

# Diaconia Poland Newsletter

February 2016

## The new volunteers about themselves

For many years Polish Diaconia has been coordinating projects for volunteers from different countries in the frames of the European Voluntary Service (EVS) and Internationaler Jugendfreiwilligendienst (IJFD). There are also volunteers from the "Signs of Hope" association who participate in the seminars. In October a new group of foreign volunteers started their projects in Poland. For the next nine months they will work in the nursing homes in Białystok and Olsztyn, Evangelical Centre for Diaconia and Education in Wrocław, Diaconia's office in Warsaw and the Lutheran parish in Cracow. Some of them have told us about their hopes and goals concerning their voluntary service in Poland.

### Marco Sedlbauer

I come from Peine in Lower Saxony. I have chosen Poland for my voluntary



service since I have roots in this country. I want to learn Polish and get to know Polish culture. I hope

these nine months will allow me to learn the language, meet new people, see wonderful places (especially in Olsztyn), and that my work will make the older people smile.

### Eike Bens

I come from Hude – a small town between Oldenburg and Brema. I have chosen Poland because I wanted to know this country and



learn new language – other than English or French. I hope this will be a good time for me, time of meet-

ing friendly people and getting familiar with this beautiful country.

### Renáta Nagy

I come from Budapest. Poland as a place of my voluntary service is not only my choice. We both have chosen each other. I want to learn a lot about Poland,



Polish people, culture, language and, thank God, I am here. It's a bit cold here but the people are very kind, friendly and helpful. I hope to learn the language quickly and start new friendships with people who will not forget me or my work.

### Judit Varga

I come from Sopron in Hungary. I have chosen Poland because it's a very interesting country. I hope



I will meet new people and culture, and I also hope this year will be a great change in my life.

### Nina Wassmann

I come from Frankfurt am Main. Why voluntary service in Poland? I often hear this question. My family lives here so I know Poland a



little bit – I know that people here are very kind. Besides, Warsaw is a great city, with lots of places to visit. I hope that as a volunteer I can do something for the people in need but also get to know Warsaw and lots of funny Polish people.

### Leon Heckmann

I come from Hemmingen near Stuttgart. I have chosen Poland because I am interested in this country and it has been unknown to me. Cracow, which is an incredible town, and work in the parish here motivate me

the most. During my voluntary service I want to get to know Poland, see and experience



more than tourists do. Of course, I want to learn Polish, meet new people and be a part of this international society, as well as develop good relations between Poland and Germany.

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## „They don't shoot here, in Masuria”.

### - Help for children from Ukraine

Due to the help of Polish Diaconia, 22 children from the neighbourhood of Słowiańsk in the eastern Ukraine were able to spend the last two weeks of August in Sorkwity. Last year there were heavy fights between pro-Russian separatists and the Ukrain-



ian army in their region. - *They don't shoot here, in Masuria. It was difficult for the kids to get use to this silence* – says pastor Valerij. He is one of the Ukrainian caregivers who came with children to Sorkwity. The war left mark on children's mentality. Caregivers admit that work with these children is not easy. Among them there are kids who have

lost a parent in the armed conflict. Each day the Ukrainian caregivers organized activities for the kids. They were using the Lutheran parish facilities. Moreover, the hosts – Rev. Krzysztof Mutschmann and his wife Hanna – organized trips, i.a. to Toruń, Olsztyn, Mrągowo, św. Lipka or Wild Animals Park in Kadzidłowo.

The holidays were organized by Polish Diaconia which also prepared gifts for the participants: school supplies (backpacks, notebooks, crayons, pencils etc.), games, hygienic articles and sweets. – *I am glad that these kids could come to Sorkwity. It is just a drop in their lives but maybe it will give them hope for kindness and peace* – said Wanda Falk, the Director of Diaconia, during the meeting with the Ukrainian group in Sorkwity. (Text und Photo: Michał Karski)

*Polish Diaconia joins the action aid for the refugees. "Let's be the ones who greet refugees with open hearts and generosity. Our prayers*

