



# Church of Norway Plan for diakonia



CHURCH OF NORWAY  
National Council



## **Church of Norway plan for diakonia**

ISBN-13: 978-82-7545-082-9

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Production: Church of Norway Information Service

Photos: <http://www.colourbox.com>

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

The first part of this plan, chapters 1-3, presents the view of diaconal ministry – diakonia – that has gradually emerged within the Church of Norway. However, there are many local variations and traditions that together form an inspiring whole. The second part, chapters 4-6, describes areas of ministry and practical methods. It contains guidelines for planning and carrying out diaconal ministry in the parishes.

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”*

This definition indicates how diaconal ministry should be developed in the future.

Local plans should be based on these elements and relate to local needs, resources and possibilities for cooperation, while at the same time being seen in relation to the total ministry of the parish.

To practise diakonia is to serve human beings, the created world, and God. This basic definition has consequences for worship and Christian education.

All Christians are called to live their daily life in service for others. This applies to all age groups. Diakonia should be a basic principle in all aspects of parish life, and should result in practical measures. Diakonia has a special responsibility in cases where nobody else take care. Mutuality and respect for the dignity of others is fundamental.

Globalisation presents a special challenge to diakonia. Cultural and ethnic diversity is a fact of life in Norwegian parishes. Our concern is for people who suffer, whether they live in our own neighbourhood or in other countries. Care for creation is a global and a local responsibility. All this is reflected in local plans for diakonia.

Diaconal measures are here summarised as loving one’s neighbour, creating inclusive communities, caring for creation and struggling for justice.

Cooperation is important, and offers many possibilities. Parishes are recommended to cooperate with other parishes within the Church of Norway, with other churches, with organisations and institutions, with public services and also with groups representing other faiths. It is important to have a broad approach to diakonia, by considering parish diakonia in relation to the ministry of diaconal institutions and organisations.



## CHAPTER 2 THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS 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..”

The Church of Norway sees itself as a serving church. Diakonia is a characteristic of the total mission of the church. It influences the church’s fellowship and the life of the individual believer.

The theological basis of diakonia lies in the mission that God has given to the Church, and is expressed in our common Christian faith.

A basic part of the Christian view of humankind is that we are created in God’s image for fellowship with one



another. We have been given to one another and we are dependent on one another and on all living beings. None of us can live totally by him- or herself or entirely for him- or herself. We have been set to serve one another and to care for one another. At the same time, all creation is dependent on human beings taking seriously their responsibility as stewards. Our faith in God involves responsibility for the world around us.

The ability to do good has been given to all human beings (Romans 2.14). When someone believes in Christ, faith will work through love (Galatians 5.6). In baptism we become partakers in Christ and members of the world-wide Church. All who have been baptised are called to care for their fellow human beings “as instruments of righteousness” (Romans 6.13). We should love one another as Christ loves us, and care for one another .

The Holy Spirit imparts faith and guidance for a life in community and service. The Spirit gives strength in hardship, endurance in service and hope for the future.

Diakonia is being as well as doing. Diakonia is part of what it means to be a believer. As Christ gave himself for us, we ought to give our lives for others (1 John 3.16). That is what it means to be merciful (Luke 6.36). Diakonia is rooted in and united with God's reconciliation in Christ. "For it was by God's own decision that the Son has in himself the full nature of God. Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself. God made peace through his Son's death on the cross and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven" (Colossians 1.19-20).

To transform faith into action means to ask time and again, "Who is my neighbour?" (Luke 10.29-37; the Parable of the Good Samaritan). It is also to place oneself at the disposal of others, as a community and as individuals, to ask: "What do you want me to do for you?" (Luke 18.41). It means visiting the marginalised, the sick, the hungry, the thirsty and the strangers (Matthew 25.35-46).

On this basis we can say:

Loving our neighbour involves our whole being. There are periods in life when we have the ability and the possibility to give, at other times we need to receive. Reciprocity is a key word. The conditions we live under are different; some people experience

greater difficulties than others. The capacity to change varies from person to person. Loving and caring for one's neighbour is based on reciprocity, equality and respect for the integrity of the other.

Being an inclusive community is an important way in which the Church shows that it cares. The Bible describes this community as one body with many parts and functions (1 Corinthians 12). The church community consists of people of both sexes, of different abilities and of different cultures and ethnical backgrounds. In an inclusive community every individual can see and be seen. Here mutual comfort and help is given and new strength and new hope is released.

