

TRANSCRIPT

Interview with Anne Thompson & Maria Thaarup

Mighty Rasing: Rev. Anne Klitgard Thompson and Rev. Maria Thaarup welcome to the podcast. How are you today?

Anne Thompson: Thank you very much.

Maria Thaarup: Very good. Thank you.

MR: Alright. So, I know that its afternoon from where you are from and if you could just tell us where you're from and your full names, what your ministries are in the church so our watchers and listeners could know.

AT: My name is Anne Klitgard Thompson and I am from Denmark. I live in Vejle, which is in Jutland from the southern part of Denmark. I live with my husband, who's from England, and our two sons: Samuel and Albert. And I'm a minister, currently of two congregations actually, and then I'm interested in children's spirituality and how we as a congregation and as a church include children and young people in the way that we think about doing church.

MT: Yeah, and my name is Maria Thaarup, and I recently moved to Aarhus, which is in Jutland as well, and I'm a colleague of Anne. And that's one part of my ministry is to be a local pastor in Aarhus, which is the second largest city in Denmark. And then I'm also a youth and scouts pastor. So, I participate in the youth and scouts' camps and join in with the teaching and worship services and like spirituality talks with youth and young adults.

And then, I'm also a teacher. I have a teacher's degree and I worked as a teacher for six years. So, the whole perspective of children's ministry I think I took that in because of my teacher's skills but also, also because I learned how important teacher's ministry is for, for all the people in the church not just the children and the families. Yeah.

MR: Alright, thank you for sharing those, and yes for those of you, by the way, who are watching and listening right now, we are going to be talking about children's ministry in the context of Denmark, which is in the Northern Europe Episcopal Area of the Northern Europe and Eurasia Central Conference. We just love those titles as United Methodists, don't we?

AT: The longer the better

MR: Long and I mean—

MT: Big titles.

MR: I mean, my own title is very long too like Director of Central Conference Relationships but anyway. But since we'll be talking about children's ministries and both of you are very involved in this ministry, your area. Although, I also know based on your introductions you also wear many different hats, right?

MR: But if you could, barely briefly, share with us what's your faith journey? Why focus on children's ministry? And, I think, my interest here is partly is that when I visited the Nordic and Baltic area sometime last year, I came across this publication which both of you have written to this *The Nordic Perspectives of Methodism* with focus on children and youth's ministries.

MT: Yeah. Well, for me, I think it started when I was a child and young adult myself, because I grew up in a big Methodist congregation and I've learned that since I was a small kid that everybody participates; everybody helps when we're done with the worship service; everybody participates with their gifts.

Since I was a small girl, I've been singing, and helping, and being a part of the whole doing church. So, to me, it was really natural that everybody should join in that whole body of Christ no matter how old they are or ... what education they have. Like children's faith story is just as important as adults and older peoples' story. So, I think, to me, it was very natural to go down that road and I think I like being among children and youth. They challenge me and they're fun to spend time with so, it's always easy to be with children and youth.

AT: I find it really interesting that you ask us to do it briefly because I find that a bit difficult. Because there are many.... In my story anyway there are many different tenets— can you call it that, tenets?

So, one time of mine, is like Maria's, it has to do with my own childhood, the way I was brought up in church. It also has to do with my— it very much has to do with my own faith development because I was quite young when I came to faith and made a decision to be committed as a Christian. So, I know from personal experience that it matters when you are young and you are a child.

Then it has to do— the big shift for me came 10 years ago, these days. I became a mom for the first time and having Samuel, who we adopted, and seeing church through the eyes of my child and as a parent made me realize that it's not always very easy to participate or be a part of a congregation when you have a small child in tow or when you are a small child. And that made me wonder and made me think differently about being in ministry.

At the time, I wasn't a minister but was working in nurseries. Not in a school, teaching like Maria, but in nurseries more with the caretaking and caregiving, and that opened my eyes as well to some of the issues and the importance of the work with children and how little we pay attention to the inner lives and the existential questions that children carry.

