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‘For Everyone Born, a Place at the Table’

The Encounter of Eucharist and Diaconia During a Sanctuary in the Netherlands

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Abstract

This paper elucidates the understanding of the bond between Liturgy and Diaconia. Liturgy and Diaconia are often considered two distinct practices in the daily life of the Church; one a set of rituals confined to the inner circle of Christians, the other a service to people in need, both in- and outside the Church. This contribution explores an encounter between the two by investigating experiences of Eucharist Celebrations during the Sanctuary in the Bethel Chapel, The Hague (Netherlands) in 2018/2019. The article briefly introduces the case of the Sanctuary, then describes and analyzes the results of interviews with pastors and finally formulate conclusions on the relation between Diaconia and Liturgy.

Keywords

Eucharist – Diaconia – Liturgy – ecumenical community – Sanctuary – migration – public theology

1 Introduction

There is no Liturgy without commitment to one’s neighbor and there is no Diaconia, or as some prefer to call it, Christian social practice, without

praying and celebrating.¹ As the editors of a Volume on the diaconal dimension of Liturgy put it: ‘The Liturgy culminates in the practicing of neighborly love, which again is tied back to the worshipping and finds its purpose in the doxology.’² The Eucharist³ is the most visible connection between Liturgy and Diaconia, as Deacons have always played a role in the celebration of the Eucharist. This connection has been confirmed in many publications and reports by theologians and churches, most famously in the report of the World Council of Churches on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (1982).⁴ However, in the life of the Church, the relation between the congregation gathered around the Table, its most intimate place, and the world in which followers of Christ are called to love their neighbors, has been a rather difficult act of balance.⁵ Eucharist and Diaconia are often considered two distinct practices in the daily life of the Church; one a liturgical ritual confined to the boundaries of the Church and the inner circle of Christians, the other a service to people in need, both in- and outside the Church. How can churches today live up to the intrinsic connection between neighborly love and worshipping, in order to strengthen and enlighten both? So far, I haven’t been able to find research on practical experiences regarding the connection between Eucharist and Diaconia. By exploring the practice of the Sanctuary in The Hague (2018/19), I try to contribute in diminishing this gap.

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- 1 Hymn from Shirley Erena Murray, sang during the opening and closing of the non-stop worship service of the Sanctuary: *‘For everyone born, a place at the table/ for everyone born, clean water and bread/ a shelter, a space, a safe place for growing/for everyone born, a star overhead.’* In Dutch, the song is found in *Liedboek. Zingen en bidden in huis en kerk* (‘s Gravenhage/Zoetermeer: Interkerkelijke Stichting voor het Kerklied/BV Liedboek, 2013), nr. 388.
 - 2 B. Kranemann u.a. (hg.), *Die diaconale Dimension der Liturgie* (Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 2006), p. 9. (translation to English EM).
 - 3 I follow the ecumenical habit to speak of Eucharist, Lord’s Supper or Table of the Lord as synonyms. During the Sanctuary different Christian traditions and denominations participated, which makes an ecumenical reference suitable.
 - 4 Recent examples: R. Gaede Neto, ‘Sharing the Body of Christ: Eucharist in a Diaconal Perspective’, S. Dietrich e.a. (eds.), *The Diaconal Church* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2019), pp 97–111; S. Dietrich and E. Thiani, ‘Interpretation, Inspiration and Interpretation: The Role of Theologies in Diaconia’, in: G. Ampony e.o. (eds.), *International Handbook on Ecumenical Diakonia* (Oxford: Regnum, 2021), pp. 81–92; E. Meijers, ‘Come and Eat: Table Fellowship as a Fundamental Form of Diakonia’, *Diaconia* 10, 1 (2019), pp. 85–111. <https://doi.org/10.13109/diac.2019.10.1.85>.
 - 5 For the slow drifting apart of Liturgy and Diaconia through the centuries, see for example A. Schubert, *Gott essen. Eine kulinarische Geschichte des Abendmahls* (C.H. Beck Verlag, 2018) and G. Rouwhorst and L. van Tongeren (red.), *Vieren en delen. De verhouding tussen liturgie en diaconie* (Berne Media, 2019), p. 34.

During a Sanctuary in the Dutch city of the Hague in the Fall and Winter of 2018–2019, worshipping, including the celebration of the Eucharist, played an important role. An Armenian family was protected from expulsion from the country by means of a non-stop worship service, which went on day and night for three months and was carried out by ministers from all over the country. The Sanctuary ended with a change of the Dutch Asylum Law and a promise of the government to review the applications of a group of families, including the one in the Bethel Chapel.

Looking at core aspects of Diaconia as defined in the Dutch handbook for Diaconia,⁶ Sanctuary can be defined as a diaconal practice: it is about ‘enduring the suffering’ together with a particular family; it is about ‘lifting the suffering of individuals and of a specific social group’, by granting one family sanctuary while pointing to other families in a similar situation, and finally it is about ‘creating just relations in Church and Society’ by putting a social issue on the political agenda, in this case the Asylum policies.⁷

The question I will seek to answer is the following: What can experiences of the Celebration of the Eucharist by pastors during the Sanctuary in the Hague in 2018/2019 contribute to the understanding of the relation between Liturgy and Diaconia? First, I will briefly introduce my research and the context of the Sanctuary. Secondly, I will present the experiences of the respondents, from which I will extract keywords for the bond between Eucharist and Diaconia. In the third and last section, I will conclude by answering my research question and propose topics for further research.

