example of and African Diaspora church. Garnet had in fact recruited students from the congregation - helping them broaden out theologically, and experience contact with other denominations in Birmingham.

How do you work with people and communities?

Working with faith communities and empowering is done through theological education. Education is not a means in itself but can lead people into a variety of avenues. The University has given Garnet responsibility to work with, and take responsibility for students who do not have entrance qualifications therefore extending the bounds of further study. Students who attain a qualification gain standing in the community which empowers the students who then wish to share their new found knowledge with others. Many students have progressed from the diploma course to a Masters course covering a variety of issues e.g. A student who was already qualified as a maths and English teacher who now wants to work in Ghana for very little money. This was not an expectation of the course. Students are developing mission skills and a rounded sense of community. Students cover working with asylum seekers and social work, take part in a mentoring system and are involved in a multitude of other areas of work.

Reconciliation

The students undertake a specific module about understanding, encounter and reconciliation. An extensive programme of visits is arranged to a variety of denominations and Black churches. These visits include a period of discussion at the close of worship. The sessions are very open and informative - again broadening out the students' view of community and church.

Has it been possible to build relations of solidarity?

Much work has been undertaken to help young people understand Black culture and give an understanding of African culture and history. Work is undertaken especially with the disadvantaged - education etc. Work is done with homeless youngsters at street level and also with the young unemployed and dispossessed. Connections are made between African churches and the African Diaspora.

Culture and Classes

Black and white students study together and work well together. Students are challenged by the experiences of differing class, academic skill levels, wealth differences - but the students tend to co-exist together. Storytelling has always been a major part of Black culture. The tradition has always had its oral tradition but it has never been formalised.

God's Mission

There are very strong links and working relationships with ADE in Frankfurt. ADE has connections with eight European churches - this is a good URM direct linking. The relationships at ADE are very inclusive, where Africans can become part of the Diaspora, e.g. a key member is a Moroccan who is not black. Communities are built with justice, bringing people together who would not normally meet or co-operate.

God's Mission and proclamation of life.

A great festival Sunday, called Frankfurt Racial Justice Sunday, afford a space and a special service of the coming together, representing a whole spectrum of different people. There is space in the service to reflect and to talk about racial incidents. Eritrean orthodox Christians now come together with other Africans whom they would not normally mix with or co-operate with. They now worship together and work together in community.

Resources

At ADE, resources are shared along with information and skills in a very practical way - solidarity in affliction and suffering. (report by Alister Goss)

4G: ADE: African Migrant Organisations in Europe

Response to Questions on Mission of Virginia Wangare Greiner, Germany.

Virginia is Moderator of ADE, African Disapora in Europe; and works in MAISHA, a self-organised African women's association for empowerment.

1. There are four areas to my work with people and communities to build alternatives: the Health project for African migrants, especially those without papers; my work in Agisra, a women's program organising against trafficking; Maisha, a self-organisation of African women in Germany; and ADE. In all these projects, the needs of people are addressed and empowerment takes place. ADE addresses these needs on a European scale, but the point at issue is that we need to understand people need to be supported in foreign lands where the forces of racism are against them. African people need to realise they are a community of Africans, not just individuals in Europe.

2. In the Racial Justice Sunday, in Maisha and in ADE, solidarity is expressed and is practiced. People are made to realise that they are not alone in their struggles and that common solutions can be sought, if we are in solidarity. My work as a counsellor enables me to be personally involved in this process.

3. God's Mission has to do with the broken, the down-trodden, the ones who are denied opportunities. To help them get justice, to help them to be empowered. That is what I do. It also means being with, accompanying them and understanding them, in and through their struggles.

Struggle of Women to Bridge the wide gulf between Eritrea and Germany.

The large group of African women all clothed in white stood up together and moved to the front of the spacious Church in Frankfurt, Germany. The church, full of people from German and migrant backgrounds, Christians and some Muslims too, was still.

