



THE FINNISH EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN MISSION'S
INTERNATIONAL CHURCH COOPERATION PROGRAMME
2013–2015





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1. Introduction

The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission carries out church cooperation, development cooperation and disaster relief in various countries. We have a partnership agreement with the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs for carrying out development cooperation work: this is the basis for our development cooperation programme 2011–2016. Both our development cooperation programme and this church cooperation programme are based on FELM's strategy for the years 2010–2015.

This church cooperation programme describes the components of FELM's church cooperation abroad and what it aims to achieve. Firstly, it outlines the Biblical basis, principles and modes of operation. It then describes the contents of our church cooperation: what it is, what it aims to achieve and the particular focus areas of this programme period.

2. Our Church Cooperation around the World

FELM's guidelines state that our mission is to participate, as an international actor of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church, in the worldwide work of the Triune God, through proclaiming the gospel among those who are not Christians and practicing love for our neighbours.

As a mission organisation of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church, FELM is committed to the Church's creed, to its ecclesiastical order and to the major ecumenical agreements.

FELM's mission work serves the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church, its congregations and churches in other countries as part of the worldwide Church of Christ. All congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland are community members of FELM. FELM contributes to the realization of the mission strategy of the Church and works in collaboration with the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches.

FELM's theological principles and cooperation basis is explained in the document Faith and Mission – Shared Commitment (2001). According to this document, mission refers to the Triune God's own mission. God has called the people he created and redeemed to be his co-workers. God's mission in the world is ongoing. FELM participates in this mission as one called equally with its partners around the world.



FELM's strategy for the years 2010–2015 expresses our vision as follows: "God's love creates hope and renewal and leads to people living responsible lives". FELM's mission statement is: "We live out God's love in words and deeds. We proclaim the Gospel, defend human rights and work towards the eradication of poverty".

The aim of FELM's church cooperation is to realize God's love in a comprehensive manner, through words and deeds



3. Biblical basis

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." Luke 4: 18–19

FELM's work is based on the mission of the Triune God, in which we have been called to participate (Matthew 28: 18–20, Mark 16: 15, John 20: 21, Acts 1: 8). We believe in the Father, who still creates new things and sustains his creation. The Father sent Jesus to bring reconciliation between God and man and between people. He has sent the Holy Spirit, who gives us power to witness concerning the great works of God.

Jesus' invitation to his followers is: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." (John 20: 21). At the beginning of his ministry, in the sermon He gave at the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus explained why the Father had sent him into the world. His sermon can be condensed into three main points: to bring good news to the poor, to free the captives and the oppressed, and to open the eyes of the blind. FELM's mission statement is based on this model which Jesus gave.

We proclaim the Gospel

The opening of eyes is a central theme of Jesus' sermon. He wanted to help people to see God and their neighbours in a new way. Jesus told of the Father, who loves and fights on our behalf, who forgives and atones and who seeks out the marginalized and calls them into a new reality. He calls this new reality the Kingdom of God. The signs of the Kingdom are justice, peace and joy. They become reality through the action of Jesus and his followers and are signs that the Kingdom is coming in its fullness.



God's love is most clearly visible in the crucifixion of Jesus, when he allowed himself to be humiliated and despised. Because of the cross, the key word of the Christian message is grace. Grace means that God carries the burden of the rejected and oppressed and gives them hope and a future. This means forgiveness for the guilty, acceptance for those living in shame and courage for those living in fear. Jesus' message about the opening of eyes in Luke's Gospel signifies that we understand God's immense goodness in a new way, and, based on this, see our neighbours through His eyes. We continue to put this teaching into practice in new and ever more challenging situations. We call this practice travelling together.

Church history shows how the Good News has got new sounding boards when it has encountered new cultures. When the Gospel reaches a person, we continually learn more about the vastness of God's love. The vision of the Book of Revelations is of a great throng of people from every nation and language praising God. Our understanding of faith is broadened when new people express it in their own language and from their own cultural perspective.

