



In November 2009, the General Synod tasked the Church Council with drafting an accessibility programme for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. Accessibility serves everyone. In this programme, accessibility is examined, particularly from the standpoint of disabled persons and those using sign language. The same principles often apply to encounters with language and cultural minorities, immigrants and the elderly. This programme is aimed at local parish members, Church employees and elected board members to make the Church more accessible.

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The accessibility programme was put through feedback rounds in March 2012 with key actors and organisations working for the disabled as well as sampling parishes in various dioceses. At the same time, feedback could be openly submitted online at sakasti.evl.fi/saavutettavuus.

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Introduction

Accessibility means the opportunity for all people to participate and be involved, regardless of their various personal characteristics. Accessibility promotes equality. The main objective of Church for All – Disability Policy Programme of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, which was approved in 2003, is a parish that gives equal consideration to the needs of all its members. Accessibility in the Church stems from the core of its theology. The Church, by its very nature, is an organisation that must take everyone into consideration.

According to the Finnish Disability Policy Programme 2010–2015: 'All people must have equal opportunities to live and act in society.' As the Church is part of society, state legislation and agreements also apply to it and its parishes.

Public services should be made to serve everyone's needs and provide a fully accessible environment. If necessary, society should provide special services, such as housing, auxiliary aids, transport and interpreting. This ensures the realisation of equality in society. In the Church and its parishes, equality and inclusion must be facilitated by removing any obstacles to mobility, communication, understanding, activity or attitudes.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was ratified in 2006. The purpose of the Convention is: '...to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.' The Convention entered into force in May 2008. The EU ratified the Convention in December 2010. As a result of this, no EU legislation, policies or

programmes may be in conflict with the content of the Convention. The European Disability Strategy 2010–2020 is intended to ensure the full implementation of the UN Convention. Finland is preparing ratification of the Convention. Upon ratification, it will also be integrated in Finnish law. Church activities must not be in conflict with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was ratified in 1989. The Convention applies to all persons under 18 years of age. The UNCRC defines and protects the interests of children. Finland ratified the Convention in 1991. Article 23 makes specific reference to the special rights of disabled children.

In the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the European Disability Strategy and Finnish Disability Policy Programme 2010–2015, the message is the same: all people are equal and must be given the opportunity to have a say in their own lives as well as the planning and implementation of services.

The Church accessibility programme brings attention to the theological foundation of accessibility. The programme is based on the Christian concept of humanity and the church.

The Church accessibility programme is founded on the gospel. This is not merely promoting the interests of a certain special group or the work of some specialist Church employees. This involves the primary mission of the Church and the fidelity in realising that mission. Only a church that is open to all people is a genuine church of Christ. It is for this reason that we must constantly strive to ensure full accessibility for all.

1. People in the Church

1.1 Creation

In confirmation classes, youths and teachers make a person out of clay. With hands made slippery by the clay and water, they are performing an act of creation. These magnificent pieces of art are left out to dry. But something is missing: life, spirit. Who is capable of breathing life into the clay? Only God. People are come from God. God created humankind, each and every one of us. God breathes life into each person, making them Human. Each person's life is a gift from God.

All that God creates is good. Each person is truly unique. The diversity of humankind is the quintessence of God's creation. In God's eyes, we are all equally worthy.

One has full human dignity simply by existing. There are no ifs, ands or buts when it comes to human dignity. All people have the inalienable right to exist and be proud of themselves. Me! A miracle! One does not have to earn human dignity. Between people, human dignity only becomes evident when each person is treated with the respect they deserve. You! A miracle!

According to a wisdom in the Story of Creation, it is not good for a person to be alone. We are created to live in a community. Genuine humanity is realised in communion with others. I am whole only in relation to others. Together, different, we are made in the image of God.

1.2 Salvation

There is no sin in diversity, but there certainly is in questioning human dignity. There is no sin in disability, but there certainly is in unequal treatment. When a person foists their own preconceptions on those around them, they are denying the acceptance of God's creation.

Each person needs release from sin. What is radical about this is the fact that this occurs through grace. Sins are forgiven through the grace of Jesus.

The deepest secret of humanity is that God becomes human through his son, Jesus. God lives and dies as people do. The

resurrection is a great miracle. Jesus of Nazareth is also the Christ, a hope that transcends death.

Christ dedicated himself to being with all the different kinds of people, championing the cause of those rejected by others. He also submitted himself to suffering and death on behalf of all humankind. God's redemptive love in Christ does not classify, reject or put people in positions of lesser or greater value. Thus, Christ's salvation fosters equality and calls us to work toward building a more accessible and equal Church.

