

MULTICULTURAL WORK IN THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN  
CHURCH IN HELSINKI

Current impact on immigrant integration

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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract I vår pro gradu-avhandling undersöker vi den Evangelisk Lutherska kyrkans roll i invandrades integration i Helsingfors. Invandringen till Finland har ökat de senaste åren, speciellt efter att situationen i flera områden i Mellanöstern och Nordafrika blivit oroligare. Internationella organisationen för migration (IOM) har uppmanat religiösa organisationer i Europa till en aktivare roll i integrationsarbete, vilket utgör grunden till vår forskning. Religiösa organisationer har möjlighet att stöda invandrades sociala och kulturella integration, medan det statliga och kommunala integrationsarbetet fokuserar på ekonomisk och strukturell integration.  Eftersom avhandlingen är ett gemensamt projekt med två författare, undersöker vi ämnet ur två perspektiv. Ida Snellman undersöker vad multikulturellt arbete i den Evangelisk Lutherska kyrkan innebär och hur de anställda upplever att arbetet inverkar på invandrades integration. Amica Richter undersöker hur invandrare upplever att den Evangelisk Lutherska kyrkan inverkar på deras integration och i vilken mån de upplever att kyrkan kan ta del av integrationsarbetet i Helsingfors.  Avhandlingen är en kvalitativ studie och materialet är insamlat genom semi-strukturerade intervjuer. Idas material består av åtta intervjuer med personer som arbetar med multikulturellt arbete inom den Evangelisk Lutherska kyrkan. Amica har intervjuat åtta personer med invandrar bakgrund, som har deltagit i den Evangelisk Lutherska kyrkans aktiviteter. Vi har använt innehållsanalys för att analysera våra material. Vår teoretiska referensram baserar sig på teorier om socialt kapital.  Enligt Idas analys kan den Evangelisk Lutherska kyrkans multikulturella arbete delas upp i multikulturellt arbete med religiöst fokus och arbete som går utöver religion. Dessa två delar av det multikulturella arbetet är närvarande i både finskspråkiga och svenskspråkiga församlingar så väl som i församlingar på övriga språk. Arbetet inverkar på invandrades sociala kapital genom att stärka band till andra invandrare, kristna och majoritetsbefolkningen samt genom att bygga broar till lokala församlingar och till det finska samhället. Ur Amicas analys framgår att invandrare upplever den Evangelisk Lutherska kyrkan som stöd för deras sociala integration genom att erbjuda sociala nätverk och spirituellt stöd. Utöver att kyrkan kan fungera som brobyggare till det finska samhället, har invandrare med olik religiös tillhörighet även skapat band till volontärer, församlingsmedlemmar och till anställda i kyrkan.  Kyrkan går mot en alltmer volontärbaserad organisationsmodell och i denna utveckling har invandrare möjlighet att inverka positivt. Ett aktivt deltagande i församlingslivet stöder invandrades integration genom att skapa band och bygga broar. Utgående från denna studie upplevs gemenskapen i församlingen och den interreligiösa dialogen som meningsfull av kristna invandrare såväl som av invandrare med annan eller ingen religiös övertygelse.			
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## 1. Introduction

In the project *Dialogue for Integration: Engaging Religious Communities* (DIRECT), the International Organisation of Migration (IOM) has researched the involvement of religious organizations in immigrant integration in different European countries. In the discussion paper for this project, IOM encourages religious communities to be more actively involved in integration by acknowledging the impact they can have on immigrant integration. (IOM, 2011.) Martin Baumann and Kurt Salentin define religion as important from both an individual and a social point of view, as it offers opportunities for social encounters as well as it meets individuals' spiritual needs. Shared religious belonging and collective religious practices provide opportunities for inter-ethnic social encounters. (Baumann & Salentin 2006, 299–300.)

With the increasing immigration to Europe since the 1990's, the religious sphere has become more diverse. According to IOM, the increasing presence of (migrant) religious communities affects both society as well as local religious communities. (IOM 2011, 5.) As the immigration increases, questions of integration has become a topic of increased importance and scrutiny. According to Baumann and Salentin (2006, 317), there is not much knowledge, in general, on the impact of religion on immigrants and integration. In the case of Finland, religion is not a common topic of discussion for the Finnish authorities, and has thereby not been considered in the integration discussion this far. The Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY) has, as a reaction to the DIRECT project, studied how religious communities promote integration in the Uusimaa area of Finland. One aim of the ELY-research (2014) is to give recommendations on how authorities and religious organizations can work together in integration.

Multicultural work has officially been part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church's work for about two decades. The multicultural work in the Church has evolved and expanded during this past year, as the number of asylum seekers coming to Finland

has been larger than ever before. The current immigration patterns has lead to a need for new perspectives and corroborates the importance of research on integration.

### **1.1 Topic and justification of the research**

This Master's Thesis examines the role of the Lutheran Church in Finnish integration. It studies the increasingly important role of the third sector as facilitators of integration services as well as the state of religion in the current integration system in Finland. This thesis has two authors, Ida Snellman and Amica Richter, which enables the expansion of the research to encompass both the viewpoints of church employees' engaged in integration as well as that of the immigrants who are in the process of integrating into Finnish society.

According to Tuomas Martikainen, immigrants represent a wide range of religious affiliation, the majority of both native Finns and international migrants are Christian. Despite this fact research on Christian immigrants and the work of Christian congregations has remained more or less unaddressed in academic research throughout Europe, as most attention has been given to Islamic organizations and Muslim immigrants. (Martikainen 2014, 61.) By defining this gap in research on immigrant religions there are two main motivations for choosing the Evangelical Lutheran Church as the object of this study. Firstly, the Evangelical Lutheran Church is preeminently the largest actor in the religious field in Finland, and secondly, the majority of immigrants coming to Finland have some sort of Christian affiliation or background.

Despite the wide range of research on immigrant religions, the specific theme of religion in the integration process has not been a widely studied topic. IOM has recognized the need to further engage religious communities and acknowledge their potential as facilitators of integrative activities and support as one of the current objectives for integration policy planning and implementation (IOM 2011, 1-2). The study of this Master's thesis is hence set out to contribute to this ongoing discussion, by bringing forth the experiences and opinions of people affiliated with the

Evangelical Lutheran Church that are practically involved in and affected by the integration practices currently effective in Finland.

## 1.2 Research questions

This is a qualitative study as we are interested in personal experiences and perceptions of multicultural work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church. We have conducted separate sets of interviews, with different target groups. Ida will focus on the Evangelical Lutheran Church employees' perception of the role of the Lutheran Church as a integration service provider and her research questions read:

1. *"What does multicultural work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church entail?"*
2. *"How can the multicultural work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church support immigrant integration?"*

Amica's research focus is on the experiences and ideas of immigrants on this matter, and the main research question reads:

1. *"How has interacting with the Evangelical Lutheran Church affected the integration process of immigrants?"*

Through this question Amica investigates if and how the interviewed have experienced that practicing their religion or interacting with staff and members of Evangelical Lutheran congregations has supported their integration in Finland. Further Amica analyses the material to answer the question:

2. *"What kind of services that support integration should be provided by the Evangelical Lutheran Church according to immigrants?"*

Based on the material gathered from both employees of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and from immigrants participating in activities organized within its congregations, in conclusion the two authors investigate in what way the Lutheran Church can and should be engaged in integration in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area in the future.

### 1.3 Content distribution

This thesis follows a basic structure with the exception that there are two separate and one combined chapter of analysis as a result of this being a joint thesis. The structure of the thesis is briefly presented below, in order to give an overview of the content.

The content is distributed into eight main chapters. In the first chapter, the topic of our thesis is introduced and justified (subchapter 1.1), followed by the presentation of our research questions. In the second chapter the context of our research is described (subchapters 2.1 and 2.2), key concepts are presented (subchapter 2.3) and previous research discussed (subchapters 2.4.1, 2.4.2, 2.4.3). In the third chapter, the main theories that are applied in the analysis of our material are presented, starting with theories of integration and acculturation models followed by theories of bonding and bridging as social capital. In the fourth chapter we describe the process of collecting and analyzing our material and justify our choice of methods (subchapters 4.1, 4.2, 4.3).

In chapter five, Ida presents the results of her research by analysing the material gathered from interviews with workers at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Helsinki. The chapter ends with discussing the results and how they relate to previous studies. In chapter six, Amica analyzes the material gathered from immigrant participants in activities organized by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Helsinki. Amica's analysis ends with discussing the implication of her analysis with relation to previous studies.

In chapter seven, a comparative and combined discussion of the results is presented. This section is written together by the two authors and contains the most valuable information in the sense of its contribution to the ongoing discussion about the possibilities of increasing the role of religious communities in integration practices in Finland. This chapter of the thesis summons the findings of the study by considering its implications and relevance in Finnish society today.



Finally, in chapter eight, we consider how our research aims have been met. The thesis is concluded by discussing the limitations of the research and the positioning of ourselves as researchers.

As this is a joint thesis, there is a need to clearly define how the work has been divided between the two writers. The chapters presenting the background for this study and the chapter dealing with the theoretical approach are produced jointly, with Amica focusing on previous research on immigrant religions and Ida focusing on previous research on the Evangelical Lutheran Church and its multicultural work.

The collection of the research material has been a twofold process, as the interviews have been conducted separately, with different interviewees and somewhat different interview questions. Ida is focusing on the experiences of the Evangelical Lutheran Church's employees and Amica's focus is on the experiences of the immigrants.

## **2. Context**

This chapter will shed light to the context of our research. Here, we will give a brief historical overview on the immigration in Finland, and then we will discuss the integration process from a legal perspective. In order to understand the discourse of our subject, we will define and discuss some of our central concepts in this chapter as well. The chapter ends with discussing the Evangelical Lutheran Church and its multicultural work, the role of religion in integration and immigrant religions in local society.

### **2.1 Immigration in Finland**

Finland has historically been a country of emigration rather than immigration. It was not until the 1990s that Finland started receiving refugees, except from a quota of 200 refugees from Chile in 1974 and 100 refugees from Vietnam in 1979. After the 1990s, immigration had an upswing in Finland, but the amount of refugees and asylum

seekers that arrive in Finland are still very low, compared to other European countries. (Anis 2008, 13; Pitkänen & Kouki 2002, 105; Pitkänen 2006, 18; Raunio, Säävälä, Hammar-Suutari & Pitkänen 2011, 18; Tanner 2011.)

According to Ministry of the Interior (2011) and Statistics Finland (2007), about 20 000 foreign born people resided in Finland in the end of the 1980s. In 2006 the number had risen to 120 000, which then rose to 248 135 by the end of year 2010. Tanner (2011) states in his article *Finland's Balancing Act: Labor Market, Humanitarian Relief and Immigrant Integration* for the Migration Policy Institute that the immigrant population grew six-fold between 1990 and 2009, and in 2011 the immigrant population composed about 5 % of the total population in Finland. There was a decline in immigration after 2008, which according to Tanner (2011) was due to economic recession. Statistics show however, that immigration had an upswing again after 2011 (Ministry of the Interior 2013, 3).

Ministry of the Interior (2011) and Statistics Finland (2007) explain that most of the foreign born people are foreign nationals while some are Finnish nationals born abroad. Most immigrants arrive from countries outside of EU, with the majority of them arriving from Russia. The most common reasons for moving to Finland are studies, family and employment.

According to the most recent statistics from Statistics Finland (2015), 31 510 people immigrated to Finland in 2014. There are no official statistics yet on the number of immigrants arriving in 2015. The number of asylum seekers has however been higher than ever before. According to the Finnish Immigration Service, 32 476 asylum seekers applied for asylum in Finland in 2015. In comparison to the 3 651 asylum seekers arriving in 2014 and the 3 258 asylum seekers arriving in 2013 the number is very high (The Finnish Immigration Service 2015). Asylum seekers are only a small amount of the immigrants arriving in Finland, but this number is larger than ever before. There is no knowing yet how this has affected the statistics on Finnish immigration as a whole.

## 2.2 About the integration process in Finland

In Finland the Ministry of Employment and the Economy is responsible for the official integration of immigrants, while the Finnish Immigration Service is responsible for providing quota refugees with initial orientation (The Finnish Immigration Service, 2016). According to the official website of Finland's Ministry of the Interior, integration is defined as following:

*“Integration means that immigrants adapt themselves to Finnish society and acquire new skills, competences and practices which help them actively participate in the life of their new home country. Some immigrants find it easy to integrate; others need more time and support services - integration measures - to adapt themselves. Some knowledge of Finnish or Swedish, and information about Finnish society are important requirements for integration.”*

(Ministry of the Interior, 2016)

According to the *Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration* by the Ministry of Employment and the Economy (2010, Chapter 1 Section 3) integration is considered an interactive development involving both immigrants and society at large. The central aim of integrative measures is that immigrants are provided with knowledge and skills required in society and working life, while being supported to maintain their culture and language. What is considered an immigrant's culture is not further defined or discussed in this Act. Social empowerment in order to prevent social exclusion and multi-sectoral cooperation between authorities and different parties are other themes addressed in the *Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration* (2010). In this thesis these aspects of integration in Finland are among the themes discussed in relation to the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

In Finland immigrants are entitled an official integration plan if he or she is an unemployed jobseeker according to the definition made by the *Act on Public Employment and Business Service*, or if he or she is receiving social assistance under the *Act on Social Assistance* on a non-temporary basis. An integration plan is defined as a personalized plan drawn up for an immigrant, covering the measures and services to promote his or her opportunity to become an active and equal member of society.

Acquiring a sufficient command of the Finnish or Swedish language and other sufficient skills and knowledge required in society and working life are defined as the main aims of the integration plan. (Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration 2010, Chapter 1 Sections 11 and 12.) As the official forms of integration focus heavily on working life and thus mainly address the economic aspects of structural integration, the emphasis in this thesis is on the social and cultural aspects of integration, as these are considered equally important for successful integration.

### 2.3 Key concepts

In this section the most important concepts used in our paper are defined in order to clarify our approach to the subject. These three concepts are *religion, immigrant and integration*.

#### **Religion**

As *religion* is a central concept in this thesis and in the material used, it is necessary to specify what is meant by the notion in the context of integration. There are many different aspects of religion to recognize, and according to Meredith McGuire, most Western societies emphasize formal beliefs or the cognitive aspects, while in other societies rituals, religious experience and community are more important domains (McGuire 2002, 15). In this study we also intend to understand religion from the point of view of the people and policies we study, and use the term depending on how the interviewees define religion and what aspects of life they consider part of it.

A classical division into official and nonofficial religion is also made by Meredith McGuire (2002). According to her, *official religion* is characterized by institutional specialization, a well defined doctrine and an organization to control doctrinal and ritual conformity (2002, 99–100). *Nonofficial religion* is a set of religious or quasi-religious beliefs and practices, that are not included in or controlled by any official religious groups. In contrast to official religion, nonofficial religion includes unorganized and changeable sets of beliefs and customs, and have often been referred

to as syncretistic. (McGuire 2002, 113-114.) In this study both types of religion defined by McGuire are equally acknowledged, however the involvement of official forms of religion is more likely to be considered when as this study is looking specifically the involvement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in integration.

