

## **REPORT OF NATIONAL COMMITTEE IN FINLAND**

### **1. Review of activities during the past year**

#### **General Synod decisions and current issues under discussion:**

##### *Renewal of the parish structure*

A proposal “parish union 2015” (or parish federation), prepared by the national Church Council, concerning the renewal of the parish structure is under discussion. It is suggested that every parish would in the future belong to a parish union. The objective is to deal with the fusions of municipalities into bigger units, encouraged by the Finnish government. Namely, the borders of a parish geographically follow, according to the church law, the borders of a municipality. On the other hand the size of a parish should not grow too much. This would fatefully disturb the character of a congregation as a community, its fellowship and unity. The discussion will continue in May.

##### *Development work of the central administration*

The central administration of the ELCF is meant to be developed in a way that the functions and administrative relations within the whole are made clearer and adjusted to contextual changes in the working environment. The aim is that the administration can better cope with the challenges of the current context and that the central administration is made lighter and more flexible. This may have influence on the role of the Archbishop and the council for international relations. The issue will be dealt with again in the general synod in May this year.

#### **Bishops' Conference decisions:**

##### *Issues from the agenda of the Bishops' Conference:*

- 1) The strengthening of the unity of the church (a working group)
- 2) Development of the central administration of the ELCF
- 3) Renewal of the parish structure of the ELCF
- 4) The Guidelines *Towards the Sacred. Interreligious Encounter in the Ministry of the Church* were published in September.

#### **General news**

##### *Partnership consultation with our mission partners from 30<sup>th</sup> March to 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2014 in Järvenpää*

The Evangelical Lutheran Church invited for the first time all the partner churches of its seven official mission organizations to a partnership consultation in Finland ([www.yourkingdomcome.com](http://www.yourkingdomcome.com)). There were about 150 participants from 37 countries, including the general secretaries of LWF, WCC and CEC. The purpose of this meeting was, on the one hand to strengthen the fellowship and cooperation between the partner churches and, on the other hand, to bolster our common mission as a part of the global church of Jesus Christ. The consultation gave the churches an occasion to discuss the challenges and opportunities they face together in today's world, and to find ways to respond to these in their shared work. Specific challenges were identified in the areas of 1) Education and training, especially theological education, 2) Economy, 3) Leadership and management, 4) Christian and Lutheran identity. It became obvious that we need each other and that the time of missionaries is not over. Also South to South and South-East partnerships were encouraged among the partner churches.

*A new record number again joined the ELCF and numerous members also left the church*

At the turn of the year, 31<sup>st</sup> December 2013 about 75 per cent – about 4 000 000 members - of the Finnish population belonged to the ELCF (76.4 % in the year 2012). 50 282 left the church, while the corresponding amount for the previous year was 41 079. A record number of people joined the church last year. The number of people who joined was 15 142, up from 14 108 in the previous year. Parishes baptized 42 741 children in 2013. In 2012 the number of children baptized was 44 774.

*Ecumenical news*

- 1) The implementation of the agreement with the Finnish Methodists is on the way. The follow-up group concluded its work in September 2013. A practical guide for the implementation at the local parishes is prepared. Further academic theological work regarding the dialogue between Lutheran and Methodist theology is encouraged.
- 2) A report of the results of the dialogue with the Finnish Baptists so far (1997-2012) is ready, and the dialogue will continue in 2015.
- 3) The preparatory work for the 500<sup>th</sup> commemoration of the Reformation. The national church council nominated in the autumn an organization for the preparation of the commemoration. The Lutheran-Catholic report *From Conflict to Communion* was translated in Finnish and published in October as a paperback and online.
- 4) A publication of the materials of the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> theological discussions between the ELCF and the Russian Ort in English is ready and available as a paperback and online:  
[http://sakasti.evl.fi/sakasti.nsf/0/DFDF3E405064A950C2257B080040C1B3/\\$FILE/KKH\\_venalaisneuvottelut\\_2013\\_verkko.pdf](http://sakasti.evl.fi/sakasti.nsf/0/DFDF3E405064A950C2257B080040C1B3/$FILE/KKH_venalaisneuvottelut_2013_verkko.pdf)
- 5) The 16<sup>th</sup> theological discussions between the ELCF and the Russian Orthodox Church, hosted by ROC in September 2014, are under preparation. The theme of the discussions will most likely be: Christian teaching of a human person and the subthemes:
  - a) Christian understanding of marriage, b) Christian upbringing at home
  - c) Challenge of the contemporary perception of the nature and vocation of a human being
- 6) The Finnish translations of the F&O document *The Church. Towards a Common Vision* and the WCC mission document *Together towards Life* are ready. Both documents were published in January 2014 as a paperback and online.
- 7) The ELCF delegation with Archbishop Kari Mäkinen took part actively in the CEC Assembly in Budapest. The Finnish member in the Governing board is Dean, prof. Aila Lauha and her proxy Rev. Tapani Rantala.
- 8) The ELCF took actively part also in the WCC Assembly in Busan. Bishop Simo Peura was nominated to the central committee and executive committee of WCC.
- 9) The history of the ELCF working group for Church and the Jewish religion 1977-2013 was published in the autumn 2013.

**2. Future plans, programs and priorities (Church council – lead projects)**

- Project for the *developing of worship services* on the basis of the strategy until 2015 Our Church. The project report was published in 2013

- *Spiritual life on the internet*, the project aims to integrate the parish work on the internet into the working routines of the church council, dioceses and parishes: 2013 and 2014
- Common internet working environment for the parishes: 2013 and 2014
- The renewal of the church strategy until 2020, preparing a report dealing with the future views
- The financial situation of ELCF is deteriorating and expenses are and will be cut accordingly.

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