

## PREAMBLE

**Acknowledging** that both persons with and without disabilities were created in the image of God;



**Recognising** that persons with disabilities, make up 15% of the world's population, with 80% residing in low income countries; and that they are the largest minority group;

**Recognising** disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal, environmental and institutional barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

**Recognising** that persons with disabilities have been excluded from the Church activities and programmes for a long time;

**Acknowledging** that there is a strong link between disability and poverty;

**Emphasising** that disability is a human rights and development issue;

**Acknowledging** that persons with disabilities have the capacity to be in decision-making positions as long as they are given the opportunity and capacitated;

**Emphasising** that discrimination against any person on the basis of impairment is a violation of the dignity and worth of the human person within the Church and in communities;

**Acknowledging** that women and girls with disabilities face double discrimination due to their impairments and womanhood;

**Recognising** that an inclusive Church creates inclusive communities; and

**Recognising** the importance of persons with disabilities having individual autonomy and independence, including their freedom to make their own choices, which include freedom to worship.

The Methodist Church in Zimbabwe do hereby adopt this Disability Inclusion Policy.

<b>MeDRA</b>	Methodist Development and Relief Agency
<b>NDP</b>	National Disability Policy
<b>UNCRPD</b>	United Nations on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

### Definition of Terms

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Affirmative Action	The prioritisation and promotion of opportunities for persons with disabilities within society, to give them equal access to that of the mainstream population.
Accessibility	Ensuring that persons with disabilities have access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transport, to information and communication, including technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open to or provided for the public, both in urban and in rural areas.
Assistive Technology	Technology used by persons with disabilities to perform functions that might otherwise be difficult or impossible, thereby enabling and promoting their inclusion and participation. Examples of assistive technology include Braille machine, hearing aids, wheelchairs, spectacles and prostheses, software and talking calculators.
Capacity Development	The process through which individuals, organisations and societies obtain, strengthen and maintain the capabilities to set and achieve intended outcomes over time.
Impairment	It is absence of, or malfunction of a body part.
Disability	It is socially constructed phenomenon, which results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal, environmental and institutional barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.
Discrimination	It is the unfair or damaging treatment of persons with disabilities on the basis of impairment.
Inclusion	The practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalised, and in this case, persons with disabilities.
Disability inclusion	The meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in all their diversity, the promotion of their rights and the consideration of disability-related perspectives.
Persons with disabilities	Include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.
Inclusive design	It is a design process in which a product, service or environment is optimised for a specific user, an extreme user, usually with unique needs.
Reasonable	Necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing

Religious model of disability	It views disability as a punishment inflicted upon an individual or family because of any sin that may have been committed by their parents and/or ancestors, or a test of faith by God to test one's endurance and resilience.
Social model of disability	It is a way of viewing the world, developed by persons with disability where they argued that people are disabled by attitudinal, environment (physical and communication) and institutional (policy and programming) barriers imposed by society, and not by their impairment or difference.
Human rights-based model	It is based on basic human rights principles and recognises that persons with disabilities have the same rights as everyone else in society.
Universal design	The design of products, environments, programmes and services, making it possible for them to be used by all people (including persons with disabilities), to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design.
Zimbabwe Sign Language	It is one of the 16 official languages in Zimbabwe, which uses the visual-manual modality to convey meaning, and it is expressed through manual articulations in combination with non-manual elements.

## 1.0 Introduction

In some cases, the Bible is intermingled with texts that have been interpreted in oppressive ways these continue to reinforce the marginalisation and exclusion of persons with disabilities in the social, economic, political, and religious life of the society. The association between sin and disability confirms the religious model of disability, which views disability as a punishment inflicted upon an individual or family by God as a result of sin. Consequently, disability stigmatises not only the individual but the whole family. Yet, it is the Church's role to provide a safe place where individuals with disabilities and their families can receive acceptance and support. It is supposed to be the place where they are looked at with love and grace, instead of shame and embarrassment. It is against this background that this Disability Inclusion Policy (DIP) is meant to equip the Church in the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities. Just as Jesus Christ broke down cultural barriers and attended to the needs of persons with disabilities, so should the MCZ.

## 2.0 Disability Policy Framework

Persons with disabilities constitute the largest minority group, which is mostly starved of services and mostly ignored by society, live in isolation, segregation, poverty, charity and even pity. Due to discrimination they do not go to public places such as places of worship. This is largely due to lack of awareness, ignorance and prejudice in within our churches and in society. The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act of 2013 promotes the rights of persons with disabilities. Sections 22 and 83 of the Zimbabwe Constitution mandate the State and all institutions (e.g. the Church) at every level, to recognise the rights of persons with disabilities, in particular their right to be treated with respect and dignity. Hence, the Church is strategically positioned to champion the alignment of its legal frameworks with the Constitution of Zimbabwe and the National Disability Policy (NDP), which was approved by the Cabinet in February 2021. The NDP seeks to address the marginalisation and discrimination of persons with disabilities and empower them to improve their own quality of life. Thus, the DIP timely in that, it is coming in when the country has just launched the NDP that has also informed this policy.

