

## **Inspiring practice of mission today** **The example of the Methodist congregation in Milan/Italy**

The Methodist congregation in Milan was an entirely Italian one 45 years ago. Then the first immigrants came to Italy. Many of them from Ghana and from the Philippines with a strong Methodist presence. They were looking for a new spiritual home and were sent by their churches of origin to the Italian Methodists. In the beginning, they mainly provided rooms and made sure that an English-speaking missionary came to Milan to provide pastoral care for the migrants.

This concept of hospitality changed after the first 20-25 years. One felt it was no longer enough to share the rooms with each other. That is how the project "Being Church Together" began, at local and national levels.

Over the years, more and more things were planned together. Services were celebrated together first once, then twice and three times a month - and now, since the pandemic, every Sunday - bilingual (English and Italian), sometimes multilingual. Music was played together; children's worship and confirmation classes were conducted as mixed groups. It became apparent that especially children and young people from "migrant families" are virtually "predestined" for an intercultural existence and way of life.

What inspires us today in our church life with people from 15 different countries?

To rediscover together in the New Testament that the Christian church began multi- and intercultural. Pentecost brought very different people together in one church (Acts 2). And this was what distinguished them as Christians "Christianoï" (Acts 11:26). And that especially people like the apostle Paul, who grew up interculturally and multilingually, made a very important contribution to sharing and spreading the Christian faith, as "bridge people" between cultures. And when we then can point out that Paul was also blessed by black hands before his first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-3), then we realize how much we as Europeans, but also as Africans, need to work on our self-understanding as Christians and on our image of mission.

*What is our common mission in Milan?*

- To be a laboratory of life and faith, in which it becomes visible that despite different origins, faith traditions, ways of life and theologies, we experience ourselves as one community and that we witness in the midst of society that a multi- and intercultural existence is possible, that it is certainly also arduous, but mostly stimulating and enriching for all!
- To be an open place where one finds security and new brothers and sisters in God's family, especially when one lives far away from the family of origin.
- To celebrate lively, colorful church services that give you the strength to get through everyday life. (Before the pandemic, each month one of our "groups" had celebrated a service with elements from the country of origin for everyone).
- To be there together for others, for those, for example, who do not even have a bed and a roof over their heads (breakfast service for the homeless).
- To be a place where intercultural children and youths are empowered to live their lives as bridge people.
- To be open to the people in the neighborhood and let them participate in our intercultural way of life, with low-threshold offers like ethnic cooking classes, multi-ethnic lunches and our participation in neighborhood and city activities.