

The Church and the Public Space. A Lutheran Interpretation

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The Reformation and the understanding of being church

The core message of the Lutheran Reformation is that justification by faith is the doctrine by which the church stands or falls. This position builds on Luther's reading of the Bible and his interpretation of the ministry of Jesus. It has often been presented as the five so-called *solae* or guiding principles of Lutheran theology: by Scripture alone (*sola scriptura*); by faith alone (*sola fide*); by grace alone (*sola gratia*); through Christ alone (*solo Christo*); and glory to God alone (*solī Deo gloria*).

At first sight these principles make no reference to the church. This may give us the impression that ecclesiology (the theology of the church) was not an important issue for Luther and his followers. This was clearly not the case; the Reformation started as a reaction against late medieval church model and its concentration on economic and political power. According to Luther's view, the consequence of this way of being church was a silencing of the proclamation of the gospel. The church was therefore in great need of being reformed and its evangelical nature to be. It is the proclamation of the gospel that forms the church's being and sending into the world, and not the other way round. The church exists and has its mandate by Scripture alone, by faith alone, by grace alone, through Christ alone and to God's glory alone.

The state of the church in the fifteenth century was such that many longed for reform. The pope had become a political leader with his own army; bishops were local rulers and in control of enormous economic resources. The problem, however, was not only how the church exercised its political power. Rather, the reformers criticized the way in which the pope and the bishops used religious power in order to legitimize their position as worldly rulers. For instance, they would excommunicate political adversaries and in some cases impose an interdict on a country. This meant that a whole people were denied access to the sacraments and to a Christian funeral. The struggle for political power thus severely impacted ordinary people and their religious life. They would fear for their salvation if they could not attend mass and use the sacraments as prescribed by the church authorities. In a similar manner, people would attend practices that the church had established with the purpose of increasing the church's income, such as for instance the campaign of selling indulgences as a way of buying an escape from the torments in purgatory. Having observed how poor people, driven by fear, wasted their money on buying indulgences, Luther wrote his Ninety-five Theses "on the power and efficacy of indulgences" in 1517. As we know, this was the start of the Reformation. On the one hand its point of departure was a reaction against the church that abused its power to exploit the poor; on the other, it questioned a church that instead of proclaiming the gospel offered believers a confidence in a piece of paper that could be bought. Salvation is not an article that can be commodified; salvation is not for sale.

Luther did not only criticize such practices. Motivated by his theological conviction he radically questioned this model of being church and challenged the political leaders of his time, to take back the power that he believed the church to have wrongly usurped. The church's mandate is not to exercise power as a political

ruler, he claimed. The “power of the sword,” in Luther’s words, belongs to those who God has rightly installed as kings and other worldly rulers. All citizens, also the church, should acknowledge their authority in obedience. The church has a different mandate: God has called it to exercise the “power of the word,” the public proclamation of gospel in word and deed.

The Word as a powerful public word

This discernment between the power of the sword and power of the Word has led to the formulation of the teaching of the two kingdoms in Lutheran theology and to an intense discussion of how to interpret this teaching in times that politically and socially are very different from the context in which Luther lived.

First, it is important to note the issue here is discerning, not separating. Luther emphasized that both kingdoms (Luther would rather say governments) are subject to God’s will and judgment. All rulers are therefore responsible to God and, as good Christians, they should consider their task as a divine vocation, and diligently use Word and sacrament to strengthen them in their duty as governors. This made sense in times when all citizens belonged to the church. Kings and other rulers were expected to be good Christians who regularly attended church and therefore were exposed to the “power of the word.”

Clearly, this doctrine must be applied differently today when in most places the church represents a mere section of society—perhaps only a minority—are members of or go to a church. In addition, only very few political leaders today would consider their position as having been ordered by God; their mandate and power are regulated according to secular procedures with regard to selecting and performing leadership. How does this challenge the church to contribute to fostering responsible government and a social and political order that corresponds to God’s will for creation and for human life?

