

THE SUSTAINABILITY BOOK

A Christian faith perspective on the
Sustainable Development Goals



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published by:



The Sustainability Book was made possible by a number of organisations, churches and individuals. Thanks to each and every one of you for your suggestions and input!

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Print: Grøset

Funded by: Norad
Translated by: Samtext Norway AS
Translation funded by: Christian Council of Norway

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Foreword

Anne Marte Skaland and Guro Almås,
editors of The Sustainability Book

The will to fight for a better world is one of our most precious human qualities. It is this will that drives a peace activist in Cambodia, a human rights activist in Cameroon and an environmentalist in Canada. It is this will that drives people who sacrifice everything for the rights of others, and it is the same will that helps us everyday activists to try as best we can. Although we may sometimes get discouraged and give up, this will motivates us to try again.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent both something old and something new. The struggle for peace, for the environment and for justice is by no means new. But never before have the countries of the world agreed on such comprehensive and ambitious targets as the SDGs. Although the struggle is old, these goals create a new impetus. They represent an opportunity that we must seize. We owe it to everyone still living in poverty and suffering from injustice. We owe it to the children who will inherit the earth.

To achieve the SDGs, many people will need to work towards them. It is the sum of all of our actions that determines the path forward. In our everyday lives, we can choose climate-friendly solutions, we can buy clothes that are ethically manufactured, and we can pick up plastic along the beach. In order to change the basic structures that create conflict, injustice and environmental degradation, we must be united in our cause. We need to organise ourselves and work through communities, organisations and international networks.

Churches and Christian organisations also have a role to play in this great project for our common good. In this book, we invite you to reflect on what the Bible and Christian faith have to say about the various SDGs. These are not new issues for the Church, but the SDGs can give us new angles, new allies and new approaches. Together, churches and Christian organisations make up a network with branches in communities around the world. Will we be able to use the resources we have at our disposal to generate meaningful changes? We hope that The Sustainability Book will help you translate

great visions into concrete action and see the big picture behind seemingly small, everyday actions. The combination of facts, Biblical reflections, questions and prayers will allow you to use this book as a resource in sermons, Bible study groups, confirmation teachings and devotions.

We stand together with our sisters and brothers all over the world who also have the will to create change. Although we do not know about each and every one, it is as if we are working together in an invisible machine. No one knows exactly what it will take to achieve the SDGs. Some of the goals focus on financial grants, others are about tough political battles, while still others are about changing attitudes and traditions. How many hours will we have to spend on this work? How many letters to the editor must we write? How many public meetings will we need to organise? We don't have those answers, but we know that the more people who work for something, the stronger the team and the greater our chances of success.

The Sustainable Development Goals

in the Perspective of Christian Faith and Theology

Kjell Nordstokke

Can the Bible, Christian faith and theological reflection be of help when working with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)? It depends on the perspective we opt to apply. Biblical texts offer several possible perspectives. Here are some of them:

One basic starting point when reflecting on biblical motifs, is recognising the fact that the Bible largely tells stories about ordinary people and their everyday lives. They include experiences of drought and hunger, sufferings due to war and violence, and a constant fear of being struck by illness or misfortune. These experiences from daily life on the one hand reminded people of their vulnerability, but they also filled them with awe regarding creation, its greatness and generosity. They recognised that they belonged to a reality far beyond their understanding.

They interpreted ordinary life in the light of their faith in God. "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas and established it on the rivers" (Psalms 24:1-2). The notion of God as creator is rooted in their experiences and wondering

in daily life, and it links to the expectation of God's gracious intervention with its promise of a future with hope (Jeremiah 29:11).

According to this faith, all creation and every being possess an inherent value; the gifts of creation cannot be reduced to tools for humans and their desire to conquer and consume. Admittedly, humankind is, according to the narrative of creation, unique within creation, only men and women are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). This implies, however, a unique vocation to be God's co-worker in promoting what is right, good and true. It is a vocation that includes all human beings, not only Christians. And it refers to ordinary people, in their daily lives. Clearly, this perspective adds important insight to our reflection on the SDGs and the work to implement them.

The people that we meet in the narratives of the Old Testament belonged to a people that had entered a covenant with God. According to the covenant, God would protect the people and see to their wellbeing; in return the people committed to keep the commandments and follow their

directions. Justice and peace are key concepts here: On the one hand, the people are promised share in God's justice and peace; on the other hand, they are expected to be good stewards of these gifts and to promote justice and peace in the relations and doings of daily life.

The Old Testament prophets criticised the people for having failed this task and for having turned away from God. Above all, they rebuked the powerful, the political, economic and religious elite and their lifestyle. The way they abused their power and oppressed the poor was not sustainable, the prophets announced. Therefore, God would punish them and the nation would perish unless they repented and again committed themselves to justice and peace.

As Christians we are no longer bound by the covenant that people of Israel made with God on Mount Sinai. The commandments, however, still indicate what it means to live rightly and according to God's will. According to Jesus, "all the law and the prophets" rest on the Greatest Commandment: to love God and "your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22:36-40). It is a calling to compassion and care, to defend human dignity and protect creation, and to promote justice and peace.

How do we do this in practice? Primarily through the daily doings of everyday life, but also through engagement in issues that challenge us to joint action.

This publication aims at interpreting the SDGs as "signs of the times" (Matthew 16:3). As a public agenda, the SDGs express a global ambition of making the world a better place for everyone, above all through the construction of sustainable societies. At the same time, several goals articulate issues that have long been on the agenda of churches and marked their social and diaconal engagement. Thus, the SDGs provide a unique opportunity for churches to join in, as part of their Christian social responsibility, in cooperation with others, both public authorities and actors within civil society.

How should we read each of the SDGs in light of our Christian faith? Christians in many parts of the world use the method "see-judge-act" when trying to interpret the challenges of everyday life from the perspective of faith. This method contains three steps; it is important that they follow the right order and to use sufficient time on each step.