To improve the livelihoods of persons with disabilities through advocating for their inclusion, participation and active involvement in all spiritual, social, economic and structural lives of the MCZ and society.

#### 4.0 Policy Statement

The MCZ recognises that full inclusion in the Church and communities can be realised only if persons with disabilities, including those with physical, psychosocial, intellectual or sensory impairments, are fully and meaningfully included in the Church, and that the MCZ needs to lead by example. To this end, the MCZ will ensure that:

- (i) MCZ staff, congregants and beneficiaries with disabilities of its programmatic work fully contribute on equal basis with others to the work of the Church.
- (ii) Its policies, projects, programmes and operations contain a human rights-based approach and gender responsive approach to disability inclusion.
- (iii) The DIP will be implemented through comprehensive strategies that establish indicators and targets for all relevant areas (implementation plan), against which progress will be assessed and gaps addressed, as well as through the development, review and application of general and disability-specific policies.

#### 5.0 Development of the MCZ Disability Inclusion Policy

Several stakeholders and policy documents, the Bible and other relevant literature were consulted during the development of this Policy, which was spearheaded by the Methodist Development and Relief Agency (MeDRA), under the leadership of Mrs Junior Vutoyi. An online workshop was attended by Ministers and lay members of the MCZ with disabilities, and the MCZ executive. It was intended to establish challenges faced by the participants with disabilities. Thus, the workshop was a precursor to the development of this policy, which is intended to guide the MCZ's standard operation procedures and ensure that disability inclusion is at the centre stage. Contributions also came from participants at the MCZ leadership training workshop that took place in Nyanga in May 2021. Participants included the Connexional Executive Leadership, District Bishops and District Synod Secretaries. Emails were also sent to various researchers on disability and the Church across the world; disability activists in Zimbabwe and several international and national policy documents (including literature on disability and Christianity), were also consulted and these sources of information were instrumental in the production of this policy, especially in promoting the *'nothing about us without us'* mantra. The policy was also reviewed by persons with disabilities, who are themselves disability advocates - Advocate Abraham Mateta, Mr Kudzai Shava. Mr Edmore Masendeke. Rev Junior Paradza also supported in reviewing the DIP. Prof Tsitsi Chataika and Advocate Abraham Mateta conducted the first training highlighted earlier in this section, which Prof Chataika conducted the second training, as well as putting this policy together. The MCZ appreciates all the people who contributed to this policy.

#### 6.0 Conceptual Framework: Theology of Inclusion

History, disability has been interpreted as loss, as something that illustrates the human tragedy. Some stories in the gospels about how Jesus healed persons with different impairments are traditionally interpreted as acts of liberation, stories of how human beings receive possibilities to live a richer life. In situations where some churches have reflected on the action of having persons with disabilities, they seem to have treated them as objects of pity rather than congregants. Hence, the churches often wrestle with how best to exercise an appropriate ministry for, to and with persons with disabilities. The MCZ bases the theological foundations for inclusion around Genesis 1 v 27: *"And God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God created him; male and female created he them."* Although direct reference to humanity being made in the image of God appears only half a dozen times in the Scripture, it is understood to be a crucial theological constituent of God's relationship with humanity. This is a sound basis for asserting that this applies equally to all people, whether they are persons with disabilities or not. The challenge is that the Church's image of God is conditioned by assumptions about the

impairment as justification of not accepting the task given by God by saying: '*I am not a man of words ... for I am of slow speech, and of a slow tongue*' (Exodus 10 v 4). However, God did not consider Moses' limitation to be so fundamental that he was unable to perform the essential or inherent requirements of the job. Rather, God sought and quickly found a solution to the problem. Moses' brother, Aaron could speak in Moses' place. The case of Moses is an example par excellence of what can happen when a person is appropriately facilitated. Providing the support needed was not so very difficult. This will often be the case, if only there is sufficient will to make the accommodations for persons with disabilities.

There is also another biblical narrative about Mephibosheth being made king regardless of his impairment. Although Mephibosheth had low self-worth, physical impairment, and shame brought to him by his grandfather's sins, defeat and committing suicide, this did not stop him from becoming a king. This should inform the MCZ to be proactive by responding positively to persons with disabilities' needs.