Under the guidance of the Priest of the Eritrean Orthodox Community, the women began to sing and dance slowly, in dignified, beautiful and prayerful hymns to God the Father and Creator of all people. It blended well into the fabric of the Ecumenical

liturgy during this Sunday worship called Racial Justice Sunday, which also was on the occasion of Human Rights Day, a day initiated by African women migrant groups, along with others, to pray about and remember victims of racial injustice in Europe.

Later on, when many people come forward to share a story or a memory of pain, injustice or empowerment, lighting a candle, or adding a stone to a pile of stones,

the women from The Eritrean Community, the 'Old Mothers' are among the first to share a remembrance and a prayer.

Since it was started a few years ago, this Sunday has become a special tradition, attended by hundreds of people from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds.

Community and religious leaders, politicians and the media of the city have come to take an interest in this unique occasion and the women's initiative has reached the national press, including attention to the issues of community building and justice.

As for the Mothers of the Eritrean community, being linked in with the other African, migrant and German groups in the region, has proved empowering for them. They came many years back as refugees from war, poverty and destruction of their communities in Africa, seeking asylum in Germany. But they remained isolated, closed off by the traumas of their experiences in Africa, unable to speak the new language and participate in the new community. Their Orthodox faith was of great life-supporting importance for them. Their priest, when he joined the new network of African Disapora in Europe, encouraged them to make contacts with other women leaders from African and also German community groups. The Mothers, after all these years, decided to learn German and made new contacts in the city and did it.

At the most recent Racial justice Sunday, the local Minister of Health asked to speak.

She announced, to the approval of all present, the launching of a community-based health and counselling service, supported by the city, and involving African women with training, especially for African Diaspora citizens of this region of Germany.

Set up after consultation with African self-organised groups, this will be a further building block in the empowerment of migrants and their inclusion into community.

4H: Organising Against Fragmentation of Communities in Wales, UK

This is an example of urban mission work to empower people in very marginalised situations in Wales. It is recounted from a fuller story of her mission work, told by Rev Cath Williams, an experienced urban mission enabler and published in the book 'People's Struggles...Unheard Stories', by WCC-URM and URM in Europe.

Ruthless policies have created industrial and cultural decimation in many areas of Wales. On the other hand, our culture, rich in poetic expression, has been further enriched by the church, . But this is lost to people who are marginalized. Real life for some groups involves a struggle to withstand an economic structure which destroys whole communities. The sell-off of caring services has resulted in a marginalization which can only be described as brutal, creating sub-cultures (alcohol and drugs, crime and violence).

Yet this situation offers the church in mission an opportunity to investigate and identify its prophetic role, for its own life and for the life of society. It must identify with the marginalized to discover its own salvation. It is vital that the church in this fragmented society accepts people and identifies with them and meets them as subjects and not as welfare objects.

The Welsh Presbyterian Church Board of Mission invested in a basis for church community work in a deprived community of a housing estate in North Wales, on which 89% of residents were dependent on welfare. We endeavoured to listen and learn, identify with and support, the people there. Our first steps were to establish groups for enhancement of life for young people, women. Then a Tenant's Association, in which skills of negotiation with authorities were nurtured, was organised. Then a half-way hostel for homeless youth was created and a home insulation scheme for the elderly, which employed 60 local young people. So bridges were gradually built and barriers of fear and hostility were broken down. Gardens and open spaces began to be cared for and improved and the living environment began to become better through people's own common efforts.

Growing in confidence, the community was enthused to further development. Leisure and travel groups emerged, where even the poorest could share, as all resources were pooled. Youth community theatre groups grew, where young people could face their deepest feelings through the media of drama, dance, and movement.

Sports groups started participate within the wider spectrum of society. Fellowships and craft groups made contacts between old and young. Luncheon groups provided nourishment, warmth and company. Training opportunities were created, including skills in leadership, constitutions and legalities, first aid and health care, administrative and technical skills. This enabled many to find a niche in the employment market, thus sustaining their move into a better standard of living.