1.3 Called to fellowship

Justice and equality are realised in the Kingdom of God at the centre of Jesus' proclamation. Jesus proclaimed that the mission for all humankind is to love God and one another. God granted us reason and a heart as instruments for loving others. Christ's presence in us asks us to put ourselves in another person's place and find what is best for them. We pray for the coming of the Kingdom of God and work to make it happen.

God is present in the Word and the Sacraments. In baptism, we are joined in the fellowship of God and become members of the parish. In the Eucharist, sharing the same bread and wine. God's word is the same for us all. It calls us to engage with one another and pray together. It is there that Christ is among friends.

The Holy Spirit unites all Christians. The link between Christians even extends to those we will never meet. All the Christians who came before us and those baptised in other Christian denominations are all together with us. The Christian Church spans the globe. Every man, woman and child is invited to be part of it. This link also extends to all Christians who lived before our time.

1.4 Building together

Faith is tied to being with and believing in God. Our fundamental experiences are formed in our first human relationships, when parents hear the needs of their baby and fulfil them. As the child grows, the image of God is released from thoughts and feelings that bind it strictly to the realm of human life. God has become the 'You', who can be trusted.

It is vital that people find the merciful face of God. Through these, one can discover the experience their existence as an image of God as well as each person's own, unique human dignity. Then, Christ's reconciling work will not just be a distant historical event. When God forgives us and we forgive each other, salvation is real, here and now.

The concept of God held by humankind is a whole. It is comprised of human thoughts, experiences, feelings and knowledge about God. This is why the concept takes on personal characteristics and can vary from person to person.

The core of a spiritual experience is not cognitive. God is greater than what humankind can conceive. A person can expect and desire that the Holy Spirit will touch them. We encounter God in each moment we live.

The core of faith can be approached from several directions. Living faith is multidimensional – it can be interpreted in different ways. Doctrine is one of religion's languages, prayer another. Faith in life can also be achieved through action and experience. All of these are needed for the whole. Each and every person has something to contribute in building a parish.



2. Accessibility in the Church

2.1. Accessibility

The Church is open to all people. A parish should be run in such a way that no one is ever rejected. A parish can enhance its accessibility by removing all obstacles to mobility, seeing, hearing and understanding. Accessibility is realised when each person can, according to their own interests, receive knowledge, experience fellowship and, if desired, serve in an active capacity or otherwise be involved in a parish.

2.1.1 Inclusion

The experience of being a part of something and accepted as a member of the parish enhances the feeling of inclusion. Inclusion is built in interaction with the community. Accepting diversity, appreciating people of different ages, being tolerant of differences and bringing them to light all contribute to inclusion. This requires a changing of attitudes and removal of obstacles as well as the use of auxiliary aids and the assistance of others.

A parish welcomes all people. Inclusion is where each person offers their own personal gifts for the entire community to enjoy. Diversity includes people who communicate in different ways and their experiences, people with different backgrounds and people of different ages.

2.1.2 Equality

Two of the core teachings of Christianity are the equal treatment of all people and respect for life. Love for one's neighbours and caring for others are motives for treating all people equally.

Society's laws also obligate the Church to practice equality and prevent discrimination. Equality is the acceptance of diversity and respecting each others' uniqueness.

Equal treatment does not mean that everyone should be treated in exactly the same way. In the Church, equality means that a parish lays a foundation for equal participation. For example, the ability

for users of sign language to receive pastoral care in their own language, the announcement of hymns and psalms for the visually impaired or the employment of aides at church services enhances inclusion and equality for all.

For employees, this may involve making special arrangements needed for work. Equality means that people with different disabilities are given the opportunity to work for the Church in a capacity that corresponds with their educational background as well as the support and auxiliary aids they need to do the job.

In the Church, inclusion and equality can be seen

- as operating content that can be understood and experienced using different senses
- as equal opportunities for participation and acting
- as a well-planned and accessible environment
- in trained and service-minded employees as well as volunteers
- in the accessibility of services
- in the accessibility of electronic communications
- in the excellent support that information and communications technology lends to participation
- as a source of information on accessible services
- as a functional feedback system

2.2 Areas of accessibility

Accessibility can be examined from a variety of perspectives. Various approaches to providing information, ensuring accessibility in built environments or the elimination of obstacles to communication are factors that enhance accessibility and equality. Here, experiential experts (i.e. people), who have personally dealt with obstacles and eliminated them, are invaluable partners.

