

# MILLENNIALS'

# PATHS Finding the Way to a Church That is Authentic and Present



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1

# A parish for the people and agile Christianity

Our Church is a church of encounters. In our parishes, people connect with each other and with God. The Christian faith comes alive when people of an everchanging world come together with the everlasting God in a meaningful way, repeatedly, in new contexts and in new ways.

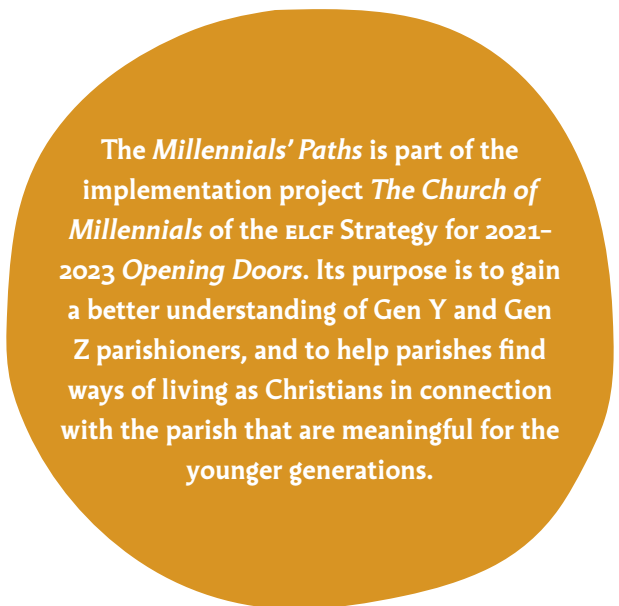
Recent studies have shown that modern-day people wish to create their own paths to living as Christians. The mission of the Church, on the other hand, is to lead people to the fountain of faith, to interact with God, to have faith, hope and love as resources in their lives, and to find a meaningful community in the congregation, should they so desire.

The *Millennials' Paths* is a model intended to promote a more people-oriented culture in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF). It is part of the development of a holistic approach to practical and spiritual ministry, and to our thinking. The *Millennials' Paths* can be used as a tool to implement the ELCF's mission in the Finland of the 2020s – to encourage a people-oriented, diverse and meaningful approach in parishes to reach out to the members of the ELCF as well as the non-members living in the area.

The *Millennials' Paths* complements the ELCF's *Path Model – Living as a parishioner from infancy to adulthood* (only available in Finnish *Polku – vauvasta aikuiseksi seurakunnan yhteydessä* and Swedish *Stigen – Livslångt växande med församlingen*). Age, growth, development and life transitions punctuate the lives of children and young people. For adults, the paths tend to have greater variation and every life moves along at a different pace. As opposed to the age-centred approach adopted in the “Path Model”, the *Millennials' Paths* model seeks to understand the lifestyles and values of parishioners using profiling.

Thus, the objective of implementing the model is not to attract new members – or even to retain existing members – but to understand people and to interact with them. Faith comes from hearing the message, but also from being heard and being noticed. God is wherever people come together without pretence. Only when the ELCF finds a way to be an interactive and people-oriented part of the Finnish society, can Church membership be considered meaningful and a positive.

In addition to providing a frame of reference for relevant approaches, the *Millennials' Paths* can be used as a tool for analysing and developing parish activities. It can be flexibly implemented, and parishes are welcome to modify the model according to their respective needs.



The *Millennials' Paths* is part of the implementation project *The Church of Millennials* of the ELCF Strategy for 2021–2023 *Opening Doors*. Its purpose is to gain a better understanding of Gen Y and Gen Z parishioners, and to help parishes find ways of living as Christians in connection with the parish that are meaningful for the younger generations.



The *Millennials' Paths* is published at the same time as the research article on the project entitled *The Church of Millennials* (only available in Finnish *Millenniaal-ien kirkko* and Swedish *Millennialernas kyrka*) and the 4<sup>th</sup> ELCF Foresight Report *The Signals of Blessings* (only available in Finnish *Siunauksen signaalit* and Swedish *Välsignelsens signaler*). Data for the Foresight Report were collected via interactive meetings held in “Signal Rooms”, where experiences of daily life, and topics such as fears, hopes, the future and the world were discussed. The data in the research article and collected via the “Signal Rooms” both support the contents of the *Millennials' Paths*.

## Church and Society

Individualism and the freedom of choice define the lives of people. People turn to various spiritual and religious sources to find deeper meaning. For a long time, Finland enjoyed a highly homogenous society, but this is now crumbling with diversity on the rise. One's relationship with the Church and Church membership are no longer dictated by tradition. On the contrary, Church membership is increasingly a personal choice. The ELCF has addressed the decline in baptisms and membership through various projects aiming to encourage parishes to acknowledge the situation and to identify what might need to be changed and then to experiment boldly. Accumulated knowledge and experimenting have increased our understanding of the necessity of a holistic change.

As a church, we are carrying out our mission in a new environment which requires us to engage in deeper interaction with the locals and to listen more carefully what is important in their lives. The employee-dominant structure of the Church needs to be disassembled and the role of the parishioners enhanced. We must explore together what it means to have a relationship with the Holy Trinity, what it means to be a Christian, and based on the answers we find, create a new organisational culture within the Church.

Important themes that came forth in the discussions held in the “Signal Rooms” as part of the ELCF's Foresight Report included life before death and people's daily life, our relationship with nature, the unsustainability of our current lifestyle, and alternative spirituality. These are the themes that people are willing to discuss with the Church. Apparently, themes that are important to Millennials are important to all people irrespective of their age. Based on the data collected via the “Signal Rooms”, the future of the ELCF seems bright in this respect despite the declining membership.

Many parish strategies include a shift away from the employee-dominant structure towards a more people-oriented approach. This same theme is also emphasised in the ELCF's missiological report “From everywhere to everywhere” (the Finnish report *Kaikkialta kaikkialle* includes an English summary), in the community-based thinking of the ELCF's collaboration with educational facilities, and in the “Path Model” created as part of the “Baptism and Godparenting” (“Kaste ja kummius”) project.

The *Millennials' Paths* is linked to this all-encompassing effort to generate a shift away from the employee-dominant structure towards a more people-oriented organ-

isation. The *Millennials' Paths* provides parishes with a practical model that brings together this type of thinking. When implemented, it enables leading change and boosting interaction within parishes.

## Focus on Gen Y and Gen Z

The *Millennials' Paths* is written from the younger generations' perspective – what kind of spirituality comes naturally for Gen Y and Gen Z, and what is the kind of parish they would define as 'meaningful'? Millennials – or Gen Y – is a term that is used to refer to people born between 1980 and 1996. Adults born after 1996 are referred to as "Gen Z". In 2023, they are 18 to 43 years old. When the current period of the ELCF's Strategy "Opening Doors" ends in 2026, most of Finland's working age population will belong in either of these two generations. In this document, we use the term "Millennials" to refer to under 45-year-old adults.

The ELCF's adult outreach work is typically based on the needs and wishes of older generations (people born in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s). The *Millennials' Paths* provides information on the values and attitudes of younger generations and the situations they face in life based on research data, and offers practical advice on how to connect with them.

Although the focus of this document is on Millennials, it can be used to develop parish life for adults of any age – being people-oriented and engaging in mutually respectful dialogue do not go amiss when listening to the wishes and needs of older generations either.

## Summary of Chapters

Chapter One introduces the theses and key principles including focusing on people, accessibility, having no thresholds, embracing the varieties of living by faith, and accepting everyone's right to determine how to live as Christians in ways that are meaningful to themselves.

Chapter Two focuses on being people-oriented. As a tool, we use four profiles of Millennials which expand the age-groups typically used in the Church to cover the younger generations and the overall population of the area in more detail.

Chapter Three discusses the forms of spirituality that according to the studies conducted as part of the project, are meaningful to young adults, in particular. In the latter part of this chapter, the previous content is reviewed against the Millennial profiles described in Chapter Two, and the importance of spirituality in each of the four profiles is described.

Chapter Four focuses on people-oriented communication, and on how to reach Gen Y and Gen Z. The key issue here is that for the younger generations, the great majority of all interaction takes place online, on various social media platforms, in particular. Thus, communication can not be separate from what we do and where we operate.



**CREATING SAFE SPACES  
BY MAKING ROOM FOR DIFFERENCES  
AND ADDRESSING PEOPLE RESPECTFULLY**

Making room for differences, addressing everyone with respect, and providing a safe space help create an experience of an inclusive church that welcomes everyone.

Nurturing sensitivity is essential in all interaction. Gender sensitivity means being sensitive to the various descriptions of gender. In an environment where sensitivity is nurtured, individuals are treated as themselves – not stereotypical representatives of their gender. Sensitivity also means that an employee is quick to critically review their own values, perceptions and ways. Often this is referred to as ‘gender-awareness’.

People have challenges in their lives that raise the threshold to participate in activities, services or communication, or exclude participation completely. These challenges might not be apparent to an observer.

Financial challenges affect people of all ages and young adults, in particular. Low income may be the result of studying, unemployment or being on parental leave. If the Church expects to gain relevance in the lives of the younger generations, it is important to understand that even a nominal cost might be too much. The cost of working hours spent on collecting payments for coffee and snacks, for example, and adding them to the account books, exceeds the generated income. Therefore, a voluntary donation to charity is a better option.

Small changes can make a big difference. In most cases, a respectful attitude goes a long way. For example, do you call it financial aid – or sponsoring? Can you apply for it using the same form you use to sign in – or do you need to schedule an appointment with an employee? It is advisable to critically review the established practices in parishes and to eliminate any unnecessary bureaucracy such as requiring a plethora of certificates. For example, when someone applies for financial aid, you can usually rely on their own declaration of annual income and family size.

You never know what battles others are fighting. When you treat others with respect, you express your willingness to find solutions together and that you trust the person to tell you the truth about their situation.

Chapter Five introduces various forms of communal activity. The chapter provides tools to map the current communities within a parish and means of adapting a more people-oriented approach. In the latter part of this chapter, communal activities are discussed in terms of the Millennial profiles described in Chapter Two.

Chapter Six focuses on doing good. The younger generations not only demand for themselves but also wish to give to others. Among other things, the profiles of Millennials differ in what constitutes a natural way of doing good.

Chapter Seven discusses connecting with people in other life transitions in addition to religious ceremonies. In the life of a young adult, typical transitions include moving to a new city, the end of a relationship, starting studies, or starting in a new job.

Chapter Eight encourages parishes to create their own versions of the Millennials' Paths, and provides links to practical examples and methods.

## The Goals and Theses of the Working Group

For Gen Y and Gen Z, it is key to be allowed to freely choose their own religious path. In order to enable this, it is necessary to work towards achieving the following goals.

- It is important to people to feel that the Church/parish:
- Supports their lifestyle and how they choose to live as Christians;
- Provides for spirituality that they find meaningful and that comes naturally to them;
- Is in alignment with their values and their life; and
- Helps those in need and provides opportunities for doing good.



