

# Contemporary and traditional voices: Reactions to same-sex marriage legislation in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland and the Orthodox Church of Finland

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**ABSTRACT:** This article studies the debate on same-sex marriage in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, within the two national churches of Finland, the Evangelical-Lutheran Church and the Orthodox Church. Legislation facilitating the so-called “gender-neutral marriage” came into effect in Finland in March 2017. In their official teachings, both churches emphasize marriage as a union between a man and a woman. An awareness of the rights of sexual minorities has, however, increased in both churches, and has given rise to the debate on how same-sex marriage should be perceived. While holding on to the traditional view of marriage, both churches have sought ways to recognize and affirm the position of sexual minorities. This has caused tension within the churches. As the majority church, the Lutheran church in particular faces strong pressure to accept same-sex weddings in the church. For the advocates of sexual minorities within the Orthodox Church, recognition of sexual minorities seems to be the main objective, rather than promoting same-sex weddings.

**KEYWORDS:** Eastern Orthodoxy, Evangelical-Lutheranism, Finland, marriage, homosexuality

## 1. Introduction

Finnish marriage legislation changed significantly on 1 March 2017. From that day onwards two persons of the same sex can get married.<sup>1</sup> Validation of same-sex marriages is part of a social development which has witnessed the rights of sexual minorities improving over the past few decades in Finland. The law on what is known as gender-neutral marriage in Finland was also the first law in the country to originate from the citizens’ initiative.<sup>2</sup> It was met with a counter initiative, *Aito avioliitto*<sup>3</sup> (in English: Genuine marriage), which Parliament, however, dismissed on February 2017 and proceeded with the original initiative.

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<sup>1</sup> *Marriage Act (234/1929)*, <http://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1929/en19290234.pdf>. The English translation, provided by the Ministry of Justice, does not include amendments made after March 2003. Up-to-date legislation is therefore available only in Finnish and Swedish.

<sup>2</sup> *Kansalaisaloite KAA 3/2013 vp* [Citizens’ Initiative].

<sup>3</sup> *Kansalaisaloite KAA 2/2016 vp* [Citizens’ Initiative].

Compared to the four other Scandinavian countries, Finland is the last to legally recognize same-sex marriage. Norway and Sweden approved of same-sex marriage in 2009, Iceland in 2010, and Denmark in 2012. In addition to legislation and marriage at the registrar's office, same-sex couples can get married in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in all other Scandinavian countries, with the Church of Norway being the most recent in officiating same-sex weddings since February 2017.<sup>4</sup>

Official registration of partnership has been available for same-sex couples in Finland since 2002. It provides a similar legal status as marriage, with the exception of the right to adopt children and/or acquire the family name of the spouse.<sup>5</sup> In 2007 same-sex couples and single women were allowed access to assisted fertility treatment.<sup>6</sup> Registered partners were given the right of intra-family adoptions in 2009.<sup>7</sup> The 2017 marriage act enabled full adoption rights for all couples.

In Finland, secular marriage law recognizes the legal effects of a religious wedding ceremony. Since 1917 register office weddings and civil marriage have been alternatives to church weddings.<sup>8</sup> Currently some 60 religious communities have the right to officiate weddings. The majority of them refrain from officiating weddings for same-sex couples.<sup>9</sup> The new marital law applies only to civil marriage and creates the provision for same-sex marriage in churches. The Finnish churches and religious communities however, still have the right to set their own conditions for marriage.<sup>10</sup>

The discussion on same-sex marriage began in Finland in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century after the registration of same-sex couples became possible. The significance of marriage and family, the roles of mother and father as educators, individual rights, and family as the foundation of society were dominating themes in the sometimes heated public debate. The common idea for advocates and opponents alike was that marriage is highly valued and seen as one of the basic units of life in both factions.<sup>11</sup> The two indigenous Finnish churches or state churches, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) and the Finnish Orthodox Church (FOC) also took part in the debate.<sup>12</sup> Based on their official capacities, the ELCF and the FOC were asked to

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<sup>4</sup> *Lakivaliokunnan mietintö 14/2014 vp*, 4–5 [Law Committee Memorandum]; Gwladys Fouche, "Norway's Lutheran Church embraces same-sex marriage," *Reuters*, 30 January 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-norway-gaymarriage-idUSKBN15E1O2> (Accessed: March 11 2017).

<sup>5</sup> *Act on Registered Partnerships (950/2001)*, <http://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2001/en20010950.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> *Act on Assisted Fertility Treatments (1237/2006)*, <http://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2006/en20061237.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> *Act on Registered Partnerships (950/2001); Adoption Act (22/2012)*, <http://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2012/en20120022.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Matti Kotiranta, "Finland," in *Encyclopedia of Law and Religion, Part 4: Europe*, eds. Gerhard Robbers and W. Cole Durham (Bedfordshire/Herndon: Brill, 2016), 112–113.

<sup>9</sup> *Rekisteröidyt uskonnolliset yhdyskunnat, joilla on vihkimisoikeus 2017*, <https://uskonnonvapaus.fi/artikkelit/vihkimisoikeudet.html>; "Suomessa 61 uskonnollisella yhdyskunnalla on vihkimisoikeus," *Kirkko ja Kaupunki*, 21 March 2017, <https://www.kirkkojakaupunki.fi/-/suomessa-61-uskonnollisella-yhdyskunnalla-on-vihkimisoikeus> (Accessed: May 17 2018).

<sup>10</sup> *Marriage Act (234/1929)*, 14:6 §.

<sup>11</sup> Kimmo Jokinen and Kimmo Saaristo, *Suomalainen yhteiskunta* (Helsinki: WSOY, 2002), 190.

<sup>12</sup> On the topic of same-sex unions in churches in Finland, see this recent analysis: Huub Vogelaar, "An Intriguing Ecumenical Dialogue: Lutheran-Orthodox Encounters in Finland," *Exchange* 42/3 (2013), 275–276, 278.

present their expertise on the citizens' initiative on same-sex marriage. Both churches took a negative stance towards the initiative.<sup>13</sup>

## **2. The aim of the article**

In this article we will study the debate on same-sex marriage in the two indigenous churches of Finland, the ELCF and the FOC. Our aim is to first discern the different views that have emerged within the two churches and track the course of the respective debates. Secondly, we aim to distinguish between the common features and special characteristics in the debates of the two churches that represent different Christian traditions. The ELCF as a Protestant church embraces the heritage of Reformation, while the FOC considers the patristic tradition of Eastern Christianity its heritage. Our hypothesis was that despite the differences in theological foundations of the two churches, there would be noteworthy similarities regarding the dominant themes in the debate of both churches and those of the solutions proposed in dealing with the reality of same-sex marriage. Nonetheless, we also expected to discover certain distinctive Lutheran and Orthodox features in the respective debates.

The scope of our study covers a 15 year period, beginning with the approval of registration of same-sex partnership in 2002 until the new marriage legislation came into force in 2017. Alongside official documents and commentaries provided by the churches, we utilized a variety of other textual sources, e.g. newspaper articles, websites and blogs, as contributions to the debate. However, the amount and nature of Lutheran and Orthodox sources are not identical. Due to it being the majority church, and due to its distinct public visibility in Finnish society, the debate has been far more elaborate and multiform in the ELCF than in the FOC. This distinction in the quantity and quality of the sources is reflected in the description and analysis of the debate in the two churches.

Male clerical dominance is a distinctive and unifying feature in the discourse of both churches. With the exception of one Lutheran bishop, all the bishops in the two Finnish churches are male. Theologians and laypeople involved in the debates have also mostly been men. This underrepresentation of female voices in the churches does not represent gender inequality or the role of women in wider Finnish society. Considering the limitations of this article, we will not reflect on the gender dimension of the debates.

Before engaging in the discussions on same-sex marriage in the two Finnish national churches, we will first, give a concise overview of attitudes on marriage and same-sex relationships in Finland, and, second, give background information on the two churches and their official teachings on marriage.

## **3. Marriage in the Finnish society and churches in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century**

### **3.1. Marriage and same-sex couples in changing social processes in Finland**

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<sup>13</sup> *Asiantuntijalausunto eduskunnan lakivaliokunnassa*, 2 april 2014 [ELCF]; *Suomen ortodoksisen kirkon asiantuntijalausunto avioliittolain, rekisteröidystä parisuhteesta ja transseksuaalin sukupuolen vaihtamisesta annetun lain muuttamisesta*, 31 March 2014 [FOC].

Since the beginning of the 1970s, the family as an institution and social unit has undergone a series of major changes in Finland. Heterosexuality, marriage and biological parenthood used to be the fundamental components of the nuclear family until the late 1960s. Homosexuality was criminalized in Finland until 1971, and the hostility towards and discrimination of homosexuals have been common until recent times.<sup>14</sup> As Finland moved into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, marital status no longer plays the focal role in defining family status; views on sexuality, relationships and family are diverse and are not bound by the idea of normativity. This has had an impact on the sphere of religion and the contexts of the churches as well. Consequently, traditional Christian family and sexual ethics have eroded, and the foundations of social and individual life have become secular. Ideologically, a human- and knowledge-centered orientation to all kinds of phenomena has superseded a God- and faith-centered approach to reality. While official religion has become more and more marginalized in Finland, churches have been active in defending traditional Christian values and views regarding marriage and family life.<sup>15</sup>

The reality of marital and family life in Finland indicates that the area traditionally outlined by marriage now incorporates various forms and models of relationships. The status of the conjugal nuclear family has been challenged by process-like views on relationship and family, in which boundaries are more diffuse, and personal opinions and emotional attachments have replaced social norms. At the same time, a multitude of different concepts and definitions of family and relationships has emerged. The impact of this reality on families and the emergence of progressive conceptualizations have resulted in the need to speak of “post-family” as the new reality: family is a changing form that needs to be constantly negotiated. The concept of post-family accentuates the profundity of the change in concepts and models of family and relationships in Finland since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>16</sup> Empirical research among Finnish gay and lesbian parents indicates that they have a tendency, on the one hand, to assimilate themselves to the model of the nuclear family, and, on the other hand, simultaneously expand the concept of family.<sup>17</sup>

Shifting definitions of family have given rise to the recognition of new types of families. General approval of same-sex marriage has rapidly gained favor among Finns within just a few years. In a survey in 2013, 58% of Finns supported gender-neutral marriage legislation while 34%

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<sup>14</sup> Tuula Juvonen, "Naisia rakastavat naiset," in *Suomalaisen arjen historia 4: Hyvinvoinnin Suomi*, eds. Kai Häggman et. al. (Helsinki: WSOY, 2008), 250–254; Lasse Majuri, "Miehiä haluavat miehet," *Suomalaisen arjen historia 4*, 254–255.