Care for the created world is part of our God-given mission as stewards, and involves the responsibility to preserve the integrity of the entire creation. Today we can see how human activity and our greed in consuming resources is threatening many species of animals and plants and entire ecosystems. The idea that human beings are the lords and masters of creation needs to be corrected. The Church needs to emphasise its conviction that human beings are dependent on their many relationships - to God, to their fellow human beings, to themselves and to the rest of creation. We can find inspiration for this



in the Sámi and Celtic traditions. Our aim should be to rejoice and be thankful that we belong to the ecological fellowship of creation. This will lead to clear prophetic talk generally in the society, and to practical measures in our own lives.

Struggling for justice involves standing alongside others, not as passive observers but as active participants. Human beings are dependent on social structures. Global systems affect the lives of individuals. We must therefore expose the causes of human poverty and suffering, strive to change the circumstances that sustain poverty and do what we can to make acceptable living conditions possible. To show solidarity is to engage in the struggle for justice and peace.

## CHAPTER 3 A DIACONAL CHURCH

### **3.1 Many forms of ministry**

Diakonia has been part of the nature of the Church throughout its history. Its organisation and forms have varied, but a caring ministry has been upheld in all periods. The Protestant renewal of diakonia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the starting-point of diaconal ministry as we know it today.

In Norway today, the diaconal ministry consists of a great diversity of activities on numerous levels and in





various situations. Diaconal ministry in the Church of Norway is part of this broader picture.

Diakonia is practised through many forms of *general diakonia* in the daily life of the parishes. Individuals and the community are moved to respond when people face minor and major crises – and at some time in their life everyone will encounter situations where they need the help of others.

Diakonia is also practised by the *organised efforts of deacons and diaconal workers* to help individuals and groups who are in need, on behalf of the parishes. Guidelines for this are formulated by parish councils, while deacons lead the local diaconal ministry and share the responsibility to recruit, equip and guide volunteers. Deacons are also trained to be professionally responsible for result orientated activity in which volunteers and staff together contribute to fellowship, caring and solidarity.

Finally, diakonia is also practised by the *specialised diaconal ministry* of numerous institutions and organisations working nationally and internationally within the framework of the Church of Norway's confessional basis. Much of this can be defined as *international diakonia*. Specialised diakonia is

practised when a parish or several parishes own and run diaconal institutions. Other and even more independent diaconal institutions regard themselves as linked to the Church, through formal agreements as well as through practical cooperation at a parish level. Specialised diakonia is practised on behalf of the parishes when specialised skills or experience is necessary. In their turn these institutions and organisations can bring valuable impulses and skills back to the parishes. In a complex society, specialised diakonia is particularly well equipped to speak up on behalf of the Church for those struggling for justice.

*International diakonia* is also based in the parishes. The need for diaconal ministry in other parts of the world has led parishes and diaconal institutions and organisations to engage in various mission and development aid programmes. Many parishes have established friendship pacts with congregations in other countries.

However, diakonia is not merely programmes and projects. It is also a *dimension of the Christian faith* that finds expression in liturgy, preaching, Christian education and activities for children and young people.

### 3.2 Diakonia in society

Diakonia is always practised in a social context, since the Church is a part of society, locally, nationally and internationally. The Church of Norway is both a community of believers and part of the public administration. It is important to have a clear view of



the possibilities of diakonia as well as its limitations and distinctive character. What does diakonia mean in contemporary society? Should it be an alternative to what is being done in the public sector or a supplement to it - or should diakonia attempt to replace public services? How is diakonia affected by its interaction with public services?

In Norway today, most people enjoy wealth and affluence, but many live in relative poverty. Due to globalisation the gap between rich and poor in the world is increasingly visible. This is a major ethical and diaconal challenge for the churches. We also live in a culture where we experience a need for reconciliation in many of our basic relationships, including our relationship to creation. For many of us, daily life is influenced by multi-cultural relations and the presence of many religions. The development of the media is opening up new forms of socialisation and is leading to more complex patterns of communication than before. The internet contributes to new forms of social relations between people, while at the same time offering access to communities and contacts that can be harmful. The dominant culture of consumerism tries to convince us that buying things can fulfill our longing for a meaning in life.