By 2026:

- Parishes are familiar with their member profiles, i.e. know the types of people living in the area;
- Parishes have made an informed decision on how to allocate resources based on member profiles;
- The parish employees engage in the daily life and communities of the people living in the area;
- Parishes have allocated employee resources to support students and working aged to live a Christian life and to strengthen a meaningful connection with the parish;
- At least a quarter of the current parish activities have been re-aligned in a way that enables connecting with people on their terms;
- Communication and staying in touch is included in every parish employees' job description; and
- The role of parish employees is no longer to act but to enable, and parish life is designed and led by the parishioners.

Helsinki, 29 November 2022

Katri Vappula, Chair, and the members of the Working Group: Henna Ahlfors, Titi Gävert, Ville Halkoluoto, Kirsi-Marja Koski, Jussi Laine, Laura Leipakka, Stiven Naatus, Menni Nousiainen, Henna Nortunen, Heidi Pitkänen, Liisa Pohjonen, Jari Pulkkinen, Timo Pöyhönen, Rebecka Stråhlman and Miia Stähle.







A person is shown in profile, looking out a window. The window has a purple geometric pattern. A large white arrow graphic points from the top right towards the window. The person is wearing a dark, textured sweater.

2

# The People in your parish

When a parish is people-oriented, the employees know the people living in the area, rely on their experiences, interact with them and allow for the parish to be reformed with new generations.

**F**or most people, organisation structure, professional fields, professional boundaries and doctrine are not that important. Instead, it is important that the Church is there for them during life transitions, that it answers to their yearning for spirituality and community, and that it provides a framework for having a connection with God – in our everyday lives and on special occasions.

## **How to use data as the basis for the development of a people-oriented parish**

One of the first and most important stages in the shift towards a people-oriented parish is to collect data regarding the people who live in the area. Studying locals helps to acquire a more comprehensive understanding of the people who live in the area.

Dividing the population into different groups, or segments, based on their values and situation in life is one way of learning to know the locals. The source material

### **FOCUS ON VALUES**

The ELCF Foresight Report the *Signals of Blessings* (*Siunauksen signaalit*) encapsulates observations, thoughts, concerns, fears, dreams and hopes in the here and now.

The following six themes arose from national data:

1. Emphasis on everyday Christianity.
2. The strengthened role of nature as a source of spirituality.
3. Alternative spirituality challenges our traditions.
4. Our current lifestyle is unsustainable.
5. Families are increasingly diverse, and this should not be ignored.
6. There is joy in a church that stops and listens.

The Church can form meaningful connections with people by being authentic, by shedding all pretence, and by listening and paying attention. If you'd organise a "Signal Workshop" in your parish, what topics could you expect to emerge? For instructions on how to set up a "Signal Room", please visit:

[evl.fi/siunauksen-signalit](http://evl.fi/siunauksen-signalit)  
(in Finnish and Swedish only).

combines statistics and data from surveys on values and attitudes. For the purposes of this document, Statistics Finland was commissioned to conduct a segmentation analysis on 18 to 35-year-old Finns. The data complement the knowledge the parish employees have of the local population, and to learn more about the parishioners living in the area, the four-year report of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and membership analyses conducted by parishes might also be of use.

Based on the segmentation analysis, four Millennial Profiles were generated. The profiles are used as a tool to observe the current situation and in people-oriented development. With the help of these profiles we can – figuratively speaking – ask the different groups in the area the same question Jesus asked from the blind man: “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus approached people on a personal level, with discretion and providing solutions customised to the need in question.

For more information on research conducted as part of the “Church of Millennials” project, please visit <https://evl.fi/milleniaalienkirkko/tutkimus> (in Finnish only).

## Millennial Segments and Profiles

Four different groups, or segments, were identified among the 18 to 35 year old adults. The younger generations do not constitute a homogenous group – according to the “Values360 Church” Survey (“Arvot360 Kirkko”), their views on spirituality, Church membership, theism and priorities in society, for example, differ. As a whole, the four segments differ significantly from each other, although they might seem closely aligned in terms of individual themes. Most likely, any close alignment occurs regarding themes that are important to 18 to 35-year-olds in general.

In the following chapters, we describe the main characteristics, situation in life, media use, values, and expectations regarding the Church of each of the four member profiles. These descriptions are summarised in the profile cards. Gender-based divisions present in the profile cards are based on the distribution of women and men identified in the study. The descriptions are based on generalisations and, hence, individuals might have characteristics of more than one profile, or identify with none of the profiles. Generalisations eliminate also many quite typical features specific to certain situations in life, such as finances or the consequences of an illness. There was no data on immigrant young adults available for this document, and as a result the dataset used in segmentation did not include any data on that population.

Profiles aid in adopting more diverse ways of thinking and acting. Furthermore, they focus attention on the different values and attitudes young adults have instead of focusing on age-groups alone.

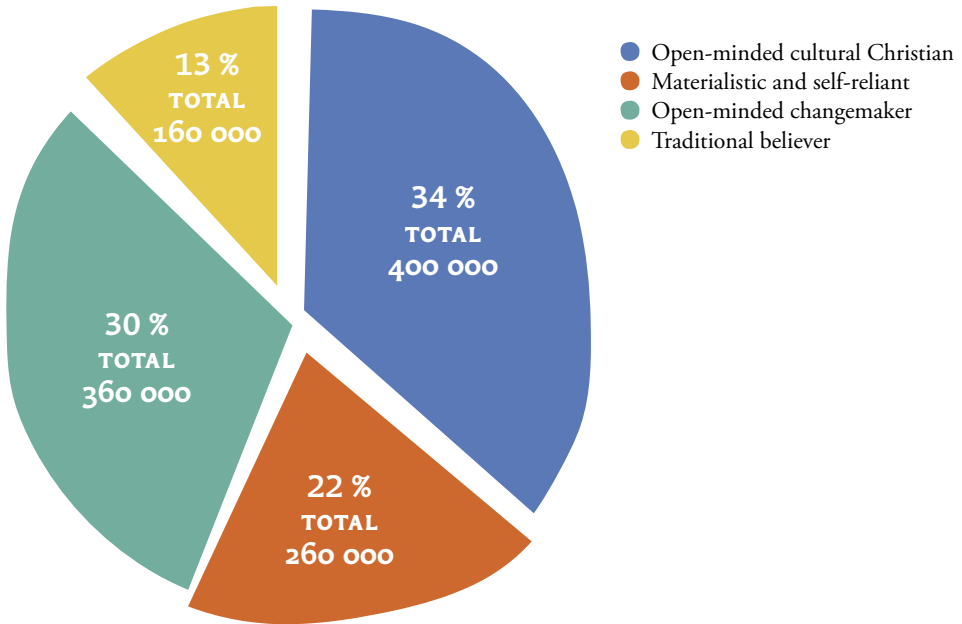
The four identified membership profiles were named:

- Open-minded cultural Christian;
- Materialistic and self-reliant;
- Open-minded changemaker; and
- Traditional believer

The overall distribution and distribution by Church membership are shown in the following figures.

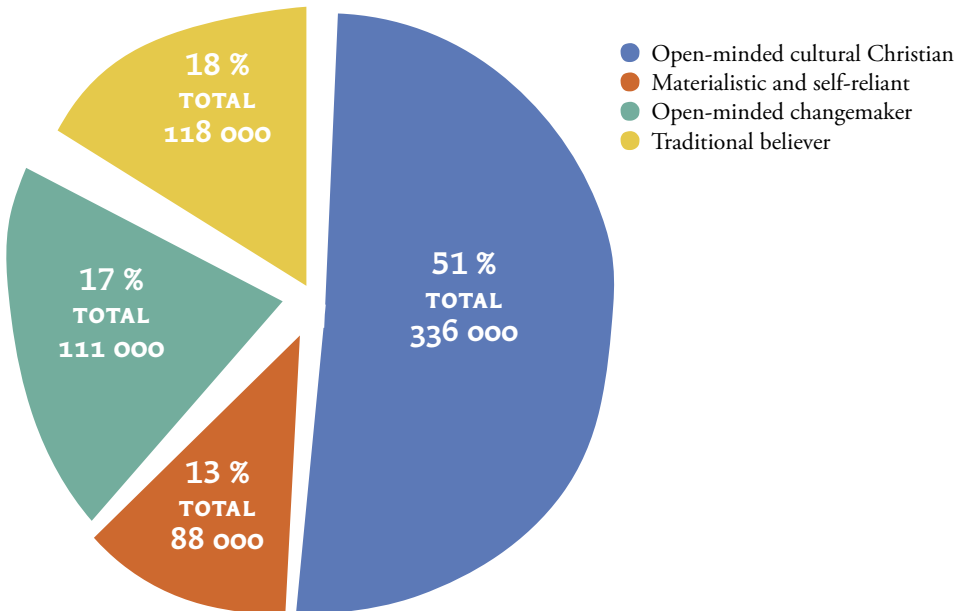


**DISTRIBUTION OF MILLENNIALS, ALL 18 TO 35-YEAR-OLDS**



*Overall distribution of Millennials*

**DISTRIBUTION OF MILLENNIALS, 18 TO 35-YEAR-OLD MEMBERS OF THE ELCF**



*Distribution of Millennials by Church membership*



*Segmentation was based on the analysis of data from the “Values360 Church” Survey (“Arvot360 Kirkko”) regarding respondents who were 18 to 35 years old (n = 677). The analysis was performed by Taloustutkimus Oy in November 2021.*

*The dataset was processed using statistical analysis tools. First, factor analysis was performed on the dataset to extract common variance to identify dataset connections (principal component analysis). Then, clustering (k means) to group similar observations was performed to create a segment model from the dataset.*

*The generated segments received a description, and cross tabulation was performed based on the segment model.*

