

## Statements issued by five defrocked pastors

In its meeting of 4 April 2015, the Diocesan Chapter of the Archdiocese of Turku passed a resolution to defrock five pastors of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) who served in the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland, ie. Sakari Korpinen, Miika Nieminen, Anssi Simojoki, Markku Sumiala and Martti Vaahtoranta. This is how each of these pastors had replied to questions posed by the Diocesan Chapter during the inquest (excerpts).

### **Rev. Markku Sumiala, Pastor**

The Church (ELCF) has not honored its own resolution promising pastors who hold the traditional concept of the pastoral office the possibility of obtaining positions and serving in them in accord with their conscience. The outcomes of the breaking of this promise not only concern pastors but those parishioners who feel they are left without shepherds in the Apostolic Order.

The letter I received from the Diocesan Chapter repeatedly referred to the fact that by serving in the Mission Diocese I have betrayed my pastoral vows. The Confessional paragraph, ie. "... all doctrine in the Church must be studied and assessed in accordance with God's holy word" can be called the Constitution of the Church. In no point have I been charged with the breach of this Confessional Paragraph, ie. that I would have spread false doctrine or lived unethically. Instead, I am accused of spreading the Gospel in a forum prohibited by the bishops. This is how the ecclesiastic authority is in conflict with the Command of the Lord to proclaim the Gospel to all creatures. The Book of Concord (Confessional Books) states that where the bishops prevent the proclamation of the Gospel they are not to be listened to. In a corresponding situation, Peter stated: "We must obey God rather than human beings!" (Acts 5:29)

### **Rev. Dr. Anssi Simojoki, ThD, pastor**

Following the Porvoo Common Statement of 1992, the concept of "oversight (episcopate)" has been parroted like a mantra in the Church of Finland (ELCF), as if it construed one unequivocal and undisputed matter from the viewpoint of the Lutheran Confessions and the Church Law. However, as a matter of fact, the use of "oversight (episcopate)" as the master key to unlock all conflicts in the church rests on an unstable foundation, thus creating more problems than solutions.

All in all, this Anglican novelty, "oversight (episcopate)", used as an ecclesiastical pawn, as an instrument in a game, has served as the grounds for the dictatorship of the Finnish bishops. In such a situation a statement by one or more bishops, the *dictum*, does not initiate a discussion, but ends it, preventing all theological discourse: *Episcopus dictus est, res statuta est* [the bishop has spoken; the matter is established]. Nothing was spoken about such episcopal power when Archbishop Martti Simojoki ordained me on 2 June 1972, and when I took my pastoral vows. I bound myself to the Word of God and to the entirety of the Lutheran Confessions. The status of bishops and pastors was defined and realized according to the Lutheran confessional in an entirely different way from today. I have not breached the doctrine or order of my Ordination.

I have preached the Word of God, heard confession and distributed the Holy Sacraments to Lutheran Christians just as I have done for decades. Now the Diocesan Chapter has the "cheek" to tell me that by carrying out these activities I have broken my Ordination Vows and proved myself unsuitable for the Pastoral Office. May a recent example set these matters in glaringly revealing light: On one side, in taking care of the Ministry of the Word and the Sacraments, I am a false shepherd, because I am in this current ecclesiastical emergency outside of the "oversight (episcopate)". In contrast, let me point out the recent "pornographic fair" in the Cable Factory of

Helsinki [the largest cultural centre in the country] where two pastors of the Helsinki Diocese from the Parish of Vantaa [north part of metropolitan Helsinki] were present and representing in their official capacity. Evidently their episcopal oversight was quite in order as church leaders all the way up to Archbishop Kari Mäkinen were interviewed about this matter. He made it clear that these two pastors had nothing to fear, no negative consequences, as they were adhering to the current order of the church. It did not matter what the Sixth of the Ten Commandments happens to state about this issue. Our Lord, on the other hand, said to the Pharisees and Scribes: “Wisdom is proved right by her deeds.” (Matthew 11:19)

**Rev. Dr. Martti Vaahtoranta, ThD, pastor**

I had been, in my own understanding, a moderately liberal, socially enlightened, well-educated and humane son of the National Church (ELCF), loyal and decent and as such – again moderately – a defender of the priesthood of women. In the spring of 1983, however, as I was actively following the discussion within the Church, I ended up in a situation where as a consequence of a hard personal struggle, for theological reasons and on the basis of a young family man's increasing life experience, I was forced to change my views.

Nothing else in me changed, not then. Yet I understood that everything would be different from my change of views onwards. I knew that all my dreams of a fine career in the church (if I even ever had any) had to be forgotten. And as I glanced at myself in the mirror I saw looking back at me, instead of the formerly clever young man, an uncivilized dimwit, a redneck from the backwoods, sitting in a rocking chair, someone who did not communicate at all but beat his old lady and the brats once a week just to be on the safe side. I did not recognize myself in the mirror, yet this image has frequently been kept before my eyes ever since.