So, I started– not a degree but a shorter course at Cliff College in England in Children Mission and Ministry and so I'm not so much– for me it's about the why: why do we do like we do or why don't we do like we do. What are the reasons? Because, I think a lot of people, generally I think anyway, in Denmark in the Scandinavian countries, we're very good at doing. We have very creative skills, we're great at storytelling, we're good at doing things but we're not as very well reflective as to why we do it. And we're not as very well reflective as to why we place children, for instance, in a Sunday school, a children's school, a children's church and not as a part of the congregation. Or, how do we expect parents who come and have their child baptized to bring up their child in the Christian faith and how as a congregation are we going to take active part in that. So, it's the whys and the behind questions that I'm really intrigued by. Yeah.

MT: And it's always interesting when you have to describe or explain to a child why we do what we do. Children are very good at asking the why questions: 'Why do we do that?' or 'Where is God now?' The big questions that we cannot easily answer but when you have to explain how wonderful God is to children you have to be very precise and that's very healthy I think to us as pastors to practice to be very precise and very direct in our, in our ministry so that people understand these difficult words and settings.

So, I think it's very healthy for us to participate on explaining faith to children and to actually to all people. I think grown-ups can learn a lot from hearing about faith from a child or from a youth ministry.

MR: I totally agree. I have a son, who is seven years-old. I have a one-year-old and we have another one on the way so. [laughs] So I have been, you know, I have seen, especially my older son, ask questions that are sometimes unintentionally profound. So – some statements and all that.

And I know we can, we can talk a little bit more about that as we go through this podcast episode. But, one of the things that I think would be helpful for me as a person from the Philippines living in the USA right now and I'm sure also for Methodists all around the world to understand a little bit of the context of your church– of the church in Denmark, because, you know, when people hear Europe, and, you know, I've seen this phrase several times, Europe is a post-Christian society. I want to ask the two of you what does that mean? What does that mean specifically for children and children's ministry?

AT: So, the Methodist church in Denmark is a minority church, which is true which is true of almost all churches except for the state church. We have a state church in Denmark that is a Lutheran evangelical church. The Methodist Church is about 2,000 members across I think 11 congregations which means we're very dispersed. It means that when you say Methodist to someone who doesn't know you or you meet for the first time, most people will say 'come again?', 'what's that?' or 'the difference between you and the Christians, what's that?' the Christians being the folks– the state church like. So, we're living in country–

MT: They ask like 'do you have your own Bible?'

AT: Exactly. Like 'You believe in the Christian God?'

Yeah. Something like that. So, we live in a situation even being a Christian isn't necessarily understood. Even while a majority of our population actually belongs to a Christian church. But for many people— but I don't want to put this out because it still has significance but for many people it's a cultural thing. You have your children baptized, you get confirmed, you get you're wed in the state church, you go to funerals, you might participate in the Christmas Eve service kind of a thing and it certainly carries meaning but it's not something that's necessarily understood you need to have the impact on how to live your life. And if you have a faith, it's most often understood to be something quite personal and private even. So, we've had Prime Ministers saying that faith—any faith, religion doesn't belong in the public spaces. Yeah, so that's kind of the part of the atmosphere anyway that we're ministering in.

So, on the one side, there's a great openness and on the other side there's almost— we sometimes talk about people having been inoculated against Christianity, because we've seen a diluted form of Christianity, you know, 'I know what that's about, it really doesn't make any sense to me. It doesn't itch where I'm itching so, it doesn't make any difference it won't have any impact so I can disregard it.' And that boundary can be hard to overstep I think.

MT: And even though we know that all that Anne just said is a fact. We also know that children, and that's all children—and actually it's all human being have some sort of religious foundation. Children ask questions. Children believe that God is there and that's what we can see and all the literature about children that they trust that God is there by their side taking care of them. But somehow, during the teen years, we see how a teenager asks questions about life and about society and about their parents and about their heritages and everything. And then they also ask questions about religion and God and faith and so on. And if there's no grown-ups or grown Christians— not only by age but grown in their faith to help them to get through that and come back to the church then they're lost. So, most Danish young people get... confirmed in the Lutheran church, but it's not, it's not very common that they come back afterwards. So, we have a—

AT: Actually, it's known. Actually, it's a known fact that we sometimes talk about. You're confirmed out of the church.