1.1 Sources and Methods

In order to gain insight into the experiences of pastors celebrating the Eucharist during the Sanctuary, I interviewed 24 of them. The interviews were all conducted between a year and two years after the Sanctuary ended, which gives them an evaluative and reflective character. Six of them were closely involved in the organization of the Sanctuary and performed a public role. Therefore, they appear with their full names, which is why all of them commented on

6 H. Crijns e.a. (red.), *Barmhartigheid en gerechtigheid. Handboek diaconiewetenschap* (Kampen: Kok, 2004).

7 For theological and legal fundamentals of Sanctuary, see *Overwegingen rond kerkasiel van de Raad van Kerken in Nederland*, oecumenische bezinning 1999, nr. 17 (revised edition 2004) and, with special reference to the Sanctuary in the Hague: Y. Hamelzky and L. van den Broeke, ‘Het kerkasiel: bevoegdheid tot binnentreden voor de overheid of recht op godsdienstvrijheid voor een geloofsgemeenschap?’, *NTKR: Tijdschrift voor Recht en Religie* 2020, pp. 169–194.

an earlier version of this article.⁸ The names of the other interviewees will not appear. One was a spiritual caretaker and some were lay pastors and had other professions. Some had participated as individuals in the Sanctuary, on their own initiatives, while others came with a group representing their congregation. Due to the circumstances caused by Covid 19, most of them were interviewed in online sessions, some individually, some during focus group sessions.⁹ They came from different churches and denominations: The Protestant Church of The Netherlands, The Old Catholic Church, The Dutch Reformed Church, and two independent Ecumenical churches. The coding of returning keywords in the interviews pointed to the intensity of the experience, which I then organized in categories. These lead me to four concepts defining the connection between Eucharist and Diaconia during the Sanctuary.

In order to get a clear view of the context of the Sanctuary, I made use of the few publications on the Sanctuary,¹⁰ the archives of the Sanctuary, containing maps of liturgies collected during the Sanctuary, press statements and social media accounts of the organizers, but also articles in newspapers and magazines, blogs and television programs during the Sanctuary.

This material lead to some assumptions regarding the views of the participants on the Sanctuary as such and especially the relation between Eucharist and Diaconia. To check the accuracy of these assumptions, I conducted a survey during the presentation of the book *Dat wonderlijke Kerkasiel* (The Miraculous Sanctuary) in January 2020. Of the approximately 120 participants, 65 responded. 40 percent of them were ministers, 39 percent churchgoers, the others were church musicians, volunteers and paid organizers of the Sanctuary.

Finally, I also rely on my own observations during the Sanctuary, which I visited twice, once as a churchgoer and once as a participating minister.¹¹ The perspective of this research therefore can be characterized as an inside perspective, reflecting on experiences of those who supported and participated in the Sanctuary, including myself.

8 I also thank my colleagues of the Practices section at the Protestant Theological University in Groningen, who commented on an earlier version of this article.

9 Part of the interviews were conducted together with or by my student Thelma Schoon (TS), who wrote a Master thesis on the topic of this paper. This will be indicated when relevant.

10 So far, there are only a few publications on the Sanctuary. W. van der Meiden en D. Stegeman (red.), *Dat wonderlijke Kerkasiel: De non-stop viering in de Haagse Bethelkapel* (Middelburg: Skandalon, 2020, Hamelzky and van den Broeke, focusing on legal aspects of Sanctuary and I. Bakker, 'Wederkerigheid én afhankelijkheid. Het Haagse kerkasiel in diaconaal perspectief', *Handelingen* 47, 2 (2020), pp. 47–51.

11 E. Meijers, 'Spirituele dimensies van een ruimte', in *Dat wonderlijke Kerkasiel*, pp. 56–64.

1.2 *Sanctuary in the Bethel Chapel in The Hague*

Between October 2018 and January 2019, an Armenian family with three children¹² received Sanctuary in the Bethel Chapel, The Hague, under the responsibility of the Protestant Church of The Hague.¹³ The organization was carried out by Stek,¹⁴ its executive agency, known as one of the bigger diaconal organizations in the Netherlands. The Church leaders based their commitment to this family on their biblical responsibility for strangers and on the diaconal values of justice and compassion, as expressed for instance in Matthew 25.¹⁵

The Sanctuary took place in a polarized situation around the asylum laws of the country, especially with regard to the so called 'Children's Amnesty', a regulation installed in 2013 to grant children and their families a residence permit who had been living in the Netherlands for five years or longer, but which was put on hold by the government.¹⁶ The family in the Bethel was one of a group of families whose stay in the Netherlands depended on the reinstallation of this Children's Amnesty.¹⁷

The goal of the Sanctuary, as the first press statement says, was to 'offer a place of rest and security to the family and to create time and space for a dialogue with the authorities for a human solution for children who have become the victim of the way the Children's Amnesty is applied today'.¹⁸ They were

12 Though their name was publicly known, I refer to them as 'the family', since their perspective on the events is not presented in this article.

13 An extensive description of the context of the Sanctuary is given in my article 'Sanctuary as a moving practice. The dynamics between Diaconia, Liturgy and Politics during the Sanctuary in The Hague 2018–2019', in: S. Mahokoto a.o. (eds.), *Moving Identities: Migration, Racism, Xenophobia and Memories of Colonization* (Göttingen: Wipf & Stock, expected 2023).

14 In Dutch, Stek means something like 'a place to feel at home', being also an acronym for Foundation for City and Church.

15 Interview D. Stegeman October 2, 2020; Th. Hetteema, June 15, 2020 (TS), Th. Hetteema, October 8, 2020, I. Bakker, December 9, 2020.

16 De 'Definitieve Regeling Langdurig Verblijvende Kinderen'. <https://ind.nl/over-ind/Paginas/Alles-over-de-Regeling-langdurig-verblijvende-kinderen.aspx> (accessed 19.10.2020).