We defend human rights

When preaching in the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus stated that he had come to proclaim freedom to the captives and the oppressed. He explained this by referring to the account of the leper, Naaman (Luke 4:27). Being a captive does not only refer to being locked up. It can also mean that one's rights are not respected, whether due to one's ethnicity, gender, age, illness, disability or other reasons. A central question in the Gospel is who should be considered a neighbour. This question was asked based on the assumption that there are people who ought not to be considered as neighbours and whose rights do not need to be upheld. Jesus gave his own answer to this question in the form of the parable of the Good Samaritan. He forced his listeners to understand that no one should be discriminated against. In his own ministry this can be seen in the way he sought out those who were worthless in the eyes of society.

Following Jesus' example, the Church has sought out those that, intentionally or unintentionally, have been excluded. This means crossing geographical, social and economic boundaries. Mission work entails seeking out those to whom the message of the boundary-crossing compassion of the Triune God has not been taken. Jesus' example does not allow the Church to exclude anyone.



The message of the Gospel provides a strong basis for defending the human worth of all of mankind and working to tackle discrimination. For this reason, Jesus' followers are called to work bravely against systems and practices that lead to discrimination, together with the most vulnerable.

We work to eradicate poverty

When preaching in Nazareth, Jesus stated that he had come to share the Good News with the poor. In his ministry, he placed the poor at the centre of religious life in a new way. He illustrated poverty by reminding his listeners of the story of the widow of Sarepta (Luke 4:25 – 26). In the society of Jesus' time, widows were among the most vulnerable groups. The ministry of Jesus and of the Early Church brought change to their lives. The Gospel of Luke and Acts tell how they were cared for, how the Church spoke out against their exploitation and how they also had things to teach to others. The poor were not targets of charity but were rather an integral group within the Early Church.

Economic poverty is not a natural law. The Church and its members have often ignored the poor, basing their position on Jesus' words: "The poor you will always have with you". These words are, however, taken out of context. We cannot use them as a justification for not acting. The example of Jesus and his followers shows that we can, and we must, act in order that the Message of God's Kingdom can bring concrete change to the lives of the poorest. This concerns all of creation. Paul talks of the sighs of creation that are the result of the evil and greed of humankind. Among others, climate change, which has been caused by the selfishness of humankind, will create more and more misery in the future. The message of the Church brings new hope to the whole of creation.

4. Principles and working methods

Values

FELM's working methods are based on the organization's values, which are Christian hope, love for one's neighbour, defence of human dignity, trustworthiness and openness.

The Gospel of Christ gives birth to Christian faith, hope and love. God's love leads us to proclaim the Good News and demonstrate love for our neighbours that crosses all boundaries and demands that we defend the rights of the weak and helpless. We treat each individual with respect, emphasizing each person's uniqueness before God. Our working methods are defined by openness, transparency and trust.



Gender equality, the environment, HIV and AIDS, the rights of persons with disabilities and the independence of partner organisations are cross-cutting themes in our work. Through these themes we work towards the eradication of poverty, the honouring of creation, social and gender equality and the realisation of justice for all.

Partnership

FELM's partners are primarily churches, global church bodies, and Christian organisations. FELM's church cooperation around the world is based on the principle of partnership, in which dialogue is important. Our cooperation is structured with the aim of strengthening the administrative, financial and operational independence of our partners.

We listen to, and work alongside, our partners. Partnership means solidarity, carrying one another's burdens and sharing. It also means sharing joy and success and mutual encouragement and support.

Partnerships are strengthened through cooperation agreements, in which we agree the content of cooperation, focus areas and targets. We support our cooperation partners' functional projects, mutual cooperation and the development of their human resources and working capacity. We train and send workers who are committed to Christ to work for our partner organisations and also support international worker exchanges.

