



# The gift of being

Called to be a church of all and for all

STUDY MATERIAL



STUDY MATERIAL

---

# The gift of being

Called to be a church of all and for all

Published 2019  
1st edition 200 items  
LaserTrykk Oslo

The study material can be downloaded freely on these websites:  
[www.k-stud.no](http://www.k-stud.no)  
[www.norkr.no](http://www.norkr.no)

When used in Norway, this study resource qualifies for financial support from the Christian Association for Adult Education in Norway.



DEN NORSKE KIRKE

**K-STUD**  
Kristelig studieforbund



# Content

- 6 Introduction
- 7 About the study resource
- 8 1st Gathering: Introduction to the conversation
- 9 2nd gathering: Valuing Human Diversity
- 11 3rd Gathering: Creation as an Act of Love
- 14 4th Gathering: The Gift of Life
- 16 5th Gathering: Vulnerability, Limitation and Healing
- 20 6th Gathering: Called to be a Church of All and for All
- 22 Other resources

# Introduction

In 2003, The World Council of Churches (WCC) published the document «A Church of All and for All». The document was prepared by EDAN (Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network) and is about the inclusion of persons living with impairments in church and society. Since then, EDAN has noticed a number of changes. Much still has to be done to change attitudes towards people living with impairments and facilitate inclusiveness in church and society. But the conversation has shifted, and this opens up for new perspectives.

EDAN therefore developed a new document “The Gift of Being – Called to Be a Church of All and for All”. In this document, it is not the case for inclusion that has to be made through theological argument; rather it is exclusion that requires an argument. We are all created as finite beings, and we all live with limitations of different sorts. Therefore, EDAN uses an inclusive language in the new document; it is about “us”, not about “them”. The church is a fellowship comprised of all, no matter the level of ability. In the new document, EDAN uses “we” in an open way to invite all Christian churches in, so that we together can listen to and reflect on the experiences of people living with impairments, people who are a part of “us”.

Together with the Christian Council of Norway, the Church of Norway’s Church

Council and Council on Ecumenical and International Relations translated the document “The Gift of Being” into Norwegian, and it was published as part of the Christian Council of Norway’s publication series. The document is rich in theology, Biblical references, ethical reflections and thematic angles. The publication is written in a theological language that is not as accessible for everyone.

The Church of Norway’s Church Council, in cooperation with the Christian Association for Adult Education in Norway, has therefore wanted to develop a study resource material that can contribute to “opening up” the text, with the help of Bible study and questions that can inspire reflection and conversation in congregations, Bible groups and study groups at a local level.

# About the study resource

## Educational goals for the study resource

- Increase awareness and knowledge of what it means to be a church of all and for all.
- Gain insight into own attitudes and relevant ethical predicaments around what it means that normal communities are made up of all types of human beings, both in church and society.
- Increase knowledge and insight into the Bible's message on this theme.

## Target group

The target group for the study material are members, leaders, volunteers and others who may be interested, in churches and congregations. The study resource is recommended for Bible groups and other smaller groups, leadership teams, councils, etc.

Participants are invited to share their own experiences and thoughts on being a diverse community, and to reflect on attitudes we hold towards each other.

## Structure and schedule

The study resource material can be used on its own, or together with the original document «The Gift of Being». As an introduction to using the resource, we recommend watching the film "My way – From the island of Edøy

to the world" together.

Every chapter in this study material starts off with some text extracts from the different chapters in "The Gift of Being". These text extracts are marked by number and are in italics. Next come practical examples to think and reflect on. There is also a list of relevant Bible passages, both from those referred to in "The Gift of Being" as well as other passages that can shed light on the questions that are raised. Thereafter, you will find a short passage that summarizes what the chapter is about together with a practical exercise and more questions for reflection and conversation.

The material is made for 6 gatherings, at least. We recommend spending 2-2,5 hours per gathering. If you need more time for one of the chapters, it can be good to divide it between two gatherings.

When used in Norway, this study resource qualifies for financial support from the Christian Association for Adult Education in Norway. Check for similar opportunities in your own context.

