



CULTA Religion and Multiculturality: Educational Pathways for Local Church Leaders

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A Norwegian case study: Migration and multiculturalism from the point of view of religious leaders in the Catholic Church in Norway

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Introduction

Religion and Multiculturality: Educational Pathways for Local Church Leaders (CULTA) is a project funded by European Lifelong Learning Programme, and is related to the Grundtvig Multilateral projects action. The CULTA project addresses the training needs in non-vocational forms of adult learning and provides opportunities for introducing this non-vocational adult learning to the target groups of the project. It aims to contribute to increasing their individual general insight and intercultural and conflict management skills in order to enhance their ability and desire to take responsibility for their lives and to recognize their central role as an active and engaged part of their local communities. The project facilitates the transfer of knowledge and good practices, and for learning from each other and exchange life experiences. This will be introduced in the teaching methodology, that will be elaborated in a form of a handbook, and introduced also through the training courses, envisage to be organized as an outcome of the project.

The first part of the CULTA project is to study and analyze the needs of local religious

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leaders in different churches (Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran and Reformed) in five countries involved (Bulgaria, Estonia, Holland, Norway, Romania). One step in the process of elaborating a the educational pathways is to interview religious leaders from these churches and in different countries in order to construct a relevant handbook and teaching methodology being relevant for these groups in Europe today. The research team has established a common interview guide, which has been used interviewing about 15 religious leaders from five countries.

This report presents some of the findings from the interviews being done of local religious leaders in the Catholic Church in Norway. The religious leaders and teachers (both men and women) being interviewed are parish priests, people from religious orders and staff being faced with the multicultural context being the target group of the project. Most of the people being interviewed are coming from other countries speaking different languages and being familiar with different cultures. The interviews were done in Norwegian, but the majority of those being interviewed have another mother tongue, like Polish, German, French, Vietnamese, Tamil etc. being familiar with cultures from different cultures in Europe, Asia and Africa. This report presents the result of a qualitative study and survey being done on religious leaders in the Catholic Church in Norway.

The context of the Catholic Church in Norway

The Catholic Church has about 1,2 billion members worldwide. She is present on all continents and in most countries. Her structure is universal, and each local church being led by a diocesan bishop in communion with the bishop of Rome, Pope Francis. She is organized as one Church for all people, with both local and universal structures. The Catholic Church believes herself to be the Church founded by the Lord Jesus Christ and his death and

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resurrection and the mission he gave to the apostles to baptize, preach the gospel and celebrate the Eucharist, inviting all people to community with God.

In Norway there are usually three bishops, but for the moment the bishop of Oslo administers the semi-diocese of Trondheim. The Catholic Church is growing rapidly in Norway and has recently become the second largest organized faith community in Norway, after the State Church (Church of Norway). The reason for this is immigration (Catholics moving to Norway).

Some numbers describe this development. At the end of the year of 2008, 53.305 members were registered. One year later in 2009 the number was 67.325. In 2010 it was 78.767, in 2011 the number had passed 100.000 and reached 100.460 members, and in 2012 there were 120.271 Catholics in Norway. When writing this report the number was 129.191¹. The average per day in 2013 is about 60 new registrations each day! Since December 2008 the number of Catholics has increased with about 75.000 people. Two new parishes are being established.²

The growing number of members is slowly changing the position of the Catholic Church in the society in of Norway. The rapid growth is due to the expansion of EU (many people are coming from new member countries from east Europe) and from all parts of Europe being marked by the financial crisis in Europe. Norway has a relatively low percentage of unemployment³ and high salaries, and is therefore considered attractive for

¹ The numbers is based on the numbers being registered by the Diocese of Oslo, and the latter was based on the nubers being registered 21 May 2013.

² The parish of St John the Baptist in Sandefjord (24 June 2010) and of St John the Evangelist in Oslo, Bredtvedt (15 March 2013)

³ Approximately 2,5 percent of the working population was unemployed in 2012, according to SSB (Statistisk sentralbyrå). According to NA24 22 May 2013 Carsten O. Five says that the real number of unemployment is 16,2%, because the majority of the unemployed are registered as receiving insurance due to disabilities.