MT: Yes. So, we have—

MR: So, it's almost like, once the confirmation is done, it's like: 'okay see you when I feel like it— I'll go to the Christmas Eve or even sometimes Easter.'

MT: Yes.

AT: Yeah, I'll come back when I'll need my child baptizing—

MT: Yeah.

AT: or when I get married.

MR: Right, sorry to interrupt you Maria please go ahead.

MT: So, that's a part of our ministry as well. Among the fact, it's like Anne said it's just not common to being a disciple of Jesus. It's not. It's normal to be a part of the Lutheran church, the state church, but it's not common to talk about your faith trying to do a difference in the world and proclaiming that you love God. That's not normal at all in Denmark, in Scandinavia or in—maybe in this part of Europe. I don't think that's —yeah.

MR: Yeah.

AT: One the interesting things as well is that we don't actually know if we have a whole generation who's growing up almost without a religious language or a faith language— What does that mean? Does that make a difference? Will it make a difference in 10 years? In 20 years? If you don't develop a language in an area, can it still exist? I'm not saying that our spirit—the part of us that looks like God or our spirituality can ever disappear, but when it's like a muscle and it's something you need to exercise. And as all other things when you don't have a language for it, you can almost not know it.

AT: I don't know if that makes sense. Like when I moved to England and I started studying and we had philosophy and I had philosophy in my A levels. So, I knew what they were talking about but I didn't know the terms in English. So, I couldn't make myself understood and consequently I didn't know the context. If you don't have a language for something how can it figure as a part of your life. **So, there's almost a sense that what we need to start doing, and what I think one of our great challenges, is to believe that mission isn't just necessary but that mission—a part of mission in this context is giving language to something that we've lost**

MT: Yeah, second that.

MR: Yeah, you're helping educate me in some of the realities in Europe, that going a little bit deeper. And I think that I would like to mention as well and highlight some of the things that I hear you saying. One similarity that I see— Now one conversation that I had with a missionary serving in Thailand, a couple of years back, and they started reaching to the students in a campus. And Christianity is very like in your country, it's a minority, and the missionary told me that when they were sharing about Jesus about our faith the student's said: 'my life is good. my grades are good. why do I need your Jesus?'

And this ties into what you were saying Anne, about the lack of the language, which has becoming like a historical, cultural trend that has been happening over the past decade or maybe, you could argue that maybe even over a century. And so, this is the context where kids

are— where you have a state church and it's a part of life and, although a minimal one. It doesn't translate into a deeper commitment, you know, deeper tenets of the faith. And you also mentioned that children and youth are confirmed out of the church and one similarity that I see here in the U.S. the rise of what they call the *Nones* and the *Dones*.

So, these are the people who no longer publicly affiliate with any religion. So, when they are asked 'what's your religion?' they say none. And also, some people are done, they are just leaving church for one reason or another.

But some of these young adults, when they get married they have children, they go back to church because they still feel that it's important for their kids at least to have some idea, some language... about faith, about religion.

Do you still see that parents when they have children, do they go back to church with their kids, do they send their kids to, like: 'oh go to the church, they will teach you a little bit about the faith that I grew up with and I don't want to be bothered' too busy, you know? How does that work for parents and children?

AT: I think you find both approaches and there's one that's very prevalent as well, maybe not so much in— well I'm not sure. From different reasons in different settings but one is: 'I don't want to force my child to believe, or to see the world from a particular point of view. So, I'm going to be very careful what I present my child with. I don't want to make it seem like you have to be a Christian or you have to live like this because I don't want to be forceful with my child. I don't want to indoctrinate them' is another common fear I think almost for parents.

And at the same time, I think that it's also true that when we become parents most of us are shook. Because, we're— because of the wonder of bringing a child into the world and the responsibility of having to care for someone and bring them up to become a whole and functional human being. I think that for most of us opens some windows into the spiritual and the faith dimension which we might have tucked away otherwise in our lives.

MT: Yeah. Well, we also— we see— I think it's pretty common for families in Denmark to more use the church when they become parents. I think also the church is very— becoming very good at making special services that fit into a family life. We have this thing called— yeah, we have messy church from fresh expressions that we do in Denmark.