2.2.1 Accessibility in attitudes

Accessibility in attitudes means that parish members and employees act in such a way that everyone can experience the sense of fellowship in a parish and live as a Christian.

The will to work together in enhancing accessibility and inclusion can overcome many obstacles and find solutions to everyday challenges. Accessibility in attitudes is the most important thing of all!

Small, well thought out changes in operating approaches can make a wide variety of functions accessible.

It is vital to ensure and consciously support the self-sufficiency of persons with disabilities, users of sign language and other minority groups. One key objective of accessibility is to provide everyone with the opportunity to be subjects, should they so desire. Groups requiring more have usually been recipients of parish aid – objects. In order to truly experience inclusion, one must be given an opportunity to function on an equal level.

Each employee contributes to influencing the realisation of accessibility. Basic attitudes apply to all employees, elected board members and parish members serving as volunteers. One must be realistically conscious of the consequences that come from choices made and solutions taken. Good practices are consistently established, observed and developed. The objective is to spread know-how from one employee and field to another. A good education and experience ensure that expertise is always up-to-date. Another fundamental aspect is theological study, which establishes the basis for common understanding on how accessibility stems from the very core of faith.

Parishes should hire disabled persons primarily through the normal recruiting channels. If the situation at a parish prevents it from doing so, work administration measures designed to promote employment can be used in certain cases. Disabled employees working for parishes change the parish image to a more open one. The proactive effort to employ disabled persons is a key disabled policy goal, to which the Church should commit itself.

2.2.2 Physical accessibility

An environment or building can be considered accessible when it is functional, safe and pleasant for all users. This is the objective of physical accessibility. Although an accessible environment serves everyone, it is an absolute necessity for many people, such those who use rollators or wheelchairs or are pushing prams.

Accessibility demands good planning. Accessible building does not increase costs during the planning phase. Over the long term, accessibility becomes increasingly economical, as the functionality of facilities reduces the need for making modifications. The fact that both parish members and employees need accessible facilities should be taken into consideration in the design and repair of buildings.

Accessibility begins with arriving and parking at facilities. An accessible building will be easy to enter, with doors that open easily or automatically. It will also be easy to move about inside the building. Facilities and all the functions found within them must be as user-friendly and logical as possible. Passageways are clearly marked. Contrasting colours help define areas. Handrails and support rails enhance user safety.

Physical accessibility should also be taken into consideration in, for example, the design of cemeteries. Resting places and seats should be placed in close proximity to the cemetery walking paths. In special cases, accessible parking for those with severely limited mobility should also be located within the cemetery.

Physical accessibility also includes adequate and glare-free lighting, unimpeded visibility and functional audio systems, including an induction loop system. Facilities should be equipped with moveable seating of various heights for parish members and their assistants or interpreters. Accessibility aids and equipment should be easily available. Offering magnifying glasses or seat cushions is simply good service.

Accessibility analysis

An accessibility analysis provides detailed information on the accessibility of a given built environment. The analysis produces precise dimensional data on the site. The result is a comprehensive picture of the accessibility of the area or site. Procedural recommendations on how to improve accessibility can be made based on the result. A user assessment on the functionality of facilities and equipment can be used as the basis for an accessibility analysis. The practical experience of parish members can be used in the analysis. For additional information on this, contact the Finnish Association of People with Physical Disabilities.

Signage

Well-placed, easy-to-understand signage and a facility floorplan make moving about easier. Signs should use high-contrast lettering and illustrative symbols. Embossed letters should be used on signs with only a few words. This precludes the need for Braille lettering.

A map placed in the church vestibule showing the range of the induction loop system will help hearing aid users find a suitable place to sit. The map can also show the routes and places for wheelchair users. An embossed map is an excellent aid for those with impaired vision.

All facilities and written materials can make use of clear, simple, easily understood symbols. There is currently no nationally or internationally universal system of symbols for accessibility, but there are still symbols in general use. Various symbols can be found in, for example, the Helsinki for All symbol databank.

Assistants, interpreters, guides

Many parish members need an assistant or guide to help them in moving about or participating in parish activities. For example, lifts and accessible toilet facilities must be large enough to also accommodate an assistant. Seating for sign language interpreters must be set aside, ensuring an unimpeded view and adequate lighting for deaf persons.

All dogs trained to assist disabled persons, such as seeing-eye dogs, hearing dogs or guide dogs, must be given full access to help people in church facilities and at church functions.