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people suffering from unemployment elsewhere. Oslo is at present considered to be one of the fastest growing cities in Europe.⁴

The Norwegian Constitution §2 was changed in May 2012. The Evangelical Lutheran Religion is no longer the state religion, but was replaced by a new paragraph underlining the values of the state coming from a Christian and humanistic heritage. The state as such is no longer based on one religion, but the state still provides for the church that earlier was the state religion until 2012. §16 elaborates this: "The Church of Norway, an Evangelical Lutheran Church remains the Folk Church of Norway, and will therefore be supported by the State. ... All 'religious and non-religious faith-communities' should be equally supported".⁵ The translation is mine and unfortunately not good, but the main content of the Norwegian text is present in this English translation. The change could be summarized as a change in the power relations, with the new situation that the State does no longer have one specific religion (The Evangelical Lutheran Religion, old §2), but the State retains the Church from the past (new §16). The meaning of this change is unclear and needs to be interpreted. The current debate is about whether the state should put more conditions with the financial support - both to Church of Norway and all other religions receiving support. One example is the debate on whether the state should require gender equality in decision-making bodies in the faith communities that will receive money from the state. There is an open discussion where some people argue that the state should support internal changes within other

⁴ Finance commissioner Kristin Vinje present this in the article "Oslo på topp i Europa" ([http://www.byradet.oslo.kommune.no/getfile.php/Byrådet%20\(BYR\)/Internett%20\(BYR\)/Dokumenter/Pressemeldinger/080512%20PM%20om%20befolkningsvekst.pdf](http://www.byradet.oslo.kommune.no/getfile.php/Byrådet%20(BYR)/Internett%20(BYR)/Dokumenter/Pressemeldinger/080512%20PM%20om%20befolkningsvekst.pdf))

⁵ "Alle Indvaanere af Riget have fri Religionsøvelse. Den norske Kirke, en evangelisk-luthersk Kirke, forbliver Norges Folkekirke og understøttes som saadan af Staten. Nærmere Bestemmelser om dens Ordning fastsættes ved Lov. Alle Tros- og Livssynssamfund skulle understøttes paa lige Linje. Grlbest. 21 mai 2012 kunngjort ved res. 15 juni 2012 nr. 522."



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religions, by promoting the rights of women and homosexual to have equal access to the same positions within all faith communities by using financial tools. There is a Norwegian public debate on how to balance the State's duty to protect the inhabitants from anti-discrimination and the state's duty to protect its inhabitants' right to religious freedom, including the right to organize themselves as communities according to their own nature.

The local church being involved in social activities

The objective pursued was to determine the role (and thereby also the conception) of the local church in the opinion of the respondent, and to get an overview of what kind of social issues that the respondents are involved in. The latter objective (the concrete issues) is easier to grasp than the first one (role and conception).

The interviews show that most parishes are mainly involved in multi-cultural social issues through their traditional work on catecheses, and social activities toward elderly people in the parish. Thus the main impression from reading all the interviews is that the social activities are closely related to the recourses and needs of the people belonging to the parishes, although they are basically open for everyone.

The respondents from the city show some different tendencies than from the rural areas. These parishes has a broader set of activities such as offering adult catechesis (not always the case in rural areas), Norwegian courses for migrants, choirs, and special activities in different language groups.

What is the underlying conception and understanding of the role of the Church in these answers? A key factor describing the respondents' conception of the role of the Church is the idea of serving a sacramental Church. Much energy and time of the leaders is related to preparation and commitment related to sacraments, such preparation of parents

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before baptism and marriage, and related to Catechizes of children before receiving first communion, confirmation. The weekly rhythm of celebrating Mass and Eucharist seems to be completely evident for the respondents, as the source for transforming and healing people's life.

The demographic changes resulting migration in Europe shaping the local (Catholic) church in Norway

The respondents explain how the church is responding to the demographic changes caused by immigration. This development is rapidly changing the sizes of the local parishes, creating a situation where Norwegian born Catholics becomes a decreasing minority within many Catholic parishes in Norway. As one example, one parish in a rural area reported a growth of 300 people the last 4 months (making a total increase of 10% of the total number).