A second point to be noted when interpreting the doctrine of the two kingdoms relates to another huge difference: the scandalous political and economic power that the church had accumulated at the time. The fact that such abuse of power may have been instrumental in the formulation of this doctrine may have contributed to an interpretation that warned against any mix of church and politics. This was the position held by many church leaders during the time of Nazism who claimed that the secular government should act according to its own legislation, to be recognized as an order God has established and therefore to be obeyed. In a similar manner, a fair number of people rejected the idea that churches should involve themselves in the struggle against apartheid, maintaining that this was a political question beyond the mandate of the church. Some would argue that dealing with this kind of political issues could cause divisions within the church, as if that were a more serious sin than the kind of division apartheid had caused in the South African society.

It is quite clear that the doctrine of the two kingdoms does not foresee a withdrawal from the world. Rather, it urges the church to discern the basis for its public mandate. Today the church no longer accumulates political and economic power—at least not in most parts of the world. The issue is therefore not so much to warn the church about the risks of striving for “the power of the sword,” but rather of withdrawing from the world and limiting its concern to spiritual matters.

Luther did not interpret the “power of the Word” as a withdrawal from the world. On the contrary, he clearly understood it as a public word. According to him,

the pulpit was a public arena from which to address the whole community, not only the inner circle of believers. In addition, his words were spread all over Europe thanks to the newly developed methods of printing. We can observe that Luther's concern when preaching and writing was not limited to spiritual matters, but very often related to politics and economy. He advocated for the establishment of schools for all children, for services for the poor and helpless and severely questioned the practice of usury declaring it unethical. When reading these texts today, his ability to interpret the signs of the time impress us, especially his courage to address public issues, even if we have to admit that some of his writings were most unfortunate, i.e., his statements about the Jews and his call to stop the rebellious farmers.

The third point requires our attention is the fact that Luther had confidence in the power of word. This follows his theological interpretation of the gospel as a living word (*vox viva evangelii*) and the church as a reality created by the word (*creatura verbi*). God created by words, "For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm" (Ps 33:9). In a similar manner, the gospel has the power to create what it names. Such power does not depend on political position or the use of arms in order to be effective. Nevertheless, the power of the Word is strongly resisted by the "powers and authorities," an expression that not only refers to the worldly rulers, but even more to the power of evil, that according to the Apostle Christ has triumphed over "by the cross" (Col 2:15).

Luther believed God to have called the church to be "a living word" in the world. The proclamation of the Word on the one hand envisages faith in God's care and mercy in our daily life, and confidence in God's lordship and providence in whatever happens to us, as individuals and society. On the other, it calls us to be stewards of the gifts with which God has endowed us, as responsible citizens caring about the well-being of others.

In the following, we shall look closer at ways of being "a living word" in the world. The first perspective will be the individual, how each Christian is called to serve God and the neighbor. This has often been presented as the Lutheran ethics of vocation, and is today very much interpreted as a vocation to active citizenship. The next perspective relates to the church as a collective body—especially as a local community—to assume roles in the public arena. We shall present diakonia as one basic task within this mandate of being a public church, with advocacy as a specific focus area of this mandate. Finally, we shall reflect on the role of the church being a sanctuary in today's post-modern world as a new and challenging role, with roots that go back to the first centuries of Christian life and public service.

The vocation to be active citizens

The call to be "a living word" is an exhortation to active citizenship. Luther radically changed the understanding of Christian vocation, shifting the focus from the internal life of the church, to serving in the world—being Christian citizens who love and care for their neighbor. Luther sharply questioned the religious orders of his time and the idealizing of the vocation of monks and nuns who had distanced themselves from normal life and instead lived a secluded life in a monastery, devoted to religious practices. From his own experience, Luther knew that such understanding of vocation often would be self-centered. But, even more important, it would ignore the call to serve the neighbor.

Luther understood Christian vocation from the perspective of being in Christ, and the two basic directions this organic relation brings with it. First, in relation to God, in Christ we are saved from the power of sin and death. By God's grace we are liberated and set free, also from the law and the fear that God will reject us and exclude us from God's love and care. This is one dimension of being in Christ: the adoption to childhood in our relation to God, enjoying with Christ a free access to our heavenly Father. There is, however, another dimension of being in Christ: as Christ was sent into the world, so we are sent for the sake of our neighbor. This is the main message in one of Luther's most important writings "The Freedom of a Christian, 1520," with its famous statement: "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."¹

