



Estudos Teológicos foi licenciado com uma Licença Creative Commons –  
Atribuição – NãoComercial – SemDerivados 3.0 Não Adaptada

## **DIACONIA, ONE OF THE CONGREGATION’S CORE TASKS: THE FINNISH MODEL OF INTEGRATING DIACONAL MINISTRY INTO PARISH WORK<sup>1</sup>**

*Diaconia, uma das tarefas centrais da comunidade: o modelo finlandês de  
integração do ministério diaconal no trabalho da paróquia*

**Pia Kummel-Myrskog<sup>2</sup>**

**Abstract:** This article explains the diaconal ministry’s way into parish work in Finland. It also discusses why the present form of diaconal ministry is so prominent. Furthermore, the article looks into its near future relating to the diaconate discussion and the changing landscape of the church. Finally the article discusses if the diaconal ministry in its Finnish form can be exported. The context in this article is The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland.

**Keywords:** Diaconia. Diaconate. Diaconal Work. Diaconal Ministry. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland.

**Resumo:** Este artigo explica o caminho do ministério diaconal para dentro do trabalho paroquial na Finlândia. Também discute por que a atual forma de ministério diaconal é tão proeminente. Além disso, o artigo olha para o futuro próximo em relação à discussão sobre o diaconado e ao panorama em mudança da igreja. Finalmente o artigo discute se o ministério diaconal em sua forma finlandesa pode ser exportado. O contexto deste artigo é a Igreja Evangélica Luterana da Finlândia.

**Palavras-chave:** Diaconia. Diaconado. Trabalho diaconal. Ministério diaconal. A Igreja Evangélica Luterana da Finlândia.

## **Introduction**

A few years ago a deacon visiting from abroad asked: “How come your diaconal ministry is so obviously integrated into your parish work?” In her country deacons

---

<sup>1</sup> O artigo foi recebido em 09 de setembro de 2015 e aprovado em 04 de novembro de 2015 com base nas avaliações dos pareceristas *ad hoc*.

<sup>2</sup> Director for Church Cooperation at The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission, having worked previously at the Church Council with Diaconia and Social Responsibility issues 2001-2013. Contact: pia.kummel-myrskog@felm.org

were struggling to maintain their position in the parishes, organizations and municipalities, the struggling increasing with every growing financial challenge in society. This deacon was not the only one to ask. During my years at the Church Council we had many groups coming to study the Finnish phenomenon.

It is true that diaconal ministry has an outstanding position in parish life in The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. Nowhere else has a church written into its Church Act that at least one diaconia worker has to be employed in each congregation. In Finland that has been the case for more than seventy years. As a result, we have today about 1300 diaconal workers in the parishes. These workers have a high degree of education, at least a Bachelor's degree and with the possibilities to obtain a Master's degree in diaconia. Furthermore, the education is provided and paid for by the state.

At the same time the diaconal ministry is far from defined within the church. What is the quality of the ministry, to which the diaconia students are ordained after graduation? What is the relation of the diaconal ministry to that of priests and bishops? What is diaconia's role in proclamation and vice versa, and how is diaconia looked upon from an ecclesiological point of view? These are some of the basic questions that have been discussed for decades. Some years the church has been closer to a diaconate and then again, it has seen the need for further theological clarifications, which often has thrown the diaconal ministry a step away from the ordained ministry of the priests and bishops.

In the last few years the weakening financial situation of the church has led to discussions on new structures, more economical solutions, core functions and synergies. The mandatory diaconal worker is no longer as self-evident as he or she was ten years ago. On the other hand, diaconal work is one of the main reasons for membership in the church and the work itself has a strong position among Finns.

This article aims to explain the diaconal ministry's way into parish work and to describe some of its main dimensions. It also discusses whether the present form of diaconal ministry can continue, relating to the diaconate discussion and the changing landscape of the church. Finally the article raises the question whether diaconal ministry in its Finnish form can be exported. The context in this article is The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, of which there is a firstly a brief introduction.