Two trends can be traced from this material. First, the new immigrants are less informed and prepared for meet the Norwegian context. More people arrive in Norway with no money, no jobs and no job contacts than before. They come and knock on the door of the Catholic Church, which is not prepared to receive such immigrants. They need very basic care, such as food and somewhere to sleep, in their search for jobs. Many are not prepared for the cold winter weather in this country, and risk the danger of freezing to death during night if they do not succeed in finding somewhere to stay inside.

Second, the parishes in the city are growing even faster, because of a double immigration according to the respondents. Catholic migrants having lived in Norway for some years seems to 'end up' in the big cities. The multicultural society in cities is growing and turning out to be more attractive to immigrants than the rural areas. These parishes are already overloaded with people, suffering from too few and too small churches in order to

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meet the needs of the Catholic population. Almost every church in the diocese are too small, lacking space for the members wishing to use it, and nearly all are involved in project expanding the buildings. A main pattern of the conception of the role of the church being assumed by the respondents is that this is not a qualitatively new experience for the parishes. The Catholic Church in Norway is used to being a migrant church, since it again was allowed in Norway from the 1850ies. The high number of people arriving on a relatively short time is the new element. The Catholic Church has a long theological tradition for dealing with being one Church for all kind of people. The theology and basic organizational structure is present, but still it is a growing number of practical problems that has to be met and the recourses to meet the development is limited. In this situation there seems to be a need for competence for how to handle the rapid growth adequately, building the community and meeting the needs on the local level.

Relation to other religions

The general tendency among the priests being interviewed are that they are basically having friendly, but distant relations to people of other religions. Many of them are cooperating especially with the local Lutheran pastors, who are experienced as being friendly and helping to establish contact between Catholic people at hospitals, prisons and refugee camps with their own Catholic priests.

However, the material from the respondents shows a tendency of change in the pattern of relations between Catholic leaders and other religions. The new generation of immigrant Catholic leaders being interviewed tells about new kinds of relations on a local level comparing with the situation 40 years ago. New co-operations are being established between Catholics and Buddhists, in relation to the celebration of Vietnamese New Year,

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and in funerals that gathers local people from both religions. Vietnamese from these two religious groups in Norway seem to have even more contact here, than in Vietnam. Hindu – Catholic meetings also take places locally, among groups sharing common language and cultural traditions etc. The traditional local ecumenical groups of pastors from different denominations (dominated by a western white culture) does not really include ‘foreign’ looking Catholic priests that do not always speak fluently Norwegian.

The reactions of the respondents to this question must be sorted in two categories, (1) those working a parish level and (2) those working on the local level of the diocese (which is considered to be the local church in theological sense.)

The respondents working on a parish level do not report about formal relations to other denominations or other religious communities. There are however some informal relations, dependant on the capacities of the local leaders.

Some of the explanation for this seems to be related to the internal challenges following from the rapidly growth of members within the Catholic parishes, pushing the time and the recourses that the leader has at its disposal. This causes some structural difficulties for prioritizing relations with other denominations suffering from completely different challenges, such as decreasing numbers of parishioners etc. The language problems and the cultural differences between on the one side the strongly growing international Catholic parishes and the other side denominations being predominantly Norwegian (facing Western European challenges like decreasing numbers, closing churches etc.) makes the traditional ecumenical dialogues harder on a local level.

There are still some respondents referring to established ecumenical practices in local life such as common processions including Christians from different denominations on Palm Sunday, Good Friday and some events during the Ecumenical Week of Common Prayer

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in January. Many small cities organize monthly meetings between pastors from different denominations, but often the respondents tell that he is not able to participate in a hectic everyday life. The energy and enthusiasm about this seems to be decreasing and being replaced by continuing for the reason of duty.

The reason why the participation in local formal relations to other religious communities is low may also be explained on a structural level. Having such relations is considered important for the Catholic Church, but it is not considered to be the tasks of the parish (priest) but the responsibility of the local church as a whole (the diocese).

The respondents working on a diocese level are well informed about the many relations, inter-Church relations, and interreligious relations. The Diocese of Oslo is involved in several bi and multilateral relations.

There are good relations to the Church of Norway, to the Orthodox and to the Jewish community. However, new and good relations to Pentecostals are also important. The diocese is member in the Norwegian Christian Council. However, the Diocese of Oslo is critical to the recent development within the multilateral organisation of the NCC, and is answering this development by strengthening the direct contact with the other churches.