As these positive developments in the whole community took place, the little church nearby, which had been almost given up before because of its small

membership, now began to grow in numbers, diversity and strength, for a few to three hundred members who dared to dream together of justice.

Although such small examples of church in community are often held up as examples of the missionary and caring aspect of the church, we are a long way from realising unity in our mission. Mission involves a challenge to the church to repent, a challenge to its responsibility, a challenge to be inclusive in mission. It means

moving from maintenance (of structures and buildings) to mission and taking risks and perhaps facing conflicts, within and outside the churches.

It means enthusing churches to hear their call among those who need empowering towards meaning, identity and community, a call which will give the church new life.

4I: The Orthodox Church in Romania responds to Urban Mission challenge

After the collapse of the dictatorship and the communist state in Romania, during the nineteen nineties, the Romanian Orthodox Church, along with all the other churches in Eastern and Central Europe, were challenged by the call and the new possibilities, of being active in Mission within their own societies.

The call to be involved in mission came from a number of sides. From the people, especially from those who held the Orthodox Church in high respect and had experienced how the church had kept very close to the people, especially to the poor and to rural people, throughout the long and painful years of dictatorship. During these years many priests had suffered and the church was forbidden to work in the society. Because of all they had gone through, people had lost faith in most social and political institutions but a high percentage of them now expressed the view that the church is the only institution remaining which can be trusted and is in a position to help to rebuild communities in rural and urban areas, which have been damaged.

The call to mission also came from some of the priests, leaders and theologians who felt strongly that mission in society, with the marginalised groups, was an essential element in the full mission of the church, what Rev Father Bria called 'The Liturgy after the Liturgy'. Also the call was encouraged by friends and other churches in the Ecumenical Movement who stood ready to work with the churches in Romania.

The Community and Justice in Mission/ URM in Europe had been building up contacts and beginning a dialogue with some theologians, priests and members of the Orthodox Church in Romania, and was glad to offer its collaboration when the idea came from Romania to have a meeting to share about urban mission practice.

The discussions led first to organising a joint workshop on the challenge to mission of the urban community context in the industrial cities of Romania. This was organised in Brasov, a major industrial and workers city, jointly with Sibiu Orthodox Theology Faculty, the Orthodox church in Brasov and the URM Europe.

It brought together for the first time about 30 people involved in and interested in starting, urban mission work in areas of poverty and high unemployment in cities.

A survey and analysis in an introductory talk by a sociologist, showed how broken the communities had become in the big high-rise workers housing estates built in the communist period on the edges of many industrial regions and cities in Romania.

Our visits and sharing from people in these areas only reinforced this picture. Furthermore, during communism, the churches had been forbidden to work in these new areas, so unlike all rural places where the church remained a centre of community, here there were huge collections of people brought from many places, now facing high unemployment as many old factories closed down and having no communities and no focus for building communities. This was the mission challenge to be faced.

The workshop was held in a meeting room in a walled or hidden church dating back many centuries to a difficult period when the church could only meet secretly. The painful historical memories still were in the background when mission was discussed.

It was a fine aspect of the workshop that it was ecumenical, involving all the major churches, reformed, catholic and others. A lot of young persons showed enthusiasm for this new mission and some shared the work in the communities they were already doing. There were theological and missiological contributions, sociological and economic too. The sharing in prayers, worship and meals added a deeper sense of unity.

The reports of the workshop were compiled into a very readable publication in Romanian by the Sibiu Theological Centre and had a wide distribution. This was especially important for the training of young priests and lay community workers taking place in large groups in the faculties like Sibiu. It also was used by church workers and priests starting new churches in the midst of the poor workers housing estates and also gained the interest of the leadership of the church in the capital.