The foundation of our work is cooperation between the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church and its congregations. We work, in Finland, with congregations, dioceses and the Church's central administration. Our workers are sent by the Church to serve in the worldwide church of Christ.

We strengthen, build and maintain contact between Finnish and foreign partners through regular dialogue. We also promote dialogue through visits and worker exchanges. We promote the building of networks among partner churches. The focus on networks as one of our working methods leads to a more efficient use of resources. We are open to being enriched by the varied spirituality of our partner churches and to learning new working methods from them that we can use in our own church.



Good governance and the independence of partners

We are committed, in our partnerships, to good governance, openness and transparency. We follow generally accepted principles of good governance, which include joint planning, monitoring of finances and activities, auditing and the evaluation of work.



FELM complies with its ethical and anti-corruption guidelines and requires that its partners do the same. We are also committed to the corresponding guidelines and principles of the Lutheran World Federation and ACT Alliance. FELM is committed to the principles of non-discrimination: no one is discriminated against in FELM's work on the basis of religion, political or ideological views, ethnic background, gender, sexual orientation or age.

The effectiveness and impact of our work is monitored through reports and evaluations. The use of funds channelled to partners is regularly monitored. We assess, together with our partners, the way we behave, operate and communicate. We are ready to change and to modify our working culture in order to promote inter-cultural dialogue and mutual responsibility. Our partner churches challenge us to renew ourselves, to change and to grow.

We support the strengthening of the balanced and sustainable financial management of our partners, as well as their own visions of target-driven and well-planned working methods. Churches develop their theology, administrative methods and organisational structure based on their own starting points and their own resources. A church's structures must correspond to the financial and operational support that members are able to provide. The participation and ownership of members is strengthened through training. Members recognize the church as their own and are prepared to support its work, also financially.

Comprehensiveness

FELM's work is comprehensive. Proclamation and service are inextricably linked. Both verbal witness and the service arising from Christ's love tell of the Good News, which calls for mental, spiritual and social improvement. We see the acts carried out in neighbourly love, as a visible message through which the Gospel becomes a reality.

We work towards the realization of each person's right to lead a decent



life. The death and resurrection of Christ are a sign of God's endless love for people. The Holy Spirit creates a desire in Christians to serve others, following the example of Jesus. The renewing power of the Gospel is made visible in those places where the central values of Christianity – justice, love, equality and compassion – are realized in practice.

Ecumenism and contextualization

By ecumenism, we refer to the recognition of one Christian Church and its role in the world. FELM's church cooperation around the world is part of the ecumenical action of the Finnish Church and is enacted through our work with cooperation churches and ecumenical organisations. The oneness of the Church means, also, that FELM's church cooperation abroad is not separate uni-directional work, but it seeks to connect with churches when fulfilling the Church's common mission.

We use a context-based approach in all our work, meaning that our work stems from the needs, cultures and socio-cultural situations of our partners. The principle of contextualization takes into account social, cultural and religious differences as well as the richness that they can bring to Christian interpretation. We aim to conserve and maintain diversity, so that the Church could, always and everywhere, be like its members and part of people's everyday life. This also aids churches in their cultural and contextual solutions and efforts to ensure a decent life for all. Knowledge of cultural differences makes cooperation easier. It also increases the impact of the work at the international level.

Freedom of religion and interfaith dialogue

FELM defends freedom of religion and actively works towards the honouring of article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

We participate in dialogue on life and faith with representatives of other religions as part of our Christian witness. Meeting together is a positive challenge. Our Christian witness is only received in its fullness when we wish to listen, with an open mind and heart, to what is most important to them. Dialogue with the representatives of other faiths requires both an understanding and internalization of one's own faith and knowledge of the faiths and traditions of others. When we meet together we want to demonstrate interest, compassion and love for our neighbours, as well as inviting them to become disciples of Christ.