I am quite surprised how difficult the situation feels to me – even after all that has happened and after all that has been said over the past years and decades. It would be easier to accept my defrocking in the Church where I was baptized and confirmed and where I was ordained and where I had served until today if only I were charged with heresy, an unethical life and the neglect of my duties. Yes, it is impossible for me to accept my defrocking for the reason that I have striven to carry out the commitments I made in my pastoral vows and for the very reason that I have refused to follow those orders and adjust to those changes in the doctrine and praxis of our Church which have no basis whatsoever in the Word of God or the Lutheran Confessions, to all of which I pledged myself in my pastoral vows.

**Rev. Miika Nieminen, pastor**

In the fall of 2001 I approached the Bishop of Turku at a time when the clause of conscience allowing male pastors to not participate with female pastors had already been shown to have difficulties. Bishop Kantola however surprised me. He engaged in an open discussion, carried out a thorough theological discourse and considered my views well-grounded. He promised to ordain me despite my request for a separate ordination, if the situation allowed it. Today I think that God led me to the office by opening the altar of the Cathedral of Turku even if I did not hide anything or play any devious games, despite being strongly tempted to do so. I simply related to the Bishop all that I understood and, he ordained me. On that day, 16 December 2001, I strongly believed that by a good give-and-take discussion and meeting matters head on we could manage going forwards.

Almost unnoticed, I began to run out of strength in my job. Despite being in the midst of a tight family situation, I had managed to pass eight out of the ten parts of the on-the-job pastoral further-training degree, until I suddenly realized that with the theology I had accepted I could never apply

for a higher position in the Church. I recognized in myself bitterness toward God, Who had led me to where I was a prisoner of such strict theology. I recognized bitterness, anger, and contempt toward the Church who from my point of view degraded herself. My feelings were not at all eased by the fact that a voice inside me insisted: “Do you think you are some sort of a Luther?”

Then came burn-out. During that year the whole dam of my exhaustion with the office and the situation in the Church broke. When I returned back to my work in the fall of 2009, I had passed through the narrow tunnel of what would follow from the developments in the Church. I was at a dead end. Then my attendance at and participation in my younger brother Markus Nieminen’s ordination on 2 October 2010 (presided by Luther Foundation Bishop Matti Väisänen) had a huge impact on my stepping over the threshold into the Luther Foundation. Even though I had no idea beforehand the media attention this ordination would receive, as I prepared for the event, I realized I wanted to be a pastor in the same Church as my brother. If the situation demanded, I would change sides, as the National Church had already closed its doors to my brother. No longer could anyone even in their wildest dreams wish for, strive towards such an arrangement as I had had a brief decade earlier.

The Mission Diocese (formed under the Luther Foundation) has been under attack for the intentional breach of ecclesiastic unity. I have had my share of the critique from people near me, from those on the other side of the church fence, from colleagues. My question to them and to the Diocesan Chapter is: Is there no right for those on this side of the fence to do anything at the time when the National Church closes her doors to that Lutheranism that was still confessed and recognized in Finland only a few decades ago? For those on this side of the fence, our being forced into the role of a church bully, and more recently of a straightforward criminal, this feels truly unreasonable.

**Rev. Sakari Korpinen, ThLic, pastor**

As I reply to your (the Diocesan Chapter’s) letter, I keep before me the Bible texts from the end of the Church Year and Judgment Sunday, which lead me, as does your letter, to a most serious searching of the soul. We have never even met, but you assess my over 43-year old shepherd’s position as a failure. With sadness, I confess that as one ordained for a shepherd’s position I have often neglected my spiritual exercises. Maintaining the attitude of a daily fight of faith and the mind of a faith in the possibilities of God Almighty have altogether too often remained in the background. The prayerbook of Michael Agricola [the Reformer of Finland] explains penitence exercises and the seven deadly sins. I confess that I have used the gift of private confession to battle these entirely too seldom. Whenever I should have brought forth the simple truth of God’s Word instead of human opinions, especially in the pastoral collegium, I have been quiet. Very often I have been overwhelmed by spiritual sluggishness. I confess all this with penitence. But due to God’s unfathomable mercy I have adhered to the doctrine that our Church’s Constitutive Law paragraph in the Church Law 1:1§ states: “The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland confesses the Christian faith which is founded on the Bible, proclaimed in the three ancient creeds and in the Lutheran Confessional Books.”

I will continue to ask the Lord for assurance and zeal to say together with the Apostle Paul, as he writes in Romans 11:13: “I praise my office.” [literal, Finnish Bible, 1776], or, in a more modern translation, “I take pride in my ministry.” (NIV)