The simultaneous relation to God and to our neighbor is fundamental in this understanding, as it is in Jesus' teaching on the greatest commandment of loving God and one's neighbor. Crucial to Luther's understanding is that out of our own strength we are not able to love God nor our neighbor as our vocation claims, but in Christ and empowered by God's Spirit this is not only possible but is what it in fact means to be a Christian. Luther sums up his reflections on the freedom of a Christian as follows: "We conclude therefore that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor. Yet he always remains in God and in his love ..."²

Luther expressed this view on being a citizen according to the way in which society was conceptualized at his time. It implied that every citizen should be faithful to their social role, as farmer, tailor or merchant, without any ambitions of changing the way in which society was structured. If Luther would have spoken about active citizenship it would have been within the confines of respecting what he would have considered to be the natural order of society and there finding opportunities for serving one's neighbor. Furthermore, he would hardly see any role for women outside the home. Nevertheless, what is new and radical is his positive evaluation of ordinary work—both in- and outside the home. Honest and faithful work is true service, more than observing religious practices. Sowing and harvesting the fields, building houses for people to live in, producing clothes and preparing food for hungry people—from the perspective of the Christian vocation all such activities are dignified and considered ways of serving God and of serving the neighbor.

This remains an important reminder to us today. Our life as Christians is not limited to what we do on Sundays and to how we relate to spiritual matters. Much more, it relates to how we live our lives throughout the week, and not least, the way in which we perform our daily tasks, as caring family members, honest professionals in our work, and responsible members of the wider community. At a time when work is conceived as a way of earning as much as possible the Lutheran ethics of vocation can orient us so that we see work in accordance to the perspective of serving God and our neighbor, and of promoting justice and well-being. In times when our lifestyle threatens the ecological balance this challenge gains a new dimension. Indeed, the concept of Christian vocation continues to be relevant and deserves to be lifted up as

¹ Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," in Harold J. Grimm and Helmut T. Lehmann (eds), *Luther's Works*, vol. 31, 344.

² *Ibid.*, 370.

a core component of the Lutheran heritage, and it can help us to develop our understanding of active citizenship.

The “living word” as diaconal action

Luther referred “living word” in the first place to the preached word, and mainly from the pulpit. This does not, however, imply that he limited the understanding of “word” to what is orally expressed and can be registered by human ears. As a biblical scholar, Luther was well acquainted with the biblical concepts of “word” (Hebrew “*dabar*” and Greek “*logos*”) that both express a living reality. Most notably this is articulated in the message of the incarnated Word, as reads 1 John 1:1: “We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life.” In a unique way, Jesus not only announced the gospel; he himself incarnated the gospel. His ministry as the word of life encompassed both teaching and care for people in need. It would make no sense to separate between his words and deeds; they are an integral part of his mission.

The concept of Christian vocation referred to above can be interpreted as mission, following the example of Jesus. To be in Christ means to be sent as he was sent, and to serve in words and deeds as Jesus did: “Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also” (Jn 12:26). The Greek verb for “serve” used in this verse, is “*diakonein*.” Here it refers to the service of the disciples; on another occasion, Jesus uses it in order to explain the distinct meaning of his mission: “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45).

When the New Testament was translated into Latin, the Greek word *diakonia* was rendered as *ministerium* and, later, as *ministry* in English. This indicates that *diakonia* basically means to be sent, to receive a mission, a task, or a vocation. The one who sends determines the content of the mission; which is expressed in the saying of Jesus: “Jesus said to them again, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (Jn 20:21). In other words, as disciples of Jesus Christ the *diakonia* of the church is to follow the example he gave in words and deeds.

Against this background, the concept of *diakonia* is widely used in churches today. In its *Plan for diakonia* the Church of Norway defines *diakonia* as “the caring ministry of the Church. It is the Gospel in action and is expressed through loving your neighbor, creating inclusive communities, caring for creation and struggling for justice.”³ This definition clearly states that *diakonia* is more than a possible consequence of the gospel, as an optional activity when considered necessary because of external challenges. *Diakonia* is an integral part of the gospel. It is an imperative to make God’s living and liberating word visible in action, and as such, an integral part of what the church as the body of Christ is called to be and to do in God’s name. Not by our own understanding or effort, as Luther states in the “Small Catechism”; “... but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth”⁴

³ <http://www.gammel.kirken.no/?event=dolink&famID=247>

⁴ “The Small Catechism,” in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 355.