The first step is to see. It implies a thorough analysis of a theme or a challenge, using the tools of well documented knowledge, for instance from social and political sciences. The SDGs are all based on such insight and understanding from a global perspective. To see is therefore about obtaining the relevant facts and clarifying the ethical dimension this issue presents, asking: Why is this a challenge that concerns us?

The second step is to judge. Here, the perspective of faith is brought in asking how what is "seen" should be judged in the light of God's Word and our faith in God as creator, redeemer and giver of life. Now is the time for bringing in biblical motifs and narratives that may sharpen the challenge that is already "seen" in order to "judge" it from the perspective of faith and hope. This should be done through a critical – also self-critical – look. Is it certain that our perspective when reading the biblical texts is the right one? For example, would the text be read differently by wealthy people than by poor people?

The third is to act. After having seen what challenges us and reflected critically on it from the perspective of faith and service, the question arises: What to do? As individuals, as a Christian fellowship, as a local congregation and so on. Both the insight from the first step and the reflection from the second step may contribute to a renewed engagement in activities in which we already are involved. In addition, we may be motivated to make new and bolder commitments, in new partnerships and with clearer objectives.



Goal 1: NO POVERTY

The fight against poverty is one of the greatest challenges of our time. Poverty is often associated with a lack of money, but it is also about access to other goods that are important for living with dignity. Extreme poverty is a lack of vital resources. Currently, you are considered to be living in extreme poverty if you have an income of less than USD 1.90 per day, adjusted for the price level in the country you live in. This means that you don't have enough money to cover very basic needs such as food, clothing and housing. The proportion of people living in extreme poverty worldwide was more than halved between 1990 and 2015.¹ This is one of the reasons why many people believe that the Millennium Development Goals, the forerunner of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), were largely achieved. In the SDGs, UN member states have set a much more ambitious goal, namely to end extreme poverty altogether. They set this goal because they believe that we now have the resources to do this.

The causes of poverty can be on an individual level (e.g. illness or substance abuse problems), on a national level (e.g. unemployment, corruption or great inequality), or on an international level (e.g. capital flight or unfair trade rules). To achieve SDG 1, we must look at all three levels. No one left behind – this is the overall vision of the SDGs and at the core of the goal of abolishing poverty. Everyone born on this earth must have the opportunity to live a good life and participate in society.

Biblical reflection

“For you always have the poor with you” (Matthew 26:11). Some interpret this as if Jesus affirms poverty as a given order of nature or as an unavoidable fate. That is clearly a misinterpretation; the fact is that Jesus here quotes Deuteronomy where this statement is followed by a clear commandment: “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land” (15:11).

The Bible presents a realistic understanding of poverty; it acknowledges that injustice and oppression often are what causes people to become poor. Especially the prophets are unambiguous when criticising the powerful who “turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right” (Isaiah 10:2). They also proclaim that God sides with the poor and defends their rights (Isaiah 1:17; 3:14–15).

Jesus clearly places himself within this prophetic tradition when announcing his vocation to “bring good news to the poor” and to “proclaim release to the captives” (Luke 4:18). To follow Jesus implies taking part in this vocation; it motivates Christians and churches to engage in action in order to eradicate poverty, acknowledging that there will always be poor with us – as long as systems and the powerful allow space for injustice and oppression.

Challenge

Is poverty a problem where you live?
Is there anything you can do to learn more about this and help reduce poverty?

Questions

- How should we interpret the statement “You always have the poor with you” today – locally and globally?
- The Bible presents poverty both as an ideal and as disgraceful suffering. How can we maintain both perspectives?

Prayer

*Lord, giver of all good things,
Teach us to be generous so that no one
need suffer from want,
Teach us to invite others in so that no
one be left behind.
Show us again that we are all your
creation, your beloved children.*

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



Goal 2: ZERO HUNGER

One in nine people suffers from malnutrition.² Who are they? What faces are hidden behind the statistics? Malnutrition is a global problem, but most people suffering from food scarcity live in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and there are more women than men.³

When we say that a person is malnourished, it means that their daily minimum requirements for nutrition for a year are not met. The number of malnourished people has increased in the period from 2014 to 2017. The UN's World Food Programme points to climate change and armed conflicts as two of the reasons for this increase.⁴ When a drought persists year after year, and people lose both their crops and their livestock, it is a daunting example of the impact of the climate crisis. When civilians in conflict areas cannot get hold of food, it truly shows how brutal the hidden consequences of war can be. This illustrates how the various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are linked.

Hunger is also closely linked to poverty, and in order to solve the hunger problem, we must fight poverty. We also need targeted efforts towards sustainable agriculture. UN organisations and other international actors can help countries develop their agricultural practices in a sustainable direction, while also fighting hunger. If we can improve the living conditions of small farmers and landless agricultural labourers, and ensure more women have access to seeds, feed, fertiliser, tools and technology, we have come a long way.

Biblical reflection

"Give us this day our daily bread". We know these words from the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples. Faith in God and confidence in God's caring love relates to everyday life and our basic needs. Without daily nourishment, we will lose our strength. Jesus knew this well from the reality in which he lived, a reality that also today affects millions of innocent people and causes suffering and death.

"Our daily bread" refers to what we need each day, with a reminder that enough is enough. We should not stock food unnecessarily, nor adopt consumption habits that burden our community or the environment.

Jesus teaches us to pray in plural, in solidarity with all who are hungry. Our concern should not be limited to satisfying our own needs, but to strive – in our prayers and in our work – for a world where everyone has the food they need each and every day. "You give them something to eat", Jesus told his disciples when thousands were without food in the desert. In a wonderful way, limited resources were transformed so that everyone had enough to eat. Part of this wonder consisted in the equal sharing of fish and bread. Thus, a shortage of food was turned into abundance (Matthew 14:15–21).

Challenge

How can we follow Jesus' command to feed the poor, in a way that both safeguards the dignity of those who receive help and strengthens their ability to feed themselves?

Questions

- What does it mean in our society of abundance and consumption when we pray "give us this day our daily bread"?
- Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev said: "The question of bread for myself is a material question, but the question of bread for my neighbour is a spiritual question." What does the hunger of others have to do with faith and spiritual life?