The Lutheran church has a concept called, they call it like, spaghetti service. Where the concept is you have like a family worship service in the afternoon and then you eat, like, spaghetti dinner afterwards and then they go home. So, it's like a weekday and not a Sunday because Sunday can be a challenging time for a family to go to the church. Like the normal service Sunday at 10 in the morning is not a very good time when you have like a toddler. So, I think the church try as much as it can to fit into the life of, of families, in my eyes.

And I think, I think we see a lot of people who have been like away from the church and when they get their children the remember where they—where home is. They come back with their children in the baptism or afterwards to give them that inheritance. I think you see that quite a lot, of course we also see parents who forget what they promised when they get their children baptized in the Methodist church.

And to me, it's just really weird, in my opinion, that all Danish people don't get their children baptized in the Methodist church. Because, like Anne said, they're very—it's very normal in Denmark to be very sure that you're not indoctrinating anyone and that anyone can make their own opinion about their faith. Faith is a personal thing and so on and so on.

But in the Lutheran church when they get baptized, the parents answer for the child that this child believes in God. So, actually what the most common—the most common baptism in Denmark is actually the opposite of what people are actually asking for, in my opinion. So that's really—I really don't get why we're a small church in Denmark. In my eyes we should be the biggest church in Denmark. Just because I think we have the best theology, so, yeah. [laughs]

MR: Yeah. I think I would—yeah, I'm just going to react as well to several things the two of you said. One thing Anne, you said about being careful about indoctrinating and I know that you come to this, at children's ministry, from more of a thinker standpoint and thinking about models and perspectives but is—do you think that's a fairly recent phenomenon because if we go back to the Bible, in Proverbs it's like: 'train up a child in the way he or she should go and when they grow up they will never depart from it.' But this one is almost like: 'I'll be careful not to impose on them, not to indoctrinate them and they will make their choice at some point in the future.' I think that's a perspective.

In your reading and your studying about this, is this fairly recent and how do you see this play out when the children are a little bit older?

AT: I think it is fairly common or fairly recent and I think that it's a result of—I think that again, it's a complex world and there are different reasons why we do think like that. I think there's something about the history of the church in Denmark. Where we have state church and we have some movements and some very—I don't even know how to say it, like—we've been quite strict on how to do it and there's been a state church those rules have been imposed from down. I think that within the Danish population, maybe even subconsciously there's, there's a rejection of that kind of top down decision on religious life, which I actually think is healthy.

But then—I think because of the way we have this tradition from mid 1800s about freedom of thought and wanting to teach people how to free think and form decisions on their own so we have this whole formation thinking in our whole teaching system, which actually comes from a Christian background. But I think as society becomes more and more secularized this thought of forming your own ideas have become what we want in all areas of life. With morals, ethics, religions, relationships everything has become a thing that you can—not even can—but have to do yourself. Even if we know it's ridiculous to assume that if we hold our eyes—our child's ears

then when they're 15 they'll chose their own language. It doesn't work like that, you have to have a language to learn other languages. You have to have a language in order to relate to the world.

And I think... I think, in a sense, we're risking abandoning our children. Because, one of my things is when you meet children, as Maria said earlier, all children ask big questions and when we're scared as adults to go into those questions then we actually leave the child alone. We abandon them. And in a sense, we're neglecting a need in that child. But because we don't know in Denmark very often we don't have a language I don't know what I think about God, or death, or justice, or you name it. Then we kind of, without wanting to, we abandon our children to figure out their own languages. Figure out their own answers.

MT: Yeah and I think it's a paradox, like the thing that you said Anne about parents wanting to leave their children with their own choices. I think that's a paradox because, I think no matter what you do as a parent you will always indoctrinate your children in every possible way: with their name, their food, where they go to school, who they can play with, when they go to bed. All that sort of stuff is that's the parent's role. So, I think it's a paradox to think that you cannot, that you can, like you said, hold their ears for stuff. I think that's not possible at all.

AT: No, but I think it's an illusion that we live in—

MT: Exactly. Yeah.

AT: that when it comes to religion and values, value-neutral is a thing. And I think that's one of the great illusions that we live with as parents in Denmark.