It is clear that Luther was not familiar with this way of understanding the concept of diakonia. He knew deacons that according to Roman Catholic tradition would later be ordained as priests, and mainly had liturgical tasks. Luther saw no reason for maintaining this tradition and soon the title of deacon disappeared in the churches of the Reformation. On one occasion, Luther wrote that the congregations very much needed real deacons that could care for the sick and the poor, but this never became a priority at his time. The pure proclamation of the gospel and a right administration of the sacraments remained the most urgent task.

This urgency made Luther appeal to the public authorities in matters of social care. They should establish services, for instance community chests, with the purpose of helping poor people, or provide homes for orphans. Luther considered it most efficient to impose these tasks on the worldly authorities, having in mind that all citizens then belonged to the church, and could therefore be expected to perform such services as good Christians. Without any doubt, this practice has strongly influenced the understanding of responsible political leadership in the countries that adopted the Reformation, and led to the development of public welfare services in these countries.

Nonetheless, it has also led to an emptying of diaconal consciousness and practice in many churches. One may ask if the focus on Word and sacraments has caused Lutheranism to develop a kind of pastor-centrism, and that has portrayed the congregation as passive receivers of Word and sacrament, rather than a living community endowed with gifts and ministries. Luther did not subscribe to the kind of ecclesiology that reduced the laity to objects of church services. On the contrary, his teaching on the “priesthood of all believers” claimed that all baptized were empowered to be “priests” in the sense of having access to God and being included in God’s mission to the world. In that sense, it gives meaning to interpret “the priesthood of all believers” as the diakonia of all baptized.

In today’s social and religious contexts, the model of “outsourcing” the diaconal mandate to public authorities is no longer viable, neither from theological nor from sociopolitical point of view. In a secularized society, the church cannot count on political leaders when it comes to the task of realizing its diaconal ministry. The church must organize its diaconal work—locally at the congregational level or by established organizations or specialized ministries that can operate nationally and internationally.

As the caring ministry of the church, diakonia may have many areas of action. The above mentioned plan of Church of Norway indicates four areas: loving one’s neighbor, creating inclusive communities, caring for creation and struggling for justice. They indicate the importance of lifting up these issues on the church’s agenda in the form of initiatives rooted in the life of the congregation, such as visiting the sick and receiving people in challenging life situations, but also, whenever possible, establishing services for instance within the area of health care or social welfare. In some instances, such services are organized in partnership with public offices or with other agents within civil society. This affirms that diaconal action envisages general well-being and the promotion of human dignity, justice and peace.

Diaconal action is both faith- and rights-based. It holds together our distinct identity as a caring and inclusive communion and our shared vocation to promote human dignity, justice and peace in the world. As we have seen, diakonia links to a theological interpretation of the gospel and of being church while affirming the vision

of a public church, assuming the vocation to contribute to the well-being of society. This reflects the vision of embarking on a pilgrimage of justice and peace that the World Council of Churches formulated at its 2013 Assembly in Busan. Moreover, it is in line with the LWF booklet *Diakonia in Context* that points at transformation, reconciliation and empowerment as the basic directions of diaconal action.

Many churches, including those belonging to the Lutheran communion, are in the process of renewing their reflection of what it means to be church today and on how to understand and practice “the power of word”. At Luther’s time the concept of vocation mainly referred to individual Christians and their service in the world. Today, we recognize that the necessity of addressing the congregation as a whole and its communitarian call to serve and to be a visible “living word” in the world. Without any doubt, this is in line with the vision of “*ecclesia semper reformanda*,” of reformation as the continued self-questioning and renewal of the church.

Advocacy

The publication of the Ninety-five Theses in 1517 can be interpreted from the perspective of advocacy. As a pastor in Wittenberg, Luther had observed how people wasted their money on indulgences. His theses represent a vehement critique of the abuse of religious power that exploited ordinary people and manipulated their faith. At the same time, it sought to defend the dignity of the believer and their right to hear the Word of God freely.