Prayer

*Lord Jesus Christ,
you are the bread of life.
Break the yoke of injustice.
The earth is yours.
Teach us to cultivate it with
wisdom and care.
Help us to share our daily bread.*

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



Goal 3: GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

In many ways, we regard health as both personal and private. Our health is influenced by our lifestyle and our genetics, and it is a private matter between doctor and patient. At the same time, everyone's health is part of a global system and international politics. Diseases know no borders, and a medical discovery that saves lives is often the result of research conducted in a distant country. We have a shared responsibility to find solutions that give everyone the best conditions to enjoy good health, and that is what Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 is all about.

Half of the world's population does not have access to basic health services.⁵ Maternal and child mortality, malaria, tuberculosis, AIDS, cancer, problems related to substance abuse, antibiotic resistance, mental illness ... The list of health-related issues that must be solved is long. But fortunately, we are making continuous progress. Many of the diseases that claim lives today, especially in developing countries, are diseases that can be prevented and treated.

If we can secure access to medicines and health services at a price that people can afford, we will have come a long way towards achieving this goal. When proper healthcare is available, it increases the chances of children surviving their first five years and of mothers surviving birth. If more people receive sex education, access to contraception and freedom from sexual violence, we will be able to improve the situation even more. New research is also making great strides. People are now able to live with many diseases that would have been a death sentence twenty years ago. If we can engage people on a global scale to commit to research, innovation and technology with the aim of solving the world's health problems, could we be closer than we would otherwise imagine to ensuring healthy lives for everyone?

Biblical reflection

"A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones" (Proverbs 17:22). This saying shows us that the Bible does not talk about health in modern medical terms, but rather about well-being and good relationships. The biblical expression "shalom", often translated "peace", encompasses this understanding of well-being. This is also how the World Council of Churches defines health: "Health is a dynamic state of well being of the individual and society, of physical, mental, spiritual, economic, political, and social well being – of being in harmony with each other, with the material environment and with God."

The healings that Jesus performed affirm this holistic understanding of health. People are set free, not only from physical suffering, but also from exclusion, stigmatisation and shame. Many of them suffered from chronic diseases; often, it was the most vulnerable who were healed by Jesus. They had their dignity affirmed; Jesus raised them up to new life and restored relationships.

From this perspective, good health implies just and equal access to basic health services, especially for people at the margins of society. This is how Jesus acts when healing (John 9), empowering people to cope with their situation and its challenges. That is what it means to promote good health, as our health does not have to be perfect, but good enough for a good and meaningful life.

Challenge

Migrants are an example of a group who can often be in a vulnerable health situation, and many lack access to primary healthcare. Can you think of any other groups who are in a difficult situation in terms of health, either in your local community or elsewhere in the world? What can you do to improve opportunities for these groups to lead healthy lives?

Questions

- Discuss the claim that health in the biblical sense is primarily about being whole and having good relationships.
- In the context of international ecumenical work, health justice is an important issue. Is it a relevant topic in our context?

Prayer

*Good Holy Spirit, breath of life in our body,
We pray for all those who live with pain,
And fight against the forces of death.
Teach us to share hope, comfort and medical care.
We thank you for everything that strengthens life
and health.*

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



Goal 4: QUALITY EDUCATION

Being able to go to school, to learn, to develop and grow together with others, to see and be seen, are fundamentally important for all children, both here and now and in terms of their opportunities for the rest of their lives. For many girls, schooling also represents an alternative to early marriage and pregnancy. The right to education is enshrined in the 1948 text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in a number of human rights conventions. Millennium Development Goal 2 stated: "Ensure that children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling." Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 sets an even more ambitious goal by stating that we should "ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education".

Quality is an important keyword here. The fact that many children don't have the opportunity to go to school is a big problem. But the fact that many children complete years of schooling without learning basic skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic is also a problem. In many countries, the quality of the schools can vary widely, and good schools are largely reserved for children from financially well-off families. Education cannot stop at the primary school level either. Both vocational education and higher education are important for good social development. In order to achieve the goal of good education for all, the principle that no one should be left behind is crucial: Everyone should have the opportunity to go to school and receive an education regardless of gender, functional ability, group affiliation and social status.

SDG 4 also implies that pupils and students should be able to have a sustainable lifestyle, enjoy human rights and experience peace and democracy, so that they have the best possible foundation for living as responsible citizens who protect the earth and human rights.

Biblical reflection

The Bible does not use the terms "school" and "education" as we use them today. However, it frequently talks about learning, guidance and growing in wisdom; the Book of Proverbs, for instance, may serve as a textbook in the "the school of life". It begins with the following statement: "For learning about wisdom and instruction, for understanding words of insight, for gaining instruction in wise dealing, righteousness, justice, and equity; to teach shrewdness to the simple, knowledge and prudence to the young—let the wise also hear and gain in learning, and the discerning acquire skill" (1:2–5).

That passage provides a solid point of departure for quality education and lifelong learning! Firstly, because it brings together knowledge and wisdom. Secondly, it highlights ethical insight and responsible conduct. From this perspective, education is learning to do what is good – for the benefit of society.

According to the Bible's understanding of being human, everyone has the right to education – independent of gender, social status, economy or ethnicity. To prevent children from receiving an education implies denying them their human dignity and condemning them to a life in poverty and exclusion. We are all created in God's image and capacitated with gifts to be unfolded. This is how active citizenship is built; this is how sustainable societies are constructed!

Challenge

How can you help raise awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)? Can you, for example, help spread information about these goals in your church, in organisations, or in your local community?

Prayer

*Father, you are the source of wisdom,
Let us share our knowledge.
Give all children the opportunity to
play and learn
With open eyes and an open heart,
So we can find our way in this frightening yet wonderful world.*

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

Questions

- Does the Bible give us any basis for saying what good education is?
- Discuss the claim that denying children access to education is the same as denying them social benefits.

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.



