

Preliminary

Spiritual care for the police

1. Fundamental aspects

Spiritual care for police officers stands by the side of the police, providing spiritual help and ethical orientation for human beings, who are working again and again at the borderlines of human possibilities, being confronted with life and death, legal and illegal, grief and hope, success and failure. Spiritual care of the police is offering something like a safe space, in which good and bad, sometimes extreme bad experiences can be reflected under aspects of prevention, on-scene-support and aftercare. The frame all around these aspects is theology, trying to give answers on fundamental human questions.

The Augsburgian Confession – the fundamental document of the Lutheran churches - clearly says, that a well structured and well governed state is according to God`s will and is created by Him. Christians may without committing sin work to support a state like this. Those protecting this state may on the other hand not be left alone by the church, but have to be supported while performing their often loading work, related to the democratic system of our federal state. So spiritual care for the police as a modern form of spiritual welfare takes care on the police and on our political system also.

2. Structures and contents of the spiritual care for the police in Lower Saxony

Starting in 1991 there is a contract between the federal state of Lower Saxony and the Confederation of Protestant Churches of Lower Saxony concerning their cooperation on the field of spiritual care for the police. The churches cooperating in the Confederation are naming specially qualified colleagues for the service of spiritual welfare for the police. The main office is situated in Hanover, where a secretary, a managing director, Mrs. Rohdenburg – well known here! - and I are working together, cooperating with the colleagues in Braunschweig, Oldenburg, Göttingen, Wilhelmshaven, Lüchow and Celle. Every colleague is responsible for an own area, related to his church – for example of Oldenburg or Braunschweig -, but all together are responsible for the whole task to do in the Confederation. Normally we come together one time a month for planning projects, reporting about operations and giving each other the support which is required. As you may know, police in Germany is organized as a federal police for the federal states and as a state police for the whole of Germany. Our spiritual welfare here in Hanover is concerned about the federal police of Lower Saxony, and even, as mentioned before, if there are several colleagues in this service, there is one office and one ecclesiastical organization as a partner for the police. There are different tasks to fulfill for the colleagues: giving lessons on ethical and spiritual care themes at the police-academy and in police-departments who require this, giving spiritual advice to police-officers – groups and individuals - who deserve it, accompanying police officers during operations, e. g. in the context of the resistance against the use of nuclear power or in the context of soccer games or in conflicts between “right” and “left” parties, especially the Neo-Nazis. Spiritual care workers for the police have to be competent to reflect on different and loading problems connected with the service in the police, e. g. the use of fire-arms, the death of a colleague, the confrontation with wounded or killed people, the confrontation with hopeless people and hopeless situations – you may think of heavy traffic or work accidents or terrorist attacks. Also important things to do are services as baptisms, weddings, funerals, Christmas time services, concerts with

the police music corps of Lower Saxony with a spiritual part, performed by one of our colleagues, the development of materials like info-sheets or work-outs for police-journals. Visits and contacts to the police in normal situations is helpful for knowing from each other and for emergency cases, when you then have something like a routine with your partner. With Mrs. Rohdenburg we have a highly specialized and personally engaged co-worker for the widening field of spiritual welfare for women in the police – this global seminar is the highlight of this engagement.

Regularly we watch out for a good and intense contact to our ministry of internal affairs and to leading chair-men and chair-women in the ecclesiastical context, also in an oecumenical perspective. We also are concerned about the fundamental, normal contact between the church and their parishes and the police. We are nine colleagues working in the spiritual welfare service for the police, but over 2000 protestant pastors in Lower Saxony. We think, that the contact between these parishes outside over there in the land and the cities could be better and more intense, and that both could learn from each other.

We regularly meet with colleagues from other psychosocial support services, e. g. from Regional Advice Services (Regionale Beratungsstellen) and the Social Sciences Service (Sozialwissenschaftlicher Dienst) and the Medical Service (Medizinischer Dienst) for discussing problems and operations in an interdisciplinary, free-of-concurrence manner.

On the national level we take part at the Conference of German Police Pastors, who meets two times a year and we cooperate with the national center of disaster prevention and management in Bonn (Bundesamt für Bevölkerungsschutz und Katastrophenhilfe) and with the German University for the Police (Deutsche Hochschule der Polizei) at Münster.

We are accompanied by a group of leading police officers and ecclesiastical colleagues in the advisory board of our service. We get advice concerning actual problems and open questions and have the chance to discuss our work with highly competent and benevolent specialists.

The legally protected confession`s secret with the right of the pastors to refuse to testify offers a safer space, in which the open, anxious-free and repression-free reflection of extreme experiences, e. g. the use of fire-arms by the police, is possible.