## **The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland is a folk church**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland is one of Finland's two folk churches.<sup>3</sup> With 74 per cent of the Finnish people (total population 5.4 million) being members of the church, it is by far the largest church in Finland. The parishes are spread throughout the whole country and normally the border of the municipality is

---

<sup>3</sup> The other folk church is The Orthodox Church of Finland. For recent discussions on the concept "folk church", see KIRKKOHALLITUS (d). *The Two Folk Churches in Finland. The 12th Finnish Lutheran-Orthodox Theological Discussions*. Helsinki, 2015.

also the border of the parish or parish union. The parishes, today around 430, form units with extensive operational, financial and administrative independence.<sup>4</sup>

Each parish belongs to one of nine dioceses, which is led by a bishop, one of them being the Archbishop with seat in Turku. The highest decision making body, The General Synod, gathers twice a year, also in Turku.<sup>5</sup> It has an important legislative function, with the sole right to make proposals regarding Church Act. The Finnish parliament can only approve of or reject the proposal.<sup>6</sup> The central administration is situated in the capital of Finland, Helsinki.

Although the church was separated from the state as early as in 1869, The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland still has some bindings to the state. It has retained under public law and to the rights to levy taxation. Church taxation accounts for some 75 % of the parishes' revenue. The church also receives a compensation from the state in recognition of the social services the church provides, not to mention interment costs, and church maintenance.

While the church has more than 20.000 employees, personnel costs are the parishes' biggest expense. About half of the personnel works in direct parish work, priests, church musicians, diaconal workers, youth workers, children's workers and mission secretaries.

## Skilled in cooperation

Being one of the biggest lutheran churches in the world The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland is a founding member of the Lutheran World Federation, The World Council of Churches and The Conference of European Churches. Because of its ecumenical openness the ecumenical relations are quite extensive both within Finland and abroad.<sup>7</sup> The Finnish Ecumenical Council counts eleven members, many observers and associate partners. It is at the moment chaired by the Catholic bishop and General Secretaries have been elected from the baptist, lutheran and orthodoxan churches respectively. The Ecumenical Council also entered into inter-religious dialogue with representatives of judaism and islam in 2001.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> For a larger presentation of The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, see its website in English at <http://evl.fi/EVLen.nsf/Documents/43B2AADB31F863AAC22572B4001DBC56?openDocument&lang=EN>

<sup>5</sup> Christianity arrived in Finland in the 9th and 10th from both west and east. Turku in Western Finland, with its dome from 1300, was considered the eclesial centre of Finland during the time of The Roman Catholic Church and later The Evangelical Lutheran Church. Its status as an independent church origins from 1809 when Finland was separated from Sweden.

<sup>6</sup> ANTILA, Jaakko Olavi. *Suomen evankelis-luterilaisen kirkon kirkolliskokous Kyrkomötet i den evangelisk-lutherska kyrkan i Finland The General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland 1974-2011*. Helsinki: Suomen ev.-lut. kirkon julkaisuja Publikationer från Ev.-luth. kyrkan i Finland Publications of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland 3, 2014. p. 48.

<sup>7</sup> KIRKKOHALLITUS (c). *Luterilainen ja ekumeeninen Suomen evankelis-luterilainen kirkko ja sen yhteydet muihin kirkkoihin*. Helsinki: Suomen evankelis-luterilainen kirkko Kirkkohallitus Ulkoasiain osasto, 2010, p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> For more information, see the website of the Finnish Ecumenical Council [http://www.ekumenia.fi/briefly\\_in\\_english/](http://www.ekumenia.fi/briefly_in_english/) (6.9.2015) and [http://www.ekumenia.fi/uskot\\_-\\_resa/](http://www.ekumenia.fi/uskot_-_resa/) (6.9.2015).

The church does extended cooperation with many churches in the South through its mission organizations, of which there are seven altogether. The biggest is The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission, which is owned by the parishes. Beside church cooperation and capacity building it focuses on development cooperation, advocacy and peace building. The NGO Finn Church Aid for development work and humanitarian assistance was founding member of the ACT Alliance.<sup>9</sup>

## **The folk church is challenged**

In the last few decades The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland has faced serious changes. Church membership has declined, due to resignations and fewer baptisms, and so has total attendance in worship and parish activities.<sup>10</sup> This follows a common trend in Western Europe. Pluralism due to migration, information technology and changes in demography has challenged the collective thinking, moved forward individualism and made people their own authorities in matters of religion, ethics and values. The folk church is challenged in the sense that Christian faith, in terms of ceremonies, sacraments and rites, is no longer supported by tradition and habit but is in a higher degree a conscious choice of the individual.<sup>11</sup> While a lot of people who resign stay outside of faith communities, others transfer to other churches or christian fellowships.<sup>12</sup>