17 Press statement October 26, 2018 Protestant Church The Hague (Archive Sanctuary); *Dat wonderlijke kerkasiel*, p. 14.

18 Press statement, October 26, 2018; *Dat wonderlijke kerkasiel*, p. 20. This was in accordance with earlier statements of Dutch Churches, see *Overwegingen rond kerkasiel van de Raad van Kerken in Nederland*, 2004; *Geloven voorbij grenzen. Over de kerkelijke betrokkenheid bij vluchtelingen en asielzoekers*, 2019.

supported by the Protestant Church of the Netherlands, the Dutch Council of Churches¹⁹ and several international churches and church bodies.²⁰

Pressure on the government by the Sanctuary and other groups, political debate and new evidence from a fact-finding mission²¹ eventually resulted in a change of attitude of the government, which promised to revise all applications for Children's Amnesty, including the one of the family in the Bethel Chapel. They received a residence permit two months after the end of the Sanctuary.²²

What made this Sanctuary different from earlier cases in the Netherlands, was the non-stop worship service, demanded by the government. The legal base for Sanctuary was for the first time strictly applied: the state is not allowed to intervene during a religious celebration.²³ Thus, the worshipping created both a safe space for the family and, by circumstances, a close connection between Liturgy and Diaconia. The non-stop service lasted three months, or 2306 hours and 15 minutes, to be exact.²⁴ The obligation to worship was felt as a burden in the beginning, but very soon, many ministers from all over the country came to worship in support of the Sanctuary.²⁵ A 'pop-up ecumenical community' came into being, as Theo Hettema, moderator of the Protestant Church of The Hague, called it.²⁶ According to him, 'Liturgy became the decisive power of the Sanctuary'.²⁷ His fellow spokesperson Derk Stegeman, vice-director of Stek, spoke about the worship service as 'the bonfire, around which we assemble, (...) were we, literally and metaphorically, break the bread and share it.'²⁸

19 Press announcement Dutch Council of Churches, December 5, 2018. <https://www.raadvankerken.nl/nieuws/2018/12/raad-pas-regeling-kinderpardon-toe/> (accessed 12.1.2022).

20 e.g. The community of Taizé, the Mennonite Church in Ohio, The World Communion of Reformed Churches: <http://wrcr.ch/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/2018-12-17-Hague-WorshipStatement.pdf> (accessed 7.8.2020).

21 *Dat wonderlijke kerkasiel*, p. 18 and p. 22. Interview D. Stegeman, October 2, 2020.

22 *Dat wonderlijke kerkasiel*, p. 20 and p. 24.

23 Algemene wet op het binnentreden, art 12. Cf. <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0006763/2010-07-01>. accessed 10.8.2020. Strictly spoken, there is no legal base for Sanctuary, but in practice, this law functions as such. See Hamelzky and L. van den Broeke, par. 2.4.

24 *Dat wonderlijke kerkasiel*, p. 102.

25 980 different ministers (including lay ministers) from different denominations, churches and a few from other religions, came to worship. 12.000 visitors were registered and 150 volunteers offered their help. *Dat wonderlijke kerkasiel*, pp. 102–103.

26 *Dat wonderlijke kerkasiel*, p. 44.

27 Th. Hettema, 'Lachen en gewezen. Maandenlang vieren in de Haagse Bethelkapel', *Laeatare* 35, nr. 3 (2019), p. 11.

28 *Dat wonderlijke kerkasiel*, p. 94. (Newsletter 2; 17.12.2018.).

Liturgy was an indispensable part of the Sanctuary as a diaconal practice, and the diaconal practice shaped the worshipping. 95,4 percent of the respondents of the survey agreed that the context of the Sanctuary had influenced their experience of the worship service.

As the Sanctuary had started head over heels, there had not been much space to reflect on the way the Worship service was organized; The Protestant Church of The Hague relied on her longstanding liturgical traditions. There was no central authority deciding on rituals and texts; everything was based on trust, and everybody was welcome.²⁹ Relying on the maps with liturgies, the majority of the participants belonged to the Protestant Church of the Netherlands and followed a protestant or ecumenical liturgy.³⁰ The choice whether or not to celebrate the Eucharist, was entirely up to the ministers themselves.

One of the first times the Eucharist was celebrated, volunteers were taken by surprise and there was even a slight panic: was there a set in the house for the Celebration of the Eucharist? They started to look in the cupboards to find anything that could serve as such.³¹ The event brought up a more fundamental question: was the liturgical space to be limited? It was important for the Sanctuary to be taken seriously as a church service by the Protestant Church of The Hague, so it had to follow the rules of this Church. The organizers decided that trust should remain the fundament. Nevertheless, the introductory text of the invitation to inscribe onto the online schedule for ministers was slightly adapted. It was made clear that it was formally a worship service of the Protestant Church of The Hague, to which every one of the oikumene was invited to participate, also non-Christians. The goal of the Sanctuary (see above) was mentioned, followed by this phrase: 'If you celebrate the Eucharist, we assume you do this as an authorized minister.'³² Ministers who wanted to

29 Politicians and journalists were allowed, but they were urged not to film or record within the Chapel. (Interviews D. Stegeman, October 2, 2020 and Th. Hetteema, October 8, 2020.

30 Th. Hetteema, 'Lachen en geweën', p. 11.

31 November 10, 2018 at 11.30, a volunteer asks for a cup and dish to celebrate the Supper of the Lord. (Archive Sanctuary, Stek, social media, whatsapp group coordinators). However, the very first celebration of the Eucharist had taken place earlier, probably on October 30, when a minister had a 'service of Word and Table' between midnight and 1:00 a.m. (Archive Stek, liturgy, folder 1.) He continued to share bread and wine during all of his (mostly nightly) services.

