



CULTA Religion and Multiculturality: Educational Pathways for Local Church Leaders

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Congregations of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and the challenges of multi-ethnic and multi-confessional environment

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General introduction

The following study on multi-ethnic and multi-confessional contacts in the congregations of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church is based on sixteen interviews with the clergy and congregation workers. Contemporary Estonia is multi-confessional and multi-ethnic country. 69,7% percent of Estonian population are ethnic Estonians. The largest minorities are Russians - 25,2%.

Estonia is situated in the Northern Europe and the territory of the country covers 45,227 km². Estonia became independent democratic parliamentary republic in 1918, and re-established its independence (after the period of Soviet occupation from 1940) in 1991. Estonia is divided into fifteen counties. According to official statistics Estonian population is 1,3 million. According to the 2011 population census 29 percent of the Estonian population identified themselves as adherents of some religious tradition. Five largest denominations

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according to the population census were Orthodox, Lutheran, Baptist, Roman Catholic, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Estonia was Christianized during the Northern Crusades in the 13th century and became Lutheran country from 16th century onward. The Lutheran Church that was Baltic-German dominated until the 20th century became to form as independent people's church in 1917. Statute of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church was adopted in 1919, and the first bishop was inaugurated in 1920. According to the population census from 1934 77,6 percent of the Estonian population declared themselves to be Lutherans. It was 0,7% less than in the population census in 1922. The second largest church in Estonia was the Estonian Apostolic-Orthodox church with 18,9 percent of the population as adherents.

In accord with the treaty between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany from 1939 Estonia was incorporated to the Soviet Union in 1940. The Soviet period was accompanied with anti-religious policy, forced secularization and marginalization of religion. However, Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC) maintained its role as traditional church in Estonia although religious socialization lost its importance from the early 1960s onward. In 1967 the profession of clergy in the EELC became gender neutral and the first female pastor was ordained at the same year.

During the national reawakening from 1987 onward the role of the EELC started to grow. Several of the clergy participated actively in the emerging social and political movements. The EELC became visible in the public and ritual sphere as non-Soviet identity marker for many Estonians. The years from 1989 to 1993 have been called in Estonia as the years of church-boom. The baptismal rates grew rapidly as did the numbers of confirmation students. At the same time the EELC as well as other churches became important channels for distributing the humanitarian aid. In 1989 the EELC, Russian Orthodox Church, Union of

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Evangelical Christians and Baptists, Estonian Methodist Church, Union of the Seventh-day Adventists and the Roman Catholic Church as an observer founded the Estonian Council of Churches that has been the main dialogue partner for the State in matters concerning religion and religious associations. The Council of Churches plays an important role in ecumenical dialogue between different Christian Churches. Currently the membership of the Estonian Council of Churches include the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Apostolic Orthodox Church, Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate, the Roman Catholic Church, the Union of Evangelical Christian and Baptist Churches, the Methodist Church, the Association of Seventh Day Adventists Congregations, the Christian Pentecostal Church, a congregation of Armenian Apostolic Church, and the Charismatic Episcopalian Church in Estonia.

In 1995 the Government of Estonian Republic established a joint-commission with the EELC. The main function of this committee has been to provide a regular discussion ground for the Cabinet Minister and representatives of different ministries with the EELC. One of the most important results of the commission could be regarded the governmental program from 2003 for the conservation and protection of churches. In 2002 the Government of Estonian Republic and the Estonian Council of Churches signed protocol of common interests where that outlines the main fields for the possible cooperation with the State and the Council.

Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church

Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church has 166 congregations that are divided into 12 deaneries. In 2011 the EELC had 163 585 nominal members and 32 980 donating members. The Archbishop heads the EELC. Consistory is the government of the Church. The president of the consistory is the archbishop. The members of the consistory are the bishop, who

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carries out orders received from the archbishop, the chancellor and four assessors. The highest governing body of the EELC is General Synod. Its 60 members are elected for four years and represent both clergy as well as laity.

The EELC has the institution for higher theological education. The Theological Institute of the EELC was founded in 1946. Theological Institute is the educational centre for the EELC. It has four units - faculty of theology, pastoral seminary for the training of clergy, department of church music, and department of continuing training.