Goal 6:

CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

The great civilisations that have emerged throughout history have been based near water. Mesopotamia had the Euphrates and the Tigris; Egypt had the Nile. Water has always been vital to individuals and fundamental to well-functioning societies. We must have drinking water to live, and when the only water available is not clean, it can cause disease. This is what makes the fact that one in nine people worldwide does not have access to clean water so serious.⁸

One in three people do not have access to proper sanitation.⁹ In order for sanitary conditions to be considered good and safe, toilets must be built so that human skin does not come into contact with excrement, and people must be able to wash their hands after using the toilet. Furthermore, toilets must be screened off to ensure privacy, and it must be safe to get to the toilet. In many places, for example, women are exposed to assault and rape if they go to the toilet after dark. In poor countries, many people die because of diseases associated with poor sanitation. They die from treatable and preventable diseases.

The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) states that we must ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all by 2030. The good news is that there is enough water for all people. The challenge is to distribute the water and keep it clean. It is relatively easy to build safe, hygienic toilets. The challenge is to spread awareness about how this can be done. Achieving this goal is a prerequisite for achieving many of the other SDGs. Not least, it is fundamental to the dignity of individuals.

Biblical reflection

The people we meet in the Bible, lived in an environment exposed to drought. Their experiences had taught them that all forms of life depend on access to clean water. Water is a gift from above, both in a physical and a spiritual sense. The narrative about the Garden of Eden starts by describing the earth as barren and arid before God "caused it to rain upon the earth". Then a stream rose from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground. Now the condition for life was at hand, and God "formed man from the dust of the ground" so that he became "a living being" (Genesis 2:4-7). We then hear about the river that provided water to all life in the garden; it divided into four branches, as a reminder that water is to be shared and not to be restricted to one course to which only few have access.

In times of draught, the powerful know how to seize control over water resources, ignoring the poor and their needs. The Bible tells about the prophets who condemned such unjust behaviour and announced a time when everyone who thirsts, would be given free access to water (Isaiah 55:1). Clean water is God's good gift for the well-being of all; it is unjust to make it a commodity reserved for the privileged few.

Question

- How can we justify the right to clean water ethically and theologically?

Challenge

Ensuring that people have access to clean water and proper sanitation is fundamental to progress. The more a topic is discussed in the public space, the more likely it is that politicians will raise the issue in international forums. Is there anything you can do to raise awareness of SDG 6?

Prayer

*Lord Jesus Christ, you give us living water,
Give us also a thirst for justice,
And quench our thirst.
Teach us to build a world where there is dignity for everyone.*

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



Goal 7:

AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

As humans, we burn energy and use our bodies for work. Throughout the ages, we have also used the earth's resources to extract energy. People have used mills at waterfalls to grind grain, fire to heat food, wind to sail the seas. The energy sources that the earth has to offer have led to positive progress for many people. At the same time, the most commonly used energy sources are very harmful to the climate and the environment, which is why it is so important for the global community to choose clean energy – now and for the future. Then we can solve the challenge of poverty and the climate crisis without one solution coming at the expense of the other.

The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) states that all people should have access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services by 2030. According to the World Health Organization, three billion people use smoke-filled stoves or fires to cook food, and about four million people die each year as a result of this harmful smoke.¹⁰

If we are to achieve this goal, a major effort is needed to promote clean energy, we must make clean energy more efficient, and we must ensure that everyone can buy electricity at a price they can afford. Everyone must have the opportunity to cook without any harmful smoke and to do their homework after the sun has set.

Biblical reflection

The word “energy” comes from Greek and means strength or power, what a person needs in order to perform a task. This is how the New Testament uses this term, in particular with reference to the power of God that empowers people to fulfil the ministry to which they are called (Colossians 1:29).

This adds an important perspective to our modern use of “energy”. Energy is a resource that we receive as a gift of nature and that we are called to manage for the benefit of all. Admittedly, we are able to store energy and measure its power, however always in ways that depend on a shining sun, on winds blowing and on rain pouring down.

Jesus reminds us that God “makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:45). God sees to the sources of energy in nature that they benefit everyone, as gracious expressions of the life-giving rhythm of days and seasons in creation. It includes a vision of original purity, taking form as a vocation to care for creation and engage in promoting a society that ensures equal access to all to these gifts and their energy as we strive for a good life.

Questions

- When is energy clean? Discuss this from an ethical perspective.
- What will it take to be able to say that everyone has equal access to clean energy?

Challenge

Can you do anything to reduce the consumption of fossil fuels – as individuals, as groups or through political influence? Or can you perhaps do something on all three levels?

Prayer

*Lord, you who have given us your creation in all its power,
With gushing waterfalls and warming sunshine,
Help us manage this energy for everyone's benefit.
Teach us to take care of nature's gifts.
Provide light and warmth in homes all over the world.*

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

Goal 8:

DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



For people of working age who are healthy and not in education, it is important to have a job to go to. When we work, we contribute to society while at the same time earning a living and developing ourselves. When the division of labour in society is implemented in a good way, it represents humanity at its best. We contribute with different abilities and ideas, with care and muscle power, and together this becomes a machine that serves the many needs of society.

Unfortunately, too many people work under poor conditions and they do not earn enough to get out

of poverty. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 states that countries must promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. Developing countries must grow financially in order to lift the population out of poverty. Then there must be decent jobs for everyone, and there must be sustainable economic growth. That the work should be decent is essential. Because the division of labour can also represent humanity at its worst. When people are forced into slave labour or exploited to work hard for lousy wages, it equates to suppression and not progress.

Biblical reflection

“The labourer deserves to be paid”, Jesus said when sending out the disciples (Luke 10:7). These words refer to every honest worker, and they are certainly based on Jesus’ own experiences as carpenter (Mark 6:3). Since his youth, he most likely had worked together with his father; he knew well working conditions that could be inhuman, with daily hard toil for an uncertain salary at the employer’s mercy. Such experiences nurtured the prophetic vision of a time when people “shall build houses and inhabit them” (Isaiah 65:21).

In the parable about the labourers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1–16) Jesus turns upside down the ruling scale of how to value work. By letting the last be the first, Jesus claims the dignity and equal importance of all, independent of social roles and productivity. The value of work and the inalienable value of the labourer are mutually affirmed. It is indecent to reduce a worker to just a cog in the wheel of production or in the pursuit of profit.

