

## **The General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland: The Church will not renounce its right to marry**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland will not renounce its right to officiate marriages. On Thursday, 17 May 2018, the General Synod discussed its foundation committee's report about the Church possibly renouncing its right to marry and approved the report's proposal to retain the right.

The Finnish Marriage Act enables same-sex marriages, but the Church does not. This presents a conflict to which one proposed solution is that the Church renounce its right to marry altogether. The General Synod rejected this solution, however, and unanimously decided to retain the Church's right to marry.

In its meeting, the General Synod also widely discussed the question of broadening the Church's notion of marriage: it was the topic of more than 70 addresses. After a round of votes, the motion to expand the Church's notion of marriage to encompass same-sex marriages was dropped, as was also suggested by the report. The General Synod did, however, decide to request that the Bishops' Conference promote respectful discussion and continue to look for alternatives in solving the prevailing conflict over the notion of marriage.

## **New principles approved for accepting mission agencies**

The General Synod approved new principles for accepting mission agencies. According to these new principles, all mission agencies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland must work on the basis of the Church's confession and in connection with the Church, unless the General Synod decides otherwise for a specific reason. The agencies must also implement the Church's policy and principles of mission in their work.

The position of the current mission agencies remains unchanged unless an agency refuses the new principles for acceptance. New mission agencies are accepted by the General Synod on submission by the Bishops' Conference.

## **Agreement between Finland and Namibia updated**

The General Synod approved the updated cooperation agreement between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Namibia, further consolidating the Church's international relations. The two churches have a long-standing relationship: Finland began missionary work in Namibia in 1870. Some of the contents of the agreement were out of date.