<sup>15</sup> Jokinen and Saaristo, *Suomalainen yhteiskunta*, 192–193, 195, 198; Pirjo Paajanen, *Mikä on minun perheeni? Suomalaisten käsityksiä perheestä vuosilta 2007 ja 1997* (Helsinki: Väestöliitto, 2007), 9–10, 13–14; Mikko Lehtonen, 'Individualismin aika', *Suomalaisen arjen historia 4*, 275; Anne Pessi and Päivi Pöyhönen, "Yksilön, perheen ja kirkon yhteiskunnalliset muutoslinjat: valintojen ja rakkauden hurma," in *Perhe, parisuhde ja kirkko: Lähikuvia leikkauspintoihin*, eds. Anne Pessi and Henrietta Grönlund (Helsinki: Helsingin yliopisto, käytännöllisen teologian laitos, 2010), 13, 29–32.

<sup>16</sup> Jokinen and Saaristo, *Suomalainen yhteiskunta*, 221; Paajanen, *Mikä on minun perheeni?* 26–28; Pessi and Pöyhönen, "Yksilön, perheen ja kirkon yhteiskunnalliset muutoslinjat: valintojen ja rakkauden hurma," 14–17.

<sup>17</sup> Paula Kuosmanen, "Ajallis-tilallinen queer-näkökulma lesboäitien ja naisparien perhesuhteisiin," in *Perhesuhteet puntarissa*, eds. Eija Sevón and Marianne Notko (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2008), 135–137.

opposed it.<sup>18</sup> Just two years later a Eurobarometer survey revealed that three out of four Finns favor equal rights for sexual minorities and heterosexuals where marriage is concerned.<sup>19</sup>

In 2006 the numbers of registered male couples and female couples in Finland were 455 and 493 respectively. By 2015 the number of male couples had doubled and that of female couples had tripled (1023 and 1585 respectively in 2015). Statistically, the phenomenon of same-sex couples is not a widespread one. Percentage-wise, registered same-sex couples formed only 0,18% of all families in 2015. Registered same-sex couples with children are even rarer: in 2015 only 604 such couples had children, with the number of heterosexual couples with children being 570 000. The most common type of family in Finland, (two thirds of all families totaling 950 000 in 2015), is a married couple with or without children. The number of families with children has steadily decreased since the 1980s.<sup>20</sup>

According to the current (2016) definition of *Statistics Finland*, the producer of official Finnish statistics, a family is comprised of persons (and their possible children) who are married, cohabit or have registered their partnership.<sup>21</sup> New marriage legislation or acknowledgment of same-sex marriages has provided yet another alternative as a basis for a Finnish family. It is obvious that Lutheran and Orthodox Finns alike are engaged in various types of relationships, same-sex marriages included, and establish different kinds of families (and are born into them). How do these models of same-sex unions and non-traditional families interact with the official views of Lutheran and Orthodox churches?

### 3.2. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the official teachings on marriage

The ELCF is one of the national churches and is by far the largest church in Finland. Until 1870 it was a state church. Nowadays the ELCF brands itself as a “folk church”. The public status of the ELCF is established by a law which specifies its organization and administration. The ELCF also has the right to levy church tax.<sup>22</sup> The ELCF consists of nine dioceses and 400 parishes. With its 4 million members, the ELCF is the majority church in Finland as 71,9% of Finns are Lutherans (in January 2017). Membership has been declining for several decades. In the 1980s over 90 percent of the population were still members of the ELCF.<sup>23</sup> Yet, the ELFC continues to be an integral part of Finnish culture and society in many other ways.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Telebus-tutkimus*, <http://www.tahdon2013.fi/tutkimus/> (Accessed May 17 2018).

<sup>19</sup> *Discrimination in the EU 2015 FI* [<https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/68104>] (Accessed May 17 2018).

<sup>20</sup> Sirkku Hiltunen et al. (eds.), *Statistical Yearbook of Finland 2016* (Helsinki: Tilastokeskus, 2016), 435.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.stat.fi/meta/kas/perhe.html> (Accessed: June 17 2018).

<sup>22</sup> *Church and state*, <https://evl.fi/our-work/church-and-state> (Accessed: May 17 2018); *Kirkkolaki* (1054/1993), 2 Luku 1 §; Kotiranta, “Finland,” 103–109; Juha Meriläinen, *Kirkon julkisoikeudellinen asema*, 18 November 2015, [http://sakasti.evl.fi/sakasti.nsf/0/EE4CA05F09EA5A22C2257E70003B1F1B/\\$FILE/JuhaMeril%E4inen-Kirkonjulkisoikeudellinasema.pdf](http://sakasti.evl.fi/sakasti.nsf/0/EE4CA05F09EA5A22C2257E70003B1F1B/$FILE/JuhaMeril%E4inen-Kirkonjulkisoikeudellinasema.pdf) (Accessed: December 11 2017).

<sup>23</sup> *Seurakunnat tilastoivat työtään*, <http://evl.fi/tietoa-kirkosta/tilastotietoa/>; *Kirkon jäsenyys*, <http://evl.fi/tietoa-kirkosta/tilastotietoa/jasenyyslukuja> (Accessed: December 11 2017).

<sup>24</sup> *Church and state*.

Lutheran understanding of marriage has changed over time, and currently there is no general consensus on the concept of marriage within the ELCF. The constitution committee of the General Synod has accepted the definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman. This can be regarded as the prevailing view within the ELCF.<sup>25</sup>

In Lutheran theology, marriage as a theological institution is based on the theology of creation and natural law, the doctrine of two kingdoms or regiments, the vocation of man and appreciation of communal life. In addition, distinction between faith and love allows marriage to be defined either as an immutable order or as a temporal, and the therefore adjustable institution.<sup>26</sup> The fundamentals of marriage in Lutheran tradition and that of the ELCF can be defined as follows:

- marriage is a common form of life between a man and a woman
- marriage as an institution can be traced back to paradise and the origin of mankind
- marriage is a life-long relationship, blessed by God and consecrated by the church, with public commitment being an integral part of marriage
- marriage between a man and a woman is the basic relationship model and the foundation of family life
- the partnership and relationship of the spouses reflect the love of God
- the purposes of marriage include reproduction, caring for children and family, channelling sexuality and partnership between a man and a woman
- due to the fall, the original order of creation and marriage are violated. Through reconciliation and forgiveness, and faith in Jesus Christ, the integrity of marriage can be restored.<sup>27</sup>

In the ELCF, Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms defines the starting point for the theology of marriage, such that marriage belongs to the civil kingdom because it touches all people.<sup>28</sup> Marriage lies outside of the kingdom of faith also because of its link to natural law and ethics. Spouses know in their heart what is right in their nuptial relationship.<sup>29</sup> The holiness of marriage

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<sup>25</sup> The General Synod is the "parliament" of the church. Among other things, it makes decisions on the church's doctrine.

<sup>26</sup> In Lutheran theology, the questions belonging to the category of faith relate to salvation and are therefore considered as unchangeable. The issues belonging to the category of love on the other hand, can be changed. Topics relating to sexuality are usually considered to be aspects of changeable love. Vesa Hirvonen, "Homoseksuaalisuus, usko ja rakkaus," in *Homoseksuaalisuus Raamatussa ja kirkon opetuksessa*, ed. Antti Saarelma (Tampere: Kirkon tutkimuskeskus, 2007), 197–215; Antti Yli-Opas, *Avioliiton teologia. Englannin kirkossa ja Suomen evankelis-luterilaisessa kirkossa vuosina 1963–2006* (Tampere: Kirkon tutkimuskeskus, 2010).

<sup>27</sup> *Rakkauden lahja: Piispojen puheenvuoro perheestä, avioliitosta ja seksuaalisuudesta* (Helsinki: Kirjapaja, 2008), 11; *Katekismus: Suomen evankelis-luterilaisen kirkon kristinoppi* (Helsinki: Edita, 1999), 20; Yli-Opas, *Avioliiton teologia*, 53–54, 76, 127, 189, 349.

<sup>28</sup> Yli-Opas, *Avioliiton teologia*, 288–289.