FELM supports its partners in their discussions with the representatives of other faiths and also participates in discussions aimed at finding joint means to reduce poverty and achieve peace and reconciliation. We encourage church members, workers and leaders to engage in open-minded dialogue, which is essential if we are to remove mutual prejudice and misunderstanding.

5. The content of church cooperation

Proclaiming the Gospel

The Christian message has the power to transform individuals, communities and whole societies. The Gospel generates life, to which belong the practice of one's faith, freedom from the dominion of sin, an honouring relationship with one's neighbours, equality between people and responsibility for (the whole of) creation.

The goal of proclamation work is to seek out, in particular, those who do not yet or any more know Christ. When cooperating with partners, it is important to consider those who are not reached by church activities and think about how they could be reached. We must consider, without prejudice, how to interpret the Gospel in the language of our time, how to strengthen mutual learning and in what ways to equip churches with leaders, workers and committed volunteers to meet these challenges.

The worldwide 'mission church' witnesses concerning the uniqueness of Jesus in our multifaith, and also faithless, world. FELM supports the mission-thinking, development and action of its partners and is involved in open discussions on religion, representing the values of the Christian faith in a moderate manner.

FELM and its partners are God's fellow workers and therefore prayer, the Bible and trust in the directing of the Holy Spirit are emphasized in their own spiritual lives, actions and proclamation. The other important direction – from person to person – crosses all language, cultural and other barriers. In its cooperation FELM emphasizes the interpretation of faith according to local contexts, without altering the core of the faith, the message of salvation in Jesus Christ.

The gospel needs to be translated so that everyone can understand its content both in terms of language and culture. To this end, FELM supports Bible translation projects in those places where partner organisations find that they are needed, and sends experts in this field to support the work. At the same time, this work promotes literacy and thus increases social equality. FELM supports Christian media work,



strengthening the proclamation of the Gospel in those areas which would otherwise be difficult to reach.

The direction of mission work has partly changed. Southern churches are sending out more and more mission workers. In addition, Christians migrating from one country to another are significant actors in taking the Gospel forward. Cooperation between them and FELM enriches and brings more resources to mission work.



Christian education

The majority of churchgoers around the world are children and young people. The Great Command requires us to provide Christian teaching. Children's and youth work is vital to churches. Through this work, future active members and church leaders are nurtured and churches' sense of community and responsibility are strengthened. The right to a spiritual life and a safe environment in which to grow are children's rights, which FELM, following a rights-based approach, is committed to protecting. FELM supports its partners' development of children's and youth work in such a way that they correspond to the needs of each church and country.

Responsible ways of living and consideration for one's neighbours are learnt in the home and in families. FELM also supports the Christian nurturing that takes place in homes. Christian parents need encouragement and new and inspiring material, especially in countries in which Christianity is a minority faith or its practice is limited.

In different cultures we meet different family models and culturally entrenched ways of thinking and acting. As a result of urbanization and globalization many traditional communities are breaking apart. Marriage and family life are also facing new challenges. In many countries HIV and AIDS are having a major impact on societies and worsening the plight of families. FELM carries out work aimed at strengthening families and marriage, such as family work projects and supporting the training and family counselling provided by partners.

FELM supports and helps develop training for voluntary workers, together with partners. Volunteers are needed to support salaried workers in the church growth process and in the strengthening of spiritual life, especially through activities such as small groups, special target groups and church administration.



FELM benefits from the music, drama and other performing arts arising from the cultures of its cooperation partners and brings them to Finland. Proclaiming the Gospel through art is a growing and inspiring form of work. Music and cultural work's complementarity and cultural exchange are increased to strengthen both education and church service work.

Spiritual work with students is needed, especially in countries in which religion is not included in the school curriculum or is left to churches to arrange. FELM supports the preparation of teaching material for religious education, as well as teacher training.