Trained volunteer assistants are an excellent resource to have at public functions. Many parishes have, for example, a service group to provide assistance during church services. The service group's task could be expanded to include receiving parish members at the church entrances and, if necessary, assisting them in moving about or with other things during church functions.

2.2.3 Accessibility in communication

Communication is interaction. The basis of interaction is that people are completely engaged with one another, feel safe and are interested in each other. Good interaction is reciprocal, equal, clear and multifaceted.

Interaction is built upon feelings, desires, thoughts and actions. It comprehends not only the spoken and written word, but also non-verbal communication, such as the tone of voice, gestures, facial expressions and overall body language. Our cultural customs and norms also influence how we understand one another.

Interaction is the foundation for a sense of community. In interaction, it is vital that the involved parties are interested in each other and seek a common language: a means of communication that both understand and know how to use. Aids for interaction include plain language text, augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), various aids or the use of an interpreter.

In communication, accessibility means giving special attention to people, who for some reason have a more difficult time understanding things and/or language or who use different types of communication. Simultaneously conveying a message using different senses helps in receiving and understanding it.

The use of multi-channel communication ensures that the message is received by everyone. Basically, clear, simple spoken or written language is used. Visual and linguistic clarity is vital in brochures, signs and bulletins. If necessary, plain language text, sign language, Braille or pictograms may be used. Websites should be designed to be easily navigated and compatible with various aids.

Below, we will discuss accessibility in terms of language and various means of communication as well as instruments of communication and interaction.

Sign language

As with spoken languages, sign languages are considered independent languages. Different sign languages are used in different countries, with Finnish and Finnish-Swedish being generally used in Finland. Signing immigrants bring their own inflections into sign language.

Tactile (or hand-over-hand) sign language is used by the deaf-blind, who cannot follow sign language visually.

For the deaf persons, sign language is their native tongue. It is important for deaf people to be able to use their native tongue in all interaction.

Easy to Read

Easy to read is a form of Finnish, whose content, vocabulary and structure has been adapted from common usage to be more readable and comprehensible. It is aimed at people who have difficulty reading or understanding common usage. Easy to read is used in communicating with, for example, persons with intellectual disabilities, memory disorders or who are not fluent in the language in question.

The use of easy to read at parish functions is especially challenging, due to the nature of Christian concepts and symbols. Many religious expressions, such as grace, redemption, sin or the Holy Spirit are familiar to employees, but strange and ambiguous to users of easy to read. Using examples and concrete things to explain what is being discussed can facilitate understanding concepts.

Churches require easy to read materials, such as sermons, prayers for different situations, parish work and various catechisms for confirmation classes. The formulas used in easy to read masses and church ceremonies serve many user groups.

Body language

Body language is an essential part of communication in situations where there is no common language. In such cases, the situation, environment and interaction control the creation of meaning. Connection and inclusion are not established through understanding alone. The expressions, gestures, vocalisations, actions and feelings related to body language convey the message. Understanding body language requires time, honesty and engagement. For example, offering confirmation instruction to intellectually disabled youths using body language provides them with the opportunity to receive a religious education.

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC)

Augmentative and alternative communication is a general description of various means of communication used to supplement, assist or act as a substitute for spoken language. If a person has difficulty forming speech, they can express themselves using gestures and facial expressions, pointing at articles and pictures, writing word lists or drawing. Augmentative and alternative communication methods include assisted discussion, sign supported communication, communicating with body language and computer-assisted communication.

AAC methods are used in interaction with, for example, autistic and intellectually disabled persons as well as children with special needs in speech development. Sometimes AAC methods are needed when a person's speech faculties or language skills are adversely affected by, for example, disorders of the central nervous system or brain or injuries sustained in an accident.

Visual communication

AAC methods also include object and visual communication as well as Blissymbolics. Blissymbolics is an international AAC method, in which words are replaced by ideographs. Symbols, moving images, image sequences or comic strips can be used in visual communications. These are used to illustrate a message to people who cannot understand spoken or written language.

Sign supported language

Specially designed for late deafened and hearing-impaired persons, sign supported language is a method, in which lip

reading is supplemented with signs borrowed from sign language in conjunction with speaking. In other words: the person signs and speaks at the same time, in accordance with the grammar rules of the language being spoken. Ensuring that the speaker's face is visible and providing ample, glare-free lighting assist in communication.

Descriptive interpretation

Descriptive interpretation helps orient a person in a space or situation. It involves the oral description of a site or space, such as a building, to a person requiring visual assistance or, alternatively, a verbal description. Descriptive interpretation can also be used to describe the visual elements of a church function, such as a mass. Descriptions can also be made tactilely to, for example, deaf-blind persons, by using prescribed 'social quick messages'. These can be used to rapidly communicate changes in the environment, such as people's reactions or movements in the space.