### **Immigrant**

Kathleen Valtonen explains that the term *migrant* encompasses both international and internal migration, which means that the term may refer both to a person who moves across a national border as well as to a person who moves within a national territory. The distinction between voluntary migration and forced/involuntary migration is often drawn in national policies that guide social work with migrants. Refugees and asylum seekers as well as people migrating due to lack of opportunities in their country of origin are examples of involuntary migration. Reasons for voluntary migrations may be education, a job opportunity or love. (Valtonen 2008, 4-6.) In this text, the term *immigrant* is used to represent both voluntary and involuntary migration, and specifically migration from outside the borders of Finland.

### **Integration**

There are different terms used for the process of becoming established in a new society, and the terms represent different perspectives on migration and the outcome of the establishing process. Acculturation, assimilation and integration are the most commonly used terms for this process, with variation especially between Europe and the U.S. The term ‘*acculturation*’ refers to the migrants’ strategy of adaptation to the new society. Psychologist John Berry (1997) first presented the classic acculturation models, distinguish between four different acculturation strategies: *assimilation*, *integration*, *marginalization* and *rejection*. According to this model *integration* is a two-way process, which entails that both society and migrant adapt equally. The term *assimilation* in turn refers to the process behind the melting pot theory of the US. With assimilation, the establishment in a new society is expected to result in total absorption into the dominant culture. Berry’s model has been somewhat criticised for being based

on simplified assumptions, but still rightly points to the agency and capacity of the immigrants to make choices themselves (Martikainen, 2005).

*Integration* is the common term used in formal speech in the European Union. The term can be seen both as a process and an outcome where the process of integration indicates that the migrant seeks full participation in the social, economic, cultural and political life of society. Integration as an outcome refers to the stage where the migrant has attained meaningful and satisfying roles and relationships to both the formal as well as the informal institutions in the society of settlement. (Valtonen 2008, 60-66.) In the integration process three different domains are defined: cultural, structural and political integration (Martikainen 2005, 3-4), and usually research focuses on one of these aspects. In research on engaging religious communities in integration in Europe, Agita Misane defines a fourth domain of integration, called identification integration. This dimension refers to the sense of belonging to a nation state. (Misane 2011, 2.)

According to Roger Patulny, the term *integration* is contested regarding its definition, but also related to how successful integration is defined and how it can be measured. He notes that involvement in civic society and social connectedness are among the most commonly cited definitions of successful ethnic integration in literature on the subject. (Patulny 2015, 207.) In this study we consider integration precisely from this point of view, looking at the social networks and social engagement of immigrants in the context of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Patulny further suggests that social capital is a useful theoretical and empirical tool for examining the diverse networks of immigrants and how these are used for support in “getting by” and “getting ahead” (Patulny 2015, 208). In our study we hence refer mainly to the to the social aspects of integration.

As we are studying integration in Finland, it should be noted that in Finnish there is a specific concept, *kotoutus*, that emphasize the reciprocity of integration as an ongoing process. In this study we hence understand integration as processual, contextual and being something that concerns society as a whole. The discussion of immigrant integration in this thesis does not only encompass the official definition of integration in Finland as presented in chapter 2.2 in this study, but understands integration as something affecting and affected by all levels of an individual’s life.

## 2.4 The Complex and Changing Role of Religion in the Finnish Society

In the first part of this section, we will discuss the relationship between Church and State in Finland and the position of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. After that we will examine religion through the perspective of integration, which leads to the position of immigrant faith in local societies.

In his article *Religion and State in Finland* (2011), Kimmo Kääriäinen analyzes the relationship between Church and State in Finland. The article shows that the relationship between Church and State is strong in Finland, even though they have formally been separated from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one had to belong either to the Lutheran Church or the Orthodox Church and it was not until 1919 that the Finns were guaranteed the right to practice their own religion publicly and privately. The Constitution Act of 1919 declared the Finnish state to be confessional neutral, and the Freedom of Religion Act of 1923 declared freedom to found, join or remain without religious affiliation for all Finnish citizens. These two laws implied a formal separation of Church and State, which gave the Church greater internal autonomy. Even though the Church and the State have been formally separated for some time, the Evangelical Lutheran Church is still defined by some as a *state church* in Finland. Another common label is *folk church*, which refers to the status of the Church as a public organization as it is defined in the Finnish general legislation. After the separation of Church and State, some administrative and economic ties have remained which may explain the lingering expression *state church* in popular speech. (Kääriäinen 2011.)

The formal separation between State and Church opened up the opportunity for other religious organizations to develop. The increasing immigration has also brought a broader religious diversity to Finland during the last few decades (Kääriäinen 2011, 155), especially after the post-war period different Christian movements as well as non-Christian traditions have established communities in the country (Martikainen 2004, 121-125). Statistics on the religious affiliation of immigrants in Finland does not

represent a realistic picture of the religiosity of people or their participation in activities arranged by religious communities, as the numbers are solely based on a person's official registration as member of a religious congregation or community, although many religious groups don't have a custom of registering their members. Also the fact that many immigrants are not especially religious in the sense, should be considered a reason for not registering to any religious community. According to an estimate from 2011, the religious background of foreign-born people (first generation immigrants) living in Finland is distributed as following: Christians being traditionally the largest group, constituting 53-61%, Muslims being the second largest group with 17-19%, Non-religious persons the third representing something between 11 and 21%, Buddhists approximately 4%, Hindus 1%, and the smallest groups Jews and Sikhs both under 1%. (Martikainen 2011.) These numbers look significantly different when looking at second and third generation immigrants.

Studying the historical and current position of religious organizations in Finland is one way of studying the religious atmosphere in Finland. This doesn't necessarily present a complete picture of the religious atmosphere though, and for a wider understanding of the current situation one has to consider the role of faith in Finland as an increasingly secular society. Finland is considered to be one of the most secular countries in the world with over 22% of the population not officially confessing any religion in 2013 (ELY 2014, 5).

#### **2.4.1 The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church (also referred to as *the Church*) is the largest religious organization in Finland, and about 73 % of the Finnish population belong to the Church (Församlingarnas befolkningsförändringar 2015 2016, 1). The Church has witnessed some challenging times during the past decades, with many people withdrawing from the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Church Research Institute 2013, 11–12). The number of immigrants in the Evangelical Lutheran Church is larger than in any other religious organizations, but it is still a very small amount of the members over all. In 2009 about 1% of the members in the Church were immigrants. A large



number of the immigrants coming to Finland are Lutheran, and about 22% of the foreign born people living in Finland in 2008 belonged to the Evangelical Lutheran Church. (Kääriäinen 2011, 168; Martikainen 2011, 240.)

### **Multicultural Work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church**

*Community, participation and and faith. Contemporary challenges of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland* (2013) is a publication by the Church Research Institute which depicts and analyses the activities of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland from 2008 to 2011. The goal of multicultural work in the Church, according to this publication, is to encourage and assist in integration and inclusion into both the Finnish society as well as the Church. (Church Research Institute 2013, 100–107.)

Multicultural work is defined as being a part of the diaconal work in the Church. Diaconal work is one of the basic, essential parts of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the aim of diaconal work is to help people in need, economically, socially and spiritually. The Church's diaconal work is part of the local parishes, and is carried out by professionals and by volunteers. It is also common that the Church collaborates with other third sector organizations or with municipalities in their diaconal tasks. (Church Research Institute 2013, 100-107.)

According to Pekka Koistinen, multicultural work in its current form, became an official part of the work in the Church in 1989, when the first refugee secretary was appointed at the diocese of Helsinki. The Church had worked with immigrants long before that, starting with the first boat refugees from Vietnam, who arrived in Finland in 1979. The focus of the work was at first concentrated on refugees, but has developed during time. As the focus of the work changed, the name for the work changed as well. It started of as *refugee work*, changed to *refugee and immigrant work* which led to the title *immigrant work*. The common name for the Church's work with immigrants today is *multicultural work*. The concept *congregational work in foreign languages* is also used to describe the Church's work with immigrants. (Koistinen 2004, as cited in Kyllönen 2012, 63.)

Katri Kyllönen studies the role of religion in mediation of immigrant's conflicts in the Finnish context in her doctoral thesis from 2012 (*Uskonnon rooli maahanmuuttajien konfliktien sovittelussa. Sovittelijoiden, maahanmuuttajien ja kirkon maahanmuuttajatyöntekijöiden näkökulmasta*). From Kyllönen's (2012, 66-68) description of the Church's immigrant services, one can draw the conclusion that it is divided into two sectors: work that goes beyond religion and work that supports Christian immigrants. Immigrant work that goes beyond religion can also be separated into two categories: consultation and activities. The consultations are generally offered by deacons and may include advice on different things related to the immigrant's life, or economical help. The activities provided especially for immigrants include camps and group activities. As for supporting Christian immigrants, Sunday services, Bible study and confirmation classes are offered in several languages.

Congregational work differs from congregation to congregation, which means that immigrant work means different things in different congregations. According to Kyllönen's study (2012, 146), some congregations have more activities aimed for immigrants, while others have none. According to the Church Research Institute (2013, 108) most parishes did not have any activities directed to immigrants in 2011. The events that the parishes organized were mostly common events for people from different national backgrounds and for Russians and Ingrians. In 2011, about 20 parishes organized multicultural family camps and about 80 parishes organized camps for immigrants.

Statistics from 2011 show that about 4,800 immigrants visited the Evangelical Lutheran Church's diaconal work with the primary need for mental support. The second largest reason for contacting the diaconal work was for economical support, and after that for counseling and for spiritual support. (Church Research Institute 2013, 108.)

#### 2.4.2 The Role of Religion in Integration

Although immigrant religions from different aspects has been a fairly researched topic in both Europe and in the US, specific focus on its relation to the integration or acculturation process is scant. Most research on the topic of religion in the immigrant context has focused on the increase of religious diversity (Warner and Wittner, 1998), the emergence and role of immigrant religious communities in a society (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014; Martikainen, 2004; Ebaugh, 2000) and the diaspora of different ethnic groups (Mooney, 2009; Kumar, 2006). In Finland also religious sensitivity has been addressed for example in studies of multicultural youth work (Honkasalo, 2007) and health care (Aalto & Gothóni, 2009).

From the European point of view, religiosity in relation to immigration is often approached from a point of view where it is regarded as a challenge, especially the growth of the Islamic population in Europe (IOM 2011, 5-6). Muslims are thereby the most studied religious group (Haddad & Smith 2004; Alwall 1999; Meer, Modood & Triandafyllidou eds., 2012). Muslims are also the immigrant religious group that has received most attention in Finland (Martikainen, 2000; Sakaranaho & Pesonen, 1999; Tiilikainen, 2003). This has largely resulted in the lack of attention to the religions and religiosity of immigrants of other faiths, and also shaped the public and media discourse to predominantly, and often in an essentializing manner, associate Islam with immigrant related questions.

In recent years network relations and transnational connections have been defined as mechanisms of cultural integration, as belonging to these networks can serve as a both bonding and bridging resource (Putnam 2007, 143). Religious communities, especially those including immigrants, often fall in this category of networks. Tuomas Martikainen (2005) studies religion and integration in a working paper, with the starting point that religious organizations is a major means of structural adaptation into Finnish society. He sees that immigrant religious organizations often are related to ethnicity, and the churches, mosques and temples are social gathering places, where it is possible to create social networks, gain social capital, ask for guidance and seek employment. In the conclusion he states that religion may play a role basically in all

dimensions of the integration process and propose religion should play a more central role in the analysis of cultural interaction and integration. (Martikainen 2005, 11–12)

A quantitative study of the relationship between religion and cultural integration in Denmark (Ahlin & Borup, 2011) focuses on the identity aspect of integration, e.i. if religious belonging affects how immigrants with Vietnamese background identify themselves as Danish, Vietnamese or both. With this quantitative approach Ahlin and Borup state that cultural integration is complex and thereby not measurable in the same way as for example economic integration, as they emphasize that the outcome of a study highly depends on how concepts are defined and how they are related to the context . They conclude that it is not the religion of immigrants as such, but the way of relating to it, that has an effect on the acculturation and identity formation. (Ahlin & Borup 2011, 182–183).

Religion as a possible means for support during the integration process has not been a common topic of research in Europe until recently, and a couple of studies in Finland have raised the importance of involving religious organizations into the integration process, as part of a EU-wide project for engaging religious communities in integration. The International Organization for Migration conducted in 2011 a study that analyzed the connection between religious communities and integration in different EU countries, mainly through interviews of religious leaders from different communities. On the basis of this research, a discussion paper with general and country-specific recommendations on the subject of engaging religious communities in integration work was produced. Following this the Center for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment, known as the ELY-center in Finland, has together with the organization ETNO mapped the integration work provided by religious organizations in the metropolitan area in Finland. This publication also provides recommendations on how to better engage and make use of the services provided by religious organizations. (ELY 2014.)

According to the publication by ELY, religious communities in the region do active work to promote the integration of immigrants in the form of cultural activities, societal education, language teaching, and spare-time activities that support social networks. Based on the interview material it is concluded that in most of the religious

communities integrative activities take place without any specifically outlined strategic goals, but rather are a natural part of the communities' general activities (ELY 2014, 4). It is also noted that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland refers to immigrant or integration related work and activities as multicultural work, and that many congregations employ and seek to employ persons with immigrant background (ELY 2014, 6–7). Furthermore the need to open the discussion about religion in the Finnish society and to encourage officials to a more open-minded attitude towards working with religious communities is defined as one of the central themes that arise from the interview material (ELY 2014, 18–19). The report also provides recommendations on how to better engage and make use of the services provided by religious organizations. For example by more effective co-operation and sharing of formation between the authorities and religious communities, immigrants that fall outside the scope of the official service systems can be reached and provided with the support they are entitled to. (ELY 2014.)

Katri Kyllönen's doctoral thesis from 2012 is one of the most recent studies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland in relation to immigrants. The main data of the study consists of interviews with immigrant workers of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland, and the main findings of the research show that in cases where religion plays a central role in the parties lives, it has high significance in conflict mediation. Hence the results complement earlier research findings showing that religious actors are potential mediators in conflicts related to immigrants. (Kyllönen 2012, 3–4.) But, and with relevance to this study, Kyllönen also concludes that the secularized and privatized understanding of religion that prevails in Finnish society makes addressing questions of religion both difficult and unpopular, and that this largely affects the way immigrant religions and religiosity is being neglected in integration contexts. She acknowledges the long-term integration work of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland and its potential for supporting the integration of immigrants that represent also other religious convictions. Kyllönen stresses the fact that in addition to the problematic approach to religiosity in Finnish society, also the unclarity on how responsibility of integration is divided between state, municipalities and civic society actors largely hinder religious actors from acting

out their potential as providers of integration related services and support that immigrants would find both useful and meaningful. (Kyllönen 2012, 165–167.)

By bringing forth the viewpoints of immigrants with other religious convictions on the multicultural work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church and comparing them with church employees' views, our study supplements previous research on religion and immigrant integration. We take note of Kyllönen's insight into the potential of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in supporting the integration of immigrants that represent other religious convictions than Christianity by giving immigrants with different faith the chance to express their views on interacting with the Church. The fact that the need for further studies on the engagement of religious communities in immigrant integration has been defined by previous research also support the scope of our thesis.

#### **2.4.3 Immigrant Religions in Local Society**

It is inevitable that the religious landscape of Europe is undergoing change along with other demographic and societal changes. But the direction of the change depends highly on the context, especially the local and societal structures and the motives and levels of activity of immigrants within this context. Immigrant religions in local society and how they are part of transnational networks has been a quite popular research subject in recent years. Here some of the main studies about immigrant religions in local society are briefly presented.

