

DOCUMENT			PAGE
Our theology: A life-empowering faith as our driving force			1 (6)
DRAWN UP BY	DATE	DOCUMENT REFERENCE	VERSION
Act Church of Sweden	2013-08-30	Ks 2013/0272	Ange version

Our theology: A life-empowering faith as our driving force

Our identity

You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit [...] I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another. (John, 15:16–17).¹

The Church of Sweden is an Evangelical Lutheran faith community celebrating services of worship, teaching and carrying out diaconia and mission. People are invited to seek and deepen faith together with other believers and seekers. The Church is a place for reflection and communion, but also for social and spiritual support. God’s love challenges each one of us to show consideration and take responsibility for each other, a better society and an ecologically sustainable environment.²

In the Church of Sweden’s parishes there is considerable commitment to the Church’s international work. We are part of a global world and a worldwide church, which we affect and are affected by. Our international work is an expression of the church’s cross-border mission. It is an indispensable part of the church’s identity to be part of a global grassroots movement, in which people’s faith, life, burdens and experiences are shared. In cooperation with other churches and organisations, Act Church of Sweden³ has special responsibility for bringing the story of Jesus to life and tackling the global challenges of our time. These challenges give perspective to our mission. We want to work towards achieving long-term change in a world where war, environmental destruction, poverty and oppression still permeate societies and people’s lives.

A life-empowering theology as a foundation

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. (John 10:10).

A relevant church is present in the midst of life. It highlights and takes responsibility for people’s situation in life. Act Church of Sweden is based on theological reflection, using both the tradition that we are part of, and what it means to be a church in our day and age. The starting point of our identity and our work is a life-empowering theology.⁴ By life-empowering theology we mean an

¹ All Bible Citations from *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, copyright 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

² The parish and thereby the basic task of the Church are described in the second section of the Church Ordinance of the Church of Sweden.

³ As of May 2019 the Church of Sweden International work was renamed Act Church of Sweden. The name has been updated accordingly throughout the document

⁴ Theology means “words about God”. It comprises how we talk about God and how we formulate and express faith.

understanding that God in Christ shares people's joy and sorrow, chooses the path of suffering in solidarity, opposes everything that is destructive and paves the way for a living hope. The starting point for our work is in situations in which life is under threat and people are suppressed, and we take a stand for life empowerment and hope for the future. To highlight this, we need a situational analysis and a power analysis that interrelate with theological reflection. It is a contextually aware theology⁵ that emphasises the significance of practice⁶ and life in the here and now. The experiences of life lived affect our theology and interpretation of the Bible, and the theology and Bible texts challenge each society and ideological structure. This means that there is a mutual relationship between theology and practice. Faith and actions are linked and should be able to lead to change in real life.

Our vision is life in the Realm of God

What is the kingdom of God like? [...] It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches. (Luke 13:18-19)

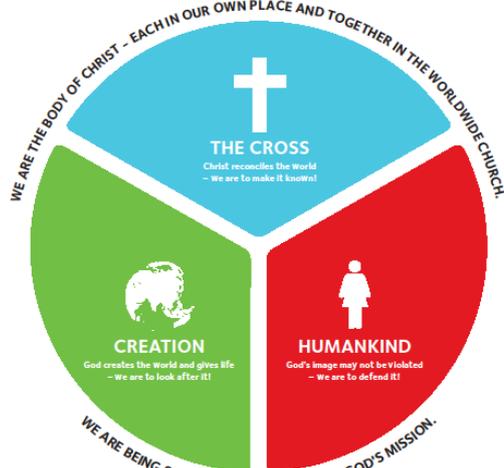
Our vision is life in the Realm of God

– a healed Creation and Humanity in communion, justice, freedom and peace.

Act Church of Sweden has a vision that points towards the Realm of God, the ideal loving world that we can glimpse or that can take shape among us, and as a future that we hope and strive for. The Realm of God is full of life under the loving gaze of God, in freedom, peace, togetherness and justice, where God looks on his beloved Creation and sees that it is good.

We use the life-empowering theology, experience and the contextual situational analysis as a basis on which to formulate our vision, mandate and values.

These can also be summarised in the model below:



Caption: Sent to the world for the sake of life and as part of the Body of Christ, we want to convey faith, hope and love, defend human dignity and safeguard the Creation.

⁵ Theological reflection is never neutral but is instead characterised by its context, in other words, the circumstances and time in which it occurs and its aims.

⁶ Practice is the understanding of the theological reflection's application of people's experience, which depends on time and context.

Central values

Our central values are the compass in our work; they justify why we are involved internationally and govern how we perform our operations. We express our values as *faith, hope and love, human dignity and right and the integrity of the Creation.*



Faith, hope and love

*Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning, for in you I put my trust.
Teach me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. (Psalms, 143:8)*

*In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them,
and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. (2 Corinthians 19)*

We believe in and pray to the Triune God that creates, liberates and gives life.

We believe in the God of life and love as the primordial force of our existence, a God who is within us and in everything outside of us.

We believe that reconciliation in Christ creates the opportunity of reconciliation between humans, between human and God and between humanity and the rest of Creation.

We pray that the worldwide church will be a communion of hope, where despair and resignation do not have the final word.