# 1st Gathering

## Introduction to the conversation

### The film “My way - From the island of Edøy to the world”

Watch the film «My way – From the island of Edøy to the world» together. You will find it on YouTube. It has been produced in both a Norwegian and an English version.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xOL32SiwqwQ>

### Practical exercise

Move around with your eyes closed while another person leads and accompanies you. Debrief together on how this felt.



## For reflection

- What strikes you first after having seen the film «My way»?
- What do you think meetings with the welfare support system are like today?
- What is your reaction to Torill's statement that she does not wish for a different life?
- Have you sometimes wished for a different life, or wished that you were someone else, other than who you are? Share.
- What does the term «impairment» mean to you?
- From your impressions, what are the attitudes towards people living with impairments in your society?
- Share experiences you have had with someone living with impairments.
- In which way can people living with impairments do a good job in your community, at your work place, or in your congregation?



## 2nd Gathering

### Reflecting on chapter 1: Valuing Human Diversity

Being created in the image of God

*(12) We acknowledge that some theological viewpoints interpret human createdness in ways that are not favourable to persons with impairments, particularly cognitive impairments. Looking for 'the seat' of the image, some theologians asked wherein, the divine the image was to be found. The notion of being created in the image of God in terms of the human intellect came with considerable costs. It implied that human beings with profound intellectual and developmental impairments were not recognisable as truly human.*

The value of life

*(22) Human diversity is constituted by, among other things, both talents and limitations. These conditions are part of how we are created. Recognizing limitation as part of creation has important implications for how we speak about "disability" in the church. It means we cannot speak indiscriminately about "the disabled" as if the individuals identified by this label are all alike in this one respect.*

Supporting people

*(30) Sometimes human limitation – such as caused by physical or cognitive impairments – affects our enjoyment of our talents, sometimes it stimulates the development of them.*

#### Practical example for thought and reflection

Sometimes we need help from others to see and discover possibilities "outside our self-defined box"! Perhaps this is especially true for adults past middle age, whom it might do good to be challenged to do something a little outside one's own comfort zone. A volunteer in a local congregation shared this story:

«I am a 45+ years old wheel chair user with CP (Cerebral Palsy) with speech impediments and involuntary gestures. I thought I was doing what I could as a welcoming host at church services and as a member of various councils and committees.

When the new, young priest asked, as if it was the most natural thing in the world, whether I could take part in distributing communion, I must admit my first thought was: Is he crazy? I cannot do that. Imagine if I drop the cup? Imagine if I spill wine on someone, or something else really stupid? And what about the young children, they might be "scared"? What will people say? It certainly didn't help that I would be next to a tall, towering priest.

When I presented my more or less well formulated counter arguments, the priest looked at me with laughter in his eyes and said: «Oh, come on, you are a good host at church services. Everyone is seen, welcomed and given a hymn

book and program, and drawing papers and pencils for the children. You see them all. I am sure you are also capable to hand out holy communion."

And of course it went well. At the coffee after the service I overheard some children saying "it is nice that she gives out the juice (wine) because she is just the right height for me"! and some grown-ups said "yes, it was nice for me too, because I need to bend my back sometimes". I have also received positive feedback from some other people living with impairments, saying that they feel more confident to volunteer when they see me there. Perhaps we need someone to dare. And we definitely need to lift each other up!"

### Bible passages

- Col.1:15 (Christ the image of the invisible God)

- Rom.3:24 (Justified by Christ's grace)
- Col.1:13-14 (He has delivered us)
- Gen.1:26-27 (Created in God's image)
- John 14:6 (The relation to our creator is through Jesus)
- 1 Cor.12 (The church's members as the body of Christ)

### Practical exercise

Tell the others about one of your hobbies while you have a spoon in your mouth.

- What was it like to speak with a spoon in your mouth?
- What would it be like to do this for a whole day?
- What do you think it is like to have speech impediments, meeting people every day, 365 days a year?