There is a clear link from this historical moment of the Reformation to situations in today’s world that challenge the churches to speak out against similar abuses of power, be they religious or political. Advocacy, the public voice of church in defense of victims of injustice, is in integral element in the church’s mission for the healing of world, as reported in the LWF document *Mission in Context*: “Mission as advocacy for justice denotes the church’s praxis in the public arena as affirmation and reaffirmation of the dignity of human life, both as individual and as community, as well as a widened sense of justice, encompassing the economic, social and ecological spheres.”⁵

Advocacy is different from lobbying that seeks to influence governments or other leaders for the benefit for one’s own organization or interest. Advocacy is concerned with the situation of others, and in the first place marginalized groups in church and society: those who are unable to defend their own interests, or for different reasons are silenced in society. This does not mean that advocacy is speaking for others, ignoring the voice of those it seeks to defend. On the contrary, advocacy presupposes listening and solidarity. A good example is the voice that many churches have given to people affected by the HIV and AIDS pandemic. From the day that the church gave space to people living with HIV and AIDS, to their stories and struggle for justice, its advocacy role grew in importance.

Advocacy can be seen as an expression of the prophetic ministry of the church. This ministry is largely modeled by the Old Testament prophets who criticized the religious and political leaders of their time, especially for the way in which they ignored their duty to protect the rights of the poor. The ministry of Jesus also manifests his prophetic role—above all in the way in which he defended the dignity of marginalized people of his time, liberating them from bonds of stigmatization and

⁵ At <http://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/DMD-Mission-in-Context-EN-low.pdf>

shame, and including them in the new society that his disciples represented. The narrative of the healing of the man born blind in John 9 illustrates this dimension of the diaconal ministry of Jesus.

As followers of Jesus the church is called to have a prophetic voice. This is how many heard the churches when they declared apartheid to be a heresy. However, not all churches raised their voice against apartheid. Within the Lutheran family of churches, some considered apartheid to be a political issue, which according to their interpretation of the two kingdoms belonged to the authority of secular powers. After apartheid had been dismantled, a number of churches admitted that they failed to take sides in this conflict, or that they had wrongly supported the racist government. It leads one to reflect on why it is easier to confess sins committed in the past than to respond to the social and political challenges of the present. One reason is that churches, as well as their members, are constantly tempted to remain within their comfort zones and to stick to interpretations of the gospel that leave us in peace.

From this perspective advocacy also plays a role in keeping the church alert and able to read the signs of the times. Advocacy is frequently related to resisting the power of the mighty and their ideology. In certain cases it may be a task also to address the church establishment in order to question how we are being “conformed to this world” (Rom 12:2) when dealing with burning issues of our time. Is it fair to say that the church has sometimes imitated structures of domination and exclusion? Has the church adopted a lifestyle of religious consumerism and ethical indifference instead of being profoundly provoked by the signs of growing poverty and injustice in the world?

Conformism is not in line with the Lutheran heritage. On the contrary, it subscribes to the principle of *reformatio continua*, or the need of constant reformation in the life and the mission of the church.

Sanctuary

Luther’s hymn “A Mighty Fortress is our God” continues to be one of the most frequently sung hymns in the churches of the Reformation—not only by Lutherans. Based on Psalm 46 it expresses confidence in God’s care and protection against all forms of evil. God provides sanctuary, a safe haven.

Throughout history, the church has interpreted this biblical message as an imperative to act likewise and to offer sanctuary to people in need. Asylum was given to refugees and also to helpless and homeless persons. The first hospitals were established within this tradition of practicing Christian hospitality. The Reformation was followed by decades of religious conflict that forced many to leave their homes. Among the Protestant refugees, many found asylum in Wittenberg, Strasbourg and Geneva. In many ways this has impacted the commitment of Christians, even today, for instance in supporting humanitarian assistance for refugees and in advocating for religious freedom.

The call to offer sanctuary may take different forms. Two recent examples from Norway illustrate this:

The first relates to the situation in 1993 when hundreds of asylum seekers from the former Yugoslavia had their application for permanent residency rejected and were told to leave Norway. Many then sought refuge in church buildings, and

because the government acknowledged this space as sacred, the asylum seekers were not arrested by the police. Some stayed there for months, even years, and many had their cases reconsidered and were in fact granted asylum by the government. Others concluded voluntarily returned to their country of origin. It is interesting to note that the secular government respected the sanctuary, although the same authorities criticized the church for promoting civil disobedience and for undermining legal procedures. It should also be mentioned that many ordinary people were mobilized in an effort to assist the asylum seekers in the churches by providing food, clothes, and not at least friendship.

