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also known as the Suomi Synod

# The Pastors from Finland at the Suomi Synod

The Suomi Synod, over the course of its beginning and development (1876-1962), was served by some 87 pastors from Finland. However, there was a time when the Synod's 1st president, Dr. J.K. Nikander, felt that the Church of Finland, was indifferent to the spiritual needs of the immigrant Finns in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Circumstances eventually changed so that it was by the help of pastors from Finland, that the Synod was able to develop. This paper reveals some of the factors having to do with the presence of these pastors in the life of the Synod. The information presented here is the product of the matriculum (SUOMI SYNOD MINISTERIUM, 1876-1962) written by this writer.

## Three types of Finland Pastors

Seventy-five of the above-mentioned 87 clergy were official Church of Finland pastors; in other words, graduates of the theological department of the University of Helsinki and ordained by the Church. The second type consisted of men (six), who had been trained as foreign missionaries (Africa and China) by the Finnish Mission Society. Six other men, who had almost completed their theological studies at the University of Helsinki but ordained by the Suomi Synod, form the third group. All, however, in the minds of the immigrant Finns whom they served, were Church of Finland ministers.<sup>2</sup>

The majority of these pastors were quite successful in their ministry among the immigrant Finns in the United States. There

were, however, a few exceptions; men who were authoritarian and especially high-churchly.<sup>3</sup> It is quite possible that the indiscretions of the few have dominated the attention of most historians writing about the Synod. The majority of these Church of Finland pastors, were normal human beings, without psychotic tendencies, who realized that democracy characterized the life of people in the New World. They went about their work enjoying wholesome relations with people while doing their visitation work, preaching, baptizing and administering Holy Communion. For those people, who had not been diverted from the practice of their Lutheran faith by radicalism, these pastors personified the familiar voice of shepherds in the Homeland. These pastors served the Suomi Synod during the era when the Finnish language characterized the work of the Synod. Some were able to do pastoral work in Swedish. When the pressure to serve the people in English arose, the Finland pastors were already diminishing. However, they did represent opposition to the forthcoming use of the English language.

## Majority of the Pastors were young

Service in the Suomi Synod, plus the opportunity to spend some time in the United States appealed to many young pastors who did not have permanent positions in one of the congregations of the Church of Finland. Tenured positions were available only after several years of one interim position after another. Furthermore, such positions were available only to those pastors who had

appeared before the diocesan bishop's council to undergo an examination of martyrity relating to a theological thesis. It was not uncommon for young pastors to serve at least in ten interim situations before securing a tenured call. A woman, whose father served in the Suomi Synod in the early 1900s, wrote about her father in this manner. "...along with many other just-ordained pastors, served the immigrant Finns in the USA where the need was great, in order to get ahead more rapidly."<sup>4</sup>

The average age of Finland pastors serving during the Pioneer Era of the Suomi Synod (1876-1890) was 32. The average age for Finland pastors during the Great Era (1890-1930) was 30. Of the 75 official Church of Finland pastors, 31 came to the United States within the first year of their ordination; 9 came within the second year of their ordination; 6 came within the third year of their ordination; 5 came within the fourth year of their ordination and 24 came within five or more years. Furthermore, only 14 of the 75 had completed their pastoral maturity examination and only one held a tenured position with the Church of Finland while serving within the Suomi Synod. Forty-six completed their maturity examinations upon returning to the Church of Finland. Fifteen served out their entire ministry in the Suomi Synod.

**Length of Service by Finland Pastors**

Years Served	Number of Pastors	Years Served	Number of Pastors
one	4	eleven	1
two	15	thirteen	5
three	9	fifteen	2
four	9	sixteen	1
five	3	eighteen	1
six	4	twenty	1
seven	3	twenty-four	1
eight	3	twenty-eight	1
nine	1	entire ministry	22
ten	1	(This includes 12 who were not official Church of Finland pastors)	

**Apparent Reasons why Finland Pastors came to serve the Suomi Synod<sup>5</sup>**

1. Received a call from a congregation or an institution of the Synod	34
2. Finnish Seamen's Mission Society played some role	26
3. Individual pastor's own initiative; opportunity to study; adventure	11
4. Finnish Mission Society played some role	8
5. Had been disciplined by the Church of Finland	2
6. To accumulate extra years of service and advance more rapidly within the Church of Finland (proved impossible to tabulate; nevertheless a factor) <sup>6</sup>	

**Apparent Reasons why Finland Pastors returned to the Church of Finland**

1. To complete pastoral maturity examination and become re-established	46 <sup>7</sup>
2. Broken health	2 <sup>8</sup>
3. Leave of absence was terminating	4 <sup>9</sup>
(Twenty two never returned; they served out their ministry in the Synod)	

