Ruhr-Universität Bochum Center for Religious Studies (CERES) Course of study: Religious studies

Erasmus+ Traineeship Semester: Summer Semester 22

Date: 05.08.2022.

### A progress report

### - Preparation: looking for an internship, finding a place to live

As I have two undergraduate study degrees in theology — the first with religion science, but the second with a church's seminary — I wanted to connect my traineeship with my previous knowledge and experience. Both degrees were complimentary — one showed me the perspective from a more neutral academic and research way, while the other was more practiceoriented and confessional. They gave me a new perspective seeing that church is not only about doctrines in a sometimes very abstract sense but also going to people and trying to help them in many ordinary ways — like providing food and shelter for those in need. That is called the field of diaconia.

Ironically, I was looking and applying for an internship when the war in Ukraine started to happen, and practical side of some social work then was immensely needed and helpful. So, as I had some previous knowledge about the diaconia, I thought that with my previous experience and the new demand, I could try to find my place there. As I mentioned before, the mission of diaconia intrigued me by the role it played within society. It is like a bridge between the idealistic world of the church (heaven) and society (earth). And this church's institution deals with mostly humanitarian aid using the instruments of its ethical understanding of human beings, which is crystallized in the positive golden law of ethics — do to another that what would you like that is done to you.

And surprisingly, as it was to me, diaconia centers mostly receive their funding from municipalities and local governments because they provide social services for the city's residents. And, as this was the format of the traineeship, I could do it officially as a work.

Finding a place where to live was not hard. In Latvia, finding a flat is not so difficult, and to rent it, you do not need to go through an enormous bureaucracy as it is, for example, in Germany. I lived in the vicinity of Riga's (Latvia's capital) city center, a place with enough space, yet optimal location within the boundaries of the various day-care centers I worked in.

# - Implementation: tasks and supervision, conflicts and solutions, everyday life and free time

My traineeship started with contacting and meeting with the head of the Diaconia Center of the ELCL, **Sector** She helped me with the acquaintance with the structure of the center, people, current projects and activities, and the possible workload in the specific institutions — daycare centers. Also, my mentor, pastor **Sector** who is the head of the diaconia branch in the church, helped me to clarify my inner objectives on how to approach all this workload, not forgetting that we are working for human beings not something else. It clarified my vision and helped to focus all this traineeship time.

The working environment and staff were supportive as their motivation also centered around previously mentioned ethics. It was mostly unnecessary for me to speak about an inclusive society, only to those coming from outside and not always understanding why the center accepts various people, who belong to different ethnic, social, and religious groups. One of the biggest challenges was addressing people, who were coming for free meals, and to face the intolerance for Ukrainian refugees, mostly from people of Russian ethnicity.

So, my traineeship included working with centers' visitors, explaining the mission of diacionia, and showing the possible services that various centers can offer, and why diaconia offers those services at all also to others (from exclusivism to inclusivism). It also implied working with Ukrainian refugees, welcoming them, understanding their needs, and providing the possible support from the center, for example, distributing some essential food, clothes, and means of livelihood.

The practice also fell during various holidays, for example, Easter, Pentecost, and Summer Solstice, which are very important events for Latvians. Enjoying this time helped me to value the meaning of free and safe country when you can do such activities without danger.

### - Evaluation: best and worst experience

My work involved discussions and activities with children and young people, who were also visitors of the day-care centers. Once I had to install a trampoline. It was big, but once I worked as a technical assistant in the construction sphere, such a task did not seem difficult to me, but still required a lot of responsibility and skills, knowing that if something is not correctly made, it could turn out badly. Together with the manager of one of the centers and one volunteer from Germany, we checked it at the end. Everything seemed normal. And this event signifies the work with people. Sometimes you do it for big goals, but risks may be very high if not done skillfully and consciously right.

## - 2-3 pictures