## For reflection

The introductory chapter in «The Gift of Being» is about human dignity and the Christian understanding of a human being. It questions historic beliefs that the intellect gives human beings an added value. It also raises questions around today's values tied to efficiency and success. Both these views collide with the Biblical notion of being created in the image of God, and bought free in Christ.

- What does it mean to be bought free in Christ?
- How does faith in Jesus Christ impact your self-image and how you see others? How does it shape your relationship with other human beings?
- To be created in the image of God – how does that impact our

view of the (self-) worth of a human being?

- What gives you a feeling of being valuable?
- Are there abilities you have or lack that affect your sense of self-worth? Have you noticed whether other people's abilities or disabilities affect how you see them?
- Share a situation where you feel that you fall short. Can you give examples of situations where you have needed others? How does this affect how you see yourself and your relationships to others?

# 3rd gathering

## Reflecting on chapter 2: Creation as an Act of Love

### Being God's creatures

*(34) When God looked upon creation, God saw that it was good, an affirmation that is repeated throughout the creation story in the book of Genesis. Therefore, it is befitting to start our reflections on disability with the same affirmation. Creation is an expression of God's love. The goodness of being God's creature lies in the relationship with each of us that is inaugurated by the triune God. Herein lies the foundation for the unity of humankind. It exists in the fact that we are all God's creatures. In reflecting on disability, this affirmation lays the ground for anything else that can be said.*



If repeatedly told “no, this is something you cannot do”, an acquired sense of helplessness can easily take root.



*(35) The Christian tradition confesses that creation is a wilful act of love. God calls each and every one of us into being. The purpose of our being is to respond to the loving relationship that God offers to*

*each of us, which is best expressed in the biblical notion of communion.*

### Community and communion

*(43) All things are created in Christ, and in him all things hold together (Col.1:16). This confession provides the context for determining what it means to say that the church is called to be a community of all and for all.*

### The Body of Christ

*(48) God's gifts to the church include each and every one of its members, even though some of its members may appear to be insignificant in the eyes of others. We already referred to the meditation on the church as the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12.*

### Practical example for thought and reflection

No matter our level of abilities, we are created, placed into (and gradually we choose) various relationships and roles vis-à-vis other people. This implies both rights and responsibilities. The first role we have is usually as a member of a family. This is a story from a childhood in a family:

*“I grew up on a small farm as the youngest of five brothers and sisters. One of the rules my parents applied was that everyone should help with whatever he or she could manage. This included me, who had Cerebral Palsy. Thus, as a 5-year-old, I was sitting in a*

potato field picking potatoes. My older brother of 12 years was also there, and as most brothers he did not pass on an opportunity to tease his sister. He got me to believe that the field was full of large, scary earthworms with big teeth. He then started digging up worms to throw at me, at which I howled and screamed. Our mother came out and scolded my brother – and she also scolded me for screaming when there was nothing to scream about. I was left sitting there wondering whether earthworms have teeth or not.

What is the point of this story? It is good for all children, no matter their abilities, to be given responsibility in the family and to have duties, like helping take the garbage out. It shows

the child that he or she counts and is fully a member of the family. If a child is repeatedly told “no, this is something you cannot do”, an acquired sense of helplessness can easily take root. Later in life, this might mean that the person does not try things or activities that he or she could have mastered.

No child should be constantly «pampered». All children can take some teasing from brothers and sisters, and some rough play without constant interruption from grown-ups. This can help prepare the child for the reality outside the family. As grown-ups, we must of course know and show the child what the boundaries are, but I was not harmed by the earth worms.”



## For reflection

This chapter, among other things, addresses the relationship between being created and being created into community. This raises questions around the connection between individual and community, and between individualistic and collectivistic ways of thinking. It also challenges the church in how it builds community in an individualistic era, and asks how the individual can contribute to community for the sake of human dignity. Not least, the chapter discusses how the human being as an individual develops in relation to others.

- When we have received the gift of being, what lies in God's invitation to love the Lord our God?
- Which characteristics are needed to love God?
- What does it mean for us as a community to love the Lord our

God?