As the global community shifts towards a human rights-based approach to disability inclusion in all aspects of life, the MCZ, in its mission, strives to shape a theological reflection and understanding of what it means to be the Church. The human rights-based approach is based on the social model of disability, which views disability as a socially-constructed problem. The social model of disability argues that it is society imposes attitudinal (stigma), environmental (physical and communication) and institutional (policies and practice) barriers, which result in the exclusion of persons with disabilities. This approach calls for the Church to remove the barriers to participation, raising awareness in societies in order to change negative attitudes, practices and policies. Thus, informed by the social model of disability and the human rights-based approach, the MCZ seeks to transform unjust systems and practices by promoting disability inclusion.

## **7.0 MCZ Position to Disability Inclusion**

MCZ is not new to the promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities in Zimbabwe. For instance, inclusion of children with visual impairment was initiated in 1962 at Waddilove School of the MCZ. Thus, resource units in ordinary schools were established by the MCZ. The MCZ has therefore contributed to the promotion of inclusive education for children with visual impairment in the country. However, the MCZ has not meaningfully addressed issues of disability awareness raising, physical and communication accessibility, and self-representation of persons with disabilities at every church level. Hence, the MCZ has now taken upon itself to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities (including women and youth (boys and girls) with disabilities), guided by the theology of inclusion, which is in line with the social model of disability and the human rights-based approach to disability.

### **7.1 Use of Enabling Terminology**

Words are powerful. They can build up or they can tear down. They can bring joy or they can bring pain. Words can also motivate and inspire. It is therefore important to use language that reinforces inclusivity and discourages incorrect assumptions and stereotypes associated with persons with disabilities.

## **8.0 Promoting Full and Active Participation of Persons with Disabilities**

The MCZ adopts a positive attitude to including persons with disabilities as equals and enable their full participation in sharing and leading worship, which is at the heart of the Gospel. The MCZ also acknowledges the intersection of gender and disability, which in most cases, result in double marginalisation of women and girls with disabilities. Thus, the MCZ commits itself to meaningfully include persons with disabilities in its work, and to effectively incorporate a disability-inclusive approach in all its policies, projects, programmes and operations, guided by the theology of inclusion.

### **8.1 Providing Physical Access**

**8.1.1** A physically accessible church, with an inclusive design, is an expression of the love and care that a congregation has for its members and visitors. Thus, buildings with

toilets that can accommodate wheelchairs, walkers and crutches.

- 8.1.3 Gathering for Communion at the altar is the heart of Christian worship. Therefore, the altar should be fully accessible to all persons, with or without disabilities.
- 8.1.4 All church activities such as prayer groups, Sunday school, Bible studies, revivals, training and meetings should be held in fully accessible locations.
- 8.1.5 The MCZ is committed to conducting an accessibility audit to all buildings, including its schools, and to review audit finding implementations annually.
- 8.1.6 All new building plans must undergo accessibility audits to ensure that the structures meet the inclusive accessibility requirements.
- 8.1.7 MCZ is aware that physical accessibility is not limited to the needs of those with mobility challenges, but also those with hearing, visual, intellectual impairments and albinism, and these should be addressed.
- 8.1.8 There should be relevant seating provisions that take into account people's different physical makeups, e.g. high backed chairs or pews with arm rests.
- 8.1.9 The MCZ is committed to having all its schools adhering to the principles of inclusivity as they enrol and nurture students.

## **8.2 Communication**

- 8.2.1 MCZ to develop a list of enabling disability-related terminology for use in the Church. The list will initially be in English, Shona and Ndebele.
- 8.2.3 MCZ will endeavour to communicate with persons with disabilities in ways that take into account their impairments.
- 8.2.2 The Church will train leaders on how to interact and communicate with persons with various types of impairments and their access needs that facilitate communication.
- 8.2.3 The MCZ will provide interpretation services, such as Sign Language in its Church services, meetings, trainings and other gatherings, thereby ensuring that the deaf community is not segregated or ignored.
- 8.2.4 The MCZ will ensure that its websites and literature complies with "best practice" standards for access of all forms information by committing to use inclusive and enabling language in its literature, songs and sermons. This also includes reviewing any demeaning terminology therein that might undermine the dignity and rights of persons with disabilities. Of importance is the promotion of digital inclusion.
- 8.2.5 The MCZ Publication Department to develop disability awareness raising materials that will be distributed to its Societies and monitor the level at which they are effectively used.
- 8.2.6 To MCZ Publication Department to develop accessible materials, as well as Sunday school materials that promote inclusion in order to promote positive a mind-set towards persons with disabilities.