Self-realisation is vital for many, and stimulates



the development of a new spirituality that can be a challenge to the Church. In the years ahead Norway's population will grow older, and the work force that upholds our welfare state will be reduced in numbers.

Our attitude should be that diaconal needs require the church to cooperate with all people of good will in the effort to preserve the basic values of our society. This implies broad cooperation and coordination of various ministries. The Church is particularly called to meet the spiritual and religious needs that are part of the pain and distress that people experience. With insight and experience gained from its encounters with individuals and groups in various life situations, the Church is committed to be a driving force in its relations with local health and social sectors. Locally, parishes have special opportunities because of the links between church and people. Through the ceremonies of baptism, confirmation, marriage and burial, church workers come into contact with a majority of the population, and with a large number of life stories that call for diaconal presence and involvement.

Norway spans the territory of two peoples – the Sámi and the Norwegians, cf. Section 110A of the Norwegian Constitution. The norwegianisation of the Sámi people has left deep wounds that are not yet fully healed. The historical role of the Church in this issue calls for efforts

of reconciliation that can visualise and preserve the cultural diversity of the Sámi people. The rights of the Sámi people to their own language, history, culture, forms of commerce and codetermination, must be at the forefront of the diaconal ministry of the Church. Diakonia can play an important part in opening up and enhancing the Sámi identity by taking seriously the Sámi people's perception of reality and way of life. There are also other groups in Norway that are marked by a history of wounds inflicted by the Church of Norway. One example is the Romani people, where a process of reconciliation is under way. The Church should also be involved in other reconciliation processes.

## CHAPTER 4 PRACTICAL NEEDS - LOCAL PLANS

This chapter points out diaconal needs in our society today. These needs are described in the framework of our definition of diakonia, forming four areas of ministry for parishes to focus on. These areas are:

*” loving your neighbour, creating inclusive communities, caring for creation and struggling for justice”.*

These areas will often overlap, and it is not important where in a plan they are described. What is important is that needs in all the four areas are taken into consideration. Diakonia concerns children, youth,



adults and elderly people. Motivation for diaconal ministry can be found in the vision: ”The love of God for all people and the whole of creation revealed through our life and service.”

### **Different levels of responsibility**

- Parish councils are responsible for initiating and developing diakonia at the local level. (Church Act Section 9).
- Joint parish councils often have responsibility as employers and are thus important resources for diaconal activity. Through their responsibility for general goals and plans, joint parish councils also focus on diakonia. (Church Act Section 14).
- Diocesan councils have a responsibility to ensure that diakonia is incorporated in the parishes’ ministry in accordance with national plans. They also distribute state subsidies for diaconal appointments.
- The Church of Norway National Council and the General Synod are preparing and adopting national plans for diaconal ministry.
- The Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations and the Church of Norway Sámi Council are responsible for particular areas and measures. That is also the case for a number of diaconal organisations and institutions.

## **Basic values**

The following basic values apply to all activities in the Church of Norway, and should influence local plans for diakonia:

- Human dignity and human rights
- Gender equality
- Cultural diversity and the rights of indigenous peoples
- Contact and cooperation with other churches
- Adaptation for and inclusion of people with physical and mental handicaps
- Recruiting of volunteers

## **Two important questions**

Local plans should spring from local conditions. Thus the following questions are important:

1) Where do we find diaconal needs?

Supplementary questions: How can love for our neighbour be expressed in practice? Who is excluded from fellowship with others? Where do we find suffering? Which global challenges can be met locally? What should the Church do? What should others do?

2) Where do we find the resources?

Supplementary questions: Who is eager to do something? Who has the time to do something? What should we do? With whom can we cooperate? Whom can we recruit as volunteers?

Spending time discussing these questions in parish councils, diaconal committees and church staff meetings, will help to give priority to the most important issues and to develop ministries that correspond to local needs and resources.

## **4.1 Loving your neighbour**

Human beings are mutually dependent. Throughout our life we need to be met with love and compassion. Practical love for one's neighbour may involve small, simple acts as well as major and demanding efforts. Love does not humiliate the recipient; it preserves his or her dignity. The awareness that "this might have been me" is important, as is reciprocity.

### **Goal:**

1. That the parish exercises a diaconal ministry that corresponds to local needs.
2. That Church and parish inspire people to love their neighbour

### **Questions to ask when preparing local plans:**

- Who is our neighbour in our local community?
- Are we encouraging one another to show love for our neighbour? Is our local congregation and its worship and meetings permeated by love for one another? How can attitudes be changed?

