



Disabled people and the community
of the church

equality, inclusion and facilitation

A statement by the Church of Norway National Council
November 2009



CHURCH OF NORWAY
National Council



Equality, inclusion and facilitation

The Church of Norway is a church open to all. All members of the church, no matter their life situation, shall have the possibility to participate in and belong to the local church community. This is not always the case for mentally and physically disabled persons. Many do not even reach the church door, as no one has invited them to come or told them they belong to the community of the church.

Through this statement the Church of Norway National Council wants to stress the right of disabled people to participate in the community of the church, and to underline the church's responsibility to facilitate this participation.

In its document *"In Christ – near life"* the Church of Norway General Synod has described the Church of Norway as a confessing, missionary, serving and open church. Against this background the National Council wants to describe the Church of Norway as:

- a confessing church demonstrating in word and deed that disabled persons have infinite dignity
- a missionary church conveying the gospel in word and deed in ways that communicate with disabled persons
- a serving church offering disabled persons the possibility to participate naturally in the local church community, where all care for each other
- an open church listening to the life and faith experiences of disabled persons; open to a multitude of expressions of faith

Based on the General Synod statement *"The Identity and Mission of the Church of Norway"* (2004) the National Council has set down the following concretisation of the place of disabled persons in church life:

- 1.) The Church of Norway has its basis in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The church consists of persons who through baptism have entered into the communion with God and with each other. This means that all baptised believers have the same right to belong to the community of the church. Disabled persons must be given the same opportunity to participate in the church as all others.

- 2.) The Christian faith is a gift created by the triune God, independently of the believer's intellectual capacity or ability to communicate. Faith is the work of God, not a human achievement.
- 3.) The Church of Norway wants to confirm and care for all baptised believers as equal members, and facilitate that disabled persons may experience the liturgy and the local church community as places where they may express and find strength for their faith, in receiving from as well as contributing to the community.
- 4.) The Church of Norway consists of a number of traditions and forms of expression. This is a treasure. With their experience of faith and life disabled persons may offer valuable contributions to spirituality as well as theology.
- 5.) In some phases and situations in life it may be difficult to respond to invitations from the local congregation. Disabled persons will to a large extent be able to participate in ordinary church life, but will often depend on assistance. For the church it is important that disabled persons receive the necessary assistance, in order for them to participate on their own terms.
- 6.) A church where disabled persons are not given the possibility to be part of the local congregation, will itself become a disabled church. Through their presence and talents disabled persons have an important function in church life.
- 7.) Freedom of religion is a basic human right in Norway and other countries. It confirms the right of everyone to choose his or her religious affiliation or to choose no religious affiliation. The Church of Norway here has a double obligation, to defend the right of free religious expression for disabled persons in other churches and religions, and at the same time to secure that its own disabled members have a real possibility for religious life – as individuals and together with others.
- 8.) The Church of Norway recognises that it is part of a history where the right of disabled persons to express their faith in the community of the church, has long been neglected. The Church of Norway wants to confirm that disabled persons belong to the church community as full and equal members.

Church of Norway plan for diakonia

A vision for diaconal ministry in the Church of Norway:

*The love of God for all people
and the whole of creation
revealed through our life and
service.*

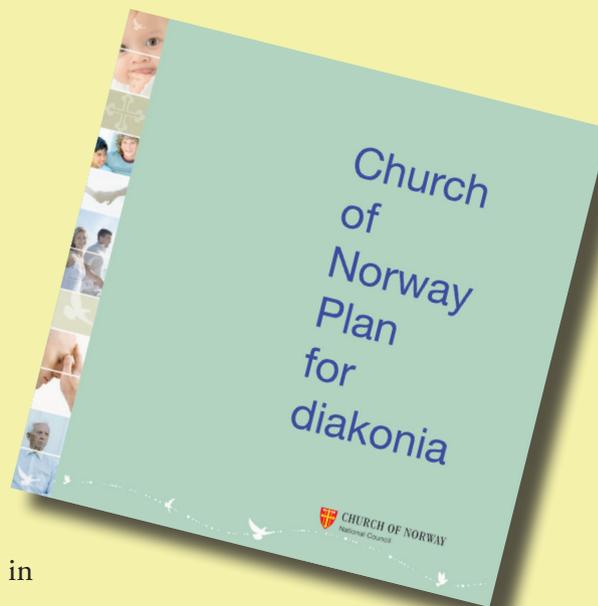
The plan is based on the following definition of diakonia:

”Diakonia is the caring ministry of the Church. It is the Gospel in action and is expressed through loving your neighbour, creating inclusive communities, caring for creation and struggling for justice”

All Christians are called to live their daily life in service for others.

Diakonia has a special responsibility in cases where nobody else take care.

Mutuality and respect for the dignity of others is fundamental.



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