- How does the Trinity – Creator, Son and Holy Spirit – shape our understanding of community?
- How can one describe the church as inclusive by its very nature?
- In which way is the church especially responsible to tear down walls?
- What does the body of Christ mean for our understanding of the church as community?
- In what ways can the body of Christ be an image of an inclusive community?
- How do we see community in holy communion? Reflect on what fellowship at the table and around a meal means in your context.
- What does community mean for the integrity of the holy communion?

### Bible passages

- Eph. 2:14 (Christ has come to break down the wall that separated us)
- Rom. 8:23 (...the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together)
- Col. 1:16-17 (In Christ all things were created, and in him all things hold together)
- Luke 10:27 (Loving Lord your God...)
- 1 Cor.12:23 (...the parts that we think are less honourable)
- 1 Cor.12:25 (There should be no division in the body, its parts should have equal concern for each other)
- 1 Cor.11:33 (My brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together)
- Matt.5:23-26 (First go and be reconciled to your brother or sister; then come and offer your gift)
- John 17:21 (Being one, so that the world may believe)

### Practical exercise

Tell a story to the person sitting next to you. Take five seconds pause between each word.

- Was it tempting to «complete the sentence» for the person talking?
- How does it feel to be able to say so little in a minute, compared to "normal" speech?
- What are the consequences for communication?

# 4th Gathering

## Reflecting on chapter 3: The Gift of Life

### Giftedness

(61) *Focusing on the person rather than its impairing condition enables us to recognize that all human beings have gifts and talents that allow them to respond to their circumstances, whatever their particular condition may be. Looking at impairment along these lines, we will discover that every human being is gifted in a way that others may need. This recognition in turn highlights the communal aspect of gift language. We are gifts to one another.*

### Socio-economic deprivation

(65) *In view of policies that marginalize persons with impairment for economic reasons, however, Christians know, or should know, that the economy of production is transcended by the economy of God's grace. In the divine economy, people's gifts and talents are not measured according to economic productivity, but according to their role in the realization of God's purpose in creation. As stated in *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*:*

*The Church is comprised of all socio-economic classes: both rich and poor are in need of the salvation that only God can provide. After the example of Jesus, the Church is called and empowered in a special way to share the lot of those who suffer and to care for the needy and the marginalized (§66).*

### Medical technology

(80) *The church confesses that all things*

*are created in Christ, and that in him all things hold together (Col.1:16). The purpose of our lives, then, is in God's act. Therefore, the faith of the church proclaims the goodness of "being."*

*Focusing on human life as God's gift in creation, the present document questions the bioethical position that grounds the value of life in the qualities of our bodies and minds. Instead, we take the position that the quality of our human lives is extrinsically grounded in the love of God. Without proclaiming the goodness of being, our faith loses the ground on which the language of hope can only begin to make sense.*

### Practical example for thought and reflection

«The worst part is actually not to have a child with an impairment. The worst part is the constant, consuming battle with the support system to get what our child needs!» - quote from a father.

«How can I live anything close to a normal life when I never know who will come into my home to give me the assistance I need in my everyday life, when that person will come, or whether somebody will come at all?» - quote from a young girl living with an impairment.

«I applied for funds for assistance on a summer vacation travel. It was declined, but I was told I could get funds for a stay at a winter resort. I said no thanks;



I am not really the type to race around the ski slope on sit-skis. I prefer sun and warm temperatures. I may be ungrateful, but...?» - quote from a man living with an impairment.

In Norwegian, there is an expression that says «We all have something [to deal with], but some have more». And there is a certain truth in this. No one can live a whole life without experiencing some kind of suffering! For this reason, we need each other as a community. We need to cry and laugh with each other! And we must fight battles together – we can be strong together! No one can help everyone, but everyone can help someone. As Christians, we should stand up together against injustice and undignified treatment of fellow human beings. And don't forget that people living with impairments are also different from each

other, and they are much more than a diagnosis.

### Practical exercise.....

Eat grapes or drink coffee with your eyes closed.

- What was especially challenging in this exercise?
- Could you do the exercise without spilling?
- How can the community be a resource for people who are visually impaired or blind?