Like many other authorities The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, and its role in Finnish society, has been questioned. While no changes in its bindings to the state have been made, the questions have been raised in political debates and discussions on religion's place in school.<sup>13</sup> In other sectors Finns look more favourably on the presence of the church, for example the military priests in the defence force, and the church is appreciated for its diaconal work<sup>14</sup>.

The economic prospects have led the church to distance itself in a higher degree from its former employee-centered working culture.<sup>15</sup> A cost effective recons-

---

<sup>9</sup> For more information on The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission, see [http://www.finskamissionsallskapet.fi/ls\\_en/](http://www.finskamissionsallskapet.fi/ls_en/). For more information on Finn Church Aid, see <https://www.kirkonulkomaanapu.fi/en/>

<sup>10</sup> Church membership in 2005 was 83,1 % of the whole population and 85,6 % of newborns were baptized. In 2014 church membership was 73,7 % and 72,2 % of the newborns were baptized. KIRKKOHALITUS (e). *Tilastollinen vuosikirja 2014 ja 2013*.

<sup>11</sup> KIRKKOHALITUS (b). *Kohtaamisen kirkko – Suomen evankelis-luterilaisen kirkon toiminnan suunta vuoteen 2020*. Helsinki: Suomen ev.-lut. kirkon julkaisuja 7, 2014. pp. 6-7.

<sup>12</sup> The conference "The church is searching its place" (Kirkko etsii paikkaansa) in Tampere in April 2015 discussed pluralism and secularization and its implications on the church. Referring to Peter L Bergers theories on secularization it was stressed that pluralism does not automatically lead to secularization but is depending on how churches locate themselves in philosophy of life and religious pluralism. KETOLA, Kimmo. *Johdanto*. p. 3 and SALMINEN, Veli-Matti. *Uskonnot, kirkko ja julkiset instituutiot*. p.13 The church's own strategy towards 2020 is called A church of encounter in order to highlight its open-minded profile.

<sup>13</sup> All elementary schools in Finland are public and follow the same curriculum.

<sup>14</sup> SALMINEN, 2015. p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> KIRKKOHALITUS (b), 2014. p. 5.

truction of the organization is on its way but the draft met with reluctance at the General Synod in May, 2015.<sup>16</sup> The parishes are, however, forced to rethink their finances and administration and mergers will be made. These mergers will in the long run lead to redundancy in personnel and cuts.

## **Diaconal ministry's way into the parishes – two parallel views**

As the teaching of Jesus emphasizes neighbourly love and taking care of one's fellow-being, christian communities and congregations have always done diaconal work. This article, however, concentrates on how the organised diaconal work developed within the church from the mid-nineteenth century.

The diaconal ministry in Finland saw its first forms in the middle of the nineteenth century. Just as in the other Nordic countries it started outside church with its roots in a pietistic background. It was mainly inspired by models from Germany, but the first attempts were seen as church criticism and were overruled. The first Deaconess Institute was founded in Helsinki in 1867 with Fliedner's Kaiserswerth as a model. In line with the ideals of the revival movements, its leading principals were unconditionality, disciplin and a calling to the task. Outside the institutes, the diaconal work was set to practice in societies and organisations.<sup>17</sup>

The clergy saw the institutes' activities as charity and did not pay much interest. This changed in late nineteenth century when visionaries began to express the opinion that the place of the diaconal ministry was in the parishes. According to them, it was not the deaconess institutes who should have the initiative on diaconia ministry. The church itself should actively organize and carry out diaconal work. This parallel political line gained importance over the first two decades of the twentieth century adding new deaconess institutes on the map which educated deacons and deaconesses for church work. In 1916 there were 468 diaconal workers in congregational work, most of them being nurses.<sup>18</sup>

## **A paradigm shift by The General Synod**

Organized diaconal work proved to be an extremely necessary form of ministry before the World War II and the war itself broke the way for significant changes. The critical distress in the country and the deepened secularism among people increased the social discourse in the church. It was time for a more authorised diaconial ministry. In 1943 The General Synod approved of a draft of amendment to the Church Act mandating each parish to employ at least one full-time diaconal worker.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> The votes fell 78-31 but the proposal being of significant relevance to the church would have needed three fourths majority.