Theological training and stipends

The Church requires competent and responsible local workers in order to grow and become stronger. FELM works with its partners to strengthen the theological and other training of church workers in order that it would be relevant to local contexts. FELM strengthens, first and foremost, worker training that increases churches' capacity



and motivation to engage in outward-oriented work. We promote theological research and training, through which the Church is better able to work with the marginalized, poor, disabled and HIV-positive. Churches define their theology in the context of their own culture. FELM encourages its partners to cooperate nationally and regionally in the planning and development of theological training.

FELM increases its partners' capacities to work independently through offering their workers stipends for studies in various fields. The aim of our stipend support is to train the present and future workers of our cooperation churches and communities that are committed to serving in the Church. Study places are sought primarily from home or neighbouring countries.

Diaconia and social justice

FELM participates in the planning and development of its partners' diaconal working models and practices. The goal is a church that demonstrates neighbourly love in a practical way, in which diaconia is given primary importance and for which the whole congregation takes responsibility. It is also important to introduce practices related to strengthening communities and caring for one's neighbour learnt from cooperation churches to the Church in Finland.



FELM encourages its partners to work among and defend the poor and marginalized. Dalits (untouchables), as well as other religious, linguistic and ethnic minorities, migrant labourers and immigrants are often scorned by majority populations or their rights are denied. It is essential to support the practical realization of neighbourly love and mutual care and to help those whose situation is most desperate and who will not receive help in any other way. All those living in precarious situations need help, regardless of the reason for their ending up in that situation. Help refers to mental, spiritual and economic support, as well as advocacy work to address the factors that cause and maintain poverty. It must be remembered that the poorest of the poor also have gifts through which they can bear witness to the love of Christ and serve others.

Thanks to preventive awareness raising work, the rise in the number of people living with AIDS has been stopped and has even begun falling in many countries. HIV and AIDS are nevertheless still a major challenge to health authorities and other social and church actors. According to a Christian view of the individual, every life is valuable. That being the case, an important task of the Church is to eradicate the stigma and discrimination associated with sickness and to work to change attitudes at the grass roots level. FELM assists its partner churches in increasing awareness of the causes and spread of HIV and AIDS and promoting responsible sexual behaviour. We encourage our partner churches to be communities to which all are welcome.

FELM supports the training of partner churches' workers and responsibility holders, with the aim of supporting Christians in practicing neighbourly love in local communities. We pay special attention to the diaconal content of theological training.

Sponsorship

FELM sponsors both children and the elderly. The majority of the work is with children. Sponsorship of underprivileged children, young people and the elderly gives them the possibility of a better life. Sponsorship benefits both individuals and communities. It is at the core of mission service.

The aim of our sponsorship work is to promote children's rights, following the principles set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to support our partners in working towards the realisation of the principles of child protection, to prevent poverty and marginalization and to train and support local communities that participate in the sponsorship programme. In that way it is also advocacy work.



Advocacy

FELM's advocacy work is based on the Christian message. It intervenes in the causes of suffering, oppression and poverty as well as situations of injustice, which are often hidden in social and church structures, subordination and attitudes. Churches are present on every level of society, and religious leaders have influence, therefore churches have a unique opportunity to work towards the eradication of injustice.

FELM is engaged in advocacy work, together with its partners and international networks, working so that the human rights of the weakest and most vulnerable could be realised in political and social decision-making.





6. Focus areas of the strategy period

The focus areas of FELM's church cooperation in the current strategy period are as follows. FELM will:

- Strengthen church cooperation in areas where Christians constitute less than 10% of the population, especially in Asia
- Strengthen partners outward-focused work in order to create new congregations, churches and Christian communities
- Support work that aims to bring ethnic and linguistic minorities, migrants, immigrants, the disabled and marginalized into the Church
- Support partners' children's, youth, student and family work which builds a Christian value set
- Support theological training, which strengthens partner churches and their outward-focused work
- Strengthen the development of partners' diaconal work so that neighbourly love would become a reality in churches, communities and society
- Engage in advocacy work with our partners and through international networks.



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- from people to people



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