### Bible passages

- Col.1:16 (For in him all things were created)
- Luke 4:18-19 (He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners)
- 2 Cor.5:18-21 (Be reconciled to God)

### For reflection



This chapter is in some ways a continuation of chapter 2, about the relationship between the individual and the community and what this means for our understanding of life as God's gift: we are reminded of the "communal aspect of gift language". Here, the idea that capabilities and productivity decide a person's worth are challenged. Questions are also raised about measuring the societal costs connected to inclusiveness and equality on the one hand, versus the difficulty of really measuring the value of community on the other hand.

- How can we talk about life as a gift, if life implies an impairment? Can we as creatures say that we are created "wrong"? Reflect on the question.
- What is the gift of life for some-

one who is born into destructive social and economic conditions? What about people who are born in extreme poverty or in the context of a genocide, or with drug addicted parents? What is the gift of life under such conditions?

- What is the role of the church in addressing attitudes that say that the value of life lies in levels of ability?
- What difference does it make if we replace the words «quality of life» with the words «sanctity of life»?
- In Norway, a recent report has documented the extra financial costs of living with impairment. You might find similar documentation or information for your society, or know of examples. Discuss the fairness in this.

# 5th Gathering

## Reflections on chapter 4: Vulnerability, Limitation and Healing

This chapter is so comprehensive that we suggest dividing it in two. We have made a separate session on the theme of healing.

### Accepting the human condition

(86) *The disability rights movement [has argued that] “ability” is not a permanent condition for anyone. There are only “temporarily able-bodied” human beings. Most of us, if not all, will face impairment at some point in our lives. This is why it is in everybody’s interest, so the argument runs, to include persons with “disabilities” in society on the basis of equality. However, instead of justifying the goal of inclusion on the basis of enlightened self-interest, Christian theology has taught that “ability” cannot be a permanent condition of human beings because of the transience and finitude of all creatures.*

### Limitation

(89) *This is what the Bible means when it says that we all hold the treasure of God’s life in earthen vessels (2 Cor.4:7). For the church it is crucially important to note that we hold it together. As it was said in A Church of All and for All:*

*In our attitudes and actions toward one another, at all times, the guiding principle must be the conviction that we are incomplete, we are less than whole, without the gifts and talents of all people. We are not a full community without one another. Responding to and fully includ-*

*ing people with impairments is not an option for the churches of Christ. It is the church’s defining characteristic. (§87)*

### Vulnerability

(99) *God is love (1 John 4:8). This means that God is exposing himself to vulnerability.*

(100) *What pertains to the connection between God’s love and God’s vulnerability also pertains to human beings. Part of what it means to love is that we make ourselves vulnerable to the other.*

### Charity

(105) *Self-advocates tend to resent the notion of charity, also within the church. They want to be appreciated for what they have to contribute, rather than being welcomed as people in need who create opportunities for others to practice Christian virtue. Here again, the church has much to benefit from the image of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians.*

### Practical example for thought and reflection

«I was 8 years old and I had learned to walk the year before. That spring all little girls wanted to have bright red sneakers, and I shared that burning wish. But the specialists had decided that I needed special shoes. And in those days, that meant big, lumpy, BROWN shoes. I cried and cried when they arrived in the mail. I was beyond comfort and squarely refused to try on my new shoes. I threw them under the



sofa, although I knew they could easily be retrieved from under there. My mother sat watching me and took me on her lap and said: "Do you know what I think, we'll just let the shoes stay there – I didn't like them either." And the next time we were in town for treatment, we went to the shoe shop and bought bright red sneakers.»

What is then the point being made? Don't make the children less normal that they are. I don't mean ignore all good advice from specialists and professionals. But it is important to see the whole child and not just the impairment. Sometimes, the child's social and playful side may be more important than all the "right" methods and exercises. Too much focus on exercises and training can lead to poor self-esteem – "I will never be good enough". Many adults living with impairments struggle with that feeling today. Sometimes it is the parents and/or the child who know what is best. There must be a level of freedom in the specialist care that allows for lowered shoulders and eases the requirements made to both parents and child.