32 Text November 9 on (Archive Sanctuary, Stek, liturgy, folder 1.) Translated from Dutch by E.M.

do so, had to provide for everything themselves, they had to bring their own equipment, and also bread and wine.³³

There was no registration of the number of times the Eucharist has been celebrated. Based on the folders with liturgies saved, and the impressions of volunteers and coordinators who were frequently present, it is likely that it happened every week at least a few times, sometimes twice a day, sometimes less.³⁴ The celebration of the Eucharist was not strictly necessary – the prayers, sermons and songs were enough to respond to the demand of the law. It was therefore remarkable that the Eucharist was celebrated and was experienced by those who celebrated it as the heart of all liturgy and Christian engagement.

2 Celebrating the Eucharist During the Sanctuary

The interviews (sixteen individually, eight in two groups of four) consisted of three parts. First, the respondents were asked why they participated in the Sanctuary, how they prepared themselves and why they choose to celebrate the Eucharist. After that, the interviews concentrated on their experiences during the celebration of the Eucharist. To conclude, the respondents were asked to reflect theologically on their experiences.

In this section, I will first say something about the motivation of the respondents, then I will focus on eight aspects which articulate the intensity of their experience. I will conclude by illustrating this by one particular story, as concepts and keywords gathered from a lot of different stories can never communicate an experience like a singular story can.

2.1 Motivations

The engagement of the respondents in the Sanctuary was very diverse: some came often, others only went once. Some were fully supported by their congregation, others came despite of disaccord on the issue. Some were since a long-time involved in working with refugees and asylum seekers, while others had never met asylum seekers before. The commitment to diaconal issues to some was an integral part of their ministry while for others it was a new experience. Some ministers had more radical political positions than others, but all agreed on the responsibility of the Church to speak up against what they felt as unjust.

33 Interview Th. Hettema, October 8, 2020.

34 Archive Sanctuary, Stek, liturgy, folder 1–6. (each folder contained between 60 and 80 liturgies, of which about 10 percent were celebrations of the Eucharist.).

The support of their national churches to the cause of the Sanctuary to some was an important incentive to come.

The same is true for the decision to celebrate the Eucharist. Some ministers simply did it because there was plenty of time to do it, and they enjoyed not being restricted to the usual schedule on Sunday morning. Celebrating the Eucharist helped structuring the long hours, although this was seldom the only reason. It also fulfilled the need to eat something during a long night of worship. The Eucharist was celebrated because the Lord's supper figured in the biblical text which was read, or because the minister was of the opinion the Eucharist should be celebrated every time Christians come together.³⁵ Most celebrated with bread and wine or grape juice, while some shared bread with cheese or crackers with orange juice (I will come back to that). Since the group of participants was usually small, the Eucharist was mostly shared while standing in a circle.

The motive most heard was the need for encouragement in a situation of distress, words being not enough or inadequate. One of the ministers expressed it like this: 'here, we share the grief of this moment and bind it to the suffering of Jesus Christ, in order to say: this is not the only thing; this also is a sign of hope. How can we overcome this moment? That has to do with the power of the meal, with healing. (..) Around the table we are connected to each other and to something bigger than ourselves. As Christ is here for us, we are here for you [meaning the family in hiding, EM]. The celebration of the Eucharist gave us the strength to continue.'³⁶

2.2 *An Intense Experience*

Despite of all the differences between them in terms of denominations, churches and theological traditions, all interviewees agreed upon one thing, how their experience of the worship service and especially the Eucharist was more intense than usual. Could this have to do with the connection between Liturgy and Diaconia during the Sanctuary? All interviewees struggled to find words to describe their experiences and I struggle in my turn to verbally express what made out the intensity of their experience. Since part of the meaning of the Eucharist is in the ritual itself and the experiences were also linked to particular stories which cannot be generalized, it will probably never be possible to fully define what this intensity was all about. Nevertheless, some common elements can be recognized. I have identified eight different aspects

35 Focus group interview September 25, 2020; Interview September 23, 2020; Interview Th. Hettema, October 8, 2020; Interview D. Stegeman (TS), June 15, 2020.

36 Interview October 30, 2020.

mentioned in the interviews. I will mention them one by one, giving one or two examples for each element.

1. The (political) necessity of the worshipping;
2. The appeal of the political context of the Children's Amnesty to the church;
3. The realness of the worshipping;
4. The presence of a pop-up ecumenical community;
5. Biblical texts understood in direct connection with the Sanctuary.
6. The physical presence of a family whose future was at stake;
7. The improvisational character of the worshipping;
8. The different experience of time and space.

The (Political) Necessity of the Worshipping

Since the worshipping itself was the legal condition for the State not to enter the building, the Sanctuary was actually created through worshipping. To some, this was a controversial element: by worshipping, political pressure was built.³⁷ But most of our respondents regarded this as 'an essential task of the Church. In Diaconia we call this the prophetic calling of the Church, something I warmly support. [...] By doing this while worshipping, we stay close to our identity as Church. If you do not choose to do this in a situation like this, one could even ask if you are not drifting away from who you are as a Church.'³⁸ This minister related the necessity of the worshipping to the insecurity of the situation; there was always fear the police might come in, or that the Sanctuary would not have a positive outcome. This possibility created tension, which made worshipping an intense experience.³⁹ Another interviewee made a close connection between the Eucharist and the goal of the Sanctuary: 'The Eucharist can create a space in which vulnerable people are safe. (...) With the Sanctuary the Church contributed to society by offering a space, a kind of break in ongoing processes. This was the goal of the Sanctuary, as the Church of the Hague had put it: to push the pause button to give a possibility to look at and improve processes at hand. They offered another space, in which rules are different on behalf of vulnerable people. I think that is a very sensible way of worshipping.'⁴⁰

37 I discuss this more at length in E. Meijers, 'Sanctuary as a moving practice'.

38 Interview January 20, 2021. This view was confirmed by 92 percent of the respondents of the survey, who agreed or fully agreed to the thesis that the Sanctuary was a successful example of the prophetic role of the Church in Society.

