POLICY ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (PLAIN ENGLISH)

1. Summary

The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (Felm) has a policy that guides how it works with people with disabilities. This policy supports their **rights**, **inclusion**, and **fair treatment**.

Felm believes all people are equal because everyone is created in the image of God. It asks the Church to challenge and remove anything that is unfair.

The policy follows the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This means people with disabilities should have the same rights, opportunities, and place in society as everyone else.

Felm works to make all its programmes open, welcoming, and easy for people with disabilities to join. It helps them take part in decisions in the Church and in society. Felm also actively works to remove barriers caused by discrimination.

Felm values diversity. It supports its staff and partners in learning more. It also works together with disability organisations.

2. The meaning and goals of the policy

This policy explains Felm's goals and how it supports the rights of people with disabilities. It guides all our work and presents the main principles to everyone we work with

3. Theological basis and principles

Creation

All people are created in God's image. Every life is valuable. Life is a gift from God, and people are made to have a relationship with God. Creation itself is an act of God's love. The theology of disability starts from this idea of creation.

Vulnerability

Everyone experiences vulnerability in life. The life of Jesus and the marks of his crucifixion show that vulnerability and disability are part of being human. A disabled body reflects the body of Christ.

Equality and Justice

Jesus treated people who were excluded with respect and asked them, "What do you want to happen for you?"

The Church should do the same:

- Remove prejudice

- Break down power imbalances
- Eliminate the division of “us” and “them”

The Church should stand up for justice and make sure that people with disabilities can participate fully and have equal rights and opportunities.

The Church is a place of safety and strength for people and families. It provides support that empowers people and helps them feel part of the community.

People with disabilities should not be treated with pity or seen only as objects of charity. Instead, the Church supports them to live actively and participate fully in their communities.

Human Dignity
In some communities around the world, people with disabilities are isolated or treated unfairly. This is against human dignity. Isolation can also affect the families of people with disabilities.

Felm works to understand different cultural and religious views about disability and to act fairly.

People with disabilities should not be used for someone else’s spiritual goals. For example, praying for healing should only happen if the person themselves asks for it.

The Bible has many stories of healing for sick and disabled people. These stories are not just about removing the disability, but about becoming whole with God and the community.

4. Human rights-based approach and principles

The mission follows the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This Convention says that people with disabilities have the same rights as everyone else. It views people with disabilities as active members of their communities, not as people who need charity or only medical care.

A person with a disability is:

- An active participant
- In charge of their own life decisions
- A full member of society and the community

The Convention says that disability comes from both a person’s condition and the barriers in their environment.

Important principles of the Convention are:

- Human dignity and the right to make your own choices
- No discrimination
- Equal opportunities to take part in the society
- Accepting people with disabilities as part of being human
- Accessibility and removal of barriers that cause discrimination
- Equality between men and women
- Children's right to develop and have their own identity

5. Operating environment

People with disabilities are one of the largest and most discriminated minorities in the world. There are about 1.3 billion people with disabilities, which is around 16% of the world's population. Disability is part of human diversity.

The rights of people with disabilities must be protected and promoted. Disability and poverty often go together. In many countries, people with disabilities get less education and have fewer job opportunities. Illiteracy is also more common among people with disabilities. They are also more likely to experience violence.

Disability is always individual. People with disabilities should not be seen as one identical group. Disability is part of being humans. However, people with disabilities are often seen only as needing care and charity. They are not always recognised as active and equal participants.

Disability can also bring extra costs. These can include hiring a personal assistant or buying assistive devices. Because of this, it can be harder for families with a disabled member to live as well as other families with the same income.

Discrimination is not the same for everyone. People with disabilities can face discrimination for many reasons, such as gender, age, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Women with disabilities face even more discrimination than men. Women with disabilities have higher risks of violence, unemployment, and illiteracy.

Many children with disabilities in developing countries do not go to school. Reasons include:

- Teachers not trained for disabilities
- Difficulty getting to school
- School buildings that are not accessible

- Discriminatory attitudes

People with disabilities also face discrimination in churches. In many churches, they cannot fully participate, and they are often not given church roles.

