



Criteria for the ordination of employees of the ELCF mission organisations within an overseas partner church

On 3 September 2024 (5/2024), the Bishops' Conference of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) adopted a position on the ordination of employees on an overseas posting to Church mission organisations abroad. The Bishops' Conference has ruled that, primarily, ordination should be requested from the diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. A worker in an overseas post may be ordained by a foreign partner church only in exceptional cases, and ordination in such circumstances may not be used as a means to circumvent an official decision of the Church concerning ordination to the pastoral ministry. If, as a Finnish mission worker, an individual wishes to be ordained by an overseas partner church, the intended ordination must be brought to the attention of the Bishops' Conference in writing before any measures or decisions related to the ordination have been made. The Bishops' Conference stipulates that, as Finnish employers, the Church mission organisations that have signed the framework agreement are responsible for all of their employees and their activities, both within Finland and abroad.

If a pastor ordained under the auspices of an overseas partner church wishes, after returning, to work as a pastor in Finland, they must apply to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland for the right to act in such a position. Provisions concerning the right of a pastor of another church or religious community to serve as a pastor within the ELCF are laid down in the Church Order (Section 7, Subsection 6). According to the Church Order, the decision to grant the right to serve as a pastor will be taken by the Bishop and the Diocesan Chapter.

On the basis of the Church Act, the Bishops' Conference has decided on the prerequisites appertaining to any pastor ordained in another Christian Church who may wish to serve as a pastor as follows (Statutes of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland 177):

- If the applicant has been ordained within a church other than the Evangelical Lutheran Church or a church where the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland may take communion, the applicant must be ordained to serve as a pastor.
- If the person has been ordained within a member church of the Lutheran World Federation, a member church of the Porvoo Communion, a member church of the EKD, the Finnish Methodist Church, or Finlands svenska metodistkyrkan church, they will be permitted to perform certain church ceremonies in individual instances.
- A pastor of another Evangelical Lutheran church or community may, in individual instances, perform a church ceremony on the basis of the Bishop's decision.

The Bishops' Conference may endorse the ordination of an employee who has been sent overseas by the Church mission organisation within a foreign partner church if the following criteria are met:

1. The ordination will take place within a member church of the Lutheran World Federation or within a church where members of the ELCF are permitted to take communion.
2. The person requesting ordination lives within the effective operational area of the overseas partner church, understands the culture of the area, and is integrated into the life of the local church or Christian community. The person requesting ordination should be familiar with the language used in the work to an at least satisfactory degree and is able to work without the help of an interpreter.
3. The person requesting ordination has lived and worked full-time within the area of operation while working for the partner church for at least one year prior to the ordination. After the ordination itself, the work undertaken by the person being ordained should continue full-time and without interruption for a period of at least two years.
4. The Bishops' Conference stipulates that ordination within a partner church will not aim at circumventing any official decision of the Church concerning ordination to the pastoral ministry. To support the decision-making process, the mission organisation

will be required to submit a report to the Bishops' Conference of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland in advance, and should include:

- a. clear grounds for any exceptional arrangements that differ from the Church's usual ordination practices.
- b. a description by the overseas partner church of the nature of the ministry for which the individual will be ordained.

If the above conditions are not met, the Bishops' Conference has the right to interpret that the proposed ceremony under the auspices of the overseas partner church does not comply with the principles of the framework agreement.

This Decision comes into force on 5 December 2024.

Helsinki, 5 December 2024

Tapio Luoma
Archbishop

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