### Bible passages

- Rom. 8:23 (...the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together) – see chapter 2
- 2 Cor. 4:7 (Treasure in earthen jars)
- Gen. 32:24-26 (Jacob wrestles with God)
- John 3:16 (Vulnerability: God became human)
- Isa. 53:5 (By his wounds we are healed)
- 1 John 4:8 (God is love)
- Hos. 2:13 (God as angry)
- 2 Cor. 12:8-10 (For when I am weak, then I am strong)
- Phil. 2:6-7 (Taking the nature of a

servant, being made in human likeness)

- Eph. 1:10 (to unite all things in Christ)

### Practical exercise

Put on a piece of clothing while wearing thick mittens. Or take off a jacket or jersey with each of your hands taped together.

- Talk about which challenges someone with reduced mobility faces in his or her everyday life.
- Share your thoughts on whether one should always adapt to people who, due to reduced mobility, need more time than most others. Why / why not?



## For reflection

This chapter deals with human limitation and vulnerability, recognising that we are all vulnerable. But it also deals with the universal human challenge to expose oneself to vulnerability and to expose others to their vulnerability. This raises questions round nuances in and differences between inclusiveness and charity.

- Discuss the sentence “There are only «temporarily able-bodied» human beings.” (paragraph 86).
- The finitude of human existence and the gift of being – how do these go together? What are the connections between being created and living with pain?
- What might it mean to wrestle with God?
- In which ways can God be vulnerable?
- Discuss the connection between vulnerability and love
- Why can charity be counterproductive?
- What does it mean to include people with impairments out of self-interest?
- What is the distinction between charity out of self-interest and a Christian theological justification for inclusion?

### Healing

*(107) A recurring theme in religious thinking about disability is the question of healing. Given the continuing witness of persons with impairments as a gift to the body of Christ, how can healing be an issue? What are we to make of the fact that many of these persons themselves witness that they neither want nor need to be cured of their impairment?*

### Practical example for thought and reflection

There are many different experiences and opinions when it comes to healing. Some may not want to speak openly about their experiences because those experiences have been too hurtful – there are many wounds and scars from things that should not have happened. Here, Torill Edøy shares a wounding experience, and her reflections on the subject. Edøy is an advisor for people living with impairments in the Church of Norway’s Church Council.

“I was invited as a guest speaker and seminar facilitator at the diocesan annual gathering in one of the Church of Norway’s diocese. After my keynote speech, I sat on the first row together with some of the other staff members from the diocesan office. Some of the participants came up to me with comments and questions. This was fine, it was part of what we had planned. Suddenly, a priest stands before me and, while moving to put his hands on my head, exclaims: “I will heal you – have faith!” I look up and manage to turn away from his hands and say “No, I don’t think so”. Those sitting there together with me luckily respond quickly and correctly and separate us. I received a lot of support there and then, and was also told afterwards that the priest had been reprimanded by a rather angry bishop. I have to admit it was a painful experience that of course did something to me.

What are in fact our needs when it comes to healing? Do we need healing as individuals – or is it our fellowships that need “healing”? The worst part about living with an impairment can in fact be that you are constantly reminded of it through the physical barriers you meet or through other peoples’ reactions.

It is a good thing to speak of the potential of prayer and intercessions in sermons and speeches, when this is part of the text. But be careful! It is also important to speak about suffering as part of human life. The most important, however, is to emphasize the Christian view that all human beings have equal worth.

Remember that any request for intercession should **ONLY** come from the person in question! Anything else is abuse, no matter how well meaning it is. Delve into your own thoughts and feelings on this before you preach on it or do anything about it. It is fine to find it difficult, and you can voice that.

It is also fine to change your opinion. Use your own experience of suffering in addressing this subject. It is important to make space for, and be prepared for, feelings and questions regarding this subject. There must be room to wonder. This is not a subject where the answers are written in stone. We do not have answers for everything, and we have to dare face that. If we choose to pray for healing, we must let the answering of the prayer be God’s “problem”. This comes down to dignity and to the right to be different. God wants diversity among the human beings in the world, and He has created and loves us ALL!”