MT: Sure, and I think that—

AT: To think that I cannot affect my child, instead of putting it on ourselves as adults and saying I am affecting my child because these are values that I think are good, strong and healthy. And later in life, you will have to figure out for yourself if they fit now under my roof, in my care, these are the values, this is what we go after.

MT: And I think that— Oh sorry.

MR: Yeah. I was just going to say as a parent, myself, you know, it's amazing how many times they repeat what I tell them. Things that I've said to them like— it's like— what, I'm trying to think of an example right now, but at some points they would repeat the very words I would say to them. So, in those small things, they are already picking up a lot of things from us as parents. And, you know, I'm also reflecting like okay: what things have I gotten from my father?

I've seen that even some of the things that I maybe don't want... I'm like: 'Oh I remember my father doing this.'

Even those small cues are important as we think about the human development. The children as they grow into youth, they grow into adulthood. But I think both of you have pointed out that the role of the parent in shaping the world view and in terms of the language, the faith that they have, or don't have depending on the way that they are being raised.

So, I want to shift gears a little bit. And so, given this context that you are in and what are some of the ways that the church is trying to address these challenges? What are the ministries that you do? And Maria, you've spoken a little bit about some of these: the messy church, the spaghetti, and also some of the scheduling challenges for parents.

AT: I think that one of the ways— one of the very practical ways a lot of churches are working on it is this trying to offer places in a busy everyday life because in Denmark most families if they consist of two adults out working full-time most often and children are in institutions so, weekends is really crucial time for doing cleaning and shopping, and being together, and playing and seeing friends. And so, if you can fit something in a shorter form in an everyday situation then it's more likely that you can do it. It makes it more practical.

Then generally across denominations there's just awareness, at the moment, on the faith formation within the family. So, most organizations or churches are working in some form or another or how do we equip and help parents to foster faith at home. So, what are the skills, what are the tools, what are the resources that we can make available for parents in order for them to take on themselves to pass on faith in an appropriate and safe way. Yeah, I think that's a big focus of most churches and organizations that work with children and youth at the moment.

MR: So, Anne, how is the church helping the families then? Do they have whether it's training or opportunities for the church to do something together? Or Are there resources, books or booklets or online resources for that?

AT: I think we're still in the developing stage of it actually. We borrowed quite a bit— and when I say 'we' I mean quite a few different organizations we borrowed Rachel Turner's work from England parenting faith and her tools. One of the organizations, within the state church, are beginning to do parenting courses kind of a thing. Where they go out and even just create a space for parents just to talk about not just bed time routines and how to deal with emotions of little people but also talking about what does work with faith at home? How do we bring in God into ordinary life? Do we know any resources that are helpful? How does praying with a 2-year-old work? What works for you, what doesn't work for you? What am I scared of what are my anxieties?

And then some of the Bible societies in Denmark are developing books and resources that are easy to pick up and go straight into for this is how you can read the Bible as well as some personal questions to talk and debate about. This is a way to pray so that it becomes fairly— Yeah, pick it up and use it so you don't have to figure it out on your own.

MR: Right.

AT: Because oddly, Mighty, oddly there seems to be—so, I've grown up in a family where we went to church, once I was 6, 7-years-old we became part of the Methodist church but my parents I don't think they were taught how to pray at home. They didn't teach me how to pray, I was taught to pray through the church. Happily, I was taught to pray through the church.

So, I've been going thinking, obviously I've not learned these things at home but everybody else who's grown up in a Christian family they will know exactly what to do because they'll have it from their own childhood but it seems that that's not actually the case not just within Methodism but in quite a lot of different denominations. People are quite clueless. 'How do we do this?' or 'What's the right way?' 'How do we not hurt our child? Or how do I not do it in a way that's completely irrelevant to a 5-year-old?'

There is actually a very real sense of we need to help equip each other and we can do it.

MR: Right, and what I hear you say is it's not just the Methodist church in Denmark doing it. There's a variety of, variety of Christian organizations working together to bring about resources that will help not just the church but their families to bring in their faith to talk about faith to their children. Which is also highlighting the role of the parents in upbringing of the children.