This process of absorption and discussion of these ideas on mission led to a new invitation two years later, from the Head of the Orthodox Church in Bucharest, to help in the organisation of a national conference on the challenges of urban mission.

This was intended to widen the discussion and preparations for involvement in urban mission into the central structures of the church and make it a new theme for all priests and church workers to be aware of and get involved in. The Patriarch, head of the whole church, gave his strong support and participated in a number of sessions in a positive way. After the meeting a new department on mission was created in the central offices to support and encourage growth of this mission throughout Romania.

4J: Urban Mission in Berlin

Gossner Mission takes part in a network of social and socio-political initiatives in the borough of Schoeneweide in the eastern part of Berlin with the name "Organizing Schoeneweide."

In the former times this region was one of the biggest and most important industrial areas of the German Democratic Republic. More than 40,000 people were employed there. A world-market oriented production, well-regarded internationally, and producers of such things as power machines, batteries, cable and tv-screens.

After the reunification of the two parts of Germany, the bigger companies were pooled in a state owned holding and then sold to private investors. The majority of the investors were interested in taking over the market share but not the production. Only the Korean TNC, Samsung, continued with less than a third of its former work-force. The other companies closed down within five years. Currently, 2500 people are employed in industrial companies and the rate of unemployment is 20%. The young migrate into regions where they can find work and as such, the area slowly becomes a marginalized and deprived population - a forgotten place for forgotten people.

To address that situation, Gossner Mission together with faith based and secular groups and other interested parties, created a network, "Organising Schoeneweide." The general aim is to bring back life into our neighbourhood. At present, about 36 groups and institutions participate. Remarkably, we have links with a number of small traders and the labour board and management of Samsung. The network has designated special groups to address areas of schooling, traffic and housing. To date, our most important project is the fight to establish a technical University in our neighbourhood, this issue is supported by many neighbourhoods in the eastern part of Berlin. The people wish to establish this University in the unoccupied industrial buildings which were constructed with a huge amount of public resources. Therefore, the participants in the network have attempted through various means to get the attention of local politicians and local government officials, and to put some necessary pressure on them to get an appropriate response. After a two-year campaign we now have an official decision to establish a University in this area in three years.

This will revive the neighbourhood and bring unlimited possibilities for the area. This will involve a future with 20,000 students and staff, and of course the employment involved with construction and associated support of workers in a new environment.

What is also important is that local people have learned to act together and to be organised and to be empowered. They have realised that they can achieve things for themselves and their area and that together with strange bedfellows, they can take responsibility for the development of the area.

The activists of the faith-based organisations understand this as a contribution to build a just society and inclusive communities in the biblical perspective of God's reign.

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4K: Sermon on Mark 5,25-34: Sharing stories of new life – receiving and passing on God's strength

(by Ulrike Schmidt-Hesse; delivered in Frankfurt; published in: Jesus Christ heals. Witnesses of women in Europe. CEC 2003.

Dear sisters and brothers,

What a wonderful story! A woman is being raised to new life!

Could you imagine that this might happen here, right in the centre of this city, in a street nearby?

The fascinating thing in this story for me is that it talks about really great changes, about new life, salvation. In our work on the field of ecumenical relations, the focus is on great challenges – on justice world wide and amongst us, on overcoming violence and racism, on community of people from various confessions and cultures and of different faiths. I gradually understand better how big the changes are that are needed for the individual and in our social structures. The biblical text speaks of the conflict with deadly powers. And I feel: goodwill and many little steps are not enough, the fundamental aspect is more, and different. What I like in this story is that it narrates how God's strength creates great transformations: new life, salvation. That's wonderful!

