

The Suomi Conference A story of Finnish Ethnic Accommodation and Continuity

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This is the saga of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, also known as the Suomi Synod, which in 1962, united with three other church bodies to form the 3,200,000 member Lutheran Church in America. Of the four bodies, three were of Scandinavian background. Of these three, the Suomi Synod was the most ethnically conscious. The fourth one was German in ethnic background, but only faintly so.¹ This latter church body was also the largest of the four. The Finnish Lutherans chose to join the merger created by the union of the four church bodies in the organic manner prescribed by the merger documents but exercising, nevertheless, the option provided by the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity of the merging churches, whereby those who spoke Finnish could maintain and cultivate their ethnic religious life. This meant the



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right to gather for Finnish religious festivals (regionally and internationally), the right to do publication work, the right to conduct Finnish language Bible camps and the right to itinerate speakers or choral groups which used the Finnish language.² This special interest group is known as the Suomi (free) Conference within the Lutheran Church in America.³

As background for our story, let it be said that the Suomi Conference is the basic original ethnic constituency of Suomi College, located in Hancock, Michigan. The Conference, unofficially, maintains "awareness ties" of fellowship with missionaries of the former constituency in what were once Suomi Synod mission fields. It has also in recent years, become painfully aware of the need for maintaining the Finnish theological heritage in the person of an actual professor on the faculty

of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, the seminary into which the Suomi Seminary merged in 1962. The Conference, in its awareness of heritage, was responsible for sponsoring the Centennial of Finnish Evangelical Lutheranism in North America in 1976⁴. Even though this Centennial was held fourteen years after the merger of 1962, it proved to be the largest gathering of the "old constituency" at any of the festivals of the Conference. Roughly, about one half of the clergy of the former Suomi Synod attended. The participants came from seventeen of the nineteen states in which the former Suomi Synod had functioned. The significance of the striking vitality of the Conference, evidenced especially by the Centennial, can be understood in the sense that the ethnic ties were still surprisingly strong and that this ethnicity appeared to have deeper roots in the younger generational levels than had been anticipated at the time that the special interest conference was organized.

At the time of merger (1962) the Suomi Synod consisted of 155 congregations located in the following states in the following manner: California --6, Connecticut --4, Florida --2, Illinois --3, Maine --4, Massachusetts --10, Mississippi --1, Michigan --54, Minnesota--34, North Dakota --2, New York --4, Ohio--8, Ontario --1, Oregon --4, Pennsylvania --3, South Dakota --3, Washington --4, West Virginia --1, Wisconsin --6, Wyoming --1. The membership of the Suomi Synod was at a new high in 1962 of 36, 274 after a low point of 28,000 in 1947.⁶ The congregations of the Suomi Synod, at that time, had a total giving of 1,731,450.00; the synodical budget was 225,555.00.

Since the Suomi Conference is not an organized church, but rather a fellowship group within the LCA, it does not have the function of maintaining statistics. Furthermore, it has no other source of

income than the few offerings it receives at its own festivals. Its officers all serve on a voluntary basis contributing very sizable amounts of time to organization, promotion and creative writing. Despite this situation, the Conference is perhaps stronger today than it was fifteen years ago when it was first organized. Here follows, therefore, a few comparative figures to indicate what has transpired within the ethnic fellowship, religious in purpose, and within a major American religious denomination, over a period of fifteen years (1962 to 1977).

At the time of its organizing, the Conference consisted of 98 member congregations (from the former Suomi Synod), who had petitioned the Lutheran Church in America for the privilege of the Conference. There were 74 clergymen of the Suomi Synod, who had similarly requested membership in the Conference. In 1977 the roster of member congregations is 90 and the number of clergy who are members in the Conference, is 138. This number includes some non-Finnish-speaking pastors, who now serve former Suomi Synod congregations, which hold membership in the Conference. However, it needs to be noted that the list of clergy include many former Suomi Synod pastors, who are now serving LCA congregations, which were not a part of the former Suomi Synod nor are they now member congregations of the Conference. The roster of congregations holding membership in the Conference, consist only of those which had been a part of the former Suomi Synod.

