



Track 4: Standing Up for Truth

Mark 4: “TRANSFORM” – To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation

Working Groups 6 & 7

Wrap-up Session

- We tend to be more affected by our culture than by our faith – in many areas.
- But we are often better at identifying the blind spots in others ...
- In “neutral” countries, or countries that haven’t experienced war in many decades, the idea of taking up arms is foreign. But most Christians in Europe still defend the right of the Ukrainians to fight back Russia’s invasion.
- Theologically, the revival movement in general and the Anabaptist tradition in particular, has been pacifist.
- The Lutheran and Catholic churches have been more open towards cooperating with the authorities and the politicians.
- One major challenge for us all is to not let our relationship with the political power corrupt the church’s calling to foster a distinct Kingdom culture.

Mark 4:

- What we do matters even if it has a very small beginning.
- It’s a matter of vocation/calling. A farmer does what a farmer does.
- Keep sowing even when the seeds are not received.
- Also that which is small scale and met by contempt has potential.
- Church history tells us that minority groups have often been change agents for society as a whole!
- God is at work also when men don’t work.
- Whatever happens God will make it grow.

Collaboration:

- The EEA can help connect people from different parts of Europe to work for the same projects. But it is also important to empower one another to do *different* things.
- We need to meet to share testimonies and to inspire each other.
- We also need each other as the challenges we face are more global.

Session 1

Why choose this group:

- Church has some answers to issues in society
- It's my job and it is not easy to change society and it is not enough to just keep ourselves clean.
- Want to see how we can help Christians stand up for our faith
- Also work with this area – though it is a broad issue
- It is an important aspect of what we do – working with national governments on policy

Mark 4: = parables – Sower, lamp, mustard seed, Jesus calming storm.

How do these connect with society?

Strengths in standing up for injustice

- Unity in Sweden is strongest around migration (But do we get the complexities)
 - o Some issues seem too complex for unity but some organisations work on them (e.g., abortion)
- Church in Sweden has credibility where it has spoken up, e.g., on migration
- Humble service of Christians in specific areas create credibility and also relationship with people in authority to then speak out and have that accepted. This can lead to legislation change and ability to challenge authority.
- When people build these relationships they can challenge and this changes us / people and also society
- Jesus was out there all the time addressing issues in society – correcting injustice, seeing the poor and vulnerable so a strength is walking in his footsteps
- Strength is us going out and showing the Gospel – not just others coming to us
- We have positive things going on in churches – this can be difficult to see in our own context. But God is bring peace as we reconcile with the outside world.
- We get the opportunity to address injustice from the top because as Christians we follow Jesus' way of serving at the 'bottom' – ordinary people. This gives us a voice.
- Example of Andrea working for women with unplanned pregnancies, as a woman - -giving a voice to women in vulnerable situations.
- We need top down and bottom up – we have a history of believing Christians can not be politicians but now see many who are doing great things.
- Often such politicians serve quietly behind the well-known front leaders.
- This bottom p approach brings us to the question of discipleship – you need to be salt and light in people's lives, we need to be faithful disciples.
 - o To be a politician you influence from authority, whereas...
 - o You can only influence by your actions, and in a secularised context, we can only have this influence if we are in Christ

Summary statement:

Strength is a multi-directional influence:

We are all finding different ways to be influencers. Despite historical perspectives, you have to be corrupt to be a politician but we now can carry Christian values.

How is the church perceived – majority or minority? This can influence our opportunity for influence if we are in large numbers, e.g., US or now in some parts of global south. But there can be temptations that come from this ('power?').

Inclusion now of many women affects how we bring peace and reconciliation and there are changes in the way we bring influence. Men and women do think differently.

This introduces question of complementarianism and egalitarianism – we can have different views, which is different here to e.g., N America (where there are fixed values seen as Christian – we have more flexibility in Europe).

Christian values bring together people from different denominations whereas we were very separate in the recent past (Austria). Such unity is a strong sign to society – 'Visible Unity'

- Recent Lutheran meeting where Catholic speaker speaking of new reformation bringing unity. Where nations are fighting together, Christians can be in unity despite differences.
- Peace cannot be done by yourself.
- Peace is not a feeling but something you do in families and in your life.

Yes, Europe is positively diverse, but there is also polarisation. E.g., in 'identity' policies, we speak of diversity but it can be within your own group.

Opportunities

Issues:

- Polarisation
 - A paradox of our time – we celebrate diversity (which is good and part of God's creation at a basic level); but we create distance if we take our own specifics as the way I see the world and make demands.
 - By emphasising a certain issue e.g., race identity, there can be a backfire of seeing everything through that lens.
 - Yet these things are real – several examples of discrimination in UK very recently.
 - How do we be able to speak out on these things? From our identity in Christ
 - Other example – Denmark, most laid-back country yet black man refused a job because of skin colour (even though English).
 - These things are not new, but we can now speak out loud
 - Polarisation around race is getting less in Europe
 - But more around identity politics.

- Different things – ID Politics: you ID around a specific thing and everyone must align with us or you're against us.

What are our opportunities to address / challenge violence in every way?