<sup>17</sup> MALKAVAARA, Mikko. *Den finländska diakonins historia och nuläge*. Helsinki: 2009. pp. 34-41.

<sup>18</sup> MALKAVAARA, 2009. pp. 42-49. Short summary in English can be read in Kiiski, pp. 3-4. [http://sakasti.evli.fi/julkaisut.nsf/A23D76B6F9901FAFC2257E2E0012D546/\\$FILE/verkkojulkaisu34.pdf](http://sakasti.evli.fi/julkaisut.nsf/A23D76B6F9901FAFC2257E2E0012D546/$FILE/verkkojulkaisu34.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> MALKAVAARA, 2009. pp. 53-54.

The decision in 1943 by The General Synod is considered a turning point in the history of diaconal ministry in Finland. Also from an international perspective, it is a paradigm shift, giving diaconal ministry a stronger position than in any other comparable church. At the same time, the definition of diaconal work in the parishes became equally important: The parishes and its members should practice a diaconia conditioned by christian love, which foremost aims to help those whose need is the greatest and who receive no other help. The definition has coined the view on diaconal ministry in The Evangelical Lutheran Church until today.<sup>20</sup>

Although the political advocacy dimension of the diaconal ministry was quite strong just after the war, the caritative dimension was always more dominant.<sup>21</sup> This is much due to the nurse training the deaconesses received at the time.<sup>22</sup> Until 1972 their primary focus was on home care in cooperation with municipality doctors. However, that year The Primary Health Care Act came into force excluding all deaconesses from home care. This cut off an important societal role of the church and marginalised the diaconia ministry. The new situation called for reorganisation of the diaconal work and resulted in a new training for diaconal workers. Diaconal workers were seen as counseling and spiritual workers in a much higher degree, leaving those materially and physically in greatest need to the extensive welfare system of the country.<sup>23</sup>

## **Rooted in the parish with a societal re-orientation**

This changed almost over night in 1991 as a major economic recession hit Finland. Suddenly the unemployed, the mentally ill, the bankrupts and families with no income knocked on the doors to the diaconal workers. The welfare system, crumbling slowly at its edges, could not help them. Legislative changes were enforced and municipality and congregations could once more cooperate. Customer contacts began to rise in 1994 and the diaconal workers were expected to handle individual financial problems as well as an allowance system with continuous changes, with or without a training for it.<sup>24</sup> The church took a stand against cuts and neoliberalism and explained that the welfare system was the product of a Lutheran thought. The new self-identification of the church was expressed in the new Church Act of 1993 where it states diaconia as one of the congregation's core tasks.<sup>25</sup>

Today the legacy of the nineties can still be seen in the diaconal work. The diaconal workers continue to fill holes in the social welfare net, as the role of the third

---

<sup>20</sup> Church Order 4.3: "Seurakunnan ja sen jäsenten tulee harjoittaa diakoniaa, jonka tarkoituksena on kristilliseen rakkauteen perustuva avun antaminen erityisesti niille, joiden hätä on suurin ja joita ei muulla tavoin auteta". The author's translation into English.

<sup>21</sup> Caritative understood as neighbourly love, the church's service to the individual person.

<sup>22</sup> MALKAVAARA, 2009. pp. 54-56.

<sup>23</sup> MALKAVAARA, 2009, pp. 61-65.

<sup>24</sup> MALKAVAARA, 2009, pp. 65-67. The church collects statistics and dates of its work, finances and employees which is published annually.

<sup>25</sup> In Church Act of 1993 the core tasks being described as proclaiming the Word of God, administering the Sacraments, in everything else spreading the Christian message and implementing neighbourly love.

sector becomes more prominent. With around 1300 diaconal workers in the church, it is by far the biggest professional group to cooperate with the 3500 social workers in the municipalities. However, the degree of cooperation varies much in different municipalities. But although it is more advocational and empowering than before the recession, diaconal ministry has not lost its caritative profile.