39 Idem.

40 Interview November 23, 2020 (TS).

The Appeal of the Political Context of the Children's Amnesty to the Church

Closely related to the first element is this second one, which I mention separately because our respondents did not only relate it to this specific Sanctuary, but to the broader political situation regarding asylum seekers and refugees: 'These children should be out making friends, and instead they have to fear to be sent to a country where they do not speak the language and are in danger. The suffering is so present. The fact that the Sanctuary can fail. All those people. It still touches me. In that situation you break the bread and think of Christ. I cannot really explain it well.'⁴¹ Many respondents expressed how the political situation brought them back to what they felt as the fundament of their belief: 'We were standing in a circle, the bread was torn, it had something basic, and in the same time I felt closer to the heart of the Eucharist: the brokenness of the body of Jesus, the longing for wholeness and the connection to those present. That was a unique experience.'⁴²

Derk Stegeman formulated it like this: 'The Eucharist to me has become more and more a political event, which is about crossing borders. If you look at the distress of undocumented migrants [...], I think you have to make sure they are sitting at your table.'⁴³

The Sanctuary thus revealed a feature of the Eucharist that often remains invisible: 'The extreme situation in the Bethel Church makes the depth of the impact of the Eucharist more visible, but in reality, the Eucharist always has this depth, also when there is no connection to Diaconia.'⁴⁴

The Realness of the worshipping

One of the ministers had participated in earlier Sanctuaries. This time it was different, she said: 'Before, when there was a Sanctuary, the police would let you know that they were on their way to the Church: quickly a bible was grabbed and a prayer said. But now, the worshipping was real, it was about the connection between people, about the hope for a different future. The sharing of bread and wine accentuated that.'⁴⁵

Ministers worshipped as they always did: there were no banners with slogans attached to the walls of the Chapel.⁴⁶ But the prayers and the sharing of

41 Interview November 18, 2020.

42 Interview September 23, 2020.

43 Interview D. Stegeman (TS), June 15, 2020.

44 Interview November 18, 2020 (TS).

45 Focus group interview 25.9.2020.

46 Interview Th. Hettema, October 8, 2020.

bread and wine in a situation of political tension worked encouraging. In addition, the worshipping was experienced as a sign of the relevance of the Church in society. 'Actually, praising God is one of the best things people can do. Not only because it bought us time and not only because the police could not come in, but because Gods voice is heard with all its vibration and energy. Something happens then. That is part of our celebrating. [...] The fact that we celebrated the Eucharist in this complex and hopeless situation gave me the feeling that we went as deep as we could. We did it all. We are not just doing quickly a few little prayers, but we are here at our very best, as we can be thanks to God. And we need to be like that.'⁴⁷

The Presence of a Pop-up Ecumenical Community

The diversity of the participants in the Sanctuary had a strong impact on all interviewees. They participated in liturgical traditions that were not their own and 'crossed borders of churches because this cause was too important to us to first formulate a common confession of faith. We celebrated in good faith and we trusted others did the same.'⁴⁸ This aspect of unity in diversity was strongly experienced during the Eucharist. One of the ministers formulated what was, according to her, the strength of this community: 'So, in the end it is possible that there is a place for everybody at the table. It is possible that, if you start to move together, things that were thought to be fixed forever can be put in motion. To us, that was in its core the meaning of celebrating the supper of the Lord.'⁴⁹

Biblical Texts Understood in Direct Connection with the Sanctuary

Many respondents expressed how the context of the Sanctuary and the biblical texts enlightened each other reciprocally. Since there was more time, long psalms (like 119) and some bible books (like Ruth) could be read entirely. The texts, read entirely or expressed in other forms, touched those present: 'The Psalm came alive; the text about justice and suffering spoke directly into the situation of the Sanctuary. The eloquence of the biblical texts was underscored by the situation in which it was read. The text made the situation more tangible,

47 Interview November 18, 2020 (TS). Practically all interviewees and the survey confirmed this: 95 Percent of the respondents of the survey agreed or fully agreed the Sanctuary was Church at its best, bringing celebrating, serving, learning and sharing together. Also *Dat wonderlijke kerkasiel*, p. 20.