Comparative Usage of Finnish and English in the Former Suomi Synod In 1962

Congregational organizations using Finnish --144
 Congregational organizations using English --451

Congregational minutes written in
 Finnish --27 congregations
 Congregational minutes written in
 English --104 congregations
 Congregational minutes written in both
 Finnish and English --8 congregations

Average attendance at Finnish worship
 --3 776 or 29%

Average attendance at English worship
 --9 321 or 71%⁶

**Comparative Attendance at Finnish and
 English Worship Percentages as of 1968**

	U.S.A. Congregations	Canadian Congregations
Finnish attendance (%)	16%	82%
English attendance (%)	84%	18% ⁷

The creation of the Suomi Conference brought 10 Finnish congregations into membership of the Conference from the former United Lutheran Church of America. They had been transferred in 1933 to the ULCA from the Suomi Synod. Migration into Canada from Finland has been very sizeable after World War I, as well as, World War II with the result that the Finnish Lutheran work in Canada has been characterized by young families and the mind-set of immigrant churches.⁸ There is no question that the most active regional of the Suomi Conference is the Canadian one. For this regional, the Conference is meaningful not only as structure for the care of the aged, but particularly for the care of all age groups.⁹ In fact, the activity and sense of responsibility has been so intense in the Canadian regional of the Conference that the subject of a Finnish synod was raised in 1974-75¹⁰. It was thought that ten congregations were too few for assuming the responsibility for a synodical structure.

The figures above point to a gradual diminishing of worship service activity in the Finnish language. Since the initial objective and probably at the time, the most important

objective, was the care of the elderly Finnish generation within the Church, the Conference has continued to be especially concerned about this diminishment. The **1977 Yearbook of the Lutheran Church in America** reveals that there are still 51 congregations within the synods in the United States where there is at least occasional Finnish worship activity. On the other hand, in the ten Finnish congregations in the Canadian section of LCA, the figures quoted above indicate that Finnish is the predominant activity. Canadian synod presidents have been especially responsive to seeing that their Finnish congregations are provided with Finnish speaking pastors (usually from Finland; while there are exceptions to the matter of the pastor's native country, all of these pastors serving Finnish congregations in Canada conduct their pastoral activities mainly in the Finnish language.) On the other hand, in the USA Finnish congregations, synod presidents have not with any consistency appointed Finnish speaking pastors to former Synod congregations. The exceptions to this have been certain larger congregations who frequently have staff ministeries, the senior pastor being able to conduct services in Finnish.

The Suomi Conference, by its initial commitment, has been concerned about continuing Finnish worship activity and pastoral ministry to the elderly generation. In order, therefore, to compensate for this diminishment, the Suomi Conference has resorted to a number of strategies, within its defined functions as a fellowship group within the church. The first strategy of the Conference has been to sponsor and arrange religious festivals in the Finnish language called **Word and Song Festivals**. This has been done by the regional committees and also by the Executive Committee on an international basis. Some records have been kept in order to record the social complexion, generation-wise, of those who attend.

These records indicate that more and more the trend is towards attendance by American-born Finns in their late forties and older. At least 50% of the attendance at festivals can be accounted for in this manner. Obviously, this is a great incentive for the elderly, Finland-born generation. This has meant, instead of attendance at festivals diminishing, the attendance has been increasing. The average attendance at a regional festival is about 175 with some festivals drawing as many as 500. The Finland-born elders are not the only ones profiting from this vitality; the American-born attenders are experiencing the rewards of more intimate fellowship and some manifestations of the "old faith."¹¹

A second strategy of the Conference to compensate for the diminishing amount of Finnish worship activity is the Visitor's Exchange Program, administered by the Conference continuously from its inception as a Conference. The Executive Committee of the Conference arranges for the itineration of select speakers, as well as, youth groups, choirs and dignitaries from the Church of Finland. There are usually two or three such itinerations arranged and managed by the Conference each year. An itineration schedule typically means congregations in Canada, as well as, the United States, frequently total some 25 to 30 local appearances. The Conference has also arranged that such visits are made into communities where there is presently no organized Finnish work, such as in the Pacific Northwest of the USA, as well as, Western Canada. The Conference receives no outside aid in performing this service.