Although the EELC has never been defined on a national basis 96,4 percent of Lutherans over 15-years of age are according to the 2011 population census ethnic Estonians. General demographic trends (ageing, migration, emigration) affect also the church.

Introduction into the study report

In the framework of the study on multi-ethnic and multi-confessional contacts in the congregations of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church sixteen clergy and congregation workers were interviewed. The questionnaire for the interview was prepared in the process of the joint Grundtvig project. The main aim of the study was to analyse as to what kind of challenges do the EELC congregations in more multi-ethnic (and multi-confessional) regions of Estonia face, whether the local congregations or the EELC in general have responded to these challenges and how.

The sample was selected following firstly the principle of representation of people from different regions in Estonia with larger Russian speaking minority (larger cities Tallinn and Tartu, counties Lääne-Virumaa and Ida-Virumaa, towns Valga, Paldiski and Mustvee). Secondly the selection has taken account the variety of different church ministries, including

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congregation workers who are more likely to interact with minorities and know their problems (diaconal workers, prison chaplains etc.).

The interviews have been agreed on and carried out by 4 people and mainly in March and April 2013. The interviews have been recorded and transcribed. Before the interview the respondents have been assured that the recordings and later the transcriptions of the interviews are kept confidential and will be processed only by the members of the study group. Even the later report is drafted in the way which does not enable to link certain statements in the interviews to a certain respondent. The confidentiality principle is based on the fear, that a disclosure of full interviews may lead to responses which are considered to be more socially acceptable, distort the real picture and do not provide the information needed.

The compiled interview material was coded according to the coding manual attached to current study report. The initial coding manual based to a large extent on the draft of the interview questionnaire, but had to be repeatedly complemented: due to the complexity and the length of several questions new subcategories had been introduced in the coding process. After complementing the coding manual, the research material was, if needed, reviewed and coded anew. At the same time, in the later analysis process some material had to be relocated under a different category (as the respondent returned later in the interview to a previous topic and provided further information). The unit of analysis was one integral section or passage of the interview, which was reduced from the point of view of the research question, so that only relevant information was extracted. This information was divided into categories and generalized while avoiding excessive loss of material and taking into account the specificity of the respondents.

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In order to illustrate typical responses and statements, the study report quotes passages from the interviews presented in italics. The use of language was left unchanged. Chapters have been listed thematically, i.e. the report follows the logical sequence of the information, not the order of questions in the interview.

The characteristics of the membership and the scope of activities of the studied congregations

The studied congregations vary a lot as far as the size of the congregation is concerned. Often the respondents have distributed the members of their congregation into different subgroups and identified them as e.g. "souls" on the list of members, donating members and active members attending worship services and congregation activities. In some cases the respondents were able to define even the so-called activity percentage. If the congregation was involved in the ministry in some other languages, we asked them to provide further information. There were 3 larger urban congregations and one countryside congregation ministering or offering activities in other languages in a considerable extent. Four congregations provided social services or projects having ethnic minorities as a significant target group. Several priests among the respondents minister more than one congregation, while some of them were simultaneously working as prison chaplains. It is quite common practice for a parish priest to have a second job as a chaplain or pastoral counsellor in a health care or social care institution. In addition to parish priests there were one diaconal worker, one youth worker and one manager of a Christian social welfare institution represented in our study sample.

Congregations, which are engaged in the ministry of some other ethnic group, mentioned working languages such as Finnish (Ingrian), Russian, English, Latvian, sign language. Among the Russian and English speaking population we can meet again quite



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many different nationalities. Among the studied congregations there were two priests having a different nationality than Estonian.

As far as the scope of activities apart from worship services is concerned, respondents highlighted especially diaconal ministry and different social projects: activities for children in need and from at-risk families, for elderly people, people with disabilities; "soup kitchens", distribution of humanitarian aid. Later in the interviews they mentioned also projects from the period of economic recession such as distribution of pillows and blankets to the people released from prison, collection of food for the parishioners in need. Several congregations are still providing soup kitchen services, some of them host self-help groups for alcohol addicts. One of the congregations has had years of experience in the work with ex-convicts and with various social risk groups, including youth and children. The wide range of services they provide would deserve special attention, but cannot be elaborated more due to limitations of this article.