<sup>29</sup> The Golden rule and the Great Commandment are considered foundational expressions of natural law. The natural moral law is manifested in loving with divine altruistic love and living accordingly. Antti Raunio, "Rekisteröity parisuhde luterilaisen teologian ja etiikan näkökulmasta," in *Homoseksuaalisuus Raamatussa ja kirkon opetuksessa*, ed. Antti Saarelma (Tampere: Kirkon tutkimuskeskus, 2007), 93–113; Yli-Opas, *Avioliiton teologia* 62, 318.

is thus bound by moral obligations in marital life.<sup>30</sup> In addition, the ELCF emphasizes the importance of a personal and emotionally functional relationship between spouses.<sup>31</sup> Spouses are considered to complement each other, and the difference between sexes enriches their relationships and allows for procreation.<sup>32</sup> Marriage is an image of faith and love: it is considered to provide more faith, trust and love than any other form of human relationship.<sup>33</sup> Alongside individual meanings, the ELCF emphasizes the communal aspects related to marriage: being married means to have a family, and a special link with a congregation.<sup>34</sup>

### 3.3. The Finnish Orthodox Church and the official teachings on marriage

The FOC is the second national church with a legal position similar to that of the ELCF. Present legislation dates from 2007.<sup>35</sup> The prevailing canonical status of the FOC was established in 1923; since 1923 the FOC has been an autonomous local church under the Patriarchate of Constantinople, canonically in communion with all 14 autocephalous Orthodox local churches. With an estimate of 61.000 members (in 2016), the FOC is the second largest Christian denomination in Finland with Orthodox Christians making up 1,1% of the population. Currently, there are three dioceses and some 20 parishes, ca. 200 priests and deacons (in 2017), one monastery and one convent.

Since the mid-1990s the FOC has been growing in number; in recent years there have been some 1000 converts to Orthodoxy each year, while some 800 people leave the church annually. Due to immigration and refugees, the FOC is becoming increasingly multicultural. Its aim is to embrace all Orthodox believers within the state of Finland, regardless of their origin and nationality. The FOC is ecumenical minded and has for the most part, uncomplicated relationship with the majority Lutheran Church and other Christian minority churches in Finland.<sup>36</sup>

Marriage is one of the seven sacraments or mysteries of the FOC. The essentials of marriage, according to Orthodox teachings, are:

- God instituted marriage in paradise after the creation of Adam and Eve
- marriage is a union between a man and a woman
- as a sacrament, marriage is a holy way of life for spouses in their joint pursuit of salvation (*theosis*)
- in order to seek salvation in life, marriage is also a form of life-long *ascesis* and *martyria*

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<sup>30</sup> Yli-Opas, *Avioliiton teologia*, 58. The moral and ethical obligations include: helping each other, commitment to one's spouse, mutual love and partnership.

<sup>31</sup> Yli-Opas, *Avioliiton teologia*, 127.

<sup>32</sup> *Rakkauden lahja*, 29.

<sup>33</sup> Yli-Opas, *Avioliiton teologia*, 162.

<sup>34</sup> Yli-Opas, *Avioliiton teologia*, 271.

<sup>35</sup> *Laki ortodoksisesta kirkosta 985/2006*, <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2006/20060985>; Kotiranta, "Finland," 109.

<sup>36</sup> Introductions to the FOC in English include: Teuvo Laitila, "History of the Finnish Orthodox Church in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century," in *A Short History of the Orthodox Church in Western Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, ed. Christine Chaillot (Paris: Inter-Orthodox Dialogue, 2006), 157–176; Matti Sidoroff, "Living Orthodoxy in Finland," in *Orthodoxy in Finland: Past and Present*, ed. Veikko Purmonen (Kuopio: Orthodox Clergy Association, 1981), 27–33; Vogelaar, "An Intriguing Ecumenical Dialogue," 276–278.

- marriage is the foundation for the family, which is customarily known as *miniature church*
- children are considered God’s gifts and the natural fruits of marital life and union of spouses
- even though marriage is in principle indissoluble, the church allows divorce and permits second and third marriages<sup>37</sup>

Non-traditional models and forms of marriage and family are not formally recognized by the FOC. Ideally, Orthodox believers should adjust their lives according to the guidelines given by the church. According to the former Archbishop Johannes (1988–2002), “family should not and cannot be an entity in isolation of the community of the congregation.”<sup>38</sup> In 1992 the synod of bishops made a statement which described the traditional concept of marriage as being “a basic unit of our society”, while concepts alien to the FOC’s understanding were characterized as damaging to the Christian view of family.<sup>39</sup> A similar stance was voiced in a statement responding to the Ministry of Justice’s memorandum on same-sex relationships in 1999: as a sacrament, marriage cannot be compared to any other covenanted forms of cohabitation. In their bid to oppose same-sex marriage, Orthodox bishops encouraged legislative authorities to take measures in promoting the traditional family institution.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, the FOC has not endeavored to prevent promoting the legal and economic rights of people in non-traditional relationships. However, this should not endanger the status of marriage and traditional view of family.<sup>41</sup> Since the 1990s there has been a discussion among the FOC members on homosexuality and same-sex unions. In this debate, both judgmental and sympathetic views on homosexuality have emerged.<sup>42</sup>

#### 4. Discussion on same-sex marriage in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

In this paragraph, we examine reactions of the ELCF towards the law on registered partnership (2002) and the new marriage act (2017). As the biggest church of Finland, the ELCF has played a prominent role in the debate on same-sex marriage. The main governing bodies of the ELCF, the General Synod and the Bishops’ Conference, have all commented on the laws. Alongside the

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<sup>37</sup> See e.g. *Kruunaa heidät yhdeksi: Avioliitto ortodoksisessa kirkossa* (Jyväskylä: Ortodoksinen veljestö, 2004); Matti Sidoroff, “Kirkolliset toimitukset,” in *Ortodoksinen kirkko Suomessa*, eds. Isä Ambrosius and Markku Haapio (Lieto: Etelä-Suomen Kustannus, 1979), 228–234. In its teachings the FOC follows the general Orthodox Christian understanding of marriage, see e.g. David Ford, Mary Ford and Alfred Siewers (eds.), *Glory and Honor: Orthodox Christian Resources on Marriage* (Yonkers: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2016).

<sup>38</sup> Metropolilta Johannes, *Lähimmäiset: Ajatuksia elämän hyveistä, ihmissuhteista, perheestä ja perinteestä* (Helsinki: Ajatus Kirjat, 2002), 146.

<sup>39</sup> *Suomen ortodoksisen arkkipiispakunnan piispainkokous 5/92* (31 August 1992). See also the statement on cohabitation without marriage *Suomen ortodoksisen arkkipiispakunnan piispainkokous 7/95* (11 September 1995).

<sup>40</sup> *Suomen ortodoksisen arkkipiispakunnan piispainkokous 4/99* (9 September 1999).

<sup>41</sup> Johannes, *Lähimmäiset*, 150, 161.

<sup>42</sup> Teuvo Laitila, “The Finnish Orthodox Church,” in *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Lucian Leustean (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 286.

official bodies, there have been manifold and lively informal discussions – also in the media – on how the ELCF should respond to this new situation. Should the church keep up with social development? Can the church adapt its teachings on marriage to the current developments? Social changes and people's altering lifestyles as such are not a problem from the perspective of Lutheran theology. Based on the requirement of love, Lutheran ethics must constantly be interpreted in the light of concrete situations and the questions of people.<sup>43</sup> According to Bishop Björn Vikström of Porvoo, there seems to be tension between doctrine and pastoral requirements in the ELCF. The doctrine of the church and the existential questions of the people, e.g. in relation to sexuality, should match and interact.<sup>44</sup>

#### 4.1. Official response of the ELCF to registered partnership

Homosexuality has been publicly debated in the ELCF since the 1950s. Usually it has been approached as a pastoral question, as part of private pastoral counselling.<sup>45</sup> The wider public debate on the theme surfaced in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Up to the present, the churches in Finland have been conservative in matters related to sexuality. The ELCF also tried to prevent developments pertaining to the rights of sexual minorities. However, it has always adjusted to major developments in Finnish society – one way or another, sooner or later.

When the law on registered partnership came into force in Finland in 2002, the ELCF was opposed to it. In a statement by the Central Administration, the importance of marriage as a special partnership between a man and a woman was highlighted. There should not be other institutions similar to it.<sup>46</sup> After Parliament had voted in favour of the law, the bishops announced that the ELCF was not willing to perform any rituals associated with registered partnerships, and that employees of the church were to live according to the church's traditional teachings on marriage. However, the human dignity of each individual is to be respected. In 2002 there were two motions relating to registered partnership in the General Synod. The first one insisted that an employee of the church cannot be part of a registered partnership. The other suggested that registered partnerships can receive blessings in the church.<sup>47</sup> As a result, the Bishops' Conference established a working committee on how the ELCF should handle registered partnerships.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> The interaction of Lutheran faith and topical life issues is presented as a positive dynamic by Bishop Björn Vikström. He argues that theological interpretation is alive as long as it truly takes the Holy Bible, the tradition of the church and the lived reality of the people into consideration. Björn Vikström, *Monta rakkautta: Seksuaalisuuden, parisuhteen ja avioliiton teologia* (Helsinki: Kirjapaja, 2016), 80.

<sup>44</sup> Vikström, *Monta rakkautta*, 83, 252–263.

<sup>45</sup> *Parisuhdelain seuraukset kirkossa: Piispainkokouksen selvitys kirkolliskokoukselle 2010*, 2. [http://sakasti.evl.fi/sakasti.nsf/0/4954C50B429AADE7C225770300438131/\\$FILE/PARISUHDE%202010.pdf](http://sakasti.evl.fi/sakasti.nsf/0/4954C50B429AADE7C225770300438131/$FILE/PARISUHDE%202010.pdf) (Accessed: November 12 2017).

<sup>46</sup> *Kirkkohallituksen lausunto Oikeusministeriölle*, 1999, [https://evl.fi/EVLMateriaalit.nsf/Documents/FBC52779F8A2E9C5C22570BE004B5CE9/\\$File/samaasukupuoltaolevi enparisuhteet.pdf?openElement](https://evl.fi/EVLMateriaalit.nsf/Documents/FBC52779F8A2E9C5C22570BE004B5CE9/$File/samaasukupuoltaolevi enparisuhteet.pdf?openElement) (Accessed: November 12 2017).