A third strategy, whereby the Conference overcomes the diminishing amount of Finnish worship opportunities, is through its publication program; another voluntary program. This means the monthly religious, tabloid-size (usually eight pages) publication, the ISIEN USKO (Faith of the

Fathers.) This publication has a circulation of about 2400, half of this in the United States and the other half in Canada. In addition, the Conference continues the publication of the annual calendar of the former Suomi Synod, the KIRKOLLINEN KALENTERI. This is a 225 page book featuring material about the congregations and church members. In 1964, this publication had an annual sales of 2500 copies. By 1977 the annual sales had dropped to 1800 copies. The outreach of these publications is greater than the figures would indicate, in-as-much as the copies are shared. The poetic fount of Finnish people finds frequent expression in these publications. Dr. Walter Kukkonen has declared that the *Kirkollinen Kalenteri* is a storehouse of both lay and clergy theology. One layman had articles over a period of over forty years in each issue of the calendar.¹² Similarly, a woman poet, Aino Lilja Halkola, had contributed poems in the Finnish language to this same publication for approximately the same length of time.

A fourth strategy for compensating for the diminishing opportunities for Finnish worship services has been the Finnish Bible Camp program. At the present, (1977), only two of the regionals (namely Lake Erie and the Canadian), are maintaining such programs. In the Lake Erie regional, the required quota of attendance for maintaining a week of Finnish Camping is met by help from a simultaneous family camping program consisting of young families of second and third generation American Finns. In the Canada region, the Finns maintain their own facilities and run a graded program during an eight-week period.

A fifth strategy to stem the tide of diminishing opportunities for Finnish worship has been religious radio programming, in the Finnish language. The incidence of such broadcast programs by concerned groups within the Conference has amounted to six.

Some of these programs reach a very wide audience, for example, in northern Michigan and northern Minnesota. The Canada regional of the Conference is also involved in a widespread broadcasting program.¹³

A sixth strategy to fill the gap created by the lessening of opportunities for worship in the Finnish language is accomplished in part by the cassette program maintained in part by the pastor, as coordinator of the cassette program for the Conference. This pastor coordinates, not only the shipment of the cassettes upon request, but also the transcription of worship services with messages received from pastors of the Conference who contribute their services. The funding of this program is also accomplished by voluntarism.¹⁴

A seventh strategy by the Conference to counter the diminishment of Finnish worship activity has been accomplished through advocacy. Since the Conference has neither the right nor is it possessed of funds to initiate special ministeries, it has been active in the role of an advocate before synod boards requesting that unmet worship needs among Finnish people would be met by programs of itineration. This has been done from time to time, especially in northern Michigan, northern Minnesota and in Western Canada. These synodical programs account in part for the continuing incidence of reported Finnish worship activity. In Western Canada, this program of advocacy has involved the Diaspora Committee of the Church of Finland, as well as, the Synod; the Suomi Conference has played a mediating role in these discussions.¹⁵

The question, "How important is it to maintain these ethnic religious activities for Finnish Lutherans in the United States?" deserves to be asked. The answers will be varied, depending upon the generation to which one belongs, whether foreign-