Perhaps the most recent study with relevance to the theme of this thesis is a book published in 2014 called *The Changing Soul of Europe: Religions and Migrations in Northern and Southern Europe* (Furseth et al. 2014). This volume edited by Inger Furseth, Helena Vilaça, Enzo Pace and Per Pettersson consists of various interesting chapters on questions of religion in relation to migration and integration, written by researchers from across Europe. It examines the state of art of current theories and methodologies of studies on religion and migration and presents empirical studies related to these themes in the context of different European countries. The concluding

chapter stresses the importance of the inclusion of religion in the studies and discussions of migration and settlement states that the relation between religion, migration and the welfare state in Europe represents an important outlook for understanding the overall policies towards migrants. The political consequences of the fact that Islam dominates the minds of most Europeans when dealing with migrations is also discussed, and how this has led to the disproportional focus on Muslim immigrants in academic research. (Furseth et al. 2014, 252–253.) One of the final remarks of the book provides support to the motivation of this thesis, by stating that the growing presence of immigrants and diverse religious communities is putting the deeply held notion of faith as a private matter in Europe into question by compelling societies as a whole to rethink and re-open old debates about religion in public life (Furseth et al. 2014, 255).

Tuomas Martikainen has contributed to the above presented volume by a chapter called "Immigrant Religions and the Context of Reception in Advanced Industrial Societies". Martikainen has studied how recent changes in welfare state policies and structures have changed the state-religion / minority relations. In this chapter he discusses the role of the receiving context for the process of immigrant religious settlement, organization and incorporation, including the role of the immigrants themselves. He points out the effects of different welfare regime types and Church-State relations on the ways in which immigrants are included in different societies. By specifically looking at the context of Finland, Martikainen concludes that the State's relationship to religions as actors in civil society is developing, but that uncertainty remains as the governance mechanisms of new public management are rather different than the historical Church-State relations. Notably also Martikainen considers expanding the academic debate to encompass also other immigrant religious organizations than the Islamic ones a prominent avenue for future research. (Martikainen 2014, 61.)

*Immigrant Faith: Patterns of Immigrant Religion in the United States, Canada and Western Europe* (2014) by Phillip Connor is a comprehensive volume presenting an overview of immigrant religion. Drawing on census data and previous surveys from several countries and statistical data from thousands of interviews with immigrants, it

does not focus on any specific faith in any particular immigrant context, but examines trends and patterns of immigrant faith across the Western world. With this mix of quantitative and qualitative data the book provides a large amount of background information relevant to this thesis presented in an understandable and useful way. In the chapter called “Integrating Faith” Connor sheds light on the relationship between faith and the social, psychological and economic integration of immigrants (Connor 2014, 68–92). He notes the great difference between the organizational model of congregations in the United States and the historical tradition of mixing faith and state together in Europe and concludes that the Christian state religions in Europe is one central reasons why immigrant religious minorities find it hard to become officially recognized (Connor 2014, 73–74). In consensus with other studies regarding immigrant religions (see for example Martikainen 2014), also Connor draws the conclusion that whether religion is a help or hindrance for immigrant integration is highly dependent on the context where immigrants settle (Connor 2014, 72). Applying this information to any study on immigrant religions and integration it seems sensible to put greater focus on the wider societal context instead of the religions and immigrants themselves, in order to understand the actual factors that shape the way religion can be part of the integration process.

In the book *Immigrant Religions in Local Society: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives in the City of Turku* (2004) Tuomas Martikainen explores what consequences the increasing international migration has on the religious field in the city of Turku in Finland. By applying theories of globalization and the relationship between local and global Martikainen approaches the way immigrant religions have established themselves in the city of Turku and how they act within that community.

While the study does not focus on the views of local authorities but rather that of representatives of the religious communities, the author stresses that having a basic understanding of the role of the local authorities is necessary in order to have an idea of the social position of immigrants and religious actors (Martikainen 2004, 244). He also notes that even though immigrants have become an important part of local life in Turku as different means of support have been created and necessary resources



provided, any aspects of religion is merely of interest from the authorities' point of view (Martikainen 2004, 245–256). According to the research material Martikainen points out that religious organizations still do play a major role for immigrants during the process of adapting to a new environment. In addition to providing immigrants means to express their religiosity, sociability and culture, organized religious communities are significant providers of social networks, which can help immigrants obtain advice and find opportunities in the new environment. Notably religious communities can also serve as forums for negotiation on how to adapt to society at large, since through them immigrants are able to position themselves with regard to the specific religious culture in that society, even challenge it. (Martikainen 2004, 83.)

In previous studies of immigrant religions in local societies, the focus is dominantly on “immigrant religions” and “immigrant religious communities”, while the dominant or majority religious organisations are left out or only briefly considered. As we in this study investigate immigrant’s interaction with the majority religious actor and organisation in the local society of Helsinki, we contribute to filling this gap in research on immigrants and religion in local society.

Considering the themes of religion and integration, and our aim to approach the subject from a humane, but pragmatic point of view, theories from the fields of Sociology and Sociology of Religion have emerged as meeting our research objectives. Notable is the lack of theoretical clarity in religious studies with regard to integration, because the process of integration is affected by the specific cultural, structural and political features of each society, as well as by the highly varying motives to migrate (Martikainen 2005, 1).

Stephen Warner (2011) contemplates on the theorizing of religion, pointing out the importance of approaching religion and any religious phenomenon in its social and historical context. For what we call *religion* means different things and works differently in different times and places (Warner 2011, 10). For example between the US and Europe there are significant differences (partly do to historical reasons) in how religions can and will operate. Considering religions involving immigrants, the differences become even more apparent. In accordance with Warner’s plea for contextualization, our research is framed so that it takes into account the specific

societal conditions and integration policies applied in Helsinki metropolitan area today.

While multiculturalist approaches to integration have been criticized for essentializing culture, theories of globalization and transnationalism have gained ground as they show the many ways in which immigrants' lives are intertwined with global developments and transnational connections (Martikainen 2005, 2). The implements of globalization cannot be overseen when looking at religion in the modern world, as it as an institution has been profoundly affected by larger society changes (McGuire 2002, 238, 325).

In theories of social capital, religion is considered both a bonding and a bridging factor. Julia Häuberer analyzes theories of social capital in the publication *Social Capital Theory. Towards a Methodological Foundation* (2011). She discusses the contributions of the American sociologist James S. Coleman and the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who are the founders of the concept of social capital. While their perspectives are somewhat different, they share the definition of social capital as the property of relationships. The relationships and networks that people have are useful and beneficial for people in different ways. (Häuberer 2011, 46.) Professor in Social Science, Robert Putnam, developed his theory on social capital following Coleman's main ideas. The most important aspect of Putnam's theory, in relevance to our study, is his concept of bonding vs. bridging social capital. Putnam (2007, 143) explains that bonding social capital describes the ties to people who are *like* you in some important way while bridging social capital describes the ties to people *unlike* you in some important way. In his publication "*Bowling alone*" (2000) he opens up these concepts further when stating:

*“Of all the dimensions along which forms of social capital vary, perhaps the most important is the distinction between bridging (or inclusive) and bonding (or exclusive) social capital. Some forms of social capital are, by choice or necessity, inward looking and tend to reinforce exclusive identities and homogenous groups. Examples of bonding social capital include ethnic fraternal organizations, church-based women’s reading groups, and fashionable country clubs. Other networks are outward looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages. Examples of bridging social capital include the civil rights movement, many youth service groups, and ecumenical religious organization.”*

Putnam (2000, 22)

Inclusive and exclusive networks serve different purposes. Inclusive networks are good when wanting to create new contacts or spread information, while exclusive networks create solidarity and reciprocity between its members (Putnam 2000, 22). The difference between these networks is highlighted with his words that *“bonding social capital is ... good for ‘getting by’, but bridging social capital is crucial for ‘getting ahead’”* (Putnam 2000, 23).

The ELY-publication *“Uskonnollisten yhteisöjen tekemä maahanmuuttajien kotoutumista edistävä työ Uudellamaalla”* (2014) reflects on the position of religious organizations in immigrant integration. According to ELY (2014, 14) religious organizations can be influential in integration when functioning as a bond and a bridge. When the religious organization provides information about the new society to immigrants, and when it helps them create networks, it functions as a bridge between the immigrant and the society. Religious organizations can also function as a bond in situations where immigrants experience inclusion as well as when they are offered support in difficult times. ELY (2014, 14) points out that the religious organization needs to be primarily integrated in the Finnish society in order to be able to promote integration.

#### **4. Methods and Data Collection**

In this fourth chapter the methods we have used when collecting data as well as when analyzing the collected material are presented and explained. Here we also motivate

our choice of methods in the light of our research questions. As we represent somewhat different backgrounds and have different relations to faith and religion, we also briefly consider our positions as researchers in relation to our subject.

#### 4.1 Semi-structured interviews

For the purpose of gathering material in a qualitative study of a social phenomenon, interviews appear the most natural and practical method. Since we are interested in gaining first-hand information and accounts of experiences by different persons in a way that makes comparing the material possible, coherence in the way the interviews are conducted is required. Thereby some degree of structure is necessary in the interviews. As limitations on time and resources also apply to this thesis in-depth, informal or unstructured interviews are not considerable options. Neither are focus groups since the themes discussed can be sensitive and we value the individual views of our interviewees. On these grounds we have chosen semi-structured interviews as the sole method for data collection for this study.

In order to make the most of the interviews and make sure they are conducted in an appropriate manner we have consulted a methodology handbook called *Qualitative Research Interviewing* (2001) by Tom Wengraf. In the volume the author refers to several theories and models for preparing, conducting and inferring from qualitative interviews. According to Wengraf, semi-structured interviewing is very often concerned to explore the subjective world of the interviewee, but without accepting it as face value or relating uncritically to what the interviewees actually do say. Hence we should keep in mind that deception and self-deception is as present in research interaction as in any other social interaction. (Wengraf 2001, 28.) Wengraf proposes that in the typical design of a semistructured-interview, what is designed are the initial questions. He emphasizes the fact that the interviewer has to be prepared to respond to the answers to these questions even if we cannot know what the answers are going to be. (Wengraf 2001, 159.) A useful piece of advice also provided by the handbook is the proposal that through good transcripts, session-notes written after the interview and memos written during the interviews, more information can be provided for

analysis (Wengraf 2001, 25). By following these guidelines for semi-structured interviews we consider our material appropriate for answering our research questions.

## 4.2 Data Collection

Following the guidelines presented above, the material used in this study has been collected separately by the two authors. By using the same interview techniques and interviewing the same number of persons we consider the material suitable for comparative investigation.

### 4.2.1 Ida's Material

Ida has conducted interviews with eight employees in the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The employees are all working in different congregations and have somewhat different titles, but connecting them is their joint task of working with multicultural issues.

The website [www.migrantchurch.fi](http://www.migrantchurch.fi) is a portal for the Lutheran Church in foreign languages. Employees working with multicultural tasks are listed on the webpage, and Ida contacted the employees working in Helsinki. Three out of them were able to participate. Ida also contacted the Secretary of International Work in Helsinki, who recommended a few people. From that recommendation, Ida got the five other interviewees.

All of the interviewees are employees of the Evangelical Lutheran Church who in one way or another is connected to multicultural work. Amongst the interviewees there were two vicars, two pastors, one chaplain, one psychologist, one youth worker and one multicultural worker. Two of the interviewees were men, and six were women.

The interviews were conducted in November and December of 2015. All but one interview took place in the office of the interviewee. One interview took place in a café in the Helsinki city center. Seven of eight interviews were done in English. The

last interview was conducted by speaking a mixture of English and Finnish. All of the interviews were recorded on Ida's cellphone, and later transcribed. The interviewees are anonymous and pseudonyms will be used in the analysis. The congregations by which they are employed will not be mentioned.

The interviews are semi-structured, which means that Ida had prepared a number of open-ended questions that became the basis of the interviews. In addition to the questions prepared beforehand, there were follow up questions which differed from interview to interview. How the interview unfolded depended much on the interviewees' roles in the church and what their experiences of multicultural work in the church were. In addition to asking about the background of the interviewees and their opinions on the multicultural work within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in general, Ida's main questions were "please describe the activities that you would consider multicultural in your church" and "do you think the multicultural activities in your church has an impact on the immigrants' integration? If so, in what way?". Ida was also interested in finding out if the Church has seen an effect from the changed refugee situation, as 2015 were a year when more refugees than ever before came to Finland. This led to the third main question "has the current refugee situation had a visible impact on the Church in general, and in your church?".

In the table below you will find the pseudonyms of the interviewees together with their position in the Church and a description of the parish they work in.

Table 1. *Ida's interviewees.*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Position in the Church</b>	<b>Parish</b>
Anna	Vicar	Finnish parish
Bob	Pastor and coordinator of [foreign language] work in Finnish parishes	Congregational group in a foreign language
Conrad	Vicar	Finnish parish
Daisy	Pastor and coordinator of multicultural work	Congregational group in a foreign language
Emma	Chaplain	Not employed by a specific parish
Martha	Multicultural worker	Finnish parish
Gina	Psychologist	Not employed by a specific parish
Hannah	Youth worker	Not employed by a specific parish, works also for a congregational group in a foreign language

Ida is aware of the difficulty in approaching a material objectively, as previous experiences and values always affect how you approach and analyze a material. In order to clarify the context in which the interviews have been conducted, a description of Ida's background and own relationship to religion is necessary. Ida has a bachelor's degree in social studies, which most certainly have affected the way she has approached immigrant integration as that has been something discussed at length during her studies. She is herself a Christian and active in a Lutheran revival movement. Even though she is a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, she does not consider herself particularly active in the the local congregations. She has not visited any of the congregations where her interviewees work and has no previous connection to them. Ida is interested in integration, especially integration services provided by third sector organizations.

#### 4.2.2 Amica's Material

Amica has collected the material by interviews with immigrants in the Helsinki metropolitan area. The first interviews were conducted in November and December 2015, but due to personal reasons and the challenge of finding immigrants willing to participate in this study, the rest were completed in the beginning of April 2016. The total number of interviews is eight. Amica got in contact with most of the interviewees by attending different events, like Sunday services, Christmas parties and language classes, in different churches in Helsinki, others were recommended by employees of the Evangelical Lutheran Church interviewed by Ida.

The interviewees represent different backgrounds regarding their country of origin, religious affiliation and time spent in Finland. Interviewees come from Iran, Iraq, China, Afghanistan and Syria. The criteria met by all interviewees partaking in this study is that they are immigrants and that they have some degree of experience of taking part in activities organized by or seeked some support from congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Helsinki. Out of practical reasons, the interviewees were also required to have sufficient command of English, in order to be understood by the interviewer. Notably the fact that the interviewees know English and in some cases Finnish, has intrinsically affected their possibility to interact with people and institutions in Finland and through that their process of integration.

The religious conviction of the interviewees is presented and discussed according to the definitions provided by the interviewees themselves. Some background information about the interviewees is presented in the chart below (Table 2.).



Table 2. *Amica's Interviewees.*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Country of origin</b>	<b>Time in Finland (years)</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Religious conviction</b>
Markku	Iraq	Under 1	29	Muslim
Juha	Iran	1	25	Muslim
Matti	Syria	Under 1	36	Orthodox Christian
Sami	Iraq	Under 1	33	Not religious
Erkki	Iraq	Under 1	27	Muslim
Heikki	Afghanistan	Under 1	Don't want to say	Shia Muslim
Sanna	China	5	35	Lutheran Christian
Jussi	Iraq	Under 1	25	Muslim

All interviewees are anonymous and pseudonyms are used in the analysis of the material. The choice of typical Finnish names as pseudonyms for all interviewees is motivated by the wish to avoid essentializing in the analysis. All interviewees have by signing a consent to participate given permission to the tape-recording of the interview and the use of the personal information provided in the chart above. The interviews have been transcribed for the parts that are relevant for answering the research questions and the transcripts are in the author's possession.