<sup>47</sup> *Parisuhdelain seuraukset kirkossa*, 3–4.

<sup>48</sup> *Kirkko keskustelee homoseksuaalisuudesta 2007*, <http://evl.fi/EVLUutiset.nsf/Documents/070D520CBC0930EDC22572590030573E?OpenDocument&lang=FI> (Accessed: May 17 2018). See also Antti Saarelma (ed.), *Homoseksuaalisuus Raamatussa ja kirkon opetuksessa*

In 2008, as a result of preparing their official response, eight bishops of the ELCF jointly published a book *Rakkauden lahja* (in English: The Gift of Love). In *Rakkauden lahja* the bishops called to mind that when homosexuality is discussed, it is not an abstraction but an issue that touches real people and real members of the church. Three points were highlighted by the bishops. Firstly, does the present knowledge about sexuality provide grounds for a new biblical interpretation? Secondly, according to Christian anthropology, God created humankind as male and female, and assigned them the task to increase in number and populate the Earth. Reproduction includes the duty to pass on spiritual heritage. Even though they affirmed that every child has a right to have a mother and a father, the bishops noted that a good life can be had in many kinds of families. Thirdly, for the sake of the unity of the church, different views on homosexuality should be accommodated.<sup>49</sup>

In 2010 and 2011 – nearly ten years after the law came into force – the Bishops' Conference finally published their responses to registered partnership. In the report from 2010, several alternative responses were presented, but no binding decision has been made.<sup>50</sup> Yet, the report states that an employee of the ELCF may be part of a registered partnership.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps a more significant reaction was a pastoral guideline for prayer services, published by the Bishops' Conference in 2011. Instead of blessing a same-sex relationship, it allowed praying for and with a registered same-sex couple. However, special aspects included in a wedding service, however, special aspects included in a wedding service, for example blessing or exchanging the rings, cannot be merged with such a prayer service, cannot be merged with such a prayer service.<sup>52</sup> Since these prayer services are not specified in church statistics, their prevalence cannot be verified. Praying for same-sex couples is, however, an already existent practice in some parishes.<sup>53</sup>

The official statements on registered partnership by the bishops have been rather cautious. They focus on the human dignity of homosexuals and tolerance towards them. At the same time, marriage between a man and a woman is clearly considered the ideal form of relationship, and even elements of its consecration should be avoided when praying for same-sex couples.

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(Tampere: Kirkon tutkimuskeskus, 2007); Annti Saarelma (ed.), *Homoseksuaalisuus kristillisessä ihmiskuvassa ja lainsäädännössä* (Tampere: Kirkon tutkimuskeskus, 2009).

<sup>49</sup> *Rakkauden lahja*, 59–60, 103.

<sup>50</sup> There were six alternatives: 1) blessing the partnership, 2) blessing the partners in a registered partnership, 3) blessing the home of a registered couple, 4) informal prayer on their behalf, 5) seeing the entire issue as belonging to the private sphere of life, 6) prohibition to acknowledge registered partnership in the church. *Parisuhdelain seuraukset kirkossa*, 118.

<sup>51</sup> *Parisuhdelain seuraukset kirkossa*, 131–132.

<sup>52</sup> *Pastoraalinen ohje vapaamuotoisesta rukouksesta parisuhteensa rekisteröineiden kanssa ja heidän puolestaan*, Piispainkokouksen pöytäkirja, 9 February 2011, [http://evl.fi/EVLUutiset.nsf/0/07372ED8DAB33799C225783200458EB9/\\$file/Pastoraalinen%20ohje%20vapaamuotoisesta%20rukouksesta%20parisuhteensa%20rekister%C3%B6ineille.pdf](http://evl.fi/EVLUutiset.nsf/0/07372ED8DAB33799C225783200458EB9/$file/Pastoraalinen%20ohje%20vapaamuotoisesta%20rukouksesta%20parisuhteensa%20rekister%C3%B6ineille.pdf) (Accessed: May 17 2018).

<sup>53</sup> Kaisa Halonen, Taneli Kylätasku and Tommi Sarlin Kuva, "Rukoiltaisiin, jos joku pyytäisi: Seurakuntien tarjoama vapaamuotoinen rukous kiinnostaa vain harvoja sateenkaaripareja," *Kirkko ja kaupunki*, 3 June 2014, <https://www.kirkkojakaupunki.fi/-/rukoiltaisiin-jos-joku-pyytaisi> (Accessed: May 17 2018).

#### 4.2. Official and other responses within the ELCF to same-sex marriage

Based on *Rakkauden lahja*, the bishops were not open towards an idea of same-sex marriage in 2008. The issue was officially discussed again in the General Synod in the autumn of 2015. In a rather extensive report, the general committee of the General Synod concluded that changes in the marriage law will not affect marriage as defined by the ELCF: priests cannot officiate the marriage of same-sex partners but rather, only have the right to marry a man and a woman, as stated in the Church Order and Handbook of Services.<sup>54</sup>

A year later, as requested by the General Synod, the Bishops' Conference also published a report on marriage. The bishops concurred with the Synod's opinion that same-sex couples cannot be wed since marriage is a relationship between a man and a woman. At the same time the bishops maintained that Christian anthropology, love for neighbours, the Golden Rule and Jesus' example insist that the church must abide by every human being.<sup>55</sup> Changes in historical and cultural perspectives on marriage were emphasized, but the report claimed that marriage has always been a relationship between a man and a woman. Interestingly, the report explicitly referred to the sacramentality of marriage: it attached strong symbolic and even sacramental meaning to the joining of the two sexes in marriage.<sup>56</sup>

Both the General Synod and the Bishops' Conference point out that there are many views on marriage within the ELCF. Yet, their official view, defined by the synod and the bishops, seems to be very clear. However, among individual bishops there are different and even contradictory opinions and views.

The bishops of the ELCF have instructed priests on how to respond to the new marriage law. In most of their letters of instruction, the official view (of the General Synod and the Bishops' Conference) is reiterated: priests are not allowed to marry same-sex couples but the pastoral guideline for prayers from 2011 opens up other possibilities for them in serving same-sex couples.

The need for flexibility and the importance of prayer are highlighted in several letters. While church buildings are not available for civil ceremonies, prayers for same-sex couples can be conducted in churches.<sup>57</sup> Praying for a same-sex marriage can also be incorporated as part of a common worship service, such as the Sunday Mass.<sup>58</sup> According to the letter by the Archdiocese of Turku, a priest or other employee of the parish can conduct a prayer service following the civil ceremony. Parishes are instructed to respond positively to any requests of praying for same-sex

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<sup>54</sup> *Yleisvaliokunnan mietintö 3/2015 edustaja-aloitteesta 2/2015. Uusi avioliittolaki*, 18–19, <http://kappeli2.evl.fi/kkweb.nsf/c7f32a5129224528c2256dba002d78f0/ebb03c055ebfeef1c2257ef3004081ca?OpenDocument> (Accessed: December 11 2017).

<sup>55</sup> *Piispainkokouksen selonteko avioliittolain muutoksen johdosta 2016*, 1–2, [http://evl.fi/EVLUutiset.nsf/Documents/F8582466C2AD8271C22580200044ADD3/\\$file/PK%20VALMIS%20AVIOLIITTOSELONTEKO%202016.pdf](http://evl.fi/EVLUutiset.nsf/Documents/F8582466C2AD8271C22580200044ADD3/$file/PK%20VALMIS%20AVIOLIITTOSELONTEKO%202016.pdf) (Accessed: December 11 2017).

<sup>56</sup> *Piispainkokouksen selonteko avioliittolain muutoksen johdosta*, 4.

<sup>57</sup> See e.g. Simo Peura, *Avioliittolain muutosta koskeva piispan kirje papistolle ja seurakunnille 2017*, <http://www.lapuanhiippakunta.fi/fi/avioliittolain-muutosta-koskeva-piispan-kirje/#.WNNoKioVOKUk> (Accessed: April 2 2017).

<sup>58</sup> In the ELCF it is customary to pray in worship services for couples who intend to marry or have just gotten married. Along with the new marriage legislation, the same possibility applies to same-sex couples.

couples, and to help to find a priest willing to perform it.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, Bishop Irja Askola of Helsinki writes that priests may attend the civil wedding ceremony and pass on the message that the church accepts same-sex couples. She relies on the professional skills, creativity and sensitivity of the priests to care for the needs of same-sex couples.<sup>60</sup> The bishop of Oulu, Samuel Salmi, points out that the wording of a prayer needs to be amended, e.g. words such as *man* and *woman* cannot be used.<sup>61</sup> Bishop Simo Peura from Lapua also reminds his priests to use accurate expressions: intercessions are not the place for statements on marriages or protests. Peura is aware that parishioners may have different requests, and that the church cannot fulfil all of them. Yet, every single person must be treated with respect. Priests must be open and honest on the services that parishes can provide.<sup>62</sup>

Three of the current ten bishops of the ELCF have publicly called for support for same-sex marriage: Archbishop Kari Mäkinen, Bishop Irja Askola and Bishop Björn Vikström from Porvoo diocese. The remaining seven bishops maintained either a more traditional view or have not expressed their opinions. Archbishop Mäkinen has suggested that due to the new law, the ELCF has to reassess its view on marriage. There are three alternatives. Firstly, the ELCF maintains its traditional views, and therefore differs substantially from society in that regard. Secondly, the ELCF renounces its right to officiate marriages. In this situation, the church still needs to decide what kind of marriages it would bless. Thirdly, the church expands its view on marriage and marries same-sex couples as well.<sup>63</sup>

Bishop Askola has supported same-sex marriage on moral bases. She has paralleled Christian values with human rights and equal treatment of all citizens, and has argued that the church must support permanent partnerships of all kind and accept different types of families.<sup>64</sup> Bishop Vikström has proposed that the ELCF should renounce the right to officiate legal marriages. In his opinion that would fit well with Luther's views. If church weddings would no longer be a legal act, it would no longer be an obligatory duty for all priests either.<sup>65</sup>

Despite the fact that some bishops like the archbishop in particular, want to change the official teachings on marriage, the bishops of the ELCF seem to be more or less unanimous in

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<sup>59</sup> *Avioliittolain muutoksen vaikutus seurakuntiin 2017*, <http://www.arkkihiippakunta.fi/etusivu/avioliittolain-muutoksen-vaikutu/> (Accessed: April 3 2017).