## Important areas of ministry

### *Who is my neighbour?*

Everyone needs to be met by love from others in times of joy as well as in times of grief. In crises and difficult times the need for love and compassion increases. This is a responsibility for us as individuals and as parishes. People are suffering because of bullying, illness, grief, drug problems, HIV/AIDS, poverty and crime. Often special skills and organising will be necessary in addition to what we can do spontaneously as individuals.

Families are vulnerable today. Children and young people are particularly vulnerable when their parents have problems. The large number of divorces and break-ups of relationships is a sign that many people have difficulties in their close relationships. We need to support families and prevent break-ups, and also help to meet the needs that many experience after a break-up. Changes in public services may cause problems at a local level. One example is that decentralisation and reduced time in institutions may create a need for us to visit those affected and assist them with shopping and transportation, in cooperation with local voluntary agencies. As more people wish to die in their homes, the local need for qualified pastoral care at life's end will

increase. Parish councils need to have plans for caring for the sick and dying.

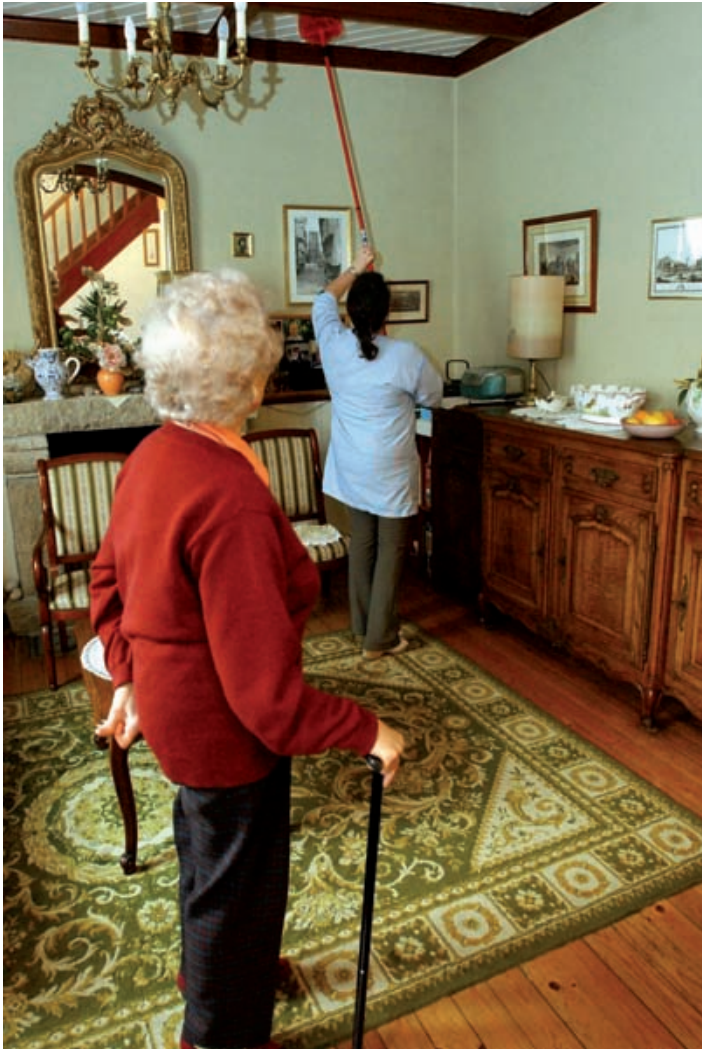
All parishes need to have local plans for dealing with accidents, crises and sexual assault. Such plans should be coordinated with diocesan plans, which are an additional resource for this ministry.

It is becoming increasingly important for parishes to cooperate with institutions, for example the Church City Mission, Church Social Service, Church Family Counselling, as well as with public authorities and voluntary agencies.

It is not always possible to transform difficult life situations. In some cases the deacon's task may be to be present, to help a person in need to live with his or her hardship, to be able to bear the other's suffering and to walk a part of the road with him or her.

### *It's possible to learn to love your neighbour!*

Although we have been created to love our neighbour, we do not always live accordingly. We need to learn, to practise and to be inspired to live in this way. The "diaconal eye" which is able to discern a situation and to do what is required, must be fostered. Identifying what prevents us from practising love for our neighbour



(for example insecurity, fear, egoism, indifference and contempt), may help us to learn to be more loving.