The interviews were semi-structured, with nine initial questions discussed during the approximately 45 minutes long interviews. The interviews took place in three different cafés in the center of Helsinki during the morning or mid-day on weekdays. Two of the interviews were conducted in Finnish as requested by the interviewees and the rest were conducted in English. An informal translator was present in one of the interviews (with "Erkki"), as the interviewee considered his English skills inadequate to express all his thoughts properly. The translator is a mutual friend of the interviewer and the interviewee and translated some parts of the accounts of the interviewee from Arabic to English as well as interpreted some of the interview questions from English to Arabic in order for the interviewee to fully understand them.

Some of the interviewees did not have a residence permit in Finland at the time of the interviews, as they were asylum seekers. Some interviewees have permanent and some temporary residence permits, but on the requests of privacy on this matter by some of the interviewees facts about residence status are not presented in the table above. The residence statuses of those interviewees, who have given permission for it to be discussed, are presented the analysis of the interview material. As official integration plans in Finland are drawn up by local officials together with immigrants only after the immigrant has been granted a residence permit and a municipality of residence (Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration 2010, Chapter 1 Section 2), also unofficial forms of integration are discussed in all of the interviews. What aspects are considered part of an immigrant's integration is further elaborated on in the analysis part of the thesis.

As we acknowledge the researcher's impact on a study and on the interview situations, some background information about Amica is presented here. When Amica has discussed themes of faith and religion with her interviewees, she has also allowed them to ask her about her own perceptions on the subject. Amica has a bachelor's degree in Study of Religions, and is especially interested in the social, transnational and inter-religious aspects of religious organisations and communities. Amica is not a member of any religious organisation and would describe herself as agnostic. As she lives in the center of Helsinki with her husband and two children, enjoys full membership of the Finnish welfare state and holds a EU passport, Amica feels very privileged when talking to immigrants, who might not have access to any of these. Also Amica has found it difficult to find a way of showing her gratitude and to properly thank her interviewees for their willingness to share their experiences and their time with her. Hence Amica wishes that this study can somehow affect immigrant integration in Helsinki for the better.

### **4.3 Content analysis**

According to Alan Bryman, one can use content analysis to analyze a lot of different data, which means that it is a very flexible method of analysis (Bryman 2002, 190).

Documents and other kinds of texts as well as media, such as pictures, TV-programs and –series, are all types of material possible to analyze through content analysis (Watt Boolsen 2007, 93, Bryman 2002, 192). It is a method for all types of qualitative research, and Jouni Tuomi and Anneli Sarajärvi (2003, 93) claim that most of the other method of analysis used for qualitative research have their roots in content analysis.

We have chosen to analyze our interviews with content analysis because we see it as the most suitable way to analyze our material considering our research questions. The aim of our research is to open up the role of religious organizations in the integration process, which we have done by describing the multicultural work in the Church and what the participants of the multicultural activities in the Church think of them in means of helping them integrate.

As all method of analysis, there are several steps involved when using content analysis. These steps are described in the work of Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2003). The steps are initially formulated by researcher Timo Laine, but adapted by Tuomi and Sarajärvi.

1. Decide what is interesting in your material
2.
  - a. Go through your material, separate and mark those things that include the thing you are interested in
  - b. Everything else is left out of your research
  - c. Collect the things that are marked and separate them from the rest of your research
3. Make categories, themes and typologies from your material
4. Summarize

(Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2003, 94)

We have approached our material in this way, by deciding what we feel is interesting and relevant for our research questions, which we marked out and separated from the rest of the material. After collecting what was interesting to us, we started to look for patterns, and began to create categories and themes from our material. The final step

was to summarize our results, both individually and then jointly when merging our results.

Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2003) also describe three different approaches to content analysis, based on the influence of theory. Content analysis can be divided into data-driven, theory-bound and theory-driven content analysis. We will shortly describe these approaches and then explain our choice of approach.

*Data-driven content analysis* is completely based on the material. Previous assumptions, theories or knowledge should not impact the analysis or the conclusions. This approach is a complicated one, when regarding the researcher's own bias, which is ever-present. Data-driven content analysis is connected to phenomenological reasoning. When using *theory-bound content analysis*, theories may help move the analysis along. Previous research and knowledge are present when approaching the material, and may guide the researcher forward. This approach is not meant to prove or test a theory but to break ground for new thoughts. Theory-bound content analysis is connected to abductive reasoning. *Theory-driven content analysis* is the most used approach in natural science, and also in other fields. The research leans on a certain theory or model, which already impacts the analysis. This approach is used when wanting to test a certain theory. Theory-driven content analysis is connected to deductive reasoning. (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2003, 97–102.)

As we have read previous research on this subject, some theories related to religion and integration have become more important to our approach. Our study is not trying to prove an already existing theory on the impact of religion on integration, but it is neither free from theoretical input. That is why we have chosen to use theory-bound content analysis as our method of analysis.

## **5. The Evangelical Lutheran Church as Provider of Multicultural Work**

In this chapter, the results of Ida's analysis are presented. Her two research questions are "*what does multicultural work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church entail?*" and

“how can the multicultural work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church support immigrant integration?”. In order to answer these research questions, Ida has conducted interviews with eight Church employees during November and December of 2015. Ida is the sole author of this chapter, and will be writing in first person singular further on in this chapter.

The first step in analyzing a material with content analysis is, according to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2003), to decide what is interesting in one’s material. This step was carried out when considering the research questions. In my material, I looked for things that gave light to my research questions. The next step is to separate the things of interest from the uninteresting things. This step was carried out when transcribing the interviews, as I only transcribed the parts of value to the research and left the other parts of the interviews out. The following task is to go through the material and create categories, themes and typologies. That can be done when noticing similarities and differences in the material. The categories and themes in my material are illustrated in table 3 below. This chapter will develop and analyze these themes and categories in detail, all while reflecting over previous research and theory, which may support or contradict my findings.

Table 3. *Themes and categories in Ida’s analysis.*

<b>Multicultural work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church</b>		<b>The effect of such multicultural work on immigrant integration</b>	
Multicultural work with religious focus	Work that goes beyond religion	A bond to other immigrants and/or other Christians	A bridge to local Finnish parishes and/or the Finnish society
1. Congregational work in foreign languages	1. Immigrant specific work in parish operations	1. Feelings of inclusion	1. Providing information and offering practical support
2. Faith based multicultural work in Finnish or Swedish parishes	2. Diaconal work	2. Creating networks and relationships	2. Creating a wider network
3. Ecumenical work and Interfaith work	3. Providing asylum	3. Receiving help when in need	

## 5.1 Multicultural Work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church

Koistinen (2004) explains that multicultural work has been an official part of the Church since 1989, but that the Church has been working with immigrants since the first boat refugees from Vietnam arrived in Finland in 1979. It started off as *refugee work*, developed into *refugee and immigrant work*, which led to *immigrant work*. (Koistinen 2004, as cited in Kyllönen 2012, 63.) The common term used right now is *multicultural work*, but this is also a term which is under scrutiny. Some of my interviewees questioned the term, and suggested that it should be replaced with *intercultural work* or *interfaith work*. Every term comes with a slightly different meaning or approach. What multicultural work in the Church entails has changed over time, and there does not seem to be a clear consensus on what the term actually implies today, according to my interviewees.

*“It’s hard to say whether really being multicultural or that we mean that we just encounter people with many cultures, because when we look at the kind of work that the Church is doing, there is very little that you would call multicultural. [...] The multicultural element is not brought in by the Church but it’s just the set up or the mix of customers that you deal with a certain time that you could say that this is multicultural. So, we’re not offering multicultural services, but we are reaching out to a multicultural community.”*

Bob, pastor and coordinator

*“I would say that the Church pretty much does it’s own work in it’s own cultural mode, but that it wants to be open and it wants to invite other cultures to be part of that and to have an input, but you still find that sometimes it’s very superficial.”*

Bob, pastor and coordinator

*“When I was replacing the [certain position in the church], I was amazed how little international, how we are so behind in the Lutheran Church still, even though we are in Helsinki. [...] I don’t think that the Church has been that active yet to really invite, open doors, for everybody.”*

Emma, chaplain

*“I have recognized that when a congregation organizes international events, it is enough for them that there is one person from another culture, or nation, like singing, or playing drums, and yeah we have an international gathering, you know. It’s kind of old fashioned way of doing things still in our church, we should have is more normal, more natural.”*

Emma, chaplain

*“I think the church should also like challenge its identity, and that’s a different thing. That’s a better way of approaching multicultural work, that it’s not only other people come to live with us and then we open up to them, but also how when we meet something that is different, how it changes us. So there’s an aspect of change always present.”*

Anna, vicar

Multicultural work can be defined differently, as someone may define it as a certain type of work while others define the term as work with a specific group of people. Some of my interviewees point out that the Church seem to define activities as multicultural when it includes people from other nations and/or languages, while the activity in itself might not be different. They feel that the Church could actively work on “challenging its identity” and opening up their praxises to other church cultures. In Bob’s opinion, the Church is not offering multicultural services, but reaching out to a multicultural community. Many of the interviewees showed hope for a change in how the Church approaches multiculturalism.

### **Who is doing multicultural work?**

Kyllönen (2012, 110) mentions that multicultural work is often found to be the responsibility of one or two people in a congregation. Her research shows that even though multicultural work has been done for many decades in some congregations, it is still limited to the job description of one or two employees. The other employees in the congregation have none or little contact with immigrants. This fact came up in my interviews as well, where a concern about the segmentation in the Church was voiced. According to Martha, every employee has their own segment to handle, and the employees are losing the ability to meet and help people spontaneously.

*“Once you have too segmented jobs, they are very rigid, and you just do your own little thing, so in that sense, it’s [the work in the Church] too, I don’t know how to say it, it’s too stiff and too categorized and it’s not flexible. [...] Once you get used to doing only your segment, like this is your segment, do it, and now the church is changing, the whole, lets say the whole society is changing, you have to be more flexible.”*

Martha, multicultural worker

Martha has experienced a challenge in working spontaneously in the Church, and she elaborates on this thought as she states that some of her colleagues feel unsure of how they should approach immigrants in their work, what they should say and so on.

*“Somebody asked me, even a Church member, like what should I speak with an immigrant, like what do I say to him? I said, say him “hello, what is your name?” and then wait what he is going to answer and then answer his question. Like, it’s not like, it feels that the people are somehow also afraid.”*

Martha, multicultural worker

This feeling of uncertainty is discussed in Kyllönens (2012, 110) research as well. Uncertainty amongst Church employees is suggested as the reason for why immigrants are often left as the work responsibility of one or two employees in the congregation. Many of the Church employees feel that working with immigrants is something foreign to them and they feel unsure how to meet with immigrants.

The segmentation in the Church is being questioned by some of the Church employees, and one can question the need of multicultural work as a separate segment in the Church. This separates immigrants from the rest of the population, and may lead to a conception that working with immigrants requires special knowledge which not everyone is equipped with. As multicultural work is part of the job description of one or two employees in a congregation, the rest of the employees might feel that immigrants are not a part of their work or their responsibility.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church have seen some changes lately, due to resignations from the Church. The resignations started to rise noticeably in 2001, when the average resignations per year were about 15 000. The resignations have had two major peaks



thus far, in 2010 and 2014, when about 80 000 people resigned from the Church in a year. In 2015, the number of resignations from the Church was 45 241, which was 42% less than the year before. The number of people joining the Church was 17 604, which was 12% more than the year before. (Församlingarnas befolkningsförändringar 2015 2016, 1-4.) The resignations from the Church has economic implications, as the Church's economy is dependent on the taxes that Church members pay (Church Research Institute 2013, 150). As the economy in the Church is deteriorating, the Church foresees a great organizational change. Employed staff do the majority of the work in the Church today. With the deteriorating economy, the Church may have to reduce its employed staff and rely more on volunteers. (Church Research Institute 2013, 171.) Emma says that volunteers have always had some part in the congregational work, but that it is still very limited. In their vision for the future, the Church Research Institute (2013, 20) states that *"the vision for 2015 is a community of sharing, in which the members find their spiritual home and in which they participate in carrying out its basic task"*. This citation shows that the Church encourages their members to be part of the congregational work. This vision is agreed upon by many of my interviewees, who envision and foresee a Church where volunteers have a big role.

One can question if this will have an affect on multicultural, integrative activities in the Church, and if so, in what way? Bob states:

*"People are leaving the Church. So does the Church even have the resources for providing integration services? That's a big question. On the other hand, when I look at other countries that have gone through this some decades earlier, and I take France, the Netherlands, Denmark, England as example, we see that actually the national population leaves the Church, the immigrants enters the Church. So very quickly the life of the Church becomes multicultural, it becomes integrative. And there, it's again much much based on voluntary involvement, more than what the Church officially offer in terms of integration services. We have to face the fact that ten years from now, most of the services will be provided by organized volunteers."*

Bob, pastor and coordinator

In Bob's opinion, the Church will function almost entirely with organized volunteers in the near future. This doesn't mean that multicultural, integrative activities will

disappear from the Church, but that the services most likely will be provided by volunteers instead of employees. He compares the Finnish situation to other countries in Europe, who have gone through this change some decades ago. If the situation will unfold similarly to theirs, the Finnish Church will become more multicultural and more integrative. As the Finnish people leave the Church, immigrants will enter it.

### **Elements of multicultural work**

From Kyllönens's (2012) description of multicultural work in the Church, one can divide it into two sections: multicultural work with religious focus and multicultural work that goes beyond religion.

The Christian faith is the essence in the multicultural work with religious focus, but that does not mean that it would be exclusively for Christians. Work that goes beyond religion, on the other hand, includes activities that stem from Christian values but where religious experience and spirituality is not the main focus.

My results are based on the viewpoints of eight Church employees in Helsinki, which means that the situation in other cities or in other parishes can be very different. What kind of activities a parish offers to its parishioners or to the local citizens may be very different in different parts of Finland. The employees and the members of Evangelical Lutheran parishes can to a large extent decide what they want to do in their congregations, based on the needs in their parish. This means that the activities in different parishes vary.

#### **5.1.1 Multicultural Work with Religious Focus**

One aim of multicultural work is to open the Church for immigrants and to give each person the possibility to worship God in his or her own language. This aim is the basis for the congregations in foreign languages. Another part of the multicultural work is faith based multicultural activities in Finnish or Swedish parishes. Local congregations may organize certain events or activities considering their immigrant members, for

example worship or Bible study groups in foreign languages or with translation. Thirdly, ecumenical and interfaith work is considered to be part of multicultural work with religious focus.

### **Congregational work in foreign languages**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church has gatherings in several foreign languages in Helsinki. They are not official congregations, but congregational groups that gather in Finnish churches and are part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Helsinki. They serve the whole metropolitan area, but are located in one particular church. The congregational groups do not have official memberships, which means that the members in these congregations are, if registered in the Church, members of the Finnish or Swedish congregation in their area. This also means that there are no exact information on how many members there are in these congregational groups. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Helsinki offers services in English, Chinese, Arabic, Estonian and Russian. Even though they are not official congregations they will be referred to as such in this text, as they are defined as such in public speech.