## Can the organized diaconal ministry continue?

The diaconal ministry is challenged on several fronts today, of which most seem to be connected with the fact that the church is struggling to define it. While an on-going discussion about the diaconate now might have a solution coming its way, the decades have led to varied practising and understanding of the ministry.

The vast variety of tasks the diaconal workers are set to do is another risk. Work becomes reactive and a more result-based management is harder to achieve. The weakening financial ground for the church's work due to resignation also has its complications. Saving on personnel costs will affect all areas of the church. The first proposal to abolish mandatory at-least-one-employed-deacon in every parish was raised in the General Synod earlier in 2015. The proposal, however, did not go through.

## Ordination to what?

In the early days the ordination of deaconesses was officiated by the leader of the Mother House, if at all. The first ordination by a bishop was made in 1927. Although at least one employed diaconal worker per parish was stipulated by The General Synod in 1943, it did not change the practise of ordination. The fact that the leader of the Deaconess Institute, and not a bishop, continued to officiate ordination revealed a weak recognition of the link between diaconal ministry and the spiritual ministry of the church.<sup>26</sup>

Ordination by a bishop became more common as the need for conformation of the different institutes' training and practices grew. The church wanted to change the ordination from being merely a graduation ceremony to becoming more the church's sending to service. The first agenda for ordinating deacons in the Church Service Book was approved of by the General Synod in 1963, with similar agendas for priests, bishops and diaconal workers. The ambivalence continued, however, in that it was more of a blessing ritual for deaconesses than an ordination.<sup>27</sup>

First thoughts on a diaconate in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland were presented in the sixties. Influences were taken from the ecumenical discussions within Faith and Order stating that the diaconate is a special ministry forming a third part of the ordained ministry. The Finnish discussions were also formed at the time

---

<sup>26</sup> MALKAVAARA, Mikko. *Diakonia ja diakonivirka*. Helsinki: Suomen ev.-lut. kirkon julkaisu 26, 2015. pp. 114-115.

<sup>27</sup> MALKAVAARA, 2015. pp. 115-116.

by prevailing requirements on the church to become more involved in society and take a larger social responsibility locally and internationally. Inputs also came from an extended theology on ecclesiology.<sup>28</sup>

Several committees presented their proposals to the General Synod over the years but theological interpretation of the diaconate and the ordination did not reach consensus. Changes have more often been made when agendas in the Church Service Books have been renewed, than from committees' proposals, forcing the church to define its practice although it sometimes meant leaving the theological question one step behind. The word ordination has prevailed although its theological foundation has been disputed.<sup>29</sup>

There is a common understanding of the caritative dimension of the diaconal ministry but from there on opinions vary from constitutive to consecutive interpretations. While most committees have suggested a three-jointed ministry, the diaconal ministry continues as a ministry apart from priests and bishops in The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. It is looked upon as a special ordination but an ordination of laymen. It has proven difficult to solve questions about the essence of the ordination itself, vocation, ministry from a Lutheran view, the understanding of proclaiming and service and the connection between diaconia, catechism and liturgy. Before 1986 the question of woman minister also influenced the discussion greatly.<sup>30</sup>

The Porvoo Agreement from 1996 obliged its members towards a common view upon the diaconal ministry. In the proposals shortly afterwards ecumenical influences were seen in the theological understanding of the ministry. But the efforts were also criticised for complicating the ecumenical understanding. In discussions within the church the ecumenical influences have come to stand in conflict with Lutheran research causing a status quo. Beside the theological arguments there have been signs of reluctance from the clergy to share representation and thus power with representatives of a possible diaconate.<sup>31</sup>

The latest proposal withholds the idea of a separate special ministry to which diaconal workers are called (vocation) and ordained by the bishop. The ministry is suggested to perform tasks of neighbourly love, formation and mission based on the Christian message. While this does not present much new to the diaconal workers the ministry opens up for youth and child workers and mission secretaries who work within the church or its close organisations. It will be brought to the General Synod during 2015.<sup>32</sup>

The proposal is understandably pragmatic and aims at a consensus built on the lowest common denominator. It does not in its content strengthen the position of diaconia or diaconal workers much. But a decision in itself would signal a stronger future

---

<sup>28</sup> MALKAVAARA, 2015. pp. 130-136.