**Let's help the refugees!**

*and even small financial support will help them*

*survive this really difficult time and give hope for the future” – say both the President of Diaconia, Rev. Bishop Ryszard Bogusz, and the presiding bishop of the Evangelical Church Augsburg Confession in Poland, Rev. Jerzy Samiec.*

*In September 2015 bishop Jerzy Samiec submitted his pastoral letter to the believers from the Evangelical Church Augsburg Confession in Poland. "I would like our church to serve God through love which is expressed in helping the poor. Let's love the refugees, since Christ comes to us in them" – writes bishop Jerzy Samiec in this letter concerning refugees.*

## Distinction for the Director of Diaconia

Wanda Falk, the General Director of Polish Diaconia of the Evangelical Church Augsburg Confession has received the "Heart for heart" medal, awarded by the "Mercy" Foundation for Disabled and Handicapped People.

The ceremony took place on 16<sup>th</sup> June in Column Hall of the Sejm in Warsaw. Except Wanda Falk, the distinction was also given to the Deputy Speaker of the Sejm Eugeniusz Grzeszczak. The medal highlights the efforts and activities for the handicapped and impoverished people.

The medals were given at the conference on financ-

ing and functioning of ergotherapy workshops. There were discussed such topics as the system of support for the handicapped people, the role of PFRON (State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons) and local government.



Among the lecturers there were i.a. the former president of German Diaconia and current advisor of Polish Diaconia, Rev. Klaus-Dieter Kottnik, who presented the organization and the ways of financing the system of help for disabled people in Germany.

*The Lutheran bishop mentions in this letter his visit in the centre for refugees in Berlin, which is led by Diaconia. In the past, this centre used to help refugees from Poland, German Democratic Republic, the Balkans, and today it helps i.a. Syrians. Bishop Samiec referred to the teaching of Jesus and highlighted the following: "You can't love God if you don't love the people (see 1 John 4; 20-5;3). We are to love every neighbour, regardless of their skin colour, country they come from or even their religion."*

## On a wheelchair through Poland

We are Sobiesław and Radosław. We are both disabled and move in wheelchairs. Each year we travel to Warsaw and due to the support of the Consistory of the Evangelical Church Augsburg Confession and Polish Diaconia we have a place to sleep. This year we decided to rest, visit Warsaw and meet with our friends.

**Sobiesław:** I am fan of the cult Polish TV series "07 zgłoś się" [07 Come In] and the vehicles from the Polish People's Republic time. About six weeks before our holidays I came up with an idea. I contacted the person who leads a fan page on Facebook "Fiat – Milicja", rents vehicles and owns a Fiat 125p that was used in Milicja Obywatelska [Citizen's Militia]. One would say this is nothing extraordinary but I really love these vehicles and their history.



We discussed the details of our trip around Warsaw in Fiat. Due to the heat we decided for a night ride. Our driver, a very kind person, was also our guide. He said we were his first such unique clients, because "Fiat – Milicja" is rented mainly for weddings or other, small routes. During the trip we had a photo session near the National Stadium, with all the police stuff such as uniforms, hats, truncheons and of course the lollipop for stopping Radek who was speeding in his wheelchair. Everywhere we went we were getting people's great interest. Once even a boy came to us asking if we were making a film. Our trip ended late after midnight. All good things come to an end. We are really grateful to the very kind driver and "Fiat-Milicja" owner for this incredible atmosphere and all the interesting things he told us about with passion.

I have also came up with the idea to visit the Railway Museum in Warsaw. The museum is huge and adjusted for the disabled people. The driveway is quite steep and we had to ask for

help but we don't complain. They have quite a big collection of exhibits from various periods of Polish railway.

As every year, we had time to take our "vehicles" for servicing. This was the opportunity to visit the service and the shop. When the worker was taking care of our wheelchairs, we had time for getting familiar with all the new products. The last part of our trip was a one-day travel to Gdańsk, which was Radek's idea. Since Radek loves speeding, we decided to get there by Pendolino.

**Radosław:** Our goal was to check the adjustments and comfort of this train, and we wanted to visit beautiful Gdańsk during St. Dominic's Fair.