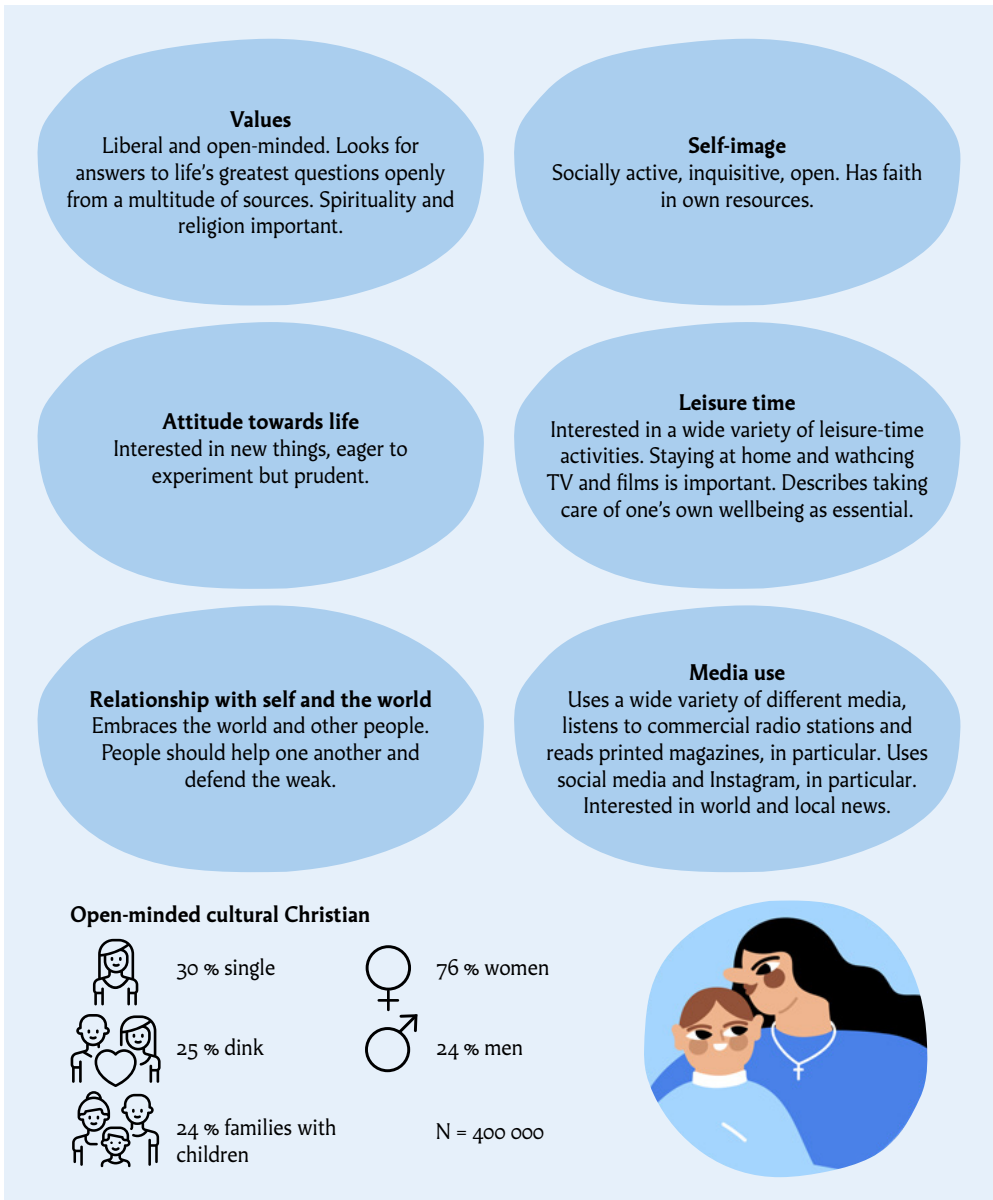
*Additionally, the Millennial Segments were modelled to geospatial data and entered into an online interface which enabled examining the segments in terms of regional prevalence.*



## OPEN-MINDED CULTURAL CHRISTIAN

As the name indicates, open-minded cultural Christians are open-minded, social and prudent. Compared to the other segments, this segment has a higher proportion of women, and one in four has children. Most live in single family homes as opposed to living in a block of flats. Open-minded cultural Christians are typically found in small town or rural parishes, and to a lesser degree in large urban parishes.

Open-minded cultural Christians value their Christian roots. Their lives are punctuated by annual festivals, and Christian ceremonies mark life transitions. In



their opinion, the Church plays an important role in the Finnish society and diaconia, in particular.

Open-minded cultural Christians attend services during annual religious festivals and ceremonies. Their personal connection to the parish may be thin. Open-minded cultural Christians may sing in the Church choir, if they are interested in that genre of music. They may also volunteer in diaconal work and Christian education. They are most likely best reached via Instagram, but read printed magazines as well. Thus, co-operation with commercial magazines and the radio could help in reaching them.

This segment comprises 400,000 young adults, and nearly 336,000 of them are members of the ELCF.

### Christianity

Considers the right to religious education of own denomination at school important. Christian understanding of being human, intellect enables telling right from wrong.

Appreciates the hymn tradition.

49% pray  
25% meditate  
18% read the Bible

### Spirituality

35% spiritual  
18% religious  
16% agnostic  
9% atheist

17% believe in God according Christian faith  
34% not sure if believe in God  
12% do not believe in the existence of God

### The Role and Tasks of the Church

The Church plays an important role in caring for the weak and in upholding Christian traditions.

### Attitude towards religious ceremonies

Likely to mark life transitions with religious ceremony. Positive attitude towards Church activities.

### Expectations

Expects the Church to care for the underprivileged, to offer weddings and blessing to same-sex couples, and to collaborate with other religious communities.

### Outreach

If open-minded, the Church can serve as a partner with whom to discuss spiritual questions. Practice of silence, pilgrimages, nature-based spirituality, retreats.

### Open-minded cultural Christian

84 % members of the ELCF

64 % religion discussed in childhood home

71 % bedtime prayer taught

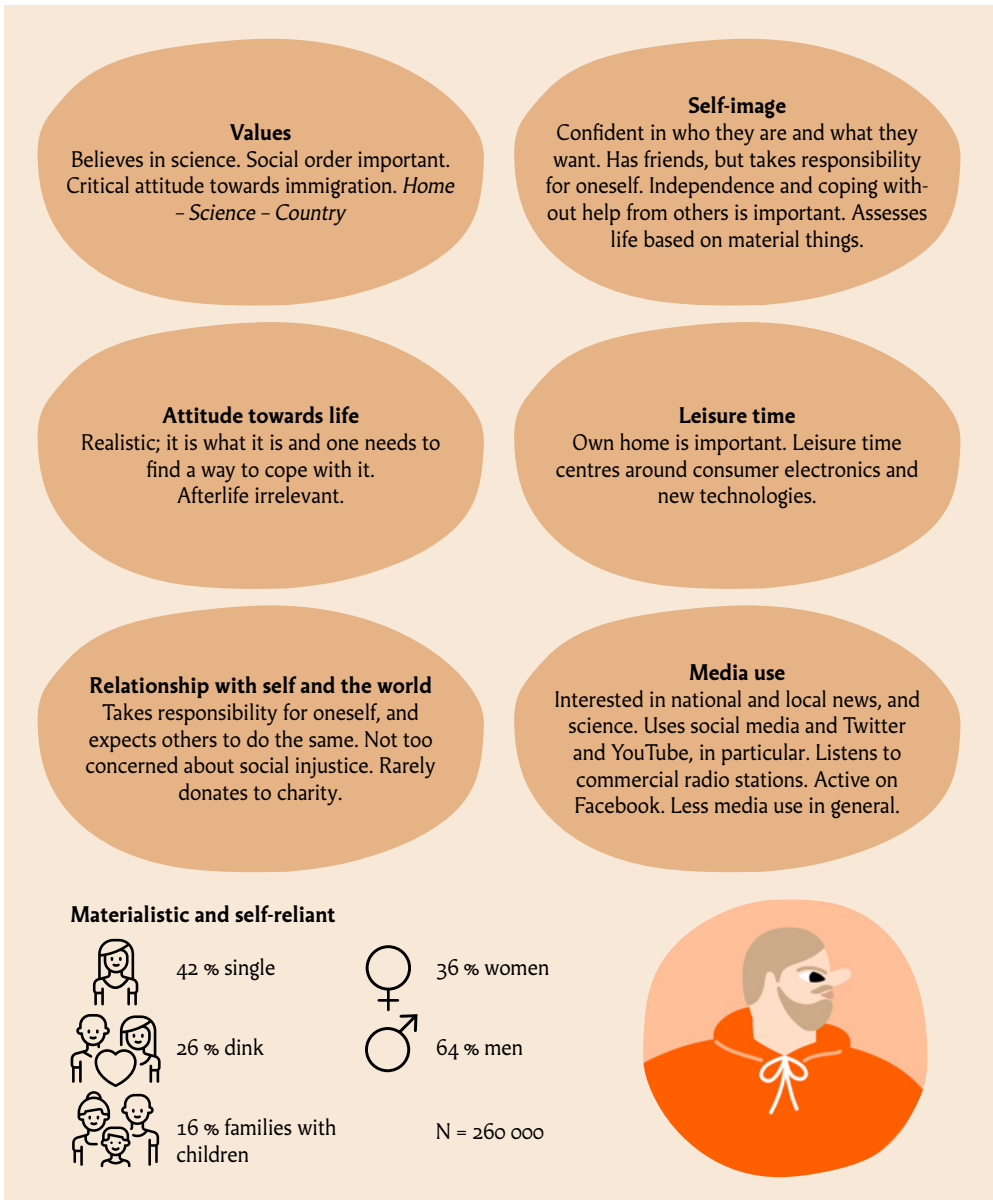
62 % Christians



## MATERIALISTIC AND SELF-RELIANT

In this segment, two thirds are men who typically have settled to where they will live, and are more often than not employed. Very few in this segment have children, and many live alone.

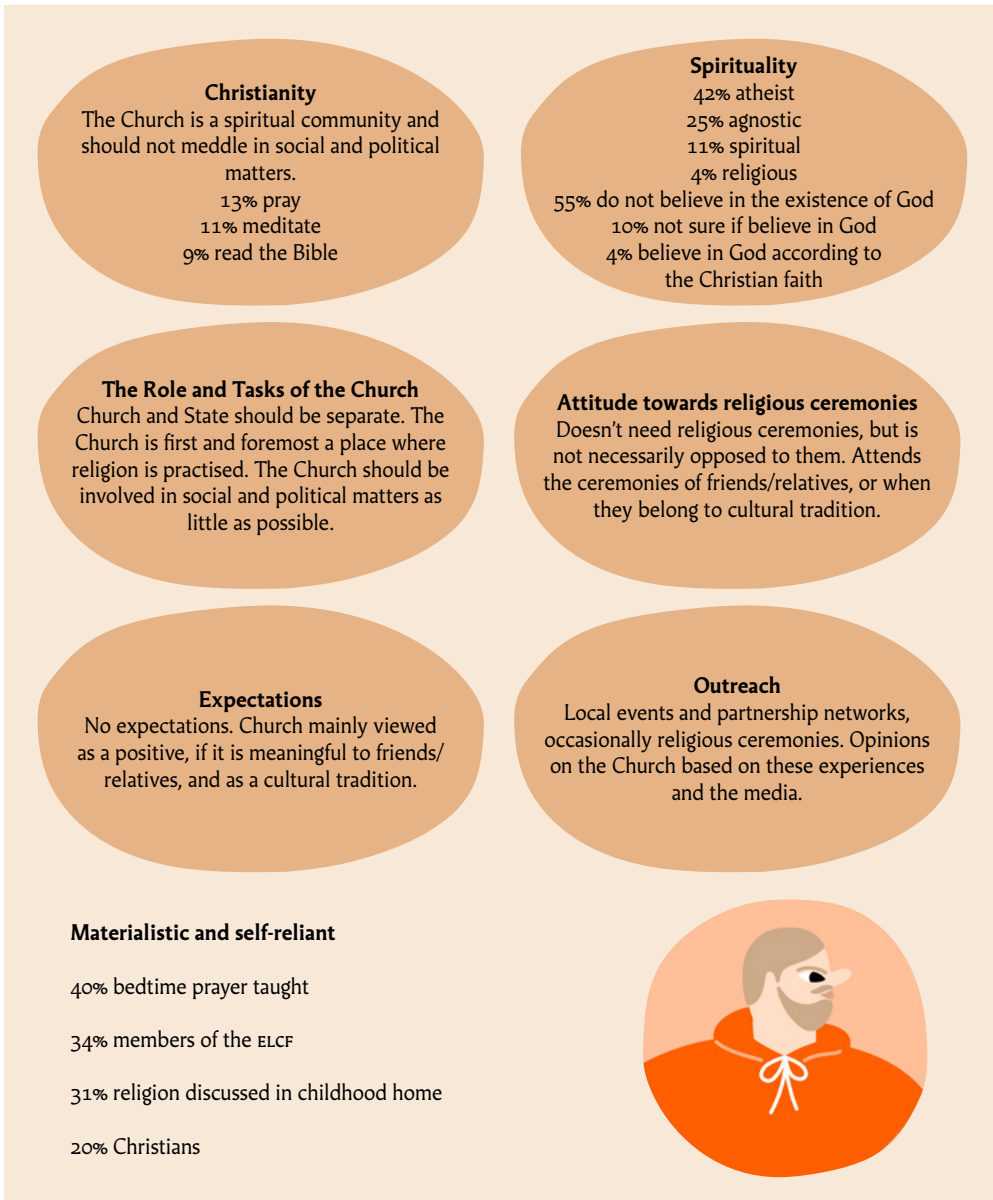
The materialistic and self-reliant rely heavily on their own abilities, and are united in their strong belief in science and knowledge. Their values can be summarised by the phrase “Everyone is the master of their own happiness”. The materialistic and self-reliant are willing to make an effort when it is for a cause they



consider important.