<sup>29</sup> MALKAVAARA, 2015. pp. 136-151.

<sup>30</sup> MALKAVAARA, 2015. pp. 152-163. Woman ministers were approved of by the General Synod in 1986. The first women ministers were ordained in 1988.

<sup>31</sup> MALKAVAARA, 2015. pp. 221-223.

<sup>32</sup> MALKAVAARA, 2015. p. 220.



for the organised diaconal ministry and would avoid the discussion of diaconia being reduced to an economic prospect. Reaching a decision in a matter that have been discussed for almost half a century would undoubtedly also be a welcome closure for many diaconal workers.

## Diaconia unlimited

Since 2005 the Diaconia Barometer has kept track of tendencies within the diaconal work by sending a questionnaire to the diaconal workers every second year. The latest barometer was published in 2013.<sup>33</sup> The results provide an overview for all interested parties and it also raises problems related to diaconal work that should be solved.

Home calls, especially among elders, have traditionally formed a stronghold in Finnish parish diaconal ministry. The demography show that this group will not diminish in the future. Home calls have also been an important task for many of the 30 000 volunteers participating in the diaconal ministry. However, in 2013 the primary client group shifted from being elderly clients to people of working age. The focus of the work also changed to more financial aid. This was due to a new financial recession in Finland and shows how diaconal work can adjust to new challenges. At the same time client numbers have not increased yet as they did during the last recession.<sup>34</sup>

The barometer has become an important instrument for following the diaconal workers' commitment, motivation and support. In 2013 it showed that diaconal workers are highly motivated for their work. Almost half of the respondents experienced a great deal of stress related to emotionally exhausting client contacts, an overwhelming amount of work, problematic client relationships, the multidimensional characteristics of the job and low pay. Superior support, opportunities for further and advanced education and supervision are the reasons the diaconal workers are coping at work. Of great importance is also their personal faith in God and the sense of doing a meaningful job.<sup>35</sup>

The diaconal work is highly appreciated inside and outside of church. Beside the church ceremonies, the diaconal ministry is the single most important reason for the Finnish people to maintain membership in the church. At the same time the financial situation of the congregations has forced many to leave vacancies unfilled, especially where there is a question of second or more diaconal worker. According to the Diaconia Barometer, the savings are not in proportion with the importance of the ministry.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> The Diaconia Barometer *Diaconal Workers – Alongsiders or Dumpsters?* was published in both Finnish and English in 2013.

<sup>34</sup> KIISKI, Jouko. *Diaconal Workers – Alongsiders or Dumpsters?* Helsinki: Kirkon tutkimuskeskuksen verkkojulkaisu 34, 2013. p. 20.

<sup>35</sup> KIISKI, 2013. pp. 15-17.

<sup>36</sup> KIISKI, 2013. p. 20.

In a financial crisis the importance of a work's impact is heightened. Finnish diaconal ministry has undergone extensive research during the last decades, much due to the founding of the Diaconia Research Society in 2004. It has clearly shown that diaconal work fills the holes that a declining welfare system leaves behind. It has also shown that the role of the third sector becomes more complicated as the boundaries between right holders and duty bearers become less visible. The diaconal work might have to become less reactive in the future and more focused and result-based in order to show the impact, and thereby the importance of its work to tax payers and donors. This is especially true on the congregational level.

## **Can the organized diaconal ministry be exported?**

Given the great interest in Finnish diaconal ministry from neighbouring countries, one could think that the Finnish model was a great export article. The PISA-results have made the Finnish school popular abroad and the model and teachers have been highly sought after, so why not diaconal ministry and educated Finnish diaconal workers?

The Finnish model has its roots in the folk church, the visionaries, the war and the rebuilding of the country after the war. Its context is one of a resourceful church that can keep many employees. The mandate about at least one employed diaconal worker in each parish is a utopia to many churches. The diaconal workers are highly educated and the education is furthermore provided and paid for by the state. They have their own union and periodical.

The circumstances can hardly be copied in any other country, but the essence can be studied. The main points would be the idea of the parish taking the initiative to carrying out its own diaconia and also employ workers for it, the service as the church's core task and service as the gospel in word and action. One could also reflect upon the caritative profile of the Finnish diaconal ministry and the lead mantra to help where the need is the greatest. This has also had an impact on ecumenical discussions, such as the Porvoo Consultation on the Diaconate.