We are convinced that our efforts make a difference, that the Church is a communion of hope and that the world has a future.

Belief in the God of life, means moving from being discontent to having the courage to face life. At the centre of Christian faith we have the death of Jesus and his resurrection on Easter morning, giving us a defiant hope of life – it is never too late! God's never-ending forgiveness and love form our driving force and give us hope for the future, even in difficult times.



HUMAN DIGNITY AND RIGHT

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27).

We are carried by the Gospel about Jesus, who takes the side of those who are suppressed or live in a vulnerable situation and safeguards their lives in spirit, body and soul. This applies above all to children, because they hold a special position in Christian faith.

We regard every person as being in the image of God with the right to a life of dignity.

We uphold each person's basic rights as stated in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights and we thereby oppose all forms of oppression or inequality.

We defend each person's own ability, responsibility and right to be the subject of their own life.

We meet God in everyone. That's why each person is holy and human dignity cannot be violated. When a person is wronged or belittled, God is wronged. People are rights holders, not needy objects for someone else's charity. That's why we want to highlight power structures and take action against oppression – also where this challenges the church's own role as part of an unrighteous world order.

We work together with churches and organisations in mutuality, respect, transparency and participation.



THE INTEGRITY OF THE CREATION

For in him all things in heaven and on earth were created [...] all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:16–17).

Our planet, our home in the cosmos, is part of God's Creation, which is constantly renewed. Everything that exists has inherent value, and all life lives interdependently. Human beings hold a unique position in terms of taking responsibility and ensuring that life is not violated.

We see that the Creation, and thereby the long-term survival of the human race, is threatened by people's current impact on our planet.

We work towards achieving sustainable development, in which humans take responsibility for their lifestyle and its impact on nature, the climate and the environment.

We undertake to counteract further overexploitation and unfair distribution of the Earth's resources.

When we marvel at life and the diversity in the Creation, we sense God's greatness. Our life-empowering theology means that we need to name and influence structures and ways of life that counteract the survival of the Earth and each person's right to a dignified life, now and in the future. The theology states that struggles to achieve peace, justice and a sustainable environment are interlinked.

Mission – we are the Body of Christ and have been sent

“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” (John 20:21).

For the sake of life and together in the worldwide church, God sends us, in our words and actions, to share the Gospel, defend human dignity, safeguard the Creation and live in faith, hope and love.

God creates, reconciles, heals and uplifts the world. We are sent to tell everyone about this and play a part in God’s mission in the world.⁷ It is about being *in the world for the world*, letting the Gospel become reality through us as we tell people about our faith and as we serve each other⁸.

The Church of Sweden shares its mission with other churches and wants to perform it in mutual partnership, based on affinity and continuous learning. We are sent to each other in inquisitiveness and respect. In the faith and life, prayer and work of the worldwide church the joint mission is expressed in many different ways. In the diversity there is a dignity and beauty that reflect people’s differences and thereby the essence of God.

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. (Romans 12:4–5).

The worldwide church is the Body of Christ, in which we are dependent on each other, bound together by a longing to promote life and by a joint lifeblood: the Holy Spirit. The communion must be built by and together with those who live in a vulnerable or marginalised situation. We show that we are one body when we share one and the same bread in the Eucharist and when we share the Earth’s resources with each other.

Application of identity and theology

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

(Luke 4:18–19.)

We have a calling, to follow Jesus and be God’s hands and feet, heart and voice in the world, as the Body of Christ. The methods for how the Church does this must change concurrently with the times, but the mission always remains. Our theology and identity, experiences of being a church and the perspectives conveyed by our cooperation partners, form the foundation of Act Church of Sweden.

⁷ Mission means “being sent out” or to have an “assignment”. The theology about God’s mission – Missio Dei – emphasises that it is God who acts out of love for the world.

⁸ The word Gospel means “good news”, the message about God who loves the world, who sent his Son to it and who wants the world to live in freedom, reconciliation, justice and peace. This is the very breath of life of the Church, but every person’s faith and outlook on life are respected. The Church of Sweden follows internationally applied ethical guidelines and opposes every form of coercion, persuasion, exercise of power or exploitation of people’s vulnerable situation with the aim of making them adopt a specific faith.

We may have different roles and speak different languages in the various contexts we find ourselves in and have access to. Our added value as a church consists of our theological foundation and our cooperation partners. We use the theology as follows:

1. As the foundation we ourselves stand on, as an expression of and form of deepening our identity.
2. As criteria or motives for focusing and positions.
3. As applied activities – through theological education and reflection together with partners.

Act Church of Sweden's work takes place in the areas of pastoral development, health, peace, gender justice and sustainable livelihoods.

The starting point of the work is in the theological interpretation of our role in God's mission and of the Church's identity. The work is performed through mutual church cooperation, exchanges of experience, policy dialogue and religious meetings, contextually relevant theological education, long-term development cooperation with quality, well-founded lobbying and coordinated and effective humanitarian assistance.

Validity of the document

The document was ratified by the Committee for International Mission and Diaconia on 29 April 2013. The document is valid until 2017 inclusive. An evaluation and review will be performed in 2015 in conjunction with a review of the strategic plan for the international work.