A second point that absorbs me in this story: in my feelings I have a direct access to the persons involved – above all to the woman. At the same time, I know that the people in the biblical story are living in a world foreign to me, that they are different from me, and that means, I need a lot of information and reflection, in order to be able to re-enact in my mind what happens to them. I will only partly understand it. In a certain way, the biblical message remains strange to me – and I think that is good. The question how we treat the alien is a basic issue of ecumenicity. And I am more and more aware, that in all mutual knowledge, the point cannot be to completely overcome strangeness, but to walk the way together with the others. How can we take part in one another, share our needs and sorrow, our faith and our bread, challenge and encourage each other, and at the same time accept our being different? This is a question facing the great story telling community of Christians, from the time of St. Mark's gospels written in the first century AD, until our time today, a question to you and to me.

Now let us turn directly to the biblical text.

The bleeding woman has no name in St. Mark's text. Later on, in the early church, she will be called Berenike. The bible describes her situation of distress extraordinarily detailed and intensively. "She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse." This makes visible her suffering of many years. To bleed constantly, that means to be again and again on the edge of your strength. And it means fear. Many women know this fear, until there is the diagnosis whether it is cancer or a benign growth of the womb, the fear whether the treatment or operation will help. The woman feels how her life is trickling away. From the then medical point of view, she is incurably ill.

She has spent all she had for the healing attempts of the doctors. Now she is impoverished. It seems that she has no family or other help, at least the text does not mention anybody.

I think of the numerous women at many places of the earth, who today are in a similar situation like her. And I think of the women here in the city, who are ill and have great problems to get access to medical care because they have no legal status of residence.

The bleeding woman has heard of Jesus, the teacher and healer, who also and especially helps those who have nothing, who are outside. She knows: "If I just touch his clothes I will be healed." She comes up behind him. The verses that proceed this story in the bible tell us that Jesus is on his way with Jairus, the head of the synagogue, to his daughter who is dying. This means Jesus is oriented towards others, and besides that, he is surrounded by a crowd. It is difficult to get near to him, but the woman does not give in. I admire her energy and persistence. As she touches Jesus clothes, she feels in her body that she is freed from her suffering.

Jesus turns around and asks who had touched him. He searches for her, wants to see her. For me it is important that Jesus turns round to her, thus bringing her from the back of the events into the foreground. The woman falls at Jesus' feet and tells him the whole truth, trembling with fear. Jesus tells her: "Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go for a life in peace and be freed from your suffering."

Let us try to imagine and to re-enact what this healing might have meant for the woman - what a joy! Let us rejoice together with that woman! Praise be to God!

In sharing her joy, we are very close to the woman. Yet it is important to clarify how we understand her healing. Of what has she been freed? What does salvation mean for her concretely? Therefore let us step back for a moment. Some of the translations of this text suggest by the wording they use that the woman has done something wrong when she approached and touched Jesus. The assumption behind this is that the woman has broken a Jewish law by touching Jesus.

In the interpreting tradition it is being said the bleeding woman is impure and that this impurity means that she is religiously discriminated and marginalized from the society. Some scholars speak of a total ban to touch somebody for women subject to genital bleeding. The act of healing by Jesus is then understood as a release from the Jewish law that discriminates women. I have long seen this interpretation - even among feminist theologians. However, female Christian theologians, challenged and encouraged by Jewish theologians, have underlined in the last fifteen years, that we have here a distortion of Jewish purity ideas. Jewish oppression of women here - Christian liberation of women there, this model is wrong. We need to overcome it as we want to overcome anti-Judaist thinking in Christian theology.

According to the purity laws in the First or Old Testament, women and men become impure by body liquids. This has consequences for their ability to worship, i.e. entering the temple is prohibited for them. But impurity does not mean to be excluded from the relationship to God.

According to recent research a Jewish woman was not subject to social discrimination when she had genital bleedings, at the time of the first century AD.

She was not a social misfit, and she was by no means banned from her house or the public area. There was no prohibition to touch somebody. When the woman touched Jesus, she didn't do anything against the Jewish life practices of that time. Only from the 6th/7th century on – when the commandments regarding the temple were transferred on the synagogue –, there was the practice to exclude menstruating women from the synagogue. Yet this took place much later than in Christianity, where since the 3rd century, menstruating women were excluded from the worship service and the sacraments.