born, second generation, third generation or fourth generation. Historically, the overall position of the Suomi Synod had been to maintain a church for the Finns as long as possible and at all costs. During the last decade of the Suomi Synod's history, this concept of the church was changing, in fact, to such a degree that the Finland-born elderly generation was, realistically speaking, politically disenfranchised within the Synod. In order to survive as a viable Church, the younger leadership, who had assumed control in the 1950's, continued to innovate with such changes that the ethnic image of the Synod was much modified in conformity with the general religious community.¹⁶ Subsequently, having merged with the other Lutherans to form the Lutheran Church in America, this leadership, quoted above, along with the rank and file of Suomi-clergy, were now relieved of the pressure of radical accommodation in order to survive. The Lutheran Church in America is an American church with historical roots, which predate the Revolutionary War. Thus, many a former Suomi Synod pastor was relieved of the burden of providing a certain image; he was now able to express himself as he wished as an avocation, either ethnically or otherwise. However, merger into the LCA meant that a sizeable Finnish element in the Church, largely the Finland-born portion, believed that they had been "sold down the river". The truth of the matter is somewhat otherwise regardless of its still not being recognized by this same generation. If the Suomi Synod had continued, the sense of rejection would have been increasingly aggravated due to the pressure upon the Church to grow and gain community acceptance. Merger has meant that the elder Finnish generation's needs have been met much better than if it had never occurred. Obviously, the Suomi Conference has meant much in this improved picture. This latter point of view is the considered opinion of this writer.

There are other implications to the question posed above, which deserve explanation and description. These are aspects of the ethnic program of the Conference which affect the Americanborn membership. The Conference has become aware that it has other objectives, besides taking care of the religious needs of an elderly, as well as, immigrant segment of the Church, such as: a) Understanding the historical roots of Finnish Evangelical Lutheranism, b) Maintaining bridges of communication with current Scandinavian theologians and their writing, c) Cultivating heritage projects like the Finnish American Archives at Suomi College, d) Inspiring the writing of studies such as "Faith of the Finns" or "The Finns in North American, A Social Symposium", e) Participating in ethnic activities of cooperating groups on a selective basis (e.g. such groups being the Finnish American Bicentennial Central Committee, the ScanPresence project of the American Scandinavian Foundation.) Furthermore, an additional objective could well be the cultivation of the American-born Finns within the Lutheran Church of America for the purpose of meeting their ethnic needs. As indicated, at the beginning of this paper, the Conference has begun to manifest an obvious attraction for second generation, American-born Finns. The motivation for this appears to be the possibility of a more immediate and realized fellowship because of common background and a shared understanding and feeling for the Gospel. As yet, the Conference has barely deviated from its practice of conducting its festivals in the Finnish language. Were it to do so, some are saying that the generational influence of the Conference would be widened and deepened. Dr. J.W. Heikkinen, speaking at the Centennial of Finnish Evangelical Lutheranism in North America, stated that the Finnish spiritual heritage is not dependent upon knowledge of the language, but rather upon an understanding of faith

in the Gospel.¹⁷ An evaluation questionnaire, circulated among those who attended the 1973 annual festival of the Conference, indicated that there was a strong feeling for moving in the direction of service also for the American-born Finns in the LCA, as well as, upholding the integrity of the Finnish theological heritage. Since the Centennial festival of 1976 included considerable programming in English language, it may mean that the Conference will move in the direction of bilingualism. It is also apropos to state that the Conference has continued to administer the Church of Finland-grant annual scholarship for study at the University of Helsinki. At least 20% of the clergy members of the Conference have studied at this University under the auspice of this scholarship program.

The Suomi Conference has not felt obligated to manifest all forms of ethnicity for its members; neither has it become involved in all kinds of cooperative ethnic activities. Nevertheless, it would have to be said that there is undoubtedly more tolerance within the leadership and membership of the Conference for varied cultural manifestations of ethnicity than in the past. This has reference to folk dancing, singing of folk songs, presentation of Finnish drama and ballet. However, the Conference, thus far, has left these activities to the secular organizations for implementation. As part of the Church, the Conference does not feel obligated to assume responsibility for such programmatic activities. However, the Conference does appreciate that such activities are cared for by other organizations. This is a long step from the posture which once existed between Finnish secular organizations and the Finnish church on this continent.

The Conference considers itself fortunate to have commenced its work in a period of church life and national history when

appreciation for diversity in people and culture is understood better than in the past. The Conference does not believe that ethnicity is an absolute good, since it is easily diverted and manipulated for cheap or even sinister purposes.¹⁸ It can be, however, whether in national affairs or local affairs, as well as, church affairs, a relative good. As such for many people, it provides a sense of identity and security in a multi-technocratic age; it can be the basis for mutual understanding in a diverse society; it can be the wellspring for cultural and religious enrichment in a consumer oriented age; it can also be the channel and the re-enforcer of traditional tested values.