Braille

Braille is a tactile writing system for persons who are blind or visually impaired. Texts to be used as a group, such as psalms and hymns, must be available in Braille.

Large print

Some visually impaired people are able to read printed text, using the right aids. Large print involves texts, whose font size, colour contrast and layout are sufficiently legible for reading without optical aids, even if a person's visual acuity has deteriorated. Additional light and a magnifying glass are helpful aids.

Recordings and electronic materials

Recordings and electronic materials give the visually impaired access to information. Websites that are compatible with reading programs are another key source of information for the visually impaired.

Print interpreting and closed captioning

Print interpreting involves the simultaneous interpreting of speech into written text on a display or movie screen. Print interpreting assists late deafened and hearing impaired people.

Closed captioning involves projecting the text of, for example, the sermon being delivered, onto the church wall or a screen. Bible texts and the sermon can also be made available as a photocopy. Modern technology is constantly offering new possibilities, even in this area.

Text messaging

Some people have difficulty in understanding time limits or remembering appointments. Consequently, confirming important matters, such as times and places, by means of text messages (SMS) helps the user to remember and understand. Making meeting appointments can also be done via text message.

Induction loop system and audio

An induction loop system is an aid, which transmits audio signals directly to hearing aids via a magnetic field. It reduces background noise, reverberations and other disturbances. Most churches are fitted with induction loop systems. These systems always require the use of a microphone when speaking. A loop system can also be installed at government agency service desks. A portable induction loop system can be installed in spaces, where it will be used only temporarily.

Particularly in churches, the acoustics can be reverberant, so clear audio transmission, articulation and a suitable speaking rhythm facilitate understanding.

Visibility

Visibility is an absolute necessity especially for people with diminished hearing. They must be able to see the face of the speaker in order to read the lips, thus helping to comprehend what is being said. The speaker should therefore constantly maintain eye contact with the audience.

For example, during Christmas functions, a special holiday atmosphere is created by dimming the lights. When using this kind of mood lighting, one should keep in mind that the lights should be trained on the areas required for following the function. It is a good idea to always have one, well-lit area in the church and offices.

Website accessibility

Accessibility is essential to the quality of online services. Website accessibility must be ensured for all users, whether they be hearing or visually impaired, suffering from motor impairment or other physical disabilities. When parish websites comply with the latest accessibility guidelines, they can be opened using a variety of different terminal devices and browsers.

Many people with special language needs need websites geared specifically to them. Based on the principles of easy to read, these websites can be understood by most people. If it is not possible to

make the entire website using easy to read, key sections, such as contact information and events, should be done in easy to read or plain language

2.2.4 Financial accessibility

Church services are generally financially accessible, because the church's functions and services are primarily free of charge. Exemptions for camp and excursion fees can always be requested based on financial reasons. It is right that assistants, guides, interpreters, counsellors or support persons be admitted to functions with their clients free of charge.

Church facilities can be rented for family occasions or other events at very reasonable rates. Ticket earnings from church concerts go to the performer of the music, not the parish.

2.2.5 Accessibility in decision-making and strategy

Accessibility in decision-making means that everyone affected by a certain matter should have the opportunity to influence the decision. That is why all parish members should be encouraged to run for office in church elections. Disabled or deaf persons should be genuinely included in the administration, parish or church as a whole.

The church and parish are public organisations. The publicity of their decisions are steered by the same laws and regulations as the state and municipalities. A decision and the justifications for it must be made openly available to all parties. The minutes from administrative meetings and parish strategy should also be posted on the parish website.

The importance of elected board members is especially emphasised in the fact that the accessibility philosophy is taken into consideration in strategy work as well as financial and operational planning. The promotion of accessibility should be part of a parish's strategy work, to the extent that a commitment to this promotion is evident in the parish's goal-setting.

3. Accessibility in everyday parish life

3.1 Ways to enhance accessibility

3.1.1 Strategy

The parish's strategic policies influence the inclusion of accessibility in everyday work. They must also be included in the basic operational description of the parish. The accessibility of parish functions is improved by an accessibility action plan or programme, which is drafted based on an accessibility analysis as well as a usability and operational assessment. The operational and financial plans should show how accessibility perspectives have been taken into consideration. Elected board members play a key role in this work.