The Church plays no role in the lives of the materialistic and self-reliant. This segment is the most critical about the presence of the Church – and religion in general – in society. For them, church is a place where other people practise their religion. They come into contact with Church employees when attending a religious ceremony of friends or family. Because they have a keen interest in knowledge and science, they might be interested in listening to a scientific podcast, for example.

This segment comprises 260,000 young adults, and 88,400 of them are members of the ELCF.



**OPEN-MINDED CHANGEMAKER**

Open-minded changemakers are principled and united by values. For them, justice and equality are inalienable values they expect to promote in their lives. Two in three are women, and most have or are studying for a Master’s degree. Open-minded changemakers are typically found in cities which have universities. Typically, they rent an apartment in a block of flats. Few have children.

Open-minded changemakers are major consumers of fact-based media. They are interested in content shared on the latest media platforms with emphasis on

**Values**  
Believes in science, global justice, equality.  
Equality, justice, global issues

**Self-image**  
Personal growth important. See themselves as actors in a global reality. Open to learning and experiencing new things.

**Attitude towards life**  
Aware of the environmental and global issues. Believes in development; believes one can make a difference by making the right choices and by adopting the correct attitude. Embraces other cultures.

**Leisure time**  
Follows current topics. Interested in reading, cooking, nature, travelling and staying at home.  
Actively consumes culture and art.

**Relationship with self and the world**  
Focus on nature manifest in leisure time activities and actively promoting environmental issues. Acutely aware of what happens in different parts of the globe. Wants to take action to create a better world.

**Media use**  
Interested in fact-based digital media, including online versions of newspapers, blogs, LinkedIn and Twitter.  
Seldom watches conventional TV or listens to the radio.

**Open-minded changemakers**

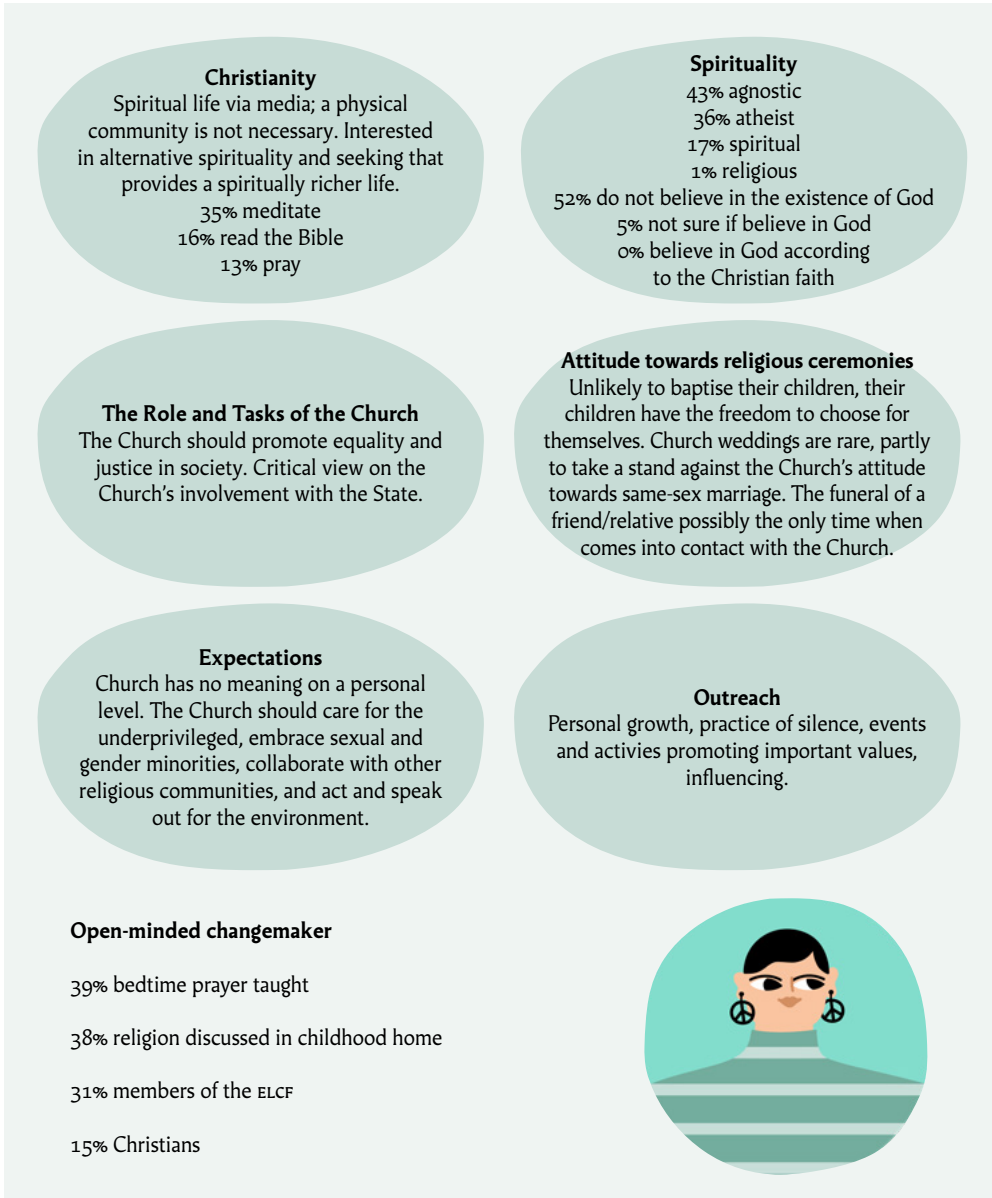
- 35 % single
- 36 % dink
- 12 % families with children
- 67 % women
- 33 % men
- N = 360 000



environmental awareness, current global issues, and personal growth.

Open-minded changemakers have a positive attitude towards spiritual matters, but do not consider themselves religious. For them, the Church has a meaningful role in promoting social justice and helping those in need. However, in their opinion the Church should be more determined in its support for same-sex couples, and collaborate with other religious communities.

This segment comprises 360,000 young adults, and 111,600 of them are members of the ELCF.



**TRADITIONAL BELIEVER**

Traditional believers are united by their shared beliefs and worldview. This segment has an equal distribution of women and men. Typically, this segment has more home-owners living in residential areas compared to other young adults.

For the traditional believers, Church is a spiritual actor and holds a strong position in society. Religious ceremonies have deep spiritual meaning for them. Traditional believers are likely to attend parish activities on a regular basis, and are

**Values**  
Home, Faith, Country. Wishes that Christian values continue to be respected in Finland and that they would be the basis for political decision-making.

**Self-image**  
Strong Christian faith. Believes in divine guidance and that God will lead them and take care of them.


**Attitude towards life**  
Religion gives life structure. Interested in current and local affairs.

**Leisure time**  
Spirituality and religion play an important role. Enjoys travelling in Finland. Taking care of oneself is important (e.g. hiking in the woods), but does not focus on materialistic values.


**Relationship with self and the world**  
Social order is important.  
Active in society and charitable causes.  
Personal growth is important.


**Media use**  
Christian media and printed newspapers and magazines. Follows Yle's channels, including mobile and web-based versions. Below average use of streaming services and social media channels.


**Traditional believer**

 29 % single

 24 % dink

 33 % families with children

 48 % women

 52 % men

N = 160 000



possibly active as volunteers also. They expect the Church to deliver the message of Christianity, and to comment on current affairs from the Christian perspective and according to the Bible.

One in three have children. Therefore, how the parish welcomes children is important to them. They can be reached fairly well via Christian media online and as printed media.

This segment comprises 160,000 young adults, and 118,000 of them are members of the ELCF.

**Christianity**  
 Christian understanding of being human, divine grace, hymn tradition and the teachings of the Scripture are important.  
 49% pray  
 25% meditate  
 18% read the Bible

**Spirituality**  
 64% spiritual  
 46% religious  
 10% agnostic  
 4% atheist  
 64% believe in God according Christian faith  
 11% not sure if believe in God  
 4% do not believe in the existence of God

**The Role and Tasks of the Church**  
 The Church is an important actor in society. Positive attitude towards the Church's involvement with the State. However, the primary task of the Church is its mission. Church is an important community where they feel included.

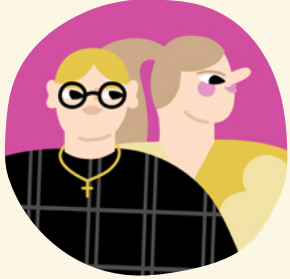
**Attitude towards religious ceremonies**  
 Religious ceremonies have deep spiritual meaning and they give life meaning and purpose.

**Expectations**  
 The Church adheres to the Scripture. The Church cares for the underprivileged. Expects the Church to speak out on current affairs from the Christian perspective, and to uphold traditions.

**Outreach**  
 Group activities, worship, religious ceremonies, newspapers & magazines and other media.

**Traditional believer**

- 74% members of the ELCF
- 64% religion discussed in childhood home
- 71% bedtime prayer taught
- 91% Christians









# 3 Spirituality as a personal space

Having the opportunity to formulate one's own worldview and to choose the ways in which to practise one's spirituality is important to Millennials. The Church can hold up Christianity as a mirror to provide a reflection against which to compare one's worldview and to open up routes that enable faith, hope and love to flow into our lives.

**K**ey findings from studies on young adults' thoughts on spirituality:

- The range of young adults' experiences of spirituality is immensely diverse.
- Young adults described experiences that the Church would call "spiritual", but they themselves typically conceptualise and articulate those experiences differently.
- Spirituality is seen as a space for free experimentation, something that counterbalances performance-oriented life.
- Spirituality is regarded as private, and people are tolerant to the spirituality of others.
- Young adults are also flexible regarding changes in religious beliefs.
- Religious practice and non-belief can coexist within the same person's life.
- Many wish they had faith.
- Faith is described as authentic, something deeply personal and unforced.
- Life's greatest questions are typically not articulated from a religious perspective, but are linked to one's worldview and deliberated accordingly. Young adults turn to themselves for answers, or are of the opinion that there are no definitive answers to such questions.
- World religions as concepts are typically very distant from the respondents' personal spiritual experiences.