Many diaconal workers have served abroad in another church through the various mission organisations of the The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. While many of them in their actual work have served outside the congregations, in hospitals and health care programs, they have together with other Finnish church workers represented a tradition where diaconal ministry is strongly linked with parish work. In some cases the partner churches have explicitly asked a diaconal worker from Finland to develop the church's own diaconal ministry in partnership with the local church.

The Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (Diak) offers English degree programmes of education and training in diaconia, nursing, social services and youth work to students from abroad. The students can choose to take courses that give them dual qualifications in the fields of social work, youth work, diaconal or youth work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. Diak also offers postgraduate studies in diaconia, health promotion and social services, and carries out research and develop-

ment work.<sup>37</sup> The students who choose to qualify for both social work and diaconal work will receive the qualification Bachelor of Social Services and the recognition as a Deacon of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. Students with a dual qualification of nursing and diaconia will as church workers be ordained as deaconesses. The difference in ecclesial titles is not gender-based but shows which study path has been chosen.

## Final considerations

The diaconia work is highly integrated with the parish work in The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. This has its roots in decisions made by the church during The Second World War and times of great needs among the population. Since then the diaconal work has developed into a profile of caritative caretaking and social work, carried out by highly educated diaconal workers. Every parish has employed at least one diaconal worker.

Looking into the future, there are two developing lines of the diaconal ministry. A decades long discussion on the diaconate is finally looking as if it is coming to an end. This will strengthen the diaconal identity of the workers and the parishes. On the other hand, the financial situation of the church will lead to cuts in personnel. This will also weaken the diaconal work and the position of the diaconal workers. The strong tradition of diaconal ministry within the parish will keep it there for a long time. On the other hand one can see that the church is taking small steps towards leading the organized diaconal ministry out from the parishes.

## References

- ANTILA, Jaakko Olavi. *Suomen evankelis-luterilaisen kirkon kirkolliskokous Kyrkomötet i den evangelisk-lutherska kyrkan i Finland The General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland 1974-2011*. Helsinki: Suomen ev.-lut. kirkon julkaisuja.
- DIAK: Diaconia University of Applied Sciences. <http://www.diak.fi/en/aboutdiak/organisation/Pages/default.aspx> (28.8.2015).
- Publikationer från Ev.-luth. kyrkan i Finland Publications of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland 3, 2014. [http://sakasti.evl.fi/julkaisut.nsf/400F9BCA1A15405FC2257E2E0012D56C/\\$FILE/Kirkolliskokous\\_1974-2011.pdf](http://sakasti.evl.fi/julkaisut.nsf/400F9BCA1A15405FC2257E2E0012D56C/$FILE/Kirkolliskokous_1974-2011.pdf) (6.9.2015).
- KETOLA, Kimmo. *Johdanto. Kirkko etsii paikkaansa Kirkon tutkimuskeskuksen seminaari 20.4.2015 Tampere-talossa*. Kirkon tutkimuskeskuksen verkkojulkaisuja 42, 2015. [http://sakasti.evl.fi/julkaisut.nsf/3594485839025B21C2257E670029B61C/\\$FILE/Kirkko%20etsii%20paikkaansa.pdf](http://sakasti.evl.fi/julkaisut.nsf/3594485839025B21C2257E670029B61C/$FILE/Kirkko%20etsii%20paikkaansa.pdf). (6.9.2015).
- KIISKI, Jouko. *Diaconal Workers – Alongsiders or Dumpsters?* Helsinki: Kirkon tutkimuskeskuksen verkkojulkaisuja 34, 2013. [http://sakasti.evl.fi/julkaisut.nsf/A23D76B6F9901FAFC2257E2E0012D546/\\$FILE/verkkojulkaisu34.pdf](http://sakasti.evl.fi/julkaisut.nsf/A23D76B6F9901FAFC2257E2E0012D546/$FILE/verkkojulkaisu34.pdf) (6.9.2015).

---

<sup>37</sup> DIAK: Diaconia University of Applied Sciences. <http://www.diak.fi/en/aboutdiak/organisation/Pages/default.aspx> (28.8.2015).