Local plans explain how this can be done, for example by ensuring that devotional talks and sermons regularly remind all age groups of the commandment to love. Courses and campaigns can also focus on this. Local plans for Christian education can set goals for both increased knowledge and action in practical love. Parish magazines and local newspapers may be invited to write about neighbourliness and related issues.

### ***Pastoral care, intercession and silence.***

Pastoral care is important in diakonia. Many people want to talk about existential issues. Young people in particular are faced with an immense number of choices. Can diakonia offer counselling that can provide help and support in difficult choices? Local pastoral care should be strengthened, as should recruitment to the Church SOS (the Norwegian equivalent of the English Samaritans emergency phone service). The Church's spiritual counselling can be developed and made known. Individual intercession in private and intercessions in public worship can be emphasised and renewed. Prayer groups can be established.

Many people have an increasing need for silence, rest and a slower pace of living. The Church's response

can be retreats, street chapels, open churches, special church services (for example based on Taizé liturgies), pilgrimages etc.

## 4.2 Creating inclusive communities

In all age groups traditional patterns of relationships are changing. Many people experience loneliness and a lack of relationships. At the same time new forms of fellowship are emerging, not least through the internet. Effects of this can also be seen in church-related communities. An important item of Christian teaching is that we are created to live in fellowship with one another. It is a diaconal responsibility to strengthen relationships between people and to establish new ones when existing relationships break up. Healthy communities offer everyone the opportunity to give and receive. Such communities have room for diversity and ensure that no one is left out.

### Goal:

1. That congregations are open and inclusive
2. That congregations participate actively in strengthening fellowship and networks in the wider local community

### Questions to ask when preparing local plans:

- Who does not belong to a social group, who has been

excluded from our local community? Are existing communities open and inclusive? Are people or groups isolated because of physical handicaps or mental illness? Does ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, handicap, language, social position, economy or dress cause isolation? Are people in institutions isolated from the local community? Are there communities for sceptics, people in opposition or people living in ways that are not socially accepted?

- What are the obstacles to fellowship, and how can we do something about them? Are the obstacles inaccessible premises and geographical distance, or are they habits, lack of knowledge and fear of the unknown?

### Important areas of ministry:

#### *Establishing communities*

Communities can be established in various ways. Examples are communities consisting of people with the same occupation or shared interests, fellowship between neighbours and self-help groups. There are many possibilities: groups for the bereaved, prayer groups, groups discussing faith and disbelief or house fellowships where people meet to share the Gospel, to care for one another and to recruit new members.



The internet can be an arena for communication, for example through chat rooms for participants at youth camps or memorial sites for the deceased.

Large gatherings can be inspiring. Examples can be church services, suppers, rallies and camps. By arranging parties to celebrate baptisms, confirmations and weddings, parishes can reduce the pressure on families with little money or other problems. Such parties should be non-alcoholic to avoid the negative effects of excessive drinking.

The communities we establish may help to strengthen families and be places where new friendships are forged and where one can bring existing friends. Children, young people, adults and older people may all need their own communities. At the same time fellowship across the generations should be encouraged.

Friendship is particularly important for young people. It is not always easy to find the right balance between virtual communities and face-to-face encounters. The Christian faith can be taught in settings where children and young people can make friends and find their place in the church.

There is often little contact between the ethnic majority and people with a non-western background.

Historically, Norway has always had a number of ethnic groups and cultures within its borders. In long periods this fact has not been recognised. Everyone should be able to be part of the national fellowship without losing his or her ethnic or cultural identity. Individuals and congregations will be enriched when there is room for diversity combined with mutual respect, for example by means of suppers, cultural evenings and international festivals. Religious dialogue may be a road to increased understanding.

Friendship and cultural contacts open possibilities for equal and mutual sharing across national borders.

Systematic measures are necessary to make it possible for handicapped persons to participate on equal terms with others.



### ***Services, sermons and church art***

Church services establish fellowship between God and human beings. Before, during and after worship there are numerous possibilities for sharing, for seeing and being seen, for opening up for diversity. In order to be an active participant, many are in need of a companion. It is a diaconal task to facilitate life-giving encounters with Christ. Worship may enhance self-awareness, through what is said and through symbols and liturgical acts.