The accessibility philosophy encompasses everything: operational planning and execution, recruiting, facilities, personnel development, elected board member training and procurement. Accessibility can be made the focal point of a parish's strategic philosophy. Parishes can choose the area or areas, from which to begin advancing matters related to accessibility.

People with experience should be included in planning and execution during different phases. Local disability councils and organisations are natural partners. Persons to oversee the implementation of accessibility measures in a parish should be appointed. Thorough training for both elected board members and employees should be ensured as a basis for strategy work.

3.1.2 Education

The accessibility philosophy is an integral part of all basic studies in religion. In education, it is essential that everyone receives information from the various areas of accessibility that pertain to their respective fields. In addition to going over the fundamentals of accessibility, information must be constantly updated. A focus must first be given to existing educational programmes, integrating the fundamentals of the accessibility philosophy in their content.

The key aims of education are sharing knowledge, practical expertise and influencing attitudes. Knowledge helps in identifying



obstacles and finding solutions. An employee who respects others will take note of their needs and know how to ask about them.

Multidisciplinary education on accessibility can be provided in a way that includes employees, elected officials and volunteer parish members. Together, it is possible to go through, for example, parish practices and the obstacles to accessibility encountered in them.

Communication professionals play a key role in the use of various communication channels and require relevant education and training. Parish websites should be fully accessible. The use of multiple channels in communications is the most effective way of reaching people.

Language and expression are crucial to the distribution of content. Key educational focal points are, on one hand, clarifying and simplifying one's own expression and, on the other, using a variety of communication methods. Wherever necessary, church employees must be given training in, for example, writing and interacting in easy to read or plain language.

3.1.3 Use of resources

A tightening economy requires a reassessment of resources. Greater consideration must be given to what an inclusive community is and what it is like. When it becomes necessary to make choices and reallocate resources, the reasoning behind these choices should be carefully considered and made available to all parties.

The single most important resource of the Church is people. This means the active involvement of all parish members and rethinking the use of employee resources, changing their role from doer to enabler.

3.1.4 Networking with other local actors

Local networking with other actors is of the utmost importance. Parish members are also local citizens and members of numerous organisations and associations. Making use of existing networks can create new types of co-operative opportunities, which benefit both parties. Local associations, disability councils as well as the municipality and city are natural partners.

3.1.5 'We' philosophy

Our faith in God demands that we all treat one another as equals. Advancing the cause of accessibility cannot be outsourced to some faceless church - it must always be done by you or me. We the people, together.

3.2 Procedural recommendations for parishes

3.2.1 Promoting parish accessibility approaches

Theological work as a basis for the accessibility philosophy

Employees shall work together with elected board members and parish members to develop the theology of the accessibility philosophy as the basis for parish operations.

Strategic accessibility work in the parish

The parish shall set the goal of creating a home parish that is accessible to all its members.

This is based on strategic planning. The accessibility philosophy encompasses all parish operations and support functions. Each year, the financial and operational plan sets accessibility goals, which can be assessed and measured. Rectification of any shortcomings found in the accessibility analysis is included in the financial plan.

Accessibility goal to be assessed in the financial and operational plan

Units/fields shall set an accessibility goal for financial and operational plans that can be assessed in the annual report.

Accessibility adviser

The parish shall appoint two people, whose mandate includes accessibility affairs. They are trained to provide information to other employees, elected board members and volunteer actors in matters involving accessibility.

Accessibility pilot sites

Each parish or parish union shall select a pilot site, where accessibility is given special attention. The goal is to use these sites as examples for other locations and parishes in the region.

At these pilot sites, every effort is made to improve accessibility in all areas: both in terms of the physical environment, the various senses and comprehensibility as well as operational content.

3.2.2 Physical accessibility

Accessibility analyses

The parish shall conduct an accessibility analysis. Co-operation with the local disability council/disability organisations is important in assessing the functionality of facilities and the environment. For additional information on this, contact the Finnish Association of People with Physical Disabilities.

Online information on the accessibility of facilities

The parish website shall provide information on the accessibility of facilities together with their general presentation.

Accessible church facilities

The parish shall make the church facilities accessible. This can be presented virtually on its website. The church must also be presented as a model for accessibility. Setting a strong example affects other parish functions. This should be given special attention in nationally significant church buildings.

3.2.3 Online communications

Developing the accessibility of parish websites

- Websites shall open on a variety of terminal devices and browsers.
- The parish shall add plain language or easy to read sections to its website. This will serve all users.
- Information on employees who use sign language should be provided on the website.
- The image of the parish as being a diverse community shall be found in the presentation of information and selection of images used on the parish website and in its functions.