The pastors in these congregations are employees of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, as the pastors in Finnish and Swedish congregations also are. What kind of operation these congregations have varies from congregation to congregation. The main reason for the existence of these congregations is to offer the possibility for people to gather and worship in their native language. Anna states that: *“it’s really important to pray in your own language or sing hymns in your own language and so on, meet people after the service and speak with the priest in your own language”*. These congregations offer familiarity to immigrants, which Daisy points out when she says that: *“in a different a strange society, you can find a place where you can hear in your own language the word of God, and you can participate in the Holy Communion and so on”*.

Three of my interviewees are working in a foreign language congregation. In their congregation they have Sunday services, fellowship evenings such as Bible study, prayer, sharing, eating together and so forth, informal social activities, family clubs

and different group activities. Bob states that in their congregation, they aim to do “*everything that is helping people to get settled in Finland, to integrate, to feel welcome*”.

My interviewees point out that the members help each other in different ways (Daisy, Bob, Hannah). The ones who have been in Finland longer, can help others integrate. Daisy points out that “*when you have somebody beside you that has gone through the same experiences and who knows what you are talking about, it has a big role*”. The next chapter will focus more on how the Church activities can impact integration.

Two of the interviewees who work in a foreign language congregation are pastors, and they encourage their members to visit their local parish as well (Bob, Daisy).

*“I also believe and I also hope and I’ve also said this to people in our congregation, that go and attend your own parishes and congregations. If you live in Kannelmäki, go to your own church also. Because then you can hear Finnish but also you can find a home there and you can feel that you are a part of that congregation too.”*

Daisy, pastor and coordinator

They encourage their members to visit the local parish both as a means of networking and integrating in the local community, as well as from an organizational viewpoint. Bob explains that Finnish and Swedish parishes offers services that they don’t, and rather than duplicating the services, they want to encourage their members to seek them out from local parishes.

### **Faith based multicultural work in Finnish or Swedish parishes**

As there is no exact definition of what multicultural work in the Church entail, it is much left to the congregations’ own interpretation. Multicultural work could be seen as a certain type of activity, or something that is directed towards a certain group of people. The Church has historically viewed multicultural work as something which is directed towards a certain group of people, and not as something which affects the content of their activities. This means that the multicultural services may be “Finnish”

in their style, but multicultural in the sense that the language is something else than Finnish or Swedish or that people visiting the services are from different nations. This is a matter that has been questioned by my interviewees, and their wish is that the increased immigration to Finland would also have a structural effect on the Church (Bob, Anna, Martha, Emma, Conrad). A structural effect could mean that the format of the services would be affected and that the parishes could be open to the influence of Church cultures in other countries. How Finnish and Swedish parishes organize multicultural work varies. According to the Church Research Institute (2013, 208), most of the activities are common events for people of different nationalities and for people from Ingria or and Russia.

Three of my interviewees work in a Finnish-speaking parish. Faith based multicultural work is only visibly present in one of them, in the parish where Martha works. Multicultural work, or international work as she phrases it, is present every day in her work. Most of the multicultural work being done in her parish is work that goes beyond religion, and will be discussed further on in the text. Faith based multicultural work is distinct in the summer when prayers in English are organized on a regular basis. Multilingual services have also been organized at times. Conrad's parish is collaborating with an international Christian community that gathers in their premises, and they have had a joint worship service. In his parish, one employee is specifically responsible for the multicultural work. Conrad states that not much has been done yet due to the employee's workload, and he points out that they have very scarce resources in their parish, which means that they are not able to provide many services or activities. He wishes that the parish would become more voluntary based so that the activities would not only be organized by employed staff.

Faith based multicultural work is not an integral part of the Finnish-speaking parishes even though their parishes are doing multicultural work at least to some extent. Multicultural work that goes beyond religion will be discussed further on in the text.

## **Ecumenical work and interfaith dialogue**

The Church Research Institute (2013, 122) defines the word ecumenia as “*inter-Church cooperation and furthering the visible unity of the Church*”. Ecumenical work in the Church is being done in different levels, from grassroots level to an organizational level. The National Church Council states:

*“For the individual Christian, an ecumenical attitude means the desire to understand other Christians, and to refrain from forming erroneous and simplistic views of them. It means the desire to build links and cooperation with other Christians. Parishes can organize shared activities with the other Christians in their area. Parishes should be ready to offer the church’s occasional offices to families of more than one denomination, and also to provide space for the use of other Christians.”*

National Church Council (2016, 8)

The National Church Council encourages parishes to encounter other Christians in their area. Conrad’s experience of ecumenical work in Helsinki has not been without complications. He explains that ecumenical work in Helsinki have been done and is being done by different people, in different organizations and on different levels. The work has not been very coordinated this far, which creates some confusion in who is doing what and where. When the Helsinki Ecumenical Committee tried to invite immigrant communities to participate in ecumenical work many years ago, they noticed that it’s already being done on some level. The Helsinki Ecumenical Committee has however made an effort to coordinate the relations between different Christian communities.

The National Church Council (2016, 8) also encourages parishes to open their doors for other Christian communities. Some of my interviewees are collaborating with other Christian communities, in the sense that they offer their church space to them (Conrad, Anna, Daisy).

Interfaith dialogue is achieved on different levels as well, both individually and organizationally. The National Church Council explains the significance of interfaith dialogue with these words:

*“Members of the Christian parish will meet representatives of other religions in their everyday encounters at an individual and a local level at schools and in workplaces, but also at community level in joint projects in neighbourhoods or residential areas. A second level is the encounter of dioceses and the church as a whole with religious leaders. At all levels the first priority is to get to know one’s neighbour, with whom a common humanity is shared and with whom cooperation may be sought without there being a particular religious dimension. In this way we can familiarise ourselves with and learn to value another religious conviction and experience. As dialogue develops, it should be natural to consider together a religions’ features, practices, teachings, or traditions which unite or divide, and how we may work together to our mutual benefit and for our common future.”*

National Church Council (2016, 10)

Individuals as well as communities are encouraged to seek an interfaith dialogue with those around them, which don’t necessarily have to include a religious dimension. The aim with interfaith dialogue is to find common ground with people who may have different religious views.

Interfaith dialogue in Finland began in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, and according to statistics, one in seven parishes had organized some kind of event related to interfaith dialogue in 2011. The need for interfaith encounters in parishes is motivated by the increasing religious diversity in society (National Church Council 2016, 17–18).

*“Maybe the most important is that the Church upholds an interfaith dialogue. It tries to create an atmosphere in Finland where people become more knowledgeable about other religions, and also becoming more tolerant or even approving of other religions”.*

Bob, pastor and coordinator

Bob sees interfaith dialogue in the Church as important because of the impact it may have on the atmosphere in society. Emma brings forth another perspective when she says:

*“It’s a place where they can get empowered as well, if this community is also in the same time in dialogue with the other culture around. So this is a thing why we as a church must be in dialogue with religious communities. We can kind of be there to guide the religious communities to be bilingual, meaning that they start to learn to talk not only using their own religious language, but also the language that other understand them and they understand the other world. So the dialogue comes to be like a bridge.”*

Emma, chaplain

According to Emma, interfaith dialogue can help immigrants who belong to minority religious organizations integrate into society. If minority religious organizations are in dialogue with other parts of the society, the dialogue can influence the integration of their members. It’s important for the Church to encourage such dialogue, but she also explains that the Church will not be able to hire someone to work with interfaith dialogue even though they are aware of the need for it. The Church has made a decision to not create new positions due to the economical difficulties it is experiencing, which makes that decision somewhat inconsistent to their vision of increased interfaith dialogue.

### **5.1.2 Work That Goes Beyond Religion**

The Church has different kinds of activities, where some are not particularly religious in character. Part of the work in the Church can be seen as suited for this category. Daisy gives an example from her congregation when she says:

*“So the role of the Church is huge, but the role of the religion might be a bit different. [...] If we talk about our Bible group, there the role of the religion, or our Sunday services, the role of the religion is more, it’s bigger, I think. But for example our family club, there the role of the Church is bigger than the role of the religion. [...] We don’t hide it, [...] but we don’t emphasize it.”*

Daisy, pastor and coordinator

Some activities in the Church are not religious in character, but stem from religious values. This means that the reason for having different kinds of activities in the church



is motivated by the Christian teaching. Daisy continues with opening up the circumstances of these gatherings when she says:

*“Most of the people are not that familiar with the Church or they are even suspicious about the Church, but they come every time. I’m also in this kind of pastors outfit, and we get together in the chapel, and we are in a church. It’s ok, it’s not something too much for them. But if I were to add for example, that I would say for example that ‘let’s now read some passages from the Bible’, or ‘let’s pray together’, so at least for a lot of the fathers it would be too much and they wouldn’t come.”*

Daisy, pastor and coordinator

According to Daisy, some of the activities in her congregation are not religious in character. People who are not Christians, and do not want to engage in religious activities, feel comfortable in going to these activities, even though they are organized by the Church. She does not “hide” the fact that she is a pastor, as she can be identified as such by her clothing, but she does not preach the gospel or declare the Christian teaching under these occasions. Daisy’s statement can be seen as an example of how activities that go beyond religion can be carried out.

This kind of work, which is labeled to go beyond religion, is present both in Finnish and Swedish parishes as well as in foreign language congregations. What kind of activity is offered in a parish or congregation is mostly up to the congregation’s own initiative and the local needs.

This past year has been an exceptional one, when it comes to immigration, as Finland has received more asylum seekers than ever before. The nation was not prepared for the amount of asylum seekers arriving since the summer of 2015, and the Church, the Red Cross and other third sector organization have been a big help in handling the situation. Some parishes have lent their church or parish hall to be used as temporary asylum centers. Both the Church in itself and local parishes have been influenced on some level by the number of refugees that have arrived in Finland in 2015/2016. Martha and Emma point out that the multicultural work that they have been doing have gained attention and people’s interest, due to the increased discourse on immigration in society. The need for multicultural work in the Church has also been

noticed, which has affected the activities in the Church as well as the motivation of employees, parishioners and the local community.

Anna's parish has had close experience of this exceptional situation. One of their churches was opened up as a temporary shelter for refugees. During the four weeks that the church functioned as a refugee shelter, volunteers and church employees organized different kinds of activities for the refugees. When the interview with Anna took place, the asylum seekers had just moved out from the church, but Anna says that *"we are in constant contact with them, and I am going to visit them in their new place this week and I just met somebody today just on the street, and so, they call me mother"*. Anna's statement indicates a bond between her and the asylum seekers who lived in their premises. The relationship that they have developed is that strong that the asylum seekers refer to Anna as their "mother".

### **Immigrant specific work in parish operations**

Immigrant specific work that goes beyond religion includes activities like language courses and camps for newcomers. This type of multicultural work is part of both Finnish and Swedish congregations as well as congregations in foreign languages. Assisting immigrant integration is the expressed motive for this type of work.

Many of the parishes where my interviewees work offer some kind of immigrant specific work. Some of the activities have been going on for a long time, and some of it has just started. One can see a clear enhancement in activity after the number of refugees arriving to Finland rose last year.

Martha's parish is because of its location very international as it stretches over an area where tourists are often present. The churches in this parish are often visited by tourists, and Martha states that *"we are very multicultural I would say, multilingual. Based on this that so many foreigners participate in our events"*. There are tourist workers employed by her parish, and they offer different kinds of services to tourists, such as guided tours. Her parish has close contact with an asylum center in the area, and they have a family club for asylum seekers every week and Finnish courses as

well. Occasionally they organize other events such as field trips or journeys somewhere. Martha states that they have been doing this work for a long time, but that it was only last autumn that it was actually noticed by people because of the increased number of asylum seekers.

They have just started a discussion group for women in Anna's parish. It's an opportunity for women who don't speak Finnish as their first language to practice it together. In addition to that is also a Finnish language group for asylum seekers which have been going on for several weeks. Anna's parish is also hosting a multicultural choir, which is organized by an independent choir organization. The choir meets once a week in one of their premises, and is therefore an essential part of the weekly schedule in the parish.

Two of my interviewees, Gina and Hannah, are both employed by the Church but not for a specific parish. They are working with youths and their clientele come from the whole metropolitan area. Part of their work includes prison work, where they also have had multicultural groups at times. They have just started two discussion groups for asylum seekers in response to the increased number of asylum seekers arriving to Finland lately. In contrast to Martha's experience with the asylum center in her region, Gina and Hanna have had difficulties in working with the asylum center located close to their office. They have not been allowed to visit the asylum center in order to spread the word about the group activities to the people living there. Gina says that she understands that the asylum centers have been limiting their cooperation to the Red Cross when the situation still is chaotic, but that she still questions if that is the only reason they are not allowed to visit.

*“We have been trying to make it clear for the personnel in the asylum center that we are not religious in these groups, even though our background organization is [the] Church, we respect everybody’s religious views and we have also other clients that are non-religious or atheists or whatever [...] but I think that has been a bit of like where we are, that the Church has, people have a lot of feelings and approaches and attitudes. Maybe not everybody, but some might have and it’s not so neutral as an organization as [an] organization that is in itself very non-religious as its foundation.”*

Gina, psychologist

Gina is questioning if the asylum center feels reluctant to cooperate with them because they are a Church organization. She indicates that some Church employees might not be able to go beyond religion when working with people of different faiths, which may have led to the perception that the Church cannot be neutral. Gina suspects that this perception might have something to do with the asylum center’s hesitation in working with them. Bob discusses this matter as well, and he states *“it’s very true that the Church has been able to switch to a non-religious mode where they can work together with the city without getting violent reactions against people who are against religion”*. Bob’s experience is that the Church is very able to work beyond religion, but this does not speak for other organization’s experiences on the matter or the experiences of people participating in Church activities.

Conrad’s parish has also been in contact with the asylum center in their area. The asylum center opened quite suddenly, and met a lot of suspicion and scrutiny from the local people at first. The parish organized a public hearing, which gathered a lot of people. At the hearing, they discussed the newly built asylum center in their neighborhood and what they could do to help. According to Conrad, the parish and the asylum center have established very good relations, and he wishes that his parishioners would take more initiative in organizing different activities for the asylum seekers.

Hannah, who is working as a youth worker for the Church, is also involved in one of the foreign language congregations. In her work she has been part in organizing multicultural family events, such as family camps, since the 1990s. The family camps are especially for families who do not have much money, and most of the families who

participate in the camps have been diaconal worker clients. Hannah explains that there will be no international camps in 2016, due to the economical difficulties in the parishes that used to organize them. According to the Church research institute (2013, 108), 80 parishes organized camps for immigrants in 2011. Less than 20 parishes organized multicultural camps or family camps. It is not mentioned how many, or if any, of these camps are organized by parishes in the metropolitan area.

### **Diaconal work**

Diaconal work is one of the basic tasks in the Church and is available for everyone who is in need. The aim of diaconal work is to aid those who are in the greatest need of help and who are not able to get help elsewhere. Diaconal work is part of the operations in every parish, and is carried out by both professionals and volunteers. (Church Research Institute 2013, 100.) Diaconal work is thus not specifically focused on immigrants, but is one way how the Church can assist immigrants as well.