### Bible passages

- John 9:2-3, 27, 35-38, 41 (or all of chapter 9, about the man who was born blind); this can be read together with paragraphs 114 – 119 in the document “The Gift of Being”
- Mark 1:40-45 (Jesus heals a man with leprosy)
- Mark 2:1-12 (Get up, take your mat and go home)

### For reflection



This chapter contends with the idea that something must be healed, and if so what must be healed. In a time where body ideals strive toward perfection and an extreme focus on health, we also encounter fear of weakness, aging and death. This is challenged by the Christian theology around creation. At the same time, Bible stories tell us of the possibility of healing. But who and what are healed?

- How do you relate to the stories on healing in the New Testament?
- Discuss experiences of and differing views on healing in Christian contexts.
- What does the word healing mean? How is it related to making whole?
- Are the Biblical healing stories only about a person who becomes medically healthy, or are they about something more? Is it only the individual that can be healed?
- What do the Biblical healing stories tell us about the relationship between God and human beings?
- What is God’s true purpose with healing, and what, in the end, is healed? (Refer especially to paragraphs 120-121 in The Gift of Being)

# 6th Gathering

## Reflections on chapter 5: Called to be a Church of All and for All

### The Good News

*(122) The good news of the gospel is that Jesus restores us as God's creatures to communion with God. Whatever reasons people may have had for excluding others from this relationship, inside or outside the church, have become obsolete. The gospel challenges the faithful not to drive out from their communities all those whom God already has accepted.*

### Liturgy

*(127) The most visible expression of church as communion is when it gathers in worship to give thanks for the paschal mystery. The Eucharistic celebration demands reconciliation and sharing among all God's children. It commands the search for appropriate relationships in social, economic, and political life. It points beyond the communion of the church toward the whole of creation. As we read in Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry,*



## For reflection

This chapter discusses concrete challenges related to including people living with impairments. Exclusion still occurs, and there is a need to keep reviewing, both as individuals and as a fellowship, the creation of inclusive and whole communities.

- What can people living with impairments and their families expect from the church, remembering that the church is called to be God's kingdom on earth?
- How do we include each other in the life of the congregation, in the fellowship of service, in prayer, in holy communion, in small groups, in music and worship, etc?
- What does it mean to be a church of all and for all?
- Look back on the whole resource document «The Gift of Being»:
  - Have you learned something new?
  - Has something in particular left a lasting impression on you?
  - Have you changed your view of anything?
  - What are your thoughts on being created in God's image?
  - What does it mean to be in fellowship with God and with each other?

*All kinds of injustice, racism, separation and lack of freedom are radically challenged when we share in the body and blood of Christ. Through the Eucharist the all-renewing grace of God penetrates and restores human personality and dignity . . . As participants in the Eucharist, therefore, we prove inconsistent if we are not actively participating in this on-going restoration of the world's situation and the human condition. (§20).*

### Mission

*(131) We ask the church to invite persons living with impairment and their families to participate in this mission. True support will be based on the affirmation of the life of each person as a child of God, with or without impairment. True support for persons living with impairment, then, does not focus on their needs, but invites the contribution of all that enables the church to be the body of Christ. That is how the needs of all God's creatures are served.*

### Bible passages

- Isa. 25:6 (Preparing a feast for all peoples)
- Matt. 22 (A banquet where people are invited from the streets)
- John 17:21 (Mission through unity)

### Practical exercise

Two people lift another person sitting in a chair and carry him or her around the room. The person being carried cannot hold on to those carrying.

- Discuss what it feels like to not be in control of the situation.
- What does your congregation / your organisation do to facilitate for wheel chair users?

## Other resources

### Film

"My way – From the island of Edøy to the world"

### For further study / Literature:

A Church of All and for All (WCC, 2003)

The Church: Towards a Common Vision (WCC, 2013)

Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes (WCC, 2013)

Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (WCC, 1982)