Among activities targeting church members the respondents mentioned Bible study groups and classes, different choirs and ensembles, groups for elderly people, youth and children ministry, Sunday school, recreational activities (woodwork) and even group gymnastics. Some larger congregations mentioned day care centres for children and even a school. One of the studied congregations keeps a shop for Christian books, church supplies and symbolics.

The activities for people from other ethnic groups were mainly addressed in the social work context. For example they noted the percentage of Russian speaking population among their target groups or beneficiaries of aid. In some rare cases they have mentioned Russian speaking population in the context of musical activities or have spoken about the



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challenges in respect of the ministry in some other language in general (limited availability of literature, financial and human resources).

Since the selection of the sample has taken into account the principle that as many different types of congregations and different fields of activity would be covered as possible, on basis of results we cannot draw any decisive and systematic conclusions, but this information is relevant for the researchers in order to understand the deeper background of the studied information. At the same time given the smallness of Estonia, it was also impossible to present the full detail of the size and the scope of activities of every studied congregation, as it would have violated the principle of confidentiality.

Encountering challenges of emigration and the position of the congregation on this issue

The purpose of this question was to identify, whether the congregation has encountered the very burning issue of emigration and if so, what kind of encounters they have been and what is the position of the congregation on this issue. In the latter case we should keep in mind that in the interviews the priests or congregation workers reflect their personal views, as it was not possible to conclude, that this issue would have been discussed in a larger circle (e.g. in a congregation event etc.).

We have to admit, that these encounters with the (work-related) emigration vary a lot and surprisingly even in the very same region we could end up with quite different statements depending on the respondent. The respondents from larger congregations in Tallinn deserve special mention, since the majority of them have responded to this question that the emigration does not affect substantially the life of the congregation. This perception is supported by the national population statistics stating that as the unemployment figures are higher in the countryside, they are also more severely affected by the emigration abroad

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than Tallinn. Another issue emerged from the interviews: congregations are never informed of the death of a parish member, not to speak of the emigration of a member. Only very few parishioners inform congregations about their emigration either via e-mail or come for a visit after living abroad for quite some time. One respondent from Tallinn identified a reverse tendency as well: they will never know that a parish member is living and working abroad, since he/she prefers to pay the annual membership donation to the congregation in Estonia and will thus stay member of the Estonian church, while avoiding the high costs of church tax in some Finnish or Scandinavian congregation.

In other parts of Estonia, except for the larger congregations downtown Tallinn, the emigration has a remarkable, but allegedly not so strong influence on the life of congregation. These are predominantly young people, who are affected, but the majority of active parish members are already in old age. The emigration and its effects are more visible in the immediate social environment. The respondents mention issues like instability and dissolution of families, abandonment of children, decline of the working-age population.

There are some exceptions to it as well: in one case the former active group of Wolga Germans in the congregation was dissolved due to their emigration to the historic home country. Or another example of the Finnish speaking congregation consisting mainly of elderly people as the younger ones have emigrated to Finland. There were no cases noted, where a family of a congregation member would have been dissolved or some serious social problems would have occurred due to migration. The respondents from two larger towns, having more younger people among the parishioners, referred to problems like difficulties in organizing confirmation classes and weddings, finding common meeting times to everybody, since many confirmation students work abroad.

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In the topic of emigration a typical position would sound as follows: emigration and especially work-related emigration is for economic reasons inevitable. Emigration is beneficial as long as people learn and gather new experiences abroad and later return home. Emigration becomes a problem as soon as people won't return to their home country anymore. The typical position could be summoned in the word of one respondent from the Viru region: *"I wouldn't call it detrimental, but rather beneficial to Estonia, if a person is here unemployed, but able to find work abroad. At the end of the day his/her income ends up here, with his/her family. This is a different case if a person does not want to return anymore. Especially if we think of our future: who is going to pay taxes for our retired people? It is a serious problem. But I don't see it as a problem, if a person leaves just for work and maintains a link to his/her home country"*.