Regarding the regulations for women with genital bleedings, there was no principal contrast between Judaism and Christianity, there were rather multiple discussions and development processes on these questions in both religions. Now let us return to the biblical story: The woman with her constant bleeding suffers from a terrible, life-sucking disease. It is not impurity what brings her on the brink of ruin, but her suffering. Thus she doesn't need liberation from the Jewish purity law, but from the misery of her disease.

Your faith has saved you, says Jesus to the woman – saved, not healed, as other translations say. We are looking at rescue, at salvation here. That is not the same as health, just as illness is not the same as lacking faith. This distinction is important for me. Doing visits in hospitals we often meet people who are depressed by the fact that they see an own guilt or lacking faith as the cause of their illness.

In our society life concepts are central that identify abundant life with healthiness, youth and prosperity. To be active, have no pain, function well, to be able to afford and to experience everything – that seems to be normal. Of course we know or suspect that this is not true – neither as description of reality nor as a goal. But it is difficult not to participate in this thinking. In the world of Jesus, the reality for the majority of the people was hunger, diseases, infant mortality and violence. And particularly in the period of St. Mark, in the second half of the first century in Syria and Palestine, after the suppression of the Jewish rebellion against the Romans, the life of nearly all humans was characterised by the suffering from the deadly powers of poverty and violence.

Still today many children die. Women eat their heart out in the struggle for survival. Even in our world, the life of the great majority of humankind – especially in the South but also for a growing number in the North – is determined by deadly powers.

Now what is our model? Do we believe in the globalizing promises of fortune by the market, or do we give up before its power? What is salvation for us? The bible narrates of people who – surrounded by deadly powers – have believed in the God of Israel who promises his salvation: life in fullness for all. The bleeding woman says: "If I just touch his clothes, I will be saved". She trusts in Gods strength, and she has realized that Jesus is filled with this strength. She works herself through the crowd to touch Jesus. She struggles for

her healing. She doesn't believe the powers of death, but the strength and nearness of God.

As she touches Jesus, the strength flows over to her. In the First Testament we can read that the strength of God rescues humans from need and distress. The gospels show that Jesus is filled with this strength of God. He preaches and acts with this strength. Other people can also be filled with this strength and act accordingly. In such preaching and acting, where people are being transformed, where healing takes place, where poverty and exclusion are overcome, the coming of the kingdom is effective and perceptible.

God's strength flows from Jesus to the woman and changes her life. She comes to Jesus, trembling with fear. She is shaken by her experience of God. And she tells Jesus the whole truth, or: what truly had happened to her. Unfortunately her words were not handed down. I conclude from Jesus' answer: she tells him why she touched him and how she was healed by the strength of God. She gives a witness of faith.

Her salvation has a religious, physical and social significance. We often separate these dimensions from one another - but they belong together! Jesus addresses her as daughter. She is God's daughter, she belongs to God's kingdom. She is rescued. The deadly powers no longer dominate her. Her sick body is healed, and she regains community and security. Jesus also grants healing to her with words and sends her out in the peace of God. The woman will now live in the community of the followers of Jesus. Now she has many brothers and sisters who will not let her down in her poverty. She receives security in this community and shares her talents with others.

Dear sisters and brothers, I believe this is a model for the life of our congregations! A model that can guide and inspire us!

The new life of the woman is a visible sign of God's promise that all shall have life in fullness. Her faith is a lively experience. God's strength has imparted itself on her in her life, rescued, healed, empowered her. And the story of her healing is also a story of a calling. She becomes a messenger of God's shalom. As Jesus and Jairus go on to the house of Jairus, the sick girl has died. The father is despairing and cannot believe in rescue any more. Then Jesus tells him: Just believe! And Jairus learns from the example of the woman. She is a witness of faith to him.