The relative merits of ethnicity and no ethnicity were submitted for the attention of the Conference in the annual report of the chairman. Insights from the writings of Will Herberg, Max Weber, Talcott Parsons, Andrew Greeley, Michael Novak and Gibson Winter were shared with the membership. The intent was to evaluate what the Finnish Church had gone through in its ethnic experience. Furthermore, since the Finnish congregations in Canada are relatively speaking, at the beginning of the ethnic cycle, it was hoped that such an evaluation might alert these congregations to avoid many of the mistakes that its USA-counterpart had made.¹⁹ Some of the largest congregations of the LCA still betray some ethnic identity, even though it is not strong nor very apparent. It is not a disadvantage to have some such flavor. Gibson Winter speaks of a church model, the "multi activity church" (or organizational church) which offers many options to its membership, (some ethnicity being a part of it). Thus it is eminently successful in serving the needs of people in the Community.²⁰

There is a mystique associated with Finns by the rest of the Scandinavian nationalities; namely, the eternal question, "What goes on in the Finnish mind?" The Finn speaks a

different language than the other Scandinavians; they are unable to penetrate it. "Is the Finn somehow different?" In actuality the mystique that we refer to is also experienced by others, not only the Scandinavians. In this last paragraph, we wish to give a few observations about the clergy members of the Suomi Conference. It is the general experience of these Finnish-background clergy that they are the objects of such mystique-curiosity within the Lutheran Church in America. If it is more than an assumed language differential, the answers may perhaps be found in the excellent analysis of the Finnish religious mind-set by Dr. Ralph J. Jalkanen.²¹ However, these mundane figures about the characteristics of the clergy members of the Suomi Conference may allay feelings about any particular mystique. Of the 105 clergy on the roster of the Suomi Synod at the time of the merger (1962), 91 spoke and preached fluently in English. Only 76 were capable of preaching in Finnish; 5 could do so brokenly; 19 had no ability in the Finnish language. Of the 105 clergyman, 80 were born in the United States and 25 were born in Finland. Of the latter 25 born in Finland, 16 were already enjoying the retired status. It is apparent that of the active clergy in the former Suomi Synod at the moment of merger, the overpowering majority were American-born individuals. Another aspect of these former Suomi Synod clergy at the moment of merger was that many of them questioned the value of the Conference as far as they themselves were concerned (they did see the importance for the Finnish-speaking elder generation.) At the present time, 1977, this attitude of the clergy has changed very much and they see the value of the Conference in personal terms relating to themselves. Many have become openly friendly and they demonstrate this by attending the regional and international festivals of the Conference. Those who

have been involved intimately in the Conference activities from the beginning, still have a very high degree of interest and motivation. It must be said that the cutoff age of such clergy is the late forties. It

is possible that the Conference will last longer than expected in the USA; it is only natural that this longevity expectancy should be greater on the Canadian side.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO SCANPRESENCE II FROM THE SUOMI CONFERENCE

1. Preparing and distributing a carefully worded resolution, in keeping with the theology of the Scandinavian-background church bodies in the United States, wherein these church bodies would take action to preserve and cultivate some of the values of their ethnic background. A resolution with a slightly different wording should also be sent to Scandinavian-background secular organizations. (For the churches, suitable projects could be hymn singing; appropriate drama or book clubs. For seminaries appropriate projects would be workshops on Scandinavian theology and religious life.)
2. Encourage more young people to make trips to Scandinavia; encourage more young people to consider spending a period of time in study in Scandinavia.
3. Enlarge and make more effective the programs whereby homes with young people are persuaded to read more of the printed material of or about Scandinavia. This is more than travel brochures or picture books. It points to the literature of these countries. If need be, translators should be set to work to open up more of this literary treasure.
4. The Scandinavian American Foundation should become involved in seeking wealthy individual or corporate donors to consider the scheduling of artistic programs on TV on Scandinavian literary subjects. As far as the Finns are concerned, an artistic rendering of the Kalevala on TV is and would be tremendously significant.
5. Parents should be guided and encouraged to display, share and use Scandinavian art, music, literature, jewelry, artifacts in their homes.
6. Additional exchange programs should be cultivated by the Scandinavian American Foundation for young people who are in high school, as well as, for those in college.
7. The colleges of the churches, which have sprung from Scandinavian background, should be consulted further than heretofore for the purpose of developing Scandinavian programs, which would deepen and widen the feeling for Scandinavian culture.
8. Perhaps there should be a greater promotive effort put forth to establish more Scandinavian local organizations by the Scandinavian American Foundation. The number of chapters throughout the country is relative few. Junior auxiliaries, appropriately named, may also be considered on a national basis.
9. Local churches could be encouraged to observe, appropriately selected, Scandinavian calendar of folk events, especially Christmas and Christmas customs.