48 Group interview September 25, 2020.

49 Focus group interview, EM and TS, September 25, 2020.

and the situation the text.⁵⁰ Another minister said: ‘We read from the first eucharistic prayer. I do not pray that often because it is so long and solemn, but I had chosen it exactly for that reason. It says: “Remember all those here present. Release and liberate them. Bring them salvation and keep them for eternity.” The way how these texts spoke directly to the situation gave me goose bumps.’⁵¹

The Physical Presence of the Family Whose Future was at Stake

The family in hiding often joined the worshipping, which touched many of the respondents, as they embodied the Sanctuary and the Children’s Amnesty. The poetry of the daughter of the family, written during the Sanctuary, was often read, either by herself or others. Several interviewees, especially those living far from The Hague, told us they got invited by the family to stay after worshipping to share a meal before travelling back to their homes, which made them wonder who were the hosts and who the guests during the Sanctuary.⁵² A few respondents felt the necessity to keep a certain distance, feeling ‘slightly embarrassed’. ‘You are there to protect these people, and they would look at you. I was kind of happy not to see them, that they didn’t have to thank me for being there. [...] There they were, closed in with all these kind people who deserved their gratitude, but they must have been afraid and angry at the same time.’⁵³ Another interviewee put it like this: ‘You should avoid the Messiah complex, thinking you are the one who saves this family. We cannot claim God. Of course, you think you are doing the right thing, but the reality is so complex; it is easy to derail and pursuit your own glory.’⁵⁴

The Improvisational Character of the worshipping

As noted above, the improvisational character was not a deliberate choice, but the consequence of the uncertainty of the situation. After the news came that all applications for Children’s Amnesty were going to be revised, a closing worshipping hour was prepared quickly. A lot more people came than expected. Theo Hettema, leading the worshipping, decided to celebrate the Eucharist. To him this was evident: ‘In the Eucharist everything we are as a Church is present. It is bread for the road, consolation and protest. Jesus is present when we celebrate the Eucharist. It was my plan to share the eucharist with the family if

50 Interview December 11, 2020.

51 Interview November 18, 2020 (TS).

52 Interview December 15, 2020. I will address the dynamics of hospitality between the family, visitors, worshipping community, volunteers and organizers elsewhere.

53 Interview November 18, 2020 (TS).

54 Interview December 9, 2020.

the police would come to take them away. It is a diaconal task to bring forward the poignant aspects of the Eucharist. [...] During the first song I started to think how to do the Eucharist. We had bought some bread, but with the two glasses we had it could never work. Then I had the experience of Abraham sacrificing his son: where are the sheep? I panicked and looked around, and all of a sudden, I saw a box with a complete Eucharist set. A volunteer who went looking for chairs had found it in the storage room and just put it there. Really miraculous! It was the most beautiful Eucharist I have ever celebrated all my life.⁵⁵

The Experience of Time and Space in the Chapel

'We came to celebrate during the night. [...] We were awake in the Chapel and upstairs the family was asleep. In the space outside the chapel volunteers were awake, making bread and coffee for us. We shortly spoke to those worshipping before and after us. All this made me very conscious of us hoping against all odds. It was Advent and we felt that very strongly. [...] Before, it had felt like an adventure: in the middle of the night, worshipping for three hours, can we do it. But what it meant spiritually, only came when we were there, in the circumstances.'⁵⁶ The Chapel became a special, intimate space. Worship time was unlimited; it went on day and night. Ten big Paschal candles were burned completely and a countless number of other candles. Afterwards, 25 liters of paint were needed to get the soot of the walls.⁵⁷ In the middle of the space a painting *The Madonna del Mare Nostrum* by Hans Versteeg, attracted the attention. A black woman with child, wrapped in insulation film to keep warm, standing in front of the sea. A painting of a refugee, but the golden film gave it the impression of an icon. 'This painting connected the fate of the family with all refugees. Sitting in the Chapel, you were looked at by her as if asked: who will you be to me?'⁵⁸

3 Keywords in the Relation Between Eucharist and Diaconia

From these eight aspects concerning the intensity of the experience of our respondents, I have drawn four interrelated keywords, which I will use to reflect on the relation between Eucharist and Diaconia. From the first

55 Interview Th. Hettema October 8, 2020.

56 Interview November 18, 2020.

57 *Dat wonderlijke kerkasiel*, p. 102.

58 *Dat wonderlijke kerkasiel*, p. 31 and p. 51. (Contributions E. Borgman and D. Stegeman.).

fundamental and obvious 'breaking and sharing', three other key words arise, which articulate forms in which the relation takes shape: community, visibility and improvisation.

3.1 *Break and Share*

Breaking and sharing was done literally and frequently, both during the celebration of the Eucharist and during the Sanctuary as such. Neighbors brought food and coffee; others shared their experiences and offered their help, the family shared (among other things) poetry and their cooking skills. Celebrating the Eucharist articulated these practices and gave them meaning, while in the same time deepening the understanding of the ritual. During the long nights of watching and praying, the Eucharist actually fed the participants. In short, the Sanctuary created an intimacy between the daily and liturgical life. This brought out a sometimes-forgotten aspect of the bread of the Eucharist: its material quality to feed, not only spiritually, but also bodily. Interviewees, often coming from protestant traditions with a history of neglecting or even condemning the body in favor of the soul, rediscovered the inextricable bond between spirit and body. And, like liturgist Marcel Barnard stated, bread as a symbol for the good life also confronts us with the question where this good life is lacking.⁵⁹ This happened very concretely during the Sanctuary. The interviewees experienced the suffering and hardship of Christ, spiritually present during the Eucharist, as inseparable from the hardship in their own society, embodied in one family, which in its turn incorporated the pain and desperation of those hoping for a Children's Amnesty. In that situation, the celebration of the Eucharist created, just like the Sanctuary itself, a safe space which interrupted a reality in which a place for refugees is never natural. The boundaries of the space for refugees, usually marked by the asylum policies of the Netherlands, were lifted during the Eucharist. The liturgical presence of another reality encouraged the participants, drawing suffering and hope closely together. This was hope against all odds, springing from the presence of Christ in the breaking and sharing, a hope that was experienced as alive, regardless of the outcome of the Sanctuary.

59 M. Barnard, 'De avondmaalstafel en de eetkamertafel. Sacramenten als concrete symboolhandelingen of heilig spel', *Kerk en Theologie* 68 (2017), pp. 339–352. Also see E. Meijers, 'Het brood van de naaste. Verkenningen rond diaconie en eucharistie', *Handelingen* 47, 2 (2020), p. 17–23.