Now what about the relationship between healing and salvation? The healing of the woman is one, is *her* experience of the strength and nearness of God. There are totally different experiences: the tax collector Zacchaeus, for example, - who got rich by cheating out the people - is by his encounter with Jesus transformed into a person who shares his possessions with the poor and pays them a compensation (Lk 19). Even this transformation is called salvation in the bible. And I think, it was then and it would be today an equally great miracle like the healing of a sick! The experience of being gifted with God's strength can also happen to incurable sick persons. St. Paul writes (2 Cor 12) that Christ did not give him health, but gifted him in his illness and suffering with divine strength. Jesus says to him: My strength is strong in the weak ones.

There are also people in our time with whom we can share this experience. Illness is not synonymous with guilt or lacking faith.

The so-called miracle stories of the bible tell how people are being touched, filled and transformed – rescued – by the strength of God. They become daughters and sons in the kingdom of God. They have experienced and witness now that the strength of God overcomes the deadly powers.

The story of the healing of the bleeding woman shows much of what characterizes the kingdom of God. A woman that has been suffering for a long time, who has been poor and on her own, has been raised to new life. She has become a member of the new community of disciples. Its mark is equality and mutuality, sharing with one another, not to believe in death but in resurrection. She has even become a witness of faith to an estimated wealthy man.

When faith is being stressed in the story the point is not a dissociation from the Jewish law, but a dissociation from belief resp. disbelief in the power of death, from the deadly resignation under the general power of the apparently unchangeable. We are talking of belief in the strength of God, of trust in the healing, life-saving and even life-raising power of God that is revealed in Jesus.

The salvation of the woman is a sign of the reversal of all conditions in the kingdom of God. Great changes are at stake: the humble are being raised, the sick are healed, the blind can see, the prisoners are freed, excluded ones find new community, the hungry are fed, the dead stand up, the poor get announced good news. (Lk 4; Mt 11)

The people who have recounted the story of the salvation of the bleeding woman, they believe in the resurrection of Jesus. Their stories contain experiences of faith, and are also stories of hope. They are stories of opposition against the deadly powers that limit and destroy life. In the midst of a world marked by violence and poverty, by child death and sickness, by resignation and disbelief, people tell what they have experienced by themselves, that God's power overcomes the deadly powers and raises people to new life.

Are we able to see the strength of God effective in our life and let it become efficient?

The strength of God or the spirit of God is a "democratic process". All people can be witnesses of the working of God – be it women or men, theologians or persons with other professions, academics or workers, natives or immigrants. All can be messengers of God's shalom: by actions and contacts – and by words.

In our society many people talk little with one another, little about what they are really occupied with. And even if we do this, often there is little hope in the future, in new life. There seems to be no alternative to the dominating powers of economy and to the images of healthiness, youth and prosperity. According to my experience it is therefore necessary and helpful for us to enter into foreign stories, into the stories of others, and to become part of the great Christian community of

story tellers. By saying this I have in mind the biblical texts on the one hand and the stories of fellow-Christians of today from different churches and countries on the other hand.

Let me share with you about a group where people get together who are committed to „Mission for Community and Justice in Europe“. In this group story telling is an important thing to do. At one meeting we discussed the role of women in this work. We read the biblical text of the great cloud of witnesses and listened to Mary’s song of praise. Then we - men and women - told of women who are witnesses of faith to us. We listened to stories of suffering from powers of death, of resistance and of hope - stories of famous and unknown women, women from different countries and at different times: women who believe life and pass on the strength of God. Their stories have fed my hope for God’s great changes. They have awakened my own stories and have encouraged me to live new ones and to pass them on. Such sharing helps us to strengthen one another and to walk our way together.

I wish that we may create many places and occasions to read the bible together and to communicate among each other the stories of our faith and life and to recount them: here in Frankfurt and in the respective communities in which we live. We need places where the great hope is alive that Jesus Christ gives us: Life in fullness for all.

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