The local church responding to the challenges relating to immigration

Again the answers from the respondents can be sorted into two groups, those working on a parish level and those working on the diocese level. Despite the fact that the number of Catholic immigrants is increasing rapidly, the respondents working on a parish level did not report to any new kind of special action plan for meeting this development. The Catholic Church in Norway has since 1845, when it was allowed to be present in the country, always received Catholic immigrants living in Norway for different reasons. The situation is

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not new, but the high number of people coming is new. They continue running their parishes as best they can, providing for the needs of the lay people. The activities reported is about serving the parish by providing Mass, the sacraments to all who seeks to the Church, and taking care of the Catechesis of children and young people before First Communion and Confirmation, by preparing couples for marriage, and trying to provide the sacraments for those being at the end of their life.

The answers from those being interviewed reports about a tendency that the parishes with settled and bigger migrant groups seems to be better to takes care of new immigrants speaking the same language. They sometimes offer language courses, job-applying information etc. The respondents share their impression that Catholics with a background from countries which only have a smaller minority in Norway, are more likely to be integrated into the common 'Norwegian speaking' group of the parish.

The interviews shows an awareness of the importance of establishing parish councils with people from different parts of the world, not letting one group being too dominant. Most parishes organize different services, such as voluntary work with cleaning, renovation, church coffee etc. by relating to different sub-groups (Vietnamese, Filipino, Spanish etc.). The main impression is that the experiences of being multi-cultural is enriching for the diocese and a positive experience.

However, some of the local parish leaders report about tensions between some smaller Norwegian groups and the majority of different migrants within the parish. There are some groups that thinks that the Norwegian culture and style should have a privileged position, acting as if they feels threatened by the richness and diversity of the expression of faith from Catholics from all over the world.



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Church in a time difficulty (such as when moving to a new country trying to establish a new life). They come because they know that the Church will them no harm, and to search for a safe haven in their experience with the new Norwegian context. The Catholic Church, because of its universal structure represents a link between something familiar in a new context. There is an awareness that the Catholic Church is the One and same everywhere.

However, the respondents from the diocese level shows an awareness of a new tendency that the new immigrants from Eastern Europe are much less prepared and fit to meet the reality of life that they can expect in this country. Increasingly, Catholic priests are faced with desperate people having had just enough money to get a one-way ticket at Ryan air to come to Norway. They do not know the language, they have no money, they have nowhere to stay, and sometimes when they come in wintertime, they do not have the clothes they need not to freeze to death during the night. These new kind of immigrants do not know where to turn to in order to get help, and they come to the Church which is not at all prepared to meet this. Caritas Norway (on a national level) has tried to meet this new development and offers some juridical and information help some days a week in Oslo. These people have to turn to institutions providing help for drug-addicts and homeless people, such as NGOs providing soup kitchen etc. Most immigrants are generally vulnerable when coming to Norway, coming from low cost countries to an extremely high cost country.

Local churches supporting emigrants

The interview guide used in all countries asked about the relation to people moving out of the country, and their relation to their local church in the home country. The construction of the question does seem to fit the Catholic context, because the Catholic Church has a more universal organization being trans national. The respondents did not



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easily see relevance of the question, because the Catholic Church has clear structures regulating these issues. If a Catholic moves, he still belongs to the same church, but he should be included and registered in a new local context at the diocese he is moving to. This means that it is normal include all Catholics living in the local parish. There might be a need for exchanging information related to preparing someone for receiving some sacraments, such as preparing for marriage, first communion or confirmation etc. if the person to receive these sacraments has been baptized in another diocese. There might also be some formal relation if someone who have migrated needs to bring a case to the court of the diocese. This is reflected in some of the answers given from the respondents which gives examples of technical contact in relation to international marriages (where the groom and the bride are from two different countries and will get married in a third, and the following need of paperwork between the three local churches involved...) and families wanting to celebrate some sacraments (1st Communion) in their old home countries due to family reasons or economy.

Discrimination - are Catholics in Norway suffering from discrimination or suppressing others?

