

Ecumenical visitation in Niederberg “Wideness is Effective”

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Introduction

We the team of participants of this noble process wishes to appreciate the invitation by the Kirchenkreis Niederberg (Church District Niederberg) in facilitating us to visit, meet and work together in developing this short report. We also wish to acknowledge and thank the Church for the well-organized programs that we participated in ecumenical experience by sharing, observing, listening and working together.

The methodology adapted to make this report was through visitation, observation, unstructured interview to people working in several programs conducted by the Church in Niederberg. For purposes of this report, we have narrowed down the concepts into seven elements in which we made our observation based on impression, interactions and the interviews we conducted.

The elements are:-

1. Spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ - The great commission
2. Spiritual fellowship/Community
3. Diakonia work
4. Education
5. Culture/Life Style
6. Economy/Ecology green economy
7. Ecumenical relationship

1. Spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ - The Great commission

The Church has several activities to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. The programs are Children ministry, youth ministry, women and music. However, our impression is that the age bracket of 25 - 65 years is the minority. This is a very key age bracket in spreading the gospel. There are a few activities that attract this age group. Our observation is that there is need to have more programs to attract them. Lots of activities are there in the church to reach out many people, however the goal is not very clear.

How do we witness Jesus Christ? When we have gatherings how do we stand out to proclaim Jesus Christ? Is Jesus Christ our bases in our witness or do we compromise?

There are many good activities in the church that the gospel is proclaimed, however there are other activities where proclaiming, witnessing and ministering the word of God to the world appears apparent. Example in some schools, some kindergarten, men's cooking club and Diakonia programs.

2. Spiritual Fellowship/Community

The Church is an open place for people to gather, such as choirs, men's cooking club, women's breakfast, youth's preparations for service and many others. All these activities create an opportunity for spiritual fellowship. Each activity could be accompanied by prayers, sharing word of God for spiritual nourishment such as the meeting of the elders group. Fellowships can also work without a pastor. These fellowships bring together people of all walks of life. On the other side there are people of different religion in the community that either get service from the church or their children are reached in schools through school ministry. Does the church have a defined direction on how to deal with multi-religious society?

Fellowship is sharing God's word. The children are sometimes taught spiritual matters in schools, is it the same at home? What can the church do to help develop a personal spiritual level in the family? How is spiritual life encouraged in the family? This is because the Church begins at home.

3. Diakonia work

There is a lot of Diakonical work professionally done to serve the disadvantaged. The poor and handicapped, the aged, refugees and sick are well taken care of. This is very good impression to serve mankind. The church is a very big voice for the unprivileged, poor and refugees. However, it's not so much distinguished from the social work done by the government.

What is the connection between Diakonical work and the witnessing of the gospel of Jesus Christ? The Diakonia staff in connection to witnessing the gospel is generally not clear. Does the Church have meetings with the Diakonia staff to strengthen the witnessing of the gospel, and to guide into the right direction?

4. Education

Our observation is that there is Christian Education conducted in schools, kindergarten, primary and secondary school. This is a very positive approach and important work that the church is doing. The Church has a lot of influence in the education system.

What is the impact of this Christian education in personal spiritual growth of the children, and also in the growth of congregations and church? How is the Church utilising this great opportunity to teach and witness the gospel of Jesus Christ to these young minds? How well are the teachers prepared to teach, witness and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to their students or pupils?

We also observed that there is lack of consistency of the Christian teaching at the family level. How can the church encourage families to continue teaching and encouraging their children to grow into the Christian faith?

There are good programs and short courses conducted in several parishes such as Culture Church, or the work of Evangelical Adult Education (EAE) i.e. EEB.

Who are the target people? Are the programmes informed by the actual needs? Is the outcome worth the resources spent on these courses? How are the programmes connected to witnessing the gospel of Jesus Christ?

5. Culture/ Life style

Our observation is that the Church tries to meet the secular way of life of the people. On the other hand, people in the society are becoming lonely because of the culture of individualism. Modern generation seems to be much occupied with secular individualist issues, consequently, it is far from Christianity. We also observe that the trust in the church has increasingly dwindled in public.

How can the church restore her trust to public? Is the church different enough to put a clear distinction from the secular way of life?

If the church has an opportunity to reach these people, how can she reach them as a role model institution? How can the church as a role model spear head the teaching of Christian ethics (moral) in this ever changing society?

6. Economy /Ecology (green-economy).

Our observation is that there is a clear indication of great care for environment. The forest kindergarten provides one of the way to instil environmental awareness right from young people. This is a very positive impression that we saw from the church. We also observed that the church is engaged in sensitization and advocacy to people on environmental consciousness and justice to all. This is seen in such activities like the *one world shop* and BePro in Velbert.

7. Ecumenical relationships

We formed an ecumenical team of people from different churches; Free Evangelical, Catholic, from Hungary, KELC and local Church working together with a purpose of strengthening the work God has put in our hands, by observing and sharing opinions and views. We believe this is an

indication that can be explored for future exchange programs between the different churches. In order to have a stronger relationship there is for example, need to have advocacy to explore how the KELC /Niederberg can strengthen their partnership to a higher level to become a member of UEM.

Conclusion

We also think that there is need to have a clear goal that can easily be noted. Does the church think of developing clear strategic plan that can be able guide them in the work they do?

The Church district can also think of defining the way to relate in the multi-denominational and multi denominational-religious society.