The Bible sees work as service – serving God, one’s neighbour and all of creation (Genesis 2:15). Work is thus a good thing; through work we realise God’s vocation. Growth is a natural consequence of decent work; sustainable growth is growth for the well-being of all and also for nature.

Challenge

Do you know if anything you own was made by slaves? What can you do, together with others, to combat slavery and degrading conditions in clothing production or other industries that we depend on?

Questions

- What does the concept of decent mean? What values does it express?
- Some perceive economic growth as a social benefit, others consider it a social problem. Do the Bible and Christian faith provide any basis to form an opinion about this?

Prayer

*Lord Jesus Christ, our brother, who walks with us through our workdays and weekends,
Let us all participate with the energy and abilities we have.
Let us share work and responsibilities,
Without coercion and with joy.
Give growth where needed, and teach us to be thankful and settle for enough.*

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

Goal 9:

INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



Industry, innovation and infrastructure – three words which have been, and will continue to be, of great importance for the development of our modern society. This goal states that we must build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation.

Infrastructure is the underlying structure needed to make society work. This includes, among other things, roads, railways, airports, water supply, sewers, power grids and mobile networks. Innovation is often associated with inventions, but it is more comprehensive than that. Innovation is about creating social change. Thomas Edison's invention of the light bulb is one example, and the development of the Internet another. For a new invention to become an innovation, society must facilitate change.

Many poor countries lack industry and infrastructure, and getting this in place plays an important role in the development of these countries. One problem worldwide is that much of our industry and infrastructure rely on fossil fuels. The task of the global community is to ensure that poor countries receive industry and infrastructure, and to replace environmentally harmful schemes with sustainable solutions. For this to happen, we must have innovation!

Biblical reflection

The Bible understands creation as a continuing process, and not in the first place as an event long time ago. The Book of Psalms praises God as creator and provider, related to the experiences of each new day and its gracious promise of life. "When you send forth your spirit, they [all beings] are created; and you renew the face of the ground" (Psalm 104:30).

Time never stands still. As individuals and societies, we constantly experience changes, often as growth and movement. It is not possible to stop time or move backwards to times that used to be.

Those who plough, must not look back, Jesus asserts (Luke 9:62). To plough means to prepare the soil for growth and for the future. Many of the parables that Jesus told point in the same direction; the parable of the mustard seed that grew and became a huge tree (Luke 13:31–32) underscores the powerful potential hidden in a tiny seed. Faith gives reason to hope, including hope in a future with better conditions for justice and peace.

Innovation is the same as renewal. All God's creatures carry in themselves the power for renewal and transformation. As God's co-workers, we all share in this power; each one of us is called to transformation (Romans 12:2), in our own life and in the society to which we belong.

Challenge

The world has evolved thanks to large and small inventions from far and near. Do you have an idea for something that could solve a problem or make society better? Do you know of anyone working on innovation for a sustainable world?

Questions

- Give examples of where renewal has led to positive change, creating a better society for everyone to live in. What are the characteristics of this kind of renewal?
- How would you describe good and sustainable infrastructure?

Prayer

*Holy Spirit, Wisdom, inspire us
And let us use our abilities and ideas for the common good.
Help us build bridges and communities,
Make plans and roads,
So that people can meet and be satisfied
And nature can continue to flourish.*

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



Goal 10:

REDUCED INEQUALITIES

The fact that some people are poor and some are rich is something that children spontaneously perceive as unfair and wrong. As adults, do we learn to be more accepting of this fact? The goal of reducing inequalities was not part of the Millennium Development Goals. It has been incorporated into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) both because inequality is seen as a problem in itself and because reduced inequalities is a tool for fighting poverty.

When the gap between rich and poor becomes too great in a society, it can undermine the trust between people and people’s trust in those who govern. In this way, great inequality can also have a negative impact on democracy. Uncertainty and xenophobia can also increase due to inequalities, conflict levels can increase, and extreme poverty can lead to environmental exploitation.

An important measure to reduce inequalities is to have a tax policy that helps equalise society, where those with large wealth and high incomes pay the most tax. Good and fair welfare schemes such as pensions, welfare rights and health and education systems are also crucial. In poor countries, economic growth is important, but this growth must be inclusive, by giving employees a living wage, for example. At the global level, we need financial transparency that makes it possible to tax the wealthiest people and large multinational companies.

We have a lot of knowledge about what it takes to reduce inequalities, but there must be major changes at several levels to make it happen. Perhaps the most important question is whether politicians and people in general have will to change?

Biblical reflection

The prophet Amos was active in Israel around years 750 before Christ. This was a time when the country, also called the northern kingdom, experienced relative peace and prosperity thanks to both military and economic success. The wealth, however, was not accessible for all; the powerful elite increased their wealth at the cost of the poor. This is how Amos describes the life of the rich: “Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory, and lounge on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock, and calves from the stall” (Amos 6:4). The fact is that their wealth is based on injustice and abuse of power; they “oppress the poor” and “crush the needy” (Amos 4:1). They conduct dishonest trade and force the poor into economic slavery (Amos 8:4–6).

Experience shows that economic growth often brings with it increasing inequalities, among individuals and groups. Economic inequalities lead to corresponding social differences, evaluating people according to what they possess and consume. In Amos’ view, a welfare based on inequality and abuse of power is not sustainable, and it is subject to God’s judgment and doomed to fail.

There is, however, an alternative: “Seek good and not evil, that you may live!” Amos announces. And he adds: “Establish justice in the gate!” (Amos 5:14–15). Equality presupposes goodness and equal relations; sustainability in addition demands justice and peace, not at least in economy and politics.

Questions

- What problems does rising inequality create in relation to sustainable development?
- The Old Testament prophets criticised the elite of that time for building their wealth on injustices and abuse of power. Is that a relevant issue in our time?

Challenge

Which actors in your local community help to reduce the economic inequalities between citizens? Can you do anything to strengthen this work?