Theologically speaking, the diaconal context of the Sanctuary underscored the anamnestic and eschatological dimensions of the Eucharist,⁶⁰ meaning that the active remembering of the suffering of Christ, the participation in the resurrection and the expectancy of Gods Kingdom, were central notions to the pastors. Practically none of the respondents spoke of the Eucharist as a practice of sacrifice or as an experience of individual healing only.

The eschatological vision both stimulated and limited the feelings of joy and togetherness. The perspective of a new Heaven and Earth, of 'the celebration of the big feast, when every human being come into its own', signaled in the same time the possibility of another world and the cleavage between the world as we know it and the world to come. Several ministers interpreted this gap as an assignment to continue solidarity with refugees beyond the Sanctuary. Some participants expressed feelings of discomfort, seeing the excitement of other participants. They pointed to the risk of becoming self-content.⁶¹ By calling the Sanctuary and its outcome 'God's gift', an eschatological caveat was expressed.

Based on the experiences of the respondents, the Eucharist can be understood as an eschatological space, which interrupts the power relations and structures of our world, a space in which Gods Kingdom is already present and in which the realness of suffering receives recognition. In this way, Christ is present both spiritually and bodily. It is from that space that Diaconia lives and learns. Through the recognition of both our own vulnerability and those of others, the Eucharist fills suffering with hope. In all this there is a sharp awareness that the Kingdom has not come yet. Our (diaconal) practices can be understood as a form of longing for the Kingdom, whether or not our acts are successful. Diaconal practices might create anamnestic and eschatological spaces in which suffering is recognized and hope is born, but diaconal professionals and volunteers should not pretend to bring salvation themselves.

3.2 *Community*

Beside anamnesis and eschaton, koinonia (community) was another aspect of the Eucharist which was very much alive during the Sanctuary. In a way, this was a surprise, since people didn't know each other before coming together in the Chapel. Groups from congregations who had come together, joined in with individual visitors, neighbors from across the street and even international

60 Anamnesis (the active remembering of the suffering of Christ to the point of participating in it) and eschaton (the coming of the Kingdom, the new heaven and earth) are important aspects of a reformed understanding of the Eucharist. I take them from Calvin's understanding of the eucharist, Institution IV, 17.

61 Interview November 23, 2020.

visitors. Together they formed a temporary and loose ecumenical community, without which it would have been probably impossible to continue the Sanctuary for the three months it lasted. Standing up together to a policy that was felt to be unjust, was a new and overwhelming experience to some of the participants. To put it in terms of Robert Putnam's concepts of bridging and bonding,⁶² differences were bridged for the sake of the cause, but the bonding within this community was very fragile, since most people went home after a few hours. Hospitality was an important aspect of this community: it provided the space in which the family could be as safe as possible. In the daily practice however, the family often acted as hosts, being the only ones who actually lived in the Bethel Church and being constantly present.

This loose community carried the Sanctuary both practically and spiritually. Celebrating the Eucharist while standing in a circle and offering each other bread and wine (or sometimes something else) intensified this experience and put it in a theological perspective: being a community and acting as one, is an indispensable and constitutive aspect of Christian life.

Diaconal communities are often loose and temporary, as people living in the margins often (have to) change their ways to survive, and live less stable lives. Diaconia, often regarded as a practice in which the strong help the weak, can learn from the Eucharistic experience of community, in which everybody is a guest at the table of the Lord. Differences do not disappear, but are looked at from a different perspective, which can relativize, criticize or celebrate them, but always recognizes them. Diaconia means to sharply analyze differences, question them and learn to live with them. The Eucharist reminds Diaconia that human relations including their power differences are always a matter of community (of vulnerable and imperfect people), in which nobody is in the center but Christ. Diaconal practices remind the Eucharistic community of the vulnerability of *koinonia*, making this visible in everyday life.

3.3 *Visibility*

The symbol of the table, at which a place for everybody is available, has come back several times during the Sanctuary: in the songs, during the worshipping and in the reflections of the ministers we interviewed. The Sanctuary itself was about asking for a place at the table of our society for this family and those applying for the Children's Amnesty. During the Sanctuary this table changed from being a symbol into an actual encounter between very different people,

62 R. Putnam, *Bowling alone: the collapse and revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

including people who fear to be expelled from the country. The visibility and tangibility of a family in distress touched the participants in the Sanctuary directly. They were confronted with the consequences of the asylum policies of the Netherlands in the lives of people who had been living here for years. This made it quite impossible to escape difficult questions about political choices and the kind of country these choices produce. The supporters of the Sanctuary had different political convictions, but they all supported the plea of the Dutch Churches to make space at the table for those children (and their families) who grew up here and had no 'home' to return to. The actual presence of such a family released uneasy feelings in some of the visitors, as we have seen above. It affected the worshipping. Biblical texts and songs shed their light on the situation of this family. The perspective of refugees and asylum seekers was always present during the worshipping.

Diaconia is often done outside the view – and even the life – of congregations, especially white middle class congregations. The Sanctuary created a different kind of community, in which differences (in power, in belief) were visible. This caused more (self)consciousness about the power of worshipping, both in terms of encouragement and risk. The interviewees expressed how this situation intensified their experience of 'being Church'.