So, before I ask you this question, Maria, I'm just going to ask as well: What is the process of contextualization like? Because you said you borrowed some materials from Rachel Turner from England. How do you contextualize the material into the Danish culture and society?

AT: Well, that's one of my pet peeves, we don't do it well enough. I think we take too many things from England, America. Well, that works there surely it will work here as well but life in Denmark is quite different than life in England for instance where it's not uncommon that one parent stays at home until the children start school. Well, that's very uncommon in Denmark. And that makes family life and the dynamics within everyday life very, very different. And that's one of the areas where we can see children's ministry and the thinking about children's spiritual formation, family formation, is really growing. It is where we're beginning to think and develop our own resources and believing that we—so, if you wanted to look statistics, for instance, about children and faith or family and faith practices or—there's very, very little in Denmark yet. But that's like, it suggests that's not an area where we've had any interest or attention, I don't know, it's not something we've looked into greatly on our own. But I think what we're seeing is that it's an area that's being developed but is happily has been developing very fast at the moment. Or I'm certainly hoping that it's developing very fast at the moment.

MR: That's great and I would say and I would like to affirm the work that you and the church in Northern Europe has done with the *Nordic Perspectives of Methodism*. I've browsed that. I've shared that with my colleague at Discipleship Ministries who is the director for children's

ministry. So, I think that's a healthy way of looking at how would this work in our context and given our society, given our church culture and all that.

So, Maria, you mentioned some of the ways the church is serving children and parents. You mentioned the messy church, the spaghetti church, and some of the challenges of scheduling for weekends and weekdays and I would say the same, for me, you know. I'm just going to share maybe two examples because we have a 6-year-old and a 1-year-old sometimes— we try very hard to arrive to church on time but sometimes we arrive like 5 minutes late. A little bit later you know. Because, you know, maybe you're all set and then maybe you need to change the diaper right before you go get into the car.

Another is, we went to a church, I'm not going to say which church it was, but they didn't have a kid's church and Anne this all goes back to what you were saying that kids have like a separate space and grownups will be like in the main sanctuary.

So, because the kid's church was not open, when we went it was eleven in the morning, our son, he's 6, sat with us in church it was the traditional service. And we had like an older couple in front of us sitting in the pew. And my son was like, he'd be whispering to me all the time like: 'I'm bored. I'm bored can I have your phone?'

And so, I would give him 'okay here's a pen,' draw and all that. After the service the gentleman seated in front of us started talking to my son and he said: 'I see you have a lot of questions for you dad— so, next time can you write them down and you can talk about it, like, after service.' I thought about it like: 'hmm, I'm not sure that's an effective way of encouraging parents to bring in their children in the service.' So. But anyway, I just tell the story because Maria, you mentioned the challenges of scheduling, and Anne you also mentioned that. So, what are the ways that the church is creatively making space for parents and children and the activities that you do in order to help them get to know the lord and faith?

MT: Yeah. So, the past year I've been working in two congregations, two Methodist congregations on Sjælland, which is a part of Denmark, and both of the congregations had that challenge that they knew that they had children, families, youth, in their gathering but they couldn't—they didn't participate in the regular worship service. So, they hired me to fix that problem. And I think, actually, that's a church doing something, hiring someone. Asking 'Can you help us fix this? We don't know what to do.'

So, in one of the congregations I started a youth small group, and in my opinion that really works. Small group is really a very, very handy tool for making disciples in Jesus Christ with youth and young adults. Along with the youth camps, which we also keep doing in Denmark with great success.

Nationally exactly yes. Nationally. Yeah. And then the other congregation, they had a lot of families and a lot of baptism the past years so, they knew they had a lot of toddlers and a lot of

families. So, what I did was I, I visited these families in their homes and asked them: 'Do you want to be a part a part of the church? Do you miss the church? Is everything ok with you, since we haven't seen you guys?' And what they answered was: 'Yes, we really want to be a part of the church. We miss tools to how to talk to our kids about faith.' Just like Anne said. 'We miss the congregation, the fellowship, actually we feel kind of lonely cause we're just us, and our little family and we don't have the time and the resources to travel around and visit all of our friends.'