Online accessibility in parishes

The parish shall have a website that conforms to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). The makers of the parish website shall be trained to comply with WCAG standards. The use of images and symbols together with text helps people who have difficulties in reading or comprehension.

3.2.4 Parish co-operation with local disability council or disability organisations

The parish shall establish co-operation with the local disability council and disability organisations. The parish can, for example, invite parish members with restricted mobility, impaired vision or who are deaf-blind and their assistants to visit the parish facilities and provide their invaluable feedback on accessibility.

Equal recruiting

The parish can serve as an example and employ persons with disabilities and other people who are difficult to employ as well as invite them to participate in volunteer functions. Parishes shall make every effort to promote the employment of these people through their own actions. Parishes can also utilise employment administration measures that promote employment.

3.2.5 Parish functions

Making worship and sermons accessible

One area of accessibility shall be given special attention in worship. For example, the parish decides whether sermons are always to be delivered in a language that is easy to understand, even occasionally in easy to read, or each employee must be trained in the use of an induction loop system and microphone.

Materials, brochures

Easy to read brochures on the church building, parish and its functions shall be produced in print and posted online.

Development of sign language for church services

The church has employees who are skilled in sign language. They can share their expertise in church services with others.

Positive special treatment of parish members during holidays

The parish shall develop special holiday operating approaches, which serve, for example, persons with disabilities, physical restrictions and mental health patients. For many people, holidays are a time to be spent together, even though the inclusion of persons with disabilities in society has indeed increased with changes in attitudes.

3.3 Procedural recommendations for dioceses

3.3.1 Accessibility philosophy in diocesan education

The accessibility philosophy shall be found in every aspect of diocesan education. If necessary, special training can be provided for certain matters involving accessibility.

3.3.2 Accessibility programmes for parishes

Dioceses shall provide support for parishes, wherein 2–3 parishes within the diocese area develop an accessibility programme that includes a concrete action plan each year.

3.3.3 Accessibility as part of bishop visitations

The realisation of accessibility measures shall be monitored during bishop visitations.

3.4 Procedural recommendations for the Church Council

3.4.1 Monitoring of the accessibility programme

The task of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland Advisory Council on Disabilities is to monitor realisation of the accessibility programme.

3.4.2 Accessibility training

Accessibility and its development shall serve as the foundation of all parish functions and a permanent operating method. Working in co-operation with the Institute for Advanced Training and various disability organisations, training materials dealing with the various areas of accessibility shall be produced.

Materials that include separate training instructor materials, shall be produced for training purposes. Based on these materials, the training instructor will be able to provide a shorter orientation

concerning a specific accessibility matter or a day-long accessibility training session. These materials shall be updated regularly. If necessary, dioceses can also provide instructor training in co-operation with the Church Council.

3.4.3 Maintenance and development of websites: evl.fi website easy to read pages, sign language pages and sakasti.evl.fi website accessibility pages

Maintenance and development of websites supports accessibility work.

3.4.4 Accessibility – informing the functions of the Church Council

The accessibility perspective is a fundamental operating principle in every aspect of Church Council operations.

3.4.5 Accessibility recognition for parishes

An operating model that supports accessibility work in parishes shall be developed based on or as part of the Church Environmental Diploma. It is important that each location or parish could receive recognition through this model.



Further information on accessibility

Visit: www.sakasti.evl.fi/saavutettavuus and other organisation and actor websites:

Helsinki for All: www.hel.fi/helsinkikaikille

Finnish Association of People with Physical Disabilities (FPD) accessibility website: www.esteeton.fi