## **Personal definitions of Spirituality**

Millennials seldom identify as "spiritual" in the conventional sense, and even less often as "religious". Despite this, they may include Christian elements in the upbringing of their children, and discuss religious topics.

Nearly one in two of the 25 to 35-year-old women identify as "spiritual", yet do not intend to join any religion. They are interested in the sacred and the supernatural. Characterising oneself as spiritual, but not religious, is becoming more and more common.

Individualism and experiences are highlighted in the spirituality of Millennials. For Millennials, the spiritual life and worship in parishes seem restrained and timid – even boring.

## **Agile and Boundless Spirituality**

Words such as "boundless", "diverse", "agile" and "accepting" define the spirituality of many Millennials. They are not necessarily interested in whether something is true or not, but whether it works for them. The important question is whether spirituality is a source of strength or peace.

How could we enable this accepting, unconstrained and diverse spirituality the younger generations long for? How could we support boundless spirituality rooted in personal experience?



Often Church employees take on the role of an interpreter mediating between Christian tradition and modern trends. Attempts at conversion, coerciveness or the use of absolutes and unyielding tones of voice tend to alienate Millennials.

The Lutheran denomination is based on scripture, whereas Millennials are a generation that seeks experiences. They are after bodily awareness and experiencing with all senses. As such, bodily awareness is not foreign to Christianity whose core message is: “The Word became flesh”. Sacraments involve water, wine and bread – all of which enter the body. In practice, however, we have all but forgotten about body and experience. Would it be possible for the Church of scripture to also be a Church of experience?

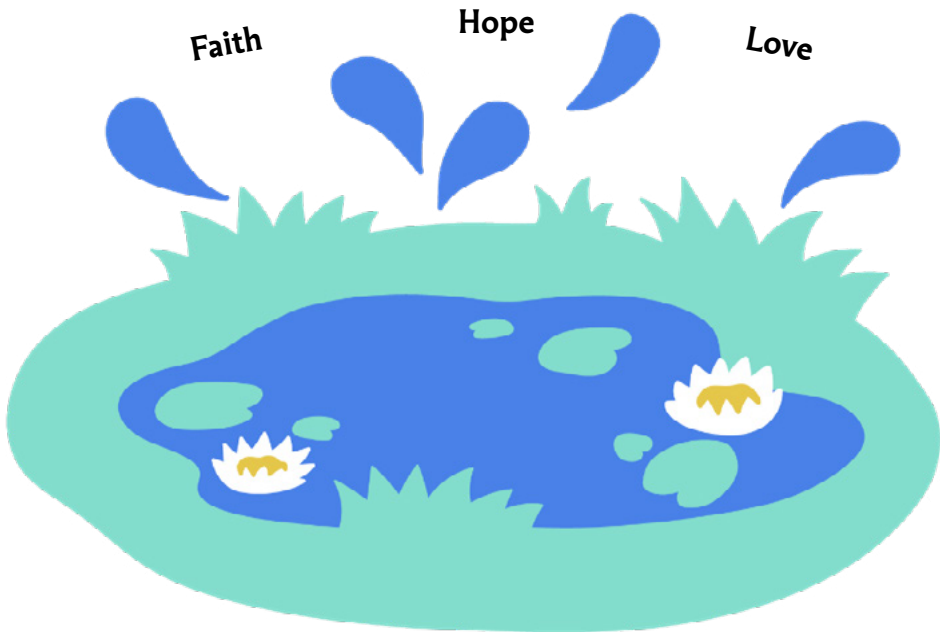
Millennials frequently gravitate towards new religious movements in search of experiences and spiritual adventure. How could we unearth in the Church a spirituality that is not theoretical and conceptual, but an experience that works for people? How could we make room for the “naturally supernatural” that goes beyond the mundane? Perhaps we could find inspiration from Christian mysticism and the reviving pilgrimage tradition!



## Millennial Profiles, Spirituality and Relationship with the Lutheran Church

The young adults' understanding and experiences of spirituality differ from those of their parents. This was apparent in the most recent four-year report of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland "*Uskonto arjessa ja juhlassa*" ["The Role of Religion in Everyday Life and Special Occasions"]: Christianity as a collective cultural identity, in particular, is problematic for Millennials. It's not that they are alienated by the excessive spirituality of the Christian faith (as claims about secularism might lead one to believe). On the contrary, their attitudes towards spirituality are characteristic to seekers who can be highly tolerant of religion in general. In this age-group, up to one in three identified as a seeker. However, the proportion of cultural Christians was the smallest – less than one in four.

In terms of spiritual needs and preferences, Millennials are not a homogenous group. In the following section, we examine Millennials' perceptions of spirituality against the profile segments described above.



## CHURCH CARRIES OUT ITS MISSION IN A NEW SITUATION

According to the ELCF's missiological report *Kaikkialta kaikkialle - kirkon missio nyt [From everywhere to everywhere - The Mission of the Church Today]*, as a church, we are carrying out our mission in a new situation. The Church's understanding of mission has expanded and is now seen as holistic interaction with the world around it. In addition to one-on-one meetings, the report calls for skills required in community-based operations. It also highlights the changes in the operational environment of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland: secularism, alternative spirituality, and religious diversity.

A community can at the same time have a strong message and identity while supporting a welcoming and tolerant culture. Finding one's own answers and the Church's doctrine are not mutually exclusive. Taking respectful interaction seriously means that the message of the Church is not be delivered as a complete package one can either take or leave, but rather as an invitation to dialogue and an opportunity to take steps together in understanding the message. Here, we can follow Jesus' example. In the Gospels, Jesus invites individuals and groups of people to join Him.

Could it be that sometimes when we think that we  
are genuinely enabling seeking, we are, in fact,  
showing a completely different face?  
The kind of face that knows better and  
defines what kind of faith  
is appropriate?



### **OPEN-MINDED CULTURAL CHRISTIAN**

Most open-minded cultural Christians describe themselves as Christians and Lutherans, while only one in four thinks of themselves as believers. Church membership is most common in this segment both in comparison to other segments and in numbers. It is likely that in the future the majority of the members of the ELCF belong to this segment. Hence, open-minded cultural Christians are very important for the future of the ELCF.

Religious ceremonies and Christian festivals can be meaningful to open-minded cultural Christians. They pray, meditate and read the Bible at least once in a while. One in two say their upbringing was Christian, or at least they were taught a bedtime prayer at home.

Open-minded cultural Christians have a positive attitude towards Christian traditions. They may embrace Christian traditions in their lives, if they find them a fascinating and touching experience. Tastes, ambience, music and activities everyone can participate in can be used to invite open-minded cultural Christians to explore Christian celebrations in more detail. Instead of a prayer, bedtime rituals can include singing a lullaby or tracing a blessing or story on the child's back.



### **MATERIALISTIC AND SELF-RELIANT**

Spirituality is not important to the materialistic and self-reliant, and Church plays no role in their lives. However, they appreciate the role of the Church to other people, their parents, for example. There may have been some Christian traditions in their childhood home, such as bedtime prayer. In their opinion, the Church is first and foremost a place to practise religion, and should not involve itself in social and political matters. Their relationship with the Church is solely through other people. They attend religious ceremonies of their friends or family.

The majority of the materialistic and self-reliant do not believe in the existence of God. What is seen positive about the Church is that it upholds traditions. Church buildings may be of interest because of their cultural and historical value.

In this segment, one in four describe themselves as Christians, but not believers.



### **OPEN-MINDED CHANGEMAKERS**

The open-minded changemakers are only thinly connected to the Church. The Lutheran Church does not play any significant role in their lives. One in two say they do not believe in the existence of God or other deities, and no-one in this segment believes in God according to the Christian faith.

However, nearly one in five think of themselves as spiritual, and nearly one in two is agnostic.

Religious ceremonies feel foreign to open-minded changemakers who are unlikely to have their children baptised, or have a Church wedding. For them, the Church is the religious community of other people.

The majority of open-minded changemakers do not pray or read the Bible, but one in three meditate at least once in a while.

Parishes can provide open-minded changemakers tools for personal growth. For open-minded changemakers, spirituality can be practised without a physical community online or in private meditation, for example. Open-minded changemakers might be interested in Christian meditation, environmental fasting, wellbeing and in the Church's opinions on social politics and ethics.



### **TRADITIONAL BELIEVER**

Traditional believers describe themselves as Christians and Lutherans, and most of them are members of the ELCF.

Believing in God is important to traditional believers. They adhere to traditional Christian doctrine, and are of the opinion that the Church should closely follow the teachings of the Bible. Typically, traditional believers come from Christian homes. Compared to an average Millennial, traditional believers are more likely to pray, and to pray more often.

In comparison to the other Millennial segments, traditional believers are most likely to participate regularly in parish activities and worship. For them, the definitive factor is that worship is holistic and inclusive. The language and practices have been modified to cater for traditional believers, and they can participate in the planning and implementation stages, if they wish to do so. If traditional believers do not find their place in a Lutheran parish, they are likely to turn to other religious communities.





# 4

# Interacting and Connecting through Communication

## ELCF Communication:

- Based on the core message of the Church
- Unashamedly Christian content
- Topical and transparent
- Conversational and respectful
- Unambiguous and accessible
- Recognises the needs of different target groups
- Reforms with the new developments in communication channels and technologies.

*ELCF Communication Strategy 2023.*

**F**or Millennials, the Church exists and is visible solely through media. Instead of thinking communication in terms of providing information, it should be viewed as a means of congregational connection. Communication is in itself a means for reaching out and connecting with people – not merely a means to invite and inform. Through communication we present an image of the Church. Is it repulsive or inviting? Does it reinforce stereotypes or challenge them? Communication creates an understanding of what the Church’s message is and what are the things the Church represents as a community.

The purpose of communication is to create meaning, and to reinforce a sense of belonging, for example. Social media offers parishes an opportunity to interactively share ideas and experiences. Parishes should be familiar with their environments and understand the needs of their target groups.

### MILLENNIALS AND THE MEDIA

- A generation of digital natives whose media use is fragmented.
- Pioneers in taking over new media.
- Prefer disappearing content, value privacy, and seek interaction and participatory content.
- Use media primarily on mobile devices.
- Social media platforms used by 94% of the 16 to 24-year-olds.

Significant variation in how different social media platforms are used and how much time is spent using them. These are affected by age, gender and segment.

In 2022, Instagram and YouTube were the most common social media platforms used by Gen Y and Gen Z. In younger generations, Snapchat and TikTok are gaining popularity. Facebook is the most common among older generations.

Social media platforms host a wide range of channels. The content and target groups of the different channels are more important than the platform.





## **Communicating Digitally attracts Millennials to the Church**

To be able to have interaction and personal encounters, the Church must create a safe space, address everyone with respect, and engage in dialogue. Digital environments lower the threshold to interact with people.

All age-groups benefit when the parish communication targeting young adults is diverse and of high quality. Content should centre around key messages that are meaningful and have potential for evoking powerful emotions. Meaningful interaction is generated by combining the message of the Church with issues important to Gen Y and Gen Z.

The selected tone of voice is no less important than the content. Younger generations respect everyone's right to their opinions and worldviews. In communication, this means adopting a respectful tone and accepting that we are different. When no-one pretends to own the truth, even controversial topics can be discussed while maintaining an atmosphere of mutual respect and having room for opposing views.