<sup>60</sup> Irja Askola, *Helsingin hiippakunnan kiertokirje 455*, 2016, <http://www.helsinginhiippakunta.evl.fi/@Bin/2348695/Helsingin%20hiippakunnan%20kiertokirje%20455.pdf> (Accessed: April 2 2017).

<sup>61</sup> Samuel Salmi, *Oulun hiippakunnan seurakunnille ja papistolle 9 February 2017*. (Salmi has sent the letter to the priests of Oulu diocese.) The Handbook of the ELCF gives three different alternatives to pray for married couples. Two alternatives mention marriage as God's gift to a man and a woman. Bishop Salmi recommends using the third alternative which speaks only of the gift of love.

<sup>62</sup> Peura, *Avioliittolain muutosta koskeva piispan kirje papistolle ja seurakunnille*.

<sup>63</sup> Arkkipiispa Kari Mäkinen, Facebook 25 November 2014, [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=310257282498066&id=135952143261915](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=310257282498066&id=135952143261915) (Accessed: April 5 2017).

<sup>64</sup> *Piispa Irja Askolan puheenvuoro eduskunnan lakivaliokunnassa 22.5.2014*, <http://www.helsinginhiippakunta.evl.fi/piispa/puheenvuoroja/?x514599=1453799> (Accessed: May 17 2018).

<sup>65</sup> Vikström, *Monta rakkautta*, 266–267; Vikström, "Kirkko voisi luopua avioliittoon vihkimisestä," *Vantaan Lauri*, 21 February 2014, <http://www.valomerkki.fi/vantaan-lauri/vantaan-lauri-arkisto/piispa-vikstrom-harkitsisi-kirkon-vihkioikeudesta-luopumista> (Accessed: May 17 2018).

their instructions on how to act in the current situation. They all underline the importance of respectful behaviour and the need to serve all members of the church.

In addition to the views of the bishops, it is also important to acknowledge the priests' views. From the aspect of lived reality and every day parish life, it is extremely relevant to research on what priests think about the issue and how they justify their arguments. Currently there are no reported data on their opinions but a study is under way. In a survey published in 2014, 44% of the priests supported same-sex marriage and 41% opposed to it. The remaining 15% could not take a stand. Performing a wedding ceremony for a same-sex couple in the ELCF was supported by 35% while 50% opposed to it.<sup>66</sup> Based on initial analyses of ongoing research, female priests seem to be more in favour of ecclesial recognition of same-sex marriage than male priests.<sup>67</sup> From these statistics it can be assumed that the question of same-sex marriage ceremony divides the clergy. Based on initial comments, the new marriage law seems to have caused confusion in the ELCF. Some priests have interpreted the law to mean that they are now allowed to marry same-sex couples.<sup>68</sup> The council of Helsinki diocese has pointed out that there are no rules in the law that would forbid conducting a same-sex marriage in the ELCF.<sup>69</sup> In addition, three professors of law, Urpo Kangas, Tuulikki Mikkola and Ahti Saarenpää, have given an analysis of the present situation which concluded that priests have a duty to perform same-sex marriages.<sup>70</sup> However, Archbishop Mäkinen's interpretation is that priests have to follow the prevailing church regulations on marriage.<sup>71</sup>

Within the ELCF, there are five "revival movements"<sup>72</sup> and some pro-minority movements<sup>73</sup>. These movements each have their own emphases pertaining to issues of faith,

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<sup>66</sup> Kati Niemelä, *Kutsumusta, auttamista ja itsensä toteuttamista: Pappien ja kanttorien suhde työhön, työhyvinvointi ja suhtautuminen ajankohtaisiin kysymyksiin Kirkon akateemisten jäsenkyselyssä 2014* (Tampere: Kirkon tutkimuskeskuksen verkkojulkaisuja 38, 2014) 77, [http://sakasti.evl.fi/julkaisut.nsf/25A061BE3EE694BCC2257E2E0012D562/\\$FILE/Julkaistu%2038.pdf](http://sakasti.evl.fi/julkaisut.nsf/25A061BE3EE694BCC2257E2E0012D562/$FILE/Julkaistu%2038.pdf) (Accessed: March 15 2017).

<sup>67</sup> At the moment, Laura Kallatsa is working on a doctoral thesis at the University of Eastern Finland on the views of priests of the ELCF on same-sex partnerships.

<sup>68</sup> The first same-sex wedding ceremonies in the ELCF took place immediately on 1 March 2017. In September 2017, 50 priests publicly announced their readiness to marry same-sex couples in the media. Same-sex wedding ceremonies celebrated by Lutheran priests are legally non-appealable, yet they are against the official guidelines of the church. Vesa Hirvonen, lecturer of theological ethics, maintains that priests do have the right to marry same-sex couples as long as the church does not specifically forbid it. Prohibition should be written in the Church Order. Vesa Hirvonen, "Näkökohtia luterilaisesta avioliittokäsityksestä," *Teologinen aikakauskirja* 3 (2016), 267.

<sup>69</sup> *Ponsiesitys/Helsingin hiippakuntavaltuusto* 2016, <http://www.helsinginhiippakunta.evl.fi/@Bin/2299277/Ponsi.pdf> (Accessed: April 5 2017).

<sup>70</sup> Topias Haikala, "Loputkin oikeusoppineet: Papin vihkimä avioliitto on pätevä," *Kirkko ja Kaupunki*, 20 July 2016, <https://www.kirkkojakaupunki.fi/-/loputkin-oikeusoppineet-papin-vihkima-homoavioliitto-on-pate-1>.

<sup>71</sup> Teija Santaharju, "Arkkipiispa samaa sukupuolta olevien vihkimisestä: 'Ei ole viisasta toimia vastoin kirkon kantaa'", *Yle uutiset* 9 April 2016, <http://yle.fi/uutiset/3-8799725>.

<sup>72</sup> The five revival movements are the Laestadian Movement, the Awakened Movement, the Prayer Movement, the Lutheran Evangelical Movement and the Fifth Revival. For more information in English, see <http://notes.evl.fi/EVLen.nsf/Documents/4F4645AE4A7608E7C2257C240058230C?openDocument&lang=EN> (Accessed: April 6 2017).

<sup>73</sup> For example: *Tulkaa kaikki -liike* (in English: Come, all), *Yhteys-liike* (in English: Communion movement) and *Sateenkaariyhdistys Malkus* (in English: The Rainbow Association Malkus).

but the Lutheran confession is shared by all of them. They have also taken part in the debate on same-sex marriages. A common point among the revival movements is the opinion that homosexual people should be treated with love, like neighbours. However, a majority of the traditional movements<sup>74</sup> see homosexual acts as a sin and do not condone same-sex partnerships. Newer movements explicitly represent the rights of sexual minorities in the church.<sup>75</sup>

## 5. Discussion on same-sex marriage in the Finnish Orthodox Church

In this paragraph, we will focus on the debate on same-sex relationships within the FOC. Unlike in the ELCF, the discussion on same-sex partnerships has not engendered official processes within the church administration or long-term theological work. Instead, mainly individuals seem to have voiced their opinions, often in response to a particular situation or occurrence. However, since 1999, the FOC has released some official statements relating to the issue of same-sex marriage.

### 5.1. Dialogue of diverging and opposing voices

Two theological reflections on same-sex unions were released in 2003 and 2004, soon after the law on same-sex relationships came into effect. Heikki Huttunen's and Tapani Kärkkäinen's account (2003) appeared in a compilation of theological analyses on homosexuality. The authors, a priest and a widely-recognized public personality, formulated grounds for a positive response to homosexuality, based on the Trinitarian premises of Orthodox theology; they stated that the dissimilarity of the divine personae allows for a positive assessment of same-sex relationships and equality of different identities within the church community. They also gave a positive, same-sex interpretation of the ceremony of brother-making (in Greek: *adelphopoiesis*), practiced as part of the Orthodox ecclesial tradition up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and proposed that holy companions like St. Sergios and St. Baccos could be considered models for same-sex relations.<sup>76</sup> Huttunen's and Kärkkäinen's views were soon confronted by Markus Paavola, a lay theologian, who rejected their favorable views on homosexuality in a chapter of a resource book on marriage. He argued that homosexuality is a negative consequence of the fall and endangers ascetic pursuit of sanctification and salvation. Homosexuals are called to refrain from sexual acts, and to constantly strive against the sinful impulses and lusts within.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Unlike in other revival movements, the Awakened Movement responds positively to same-sex marriage.

<sup>75</sup> For more information, see: <http://tulkaakaikki.net/ohjelma/> ; [http://www.yhteys.org/julistus\\_n.htm](http://www.yhteys.org/julistus_n.htm) ; <http://www.malkus.fi/index.php/yhdistys/perustietoa/in-english> (Accessed: May 17 2018).