In few interviews the issue of domestic migration has emerged as well. One respondent from a congregation in Tallinn addressed the difficulties the migrants from other regions of Estonia to Tallinn might face in adjusting (*"they have difficulties finding housing and are forced to settle with lower-paying jobs"*). The same issue was also described from the point of view of the region people are leaving from, Viru region: *"many people move away from here /---/ no, they have never returned. Job opportunities determine ..."*. In conclusion we can say that apart from few exceptions, the emigration is not a burning issue in the congregations. The problems are more explicit in the immediate social environment, but in general it is not considered to be a major problem as far as the emigrants express their intention to return home in future. Emigration for economic reasons is seen as inevitable.

Communication with people who have recently left Estonia

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We asked the respondents as whether the studied congregations sustain relations with people, who have recently emigrated from Estonia. The relations, if at all, are more of a personal nature and in congregations there is no organized approach in dealing with this group of people. Usually they send each other e-mails, letters or postcards. Emigrated parishioners while visiting their homes visit also home congregations. Occasionally they want to have baptisms, confirmations and weddings in their previous congregation. Several priests mentioned in their interviews that they recommend the emigrants to contact a congregation in their new place of residence, but in many cases people prefer to stay in their previous congregations, in order to keep up the links to their home country.

For the congregation these people are more likely just "lost", they don't inform the congregation either about leaving the congregation or about their emigration. Besides, the relations to emigrated parishioners tend to fade over time.

Contacts and relations to other Christian and non-Christian confessions

This question was divided into two categories, accordingly contacts to Christian or non-Christian confessions.

First of all, Christian confessions: The majority of the respondents keep strong and positive inter-confessional relations to other local Christian congregations. In case the relations are inexistent or for some reasons not active, the reasons are more of a formal than of a substantive kind: they are lacking time or other resources; relations to an orthodox church "faded away" because of their limited language skills etc. The only substantive obstacle was: *"The Russian Orthodox Church is a conservative church; they are not interested in it (ecumenical cooperation - author's remark)*. Even in the most minimal cases of contacts the priests of different denominations sustain at least some personal relations, since they



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meet in official receptions and events, trainings, even sports competitions, and have a conversation.

If the different levels of relations were to be divided according to their intensity, then the next level of activity has been aptly characterized by a respondent from Tallinn: *"The pastors of Evangelical Alliance meet monthly. /-/ Different worship services or the youth and singing festivals for Church choirs, where people from different congregations sing side by side. /-/ Estonian Council of Churches exists of course as well."* The respondents mention joint worship services with organizers from different confessions, joint training courses, singing festivals, annual Good Friday's Way of the Cross, consecrations and inaugurations, Independence Day celebrations, prayer-breakfasts organized by a local municipality.

The third and most active level of cooperation includes immediate, regular and conscious contacts and cooperation projects e.g. for people in need, founding a food bank, joint celebration of commemoration and liturgical feast days, regular exchange of information. The relations can be especially intense, if there are more people in congregation having the time, talents and willingness for promoting ecumenical cooperation: mutual visits, trips, lectures for confirmation students, participation in the small group activities of another denomination and in one case even in the worship services.

In general, the relations to other local Christian confessions are close and they are addressed in a very positive context. The respondents do not mention any specific problems connected to that. They emphasize - with pride - the openness and tolerance of their congregations.

Non-Christian denominations: The relations to them are rather limited and sporadic. The main reasons for that are the lack of a (religious) driving force and the fact that in less populated areas there are no other religious denominations existent. On a personal level the



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respondents have had more contacts e.g. with Jehovah's Witnesses, Moonies or adherents of the ethnic religion Maausk. The statements are of rather neutral or positive nature. As an exception was the case of a much closer cooperation of two congregations with the Jewish community, mainly in the form of visits and lectures. Quote of a respondent from Tallinn: *"I like our Jewish community very much, they are very open. They always invite us to participate in their celebrations. We have visited them with our confirmation students. Very good experiences!"*

Reflection of the official position of the Church (government) on inter-confessional relations and the position on the cooperation of the congregation with people speaking other languages

The following chapter is focused on two topics: first of all, are the respondents aware of the official position of the Church (government) on the inter-confessional relations, how does it reflect in their opinion in the activities of the congregation and do they feel the support of the Church government in terms of the contacts and cooperation with people of other nationalities and confessions. We asked them also about the form of support they received and have they experienced any kind of conflicts on that basis.