**Social status of parental homes Finland Pastors serving the Suomi Synod<sup>11</sup>**

"Torppari"/cotter home	3
"Talollinen"/Farm owner	8
Locomotive engineer	4
Skilled laborer	3
School teacher (elementary)	4
Church of Finland clergy	9
Cantor	2
Plant superintendent	1
Small-businessman	1
Information not available	52



**Spiritual Roots of Church of Finland Pastors who served the Suomi Synod<sup>12</sup>**

"Herännyt"/Awakenist	8
"Evankelinen"/Evangelical Movement	13
"Rukoilevaiset"/Prayers	1
"Laestadiolainen"/Apostolic Lutheran	2
"vapaa kirkollinen"/Congregational	0
Metodistit/Metodist	2
Helluntailainen/Pentacostal	1
"Beckiläisyys"/Theology of J.L. Beck	1
Church of Finland, Lutheranism	52

**Academic standing for theological Studies at the University of Helsinki by Church of Finland Pastors serving the Suomi Synod<sup>13</sup>**

Approbatur	pastors	13
Cum laude approbatur		20
Cum laude		12
Magna cum laude		1
Summa cum laude		1
laudatur		16
Information not available		12

Approbatur: lowest honor granted in the Finnish Universities

Laudatur: the highest honor granted in the Finnish Universities

**Additional degrees earned**

Master of arts	9
Doctor of Philosophy	1
Doctor of Theology	2

**Size of Parishes served by Suomi Synod Pastors According to the Eras of the Synod<sup>14</sup>**

Era	Size of Parish	Number of pastors involved
1876-1890	Entire country	3
	Regions	8
1890-1920	Entire country	1
	Regions	3

Era	Size of Parish	Number of pastors involved
1920-1945	Multi-parish (three to eight-point)	45
	Multi-parish (three to six-point)	60
1945-1950	Two to three-point parish	20
	Multi-parish (two to three-point)	30
1950-1962	One or two-point parish	60
	Practically all one-point parishes	

**Marital status of church of Finland pastors serving the Suomi Synod**

Married in Finland	41
— to a Swedish woman	1
— to a Japanese woman	1
— to a Swiss woman	1
Married in the USA	15
— to a Finnish woman	14
— to a Swedish woman	1
Unmarried	2

**Involvement of Wives of Church of Finland Pastors serving the Suomi Synod<sup>15</sup>**

Speakers in congregations	11
Sunday School leaders	16
Summer School teachers	10
Leaders, Ladies Aid Society	16
Overseas missionaries	6
Registered nurses	2
Musical leaders, performers	4
Instructors at Suomi College, Kansan Opisto	5

**Reference and Notes**

1) J.K. Nikander's comment to Pastor K.K. Tötterman, Director of the Finnish Mis-

sion Society (DEAR UNCLE, pp. 35-36): "Is it not possible to hope for a loving response to the spiritual needs of these children, who have migrated to America, even if they are regarded as defectors from the homeland? ..... I would think that the bishops of the several diocese as well as the professors in the theological department of the University could do something!"

- 2) Lauri R. Ahlman, Ruben M. Ahlskog, Pekka J. Airaksinen, Heikki Anias, Johannes Bäck, Alfred E. Backman, Evert Blomberg, Johan Wilhelm Eloheimo, Aleksander Granholm, Karl Alfred Gröning, Mikko Haapala, Heikki Haapanen, Eliel J. Hakala, Aarne Viktor Halla, Rafael Hartman, Mikko Havukainen, Robert L. Hernberg, Torsten Maurits Hohenenthal, Albin Hukkanen, Kaarlo Huotari, Erik Viljo Hynninen, Yrjö E. Jauhainen, Juho Nimrod Johansson, J. V. Johansson, Frans Yrjö Joki, Juho (Kallen) Kiviharju, Eero Aulis Kansanen, Iisakki Katajamaa, Frans Vihtori Kava, Aapeli Kivioja, Kaarle K. (Käes) Klockarila, Armas Robert Korhonen, Juho Korhonen, Niilo Korhonen, Maunu Ilmari (Granfelt) Kuusi, Kaarlo Frederik Kuusisto, Juho Kustaa Lammi, Hannes Leiviskä, K. E. Lindström, Gabriel Lipsanen, Kalle Mäkinen, Kalle Heikki Mannerkorpi, Urho Rafael Muröma, Juho Kustaa Nikander, Emil Efraim Panelius, Lauri Taneli Pikkusaari, Tauno Pyykkö, Pekka Räsänen, Alvar Albert Rautalahti, Viljam Bernhard Rautanen, Samuel V. (Renko) Renfors, Adolpf Riippa, Samuel Heikki Rönkä, Emil Vilho Saaranen, Arvi Henry Saarisuu, Uuras Saarnivaara, Abraham Salminen, Kaarlo Erkki Salonen, Kaarlo Fredrikki Salovaara, Al-Savola, Anton Vilhelm Sederström, Alpo Setälä, Eemeli Wilho Siikanen, Klas Eliel Sjöblöm, Kristian Johannes Sjöblöm, Otto Stadius, Ilmari A. Tammisto, Heikki (Pellikka) Tanner, Matti Tarkkanen, Jussi Alfred Tenkku, Vihtori Tiitola, Kaarlo Leonartti Tolonen, W. K. (Durchman) Turkanhei-

mo, Eino Johannes Vehanen, Urho Waltari, Kustaa (Sahlberg) Warmavuori, Ero Warttainen, A.A. Wirtanen, Bruno Wuornos, Robert Ylönen.