- KIRKKOHALLITUS. *A church of encounter*. Helsinki: Suomen ev.-lut. kirkon julkaisuja 7, 2014. <http://sakasti.evl.fi/sakasti.nsf/sp?open&cid=Content2656A1> (6.9.2015).
- KIRKKOHALLITUS. *Kohtaamisen kirkko – Suomen evankelis-luterilaisen kirkon toiminnan suunta vuoteen 2020*. Helsinki: Suomen ev.-lut. kirkon julkaisuja 7, 2014. [http://sakasti.evl.fi/sakasti.nsf/0/9297F603C875C1C8C225770A002E3448/\\$FILE/253062\\_KKH\\_Kohtaamisen\\_kirkko\\_sisus\\_KORJ.pdf](http://sakasti.evl.fi/sakasti.nsf/0/9297F603C875C1C8C225770A002E3448/$FILE/253062_KKH_Kohtaamisen_kirkko_sisus_KORJ.pdf) (25.8.2015).
- KIRKKOHALLITUS. *Luterilainen ja ekumeeninen Suomen evankelis-luterilainen kirkko ja sen yhteydet muihin kirkkoihin*. Helsinki: Suomen evankelis-luterilainen kirkko Kirkkohallitus Ulkoasiain osasto, 2010. [http://sakasti.evl.fi/sakasti.nsf/0/D820F851818FF478C22577890032C3DE/\\$FILE/luterilainen\\_ja\\_ekumeeninen.pdf](http://sakasti.evl.fi/sakasti.nsf/0/D820F851818FF478C22577890032C3DE/$FILE/luterilainen_ja_ekumeeninen.pdf) (6.9.2015).
- KIRKKOHALLITUS. *The Two Folk Churches in Finland - The 12th Finnish Lutheran-Orthodox Theological Discussions*. Helsinki: Publications of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland 29, 2015. [http://sakasti.evl.fi/julkaisut.nsf/E3BCC18AACBE6F97C2257E6600482C66/\\$FILE/The%20Two%20Folk%20Churches%20in%20Finland%20verkkoversio.pdf](http://sakasti.evl.fi/julkaisut.nsf/E3BCC18AACBE6F97C2257E6600482C66/$FILE/The%20Two%20Folk%20Churches%20in%20Finland%20verkkoversio.pdf) (6.9.2015).
- KIRKKOHALLITUS. *Tilastollinen vuosikirja 2014 ja 2013*. <http://sakasti.evl.fi/sakasti.nsf/sp?open&cid=Content240FFA>
- MALKAVAARA, Mikko. *Den finländska diakonins historia och nuläge*. In *Där nöden är störst – En introduktion i diakoni ur finländsk synvinkel*. (Ed. Kummel-Myrskog, Pia et al). Helsinki: Publikationer utgivna av Evangelisk-lutherska kyrkan i Finland, 2009.
- MALKAVAARA, Mikko. *Diakonia ja diakonivirka*. Helsinki: Suomen ev.-lut. kirkon julkaisuja 26, 2015. [http://sakasti.evl.fi/julkaisut.nsf/020A6402AC464E4EC2257E6E004415C4/\\$FILE/255445\\_KH\\_Diakonia\\_ja\\_diakonivirka.pdf](http://sakasti.evl.fi/julkaisut.nsf/020A6402AC464E4EC2257E6E004415C4/$FILE/255445_KH_Diakonia_ja_diakonivirka.pdf) (6.9.2015).
- SALMINEN, Veli-Matti. *Uskonnot, kirkko ja julkiset instituutiot. Kirkko etsii paikkaansa. Kirkon tutkimuskeskuksen seminaari 20.4.2015 Tampere-talossa*. Kirkon tutkimuskeskuksen verkkojulkaisuja 42, 2015. [http://sakasti.evl.fi/julkaisut.nsf/3594485839025B21C2257E670029B61C/\\$FILE/Kirkko%20etsii%20paikkaansa.pdf](http://sakasti.evl.fi/julkaisut.nsf/3594485839025B21C2257E670029B61C/$FILE/Kirkko%20etsii%20paikkaansa.pdf). (6.9.2015).