Is there anything you can do to put inequality (locally, nationally or internationally) on the political agenda?

Prayer

*Lord Jesus Christ, you do not discriminate between people,
Make us more like you.
Grant us wisdom and the will to share.
Let greed be lost to justice,
And give us the courage to accept one another across our divides.*

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

Goal 11:

SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



In many poor countries, the population of cities is growing faster than the infrastructure and institutions. The development of basic social goods such as roads, sewer systems, healthcare services and schools does not keep pace with population growth. The result is poverty and expanding slums. We cannot abolish poverty in the world without taking the challenges of cities seriously.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 states that countries must make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. This means making cities environmentally

friendly and comfortable to live in for the residents. Not least, this applies to vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities. No one should be left behind. In other words, universal design of cities is crucial. Cities need environmentally friendly means of transport, good systems for waste management, green lungs, safe housing and welfare services. Not least, there must be long-term planning that ensures that urban development keeps up with population growth. At the same time, it is important that individuals engage in their local environment and build good communities from the bottom up. Good and sustainable cities and communities must be created in a cooperation between the authorities and each individual citizen.

Biblical reflection

The Bible contains an ambivalent view on the city, often presenting it as a place of injustice and sin. The city creates differences among its inhabitants, its powerful explore the poor, and it shows no mercy for those considered expendable. Not without reason, Cain, who murdered his brother, is portrayed as the founder of the first city (Genesis 4:17). The Bible draws a line from Sodom in Genesis to Babylon in its last book, Revelation.

At the same time, the Bible praises Jerusalem, the city of peace. Here the Lord dwells; in the last days, all nations shall stream to it in their longing for justice and peace. "They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:4).

Jerusalem, however, did not manage to live up to this vision. As in most cities, evil reigned, which caused the prophets' condemnation (Isaiah 1:21-23; Jeremiah 6:6-8).

Even so, the vision of the city of peace was kept alive. The Book of Revelation does not only talk about Babylon, the symbol of the power-hungry metropole spreading fear and destruction, but also about the new Jerusalem, a city with gates always open giving everyone access to its beauty and riches (Revelation 21:9-27). While Babylon is doomed to downfall, Jerusalem is sustainable and will remain forever.

Challenge

Do your local politicians focus on sustainable development? Can you influence them to improve on doing so?

Questions

- Is the Bible's ambiguous view of cities relevant in our time? Do cities have particular characteristics that promote differences between people?
- How can the vision of the New Jerusalem inspire our notion of sustainable cities and societies?

Prayer

*Good Holy Spirit, you are present everywhere people meet,
Walk through our streets and dance in our squares.
Help us to build safe cities with room for everyone.
Let plants and trees, hopes and futures blossom
and bloom where we live.*

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



Goal 12:

RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 12 is about how we can consume and produce goods in a way that ensures the continued availability of resources for future generations. Each and every one of us can help us achieve that goal.

The goods we buy are part of a global market where people and the environment are affected throughout the chain of production. Think about all the things that need to happen for you to buy a T-shirt. Someone cultivated, picked and processed the cotton. Then, the cotton became a garment in a factory where someone made and packed it for shipment. Furthermore, the T-shirt must be transported to a store. We must focus on sustainability at all levels if we are to succeed in reducing the use of resources. If we, as consumers, choose products that take this into account, in addition to choosing second-hand items and products with a long shelf life whenever we can, we will have taken important steps towards achieving this goal.

At the same time, consumers cannot take full responsibility for ensuring that the chain of production is sustainable. Authorities and businesses need to make sure that consumers are actually able to choose products that are produced in an environmentally friendly way. Waste must be handled in a responsible manner, and there must be environmental requirements for production and management. If we really are to achieve this goal, simply having the option of choosing a sustainable alternative may not be enough – all alternatives will need to be sustainable.

Biblical reflection

When God created man and woman, he told them to subdue the earth and “have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Genesis 1:28). Some interpret this saying as a divine green light to exploit nature and consume its resources. This is obviously a misinterpretation; the right of disposal is given as integral part of the mandate to be good stewards of creation.

The second narrative of creation, the one about the Garden of Eden, clearly affirms this view. God gives Adam the task to “till and keep” the garden (Genesis 2:15). To be created in God’s image implies communicating with God: God speaks to men and women and commissions them to take care of the gifts of creation; they respond through responsible action.

However, humans are easily lured to self-centred consumption and irresponsible stewardship, as tells the story about the two in the Garden of Eden. The Bible contains many similar narratives, such as the one Jesus told about the rich farmer who thought that wealth and consumption was the certain way to a good life (Luke 12:13–21). That is a delusion, Jesus states, and he warns: “Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”

Challenge

Is there anything you can do in your local community to help each other live more sustainably?

Questions

- When the people of Israel received bread from the Lord in the desert, they were told to gather enough for that day (Exodus 16:15–20). Can this story teach us something about responsible consumption?
- Discuss what is meant by responsible production.

Prayer

*Lord, our good shepherd,
Let us not want for anything, and show us what we have.
Teach us to value our resources,
Reuse and make what is old new again.
We thank you for all your generous gifts.*

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

Goal 13:

CLIMATE ACTION

The earth's climate has always changed, but not as quickly or dramatically as we are experiencing today. Emissions of greenhouse gases such as CO₂ and methane are causing the atmosphere to warm up, leading to higher average temperatures and more extreme weather. Across the globe, people are experiencing more droughts and floods and more extreme weather phenomena in general. The consequences are very serious: Drought causes crops to fail and drinking water to dry up, while floods and hurricanes destroy people's homes and livelihoods. More and more people are being forced to flee their homes when water disappears and their livestock die. Climate change is fundamentally unfair. The rich countries are responsible for most of the emissions, but the poor countries are the hardest hit by the consequences.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 13 states that we must take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. Unfortunately, human-induced climate change is already underway, but we can still slow it down. In order to prevent the most dramatic changes, we must ensure that the average global temperature does not increase by more than 1.5 degrees. It is possible to achieve this target, but this will require the countries of the world to collectively reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by 50 per cent before 2030.¹¹ If we are going to make this happen, we need to work together in a global effort, where individuals, civil society, the business community, countries and international bodies all take their share of the responsibility.



