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Short communication

The contribution of the German organization “*Evangelisches Jugend- und Fürsorgewerk*” in addressing immigration issues



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ABSTRACT

During its more than a hundred and twenty-year history, the German organization “*Evangelisches Jugend- und Fürsorgewerk*” has always devoted its Christian support to people in need. Today, its activities focus mainly on the area of inclusive nursery education, comprehensive assistance to children and youth in need, assistance to adults with disabilities, housing and related services for the elderly, and counselling for different target groups. In recent years, it has been a major contributor to the migration crisis management in Germany, particularly in Berlin. The theological and philosophical basis of all its activities is the love for God, manifested as a love for a particular suffering person. The activeness of the organization derives from the well-known Protestant work ethic. In German society, it advocates a position that grants legal and legally living immigrants the right to freely decide on the possibility of retaining the most diverse ties to their original communities. For the various phases of the integration of immigrants into a free democratic society, the organization is developing a number of diverse projects. Part of this paper is a brief description of good practice examples. The first, indicative phase, deals with the *Georg-Kriedte-Haus* project, which provides accommodation and the necessary stabilization for immigrants. The orientation phase is represented by the *Deutsch-Arabisches Zentrum für Bildung und Integration* a counselling and education facility. The *Familienzentrum Bisamkiez*, located in a panel housing estate in Potsdam, inhabited by several dozen people of different nationalities, best points out the wide range of activities characteristic of the third, integration phase. The aim of this contribution is to motivate university students in the humanity study programmes to gain personal experience from abroad for the future effective solution of immigration problems in the Czech Republic.

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“We must be seeing their faces and listening to their stories.”

Pope Francis in the US Congress 24 September 2015

Introduction

Since 2009, the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences of the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice (FHSS USB) has had a bilateral agreement on cooperation with the German society *Evangelisches Jugend- und Fürsorgewerk* (EJF). Within the framework of this international cooperation, students have a unique opportunity to complete an internship in various well-equipped and well-organized health and social and educational therapeutic facilities of the host organization. The migration crisis that the whole of Europe, including Germany, has been going through for a number of years, has also directed the activities of the EJF in this highly significant social area. The aim of this paper is to motivate other university students (with the necessary good knowledge of the German language) to gain irreplaceable experience from abroad for future personal engagement in the solution of immigration issues in the Czech Republic.

Materials and methods

The article presents a research that can be, along with Nakonečný [1], classified as descriptive. It describes the phenomenon of the specific contribution of the EJF to help immigrants integrate into the German society. The research methodology is based on the content analysis of documents (relevant older and contemporary literature sources, printed and electronic information materials produced by the institution over the last five years), but above all on a series of structured observations and non-standardized interviews conducted by the author over the last decade (recently the Erasmus + training mobility to Berlin, from 11th to 14th June 2017), both with the EJF's senior representatives and with numerous regular investigators of individual specific projects.

An outline of the past and present of the EJF

In the 19th century, the European continent was shaken by wars and social revolts. The incipient industrial revolution was accompanied by deep social transformations in Germany. There was a rapid increase in the number of industry workers, which exceeded ten million. In particular, young families moved to Berlin and other rapidly growing cities. New production technologies with their demands for job qualifications led to a significant social stratification of the then German society. In a large part of the population, poverty and related crime increased. The number of neglected children and adolescents who lived in material and moral distress increased [2].

The sad reality of the lives of a considerable part of the German youth could not leave the representatives of Christian churches indifferent [3]. In Germany, during this period, the rapid development of the *Rettungsbewegung* – a movement

seeking the construction of “rescue houses” occurred. Johann Hinrich Wichern, a theologian and teacher from Hamburg, was the head of this “inner mission” of the Evangelical Church. In 1840 there were already 36 educational institutes of this type in Germany, to which another 24 were added by 1848, and another 100 by 1860. The financial support for these houses represented the revenues from their own economic (predominantly agricultural and horticultural) activities, donations as well as voluntary contributions by members of the relevant ecclesial community [4]. From the outset, the education of the pupils was based on friendly pedagogy sensitive to children [5].

From the 1870s onwards, in the context of the deteriorating economic situation [6], there were state budget cuts to educational institutions. That situation was perceived attentively and with increasing concern by the central organs of the Lutheran Church. They decided to confront these tendencies with a greater integration of their own strengths and finances. In the 1890s, a draft statute for the future organization was elaborated. On December 4, 1894, *Branderburgischer Rettungshaus-Verband*, a direct predecessor of today's *Evangelisches Jugend- und Fürsorgewerk* [7], was constituted at a special conference held in Berlin.

In the following years, the established organization, wisely and skilfully led by the agrarian and politician A. W. Henning, pastor of F. E. Braun, and their co-workers and followers, walked through many complicated peripetia without ever compromising their original and unique mission. The strong inclination to faith in divine providence helped its professional and volunteer workers in the first and second world wars to overcome the most serious problems and, after 1945, to re-fill the originally happily-based form with rich and beneficial content again [8].

The situation in the country (destroyed by the war and ultimately politically and economically divided) was not easy. Nevertheless, the missionary work of the Lutheran Church followed its course, especially throughout the territory of Berlin and Brandenburg. A qualitative change in the conditions for further development was the acquisition of sixteen-hectares(!) of land in the north of Berlin in the 1960s, where *Diakoniezentrum Heiligensee* was gradually being built. This allowed for embarking on widening the spectrum of services provided according to the age and needs of its clients [9].

After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the unification of Germany, there was also a union of the “East Germany” and “West Germany” branches of the internal missionary effort of the German Evangelical Lutheran Church. This movement was referred to as “Zurück zu den Wurzeln”/“Back to the roots.” Especially for the territory of the former GDR, this meant a considerable influx of funds to duly meet the new tasks and challenges in the therapeutic, social and educational care of the needy citizens.

At present, EJF owns a total of 120 different institutions in Berlin, Brandenburg, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia, Bavaria, Poland and the Czech Republic (since 2005, a Czech – German project called the *Útočiště/Fluchtpunkt* in Cheb, a beneficiary association, has been developing its social and educational activities. A representative of the FHSS USB is in the Supervisory Board). 4000 fully committed professional and volunteer staff are involved with the EJF, where they, either full-time or part-time, care for a

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