*“I think first and foremost what they [the Church] want to offer, what they think they can offer, is help to people in need. In other words diaconia work, social work, is something that the Church is very strong in, they have great expertise, they have a great organization.”*

Bob, pastor and coordinator

In Bob’s experience, the Church has great expertise in diaconal work. Bob has also experienced that the municipal social services have suggested to their clients that they should seek aid from the local parish’s diaconal work, in cases when they have been overloaded with work.

Conrad agrees with Bob’s experiences and states:

*“When there’s a need, a social, economical or some other need, the Lutheran churches always tend to view themselves as being open to everyone, absolutely everyone. Anyone who is in need. We don’t ask you know, whether you are a Muslim or a Christian. And you know, that’s absolutely, that’s the way it is. So we open our door for anyone, if they are in need”.*

Conrad, vicar

In this citation, Conrad highlights the importance of diaconal work operating beyond religion. The Church offers the same services to everybody in need, independent of their religion.

In Bob's congregation, they do not have diaconal workers, and he explains that they do not want to duplicate services which are already available for his parishioners elsewhere. Bob is a pastor in a foreign language congregation, which means that his parishioners belong to another Finnish or Swedish congregation, if they are registered in the Church. Bob's wish is that the need for diaconal aid would lead his parishioners to their local church, and would thus be an opportunity for them to come in contact with local Finnish or Swedish -speaking Christians.

### **Providing asylum**

Asylum seekers have the possibility to seek refuge in churches; mosques; synagogues; temples and so on. The Finnish Ecumenical Council has published a guide on how to proceed under these circumstances (Finnish Ecumenical Council 2007). They explain that religious organizations have traditionally offered physical and spiritual protection to people who are being persecuted. Today, that means that religious organizations have the possibility to open up their facilities as refuge for those asylum seekers who, in the religious organizations opinion, wrongfully have been denied asylum by the state. The Finnish Ecumenical Council (2007, 9) explains that if someone feels they are in danger for their life and seek help in a parish, the parish is obligated to take that person's need seriously. It is always the asylum seeker who takes initiative to Church asylum, not the parish. The aim with church asylum is to induce a new asylum process, where the person's case can be reexamined, and to provide shelter for the asylum seeker during the time his/her case is being treated anew. This obligation stands for everyone, independently of religion.

*“I think the Church is quite often the kind of safe haven and kind of like the doors are open and has been also giving asylum when the official system hasn’t. There have been those kind of cases that the Church people have been really thinking that somebody is really victim of torture when the kind of the process, the legal process have been given like that you need to go back to your own country, [...] and I understand that that cannot be kind of like the main road what Church can do but there has been some kind of like human reasons for that kind of activity and I think it’s quite brave”*

Gina, psychologist

One of my interviewees, Gina, brings forth the possibility of Church asylum in our conversation. She thinks that one role of the Church is to offer a safe haven for those who really are in need of one. She admits that this cannot be the main thing that the Church does, but that its importance cannot be denied. Church asylum is one factor in the Church’s work with immigrants.

## **5.2 The Church as Support for Immigrant Integration**

In the previous chapter, I have analyzed the different elements of multicultural work present in a few of the Evangelical Lutheran parishes in Helsinki, or operated by the Evangelical Lutheran Church. In this chapter, I will analyze the impact these activities can have on immigrant integration, from the perspective of the Church employees.

One important factor to take into account when discussing the Church as support in integration is that the Church is not a service provider but a religious community. The main focus of the Church is to spread the word of God, to administer the sacraments and to implement neighborly love (Church Law 1, 1 § 2, National Church Council 2014). The fact that the Church exists first and foremost to serve people’s spiritual needs is important to remember when discussing what they can offer in terms of integrative activities.

In the discussion paper on engaging religious communities in integration, IOM (2011) points out that spirituality and religious experience is the main focus of religious communities and that *“any other roles, as important and relevant as these*

*“secondary” functions may be for both communities and society at large, are subordinate to this*” (IOM 2011, 18). This fact is important to remember when considering how religious communities, in our case the Evangelical Lutheran Church, are engaged in integration. IOM (2011, 18) continues with pointing out that religious organizations don’t want to be seen as *“simple ‘tools’ to be used by other actors to achieve some more general social objective, such as the better integration of their members”*. This viewpoint is also emphasized in my interviews with Church employees. Martha points out that:

*“As a Church, as a universal Church, as a body of Christ, we are not supposed to be integrators, or we are not supposed to be service provider, we are not a service provider machine. We are supposed to preach gospel in that sense, preach God, that is our job in general, to tell about God’s love, that is our job ... we have to keep the doors open for everybody. The church, the body of Christ is for everybody, for anybody all around the world. We are not just local church; we are part of the international church. So people, anybody is welcome. So we keep the doors open and invite people and let them come and show, show love and charity to everybody. And then if there is something else that we can do, we do. But that’s the most important thing to do and then later on comes these services, church of services I mean.”*

Martha, multicultural worker

Martha feels that the Church’s main obligation and assignment is to preach the gospel and to spread the love of God to people. The Church is an international Church, and the doors are open for everybody she says. Conrad has similar viewpoints as Martha, as he states:

*“I think it’s a wrong self-understanding if we position ourselves as totally as service providers. We should position ourselves as a Christian community. And if we do, and if we really are, if we live that, then we can make a difference.”*

Conrad, vicar

Conrad points out that the Church should first and foremost position itself as a Christian community, and by doing that, it can really have an impact in people’s lives.



Similarly to IOM (2011), many of the interviewees point out that the Church is first and foremost a religious community. Integrative activities and services are not contradictory to this fact, but it is integral to remember the priority and the outset of the Church and its employees.

Martha continues with explaining how the mission of the Church is to tell the gospel in different ways, not only by preaching but also by deeds. She says that the Church is not Finnish or Swedish speaking, but universal, and that their job is to go out to the world and tell people about God's love. She explains that the international work, or the multicultural work, in the Church is just another way of saying that it is an outreaching Church. Multicultural work and integrative activities are thus a natural part of the Church, according to Martha as well as other interviewees.

### **Recognizing religious communities as contributors in integration**

Participation in religious communities is, according to IOM (2011, 10), important for many immigrants, especially in situations where the immigrant is unfamiliar with the customs and functions of the host society. Both Anna and Conrad have experience of working in the Finnish Church abroad, and they have encountered people who maybe didn't consider religion an important matter in Finland, but sought out the Church when moving abroad. Conrad states that religion is even more essential for those who come from countries where religion is important.

The religious organization can offer familiarity and inclusion to the immigrant. Bob states that:

*“When people come to Finland and they experience all the difference here, the mindset they don't understand, the language they don't understand, the culture they don't understand, then they are looking for an identifier that connects them to the people, and often religion is that kind of an identifier [...] so it's a very important way of connecting, when you come as a Christian, you want to connect to Christians, when you come as a Methodist, you seek out are there any other Methodists here? Or if you are a Catholic you look for a Roman Catholic Church because you know you will find people that in a sense you have something in common with”*

Bob, pastor and coordinator

According to Bob, religion is an important identifier for many people, and that when moving to another country, you seek out people who share that identity with you in order to feel connected to someone. Religion can function as a bond between people and it can help immigrants feel connected to others, immigrants as well as native Finns, in the new society. Emma has the same experiences as Anna, Conrad and Bob, but points out that the religious organization is also a place where the immigrant can be empowered to integrate as well, assuming that the religious community (referring to a migrant religious community) is in dialogue with the culture around it. Emma feels that the Church has a responsibility in initiating dialogue with other religious communities. Interfaith or ecumenical dialogue can, under good circumstances, become a bridge between the immigrant and the society.

Religious organizations can support immigrant integration in different manners. By offering them a place where they can feel at home, bonds are created between parishioners or participators in the activities organized by religious organizations. They can also create a bridge to the local society by providing immigrants with information and practical support. In the following section, I will discuss how the Evangelical Lutheran Church can contribute to increased social capital by creating bonds and bridges, individually and organizationally.

### **5.2.1 Bonding Social Capital**

Robert Putnam describes bonding social capital as the ties that connect you to people who are *like* you in some important way (Putnam 2007, 143). In our case, when discussing religious organizations, one of the primary ties that connect people together would be religion. As our focus lies on immigrant integration through religious organizations, nationality and language are equally essential elements in connecting people together, and is not to be forgotten as a bonding element. The feeling of inclusion is essential in this context.

Religion is one of the primary ties that connect people together in religious organizations. It can connect people both intra-organizationally as well as inter-

organizationally. Shared faith unifies, but faith per se can also be seen as a strong common denominator amongst people. Bob develops this thought when he states:

*“What we do see, is that people come and want to take part in worship, they want to learn to know the Church, they want to get contacts, and so what we do find is that you have a Church service and suddenly you find that there is ten or twenty or fifty Arabic speaking Muslims who come to join you for a [foreign language] mass [...] they seek contact, they very much appreciate the fact that Christians in Finland worship. What is maybe their biggest disappointment when they come, if they are Muslims, is the laissez-faire attitude of many Finnish Christians. What I mean is that they are Christians, they are baptized, they are Church members, but they don't participate in worship, they don't speak about their faith. They are embarrassed to be asked about their faith, and so forth and so forth. So they actually feel that they have much more in common with Christians who go to church on Sundays. And then they worship in their own way, they go to the altar to have a blessing, they light candles in church as their prayers, and so forth.”*

Bob, pastor and coordinator

In Bob's experience, Muslims may feel a stronger connection to Christian Finns than to Finns without religious conviction. He has experienced that Muslims seek out Christian services and partake in them in their own way. The Church is able to support at least some parts of the Muslims' spiritual needs, even though they do not share the same faith. Kyllönen (2012, 166) discusses this matter briefly in her study, and says that the Church is important for the integration of immigrants of other faiths or denominations as well. Religion can thus connect inter-organizationally. It can offer a feeling of inclusion also to those outside the membership of the religious organization.

IOM (2011, 17) notes that because religious organizations are constructed as social networks, they can contribute to increased social capital. By involvement in religious organizations, wider networks are developed and relationships created. Bob and Hannah emphasize the value of the networks being created in religious organizations:

*“I think what is very important in these kind of small religious communities is that it’s networking, it’s building family relationships, and helping one another, sharing the good things of Finland with others who are just coming in the hope that they will be able to share with the next generation, to the next group of people that come to Finland that looks for help for integration”*

Bob, pastor and coordinator

*“In my experience, the thing that helps the most is when youth meet youth, mothers meet mothers and children are there amongst them. It is somehow that kind of ordinary everyday life where they can share it and talk to each other, so they don’t remain at home but visit among others... our job is to create frameworks where people can visit, and the lowest possible threshold, so that you don’t need to participate in some extraordinary Finnish integration service, when just living normal ordinary life.”*

Hannah, youth worker (own translation)

Bob feels that the networking is very important in religious communities, especially in migrant religious communities. He says that immigrants who have been in Finland longer can help newcomers get accustomed in society. Hannah observes the great opportunity in which the Church can help people in their everyday life. The Church can organize activities and platforms where people can meet and get to know one another. She feels that the Church has an important role in showing practical love in people’s everyday lives. She states that the most essential thing in integration is that people get to know one another.

Increased bonding social capital manifests itself in networks and feelings of inclusion. Receiving help is another essential element in increased bonding social capital, according to ELY (2014, 14). The Church has provided services and aid for immigrants, in some format, since the first boat-refugees arrived in Finland in the 70s. As the Church has historically been very big in Finland, Bob experiences that because of its share size, the Church has understood that it has a special responsibility to assist in integration as well. In his opinion, the Church has made a great effort in providing for the needs of immigrants, both spiritually as well as practically. Diaconal work is one of the means by which the Church can support immigrants, and providing asylum in special circumstances is another. These ways of supporting immigrants have been discussed in our previous chapter. One can see diaconal work and asylum provision as

ways in which the Church enhances bonding social capital, as immigrants can turn to these means when in need.

### 5.2.2 Bridging Social Capital

Robert Putnam describes bridging social capital as the ties that connect you to people who are *unlike* you in some important way (Putnam 2007, 143). There are a lot of different factors that separate people from one another. In our case, when discussing immigrant integration through religious organizations, essential factors are nation, language and religion. These are elements that bond people together, as discussed in the previous section, but that also may divide people apart. Religious organizations can bridge the gap between people who are *unlike* one another in some important way.

ELY (2014, 14) describes different ways in which religious organizations can increase social capital through bridge building. Providing information about the new society to immigrants and helping them create wider networks, are methods by which religious organizations can function as a bridge between the immigrant and society. These methods, amongst others, came up in my interviews as well.

My interviewees focused more on bridge building than on bonding when discussing how the Church, or how their parish, can encourage and support integration. Concrete actions like spreading information about the Finnish society, offering Finnish discussion groups, translating their service material to other languages and so on, were methods in which they felt the Church, or their parish, can assist in integration. The interviewees focused more on structural integration than on social integration, which may be the reason for them concentrating on bridge building action as these two are connected.

Bob, who works in a foreign language congregation, experiences his work as a form of bridge building. He says:

*“What I’m actually doing is building bridges. People come with maybe no knowledge of Finnish, culture is strange, language is strange, so we help them get settled, I help them get into the Church, where the Finnish parish also has services, so we build community and we build contact and the idea is that when people become more fluent in Finnish, and get used to this, flow of to the Finnish parish or the Swedish parish and so they wouldn’t stay in the [foreign language] congregation for too long, or at least not only there, but also have a role in the local Finnish or Swedish - speaking parish, so integration and bridge building is really very very essential particularly in this [foreign language] work.”*

Bob, pastor and coordinator

Those who work in foreign language congregations encourage their parishioners to visit the local Finnish parish, which we have discussed in the previous chapter. Bob feels that an important part of his job is to support this merge. As Bob works in a foreign language congregation, bridge building implies the connection between his congregation and local Finnish parishes, as well as the connection to Finnish society at large.

Most of my interviewees point out that it is not only the employees in the parish who function as bridge builders, but that *“immigrated people can become bridge builders for newcomers”*, to quote Emma. Bob, Daisy and Hannah mention that the parishioners in their congregations help each other with practical things, like paperwork, applications, translations and so forth. Daisy gives an example from her congregation:

*“What I’m really proud about in this congregation, is that people, for example if somebody comes to Finland and they haven’t been here for a long time, so the other members, or the other people, they are always like ‘can we help you in any way?’ and ‘do you need a translator, or do you need help with the paperwork’ or something like that. And also in the family club, they offer each other support and it’s great to hear, and I think that it has a huge role in the integration process.”*

Daisy, pastor and coordinator

Daisy has experienced that the parishioners in her congregation are able to help each other, as they have all experienced similar issues when having moved to Finland. This is an experience that all of the employees who work in a foreign language

congregation share, but that is not brought forth by those employees who work in a Finnish parish. One can see that the point of departure is different in the foreign language congregation compared to the Finnish parishes, as multicultural work is a natural part of the foreign language congregations.

