


The Draft “Principles for Child-Friendly Churches” Explained to 11 to 18-year-old Children and Adolescents



World Council
of Churches

unicef





*Children and young people are full of ideas;
they have views and concerns that can help shape
the church and the world. It is important that we listen
to children and young people or we may miss what
God is trying to say.*

This document has been prepared for consultations with adolescents. It should be used together with the "Guide for Consultations with Children and Adolescents on the Draft 'PRINCIPLES FOR CHILD-FRIENDLY CHURCHES'".

The idea started in 2013, when the World Council of Churches (WCC), an organization that rallies 345 churches in the world behind joint goals, held a big meeting in Busan, a city in South Korea. In this meeting, the 10th Assembly of the WCC, over 5000 people, including leaders of churches and many young people, discussed how to improve our world. A group there discussed that churches should do more to support children throughout the world. At the end they signed a declaration entitled “Putting Children¹ at the Centre” – a text in which they agree the churches can do a lot to improve children’s lives. They said that the WCC should help them do this.

About a year ago, the WCC signed a partnership with UNICEF – the United Nations Children’s Fund. These partners agreed to work with many experts on “Principles for Child-friendly Churches.” This document should explain what churches can do for you, and to then ask all churches that are members of the WCC to turn these principles into action. Some of the most important experts on these questions are you, the adolescents themselves.

This is why we have invited you for this workshop. We are very happy that you are interested in telling us what you think about the principles, or how they could be improved.

Here is a short overview of what has been proposed so far.



1. The church needs to make it possible for girls and boys to participate in decisions and activities affecting their lives.

a) In church activities and planning for services and praying

In particular, churches commit to:

- consulting children, adolescents, and their families or caregivers and considering their needs when developing church activities;
- teaching all people in the church about children and adolescent’s rights and about the fact that they should be allowed to participate in church activities;
- using creative ideas in church to discover the children’ and adolescent’s views, ideas, and worries;
- creating and using prayer/service resources for children, adolescents, their families or caregivers so that worship addresses the needs of their day-to-day lives and they can easily understand it and feel welcome;
- considering the needs of any child or adolescent with disabilities when planning all activities.

b) In society (society means a large group of people including you, your family, your school, your community, your leaders, politicians and decision-makers)

Churches should ask society to listen to and act on children and adolescents’ ideas. Children and adolescents who feel safe, valued, and included in their churches want to share their ideas, suggestions, and involve others.

¹ Explain that this includes adolescents according to the CRC.

In particular, churches commit to:

- making people understand how much children and adolescents can contribute to decisions affecting their lives and how important it is to give them a chance to do so;
- creating spaces for children and adolescents to tell politicians and decision-makers what they think about decisions that affect their lives;
- making sure girls and boys know how to keep safe online and who to go to if they have something that worries or frightens them;
- supporting children and adolescents in sharing their views and ideas with society so that their views and ideas are listened to and taken into account.



2. The church needs to do everything possible to protect children.

- a) *Making sure children and adolescents are safe within the church community; also making sure children and adolescents know whom to ask for help if they have a problem*

Churches that agree to this should make sure they have and respect up-to-date safeguarding policies and procedures that include:

- the way they create their activities;
- the way they select their staff and volunteers;
- how their staff and volunteers as well as children and adolescents are allowed to behave;
- how children and adolescents can safely let someone know if they are being subject to violence or abuse;
- how churches can immediately stop whoever is abusing and harassing children and adolescents in any way.

- b) *Helping to stop violence against girls and boys in the village/city/country and even throughout the world*

Churches should be safe places for all children and adolescents, offering help and support to girls and boys who are victims of violence. They should also help make the rest of the world a safe place for children and adolescents by spreading information on the risks and consequences of violence and by supporting local and national institutions in charge of protecting them.

In particular, churches commit to:

- helping families and communities understand that violence against children and adolescents is always wrong, including how to prevent physical, sexual and emotional abuse, neglect, family violence, bullying, and online risks;
- promoting the prohibition of corporal punishment of children and adolescents (corporal punishment means punishing by using physical violence – spanking etc.);
- opposing traditions followed by families and communities that are harmful to children and adolescents (for example, children getting married or being sexually abused by family members);

- trying to convince mayors, politicians, and governments to create laws and structures to help prevent violence against children and adolescents from happening;
 - organizing activities to try to convince all society about the need to stop violence against children and adolescents;
- c) *Helping to protect children and adolescents if a big unexpected problem happens near the church (for example, hurricanes, earthquakes, or wars)*

Churches should help families and communities to be ready to react in the right way in case of an emergency. They should make sure their staff and volunteers are able to protect children and adolescents in case of an emergency.

In particular, churches commit to:

- being close to and helping children and adolescents who have experienced a frightening situation and are scared;
 - trying to convince governments and all kinds of groups (like schools, associations, youth clubs) to pay special attention to the needs of children and adolescents during emergencies;
 - consulting with and involving children and adolescents in the planning of activities for helping people affected by an emergency;
 - always speaking and cooperating with people of other religions to make sure all children and adolescents are protected during and after emergencies.
- d) *Helping all children get a document called a “birth certificate” – as this paper is needed for a person to get support if they are ill, to go to school, and to access many other “adolescents’ rights.”*

Churches can help all children have a birth certificate by:

- keeping a record whenever they perform a baptism (these records can help children obtain a birth certificate);
- trying to convince the governments of those countries that do not give a birth certificate to all children of the importance of doing so;
- telling all families and members of their community how important it is that they request a birth certificate when a child is born and teaching them how to do it.



3. The church needs to help to make sure that everyone knows about the rights of children and adolescents, and to tell the people in charge of their village/city/country to act when the rights of children and adolescents are not properly respected.

Churches commit to:

- talking to leaders to create laws and structures to make sure children and adolescents’ rights are respected everywhere;
- working with schools and with media (television, radio, Internet) so that everybody can learn about the rights of children and adolescents.



4. The church needs to organize projects with boys and girls in the church to help protect our planet and your future.

Children and adolescents are those whose lives will be affected the most if our planet is not respected.

Churches should:

- convince families and members of their community to make sure they reduce waste and don't pollute;
- offer children and adolescents the chance to be involved in helping shape the future by being involved in activities and trainings and included in making decisions on any issues about protecting the environment;
- explore how eco-friendly they are and then include children and adolescents in deciding on any changes that need to be made.