

NEWS
FROM THE CHURCH
OF FINLAND

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MAJORITY OF FINNISH MINISTRY COMMITTEE FOR ORDINATION OF WOMEN

The committee appointed by the Synod of the Church of Finland to study the ministry of the church has completed its final report. It deals with the question of permitting the ordination of women to the priesthood in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland.

In the report the ministry of the church in the light of the New Testament and the doctrine of the Lutheran Church are expounded. The 5-member committee has unanimously approved the basic text of the report, but in drawing conclusions the committee is divided. The committee does not as a whole take a stance on whether the priesthood should be opened to women or not. This matter has been left for the Church Synod to decide on the basis of the study carried out.

The majority on the committee - the Chairman, the Rev. Thure Eriksson, and the two women members Ritva Hyöky, who is President of the Court of Appeals, and Pirkko Lehtiö, a female theologian, came to the conclusion that there were no theological reasons preventing the ordination of women.

On the other hand, the minority - consisting of the Rev Esko Haapa, a professor of New Testament studies, and the Rev. Timo Holma, felt that permitting the ordination of women would presuppose a decisive change in those theological points relating to the ministry on which the Church of Finland presently founds its position.

It is pointed out in the report that in this connexion ministry is taken to mean the spiritual office of a person performing divine services of worship and distributing the sacraments in a congregation. The whole Christian church has a common ministry.

On the other hand, Christ has Himself ordained a special ministry to work on His behalf. It was born in the early church on the foundation provided by the apostles and received its basic character in the New Testament already. The Lutheran Church regards the Bible as a guide also in the organization of the ministry.

In the opinion of the majority on the committee, women can not be excluded from the priesthood on the basis of New Testament exegetics. The New Testament supports the belief that God will call people to serve Him regardless of their sex, race or social position.

Nor, in the opinion of the majority, do the Lutheran articles of faith say anything directly about women's right to execute the ministry of the church. Luther, whose stance on this matter was unequivocally negative, was a "child of his time" in the view of the majority of the committee members.

The minority is of the opinion that neither the New Testament in its entirety nor traditional Lutheran doctrine on the ministry of the church is unambiguously in support of the ordination of women. To support it one has to execute choices relating to the contents of the New Testament. The minority felt that the only thing that one could point to in favour of the ordination of women was the common priesthood of Christians. This is, however, incorrect, because the office of "shepherd" can not be traced back to the common priesthood.

The Bishops' Conference, the Ecclesiastical Board and the Diocesan Conferences will submit their comments on the report before it comes before the Church Synod for handling. This will hardly occur before next November.

Study reveals:

TOO MANY THEOLOGIANS GRADUATING IN NEXT FEW YEARS

A survey into the supply and demand position relating to theological manpower in the years 1976-84 executed by Dr. theol. Heikki Mäkeläinen was appended to the report of the Church Committee on the Ministry.

The survey shows that there will be more theologians graduating in Finland in the next few years than there are jobs for them. At the moment there is no actual shortage of pastors in Finnish-speaking parishes, but there is something of a shortage in parishes belonging to the Swedish-speaking diocese of Porvoo (Borgå). (Finland has a Swedish-speaking minority amounting to nearly 7 % of the total population). There is also a shortage of religious teachers.

If all women theologians seek employment when they graduate supply will very soon cover demand where they are concerned. Also the shortfall in the number of ministers should disappear during this decade.

The shortage of male theologians amounts to 18 this year, the surplus in 1979 will be one, according to the forecast, but it will increase after that at such a rate that the surplus in 1981 will already have risen to 74 male theologians, and to 183 in 1984.

The shortfall in the number of women theologians will be 16 this year, the surplus in 1979 will be 42 and by 1984 it will have increased to 163.

By "supply" is meant the number obtaining their degrees in theology.

In the summer of 1975 there were 627 women with theology degrees in the Lutheran Church of Finland. Of these 207 were in the service of the church - mainly in the special position of "Lector" intended for female theologians in parishes. 306 female