The proclamation of the Gospel may impart strength and self-confidence, and can contribute to reconciliation, liberation, faith and hope. Preaching can be provocative in its challenge to serve and to care for others.

Church music and church art may be of help in grief as well as in joy. Choirs and concerts can make a valuable contribution to strengthening fellowship.

### ***Reconciliation.***

Sometimes fellowship is so damaged that reconciliation is necessary. God has given us the ministry (diakonia) of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5.18). At the deepest level this is about humankind's reconciliation with God, a reconciliation established by Christ.

Wherever possible, reconciliation is an important task for the Church and the parishes. In a number of situations the Church will have the confidence that is necessary for this ministry. It may be a question of reconciliation between individuals, between local communities, between ethnic groups or nations or in our relationship to the world of nature. This is an area of ministry which is being developed, and knowledge and skill is of vital importance here.

### ***Fellowship between churches.***

Diakonia is a common concern in ecumenical relations, with practical action as its hallmark. This is a suitable area for ecumenical cooperation. Parishes have many opportunities to seek ecumenical solutions to diaconal problems.

## **4.3 Caring for creation**

Caring for creation concerns everything that God has created; the earth with its plants, animals and human beings, the oceans and the air and the entire ecological system. "The earth and its fullness are the Lord's." (1 Corinthians 10.26). This also involves our own personal consumption and life-style.

## Goal:

1. That Church and parishes study the biblical view of the created world and humankind's place in it.
2. That Parishes and individuals make an active and practical contribution to the development of a life-style that furthers balance and wholeness.

## Questions to ask when preparing local plans:

- How can Bible study, worship and prayer also focus on care for creation? How can this shape our life and our attitudes?
- How can we in word and deed promote alternatives to the ideals and life-style of consumerism, so as to contribute to a sustainable stewardship of creation?

## Important areas of ministry:

### ***The Church's ministry with regard to the environment has three parts:***

- To be a prophetic voice in society.
- To be consistent and self-critical in these issues in its own daily life and practice.
- To be creative and inventive in order to find sustainable solutions to the real needs of individuals and society.

In this area of ministry, it is very important to cooperate with others, for example church organisations like the Church Network for the Environment, Consumption

and Justice. Cooperation with children and young people is also possible, for example with the Scout Movement and Changemakers – organisations that have the environment as a special concern.

Local plans can encourage people to challenge a life-style that involves excessive consumption. Diakonia can indicate opportunities in the local community. The pilgrimage tradition involves values such as setting out, living simply, travelling slowly, appreciating silence, being free of cares and being willing to share. Self-denial and renunciation can relate directly to love for one's neighbour. For many people, nature is a good setting for wondering, searching and resting. Church services and the language of liturgy offer possibilities to express the challenges posed by everyday life also in this connection. Rejoicing in creation and its ecological diversity can also be expressed. The possibilities afforded by Lent can be raised and the Day of Creation can be celebrated. Preaching can focus on hope – without encouraging escapism; hope in God the Creator and in Christ's return to make all things new.

Church offices can apply to be registered as "Miljøfyrtårn" ("Environmental lighthouses" – a Norwegian programme for environmentally friendly workplaces). It is possible to cooperate with various institutions and groups to launch campaigns, and

parishes can link up with the Church Network for the Environment, Consumption and Justice. By increasing awareness of the effects on the environment of various church functions, parishes may find it natural to organise common transport and to reduce the use of disposable tableware.

***Human life is also God's creation.***

Human life and human dignity must be protected, from conception to the grave. The Church must therefore be a critical voice on the present use of abortion, oppose a selective society where people can be rejected because of handicaps, oppose active euthanasia and engage in debates on the major ethical issues raised by biotechnology. Diakonia must also meet the challenges posed by these issues. There are organisations that have this as a special concern. Parishes can approach these issues locally through ethical reflection, pastoral care and practical efforts like babysitting and programmes giving support to families or individuals in need.

**4.4 Struggling for justice**

Every human being is entitled to a life in dignity. We cannot be indifferent to people who are fighting for their life. We should show solidarity and join them in the struggle for justice.



As a church we are called to work for justice and human rights globally as well as locally. Examples are the issues raised by globalisation, international trade, illegitimate debts, poverty, war, peace and reconciliation, and technological development.

**Goal:**

1. Church and parishes in support of a just distribution of the world's resources.
2. Church and parishes in support of people who feel that their dignity is being violated.