The respondents were not aware of any official document or position of the Church concerning inter-confessional relations. The most common reply was: there might be an official position, but I am not aware of this and am not familiar with its content. Some respondents mentioned joint ecumenical messages etc. which obviously reflect the official position. Some of the priests stressed the need for that kind of an agreed and clearly expressed position. In general the respondents didn't feel the need for a special official position and emphasized with pride the ecumenical openness of their congregations.



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In some cases the respondents considered the important role the EELC plays within the Estonian Council of Churches to be an expression of the official position of the Church government.

Furthermore they have been asked about the support or obstacles in the communication with people of other ethnic groups or belonging to other confessions. In this matter the respondents share a common view that they have not encountered any impediments from the side of Church government to the ecumenical contacts. The official line of the EELC on ecumenical cooperation is very supportive, at least as far as the Christian confessions are concerned. The congregations engaged in the ministry in Russian language experience certain lack of material support. Usually they talk about the need to translate and publish print materials. The main challenge concerning the ministry in Russian language is the missing support from Russia (especially compared to the ministry in Finnish or Swedish language). There are several places which would still need bilingual ministry, in order to minister e.g. the Russian speaking population in their mother tongue. Obviously the Church is not capable to provide these services in the extent it is needed. The support is limited and as little as absolutely necessary.

In general the tolerant attitude in the EELC was underlined by all respondents: we don't think that there is no salvation outside our Church. Proselytism among other Christians is not a general practice, the converts are not baptized again; Baptists, Methodists and Adventists are accepted to take part in the Holy Communion. The respondents shared the opinion that the Lutheran church is compared to other smaller confessions the most tolerant and open one.

None of the priests have had any disagreements with the congregation or the Church government pertaining to issues described above. Some respondents highlighted the



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discussions either with the Church government concerning the scope of activities or inside the congregation as whether to offer activities in Russian language or invite these people to join the Estonian speaking group, but none of these cases was described as a conflict situation.

In conclusion, there is no awareness of an official opinion or line in the EELC as far as the cooperation or communication with people of different nationalities is concerned and the respondents don't feel any particular need for that either. EELC is considered to be a open and ecumenical community having intense and friendly relations to other Christian confessions. Thus, the local congregations are given a full freedom to act and so far they have not experienced any conflicts or restrictions in this matter. The respondents find that, if needed, the Church government gives them its support for maintaining the relations with other confessions/ethnic groups. Only the congregations engaged in the ministry in Russian language mentioned the need for more support as far as material and human resources are concerned.

Local congregation's contacts to other ethnic groups

This question developed to be the most detailed one, since it was one on the main aims of this study. The responses were divided, if necessary, into subcategories, in order to specify the different aspects of this question as the characteristics of other ethnic groups, position towards the Lutheran church etc.

In Estonia the majority of the non-Estonians are Russian and Orthodox. A small percentage of Russians are members of some other Christian confessions as Baptists, Methodists, Adventists. Furthermore, in the study we have collected some information about the congregational activities targeting other ethnic minorities being traditionally



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Lutheran (Latvians, Wolga Germans, Finns) and about the ministry in sign language and English. The specifics of this ministry are different from the one of Russian speaking population and due to limitations of this article are not addressed in detail.

For historical reasons the Russian speaking population in different parts of Estonia has a different background, e.g. Russians in Eastern Viru region and Mustvee. The first group is predominantly orthodox, whereas the second one Old believers. In other regions one would meet some other ethnic minorities as well - Latvians, Finns, Roma people. The group of Wolga Germans has mostly already emigrated. The percentage of ethnic minorities can vary depending on the region a lot, starting of Valga and Tartu, where the percentage is quite insignificant and ending with Eastern Viru region, where Russians make up the majority of the population (according to Statistics Estonia the percentage of Estonians in Narva is only 5%).

Furthermore, we can say that the studied congregations find themselves in a wide range of different environments, which is reflected accordingly in their contacts to people of other languages groups, all this not depending so much on the number of Russian speaking population in the respective region. It will depend primarily on the Russian language skills of the priest and the specifics and scope of the congregation, i.e. does the congregation feel more socially engaged or not. In the first case the contacts to Russian speaking population are much more intense and the respondents even raised the fact, that among the clients of social work Russians outnumber Estonians (according to respondents' estimation they make up 50-80% of the people in need). One of the studied congregations has even specialised to social projects, having especially local Russian speaking population as their main target group, so that the representative of the congregation has noted: *"in addition to our inter-*



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confessional approach and position, our congregation is in some sense a multi-ethnic congregation as well".