Inclusion Finland KVTL: www.kvtl.fi

Culture for All: www.kulttuuriakaikille.info

Finnish Association of the Deaf: www.kl-deaf.fi

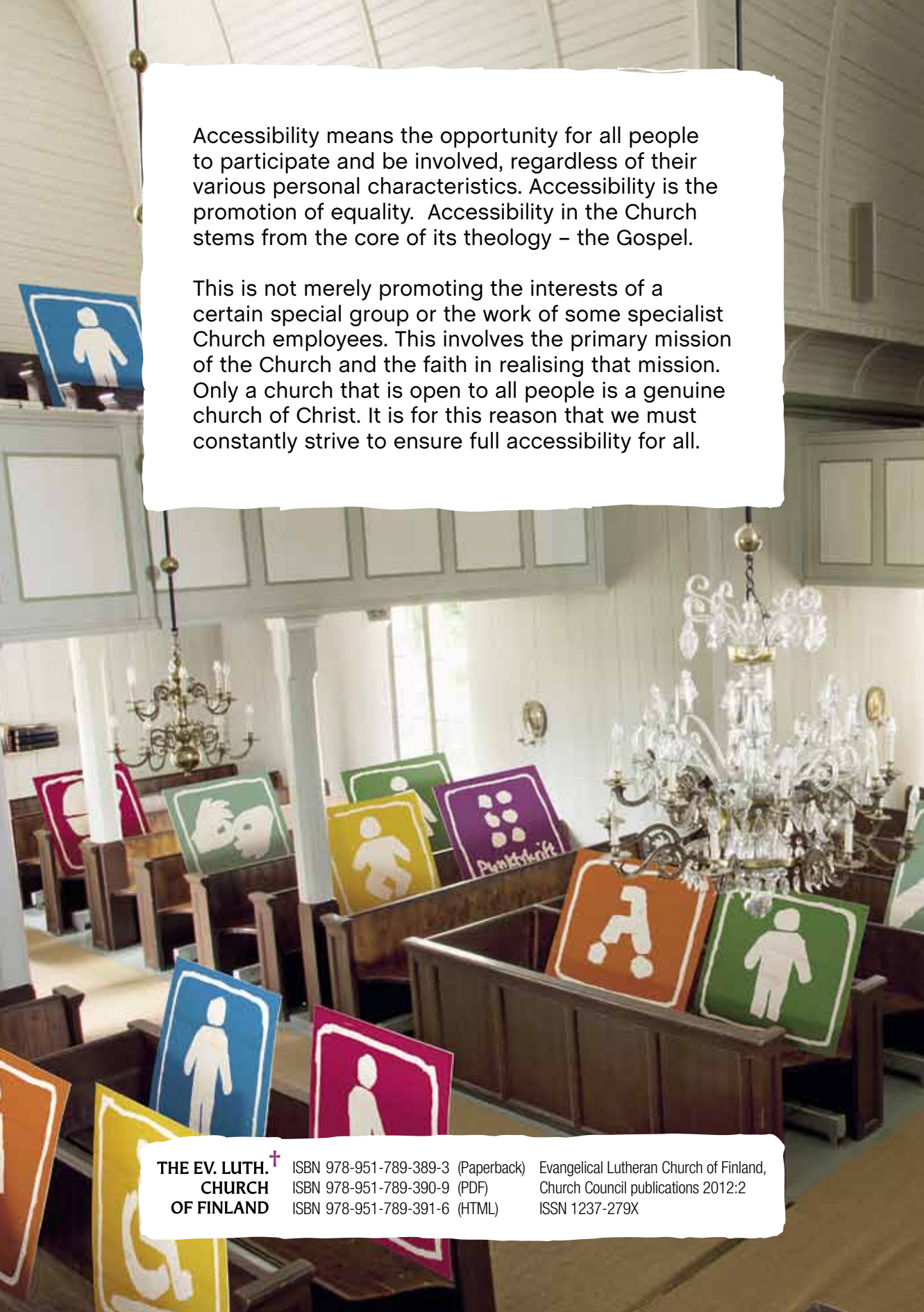
Finnish Federation of Hard of Hearing (FFHOH): www.kuuloliitto.fi

Kynnys – The Threshold Association: www.kynnys.fi

Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired (FFVI): www.nkl.fi

Finnish Centre for Easy to read: www.selkokeskus.fi



A photograph of a church interior with wooden pews. Several pews have colorful signs placed on them, each featuring a white icon representing a different type of accessibility: a person in a wheelchair (orange), a person with a white cane (green), a person with a hearing aid (purple), a person with a white cane (yellow), a person with a white cane (blue), and a person with a white cane (pink). A large, ornate chandelier hangs from the ceiling. The church has white walls and a high ceiling.

Accessibility means the opportunity for all people to participate and be involved, regardless of their various personal characteristics. Accessibility is the promotion of equality. Accessibility in the Church stems from the core of its theology – the Gospel.

This is not merely promoting the interests of a certain special group or the work of some specialist Church employees. This involves the primary mission of the Church and the faith in realising that mission. Only a church that is open to all people is a genuine church of Christ. It is for this reason that we must constantly strive to ensure full accessibility for all.

**THE EV. LUTH. ⁺
CHURCH
OF FINLAND**

ISBN 978-951-789-389-3 (Paperback)
ISBN 978-951-789-390-9 (PDF)
ISBN 978-951-789-391-6 (HTML)

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland,
Church Council publications 2012:2
ISSN 1237-279X