

Report from the VEDD

With great personal commitment and time people (volunteers) and bodies within the VEDD are working on current issues. Individual members and communities advocate for and represent the interests of deacons and the deaconate within church, diakonia and society. At the same time they make sure that this is not just a matter of lobbying, but foremost about communicating the gospel and standing up for the interests of people – God’s beloved creatures – in various life situations.

Current focus:

1. First reflections on a future strategy of VEDD are now processed, discussed in the various bodies of the Association and adopted. Out of that the "Strategic objectives for the VEDD until 2018" have developed and are now part of a process with the theme "**VEDD - Network with future**". It is an exciting challenge for deacons "to stand up for the diaconal dimension of the church and for the clerical dimension of diakonia, and doing it professionally, publicly and eloquent". Likewise, the diaconal communities are challenged to "develop into working groups for a diaconal church".
2. A special highlight: After a long break, there will be a **Deacon-Day** at Eisenach from June 17 - 19, 2016, for all those, who received a call. They will develop visions for the deaconate within church, diakonia and society; will reflect and develop the ministry, have time for sharing; will celebrate services; encourage sisters and brothers; bring people and tasks back to the awareness of the church.
3. At the annual meeting in November 2015 for the first time a **new arrangement for membership fees** for VEDD was adopted. It is hoped to make the VEDD fit for the future (see no 1), to develop a just system, understandable for everyone and to find obligatory rules for communities, that have financial difficulties.
4. Within the German Protestant Churches (EKD) degrees of the various diaconal-missionary schools are still recognized differently. This always leads to difficulties if individuals want to change job or towns. Because of various suggestions by VEDD the EKD established an ad-hoc-committee to deal with these issues and problems. Just recently this committee submitted its results to the board of EKD and the church conference. They decided to found a new committee ("**Fachkommission 3**"). This group will deal with recognition of degrees and their decisions will be valid in every church of the EKD. An important step for the schools and especially for the graduates of these schools because it allows greater freedom for job changes based on personal interests.
5. An exciting topic is discussed within the bodies of VEDD at the moment: How and in what form should **diaconal communities and diaconal institutions** cooperate in future facing an increasing processes of change? What common areas of work still exist although training opportunities for deacons are decreasing in diaconal institutions?
6. Beside all these issues at federal level, there are also recent developments in the member churches which the VEDD is watching carefully and is sometimes even accompanying. Three national churches currently develop new **deacon laws**: In the

North Church, the Evang. Church of Central Germany and in the Wuerttemberg church.

7. "We connect earth and heaven!"

This was the theme of the **general assembly of VEDD**. It took place at Johannesstift, Berlin from November 10-12, 2015.

Main speaker was Deacon Katharina Seiler. She works with the Foundation Alsterdorf, Hamburg in the Office of profile development of the diaconate on the question of the relation between diaconal communities and institutions. "Reveal yourself, become visible and take sides, anticipate resistance and just begin!" This is how she encouraged brothers and sisters at the general assembly of VEDD.

What makes a company become a diaconal business?

After Alsterdorf Foundation opened up for employees belonging to other religions, they needed new ways to make their laborers familiar with the Christian mission statement. "Here it is necessary to start a conversation again!" So Deacon Seiler says. During the admission process the mission statement is presented and individual ways to adopt it are arranged. A deacon should be able to speak out, have a network for his support and should act with courage, knowing that a strong community is covering his back, Seiler demanded from the audience. "In this way we connect earth and heaven, faith and love, word and deed. This is what we stand for! "

Entirely different was what Pastor Matthias Loyal, CEO of EVIM (Evangelical Association of the Home Mission in Nassau) from Wiesbaden told the delegates. He had been asked to name provocations and challenges. His assumption: diaconal institutions do not need deacons, others can do the work as well. He stayed with these simple statements, even questions from the floor did not lead to more insights.

Small groups discussed on this theme further. The four sub-groups showed how different the communities and their diaconal institutions within the VEDD are: the range goes from "no anchoring in the company, either in structure or by tasks" to "tasks within the company, as well as co-responsibility in the supervisory and governing body". There are strengths and weaknesses within each "type" and the participants looked for more potential that can be lifted. They should lead to concrete steps to develop their own community. The Conference of Elders in 2016 will deal with the issue. 2017 the talks will continue at a meeting with leaders of diaconal institutions.