Biblical reflection

In the world of the Bible, the powers of nature appear sometimes as personal beings that may become demonic in their destructive strength. The disciples feared that the storm and the waves would drag them into the darkness of the sea (Matthew 8:23–27). We also sometimes experience nature as capricious; when exposed to the powers that it may trigger, we realise that we are small and vulnerable.

This became dramatic in times with prolonged drought and crop failure. The Bible tells about climate changes in Egypt and about Joseph who acted as a wise political leader when engaging in resilience, disaster preparedness and relief work, assisting the victims of “the seven years of famine” (Genesis 41). Thanks to this response, the country and its inhabitants survived. Today's political agenda likewise requires similar measures responding to the dramatic consequences of climate change, in particular for the poorest and most vulnerable.

In contrast to the times of the Old Testament, today's climate change is largely caused by humans. We cannot blame nature and its caprices, we must recognise our shared responsibility, and not least, express this responsibility through faith and action. Affirming our belief in God's continued reign over the world, God who once brought the Great Flood to an end and established the rainbow as a sign of the future and hope (Genesis 9:11–17).

Challenge

We cannot solve the climate crisis unless politicians take action. How can you challenge politicians at the local and national level to cut greenhouse gas emissions in line with the Paris Agreement?

Questions

- How can our faith in God as Creator motivate us to help stop climate change and to improve people's readiness to adapt to climate change?
- The Old Testament portrays the rainbow as a sign of God's covenant and his promise that he will not destroy creation. Does this understanding have relevance today?

Prayer

*Lord, we feel your creation groaning
Under the weight of our incessant striving.
Grant us the grace to help us turn around,
Even when the changes cost.
Along with the rest of creation, we yearn for life
and health for our earth.
Give us strength in our struggle and our hope.*

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

Goal 14:

LIFE BELOW WATER

Three quarters of the earth is covered by water. Most of this is seawater, while only 2.5 per cent is fresh water. The deepest parts of the sea are the least explored areas on the planet. What is hiding far down there? What forms of life have we not yet discovered? What we know for sure is that people have always harvested the resources of the oceans and lakes, but we have not been as good at taking care of these blue treasures.

In practice, the sea is used as a massive garbage dump. According to the UN Environment Programme, eight million tonnes of plastic end up in the sea each year.¹² This plastic has become a major threat to fish, birds and other animals living in or near the sea. Goal 14 states that countries must conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. Reducing marine pollution, avoiding overfishing and protecting marine ecosystems are important measures for countries and for industry. This is an area where international cooperation is crucial. It also means that you and I must become more aware of how important it is to cherish life under water and to take action to preserve it.



Biblical reflection

"Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great [...] These all look to you to give them their food in due season" (Psalms 104:25-27). This is how the Bible describes life below water. First as a rich diversity with a multitude of life far beyond human knowledge and imagination. Then as an arena for God's care. God is the giver of life in all parts of creation. For that reason, every being praises God's name. Life is much more than human life; our lives are woven into a web much larger than what we ourselves oversee.

Our modern way of thinking tends to consider the unknown as less important. What we do not see, we need not care about. That may be the reason why we fill the seas with waste, in a way that threatens life below water. Or, we may consider the seas as being of interest only if they serve our interests, giving us the freedom to drain their resources, quickly and efficiently.

Faith in God the creator maintains that all life has value in itself, and that there is no sustainable exploitation without sustainable management. This also includes life under water.

Questions

- Psalm 104 encourages awe of life below water. What could be the reason why this topic has rarely received attention in Christian preaching?
- How can awe of life underwater come to expression in churches and in society?

Challenge

How can you change your consumption and your daily routines to reduce the amount of plastic waste that makes its way to the ocean?

Do you know of companies that you can challenge to reduce their contribution to plastic waste in the ocean?

Prayer

*Lord, you who know the depths of the sea,
Forgive us for our pollution and destruction.
Grant us wisdom and new chances
To let the fish swim and the waves break freely,
And to harvest the oceans wisely and with gratitude.*

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

Goal 15:

LIFE ON LAND

The earth is diverse and colourful. Estimates of how many species exist, range from two million to thousands of millions!¹³ Certainly, humans share this planet with a myriad of plants and animals. The biological diversity and ecosystems on earth are fundamental to our life. We need the cycles that give us oxygen to breathe and clean water to drink, we need to harvest the earth to get food.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 15 is about taking care of this enormous wealth. We need to create a lifestyle and build communities that do not threaten biodiversity and destroy ecosystems. Unfortunately, we have a long way to go.

We consume much more of the earth's resources than is sustainable. Removing a small piece of nature, to build a road for example, does not necessarily have a major impact in itself. But when more and more pieces of nature are destroyed, the sum of this destruction has catastrophic consequences. Every five seconds, rainforest is disappearing corresponding to the size of a football pitch.¹⁴ That's 12 football pitches per minute, 720 per hour and 17,280 a day. Deforestation is a disaster for biodiversity, for the people who live in the forests and for the climate. Halting deforestation and restoring degraded forests is an important part of SDG 15.

Biblical reflection

"You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills, giving drink to every wild animal; the wild asses quench their thirst. By the streams, the birds of the air have their habitation; they sing among the branches. From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work" (Psalm 104:10–13). The Bible is generous in describing the magnitude and beauty of creation; always praising God who cares about all life, including birds and animals.

The Greek New Testament uses the word *oikoumene* when speaking about the whole inhabited world (for instance in Luke 2:1). This word comes from *oikos* (house) and refers to the global household and all that belongs to it – humans, fauna and flora. Both "economy" and "ecology" are rooted in this concept and should be understood within this totality.

Today, both the diversity and the balance in nature are threatened. A wounded creation "has been groaning in labour pains" and is longing for its redemption (Romans 8:21–22). To care for creation means to join in praising God, affirming that "the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it" (Psalm 24:1). It also means to acknowledge our belonging to a household with kinship ties to all forms of life – as the gracious gift of being and a vocation to serve.