**Questions to ask when preparing local plans:**

- How can we help to put injustice on the agenda of society?
- How can we oppose threats against human life, health and dignity?

**Basic areas of ministry:**

***The just distribution of the world's resources***

The Church of Norway General Synod has focused on ethical trade, the issue of indigenous peoples, debt cancellation and climate, environmental and resource issues. Local plans should reflect this and discuss how these issues can be approached locally as well as globally.

Financial support can be raised through various donor arrangements, collections etc. Microcredit is a sustainable form of assistance, through which people are granted cheap loans to start small businesses which in turn may lead to an income that can support a family. Confirmants and other groups of all generations can cooperate locally in Norwegian Church Aid's annual Lent campaign. Parishes and church members may also find it natural to participate in other campaigns raising funds for humanitarian work, like the annual Norwegian TV charity campaign.

Church services and liturgy offer many possibilities. Material has been developed to focus on the realities of wealth and poverty, for example linked to North/South Sunday, Peace and Human Rights Sunday and the International AIDS Day. Study material, songs, courses and programmes intended to raise awareness for global justice are also available. Many mission and development cooperation organisations have programmes for different age groups, and are natural partners for local parishes.

Parishes may decide to buy Fairtrade coffee and tea.

***Supporting people whose dignity is violated***

To struggle for justice also implies participation in local debates when human dignity is violated. What can we

say when children and young people suffer because they are ignored, when elderly people are afraid of being left alone or forgotten, or when others are stigmatised and excluded?

It is said that the welfare society makes poor people feel ashamed and deficient. Contact between people can have a liberating effect, but it can also bring out differences. It is therefore important that congregations reflect on the way they meet people who are experiencing difficulties. Are people excluded from fellowship because they cannot afford to pay their share or respond in other accepted ways?

Parishes can also engage in human rights issues on a global level. Some parishes have participated in petitions organised by the Norwegian Coalition for Debt Cancellation or Amnesty International.

It is our responsibility both as individuals and a community to speak up when there is suspicion of violence and harassment. Numerous children, women and elderly people are exposed to violence. Violence often occurs within families and as a result of excessive drinking. Bullying occurs among children and young people (also via mobile phones and the internet) and among adults. Sexual harassment occurs in church settings as well as in other parts of society.

To oppose violence also means to work to change attitudes. Preventive measures are necessary, for example by encouraging non-alcohol zones. Parishes could here cooperate with the police, schools, municipal services, child and family welfare authorities, the City Mission and other organisations.



## CHAPTER 5 CONSEQUENCES

This plan should be followed up by local plans that can develop diakonia further in the parishes. Diakonia is about being and doing, that is the purpose of such plans.

A survey of Church of Norway diaconal work has shown that having a deacon on the staff strengthens the diaconal work of the parish and increases cooperation with public services. Both traditional parish deacons and deacons at a deanery level are important. Our goal is that all parishes should have their own deacon or access to diaconal competence. If this goal is to be achieved, the number of diaconal appointments must be considerably increased.

Some of the areas of ministry referred to in this plan, may be new and untried in many parishes. In some cases manuals and other resources can be obtained. In others it will be necessary to produce manuals, and courses and training will have to be introduced. Also, studies and projects should be carried out in order to further develop these areas. Examples are diakonia and youth, developing guidelines for cooperation for

parishes and diaconal organisations and institutions, liturgy and diakonia, and how to involve more men in diaconal activities.

Diaconal ministry affects parish budgets. A number of the areas of ministry referred to in this plan are not expensive. A major item of expenditure will be courses and supervision for diaconal leaders (staff as well as volunteers). More comprehensive diaconal efforts may require grants. New appointments will raise the question of various forms of financing.

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 Church of Norway Plan for Diakonia is based on this vision and definition of diakonia. The plan presents a theological basis for diaconal ministry and describes areas of ministry and practical methods. It contains guidelines for planning and carrying out diaconal ministry in the parishes.

The Church of Norway sees itself as a serving church. Diakonia is a characteristic of the total mission of the church. It influences the church's fellowship and the life of the individual believer.

A basic part of the Christian view of humankind is that we are created in God's image for fellowship with one another. We have been given to one another and we are dependent on one another and on all living beings. None of us can live totally by him- or herself or entirely for him- or herself. We have been set to serve one another and to care for one another.