Crises, conflicts, and climate change make it more likely for people with disabilities to be left out. They are often seen only as victims, which means they are not included in important decisions.

Many of Felm's partner countries have agreed to the UN disability convention. But they often do not have enough resources to follow the laws. In many of these countries, protecting human rights is weak.

Although disability is often linked to poverty and discrimination, people with disabilities do not all face unfair treatment in the same way.

6. Policies

6.1 Principles

1. **Human rights:**

   Felm follows a human rights-based approach in all its work. We follow the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and respect its principles.

2. **Multiple discrimination:**

   Felm understands that people with disabilities can face many types of discrimination at the same time. We work to stop all forms of discrimination, especially against children, young people, women, and sexual and gender minorities with disabilities.

3. **"Nothing without us" and inclusion:**

   Felm believes that people with disabilities must be part of decisions, especially the ones that affect them. We aim to fully include all people and do not support any activity that excludes or discriminates. We work with people with disabilities and disability organisations in everything.

4. **Self-determination:**

   Felm respects and values disabled people's dignity. Every person with a disability has the right to make their own choices and decisions about their life.

6.2 Programme work

1. **Twin-track approach:**

   Felm promotes the rights of people with disabilities in all its programmes. We make sure our work includes people with disabilities. We ensure everything is accessible. We support full participation. Our goal is to remove barriers and end discrimination. We also help them take part in decision-making in society and in the Church.

2. **Comprehensive approach:**

   In social work, we see people with disabilities as active agents of change. Felm works to improve disabled people to have equal chances to participate in church activities:

   -By supporting the theological education and leadership of people with disabilities

   -Promoting the education of children with disabilities

   -By supporting active participation in peace building, climate change action and in humanitarian work.

3. **Support for disability organisations:**

   Felm supports disability in Finland and internationally. We consult with people with disabilities and disability organisation partners at every stage of our programmes.

4. **Mainstreaming inclusion:**

   Felm makes sure programme budgets include money for accessibility and accommodations. We continuously discuss and improve disability inclusion with our partners. We help them improve accessibility, disability rights knowledge, and understanding of disability theology.

5. **Knowledge-based advocacy:**

   Felm strengthens the rights of people with disabilities and needs from good knowledge and research. Felm helps partners to use evidence for advocacy and decision-making.

6.3 Organisational culture

1. **Positive discrimination in hiring:**

Felm supports hiring people from minority groups. We improve job opportunities for people with disabilities by hiring them. We also make our workplaces accessible, and value diversity in recruitment.

2. **Reasonable accommodation:**

   Felm will provide the adjustments a person with disabilities needs so they can do their job.

3. **Accessibility:**

   Felm will make sure buildings, tools, information, and systems are accessible. We design things so everyone can use them without special changes.

4. **Staff training:**

   Felm will train its staff on:

   - the rights of people with disabilities
   - how to involve them fully in all activities
   - disability theology.

   We also encourage staff to learn from each other.

5. **Consultation:**

   Felm's leadership will consult people with disabilities and disability organisations when making decisions.

6. **Communication:**

   Felm will follow disability laws in all communication.

7. **Monitoring and evaluation:**

   Felm will regularly check how well this disability rights policy is being put into practice.

7. Felm's added value

Felm adds value to disability rights work. It is a global Christian organisation that supports people who are marginalised following the example of Jesus.

Felm's human rights and faith-based work is committed to:

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- World Council of Churches *The Gift of Being*.

These documents create a frame of the methods and work in Felm.

Felm is active in international church networks, such as ACT Alliance and the Lutheran World Federation. Felm is one of the few organisations that consistently promotes disability rights in these groups.

Felm shares good ideas and works to improve the rights of people with disabilities in international Christian networks.

Felm has long experience supporting inclusive education. Felm has done important work in Ethiopia for children with hearing disabilities. It has promoted their rights and supported the use of sign language. Felm's projects help persons with disabilities take part in society and become active change-makers.

Felm is committed to meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in all areas of its work internationally, in Finland, and inside its own organisation. This shows Felm's commitment to being a strong expert and role model in disability inclusion also in the future.