Based on the interviews of our study it can be stated that the contacts and interest of Russian speaking population in Lutheran church are more of a pragmatic (social assistance, social rehabilitation) and cultural nature (interest in church building as a historic monument, architecture, church organ) or is linked to certain traditions, but as far as the religious component or the content is concerned, the interest is rather limited (*"they are interested in external things, but not in the content"*). Congregations having ministry in Russian language have over the years not experienced any particular increase on church members. Nevertheless this ministry is not limited to the work with people of Russian nationality only - in several cases the respondents emphasized the multi-ethnic background of this Russian speaking group and often these people are ethnically in fact (Ingrian) Finnish.

For example several priests mentioned how the death cases are handled in a mixed family, where the deceased one was a member of the Lutheran church. Family members, even though being Orthodox and Russian, would like to have a Lutheran priest present at the funeral (*"... Russians have buried their mother. Mother was Lutheran, so she has to be buried in a Lutheran way. I am Orthodox myself, but I ask you to commemorate my mother ..."*). In most common cases the interest in the Lutheran church is limited to this, but many of the priests have experienced in the course of their career some exceptions as well. It means people or families, who joined the Lutheran church, because this was one way to "become an Estonian". They have tried to become more like Estonians in many other ways as well, e.g. by accepting the language, traditions, identity. These remain only few rare exceptions though.



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Most of the respondents highlighted the strong Orthodox identity of the Russian population no matter whether they are devout believers or go to church. In some rare cases they belong to some minor confessions like Baptists, Methodists and Pentecostals. Three respondents addressed the careful or even suspicious attitude towards the Lutheran church: *"... they ask the Lutheran priest, what they don't dare to ask their batyushka, as whether they risk the good relationship with God by it. Or could it happen, that I end up being sinful and impure, and am no good in the eyes of God"*. Another respondent puts it this way: *"Another thing, I had several cases in my church, that I meet a person, who asks me for permission: "May I enter the church building?" or they say "this is not our church". And I tell them: "Of course you may enter the building and take a look"*.

Interestingly in the course of this study the views of the respondents diverged most decisively in the issue of the necessity of the ministry in Russian language!

Apart from the congregations already engaged in some form of the ministry in Russian language and which are more socially engaged and therefore in closer contact to language minorities in Estonia, the general attitude of the respondents is characterized by following statements: we have no time and no capacity for that; it takes more than simple language skills to handle this work (ministry presupposes a thorough knowledge of the language and of the theological vocabulary), the experience of other congregations so far has proven this ministry not to be very fruitful, and finally and most importantly, churches happen to be ethnically focused communities and it is not our wish to convert Russians to become Lutherans. Or to quote one of the respondents: *"... I have the feeling that we don't have to. If Estonians are Lutheran and Russians are Orthodox, then why should we convert Russians to Lutherans? Churches are predominantly ethnic communities anyway"*.



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The other party considers the ministry in Russian language to be very important on which we should not give up. These congregations should think of hiring of a (at least one) priest whose mother tongue is Russian. They even question the position of people, who do not prioritize the ministry in Russian language: *"Somehow the importance of the ministry in Russian language is not recognized, even though it should appear as one of our priorities, especially in terms of missionary work. I really don't know, why this is not seen as important..."*.

All respondents shared the opinion, that we should not turn our back to people in need irrespective of the issue. In these situations we don't ask for the passport, nationality, confession or mother tongue. All people who have approached church in their times of need, have received assistance in accordance with the local capabilities: *"We don't charge people by their passport or ID or nationality. Our doors are open to everybody."* Or a quote from another interview: *"when we meet a person, who is hungry, we don't ask for the nationality or for confession"*.