For younger generations, authenticity and presence are more important than advanced technology. Communication at its best enables discussing issues openly and in a respectful tone. The Church accommodates a multitude of opinions, and this is something that should be made visible.

## **Communication is Everyone's Responsibility**

Through their actions, every single parish employee and volunteer communicate information about the Church. How do we welcome visitors in the parish offices? How do we welcome passers-by? What about groups of young people? How do we interact with people at ceremonies? How do we behave when there is an opportunity to have a random conversation? Are we present and available in the local channels on social media? A successful encounter is remembered for a long time – but so is an unsuccessful one!

How do the communication professionals participate in everyday activities and contribute their knowledge of the target groups? Could we plan, implement and assess all parish endeavours from the perspective of communication?

It would benefit the Church and its parishes to know which spiritual topics interest Millennials. The Church does not have a monopoly on religious and spiritual content nor the related discussions. Often, communication is more effective between parishioners than when parish employees communicate with the parishioners. This should be encouraged.

## **Segment-specific Communication**

When planning communication, consider what you already know about the target group's values and attitudes and how you intend to respond.

Younger generations are not effectively reached via conventional communication channels and methods. Segmentation helps us improve our communication and create content that takes into consideration the needs and media use of our target group.

For many young adults, the only connection they have with the Church and Christianity is when they attend a religious ceremony of a friend or a relative. Profiling enhances understanding in these situations as well. How do you address the people attending religious ceremonies? Talking past others is alienating.

Some segments are best reached online. How could we eliminate having several small streams, and take advantage of opportunities on a broader scale? Establishing hundreds of separate mindfulness services and Godfulness sites is hardly an efficient use of resources. When a successful online service is developed somewhere, could we scale it to cover all of Finland? While most Millennials do not follow any of the Church's media, maybe we could co-operate with commercial media to produce interesting content? Is there a way to invest jointly in this type of collaboration?



## OPEN-MINDED CULTURAL CHRISTIAN

Open-minded cultural Christians use a wide array of media. Of social media platforms, Instagram is more popular than on average, and on Instagram, the personal accounts, in particular. Open-minded cultural Christians are interested in personal communication, not communication on an organisational level.

Content-wise they might look for easily accessible information on how to organise ceremonies and what is the schedule for Christian festivals, for example. They might respond to the main Christian festivals of the Liturgical Year, if they come across ideas that inspire them on a personal level. They are interested in comforting devotional content that gives them energy. They look for material with which to build their own worldview; not answers, instructions or guidelines, but people's stories. Open-minded cultural Christians embrace the different ways of living a Christian life. They might be interested in content such as silent devotionals, spirituality in nature, and everyday Christianity.

For open-minded cultural Christians, the Church has an important role as a defender and carer of the poor who fights for equality and human rights. Children and youth activities are also of interest.

An updated list of the examples of segment-specific social media content in Finland listed in this document can be found at: [www.evl.fi/millenniaalienpolut](http://www.evl.fi/millenniaalienpolut)

*Pastor Marjut Mulari on Instagram:*

**Marjut Mulari (@pastorimaikki) • Images and Videos posted on Instagram**

*Podcasts to power up the soul uploaded by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Vantaa:*

**Podcasts to power up the soul - the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Vantaa**

*"Hours and seconds" Blog by Hanna Kivisalo, recipient of the Church's Communication Award <https://sekunnitjatunnit.fi/>*

*Children's Church by the Finnish Association for Children and Youth (LNK)*  
**Children's Church**



## MATERIALISTIC AND SELF-RELIANT

Typically, the materialistic and self-reliant need nothing from the Church. They hardly ever read any of the Church's media, and do not follow the Church on social media either. Their image of the Church is based on the experiences of their friends and family, the occasional ceremony they've attended and public discussion. Contacts with the Church are few and far apart. Therefore, each contact counts.

The materialistic and self-reliant are interested in local news. Their preferred social media platforms include Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. On occasion, they might listen to the radio.

Choose a formal and informative tone. The materialistic and self-reliant respect science and knowledge, and have a low tolerance for any kind of influencing, sweet-talk or sugar-coating. Communication should be transparent and based on facts, issues referred to by their real names. Content that interests the materialistic and self-reliant, such as facts about diaconal work and youth outreach, should be presented by giving facts, numerical data and measurable results.

The materialistic and self-reliant can be seen attending events organised in celebration of Finland's independence. They might be interested in listening to a military chaplain talking about peacekeeping, values, leadership and conscience, for example. To find opportunities for meaningful interaction, relaxed and uncomplicated parish participation in local activities is recommended.

*Pastor Jussi Koski's YouTube Channel "Pastorific":*

**(32) DOES SCIENCE DISPROVE RELIGION? | Pastor speaking - YouTube**

*Haaga parish from Helsinki on Twitter:*

**(1) Haaga parish - Twitter Search / Twitter**



## OPEN-MINDED CHANGEMAKERS

For the open-minded changemakers, the Church is much like the Emergency Services – they might not need the provided services personally, but appreciate them nevertheless. “If I ever need help, it’s a good thing to have the Church there.” When open-minded changemakers do turn to the Church for help or contact the Church for some other reason, reply in person without undue delay.

The subtext of communication with open-minded changemakers should be: “This is the kind of work we do, and we are really glad to have you with us. Whenever you need us, we are here for you.” Tell them in a positive light what the Church or parish does to promote sustainability, equality, justice and global responsibility.

Open-minded changemakers use a wide array of media and are interested in informative content, in particular. They search for facts they can use to form opinions and for support in conversation. They appreciate the collaborative networks of the parish involving NGOs and other religious communities. When the Church channels help to important causes at home or abroad, they are happy to participate by making mobile donations, for example, or organise and participate in events to ensure that the help reaches its destination. Open-minded changemakers appreciate freedom of choice, comfort, personal experience, and self-actualisation.

*A forum for wellbeing, “Slow Living”, posts articles in collaboration with the Church*

**Slow Living (hidastaelamaa.fi)**



## TRADITIONAL BELIEVER

Traditional believers could be major consumers of the Church's media and data. They visit Web sites, social media and podcasts to access the verse of the day or suggestions on how to deepen their spiritual life over the course of the Liturgical Year, for example. In terms of communication habits, traditional believers are representatives of their generation, and as such unlikely to watch TV broadcasts or read printed newspapers.

In addition to inspiring spiritual content, they might be interested in topical religious discussions and decision-making in the Church on local and national levels. Traditional believers might be interested in the opinions, comments and views of spiritual authorities, such as bishops and leading pastors.

In addition to knowledge and spiritual inspiration, traditional believers seek activities and community. For them, connecting with other Christians on social media is equally meaningful as meeting other Christians in worship or small groups.

*Pastor Miika Koistinen on TikTok:*

**[Pebbles in my shoe \(@pebbles in my shoe\) TikTok | See latest TikTok videos by Pebbles in my shoe](#)**

*Parish of Mikael in Turku on Facebook:*

**[Parish of Mikael in Turku | Facebook](#)**

*YouTube channel for children by the network of parishes in the metropolitan area:*

**[Sunday School Game: The Baptism of Jesus - YouTube](#)**

*Daily spiritual exercises to verses from the New Testament by the Finnish Bible Society*

**[Here I am](#)**



## Suggestions on how to improve communication and interaction

- Operative strategy and communication strategy are combined into one content strategy that is implemented in both live and digital activities and communication
- Many of the influencers on social media already have a segment-based target group. Join resources in content marketing with appropriate influencers
- Advertise what the Church does in a way that one can connect with on an emotional level and feeling a sense of purpose
- Openings for media positions in the Church; share social media credentials with parishioners
- Develop existing activities towards digital interaction
- Millennials search the Internet before participating in anything or making any decisions. Brief, personal introductions of Church employees and activities are important. Preferably videos, but at least in text format. Introductory videos of the pastors who perform baptisms and Church musicians playing at weddings lower the threshold to contact them
- Following an event or ceremony, a message sent from the parish employee to ask how they are doing
- Timely posts referencing hot topics, such as the Ice Hockey World Championships, for example
- Real-time chat
- Visibility in social and traditional media is a sign that people are interested in the issue. Thus, let's pay attention to social media reach analyses
- Christmas Calendars delivered to every home by the parishes were welcomed
- Targeted communication to people who have recently moved to the area. Focus on their situation; communication should not be centred around parish activities or limited by parish boundaries
- Try out new ideas, experiment, and embrace successes and failures alike!



A photograph of a man with a beard and a woman in the background, with a large white arrow pointing downwards.

5

# Changing Communities

In addition to worship, parishes as communities need to be connected to the daily lives of the people living in the area. Millennials look for different types of communities than the previous generations.

A community is always centred around something. For a parish to be a meaningful community or to create meaningful communities for Millennials, it must demonstrate that it is connected to the values, questions and situations in life that are currently important to Millennials.

**B**elonging to large worship communities provided the older generations easy access to their local parish, but the younger generations are alienated by this type of community that is a given.

For the younger generations, the most important thing about communities is that they are gatherings of like-minded people who share the same values. In addition to families, such communities include self-selected groups of like-minded friends or, alternatively, temporary communities that form around a common interest such as a hobby.

For many young adults, spirituality is not something that requires a community. Instead, spirituality is regarded as individualistic and private. Millennials consciously avoid conflict and conflicting values, in particular. If the spirituality or values of the Church are in conflict with one's own worldview or spirituality, the Church is not seen as a safe space or a safe community one would wish to join.

People active in the communities of their parishes are often trying to find their place in the world. Participation must be meaningful on a personal level – voluntary, fun and supportive of one's own faith. Additionally, the activities should provide opportunities for having new experiences, use an inviting language, and one should be able to influence them.

According to the Augsburg Confession, “the Church is the congregation of saints”. Therefore, it is a community of people, but also sacred in that it is created when the Holy Spirit joins believers through the Gospel. In the Augsburg Confession, “the congregation of saints” refers on the one hand to the worldwide, invisible Church of Christ and on the other, to the local, visible parishes “where two or three gather”.

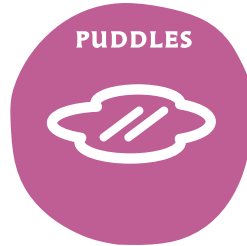
The paradox of congregation is that it is a community where people gather and are at the same time sent to all parts of the world. Thus, a congregation is a community within the Body of Christ. However, the congregation comprises also smaller, closed communities, such as families. The congregation is not separate from the world, but connected to the other communities in the area.

## Communities in Parishes are Fluid

For Millennials, belonging to communities has been described as fluid, or flowing like water. In the following, the different communities are described using symbols related to water, and divided into six different categories.



**PRIVATE COMMUNITIES**  
Friends, godparents, relatives,  
peers



**POP-UP COMMUNITIES**  
Projects, temporary, situational



**SMALL GROUPS**  
Cells, interest groups meeting in the  
parish's premises



**COMMUNITIES ON SOCIAL MEDIA**



**REGIONAL COMMUNITIES**  
Schools, military bases, work com-  
munities, organisations



**WORSHIP COMMUNITIES**



## Private Communities

In the future, could the Church offer people opportunities to create their own communities according to their own interests? The Church could facilitate the creation of such communities, or its role could be merely to provide the premises. The Church could support people and offer resources to people to create their own communities.