- 2 poles
 - Stand up for the weak, even when we disagree
 - Yet also speak truthfully about what you believe
 - So we feel backed into a corner as you cannot speak out against issues that lead to cancelling because people are so sensitive
 - Those pushing the identity issue will see themselves as the victim so it is difficult to address beliefs or specific relational issues.
- These are not easy

So, the opportunity to be open to the vulnerability..... What is our reconciliation opportunity?

- We have moved being tolerance and we are forced to celebrate (things we disagree with, but are seen as level if we do not celebrate...)
- Have we been too slow and therefore we are now backed into a corner
- Is this a reversal of our judgement of others in the past?
 - How do we humbly represent Christ in loving? How do we 'not judge' and is there a repentance for us?
 - But how do we deal with being forced to say what we do not agree with?
 - And we can also see people are hurt by the world's approach to this issue, so we cannot be silent

War and, associated with it, refugees and trafficking creates some 'opportunities' to serve...

Proposal that there is an issue of disconnect between NGOs and ministries. Many Christians serve in specific areas to serve the poor, alien, widow and orphan; but does the church see these things as central and essential for every day church and Christian life....? Without it being separate projects or programmes. A normal expectation that we are serving these groups.

So, where can we contribute if we are a body of many parts, not just a building where we meet as believers.

- Is it a restructuring that takes an issue so huge as e.g., trafficking, can we address these at a local level?
- NGOs and issue-passionate individuals can inspire and inform the church?

Question of welfare state – what is our role? We do not have the poor in our doorstep in the west/Nordic. So....?

- There are some needs (e.g., male loneliness)
- It is our scriptural mandate to care, so what does that mean in a different context
- Whatever the structures, the place of one human to another cannot be replaced

Challenge – Sikh temples will feed anyone with no questions asked

- But we as Christians often want rules to tell us what to do
- We have a segregation that those in need are less than us – we see ourselves as givers, not receivers also....
- So, how do we de-institutionalise what it means to be a follower of Jesus

We are often unaware of the poor near us if we live in a well-off area..., so a question of awareness

- So, the opportunity is a life of [missed the word] rather than a course or structure
- Example of churches providing food also through 'togetherness meals' where it is a community thing and they find people and relationship as well as food.

So, it is an issue of being aware of people's needs, which are often relational and not always financial or physical;

Christian culture and love goes beyond state systems and it is recognised when we do it – leading to invitations and relationships with authorities (because they see the value of what we do).

MORE GROUP NOTES FROM THE TRANSFORMATION TRACK

STRENGTHS

- Our faith in the Lord, His strength, His grace, His victory. 'We don't fight for victory, we fight from victory.'
- NEAs in different nations very varied yet cohesive values and vision.
- EAs working through networks, especially noted in Flanders region.
- Strength in cooperation.
- Strength in our representation at the EU.
- Learning from other nations.
- Transnationalism but shared values.
- A different message, what can we offer Europe, what can Europe offer the rest of the world?
- Being good news people, bringing a different quality of message.
- Togetherness, a balance of different interests.
- Our network itself.
- Helping politicians to see the strengths of the church.
- Meetings to promote dialogue rather than confrontation, (eg Spanish EA).

OPPORTUNITIES

- Communication of truth to a needy world.
- The need to play the long game, not to always expect quick results.
- Increase effectiveness of communication to members, especially churches.

- Ensuring we use plain language, easy to understand, especially as most EEA members using English as a second, or third language.
- We can make more effective use of media opportunities.
- We can scale down the issues and problems to a level where people feel they can make a difference.
- What is the model of Europe we have in mind? How do we explain it?
- Understanding our history as nations and 'tribes'.
- Providing a real message of hope for the growing and future generations.

PRAYER FOLLOWED

- Peace and reconciliation with Russia and Ukraine.
- Russian non-orthodox believers.
- Denmark – abortion and euthanasia issue.
- Spain – political situation.
- Germany – factions trying to head in different directions.
- Belgium – situations of historic abuse in the church.

ASPIRATIONS

- A Europe of personal and social liberty seems to be being eroded and lost. No change without reformation?
- A definition of tolerance withing the church. How can we live with such diversity? An example from the Church?
- For the Church to be seen for the love people have for each other.
- How to stand against the rising tide of abortion, euthanasia and the loss of human dignity.
- Every child to have a Christian teacher for at least a year.
- On earth as it is in heaven. Practical answers flow from heaven to earth. The goal of discipleship.
- A reawakening of the reality of sharing the gospel. A mission-minded life.
- Giving new churches in particular a sense of them having their roots in history.
- People with disabilities a very unevangelised group.
- To be peacemakers and help people to disagree well.
- How are minorities integrated, e.g., evangelicals.
- Gender identity, 80% who want to change are girls. What is happening here? What can we do?

RESULTS

- A lot of talk about sharing good practice between EAs, networks and affiliates. EEA sharing good models widely. Iron sharpening iron.
- A constant cry for us to increase our effectiveness at communication (nb, it's a two-way street).
- In view of the sense of democracy being weakened and, in many cases, greater distance between people and their civic representatives, is there room for a 'civil rights movement'? Especially around freedom of expression?