The importance of visibility has been stressed before. Most famously in the Confession of Belhar (South-Africa, 1986), born during the struggle against apartheid. The importance of not only abstractly talking about or celebrating unity, justice and reconciliation, but to actually make them visible, is at the core of this Confession.⁶³ The experience that fine words and rituals concerning the unity of mankind can go together with politics of segregation and oppression and with segregation at the heart of the Church in the Celebration of the Eucharist, firmly anchored the conviction in the Belhar Confession that the marks of the Church are not only a gift, but also involve an obligation in everyday life, as difficult as it might be. The visibility of diaconal work, more precisely of people taking part in diaconal projects, in the liturgical life of congregations, enriches the Church as a learning community. The diversity of the Eucharistic community, which transgresses the boundaries of the Church, confirming its nature as a fundamentally open community, has to be visible in all its asymmetric relations in order to understand the full meaning of both Diaconia and Liturgy.

63 https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/theologyandworship/pdfs/belhar.pdf (accessed February 22, 2022). Also see G.D. Cloete and D.J. Smit, *A Moment of Truth. The Confession of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church 1982* (B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1984).

3.4 *Improvisation*

The visible diverse and asymmetric (diaconal/liturgical) Eucharistic community emerges in a different way in this third keyword: improvisation. The messiness of daily life was very present during the Sanctuary, due to the pressure it was under. There was little time to organize things properly, the situation was new and there were few proven methods available. As a consequence, there was both a necessity and a possibility to improvise. Messiness was accepted to a certain degree (as long as it didn't jeopardize the safety of the family and the Sanctuary itself). This gave the participants freedom to follow their own traditions or try out new ways. It also brought up questions and differences, that partly came up in hindsight (during the interviews) and were not deepened nor explored during the Sanctuary, due to the concentration on the goal and the relatively short period it lasted. This however, is typical for diaconal work. There is seldomly time for systematic discussions. Messiness seems however strange to Liturgy, in which long lasting traditions shape the forms used. But this time, even the celebration of the Eucharist was sometimes improvised. This evokes questions like: is bread and wine really necessary to celebrate the Eucharist, or can we also use other kinds of food and drinks? What is the connection between the Table of the Lord and the kitchen table, that was just outside the Chapel and served as much as a place of hospitality as the Eucharist did? The distinction between the Supper of the Lord and what is known as agape meals was blurred during the Sanctuary. The deepening cleavage between the two in the history of the Church has contributed also to the drifting apart of Liturgy and Diaconia. The practice of breaking and sharing in The Hague seems to confirm insights of scholars who question the distinction between agape meals and Eucharist.⁶⁴

If the relation between Eucharist and kitchen table is taken as a symbol of the relation between Liturgy and Diaconia, how much closeness can they endure? Can they be seen as an extension of each other,⁶⁵ or should they keep a certain distance? 'Liturgy always evokes the question "what can I do"?' But on the other hand, too close a connection between Liturgy and Diaconia implies the risk of not respecting the eschatological caveat. The heat of the moment, the political urgency of the situation, needs the other reality of Liturgy. On the other hand, Diaconia can remind Liturgy not to focus on itself

64 For example: A. McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists: Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1999); or more recent: N.M. Vos and A.C. Geljon (eds.), *Rituals in early Christianity: New perspectives on tradition and transformation*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 164 (2021).

65 As M. Barnard proposes in, *De avondmaalstafel en de eetkamertafel*, pp. 339–352.

but continuously transgress its own space. Dutch theologian Gerardus van der Leeuw spoke in his famous book *Wegen en grenzen* of liturgy as a sacred game, which can never be fixed, but points beyond itself, downwards into the world and upward, towards God.⁶⁶ Diaconia and Liturgy need each other, but should not be confused, as one constructs a space distant to our daily lives, while the other moves within the turmoil and messiness of the space of this world.

4 Conclusion

The most important conclusion of my research, in which I hoped to learn more about the understanding of the relation between Liturgy and Diaconia, is this: During the Sanctuary, Liturgy and Diaconia were not just incidentally combined, but really did meet, while keeping their own specific character. Both the interdependency and the differences between Diaconia and Liturgy became clear during the Sanctuary. They were interconnected in an inextricable way, as the safety of the family depended on the 'never ending' worship service. The context of migration and asylum-policies in the Netherlands shaped the liturgical experience, and the continuous worshipping carried the diaconal practice. The citation at the beginning of this article, that 'Liturgy culminates in the practicing of neighborly love, which again is tied back to the worshipping and finds its purpose in the doxology', is not an abstraction, but a tangible reality in the case of the Sanctuary. The celebration of the Eucharist during the Sanctuary represented a concentration or densification of these experiences. Aspects of the Eucharist which were accentuated by our interviewees were the community, the presence and hospitality of Jesus, the connection between the suffering of Christ and the World and between the brokenness of our existence and the longing for the Kingdom of God. Hope and sorrow were present simultaneously. All of this was felt much more vivid than usual because of the connection to the Sanctuary, its concrete plight and even its messiness. The usual ecclesial and practical borders between Eucharist and Diaconia were blurred, but their different functions were also confirmed as helpful to endure and analyze the situation of the Sanctuary and choose a position as Christian churches. Liturgy and Diaconia were experienced as two expressions of Church which should neither be confused nor separated.

66 G. van der Leeuw, *Wegen en Grenzen. Studie over de verhouding van religie en kunst*, Amsterdam (H.J. Paris (second, revised edition), 1948), p. 151.

The Sanctuary underscored the importance of anamnesis, eschaton and koinonia in the life of the Church, both diaconally and liturgically. This eucharistic power might remain hidden, but it comes alive during moments of crisis. Breaking and sharing needs the liturgical space, which stands apart from daily life to remember us that the Kingdom is *given* to us, but it also needs the diaconal practice in all its messiness, to remember that the Kingdom is given to *us*.