- 3) These men were W.K. (Durchman) Turkanheimo, Johan Wilhelm Eloheimo and Heikki Tanner.
- 4) Katri Kava's comment about her father, KIRKOLLINEN KALENTERI, 1972.
- 5) "Received a call directly from a congregation" means that the congregations of the former Suomi Synod were not forced to the procedure of receiving names of pastoral candidates from the Synod president. All other Lutheran Churches in the United States endorsed this polity rule except the Finnish churches. The fact that Suomi Synod congregations selected and called their own candidates for the pastor's office is a definite indication of a very democratic church polity rather than authoritarian. The Suomi Synod Consistory maintained the clergy roster and only Synod-trained pastors and Church of Finland clergy were eligible. "Other Lutherans" were admitted to the roster only by Consistory action.
- 6) Accumulating additional years of service by doing service abroad was a concession as well as an inducement to pastors by the Church of Finland. These additional years became a part of the pastor's resume and appeared to his advantage when seeking placement by the diocesan chapter.
- 7) The high frequency for completing the pastoral maturity examination upon returning to Finland indicates that this was a pattern for these pastors.
- 8) Church of Finland pastors called to early deaths were Ruben Ahlskog, Heikki Anias, Mikko Haapala, Mikko Havukainen, Iisakki Katajamaa, K. F. Kuusisto, Eemeli W. Siikanen, and Juho Kustaa Lammi. The mortality rate was plus 13 % !
- 9) Sources available revealed only four instances of termination of leaves of absence. However, it would seem plausible that this reason for returning was more fre-

quent.

- 10) The pattern of immigration to the United States for Finnish clergy by provinces does not seem to follow the pattern for the common run of immigrants from Finland as indicated by immigration researchers.
- 11) Even though the sampling relating to the social status of the parental homes of Church of Finland pastors serving the Suomi Synod is but one third of the total, it is nevertheless, sufficiently significant. In other words, it allows for the possibility of extrapolating. The proportions of the state suggest that they are typical. Furthermore, they suggest the presence of upward mobility.
- 12) Classifying the Ch. of Finland pastors according to their possible spiritual roots should not imply that the majority were the Lutherans and the others were not. What is intended is to indicate the presence of the "Little Tradition" (folk religion). However, "Beckianism" is not a "Little Tradition".
- 13) The academic achievements of the Church of Finland pastors serving the Suomi Synod can be studied in comparison with the "Suomi-trained" clergy. It is suggestive of the comparative leadership role either group had. From 1906 to 1924 the "Suomi-trained" clergy had only the equivalent of high school and two years of theology; from 1925 to 1952 they had the equivalent of junior college and three years of theology; and finally from 1953 to 1962 B.A. and B.D. degrees. In addition, by the 1950s the "Suomi-trained" clergy had acquired 26 M.A.'s, 5 Ph.D.'s, 6 Th.D.'s and 1 Doctor of Education. During the Crest Period (1890 to 1930) the Church of Finland pastors were represented by 16 clergy on the Consistory, 14 as officers of the geographic conferences,

19 on the faculty of Suomi College and Theological Seminary, and 25 on the Board of Directors of the College and Seminary. The above situation prevailed for several reasons: 1) It took time for "Suomi-trained" clergy to mature; 2) "Suomi-trained" clergy were at an academic disadvantage for a long time and 3) the immigrant generation of church members felt closer to the "homeland" pastors: By the 1930s the pendulum of leadership role had swung the other way.

- 14) The chart relating to the size of parishes according to the eras of the Synod reveals that the Church of Finland pastors served at the time of greatest dispersion and greatest travel burden. Obviously, much of this had to be done by horse and buggy (or for that matter by horse and sleigh) in remote rural and mining areas.
- 15) The democratizing influence of the American scene brought about greater participation by the Church of Finland pastors' wives in the life of the congregations. The parsonages became more open and available to socialization by the parishioners. The leadership and artistic talents of the pastors' wives were an important ingredient in life of the parish. In many ways, the "pasturska" became a role model for the women of the congregations: baking, handwork, music, literature, appearing and speaking in public.

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Postscript: For further study, the matriculum, SUOMI SYNOD MINISTERIUM, is available in the archives of the Institute of Migration, Turku; the Department of Theology of the University of Helsinki; the Finnish American Historical Archives, Suomi College; the Immigrant History Research Center, University of Minnesota and the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.