Employees in foreign language congregations emphasize the aspect of bonding in social capital as well as the interaction between immigrants in their parish and how that builds bridges to the Finnish society. Employees in Finnish parishes focus more on bridging social capital, and how they as a parish can offer practical support to help immigrants integrate into society. In other words, those who work in a foreign language congregation feel (more strongly than the others) that bonding and networking is very essential in integration, and that their congregation can support that. Those who work in Finnish parishes experience that their parish can enhance integration through practical methods like spreading information about the Finnish society and translating service materials. These are two sides of social capital, as described by Putnam (2007). Putnam declares that these two parts serve different purposes and exist either by choice or necessity. The foreign language congregations are somewhat more able to encompass both bonding and bridging social capital, as their parishioners are almost entirely immigrants. There are not a lot of immigrant parishioners in those Finnish parishes where the my interviewees work. Anna speculates that most of the immigrants who have visited the parish where she works seem to be seeking for something, which they don't find there. She says:

*“Usually they come and visit for a few times and then they don't come again. So there is clearly something that we need to do differently, and they are seeking for a community or some interaction and people who meet them and they don't find it here. But we do have also people who are from different, like we have migrant members who are in our parish as well, but they have somehow find their way here, but I think often it's the language barrier, we have been thinking about if we should translate some of our service material to different languages, at least to English and French maybe and so on.”*

Anna, vicar

Anna has a feeling that they should change something in their congregation in order to invite immigrants. She suspects that the language difference may be the reason for why immigrants' don't feel at home there, and considers translating some of their service material to other languages in order to open up their services to foreigners as well. Conrad, who also works in a Finnish parish, shares similar thoughts and says that they haven't had many migrant members in their parish this far. This means that the immigrant contact they have in their parish is mostly a result of activities they organize in order to support integration, directly or indirectly.

Emma voices concern over some of the multicultural activities in Finnish parishes. According to her, the activities may foster an imbalance between the immigrant and the employee or the parishioner in the Finnish parish. She explains that:

*“When there's a minority and a majority, there's a difference in position. But what is the motive of the church and worker, and what is the motive of the individual from this other group? And do they meet? This is the thing. Too often you know it's not considered, they are not considered as subjects, they are more like objects. You know if Church is organizing international event, the other ones are like guests, they are objects, they are like content to our event. Not that we are in the same level, everyone is sharing and doing things together and also like, always when you organize so called multicultural event, it should be that there are also Finnish culture, should be there as well, Swedish speaking culture, everybody should be mixed. So there are a lot to do. Because people they don't recognize these kind of structures in their mind, they think they are doing great work, but they are still stuck with this kind of mindset.”*

Emma, Chaplain

Emma points out that when developing multicultural activities in the Church, one should also critically review the content of such activities. When creating events *for* immigrants instead of *with* them, there is always the risk of objectifying immigrants and viewing them as a homogenous group. There is always a power balance present in the interaction between majority and minority group, which Church employees also must remember to be conscious of in order to challenge their own mindset.



### 5.3 Discussion

The subject for Amica's and my study arose when reading publications by IOM (2011) and ELY (2014). Both of their publications call for a greater involvement by religious organizations, more specifically migrant religious organizations, in integration. They focus mostly on migrant religious organizations, which of course affects the outline of their study. Amica and I have chosen to focus our research on the Evangelical Lutheran Church's impact on integration, which is not entirely similar to the focus of the previous mentioned publications. The Evangelical Lutheran Church is however the largest religious organization in Finland, and has thus, in our opinion, a unique possibility to impact integration. There are also congregational groups in foreign languages in the Church, which means that the Church can partly be seen as a migrant religious organization as well. I have studied what multicultural work in the Church entail and how Church employees have experienced their work in relation to integration. My research questions are: *"What does multicultural work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church entail?"* and *"How can the multicultural work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church support immigrant integration?"*.

Multicultural work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church can be divided into work with a religious focus and work that goes beyond religion. There are a number of congregational groups in foreign languages in Helsinki, and they represent an example of religiously focused multicultural work. Another example of religiously focused multicultural work are ecumenical and interfaith dialogue. Religiously focused multicultural work is very present in the congregational groups in foreign languages, as multicultural work is the essence of their work. Religiously focused multicultural work is not very present in Finnish parishes this far, as there are not a lot of immigrant members in Finnish parishes. One interesting result in my analysis is the indication that the Church can support immigrant's spiritual needs inter-religiously as well. Even though there are not a lot of immigrant members in Finnish parishes, some Finnish parishes have seen an increase in immigrant participation in their services as a result of the increasing amount of asylum seekers arriving in Finland. Even though the asylum seekers who have visited the Finnish services may have had different religious convictions, they seem to have received support for their spiritual needs in the Church.

Examples of multicultural work that goes beyond religion are Finnish discussion groups, providing shelter for asylum seekers and spreading information about the Finnish society in different ways. Multicultural work that goes beyond religion is present both in congregational groups in foreign languages as well as in Finnish parishes.

Multicultural work in the Church can have bonding and bridging effects on immigrant integration. Congregational groups in foreign languages are able to support both bridging and bonding factors in integration, as their members are mainly immigrants and can assist one another in integration as well. The Finnish parishes do not have many immigrant members yet, as the language may be a barrier for immigrant Christians to take part in their services. The employees in Finnish parishes feel that they are not able to support integration as much as the foreign language congregations. The immigrant contact they have in their parish is mostly through immigrant specific work, such as language groups or activities which they have organized for the asylum seekers who have recently arrived in Finland. They are able to support both bonding and bridging factors in integration, but they stress the limitations of the multicultural work in the Finnish parishes. Some of the employees in the Finnish congregations feel that they are not sufficiently resourced to actively work multiculturally, and emphasize the need for more voluntary involvement in Church operations.

Previous research have focused mostly on migrant religious organizations' involvement in integration, and by studying the Evangelical Lutheran Church's multicultural work and its implications on integration, this study contributes to a more comprehensive insight to the religious organizations' involvement in integration in Finland.

## 6. Experiences of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as Support in Immigrant Integration

In this chapter Amica analyses the material gathered through interviews with immigrants living in the Helsinki metropolitan area at the time of the interviews. As this chapter is the result of Amica's research and writing, first person singular will be used throughout the chapter. The material is approached in order to answer the question *"How has interacting with the Evangelical Lutheran Church affected the integration process of immigrants?"*. With reference to the recommendations made in the IOM discussion paper *Dialogue for Integration: Engaging Religious Communities* (2011, 20–22), that countries in the EU should work towards a better recognition of religious communities' role as integration facilitators, I also consider the question *"What kind of services that support integration should be provided by the Evangelical Lutheran Church according to immigrants?"*.

The theoretical framework and centrally used terminology in this analysis is presented in the second chapter of the thesis. In addition some concepts and theoretical approaches are introduced here to correspond with the themes that arise from the material. However the starting point for this analysis is the notion that social networks are an important source immigrants' capital and means of integration and that these social networks are characterised by a complex balance between solidarity and exploitation as well as related to trust and conflict (Ryan et al 2015, 3–4). The importance of social connections and creation of networks in the integration process was emphasized by all interviewees, which supports the use of this framework. As the object of this study is integration in the Evangelical Lutheran Church context, also the aspects of spiritual support and inter-religious dialogue are considered with regard to their effect on immigrant integration.

The interviewees, whose ideas and experiences are discussed in this chapter, represent different religious, lingual and social backgrounds. Facts about the countries of origin and religious convictions of the interviewees are found in the table in chapter 4.2.2 where the my material is presented. The interviewees also have different reasons for migrating. Most of the interviewees have come to Finland as asylum seekers and have

lived here for less than or around a year. Some have got a residence permit and some refugee status, others are still in the process of seeking asylum. One of the interviewees report the reason for moving to Finland to be love. The fact that most of the interviewees are asylum seekers or have arrived in Finland as asylum seekers reflects the immigration patterns currently ongoing in Finland and in Europe. It also mirrors the kind of multicultural work that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Helsinki has been doing the past year, as discussed by Ida in this thesis. With respect to their privacy, the residence status is not mentioned when presenting some of the interviewees. The different life situations of the interviewees naturally mean that different aspects of integration are of importance in their lives at the time of the interview. I have thus also asked my interviewees questions about their previous experiences as well as their ideas about the future regarding integration in Finnish society.

All interviewees are young and physically healthy adults in their twenties and thirties, and could be defined as in a working age. This makes them subjects to the integration goals outlined in the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (2010), given that they have a residence permit and have been ascribed a municipality of residence. Three of the interviewees report that they have a family, of which one has a spouse and child in Finland, one a spouse in the previous home country and one a spouse and child in the previous home country. All of the interviewees live in the Helsinki metropolitan area and have visited Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Helsinki. All except one of the interviewees report going to the church or to different churches on regular, usually weekly, basis. Only the one interviewee, who has lived in Finland the longest, is a member of a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, more specifically a foreign language congregation. All the other interviewees are not members of any religious organization in Finland.

According to Tuomas Martikainen religious organisations can at the same time play a major role in the adaptation process to a new environment and provide means for them to express their religiosity and sociability. He also points out the significance of organized religious communities in providing its members access to social networks which can help them get advice and find opportunities in the new environment.

(Martikainen 2004, 83.) The Evangelical Lutheran Church being a particularly organized and integrated part of Finnish society suggests that it can function as a provider of this kind of social networks for immigrants. This idea is supported by all of my interviewees in one way or another, and the different forms of networks and connections are discussed in my analysis. As most of the interviewees report adherence to other religions than Lutheran Christianity, part of my analysis investigate if they have found ways to express their religiosity within the context of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and what they think about it.

### **6.1 The Evangelical Lutheran Church Contributing to Immigrant Social Capital**

Robert Putnam use the concepts of *bonding* and *bridging* social capital to distinguish between local informal and broader formal types of connections and networks that immigrants have access to (Putnam 2000). According to Putnam the local informal connections are defined as inward-looking networks with a tendency of reinforcing exclusive identities and groups. These networks and connections are more important for “getting by” in everyday life. The broader formal types of connections are described as open and outward looking networks, that consist of people across diverse social cleavages. This kind of networks are useful for “getting ahead” or advancing in society. (Putnam 2000, 22–23.) As my interviewees accounts of interacting with the Evangelical Lutheran Church, its employees, parishioners and active local citizens include experiences of both bonding and bridging, both types of social capital are discussed in this chapter.

In the light of critical approaches to social capital research, Roger Patulny discuss the possibility of conceiving a combination of multiple forms of social capital and ethnic networks, keeping in mind that migrants have the possibility of moving between different networks at any given time. As an example of the complex nature of social networks Patulny also points out the distinction between vertical and horizontal bridging, meaning forming connections with people who can help advancement respectively with those who cannot. (Patulny 2014, 210.) Noting these remarks on the theory of bonding and bridging social capital, I understand the multiplicity and

complexity of the social connections discussed in this analysis and the fact that immigrants are not foremost part of the social group “immigrants”, but individuals acting within the wider context of Finnish society. I also want to emphasise the agency of the immigrants in creating and moving between these social networks and making use of the social capital they hold.

### **Church as Platform for Creating and Maintaining Contacts to the Majority Population**

Every one of the eight persons I interviewed say that they have made Finnish friends in church. Although only two of the interviewees define themselves as Christian, the environment of the church appears safe to meet and connect with people. Interviewees report that they have made friends with Finnish people when attending language class at different churches, cooking dinner at weekly organized “Soppasunnuntai” (Suop Sunday) in Mikael Agricola church, staying in church as asylum seekers or when attending service in Finnish, English, Arabic or Chinese. According to my interviewees, most of the people they have established friendships were working as volunteers in activities organised in church or church community members attending these activities.

Based on the comprehensive material of his study and in line with previous research, Phillip Connor suggests that immigrants who are highly involved in religious organizations can use their experience to become full members of society (Connor 2014, 12). As many of the interviewees in this study express that getting to know Finnish society and culture is the reason for interacting with Finns in the Church context and elsewhere, gaining social capital that can help them get involved in Finnish society is a central theme in many of my interviews. Since learning the Finnish language is perhaps the most central aspect of immigrant integration in Finland, all interviewees say that it is the main reason or part of the reason they wish to establish friendships with native Finns.

Erkki, who is a 27 year old anthropology student from Iraq, has just been granted residence in Finland. He explains his reasons for attending Service in Church every week after arriving in Finland:

*“Yes, so I started to talk to people. And he [the pastor of the church] told me it's not important to turn to Christianity or something like that, but just to meet them to share some traditions, to be friends with them. Because you are in a new community, and you need to know everything about this community...”*

Erkki

Erkki says that he wishes to define himself as a not particularly religious Muslim. To him, interacting with people in the Evangelical Lutheran Church is an important way of getting to know and getting into the community here, as the Finnish friends he has made there possess knowledge and have access to networks he needs in order to become a member of Finnish Society. He goes on explaining why he has been attending service in church every Sunday, and what concrete support he has received from the church community members and how he has been able to meet and connect with other Iraqis as well:

*“And this was our chance to get to know some Finnish families, and to be friends with the Iraqi families. And some families invited some guys to their place, to stay the night or to have lunch or dinner...And they asked some guys to stay there until they get their own place, to live with them.”*

Erkki

The social networks created within the context of the Evangelical Lutheran Church provide also concrete opportunities to improve the living conditions of asylum seekers. Markku is a 29 year old asylum seeker from Iraq, currently living with an elderly Finnish couple in Helsinki. He states that living close to the center of the city is crucial for his mental well being and possibility to integrate into society. As asylum seeker waiting for a decision, he was ordered to move to live in a reception center quite far from Helsinki. But because of the connections he had made while living in Lauttasaari Church at arrival and later actively participating in Service and organising different events for other refugees, he had made Finnish friends that allowed him to stay with them in their home, allowing him to stay physically close to the urban society of Helsinki.

Describing his current living conditions, Markku says: *"There's a man and a woman, who told me "you are like our son" and if you want to stay here [in their apartment] for more than a day, you can stay."* At the question of where he came in contact with

the man and woman, he replied: *"In the Church. Most of the people I've met in the Church...They [the elderly couple he is living with] are like a family of mine, a Finnish family."* Markku knows good English and is very social and outgoing, which has enabled him to create a comprehensive network in Helsinki in the short time he has been here. He says that most of the social connections he has made is in Church, and that his friends are either people doing volunteer work there or Church employees.

Matti, who is a 36-year-old Eastern Orthodox Christian from Syria, has while in Finland attended activities in the Evangelical Lutheran Church here in both Arabic and Finnish. Even though he states that his main reason for attending Sunday Service or other activities in Church is spiritual, he emphasises the social aspects of the Church community: *"I will think about that as Church is central...a center for social encounters in society...So I like always to make friendships in Church"*. He sees the connection between social encounters and the paths into Finnish society as natural, the Church community functioning as a bridge for him.

Sanna is 35 years old and has lived in Finland for over five years, she has a job in the chemical industry and is married to a Finnish man. Sanna comes from China where she became a member of a Christian congregation after the serious illness and death of her sister. In Finland she describes herself as quite well integrated, but complains about the few connections she has made with native Finns, as most of her friends are other person with immigrant background. Sanna attends Service in her mother tongue almost every Sunday and says that most of the people she meets in Church are also Chinese. But through the connections she has made in Church, she has made new, Finnish friends that she keeps close contact with.