One of the local church leaders answered the question about discrimination with describing this as a kind of a taboo, and that this it is not something you speak about in the parish. I got a similar impression from the other informants, even though they did not say it explicitly. The level for even using the word 'discrimination' is very high, and not something that the multicultural respondents are likely to use describing their experiences when living in Norway. However, some of the religious leaders being interviewed told about their experiences meeting parents and children having experienced being stigmatized by the



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Norwegian teacher in public schools. Catholic children being pinpointed as Catholics in a context where the teacher tells about either the sexual abuses in the Catholic Church or the teacher presents statements like that the reason of all evil within the Church is due to its hierarchical structure. This kind of experience in the classroom is described as a painful burden for the child and their parents. Stereotype and not nuanced presentations of Catholicism (or what might be experienced as anti-Catholicism) is part of family experiences being addressed in the interviews.

The main tendency in the material of these answers, taking into account the extreme variety of ethnicity, cultures, languages etc being present in every Catholic parish in Norway, is that the local leaders are trying to practice non-discrimination and the equity of all in their service for the Church. They express a general atmosphere of incisiveness, and that the essence of the Church is that different people gather around the gospel of Christ and Christ present in the Eucharist. The unity and diversity is assumed in the very structure of the Church, providing a good basis for prohibiting discrimination from a theological point of view. However, some informants also express some local challenges. There are some local national groups that sometimes tend to 'monopolize' their own background with true Catholicism, with the effect acting in a way that is understood to be intolerant to other groups. However, the religious leaders being interviewed sometimes identify these groups as sympathizing with groups being critical to the teaching of the Church expressed by the 2nd Vatican Council. Their numbers in Norway are quite limited, but there are some small Norwegian sub-groups and Polish sub-groups causing problems for the local communities and creating local tensions.



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Doctrine on religious freedom and its practices

The Catholic Church has a very clear universal teaching on this topic, explored by the 2nd Vatican Council in a few very important documents.⁶ The doctrine on religious freedom developed into its current teaching during the Second Vatican Council. Before that, the Catholic Church promoted freedom for the truth, but this way of putting it was reinterpreted and presented as freedom of religion. The multicultural group being interviewed shares the official teaching position as a deeply held conviction and tries to put it into practice in their running ministry.

⁶ Lumen Gentium, Unitatis Redintegratio, Nostra Aetate and Dignitatis Humanae.

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Good cooperation between the diocese and the parishes

Taking into account the limited resources constantly forcing the parishes to focus on their primary tasks, it is somewhat surprising that all the respondents expressed that they were quite satisfied with the help received from the bishop and his administration. They especially emphasized the need to strengthen the education of new priests coming to the country, underlining the need to understand the needs of this diocese to pull in the same direction, underlining the equity of all (not only the group that the priest share the language with).

Local church / parishes doing “peace work”

Some of the respondents underlined the Department of External Relation as an important part of the work of the diocese in this field. There are several commissions, ongoing dialogues working with creating dialogue and providing a peaceful development in the multicultural Norway. However, the respondents working on a parish-level are not directly involved in these kinds of dialogues. These respondents emphasized their daily parish-life activities, on how to involve all ethnical groups within the parish. How to handle strong expectations from some national groups concerning traditions from their home-countries, and how to facilitate a good and healthy development taking care of the needs of all and strengthening the fellowship across language and cultural barriers.

Religious freedom

The doctrine on the freedom of religion according to survey is considered to be self-evident. The quick answer is that Catholic local leaders being interviewed supported very strongly the idea of religious freedom, and the longer answers can support the quick answer



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by giving some examples from how they meet people of other religions in everyday life, when for instance preparing people for marriage etc, underlining that this should not be a reason for converting. The freedom is very basic, and followed up by such practices.

Best practices

The most basic practice is to include all people in the fellowship of the church, inviting all groups to share and transform their own culture in light of the gospel of Christ and thereby enriching the fellowship as a whole. Some of the informants described their good experiences with sharing the gifts of the cultural diversity, especially by sharing different food. Another mentioned the importance of making the different groups visible by reading the bible texts in other languages too (Polish on week, Spanish the next etc.). Some mentioned the importance of composing the parish council in an including way, prohibiting that some take monopoly on defining the fellowship.

What would you like to learn more about, in order to meet the development of migration?

Knowledge about the society where they live (about Norway, infrastructure, culture, values, codes of conduct in the public sphere, etc.).