## **8.3 Assistive Technology**

- 8.3.1 The MCZ is committed to support persons with disabilities who use assistive technology (e.g. wheel chairs, hearing aids) to obtain, use or benefit from its programmes, ministries, goods and services.



## **8.4 Use of Support Persons**

- 8.4.1 The MCZ welcomes and allows any person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person to enter the Church's premises, together with his or her support person.
- 8.4.2 Persons with disabilities to be treated with dignity and respect when being supported in one way or another.

## **8.5 Decision-Making and Self-representation**

- 8.5.1 The MCZ to make a deliberate effort towards self-representation of persons with disabilities at all decision-making levels of the Church (society, circuit, district and Connexional), taking into account issues of women and youths with disabilities.
- 8.5.2 The MCZ to establish a disability inclusion desk at Connexional level and disability inclusion focal points within the Christian and Social Responsibility Committee at lower levels of the Church in order to promote full participation of persons with disabilities in the Church and related services. Persons with disabilities will be represented in these committees.
- 8.5.3 The National Disability Desk within the MeDRA Department to spearhead the development of the National Disability Inclusion Implementation Plan, with clear outcomes and indicators, using a bottom up approach.
- 8.5.4 The disability inclusion focal persons embedded in the Christian and Social Responsibility Committee will be responsible for the crafting of the disability inclusion implementation plan, which will assist in monitoring and evaluation.
- 8.5.4 The MCZ to make a deliberate effort to train Ministers with disabilities, taking into account their right to opportunities that are extended to those without disabilities.
- 8.5.4 The MCZ to support persons with disabilities in creating a disability inclusion advocacy group in order to create a critical mass of well-informed disability activists. This group will act as a watch dog for disability inclusion and also assist in raising awareness on disability rights and the theology of inclusion in the Church.

## **8.6 Capacity Development**

- 8.6.1 The MCZ to review the current curriculum at the United Theological College and ensure that disability becomes a cross cutting issue; as well as influencing other related institutions. This is based on the church's appreciation of the significant role theological institutions play in ministerial training. The aim of this work is to influence inclusion of persons with disabilities in these institutions, both as students as well as staff members, thus preparing them for ministry that embraces the theology of inclusion.
- 8.6.2 The MCZ will provide disability inclusion training to all staff and leaders, and all those who are involved in the development and approvals of MCZ policies, practices and procedures. Individuals in the following positions will be trained: Connexional, District and Circuit leaders and staff, Preachers, Training Coordinators and Church Ushers, then cascaded to Societies to ensure that the MCZ becomes a more inclusive Church.
- 8.6.3 The MCZ to make a deliberate effort to capacitate persons with disabilities in disability inclusion and leadership skills. Once the disability inclusion advocacy group is formed, there is also a need to capacitate it with disability rights.

meetings.

**8.6.5** The MCZ to carry out community awareness programmes on disability inclusion in order to demystify the cultural and religious beliefs and myths surrounding disability, with the intention of promoting inclusive development.

## **9.0 Monitoring and Evaluation**

Monitoring and evaluation will be conducted through:

- (i) Quarterly reports from each level - Circuit, District and Connexional.
- (ii) Random interactive visits by the Circuit, District and Connexional.
- (iii) Reports submission to Synod and Conference.
- (iv) Reports to District and Conference.
- (v) Feedback meetings with the clergy and laypersons with disabilities (including the disability inclusion advocacy group) to establish the level of disability inclusion at various Church levels.
- (vi) Monitoring and evaluation framework should consider the following:
  - o Capturing inclusion concerns at all levels.
  - o Using inclusive indicators, both quantitative and qualitative.
  - o Recognising different impairment needs.
  - o Collect disaggregated monitoring data.
  - o Establishing a beneficiary reporting mechanism.
  - o Upholding ethical and safety considering.
  - o Explicitly refer to inclusion in reporting and evaluations.

## **10.0 Application of the Policy**

This policy will apply to every person who deals with members of the public or other third parties on behalf of the MCZ, whether the person does so as an employee, volunteer, agent or otherwise. It also applies to all Ministers and lay members of the MCZ, regardless of their position in the church's hierarchy.

### **10.1 Review of Policy**

After adoption, this policy will be subjected to review triennially (after every three (3) years) to take into account changes that arise due to the dynamic nature of disability-related needs, including languages.

### **10.2 Policy Adoption**

Adopted by the Conference of the MCZ as attested to by the following signatures:

**Presiding Bishop:** .....

**Date:** .....

Rev George Mawire

**General Secretary:** .....

**Date:** .....

Rev Dr Martin Mujinga

**Lay President:** .....

**Date:** .....

Mr Gear Hanyani