In conclusion, the main (and the successful) platform for the contacts between a local congregation and the people of other language minorities is the social work and services. The interest of other ethnic groups in the Lutheran church is mostly of a cultural nature, while in religious issues it is very often of a temporary nature, sometimes mixed with the feelings of a slight disaffection and distrust. The attitude of the church towards the other ethnic groups is open-minded, but as a rule rather passive and of the wait-and-see kind, except of the congregations to some extent already engaged in the ministry in Russian language. For a more active approach there are not enough financial and human resources and the topic (with some exceptions) is considered to be not of first priority.



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Encounters with the issue of discrimination and the approach to the question of religious freedom

Practically all respondents shared the opinion, that they have never encountered the issue of discrimination on the basis of nationality, religion, gender or sexual orientation. It has occurred neither in the congregation nor in their surrounding social environment. They mentioned certain occasions, when "someone might have felt discriminated", but this was not considered to be a serious problem. One respondent described the situation of disabled people two decades ago, which can be considered as discrimination, whereas the situation today looks whole lot better. Some respondents addressed also the issue of homosexuality and their position can be summarized in the words of one priest: *"we don't discriminate against anybody, but we know for sure, that God created humans male and female"*.

In addition to the ministry on people with hearing and intellectual disabilities, one respondent shared the experience in helping different social groups like ex-convicts, crime victims, some transvestites in the areas like communication with authorities and providing legal aid and pastoral counselling.

The approach to the idea of religious freedom is also quite clear: as far as the religious matters are concerned, Estonia is considered to be a very free and liberal country. Many priests claimed to have been always underlining the freedom of every person to choose a world view or a religion. They don't mind, if a person has decided to convert into a different confession or a person of a different confession is attending their church. A quote of a respondent from Tallinn: *"first of all, we have never persuaded the people, who participate in our confirmation classes, to stay here for good and prohibited them to go to other churches or confessions. /---/ If the Lutheran word service does not speak to the person, then why should we keep him a captive"*. Respondents referred also to the need for the



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church not to be very conservative in the situation, where the society around it is getting in many ways more and more liberal. One respondent from Southern Estonia addressed this issue as follows: *"We have a free country. Unfortunately, if a person dislikes something, he votes with his feet. He walks away with his donations. Congregation cannot force itself on people."*

Cooperation with secular and non-Christian religious organisations

The aim of this question was to find out, whether and to what extent the congregation have cooperation with non-Christian organisations like local municipalities, NGO-s or other religious communities and their organisations.

Main cooperation partners for the congregation are the local municipalities. The respondents stressed repeatedly that the extent and importance of this cooperation cannot be overestimated. Local municipalities have contributed to the renovation of church buildings, in particular cases they delegated some social services to congregations, e.g. soup kitchen, services for children from at-risk families or distribution of clothing to the people in need. Often the municipalities involve local congregations in the celebration of public holidays, schools invite priests to lecture or have classes, hospitals engage priests in pastoral counselling. In several cases respondents have mentioned cooperation with municipal cultural centres which consists of planning joint events and getting support for the church events. One respondent from a larger congregation in Tallinn mentioned cooperation with the city government in the field of tourism. A typical response referring to the cooperation with local municipalities sounds as follows: *"This cooperation is so natural, that we don't even notice it"*. Quite remarkable is the fact, that priest have been or still are members of local councils.

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The cooperation with NGO-s is not so widespread practice, but is addressed in quite many interviews. As cooperation partners they mention organisations of pensioners, local Chamber of People with Disabilities, Union on Lung Health, country union, union of war veterans or war victims, support organisation for the families of the victims in the "Estonia" ferry disaster. There are many cooperation links between the local and church choirs.

The respondents did not bring up almost any examples of cooperation with a non-Christian religious organisation. As exceptions they mentioned an open lecture series for church members and interested public, where Muslims have been invited to lecture, and meetings of a priest with Muslim and Jewish clerics in the ministry as a prison chaplain.

Conclusion

1. Apart from few exceptions, the emigration is not a burning issue in the congregations. The main reason for that is the fact that emigrants are predominantly young people, but the majority of active parish members are already in old age. The problems are more explicit in the immediate social environment, but in general it is not considered to be a major problem as far as the emigrants express their intention to return home in future. Emigration for economic reasons is seen as inevitable.
2. The relations to emigrants, if at all, are more of a personal nature and in congregations there is no organized approach in dealing with this group of people. Usually they send each other e-mails, letters or postcards. In many cases emigrants prefer to remain members of their previous congregations, in order to keep up the links to their home country, but relations to emigrated parishioners tend to fade over time. More often the main problem appears to be the fact, that these people don't inform their congregations about their status.