The other is related to the terrorist attack in July 2011 when seventy-seven persons were killed in Oslo and on the island Utøya. In the days that followed many churches, especially the Cathedral in Oslo, were filled with people. Some brought flowers, others lit a candle, and there were those who simply sat down in silence. Not many of them were active Christians, some were Muslims, and some said they had never been inside a church before. Clearly they were searching for a sanctuary, a holy space, where they could express their grief, anger and their terrified awareness of being vulnerable. Secular and post-modern society does not offer a similar space, and even secular persons sensed the importance of it.

Offering sanctuary does not mean absolute safety from the forces of evil. All 600 that had sought refuge in the St. Peter Lutheran Church in Monrovia, Liberia, on the night of 29 July 1990, were killed by rebels. Perhaps they sang “A Mighty Fortress is our God” as they were gathering in the church that evening, just as Luther and his friend did as they were entering the city of Worms on 16 April 1521 where the Diet was summoned.

Sanctuary does not mean invulnerability, but care and solidarity; it does not promise unconditional happiness, but eternal blessing. “The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. (Selah)” (Ps 46:7), and, as Luther sings, “For God himself fights by our side with weapons of the Spirit. Were they to take our house, goods, honor, child, or spouse, though life be wrenched away, they cannot win the day. The kingdom’s ours forever!”⁶

Public church

As we have seen, Lutheranism firmly situates the church in the public space. It is there where the Word is announced and practiced as a living and a visible word. This is in accordance with how Jesus refers to his public ministry: “ ‘I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret’ ” (Jn 18:20). Similarly healings were performed openly, in the context of everyday life.

There are different ways of arguing for the public church and, consequently, different models of being public church. One may be described as church-centered; it promotes Christian knowledge and values with the aim of Christianizing public space. As a strategy, it may also aim at recruiting new members to the church.

Another model may be presented as the universal; its point of departure is society and people’s general welfare. The concept of civil society has added new facets to understanding this model, as it opens space to different actors, also churches, with the task of contributing to what is right, good and true for all citizens.

⁶ At <http://www.lutheran-hymnal.com/lyrics/tlh262.htm>

In addition, this space offers a new opportunity for ecumenical and interfaith cooperation in the effort of constructing a just and peaceful society.

There are strong traits within Lutheranism that point in direction of the second model. The teaching of the ethics of vocation as call to active citizenship, points in that direction. The same applies to the understanding of diakonia as service in the public space, as well as the task of advocacy and of providing sanctuary. It is all about loving one's neighbor.

Consequently Lutheranism emphasizes the theology of creation, as a result of which we may regard the public space as an arena of God's continued action in a way that calls all humans to participate in God's mission of promoting human dignity, justice and peace. Equally, it is strongly influenced by the theology of salvation, of Christ incarnated in the middle of ordinary human life; and last, but not least, it is nurtured by the theology of sanctification that announced that God's Spirit equips and empowers all baptized to love one's neighbor.

All three underpin the view that public vocation of the church envisages: transformation, reconciliation and empowerment, in a way that promotes human dignity and contributes to the construction of a just, participatory and sustainable society. At the same time, some will interpret the acts of this vocation as signs of God's love and gracious care and thank God for them and, eventually, when moved by God's Spirit, seek ways of growing in faith, hope and love.

Topics for discussion:

How is **active citizenship** understood and practiced where you live? What are the challenges? In what way could the Lutheran ethics on vocation be activated in order to strengthen the concept of active citizenship? How could this topic become more integrated in teaching and preaching?

What kind of **diaconal work** is your church and local congregation involved in? How does this work express the theme of the Reformation: Liberated by God's grace? Do you agree with the statement that diakonia in an integral dimension of the church, its being and its mission?

Is the concept **advocacy** known and used in your context? Give examples of how your church/congregation is involved in advocacy, and discuss how this ministry can be strengthened. The LWF commemoration of the Reformation states that salvation, human beings and creation are not for sale; how can these statements motivate us to more conscious role as **public churches**?