FOOTNOTES:

- 1 The four were: The American Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Augustana Lutheran Church, The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church/Suomi Synod, and the United Lutheran Church of America.
- 2 Minutes of the Constituting Convention. Lutheran Church in America, page 231-232.
- 3 The Danes or the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, also exercised the same option. The Swedes or the former Augustana Lutheran Church did not do so. However, since the date of merger (1962) various Swedish elements of that church have expressed the wish to have done what the Finns and Danes did.
- 4 "Special Issue on Finnish Lutheran Theology", LUTHERAN QUARTERLY, Nov. 1976, Vol. XXVIII, No. 4. Also "Centennial Essays", *Kirkollinen Kalenteri*, 1977.
- 5 "Two Decades of Change," *1962 Yearbook, Suomi Synod*, page 257.
- 6 "TwoDecades of Change", page 258.
- 7 1968 Annual Report of the chairman of the Suomi Conference.
- 8 Yrjö Raivio, *The History of the Finns in Canada*, New West Press, Vancouver 1975.
- 9 There are eight regions for the Conference: Eastern seaboard; Lake Erie Region; Michigan; Illinois; Minnesota; California; Columbia River Basin; and Canada. Each regional is structured to direct the affairs of the Conference on its own territory. The Executive Committee of the Conference supervises the activities of all the regionals.
- 10 1974 and 1975 Annual Report of chairman of the Conference. (Suomi College, Hancock, Michigan, Finnish American Historical Archives.)
- 11 1976 Annual Report of the Chairman to the Suomi Conference; Finnish American Archives at Suomi College, Hancock, Michigan.
- 12 Centennial Essays, *KIRKOLLINEN KALENTERI*, 1978.
- 13 1969 Annual Report of the Chairman to the Suomi Conference. (Finnish American Archives, Suomi College, Hancock, Michigan.)
- 14 "Suomi Konferenssin Kasettipalvelu", ISIEN USKO, 7-8, July-August, 1977.
- 15 1973 Annual Report of the Chairman to the Suomi Conference. (Finnish American Archives, Suomi College, Hancock, Michigan.)
- 16 "Two Decades of Change", *1962 Yearbook, Suomi Synod*, Page 18.
- 17 Centennial Messages, *KIRKOLLINEN KALENTERI*, 1978.
- 18 "The Troubling Future of Ethnicity", *The Christian Century*, August 17-24, 1977, pages 718-721.
- 19 "Observations Concerning Ethnic Issues On This Continent" or Leap-Frogging over the Lost Generation and Saving the Second Generation", Annual report of the Chairman to 1974 Annual Meeting of the Suomi Conference.
- 20 "The Introversion of the Churches"; Gibson Winter, *THE SUBURBAN CAPTIVITY OF THE CHURCHES*; Pages 105-112.
- 21 "Certain Characteristics of the Faith of the Finns"; Ralph J.Jalkanen; *FAITH OF THE FINNS*, and "Finnish Folk Religion and the Christian Faith", Ralph J.Jalkanen; *KIRKOLLINEN KALENTERI*, 1978.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Suomi - Konferenssi on muodostunut amerikkansuomalaisten luterilaisten kirkkojen yhdistymisen kautta v. 1962. Sen kannattajajoukko muodostui Suomi Collegien (Hancock, Michigan) alkuperäisistä kannattajista, sekä Suomi Synodiin kuuluneitten 17 osavaltion 98 amerikkansuomalaisesta seurakunnasta, jotka olivat anoneet Amerikan Luterilaiselta kirkolta oikeutta konferenssin perustamiselle. Suomi-Konferenssin tarkoituksena on ylläpitää yhteenkuuluvuuden tunnetta niillä alueilla, jotka ennen olivat Suomi-Synodin lähetyalueita sekä säilyttää suomalaisen teologian perinnettä siellä. Tarkoituksena on turvata suomea puhuville mahdollisuus ylläpitää ja harjoittaa kansallista, uskonnollista elämää. Tämä tarkoittaa oikeutta kokoontua suomalaisiin uskonnollisiin tilaisuuksiin, oikeutta järjestää suomenkielisiä Raamattuleirejä, oikeutta käyttää kiertäviä saarnaajia ja oikeutta harjoittaa julkaisutoimintaa. Suomi-Konferenssi ei ole organisoitu kirkko vaan pikemminkin ystävyysseura. Sillä ei ole muita tulolähteitä kuin lahjoitukset, joita se saa omilla tilaisuuksissaan. Sen virkailijat toimivat vapaaehtoisuuden pohjalta ja käyttävät paljon aikaa organisoinnissa, kannatus- ja suunnittelutyöhön.