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3. In general, the relations of a congregation to other local Christian confessions are close and they are addressed in a very positive context. The respondents do not mention any specific problems connected to that. They emphasize - with pride - the openness and tolerance of their congregations towards other Christian confessions, and highlight that Estonia must be the most tolerant country in the religious landscape. The relations to non-Christian denominations are rather limited and sporadic. The main reasons for that are the lack of a (religious) driving force and the fact that in less populated areas there are no other religious denominations existent.
4. There is no awareness of an official opinion or line of the Church as far as the cooperation with other confessions or communication with people of different nationalities are concerned, and the respondents don't feel any particular need for that either. Only couple of respondents felt otherwise and wanted to see an official line taken. EELC is considered to be a very open and ecumenical community having intense and friendly relations to other Christian confessions. There are functioning cooperation councils like Estonian Council of Churches and Evangelical Alliance. Local congregations are given a full freedom to act in this matter and they have not experienced any conflicts or restrictions so far. The respondents find that, if needed, the Church government gives them its support for maintaining the relations with other confessions/ethnic groups. Only the congregations engaged in the ministry in Russian language mentioned the need for more help as far as material and human resources are concerned.
5. The main (and the successful) platform for the contacts between a local congregation and the people of other language minorities is the social work and services. The interest of other ethnic groups in the Lutheran church is mostly of a pragmatic nature: they are either in need of social assistance or have a cultural interest in church as a historic

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- monument or architectural object; in religious issues the interest is very often of a temporary nature, sometimes mixed with the feelings of a slight disaffection and distrust.
6. As far as the necessity for the ministry in Russian language is concerned, the opinions of the priests diverge clearly - there are priests, who don't see the necessity for that and question its effectiveness, but on the other side there are priests, who consider it to be a very important task and want to see the church more active. In general, the attitude towards other ethnic groups in congregations is open-minded, and they are called welcome.
 7. Practically all respondents shared the opinion, that they have never encountered the issue of discrimination on the basis of nationality, religion, gender or sexual orientation. It has occurred neither in the congregation nor in their surrounding social environment. Particularly significant and interesting are the topics raised by the respondents in the context of discrimination. They have mentioned predominantly ethnic and sexual minorities, to a lesser extent also people with disabilities, but they don't think that any discrimination against these groups is happening in Estonia right now.
 8. Main cooperation partners for the congregation, as far as the secular organisations are concerned, are the local municipalities. In particular cases local municipalities have delegated some essential social services to congregations. There are functioning partnerships with schools, hospitals, day care centres, social services centres and other organisations. The respondents addressed in quite many interviews cooperation with NGO-s. The practice of partnerships to other religious organisations is rather marginal.



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ANNEX 1. Coding manual

K1. Scope of activities of the congregation

K1.1 The proportion of other language groups

K2. Encounters with the challenge of emigration

K2.1 Position of the Church / congregation

K3. Encounters/contacts to other Christian confessions in region

K3.1 Encounters/contacts to other non-Christian confessions in region

K4. Contacts to other ethnic groups

K4.1 Percentage of Non-Estonians in region

K4.2 Description of the Non-Estonian population in region

K4.3 Confessional affiliation of the Non-Estonians in region

K4.4 Position of the of the Non-Estonians in region on the cooperation/contacts

K5. Participation of the congregation in the joint projects with other religious communities

K6. Contacts to recently emigrated people

K7. Encounters with the issue of discrimination

K7.1 Countermeasures against the discrimination

K8. Official position of the Church (towards other confession) as reflected at the local level

K8.1 Interpretation / awareness of the official doctrine

K9. Does Church government support you in terms of contacts to other confessions/ethnic groups?

K9.1 Character of the support/conflict

K10. Cooperation with NGO-s

K10.1 Cooperation with local municipalities

K10.2 Cooperation with non-Christian religious organisations

K11. Approach to the question of religious freedom

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