<sup>76</sup> Heikki Huttunen and Tapani Kärkkäinen, "Ortodoksinen kirkko ja homoseksuaalisuus," in *Synti vai siunaus: Homoseksuaalit, kirkko ja yhteiskunta*, eds. Martti Nissinen, Liisa Tuovinen and Raimo Harjula (Helsinki: Kirjapaja, 2003), 65–85.

<sup>77</sup> Markus Paavola, "Synti tuomitaan, syntistä rakastetaan: Homoseksuaalisuus ortodoksisen kirkon näkökulmasta," *Kruunaa heidät yhdeksi*, 74–97.

These two theologically opposing views reflect the basic juxtaposition concerning homosexuality and interpretations of it within the FOC. On the one hand, there is a quest to make space for sexual minorities within the church and its theology. On the other hand, homosexuality is strongly condemned. When the debate resurfaced in 2007 in *Aamun Koitto* (in English: Dawn) magazine, the semi-official voice of the FOC, the lines were formed according to the two following basic views.<sup>78</sup> Critics accused *Aamun Koitto* of propagating Lutheran views in an Orthodox community.<sup>79</sup> Even though it may not be entirely plausible to locate the starting point of the discussion outside the context of the FOC, the overarching ecumenical nature of the question of homosexuality has evidently paved the way to discuss the issue of homosexuality on Orthodox forums. A decisive breakthrough in the public domain occurred in 2006 when a group of Orthodox clergymen and laypeople signed the declaration of *Yhteys-liike* (In English: Communion movement), a Christian solidarity group in support of sexual minorities.<sup>80</sup> Also, in 2006, a specific Orthodox Rainbow Society (ORS) was established.<sup>81</sup>

In May 2007, three theologians belonging to the Brotherhood of St. Cosmas of Aitolia, a society that promotes awareness of Orthodox tradition, demanded that the names of the Orthodox faithful be removed from the declaration of *Yhteys-liike*.<sup>82</sup> The Brotherhood also published a book which took an unambiguously negative stance on homosexuality.<sup>83</sup> In a review on the ORS's website, the book was characterized as "oppressive, crushing, accusing and nearly (even as a) persecution of a group of people" and also as lacking pastoral responsibility.<sup>84</sup> Clearly, the two basic opposing views had become more divergent.

The debate died down only to come into focus again in 2011 when Jukka Korpela, a professor in general history and the deacon in the FOC, published a booklet on the blessing of male-couples in the Orthodox Church. Korpela intended to show that the church "has also blessed male couples to love each other".<sup>85</sup> His suggestion on the possibility of the existence of

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<sup>78</sup> Hellevi Matihalti, "Homoseksuaalisuus: vaiettu vamma vai avoimen keskustelun paikka?" *Aamun Koitto* 1 (2007), 16–22.

<sup>79</sup> Hannu Pöyhönen, "Joitakin korjaavia näkökohtia keskusteluun homoseksuaalisuudesta," *Aamun Koitto* 3 (2007), 14–15.

<sup>80</sup> *Yhteys ja ortodoksit*, [http://www.yhteys.org/ortodoksit\\_n.html](http://www.yhteys.org/ortodoksit_n.html) (Accessed: August 18 2017).

<sup>81</sup> *Ortodoksinen sateenkaariseura*, <https://sateenkaariseura.wordpress.com/> (Accessed: March 8 2017). The society's website has not been updated for several years, and the administrator did not respond to our query in March 2017 on receiving updated information on the society.

<sup>82</sup> "Homoseksuaalit: ainoa ongelmako?" *Aamun Koitto* 11 (2007), 19–20.

<sup>83</sup> Hannu Pöyhönen, *Homoseksuaalisuus ortodoksisen perinteen valossa* (Joensuu: Pyhän Kosmas Aitolialaisen veljestö, 2008).

<sup>84</sup> "Kirja-arvostelu: 'Homoseksuaalisuus ortodoksisen perinteen valossa',"

<https://sateenkaariseura.wordpress.com/articles/kirja-arvostelu-homoseksuaalisuus-ortodoksisen-perinteen-valossa/> (Accessed: August 18 2018).

<sup>85</sup> Jukka Korpela, *Miesparin siunaaminen: Viisi ortodoksista keskiaikaista rukousta* (Helsinki: Arator, 2011). An interpretation of the ceremony of brother-making as "blessing of male relationships" was first proposed in 1997 by Tapani Kärkkäinen in *Aamun Koitto*. Based on John Boswell's study, Kärkkäinen suggested that the ceremony might have enabled erotic fulfilment of homosexual love. Tapani Kärkkäinen, "Kirkko siunasi miestenvälisiä liittoja," *Aamun Koitto* 4 (1997), 5–8. See also John Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (New York: Villard Books, 1994).

some kind of same-sex marriage in the Christian past attracted attention of several widely-distributed newspapers, which linked his writing to the topical debate on same-sex marriage.<sup>86</sup>

Occasionally, Orthodox clergymen have addressed the question of homosexuality in different media. A common feature for them was to acknowledge that homosexuality is a special, pastoral situation for which there is no easy or oversimplified solution. They advocate approaching homosexual members in the church with compassion rather than disapproval.<sup>87</sup>

Strong opposing Orthodox views towards homosexuality have not been published in recent years. Even if this cannot be taken as proof that opposition has died down entirely, a favorable and neutral attitude towards homosexuals within the FOC clearly has seemingly gained strength.<sup>88</sup>

## 5.2. Official statements and views

The discussion on the official level of the church has been twofold. Firstly, there are few official statements dealing with same-sex relationships. Secondly, some bishops have occasionally commented on issues relating to same-sex marriage over the past years.

In 2007 Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople informed Archbishop Leo that he was aware of efforts within the FOC to “legalize homosexuality”, and demanded to align the situation with Orthodox teachings.<sup>89</sup> In his answer to the patriarch, the archbishop informed him that the synod of the Finnish bishops sees the declaration of *Yhteys-liike* as a sociological statement,

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<sup>86</sup> In an interview in *Helsingin Sanomat*, the biggest daily newspaper in Finland, Korpela stated that he found it hard to accept that male couples are not blessed by the church. He also proposed that the prevailing concept of marriage should “be thrown into a trash can”. “Miespareja on siunattu liittoon jo keskiajalla,” *Helsingin Sanomat*, 4 August 2011.

<sup>87</sup> E.g. Lars Ahlbäck and Ville Kiiveri, priests from Helsinki diocese, have pointed out that the Orthodox tradition makes a distinction between homosexual acts and homosexual orientation – the former is condemned as sin and the latter is seen as part of a spiritual struggle. Both priests emphasize that the distinction creates rather high tension and there are no easy answers to it. Ville Kiiveri, “Ihminen kannanottojen takana: kuluneen vuoden homokeskustelu,” *Ortodoksina tänään*, 17 September 2013, <http://ortodoksina.blogspot.fi/2013/09/ihminen-kannanottojen-takana-kuluneen.html> (Accessed: March 8 2017); Lars Ahlbäck, “Papilta kysyttyä 31: Homoseksuaalisuus,” *Sana papilta*, 1 March 2015, <https://sanapapilta.blogspot.fi/2015/03/papilta-kysyttya-31.html> (Accessed: March 8 2017). Mitro Repo, an Orthodox priest, celebrity, and member of the European Parliament, has cautiously come to terms with the possibility of blessing same-sex couples based on the motherliness and compassionate broad-mindedness of the Orthodox Church. “Kävi ennen, miksi ei nyt?” *Iltasanomat*, 6 August 2011, [http://www.iltalehti.fi/uutiset/2011080614167285\\_uu.shtml](http://www.iltalehti.fi/uutiset/2011080614167285_uu.shtml) (Accessed: March 8 2017). More recently, the archpriest of Helsinki parish, Markku Salminen, has stated that parishioners belonging to sexual minorities should be treated and served like any other parishioner. Markku Salminen, “Seurakunta palvelee kaikkia jäseniään,” *Ortodoksiviesti* 7 (2016), 15.

<sup>88</sup> The increase in tolerance was observed by two active homosexual laypersons in an interview in the Helsinki diocese magazine in late 2016. Despite occasional pain points, both of them have found Orthodox believers and clergy to be accepting concerning their sexual orientation. To give an illustration of the atmosphere, one of them stated that he did not need to hide his homosexuality in the church. Neither of them expects the FOC to marry same-sex couples, even though they have mixed feelings concerning the issue. Mirva Brola, “Vähemmistönä vähemmistökirkossa,” *Ortodoksiviesti* 7 (2016), 13–15.

<sup>89</sup> *Patriarch Bartholomew to Archbishop Leo*, 21 May 2007. Archive of Archbishop Johannes, file 45, H:1, National Archives in Joensuu.

which is not contrary to Orthodox anthropology. The patriarch was told that the signatories have been requested to withdraw their names from the declaration.<sup>90</sup> Evidently, the signatories have not complied.<sup>91</sup>

In March 2008, a decision pertaining to the complaint on Orthodox involvement in *Yhteysliike* was made. The synod imposed no sanctions on Orthodox advocates for the rights of sexual minorities. Instead, the bishops expressed their contentment with the fact that the signatories did not aim to alter the Orthodox teachings on marriage.<sup>92</sup> Clearly, the demands made by the patriarchate of Constantinople to straighten things out were not fully met by the Finnish bishops.