Aktiivisinta Suomi-Konferenssin työ on ollut Kanadassa, koska siellä on pyritty toimimaan maan kaikkien ikäryhmien, siis sekä ensimmäisten että myös myöhempien sukupolvien parissa.

Koska suomenkielen käytön on todettu vähentyneen jatkuvasti Amerikassa on Suomi-Konferenssi ryhtynyt aktiivisiin toimenpiteisiin turvataksaan suomenkielisen jumalanpalveluksen ja erilaiset kirkolliset toimitukset. Tähän pyritään

1. järjestämällä uskonnollisia tilaisuuksia suomenkielellä,
2. järjestämällä kiertomatkoja Suomen kirkon edustajille ja avustamalla suomalaisten kirkkokuorojen yms. ryhmien esiintymismatkojen järjestelyissä,
3. harjoittamalla suomenkielistä julkaisutoimintaa. Suomi-Konferenssi julkaisee mm. kuu-kausittain ilmestyvää ISIEN USKO julkaisua sekä on jatkanut Suomi Synodin aikaisemmin toimittaman KIRKOLLISEN KALENTERIN julkaisemista,
4. toimittamalla uskonnollisia radio-ohjelmia suomenkielellä,
5. nauhoittamalla erilaisia tilaisuuksia kaseteille ja välittämällä niitä halukkaitten käyttöön,
6. esiintymällä esitaistelijana viranomaisiin päin pyrittäessä turvaamaan suomenkielinen kirkollinen toiminta.

Keskeiseksi kysymykseksi on noussut, kuinka tärkeää on ylläpitää näitä etnis-uskonnollisia toimintamuotoja suomalaistuterilaisille USA:ssa ja Kanadassa. Vastaukset vaihtelevat siitä riippuen, minkä sukupolven edustaja on kysymyksessä. Viime aikoina Suomi-Konferenssi on pyrkinyt tehostamaan toimintaansa toisen ja kolmannen polven amerikkansuomalaisten keskuudessa. Motivaationa on ollut yhteisen taustan pohjalte rakentuvan yhteenkuuluvuuden tunteen aikaansaaminen.

On mahdollista, että Suomi-Konferenssi tulee kestämaan Amerikassa pitempään kuin on arveltu. Toiminnassa on ollut havaittavissa kaksikielisyyden lisääntyminen, joka voi saada aikaan sen, että sellaisetkin jälkipolvien edustajat, joilla ei enää ole suomen kielen taitoa, pysyvät kuitenkin konferenssin toiminnassa mukana.