It's just like you said Mighty. Just headed out of the door and then something happens and to have to stay back and the children and all of the stuff you have to bring along with you.

So, talked with these different families. Heard them and I heard their stories heard them also telling like how the setting was not fit for a family. So, we moved the worship service to 9 in the morning instead of 11 in the morning. So, we started at 9 and then I— we moved all the stuff, on the floor, everything I wanted to see and learn was on the floor we still had like lights on the alter and I wanted, I wanted to show them this is still church, this is still worship service, this is not a day care offer. This is church. And then we had a lot of toys and we had the toys on the floor in front of the altar so the children could get comfortable being in the room and being near the altar.

And then, I started out telling the Bible story that I wanted to share with them. We sang a lot of Christian children's songs, which is a very handy tool. Just like Wesley told us: 'Sing with each other, sing, sing, sing.' So, we did that a lot and we did a lot of games that fitted into the theme. A theme could be like: water, or love, yeah or Easter, or Christmas or whatever. And we did all this playing and when the whole thing was done we—I we shared blessings and we went downstairs and had like food that was fit for children. Because, that was another issue that they had lunch after the worship service but the lunch was very grown up lunch that children don't, like, enjoy.

So, that was some of the things that we did. We took the church back and made it fit for children and families. And it's still going on, that work is still going on and they're very happy about it, the families. Now they feel like they're a part of the congregation and they feel welcome again.

MR: Yeah, that's amazing and, you know, whenever you have kids, the church expects some crying and some screaming, expects some running around. So.

AT: And also, I think that I would say that as a minister, one of the things I think that makes the people look the most relieved is when you, from the front, say: 'children are welcome and that means that parents when they make noises, when they move around, when they want to come up the front, please let them. They're actually allowed to be here.' So, don't feel stressed that your child is being a child.

And just allowing that. Because, one of the things that happens as well is that as parents we fret, we're anxious, and it just makes everything noisy. And quite often we're more noisy trying to make our children quiet than the child that's not quiet.

MT: I think it's a balance. Because, I think, the families and the children, need their own service and their own space to move around and see that this is their church and they also need to meet like the rest of the congregation. We need both parts we can't just have children's worship services and then adult worship services and then a youth worship service and then that's it. No, we need to cross over and to meet each other but it's ok to have like their own thing for their—

AT: I do think, I do think sometimes adults, proper adults, without children tagging onto them, are kind of hogging church services—and have decided the right way of doing children's worship or service where it only fits us. And it's actually kind of a selfish way of thinking of it and how is one of my questions.

Last year, we had a family service, an all age service—I can't even remember what we call it, but we had a service where we were all in like inter-generational we were together. And we had prayer station, and at one point I'm sat so I can see my oldest son doing something in the worship room, and my husband sitting with our youngest son and up at the altar comes one of our old faithful men from the congregation and he kneels down in prayer. And it just—it hit me when we sat there and I still get touched when I think about it. It hit me at that point. I can tell my children, I can tell my boys, they can be men of prayer and they can be men of faith and I can pray with them at night and I can tell them about the importance of praying and a relationship with Christ but I can't show them, that as an 80-year old man—Christ is still significant. I can't but he could. But if my boys are never allowed to be—and I get all goosebumps. If my boys aren't allowed to be in the same room as faithful young people, adults, old men. How are they meant to know that it works throughout life and it's not just something that mommy makes up?

But we need to be together.

MR: That's a beautiful story, Anne. Thank you for sharing that. It's amazing for children to see that older people still take their faith seriously and I think that's going to be an image that hopefully sticks with them throughout their lives.

Yeah, I know we're nearing the almost one-hour mark and I think this has really been a fun conversation learning about the society and culture in Denmark and all that and all the ways that the church there is ministering with children.

And I think I would like, very briefly, if you could share, some of the ways you are ministering with children of refugees. Because, this is also a reality that many countries in Europe are facing. I think countries continue to face this, this reality. If you share some of the stories and some of the impact of your work with the refugee children.