Even though the bishops of the FOC seem to have a non-judgmental attitude towards homosexuality, they have shown no inclination to alter the traditional concept of marriage either. This became evident in the FOC's official statement in response to the citizens' initiative on same-sex marriage. In the statement from March 2014, they gave two arguments for their rejection of the initiative. The first argument was biological; marriage in their view is based on a vocation to procreate. The second argument was theological; marriage is a sacrament, and hence unchangeable.<sup>93</sup> This explicitly traditional statement indicated their unfavorable attitude towards same-sex marriage.

A rather different account of family and sexuality was detailed in *Seisokaamme hyvin* (in English: Let us attend), a resource book for adult education published in 2013. Its description of family is open-ended when it comes to whether or not same-sex couples can also participate in the reality of the miniature church. Where sexuality is concerned, the positiveness of "the range of sexuality" is acknowledged and neither premarital sex nor other non-marital sexual relationships are explicitly rejected.<sup>94</sup> In recognizing the existence of non-traditional family units and even same-sex relationships, the resource book indicates a significant change in how family and sexuality are perceived within the FOC.

Based on official texts, the FOC defends the traditional concept of marriage and does not approve of same-sex marriage. Yet, there seems to be an ongoing search for a new attitude towards sexual minorities and alternative types of families. Alongside the few texts produced by the church, the official voice has been reinforced by the comments of the two leading bishops, Archbishop Leo and Metropolitan Ambrosius of Helsinki.

At the end of 2008 Archbishop Leo stated that the FOC does not interfere with the family relationships of any of its members. Consequently, laypersons can be in a same-sex relationship,

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<sup>90</sup> See *Archbishop Leo to Patriarch Bartholomew*, 22 November 2007, nr. 206/07; *Patriarch Bartholomew to Archbishop Leo*, 23 January 2008. Secretariat of the Archbishop, file 000, 2007–2008, Kuopio. In his reply to the archbishop's letter in January 2008, the patriarch informed him that the synod was grateful for receiving his explanation.

<sup>91</sup> The Orthodox statement is still signed (May 2018) by 49 persons, including six clergymen and three lay theologians.

<sup>92</sup> "Piispainkokous: Yhteysliikkeen julistuksen allekirjoittamisella ei kirkon opetusta voida muuttaa," *Ortodoksi.net*, 7 May 2008, <http://ortodoksi.net/ortodoksi/blogi/uutiset/2008/05/07/piispainkokous-yhteysliikkeen-julistuksen-allekirjoittamisella-ei-kirkon-opetusta-voida-muuttaa/> (Accessed: March 8 2017)

<sup>93</sup> *Suomen ortodoksisen kirkon asiantuntijalausunto avioliittolain, rekisteröidystä parisuhteesta ja transseksuaalin sukupuolen vaihtamisesta annetun lain muuttamisesta*, Kuopio, 31 March 2014.

<sup>94</sup> Simo Haavisto, "Älä veljeä tuomitse," in *Seisokaamme hyvin: Ortodoksisen kirkon aikuiskasvatuksen oheismateriaali*, eds. Risto Aikonen and Sirpa Okulov (Kuopio: Suomen ortodoksinen kirkko, 2013), 123–126.

though this is not permissible for the clergy.<sup>95</sup> The archbishop's statement was soon put to the test when a group of parishioners demanded that the installation of their newly elected cantor must be voided because she was in a registered same-sex relationship. The archbishop did not concede but called for respect for United Nation's basic rights, such as equality and personal dignity.<sup>96</sup> The approving stance of the archbishop towards same-sex couples is also evident in his statement that homosexual couples should be served in the church like any other couple.<sup>97</sup>

These views have two significant outcomes. Firstly, the archbishop suggests that sexual minorities should be accepted in the church and that the status of registered same-sex relationships be recognized. He himself evidently recognizes the diversity of everyday life in the FOC when it comes to sexual orientation and is dedicated to serve the needs of these minorities. Secondly, the FOC does not question the suitability of its lay employees on the basis of their sexual orientation. The clergy however must live up to expectations.

Nevertheless, the FOC has indicated that it will not conduct wedding services for same-sex couples. This has been a recurrent theme in the archbishop's comments on the effects of the new marriage legislation. He has assured that the wedding practices of the FOC will not be affected in any way when same-sex marriage comes into effect.<sup>98</sup> On the eve of the decisive vote in Parliament, he stressed that the Orthodox Church will not change, even if the world around it does.<sup>99</sup> In the 2010s Archbishop Leo has repeatedly emphasized that the FOC is not an isolated island but an inseparable part of global Orthodoxy. The identity of the Finnish Orthodoxy is therefore based on a common tradition shared by all Orthodox churches, and not on Finnish culture or the prevailing social context.<sup>100</sup> When the new marriage legislation was accepted, the archbishop immediately announced that the FOC's teachings on marriage will not change. In his

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<sup>95</sup> "Ortodoksimaallikko saa rekisteröidä parisuhteensa," *Kotimaa* 13 November 2008, 3.

<sup>96</sup> "Arkkipiispa Leo hyväksyy kanttorin rekisteröidyn parisuhteen," *Länsi-Savo*, 18 September 2012, <http://www.lansi-savo.fi/uutiset/kotimaa/arkkipiispa-leo-hyv%C3%A4ksyy-kanttorin-rekister%C3%B6idyn-parisuhteen> (Accessed: August 17 2017).

<sup>97</sup> "Käsitys avioliitosta pysyy samana," *Ortodoksiviesti* 7 (2016), 11–12.

<sup>98</sup> "Ortodoksinen kirkko patavanhoillinen: Homot ja naispappeus 'täysin mahdotonta'," *Iltalehti*, 29 March 2013.

<sup>99</sup> "Arkkipiispa Leo hermostui avioliittokysymykseen: 'Pieni suomalainen yhteiskunta ei ymmärrä'," *Kaleva*, 27 November 2014, <http://www.kaleva.fi/uutiset/kotimaa/arkkipiispa-leo-hermostui-avioliittokysymykseen-pieni-suomalainen-yhteiskunta-ei-ymmarra/682605/> (Accessed: August 23 2017). However, the archbishop has speculated that even if there were to be changes in the FOC concerning marriage, these adjustments need to be accepted on a pan-Orthodox level. "Ortodoksisen kirkon kanta spn-avioliittoon on järkähtämätön," *Ortodoksi.net*, 30 November 2014, <http://ortodoksi.net/ortodoksi/blogi/uutiset/2014/11/30/ortodoksisen-kirkon-kanta-spn-avioliittoon-on-jarkahtamaton/> (Accessed: August 17 2017).

<sup>100</sup> See e.g. "Haastattelu: 'Moraalikysymykset on yhteiskunnallisia'," *Suomen ortodoksinen kirkko*, 20 June 2012, <https://www.ort.fi/arkkipiispa/kolumnit-ja-kannanotot/haastattelu-moraalikysymykset-yhteiskunnallisia> (Accessed: August 17 2017); Arkkipiispa Leo, *Avauspuhe kirkolliskokouksessa Valamon luostarissa*, 26 November 2012, <https://www.ort.fi/arkkipiispa/saarnat-ja-opetuspuheet/avauspuhe-kirkolliskokouksessa-valamon-luostarissa-1> (Accessed: August 17 2017); "Kirkon avioliitto ei muutu," *Suomen ortodoksinen kirkko* 21 May 2014, <https://www.ort.fi/arkkipiispa/kolumnit-ja-kannanotot/haastattelu-kirkon-avioliitto-ei-muutu> (Accessed: August 17 2014); "Arkkipiispa Leo: Suomen ortodoksinen kirkko ei ole irrallinen saareke," *Simeon ja Hanna*, 14 March 2015, <https://simeonjahanna.com/2015/03/14/arkkipiispa-leo-suomen-ortodoksinen-kirkko-ei-ole-irralainen-saareke/> (Accessed: August 21 2017); "Ortodoksisesta identiteetistä," *Suomen ortodoksinen kirkko*, 16 March 2015, <https://www.ort.fi/arkkipiispa/kolumnit-ja-kannanotot/kannanotto-ortodoksisesta-identiteetist%C3%A4> (Accessed: August 21 2017).

statement he even anticipated that, should the new law mean that the FOC will have to give up its right to officiate marriages, wedding services in the future would be performed for male-female couples, whose marriages had already been formalized at the registry office.<sup>101</sup>

Just before the FOC's official opinion was submitted to the law-making body in 2014, Metropolitan Ambrosius joined the discussion on same-sex marriage by emphasizing the importance of guaranteeing equal legal and economic rights for people in registered relationships.<sup>102</sup> The metropolitan has also stated that it is a positive thing that same-sex relationships are currently seen as part of normal human life. He has suggested that the church should "update" its values and attitudes concerning family issues – same-sex partnership and cohabitation included. Nevertheless, he does not anticipate that the FOC will change its practices regarding marriage.<sup>103</sup>

The two bishops repeated their somewhat standard views on the effect of the new marriage law on the FOC in February 2017: the FOC will remain faithful to its doctrine and define Christian marriage independent of civil law. The metropolitan specified that even though same-sex couples will not be married in the FOC, the church will, if so requested, bless the home of such couples.<sup>104</sup> There are no statistics on how frequently home-blessing takes place or is pastorally used as an approval of same-sex couples in the FOC.

The official stance of the FOC on same-sex relationships is also being observed on an inter-Orthodox level – as was seen in Patriarch Bartholomew's letter of reprimand in 2007. The gravity of the pan-Orthodox opinion on same-sex marriage was felt in November 2016 at the annual Church Assembly, the highest governing body of the FOC. In his letter to the Assembly, the patriarch stepped in with a remarkably pronounced exhortation to secure the traditional view of marriage. He emphasized the Pan-Orthodox Council's (Crete 2016) teachings on marriage<sup>105</sup> as being the only canonically and morally acceptable form of partnership. As other forms of cohabitation other than marriage are not approved, the FOC has to face issues relating to

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<sup>101</sup> "Kirkon avioliitto ei muutu," *Suomen ortodoksinen kirkko* 28 November 2014, <https://www.ort.fi/artikkelit/kirkon-avioliitto-ei-muutu> (Accessed: August 17 2017).