### **EXAMPLES OF SELF-SELECTED COMMUNITIES FOR ADULTS AND HOW THE CHURCH CAN SUPPORT LIVING AS A CHRISTIAN IN THOSE COMMUNITIES**

- Family and friends. Parish bulletins include suggestions on how to incorporate Christian lifestyle into one's daily life, and the parish provides the premises and opportunities for meetings.
- Godparents; a small community selected by the parents. Offer suggestions on how to spend time with one's godchildren and organise a special day dedicated to godparents and godchildren.
- Parents of children born in the same year. The parish invites all of the parents to get together, thus enabling peer support during the life transitions such as the first year with a baby, when the children start school and when the children start seventh grade.
- People who are new to the area.
- Scouts and other youth groups and groups for young adults.

*Women's Bank/Finn Church Aid:*

**Women's Bank - Women's Bank**

*Changemaker youth network of Finn Church Aid:*

**Changemaker**

If the Church is to provide facilities for various communities, this is to be taken into account when the buildings are modified or renovated, for example. Providing an opportunity for people to stop by and visit the Church or to book Church premises for one's own community requires flexible practices. There is also the question of how the Church premises are perceived: How do churches look and feel to the younger generations? What kinds of activities are they looking for?



## EXAMPLES OF VERSATILE USE OF CHURCH PREMISES

*St. Peter's Church in Lieto*

**St. Peter's Church in Lieto**

*Chapple, the premises of the parish of Olari in a shopping centre in Espoo:*

**Chapple**

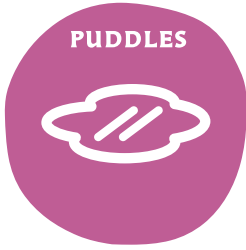
*Skappeli, a living room for families in a shopping centre, Turku and Kaarina  
Parish Union:*

**Skappeli - Front Page | Facebook**

*Skeittitapuli at the Tampere Old Church:*

**Skeittitapuli - Skeittitapuli**





PUDDLES

## Pop-Up Communities

For Millennials, communities are not necessarily permanent fixtures, but can be instantaneous, short-lived and shifting. Pop-up communities include campaigns such as to collect Christmas presents for families. One-time encounters can grow into meaningful experiences or even long-term communities. For example, when the same people attend weekly organised meals or digital communities relatively regularly, they might bond as peers and feel they belong to the same community.

In order to enable pop-up communities, the parish needs to stay alert, closely monitor the developing trends, and be connected to the people living in the area. For example, facilitating external communities, networking and joining existing networks are ways of enabling and creating pop-up communities.

Young adults are not interested in just any community. Instead, communities are scrupulously analysed and selected only if they reflect one's personal values and interests. Communities are viewed as shifting and their boundaries are loose.

Reference: *Nuorten aikuisten elämä ja hengellisyys. [The Life and Spirituality of Young Adults.]* Noren 2021.



RIVERS

## Small Groups

Regularly meeting small groups led by parish employees who typically also plan the activities form the backbone of parish activities.

Younger generations are attracted by group activities when they initiate them themselves or when the activities reflect their interests. It is crucial not to assume, but instead ask questions and pay attention to what people genuinely need in terms of content and organisation.



## Communities on Social Media

In one way or another, social media plays a role and must be taken into consideration when building communities. Social media is based on following and interaction. For the younger generations, belonging to a community on social media is not so much being part of a group as it is following, joining and reacting to content. Communities on social media are usually centred around individuals, interests or some shared life experience, for example.

Communities on social media are part of people's lives irrespective of age. How could the Church's presence on social media be strengthened? By creating communities and joining existing online communities? Do online communities help the younger generations find meaningful ways of living as Christians?

### EXAMPLES OF ONLINE COMMUNITIES

A mobile app of the Media Mission the Messengers (Sansa), **Domini Life**, to take Christian content with you wherever you go. The application is for parishes and other communities. The app has content from various Christian media such as **Godfulness**, a Christian Web site by the parish of Raisio, and the web sites of the parish of Messukylä, the Logos Ministries in Finland (KRS) and the Media Mission the Messengers (Sansa).

*The mobile app of the Media Mission the Messengers (Sansa), Domini Life, supports a lifestyle of prayer:*

**Domini Life Load App (iOS, Android) and collect a treasure in heaven**

*"Slow Living". A community on social media supporting wellbeing. Collaborates with the Church.*

**Slow Living (@hidasta) • Images and Videos posted on Instagram**

*Piplia. An application of the Finnish Bible Society to search and read verses from the Bible and learn more about what the world was like in Biblical times.*

**Piplia**

*Love Clinic. Relationship advice. Questions answered by professionals employed by the Family Counselling Services of the Church.*

**Love Clinic**

*Control Cross, a gaming and streaming service of the ELCF's digital youth outreach programme:*

**Control Cross – the gaming community of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland**



## Regional Communities

What would happen, if the Church used more of its resources to join communities that already exist in the area? The ELCF's Strategy "Opening Doors" encourages us to go out into the world where the people are. If joining forces with other actors and existing communities was our guiding principle, how would the parishes need to change?

Parishes engage in established contractual collaboration with schools and hospitals, for example. We have an abundance of tacit knowledge on community-based activities. Diaconal workers collaborate with the public sector as well as organisations and businesses in their area.

In addition to formal, contractual collaboration, the employees of a parish may join the children and parents coming to a near-by playground every morning, volunteer in sports clubs, participate in neighbourhood programmes or join other activities in the area. By joining existing communities, parishes can decrease the need to organise their own, overlapping activities.

We need to participate in different types of community action. Building a connection takes time and thus, takes up employee resources. Tasks can be divided between employees so that some be allocated more hours to stay in their own familiar surroundings while others may be allocated more hours for networking and connecting with the local communities. Collaboration requires discussions and paying attention to the expectations and hopes of the communities. However, sometimes it is prudent to sign a written contract regarding the collaboration.



## Worship Communities

Traditionally, the parish life is centred around Sunday morning service. How could we pass on this tradition to the younger generations? What would the interior of a church, the framework for an event, the language used, and the music and ambiance need to look like for a person to feel that they belong, that worship is their own safe space?

In addition to the new communal services, such as **the Depot Service organised by Uusi Verso** and **the Network congregation**, each Sunday morning service or any other worship event, e.g. pop and heavy metal services, is also a community.

When building a community around the service, ask yourself whether the people attending the service feel they have something in common? Is there opportunities for them to interact with each other?

The traditional Sunday morning service and the communities attending them do not attract Millennials. It is difficult to feel you have something in common with a group where you are the only representative of your age-group. Many are unfamiliar with the worship ritual, and not knowing the lyrics and when to stand up or sit down easily makes one feel like an outsider. This has been discussed in association with needing to lower the threshold for new people to attend, but are we taking

the matter seriously? This can be a barrier for Millennials, in particular, who shun being different and consciously avoid conflict.

The religious language used in conventional services does not improve the situation. The language of the Church and adherence to the scripture are alienating for young people. The liturgy may seem excessively formal when the language and content have no personal meaning. Hymns with their old-fashioned teachings and words sound foreign.

Many are not familiar with the music in traditional services, nor fans of organ music. Main stream instruments such as the piano and the guitar and pop music in general are familiar and therefore safe and more attractive.

Millennials seek genuine connection. Traditional liturgy and scripture are unfamiliar, and the language and symbols have no meaning for Millennials. The wording of the creed and the lyrics in hymns determine what to believe pushing Millennials away from worship service and even the entire Church. These are often taken as attempts to convert them. However, religious language becomes markedly less

## **CHURCH PLANTING AND FRESH EXPRESSIONS**

**The Church of England has conceptualised two different approaches to establish and build communities – Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of the Church.**

**The Church Planting approach resembles the mindset of the Dominican Order of the Catholic Church. The community is centred around the church and worship. The church community is built around modern, inviting and inclusive worship. This is the centre of the congregation, and everything is then built around it. New communities are established by planting part of the living congregation to a new place.**

**The mindset in the Fresh Expressions movement is that of the Franciscans – go out into the world and live with the people. Building a community starts with living among the people, listening and serving. First, the communities are very small, and shaped very differently due to the different needs of the people and their situations in life.**

**Discipleship is reformed by the changing world.**

**Which one of these approaches resembles the approach you have chosen in your parish, or do you incorporate them both in building your communities?**

off-putting when the pronouns are changed from “we” to “I”. Worship should be more relaxed and flexible, and have room for incompleteness. It should look and feel like a community, not an institution.

*An article on communal approach being the answer to saving the Church (“Yhteisöllisyys pelastaa kirkon”) by Patronen, Viljakainen and von Weissenberg:*  
**Will a more communal approach save the Church? - evl.fi**

## Millennial Profiles and Communities

Examples of parish activities and communities by segment

### FOR OPEN-MINDED CULTURAL CHRISTIANS

- Spiritual pop-up communities highlighting personal experience such as retreats, resting in a sacred space, **Silence Practice**
- Bands, choirs, other ensembles
- A community on social media highlighting life management skills and spirituality, such as “Godfulness”
- Groups and activities related to common interests or life’s transitions, e.g. a club for the parents of young children
- Events related to Christian festivals of the Liturgical Year one can attend with family and friends, such as Favourite Christmas Carols, Shrove Tuesday Feast, Evening Service

*A devotional method by the parish of Raisio:*  
Godfulness: <https://www.godfulness.fi/>



### FOR THE MATERIALISTIC AND SELF-RELIANT

- Self-selected community, such as godchildren. Low-threshold activities to enhance the relationship, including a special day to connect with the godchildren, or playing a game with godchildren.
- A devotional group or special day one can attend with family or friends
- Helping neighbours, friends, the elderly
- Garage

*Garage by the Finnish Association for Children and Youth (LNK):* **Joemopa.fi – Garage Association**





## FOR OPEN-MINDED CHANGEMAKERS

- Communal meals such as Varustamo in Helsinki that specialises in using food that would otherwise go to waste
- Charity shop that recycles clothes and organises subsidised employment such as the DOM Second Hand Shop in Oulu
- Participating in a Common Responsibility Campaign, Changemaker network or similar

*DOM Second Hand Shop organised by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Oulu:*

**Front Page - DOM Second Hand Shop**



## FOR TRADITIONAL BELIEVERS

- New communal and inclusive worship, including Uusi Verso, Verkosto, Valo
- Spiritual cells, Bible Study groups, prayer groups, or revivalist movements within the ELCF
- Influencer Group
- Elected official

*Worship Communities in Finland:*

**Worship Communities in Finland |  
Spiritual Reform**







# 6 Doing Good

Millennials respect the diaconal work of the Church, although the traditional forms of volunteer work in parishes are unlikely to attract them. However, many are willing to participate in activities that are aligned with their values to make a difference. The majority feels that their daily choices connect them to a worldwide network and that this is sufficient activity for an individual. Their goal is to make a difference within their circle of friends and family and by being responsible consumers. Some are ready to take action to address global problems. Taking part in projects and pop-up action matches the Millennial lifestyle.

