

Goal 5:

GENDER EQUALITY



Gender equality is about freedom and justice for all people regardless of gender. In a world where men have historically had – and still have – most of the power, the goal of gender equality is mostly about improving the situation of girls and women. In 2016, the World Bank conducted a review of the laws in 173 countries and found clear examples of how poor the situation really is in terms of women’s rights. In 155 of the countries, there was at least one law that limited women’s economic opportunities. In 46 of the countries, there were no laws prohibiting domestic violence. In 18 countries, a woman’s husband had the right to refuse his wife the opportunity to accept paid work.⁶

There are still many battles to be won before we will have achieved this goal, which states, among other things, that we must eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls. According to the World Health Organization, one in three women experiences sexual violence or other physical violence during their lives.⁷ Rape, genital mutilation and domestic violence are some examples.

In order to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, we need attitudes to change, more girls must receive an education, and policies that promote gender equality must be put in place. Gender justice is crucial to achieving progress. When women can live without violence and abuse, with access to education, jobs, legal rights and political participation, we are also much better equipped to achieve the other SDGs.

Biblical reflection

God creates humans in God’s image, ever since the beginning of time, “male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). This implies a basic recognition that women and men, different from all other creatures, have a special relationship with God, “crowned with glory and honour” (Psalm 8:6). At the same time, this image expresses equality when considering human differences: We are all equipped with a rich variety of valuable gifts. Our diversity is a resource for the well-being of us all; it gives each of us a unique place in the web of social roles with the vocation to promote what is true, good and right.

History, both biblical and our own, testifies to the fact that this view does not always prevail. Patriarchal social structures have dominated, often legitimised by religious rules and traditions, including biblical traditions. Consequently, women’s contributions and rights are made invisible, both in church and in society.

Jesus broke with the prevailing social and religious conventions, not at least in relation to women. He affirmed their dignity (Luke 7:36–50), set them free from plagues and stigma (Luke 8:43–48), and included them in the community of disciples (Luke 8:1–3). By doing this, he not only set an example, he opened for a new time, envisaging human dignity and gender equality.

Questions

- Discuss possible reasons why churches have often been ambiguous regarding gender equality.
- How can we maintain the connection between diversity and equality in our efforts to achieve gender equality?

Challenge

Think about work that you are involved in. Are there any steps that can be taken to clarify that all girls, boys, women and men have the same value and should have the same rights?

Prayer

*Lord, you who made us as children,
Man and woman, brother and sister,
You carry us in your mother’s heart,
And you are the father of all.
Let us walk together in freedom and dignity.*

We commit everything and everyone, into your hands, Lord. Amen.