<sup>102</sup> "Ortodoksiispa: 'Parisuhteen rekisteröineet eivät saisi olla huonommassa asemassa'," *Verkkouutiset*, 1 March 2014, <https://www.verkkouutiset.fi/kotimaa/ambrosius%20ja%20homoliitot-16622> (Accessed: August 21 2017).

<sup>103</sup> Metropoliiitta Ambrosius, "Päivittämistarpeita," *Ortodoksiviesti* 4 (2015), 14.

<sup>104</sup> "Tampereella vieraileva metropoliitta Ambrosius: Ortodoksikirkko ei vihi, mutta siunaa homojen kodin," *Aamulehti*, 3 February 2017, <https://www.aamulehti.fi/kotimaa/tampereella-vieraileva-metropoliitta-ambrosius-ortodoksikirkko-ei-vihi-mutta-siunaa-homojen-kodin-24252814/> (Accessed: August 21 2017); "Avioliitto: Jumalan luomistyön ihmeellinen lahja," *Uusi Tie*, 21 February 2017, <https://uusitie.com/avioliitto-jumalan-luomistyon-ihmeellinen-lahja/> (Accessed: August 21 2017).

<sup>105</sup> See the council's document *The Sacrament of Marriage and its Impediments*, 2016, <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/marriage> (Accessed: May 17 2018). The document explains the traditional understanding of marriage as a "freely entered union of man and woman" and as "a small church". It focuses on "protecting the sacredness of marriage" and the "bounds of the traditional family" in the present situation of crises concerning marriage and family life. The attitude towards same-sex marriage is negative and unfounded. "Pressure to recognize new forms of cohabitation constitutes a real threat for Orthodox Christians", the document states.

marriage with a mixture of strictness and pastoral gentleness.<sup>106</sup> The archbishop has expressed his obedience to the Council's authority, and has stated that its decrees will be used as guidelines in the FOC.<sup>107</sup> Metropolitan Ambrosius, for his part, has belittled the relevance of the Council's document on marriage, which, according to him, will not be "that relevant in Finland".<sup>108</sup>

All in all, the two leading bishops agree that same-sex marriage has no place in Orthodox practice. Archbishop Leo has defended the traditional stance more audibly, yet both have sought ways to adapt traditional views to the present reality of sexuality and family issues. It is still unclear what kind of stance the FOC is going to take regarding the Pan-Orthodox Council's authority when it comes to their stance on same-sex marriage. No official guideline has been issued on how to proceed with the Council's teachings on marriage in relation to the new marriage legislation.<sup>109</sup>

## 6. Conclusions and reflections

The debate on same-sex marriage in Finnish churches has emerged as a result of social processes in which the place and definition of family has gone through major changes since the 1970s. The new marriage legislation in 2017 enabled the relationship of same-sex couples to be recognized in the eyes of the law. As a consequence, Finnish society no longer defines itself along the traditional Christian ideals of marriage and family. In anticipation of the new marriage law, the two indigenous Finnish churches, the ELCF and the FOC, have in their official statements defended the permanency and uniqueness of the nuptial union between a man and a woman. At the same time, however, critical voices and advocacy for the recognition of sexual minorities have gained ground in both churches.

In relation to the ELCF, the debate on same-sex marriage stands out as a multi-voiced reality. Members of the church, priests and even bishops read the Bible and interpret Lutheran teachings in various ways. The key conclusions are:

- Officially, as shown by the decisions of the General Synod and the Bishops' Conference, the ELCF does not approve of same-sex marriage as a Christian way of life. Yet, since 2011 the church has held prayer services for and with same-sex couples.

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<sup>106</sup> "Ekumeenisen patriarkan Bartolomeoksen tervehdys Suomen ortodoksisen kirkon papiston ja maallikoiden kokoukselle," *Suomen ortodoksinen kirkko*, 28 November 2016, <https://www.ort.fi/uutishuone/2016-11-28/patriarkan-tervehdys-0> (Accessed: August 21 2017).

<sup>107</sup> In his opening speech at the same Assembly, the archbishop emphasized the authority of the Pan-Orthodox Council and demanded loyalty towards patristic tradition. "Karjalan ja koko Suomen arkkipiispan Leon avauspuhe vuoden 2016 kirkolliskokouksessa Valamon luostarissa," *Suomen ortodoksinen kirkko*, 28 November 2016, <https://www.ort.fi/uutishuone/2016-11-28/arkkipiispan-puhe-0> (Accessed: August 21 2017). See also Arkkipiispa Leo, "Arkkipiispan katsaus kirkkovuoteen 2015–2016," *Aamun Koitto* 5 (2016), 18–19.

<sup>108</sup> The reasons are: firstly, its link to medieval thinking and, secondly, its contradiction with the prevailing pastoral customs in Finland. As an example of local Finnish deviations from Orthodox standards, the metropolitan referred to the permissive view on mixed marriages with non-Orthodox Christians and tolerance for the remarriage of priests.

<sup>109</sup> Kari Rönttilä, a priest from Helsinki diocese, remarked in November 2016 that since the Council's decrees on marriage do not concur with the current stance on same-sex marriage in the FOC, the Council's decisions will be disregarded and deemed impossible. Kari Rönttilä, "Synodi voitti vaikeutensa," *Aamun Koitto* 5 (2016), 11.

- Bishops do not collegially encourage approval for same-sex marriage in the church, but individual bishops support it.
- The clergy seem to be divided on the issue, but revival movements for the most part condemn homosexuality and do not approve of conducting weddings for same-sex couples in church.
- Opposing views are based on the commitment to traditional teachings on marriage and its theological foundations, and the negative view on homosexuality in the Bible.
- Advocates for same-sex marriage base their arguments mainly on human rights, love towards the neighbour and understanding marriage as belonging to the civil kingdom.

The FOC tries to balance between an immutable tradition and the approval of sexual minorities.

The debate within the FOC can be summarized as follows:

- The discussion has mainly focused on the relation of homosexuality to Orthodoxy. Instead of being a debate on same-sex marriage *per se*, it can instead be labelled as a debate on the attitude towards sexual minorities in the church.
- The official statements assure that teachings on marriage are not likely to change. Despite the alleged consistency of Orthodox teachings, registered partnerships of Orthodox believers are accepted by Archbishop Leo.
- The negative stance towards the possibility of same-sex marriage in the church does not necessarily mean rejection of same-sex couples in parish life. Clearly, the leading bishops and individual members of clergy are tolerant towards people belonging to sexual minorities within the church.
- The Finnish debate has been connected to a broader pan-Orthodox discussion on marriage and sexuality. The Patriarch of Constantinople has intervened in the debate with instructions to promote Orthodox teachings.

There are several points through which the debates of the two churches concur with each other. Firstly, the union between a man and a woman forms the basis of the official teachings on marriage in both churches. Secondly, both churches aim to safeguard the integrity of the traditional view. Thirdly, despite the official reluctance to accept same-sex marriages – and homosexuality – in the church, there is an effort to acknowledge sexual diversity as a part of lived reality. Consequently, the two churches have sought other ways than marriage ceremonies in recognizing the needs of same-sex couples. This is exemplified by praying for them in the ELCF and blessing their homes in the FOC. Fourthly, there is an increasing number of voices that support the value and equal rights of sexual minorities in the two churches.

The latter point also indicates a major difference between the ELCF and the FOC: while there is a strong cooperation within the ELCF that supports same-sex marriage in the church (with Archbishop Mäkinen being the most eminent spokesperson), introducing same-sex marriage ceremonies does not seem to be the main objective for the advocates for sexual minorities in the FOC. Rather, the aim is simply getting representatives of sexual minorities recognition as full members of the FOC, rather than advocating for wedding ceremonies.

Another evident point of difference lies in the approach to the entire issue. The ELCF has taken the question of same-sex marriage as an important social and ethical issue to which the

church is obligated to react. Public approval of same-sex marriage in Finnish society may even have a binding impact on the ELCF due to its strong social nature. On the contrary, the FOC seems to perceive itself as detached from the societal dimension and obligations resulting from it. Unlike the ELCF, the discussion on same-sex marriage has not engendered large scale official processes in the FOC administration. The dynamics of the respective majority and minority positions might be able to explain the differences in the churches' approaches and reactions.

What is certain is that in all likelihood the current situation will change again. The foreseeable future will most likely bring about some significant changes in the ELCF. Due to the number of clergy in favor of same-sex marriage in the ELCF, the debate and demands will not subside until the church approves of same-sex weddings. We assume that individual priests, (albeit it not being their duty) will increasingly be wedding same-sex couples despite the prevailing church regulation, and will continue to do so until the ELCF officially recognizes same-sex marriages. Presumably, the ELCF will not undertake the strictest disciplinary actions against them. It could well be that the ELCF will officially approve same-sex marriage within a decade or so, and thus follow the way paved by other Scandinavian Lutheran churches. This may, however, possibly lead to divisions within the ELCF.

From all accounts, the new marriage legislation will have no noteworthy effects on the practices and definition of marriage in the FOC. The civil same-sex marriages of Orthodox believers will be acknowledged, but no wedding service will be available for them in the FOC. Due to pressure by inter-Orthodox relations, the FOC will aim to retain its traditional teachings while simultaneously being tolerant towards different relationships and family types of its members in practice.