

ALLOWING OTHER RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES TO USE OUR CHURCH BUILDINGS AND PARISH PROPERTIES

Over the past couple of decades the ecumenical and religious situation in our country has undergone significant changes. We therefore need to update our guiding principles for lending various parish premises to other communities.

Church law determines who is to make decisions about the use of a church. According to Chapter 14, section 2 of the Ecclesiastical Code, ‘decisions regarding church use are made by the vicar and the church council or parish council together’. If the vicar and the church council disagree about the use of a church, funeral chapel or chapel, the matter must be resolved by the Diocesan Chapter (*Ecc. Code 9:7*).

Our intention with this procedural advice is to provide support for the people who are making such decisions within each parish.

This guidance applies to situations in which the vicar together with the church or parish council is considering the use of parish premises by a community outside our own church. When those requesting the use of parish premises represent the revivalists of our own church, the guiding principles to be followed are those expressed in the joint declaration by the bishops and revivalists on March 4, 2009.

1. In principle, there is no obstacle to lending church buildings or other parish premises to a Christian church or community for their divine service and other services. Our church has embraced an ecumenical approach that strives to cooperate even with those churches and Christian communities whose teaching differs from our own.

Since there is now a wider variety of Christian communities in Finland than ever before, partly due to immigration, it is counterproductive to give a definitive list of the communities that are to be considered Christian. On a case-by-case basis, parishes can make use of the criteria used in the ecumenical movement. According to which, communities can be considered Christian if they acknowledge the Lord Jesus as God and Saviour in accordance with the Bible and thereby strive to fulfil their joint calling in honour of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

2. Despite our general principle of taking a positive ecumenical attitude towards other Christians, no community can demand that our premises be made available to them. In the event of a service being arranged on the premises of a Lutheran parish, it is reasonable to require that it will not contradict the teaching or work of our own church nor be intended to replace church services for our own members.

3. A reasonable fee can be charged to cover the costs of using the premises (for personnel, electricity, heating, cleaning and suchlike).

When a Christian community uses the parish premises they may use the altar, the baptismal font and the organ.

4. When considering requests from other religious communities a specific, case-by-case decision must always be made, for which it is prudent to adhere to the following principles:

- Parish rooms other than the actual church can be considered.
- For special pastoral needs a non-Christian community may be allowed to use a funeral chapel for funerals.

- The loan of premises is based on Christian hospitality and is in principle a temporary arrangement.
- To avoid any misunderstanding, it is best to agree beforehand that the Christian symbols in the rooms are not to be covered or removed.
- The loan of premises must take place in an atmosphere of mutual respect, and the advice in points 2 and 3 above should be followed with appropriate modifications.

In Rovaniemi, Finland, September 11, 2012



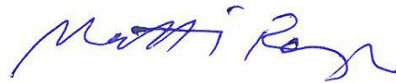
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