MT: So, in one of the, one of the congregations I worked in last year, before I was sent to Aarhus, that congregation was seated in a small, in a small village, city, where there is a lot of refugees' families and we did this—The congregation wanted to do this thing with the children and the youth. So, they hired me to do the messy church thing. And the whole concept was were doing it on Saturday, in the morning, so the parents can drop their children off at us and we can have messy church with them—and they can go shopping and then they can come back.

What actually happened was, when we opened the doors there was all these refugees' families just once walked in. It was a lot, a lot of people, a lot of children. And these families have never had, in Denmark, people dropping everything they had in their hands and just making a nice day for them. So, we wanted one thing but God wanted another thing.

So, what actually happened was that I had two years where I could talk about Jesus, tell them about God and we could play and we could be a fellowship, we could be a congregation together. And then now these children and these youths and these families are now a part of that congregation and messy church, and that congregation, is still a door for new families to come into the church because, it's very easy playing soccer, painting a new picture, baking a cake, doing all that messy church stuff but also hearing about faith... are not always welcome in this part of the world and that also helps, that also helps the Danish part of the congregation to see how these refugees are people and not just a number in the newspaper. So, to me, being in ministry with refugees' children that has been very giving but also very challenging because they have their Muslim background and culture and they know Allah, and they know the stories, but then I'm... and I really have to know the Islam story to connect the two parts. But, in my opinion, they really, it's really a gift working with refugees' families.

AT: Maria, can you tell about the work that the national youth and children's organization have done with the refugee centers last year?

MT: So last year when we had our annual conference, we also had the youth work also had their like annual meeting, and every year we do like, we collect donations and give it to some special project, and this year we spent all of the money we collected on going to refugee centers around the country and making activities for the children that live there. Because, when they live there it's not, it's not a place for children. Because, it's just a center where the families are being put in. And then they, they don't have a normal life. They don't have time for going on vacation, or sports, or anything. So, we spent the money and sent teams there two times this year they went and did activities with children on the centers and that was really giving, I think, for everyone.

I think for us, in Denmark, where people have what they need, we have a good health, health system. We have a good education system and everything, so, the church is not needed as much for that kind of social work but these people really needed us. And to us it was also a great gift, so we could be like a true Methodist church again. And I think that's a struggle we still have, we need to do more stuff for people. But people are so well and so wealthy in this

part of the world. So, we need to find who to help and when and where, and these people really need us. So, that was a gift for everyone.

MR: Yeah, that's beautiful. You said the church opened up its doors reaching out into the community but God sent in more people than you expected, which turned into this beautiful ministry.

Thank you for sharing, Maria. Thank you, Anne, so much for your time with me this had been a really fun conversation.

Now, if people want to learn more about your ministries with children or the things that you do in the Northern Europe and specifically in Denmark, where is the best place online where people can either connect or learn more?

AT: About the Methodist church, in general, it's <http://metodistkirken.dk>, that's the national website for the Methodist church where you'll be able to find both Maria and I and our contact details.

I have a website for my ministry stuff that's called– which is not going to make any sense, but I'm going to say it anyway, <http://digogmigogvitro.dk> as well. I'll give you the actual address.

MT: Anne is an influencer. She's a blogger and it's pretty cool and you should check it out. It's really cool blog yeah.

AT: Thank you.

MR: I was also going to say that Anne is a very prolific writer and author too. I've read parts of, I've browsed the *Nordic Perspectives of Methodism*. There you go.

AT: Well worth a look. I think it's on Amazon. I've been told you can buy it as an e-book on Amazon. That might be easier than asking for it to be sent in paper. But yeah *Nordic Perspectives of Methodism* with a Special Focus on Younger Generations.

MR: And if you are watching or listening to this podcast episode we are going to post the show notes on our website at <http://umcdiscipleship.org>. Just look for Global Conversations on Discipleship and you will be able to find this, the link to the book. You'll be able to find it on the show notes we will be posting them.

AT: Thank you for having us, Mighty.

MR: Yeah, thank you so much this is beautiful, and may God continue to bless you, your families, the work that you do with the United Methodist Church and with other organizations in your country. Thank you so much, Maria. thank you so much, Anne.

MT: Thank you, Mighty. Thank you for connecting us.

AT: Yes.