Questions

- The verb "to steward" means to manage property on behalf of someone else. What do we mean when we say that humans have a special responsibility to steward creation and all life on earth?
- What does it mean when we say that we humans are related to all life on earth?

Challenge

Preserving life on land is a matter for international, national and local politics. Can you think of examples of dilemmas where nature conservation is pitted against other interests? What can we do to become better at taking care of nature?

Prayer

*Father God, you who have given life to everything that crawls, creeps and flies,
Awaken our awe of all living things.
Help us tread carefully and let diversity flourish.
Thank you for everything that belongs to the whole.
Teach us to find our place in your teeming world.*

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

Goal 16: PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



Some people live in well-functioning countries governed by the rule of law, with freedom of expression and voting rights. Others live in countries with extensive corruption and mismanagement and may not even have a birth certificate. Some live a safe life without fear of abuse. Others live in constant fear of violence. The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of peace, justice and strong institutions is perhaps the most comprehensive of all 17 SDGs. According to this goal, the world community should promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

One of the sub-goals under SDG 16 is to significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere. The World Health Organization defines violence as the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation. Violence is exercised in very different contexts: violence in close relationships, violence against children, sexual violence, blind violence, war, terror, torture and other human rights violations. It is obvious that we must work on many levels if we are going to succeed in reducing violence. We owe it to everyone who experiences violence to do everything we can to achieve this goal.

Biblical reflection

Peace and justice are key terms in the Bible. They often appear together, reminding us that there is no justice without peace, and equally, no peace without justice. Both presuppose relationships marked by openness and care: "Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other" (Psalm 85:11).

According to the Bible, both peace and justice are anchored in God's care for creation. "Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful" (Psalm 116:5). Here, justice is not perceived as a cold juridical principle focusing on guilt and punishment, but as action envisaging protection of human dignity and ensuring frameworks for a good and meaningful life. Equally, peace is more than the absence of war; the Hebrew term "shalom" expresses harmony, well-being and joy in good and safe relations.

Against this background, Paul states that the kingdom of God is "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17), gifts that Jesus brought near, and that faith anticipates. At the same time, peace and justice are values that we as Christians are called to promote, motivated by the hope that, by the end of time, they will be fully realised. "In accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home" (2 Peter 3:13).

Challenge

Do you have suggestions for things that can be done to help people experiencing violence in their community?

Is there anything your government can do to combat violence, whether it be war, human rights violations or other types of violence?

Questions

- What characterises the biblical understanding of peace and justice compared to the common use of these terms? Cf. Isaiah 32:17 «The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.»
- Discuss the statement: "There can be no real peace without justice and no real justice without peace." Use concrete examples from our modern times.

Prayer

*God of peace,
We pray that everyone who is subjected to violence and abuse
Be raised up and find peace.
Preserve our hearts
And strengthen the institutions that preserve justice among us.
Lead our feet onto the path of peace.*

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



Goal 17:

PARTNER-SHIPS FOR THE GOALS

The future is wide open. No one can know what the world will look like in 2030. But one thing is for sure: everything made by humans can be changed by humans. Society is not defined by the laws of nature, it is shaped by the people who take part in it. World history has been created through the choices of the people who have come before us, and likewise the future will be shaped by the choices we make today.

Goal 17 is about how we can work together to achieve all the other goals. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are comprehensive and ambitious, and all sectors of society need to be involved in them. All countries must take responsibility. Civil society, you and I, religious communities and organisations must take responsibility. The private sector, both large and small companies, must take responsibility. The UN, the World Bank and other international organisations must take responsibility. Not least, countries, companies and organisations that manage extensive resources must take responsibility for achieving the goals everywhere, including in poor countries and societies. If we are to achieve major changes and achieve the SDGs, we must work together. It is possible to move mountains, but we must start by carrying stones. And no one can bear the burden alone.

Biblical reflection

The Bible gives clear directions for what characterises a good society: Above all justice and peace, inclusiveness that secures the rights and participation of the lowly, and respect and care for vulnerable people – widows, orphans and strangers (Deuteronomy 10:17–19).

The government has the prime responsibility for guaranteeing these goals. A good king promotes righteousness and sees to the well-being of the defenceless (Psalm 72:4). In addition, every citizen shares a corresponding responsibility for building the society. The biblical understandings of being human and of society are related, they affirm each other mutually in the sense that all of us are called to promote what is right and good for all. "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

This is done by working together with all people of good will, also with individuals and groups that we traditionally have not considered as natural partners when engaged in social activities. It implies a willingness to cross social borders when working for the well-being of the community. This is how the prophet Jeremiah urged his countrymen exiled in Babylon to contribute to peace and well-being, and to pray for the city; "for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jeremiah 29:7).

Questions

- How is your country engaged in achieving the SDGs? What space is provided for churches and civil society?

Challenge

Which partners are relevant to you (such as your congregation, your church or an organisation) in the work to promote the SDGs, and what opportunities and challenges will that partnership provide? How can you maintain the uniquely Christian perspective in such partnerships with other social actors?

Prayer

*Lord, Father of all, you who created us for each other,
Let us understand that we are all sisters and brothers.
Forgive us when we forget this truth,
And reawaken our brotherly and sisterly love.
Let us walk side by side towards a better future.
Let your kingdom come!*

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

End Notes

- 1 UN (2015) The Millennium Development Goals Report. Retrieved from [http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20\(July%201\).pdf](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20(July%201).pdf)
- 2 In 2017, there were 821 million people suffering from malnutrition worldwide. The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (2018) The state of food security and nutrition in the world. Retrieved from <http://www.fao.org/3/I9553EN/i9553en.pdf>
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 The World Health Organization (2017, 13 December). World Bank and WHO: Half the world lacks access to essential health services, 100 million still pushed into extreme poverty because of health expenses. Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/news-room/detail/13-12-2017-world-bank-and-who-half-the-world-lacks-access-to-essential-health-services-100-million-still-pushed-into-extreme-poverty-because-of-health-expenses>
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