We both agreed that travel on this train is very comfortable; it's spacious and the staff is very helpful. Unfortunately, the lift that both of us need was broken twice. When travelling from Warsaw to Gdańsk, we got on the train through a ramp because the lift didn't work. In Gdańsk the security had to take us out because the lift didn't work again. Everything worked on our way back to Warsaw, but when we got there, we found out the lift at the other end of the car



didn't work and the security had to help us once again. One question comes to my mind: How is it that the train has been used for only nine months and it's so damaged already?

After getting to Gdańsk we went by bus to the centre – a kind driver explained to us where we should go to see the Fair. After several meters we met the marathon – we took some photos of the runners, the statute of King Neptune and went further, along Motława river, getting some cool air on this hot day. We visited the

National Maritime Museum. We learned a lot about old and new ways of fishing and how the shipyard industry works. The whole museum is adjusted for the disabled. We ended our visit with fish for dinner.

We came back to Warsaw tired but satisfied. We didn't have a plan for visiting Gdańsk – this was a spontaneous trip and we went there without any carer. We just informed the Polish Railways about our trip a day before and in Gdańsk we used help from the people we met. We are proud that we were able to organize it.

We are grateful to Polish Diaconia and the Consistory of the Evangelical Church Augsburg Confession for help in realizing our plans, all the anonymous people who ask if we need help and those who never say no.

We have our fan page on Facebook. It is called "On wheelchair through the world". We describe our trips there and show that you can travel even if you move on a wheelchair.

You can visit the fan page here: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Wózkiem-przez-świat/761681287272724>

## Mercy is not an offer, it's our duty

Mrs. Urszula Paślawska, Member of Polish Parliament, has received the Main Prize of Polish Diaconia "The Good Samaritan". The honourable mention was given to Mrs. Aurelia Jarosz and special prizes to Mr. Wolfgang Knoch and Mr. Günter Kirschbaum from Germany.

The awards were given by the Polish Diaconia for the ninth time already. They were given during the ecumenical, 14<sup>th</sup> Ubi Caritas Gala, which took place on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2015 in the Polish Theatre in

from the Orthodox Church and the Diaconia of the Evangelical-Reformed Church.

This year's Main Award of Polish Diaconia and the statue of "The Good Samaritan" was received by Urszula Paślawska, the member of parish council of the Lutheran parish in Sorkwity and the Member of the Polish Parliament, who for many years has been engaged in social and politic matters. As in previous years, Polish Diaconia gave also the honourable mention. This time it was received by Aurelia Jarosz from

the Lutheran parish in Drogomyśl, who is an initiator of various social actions.

Polish Diaconia gave also the special awards. They were received by Wolfgang Knoch and Günter Kirschbaum from Germany. Wolfgang Knoch from Bonn, an

active member of the Evangelical Church in the Rheinland, was one of the first people who



Warsaw. The awards and honourable mentions were also given by the Roman-Catholic Caritas Poland, Eleos

## Dissimilarity is a part of normality

New ways in psychiatry were the main topic of the Visegrad platform meeting of Eurodiaconia. Participants were discussing the ways in which diaconal organizations and European institutions can help people with mental disorders, especially in the area of engaging them in social life.

The conference took place in 23-25<sup>th</sup> September in the Lutheran parish in Cracow and was coordinated by Polish Diaconia. It gathered the representatives of the Eurodiaconia membership organizations from the Visegrad Group countries: Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary. There were also representatives of the diaconal organizations from Germany and the General Secretary of Eurodiaconia, Mrs. Heather Roy. The conference was financially supported by Württemberg Diaconia, Berlin-Brandenburg-Silesian Upper Lusatia Diaconia and Eurodiaconia with the funds from the European Union. (Michał Karski)

in 80's started the transports for the people behind the Iron Curtain. Günter Kirschbaum from Lich worked for 30 years as a volunteer, organizing together with Anna Rüst charitable transports for Poland, supplying parishes, diaconal stations and hospitals in medical and rehabilitation equipment. This year's Ubi Caritas Gala was also the time for celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Caritas Poland reactivation. Ubi Caritas Gala was ended with the concert of Natalia Niemen. (Text: Michał Karski, Photo: Caritas)



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