## Choices based on Values

In the Western world, the gap between everyday reality and spiritual reality has become very wide. For many, the Church no longer seems to inhabit this world and understand the current realities. Jesus often talked about social justice and ethics. The everyday life and spiritual reality should have some overlap or else there is a danger that spiritual life becomes rather hollow. The ELCF Foresight Report *Siunauksen signaalit* (“Signals of Blessings”) highlights the importance of life before death and daily life. Questions about heaven and the afterlife were all but absent in the material.

Individualism, respectful interaction with others, gender equality, social justice and responsibility are important values to young adults. In parishes, what does taking the side of the oppressed and weak, fighting for human rights and social justice, climate change and ecological challenges mean in practice? How could parishes be opening doors for Millennials in order for them to promote the values they find meaningful and to act for the common good?

## Appropriate Framework for Charity

Regarding charity work, it is important to know how to answer the question of what’s in it for the Millennials. Millennials seek experiences, a feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction, and can find them via the content, method or community of charity work. They are happy to participate in a variety of charity work, given that the group is inclusive, safe and fun, whereas working with unfamiliar people who are not like-minded might seem impossible even when the cause is good. Or at the very least, the threshold to participate rises very high.

While others wish to solve global issues, others want to make a difference closer to home. Both groups are motivated by their desire to do something that is meaningful for themselves.

## Recommendations

Establishing common ground requires that parishes communicate their values. Additionally, efforts should be made to actively prevent the values of older generations over-riding the enthusiasm of the younger generations to take action and make a difference.

The recommendations of the four-year report of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland *The Role of Religion in Everyday Life and Special Occasions* [“Uskonto arjessa ja juhlassa”] include the following:

- The Church should lower the threshold for participation in equality and environmental work
- The Church should promote participation in other actors’ charity work
- The Church should systematically take down barriers to planning and carrying out volunteer work independently of the Church



Church makes investments in work carried out abroad. Missionary work and development cooperation resonate with Millennials and open-minded changemakers, in particular, who have thus far been difficult for the Church to reach. Promoting human rights and defending the underprivileged are at the core of work carried out abroad. Key themes include gender equality, climate change and the rights of children and disabled persons. According to assessments by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, religious actors find the channels for development cooperation together with other actors who share the same values. As a result, the effort yields result and is transparent. Traditional believers might be interested in information on the growth of local churches and congregations, for example. Open-minded cultural Christians find helping others and defending the weak important, and might be interested in the long-term and short-term opportunities the Church can offer abroad.

According to studies by the Citizen Forum, 60% of 15 to 24-year-olds and 40% of 25 to 34-year-olds would participate in volunteer work, if only someone asked them to.

Diaconia Barometer 2022 reports that 75% of the respondents have under 30-year-olds volunteering in their parishes at least occasionally. The most common forms of volunteer work include food aid distribution, providing digital support, enabling communal participation and inclusion, volunteering in diaconal work abroad, organising open doors events, acting as parish representatives in diaconal positions of trust, volunteering in neighbourhood or town activities, working as an expert by experience, and communication and influencing.

By implementing these recommendations, parishes are in a better position to open doors for Millennials to participate according to their own values. Overall, parishes should carry out reforms to better accommodate the Millennials' desire to participate and take action. This could be in the form of increasing collaboration with different partners, or organising short-term campaigns and projects that provide opportunities for making a difference either on social media or live.

## Segment-specific examples

Examples of what making a difference might mean to Millennials by segment.



**Open-minded cultural Christians** do not question the existence of the Church nor its importance as an actor in society. For them, it is important that the Church helps those in need and speaks for the underprivileged in public debate. In the opinion of open-minded cultural Christians, Church weddings should be allowed for same-sex couples.

Open-minded cultural Christians could:

- Donate money or a couple of hours of time to volunteer in a collection or other campaign, such as the Common Responsibility Campaign, the Equinox Campaign or the Joulupuu Campaign
- Sing Christmas Carols and donate money for a good cause
- Distribute food parcels, and participate or organise communal meals from food waste in an appropriate team
- Participate in local initiatives and activities, e.g. crowdfunding
- Participate in parish youth influencer groups
- Volunteering abroad via Felm Volunteer, for example



**Materialistic and self-reliant** do not value the Church as an important social and political actor and benefactor. According to them, the Church should focus on spiritual work. They are most concerned by what happens to the people they are close to.

Materialistic and self-reliant could:

- Participate in or donate to a good cause, if their friend or family member asked them to
- Participate in an interesting benefit where part of the ticket price is donated to a charity





**Open-minded changemakers** are acutely aware of the global situation and wish to make the world a better place and to donate money for good causes. According to open-minded changemakers, the Church should care for the underprivileged and speak for them in public debate. In their opinion, the Church should do more to help immigrants, and Church weddings should be allowed for same-sex couples. Open-minded changemakers are interested in the Church's actions regarding the environment and human rights.

Open-minded changemakers could:

- Participate or organise communal meals from food waste
- Participate in a campaign, protest or pop-up event to promote equality
- Visit, make a donation or participate in the organising of a second-hand shop which donates its proceeds to immigrants
- Contribute to making the Church *carbon neutral* by influencing how the Church uses its forests and plans its energy consumption, liking a campaign on social media and participating or initiating campaigns



**Traditional believers** see the Church as a visible and influential actor in society that helps the underprivileged and speaks for them. Traditional believers might be socially active benefactors, volunteer workers or make donations. They have a close and positive relationship with the Church. Missionary work is important to them.

Traditional believers could:

- Donate money during worship using MobilePay
- Participate in an action abroad in good company
- Sing Christmas Carols in nursing homes
- Participate in a campaign organised for a good cause such as the Common Responsibility Campaign





7

# Life transitions provide opportunities for connection

Life transitions prompt us to review our values, worldview, life choices, and our involvement in various communities.

**R**eligious ceremonies are connected to life transitions. Traditionally, marriage and the baptism of one's own children have been part of the life of approximately 20 to 45-year-old adults. Ceremonies have provided the Church with opportunities to have meaningful encounters with young adults.

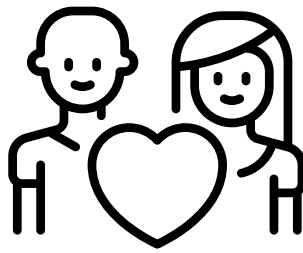
However, Millennials are challenging this tradition. Letting culture and family traditions dictate choices is going out of fashion. Millennials want to create their own paths, and religion and tradition are not an exception to this. Ever fewer people enter into matrimony, and those who do, do so later in life. Couples are having and baptising their first child at an older age, if at all.

Important life transitions in the lives of young adults that do not involve the Church, include moving to a new city, celebrating milestone birthdays, the end of a relationship, miscarriage/abortion, or falling seriously ill or someone close fall-

### **Life transitions enabling connecting with all of the four segments**



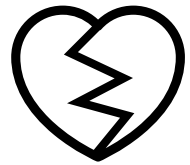
**Moving to  
a new area**



**Relationship/marriage**



**Baptism or  
meeting with  
the family of an  
unbaptised child**



**Break-up/  
divorce**

ing seriously ill. Such life transitions provide perfect opportunities to connect with people and to offer support.

Businesses use service paths to visualise encounters between the company and its customers. A service is broken down to its components and visualised step-by-step from the customer's perspective. Could service paths be a useful tool in parishes as well? How to approach someone new to the area, for example? Does a welcoming greeting from the parish pave way for further interaction? Do we offer the same thing for everyone? Or do we let the parishioners make their own choices regarding the next point of contact and the next encounter? In the future, could we use AI to help in connecting with people on their terms and leading them to the service or connection they are looking for?



**Birthdays**



**Unexpected  
crisis situations**



**Death**







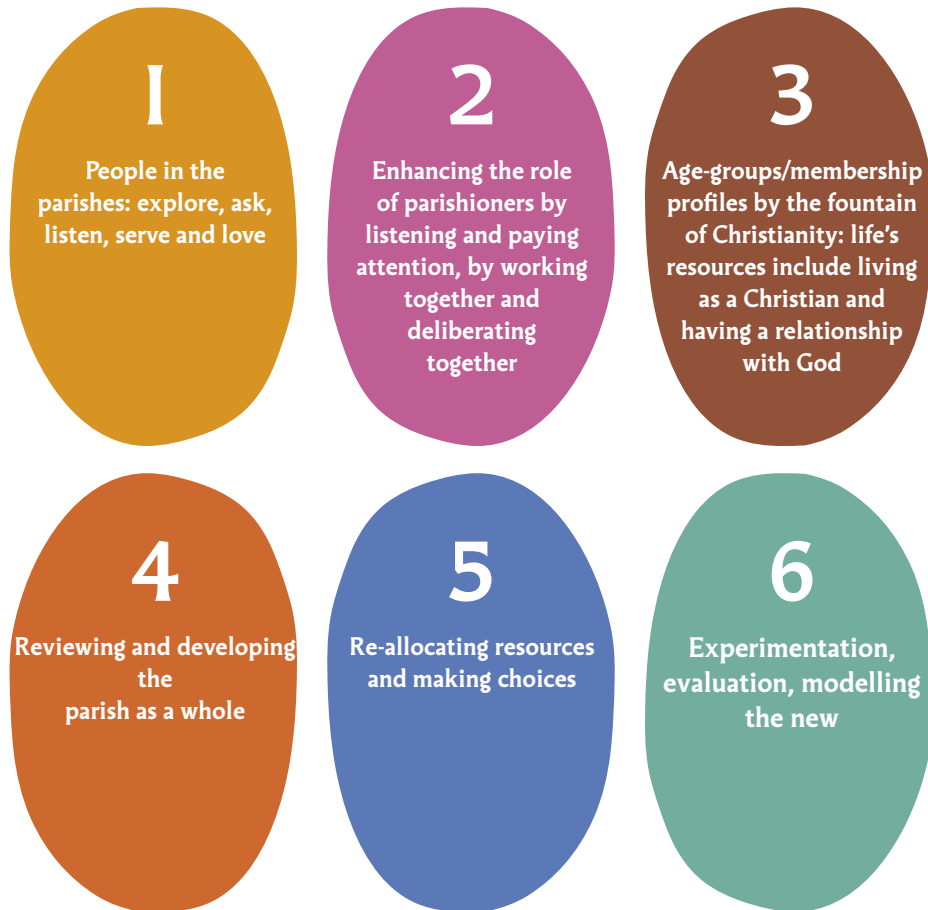


# 8 Epilogue: Creating paths

Creating people-oriented paths is vital for the future of the ELCF. The progress will be slow, but worth the effort.

The best paths are created locally. The key to a successful implementation of the model is that all of the different groups of Church employees, elected officials and networks co-operate with each other. Start with baby steps. The main thing is to roll up your sleeves and get to work.

## The Steps to Creating Paths



Development work includes paying attention to what people are saying and inviting them to join in on the work at hand, analysing the environment, membership analyses, assessing the present state of the parish, allocating resources, and experimenting. Parishes create their paths differently based on the people living in the area, on existing and proven models, and on local development requirements.

For examples and practical advice, please see [www.evl.fi/millenniaalienpolut](http://www.evl.fi/millenniaalienpolut).

You do not need to come up with everything on your own. When creating paths, it can be useful to take a look beyond the parish to other parishes with a similar mix of membership profiles.

Let's stay in touch, and create together a Church that is authentic and present.

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