*"For example I have a very good friend, her name is Linda, and I met her first time in Chinese Church, through other friend, yeah... And then we become even better friends than the previous friend [...] We always talk. And now with the internet it's so easy, we have...we chat on mobile."*

Sanna

Meeting and making friends with Finnish people is brought up by most interviewees as often the reason for, but sometimes the additional outcome of, attending activities in



Church. Jussi, a 25-year-old Iraqi student of accounting and statistics, explains how he met his now closest friend in Finland:

*"I just read in the Facebook that they had some group for Finnish language [in Agricola Church Crypt]. Yeah and then I went there. And after that I knew someone, called Pertti (name changed), he's Finnish, and he became my friend"*

Jussi

Jussi says he has been going to Church three times a week after arriving in Finland, to pray, to learn Finnish and to make friends. After meeting Pertti, who volunteered as language teacher in church, the two have started meeting regularly also outside of church, playing board games and doing things in the weekends. Through this friendship Jussi improves his Finnish language skills, makes acquaintance with Finnish traditions and familiarise himself with the city of Helsinki through guidance of a native person approximately his own age. Jussi describes himself as a fairly religious Muslim and Pertti is a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

As these examples show the bridging effects of networks created in church, many interviewees express also the importance of bonding with people. Robert Putnam (2007, 143) defines bonding social capital as connections with people, who are in some significant way similar to you. Thus shared religious and lingual or ethnic background is often described as a bonding factor for immigrants in their religious community. The two interviewees in this study, who define themselves as Christian, support the idea of religion as bonding factor when talking about the relationships they have created in the church setting. But as most of the interviewees in this study don't define themselves as Christian or even attend activities in church organized in their mother tongue, many still feel they can bond with people there. Thereby also other common factors or similarities should be taken into account when looking at the bonding effects of social networks in the church context.

Juha is a 25-year-old asylum seeker from Iran, waiting for a residence permit and to be able to bring his wife and newborn child to Finland to safety. He says that his mind is constantly busy with worrying about his family and stressing about the outcome of his asylum process. To keep mentally sane in this extremely difficult situation, he has

found help in the Evangelical Lutheran Church. He was introduced to the church community when staying in Lauttasaari church for a short period after arriving in Finland. For Juha the most important thing about interacting with people is bonding with others, the mental support of other human beings. He describes his relation to Christianity as following:

*"Yeah, because as I told you I don't think like..this is Christian and this is Muslim, we are like brothers, yes. And the Christians have the same idea about heaven and the prophet of God. Yeah. It's the same. And the Christians have a book and we have the holy book. It's not so different."*

Juha

When we discuss about the reasons for him to seek contact with Christians instead of turning to for example a Muslim community here in Helsinki, Juha explains that it is the mentality of caring for fellow humans that is the bonding factor of people of faith, regardless of religion. Being in the stressing situation he is in and not knowing anybody in Finland from before, the most important thing for him is to make human connections, having someone to talk to. He says that the friends he now has here in Helsinki are the volunteers that came to the church where he was staying:

*"Yes and I love the people who work in the Church, they helped us every day. They cooked the food for us. They do..and everything is good..And they come to speak with us and they don't leave us alone. For I see they do so much for us... Not just the ones who work there but people come every day [volunteers] and ask how we are speak with us and say "What is your name?"... I think yeah.."*

Juha

Also Jussi explains, that creating contact with people in Church has a bonding effect in addition to the help he has received to get to know Finnish society. Because he feels difficult to make contact with Finns in other situations, Jussi explains that the culture of caring for other human beings is what makes him feel togetherness with Christians he meets in Church. As he says he also wants to help other people, he can relate to those helping him:

*"I think there is a difference between Arabic countries and here. But I feel, that in the Church I can connect with them, because they care for you they come to ask you, to speak with you. "What do you want, what do you need?" [...] But anytime you need help, you need to go to some address or anything, of course they will help. Otherwise I feel that Finnish people don't speak that much."*

Jussi

For Sanna, who is a Christian, the reason for creating networks in Church has naturally also bonding features. She has a Finnish husband, and their marriage was the reason she moved to Finland. Sanna comes from China and has been in contact with the Chinese congregation in the Evangelical Lutheran Church from the time she arrived in Finland. For her, shared religious identity is an important bonding factor, but also language is a central reason for her to go to Chinese Church regularly. Especially for her in Finland born child she thinks that making friends in Church is important:

*"Because for me it's not just the religious part..It's also quite important for my son. As I want him to know more Chinese people, who have this language background. Because we don't go back to China that much and I want him to speak good Chinese, as it will help him in the future."*

Sanna

The creation of bonds based on common language correspond with examples given by Tuomas Martikainen about activities that take place in religious organisations in addition to religious activities. He notes that migrant religious organisations are an arena of sociability in addition to being a faith-based community, as fellowship groups based on language and other activities (many times somehow related to traditional food,) often take place in congregations. (Martikainen 2004, 81.) By attending Bible-club and interacting with other children of Chinese heritage, Sanna hopes to create a network that her child can make use of in the future.

According to the accounts of the interviewees in this study it appears that many of the social networks that immigrants create in the context of the Evangelical Lutheran Church are often at the same time bonding and bridging, also for non-Christian immigrants.

## Friendships with Church Employees

All interviewees in this study say that they have created contacts with volunteers working in the church or with church community members they have met in church. In addition, several interviewees have personally become friends with people employed by the Evangelical Lutheran Church, often with the priests and pastors of the parish they are active in. The social networks of immigrants can improve significantly through these friendships, as religious leaders are considered influential persons in a community. According to Connor, interaction with leaders of established religious communities in a society can create bridging social capital for immigrants (Connor 2014, 84). As the Evangelical Lutheran Church enjoys a special position in Finnish society, the religious leaders of its congregations most likely have access to wide social networks both locally and on a national and even international level, which can provide bridging social capital to immigrants.

The first time I met Markku was when he was translating the Christmas gospel from English to Arabic at a Christmas party for asylum seekers organised in a church in Helsinki. He was standing next to the Finnish priest of that congregation and interacted with her on friendly basis. Markku explains about his experience with interacting with the church: *"And now, I have friends, they are Pastors [in Evangelical Lutheran congregations]. I don't know if you know or not, but my best friend, she is a pastor in [in a congregation in Helsinki]."* When I ask him about how he became friends with the pastor, Markku describes how she participated in leisure activities organised for asylum seekers while staying in church:

*"One day...in Luttasaari, they made many activities for us, like playing football or going to the library..and something like that. And they were playing football, and I don't like to play football, I hate football. But..I tried to play volleyball with her [the pastor]. We played volleyball a little and then we became friends after that."*

Markku

Many interviewees highly appreciate the connections they have with church employees, as they provide comfort and serve as a potential bridge to Finnish society. As asylum seeker Erkki was moved to live in Oulu, but soon returned to Helsinki as

his friend had offered him to stay in his apartment. Erkki has also become friends with a pastor, and explains how he has invited other asylum seekers to join him to attend service every Sunday:

*"Before I was moved to Oulu, I knew a man here, [...] he is the responsible one, the pastor of his Church. [...] And when I met him I found that he's a really good man and that he helps refugees. I have a good connection with him and I've been visiting his family, his house. And he's been visiting me in my place. And every Sunday they have counted on me and my friend to take bus cards and some refugees [from the reception center where I used to live] and go to that church."*

Erkki

Sanna explains that she had contacted the pastor of the Chinese congregation before coming to Finland, so that she would have a familiar place to go when she arrives. Because of her contact with the pastor and the Chinese congregation she says that she didn't think about going to another, Finnish or English language parish closer to where she lives, and that knowing the pastor from before helped her adjust to the new environment. Sanna feels strong bonding with the church she goes to every Sunday: *"But here, since I knew [the pastor at the Chinese congregation], I knew that there is Chinese Church, I'm very happy to go there, to meet friends there. Yeah so.."*

Matti, who used to be employed by his local congregation in Syria, working as organiser of youth activities and offering help to troubled youngsters, has in Finland contacted the pastor of the Arabic speaking ministry in Helsinki. As they have become friends, Matti considers the impact it has on his welfare and mental health, as he feels comfortable talking about his situation with the pastor. Matti says: *"The Arabic Pastor, do you know him? [...] We are like friends, and he takes me to spend time in his summer house in Nuksio. Maybe [it makes me feel] less stress..."*. Being able to discuss with a pastor in his own language gives Matti a bonding experience that

Heikki is a young man from Afghanistan, who describes himself as Shia Muslim. In Afghanistan he has experienced severe difficulties because of his faith, which were part of the reasons for him to seek asylum in Finland. Heikki does not attend any activities in church on regular basis, but has become friends with a married couple, of

whom both are employees of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. He tells me that he was visiting his friends, who is the vicar of his congregation, and joined him for service in church. According to Heikki, this supports him in the process of getting to know Finnish society and culture. He specifically thinks that getting acquainted with the Evangelical Lutheran Church guided by the pastor is meaningful:

*“You see, my friend there works in the church and her husband is the pastor, they both work in the church. So I went with him to a christening ceremony and before that to pray in church. So I could see what it was like there [in church]. Because I really want to know Finnish culture. How you do things here and what I’m supposed to do, I really want to know.”*

Heikki (Own translation)

In the research activity report of the DIRECT-project, Agita Misane conclude that due to their openness to integration related issues and to their authority, the potential role of religious leaders as integration agents is still underestimated in Europe (Misane 2011, 34). Her idea is supported by the material in this study, as both Christian and non-Christian immigrants here see that friendships and contact with employees of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, pastors and vicars in particular, are valuable to their social and even structural integration.

### **Volunteering in the Church Community – Giving Back and Being Active**

When asked about activities they have participated in in the Church, several interviewees expressed their will to participate as volunteers themselves. Many said that they have contributed to the Church community by doing volunteer jobs, such as participating in the organisation of Service and parties, providing translation services, helping elderly parishioners with everyday chores and cooking food in different events. As also stated by some of the interviewed Church employees according to Ida’s analysis, volunteer work is an evolving and central part of the structure and organisation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Sanna, who attends Service in Chinese Church every Sunday, expresses her concerns about not being able to be as active in the Church community after having a baby and

being more tied to home. According to her it is the obligation of Christians to help others in need. She feels that the Church and its adherents should help newcomers as well as older members of the parish according to their ability and availability.

*"I feel helpful in my life and very meaningful as well, and I like it and I want to go there as much as I can. And I also wish I could help, in the future, to do something there! Yeah, [the Pastor in Chinese Church] always mentions, as a Christian – be active. And because sometimes I feel also that I'm not so active"*

Sanna

After telling me that she has contributed to the congregation by helping the pastor with translating parts of a book he is writing from English to Chinese, Sanna emphasises that she is going to be more active in the Church community as her child gets a little older.

Markku, who speaks fluent English and has learned some Finnish, explains that the least he can do is to offer translation help for other Arabic speaking asylum seekers when communicating with Church employees and volunteers in the church community. He says:

*"And for the first time I came here to Finland, to Lauttasaari, I volunteered to translate...I told them that even if I am sleeping you can wake me up to translate. I have to because, as you know, most of the asylum seekers don't speak English, only Arabic. So I had to help."*

Markku

This translation help was offered by Markku without being asked to do it. As he wishes to be able to find work in Helsinki and not just “sit and take money from the government”, Markku thinks that volunteering in the church community is a meaningful way of gaining experience and doing something meaningful with his time. According to him all asylum seekers that stayed in the Lauttasaari church were helping in the community:

*"About the Church...You know that all of us [asylum seekers staying in Lauttasaari Church], before being moved to Heinola, to Pieksamäki or to other places... we volunteered to help. Like help elderly people, and to help for Christmas, to make Christmas trees and to wrap gifts, to make many things. Already we were very active in the Church. But as you know we were moved and couldn't continue with the projects."*

Markku

The same notion of volunteering as meaningful activity is expressed by Sami, who also has experience of helping out in the church community. He is a 33-year-old engineer from Iraq, who came to Finland as asylum seeker in 2015. Sami considers himself not religious and explains that he used to be Muslim, but that has changed after moving to Finland. According to Sami, he started attending church regularly after a volunteer had come to the reception center he lived in to invite asylum seekers to Finnish language class in the Mikael Agricola church. When I ask him if he has got any help or support from the church community, Sami turns the topic of the discussion to considering how he has helped in the community. Sami says: *"Of course, if a friend [referring to elderly people from the church community] needs help for example at home, I go to help. If I'm called to help I go."* (Own translation.) After language class, Sami usually stay for Sunday service in the Agricola church. There he has helped out with practical tasks, such as handing out hymn books to church visitors.

According to Phillip Connor being involved in religious communities by volunteering can work as a good starting point for immigrant integration into society at large. His study show that immigrants involved with immigrant congregations can have better mental health, but also that this involvement can create a pathway for social mobility and higher esteem from the general public. (Connor 2014, 86–87.) Even though the congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland that are the subjects of this study, are not specifically immigrant religious organisations, rather the opposite, it seems volunteering in the community can have a supportive effect on immigrant integration. As the role that religious organizations have in local communities in the Nordic context is significantly different than for example in the United States (Martikainen 2014), which is the context for most of Connor's study, the Evangelical Lutheran Church is in a unique position in Finland regarding the Church-State



relations. How the context of reception and role of religion in Finnish society affects immigrant integration is discussed in more detail further in this analysis.

## 6.2 Spiritual Support and Interfaith Dialogue

As immigrant integration has been considered from a social capital perspective, mainly social aspects of the Evangelical Lutheran Church has been considered in the first section of this analysis. Since the Evangelical Lutheran Church is primarily a religious organisation, the following chapter is dedicated to discussing how immigrants feel that the spiritual support from the church has affected their integration and how they perceive the role of religion in Finnish society.

Also interfaith dialogue is discussed in this chapter, as it is a recurring theme in my interviews. Since most of the interviewees are either non-Christian or come from a different Christian tradition, the discussion often turns to considerations on the differences and similarities of different religions and traditions. The importance of promoting interfaith dialogue in immigrant integration is also presented as one of the findings in the research activity report on the IOM research project on engaging religious communities in integration. There Agita Misane concludes that intercultural dialogue is an important instrument for fostering integration, and inter-faith dialogue is defined as one central aspect of it. (Misane 2011, 6.)

### **Spiritual Support in Difficult Situations: Prayer and Belonging**

According to most of the immigrants interviewed in this study, faith and spiritual experiences can provide support in different situations. Participating in religious activities and related spiritual rituals can help immigrants psychologically integrate and provides structure in their everyday lives. Practicing faith is also defined as the most common way in which religious organizations in the Uusimaa area in Finland do support immigrant integration (ELY 2014, 12).

Sanna, whose affiliation with the Lutheran Church started during a difficult time in her life, contemplate over the fact that the importance of faith in a person's life tends to

actualise in difficult situations. She explains that her religious community in Finland has provided spiritual support in times she needed help the most:

*"...Yes, so it was a really bad situation at that time, so he [Sanna's Finnish husband] went to hospital. I was really scared as he was like unconscious at home, and a lot of blood came out and we called an ambulance and took him to a hospital. And I was so scared. So I told my friend at church and also [the pastor of the church], they tried to contact me to ask if we need help or need anything and said that they would pray for you. But my husband didn't feel comfortable at that time to meet people. So [the pastor] sent a card to our home that said that God will bless you and we have prayed for you. And I had talked on the phone with him [the pastor] and I got a lot of comfort from that and courage from that."*

Sanna

As a Christian, Sanna feels that the spiritual support she gets from her congregation is unique and she says that she wouldn't think of any other place to ask for help or support in situations like the one described above. Sanna stresses the spiritual aspects of her church community in other contexts as well, as she sees common faith as the foundation for the services and the help offered by the Church.

Matti is constantly worrying about his wife, who is still in Syria, and under a lot of stress as he is still waiting to proceed with his asylum seeking process. In the stressful situation, he turns to his faith to get strength. Matti attends church regularly to pray, but finds the prayers of others important as well: *"Yes I know everybody prays for me. I know many people here in Finland who pray for me...friends and..."*. The feeling of bonding through common faith helps Matti through difficult times in his life.

In a chapter on the impact of faith on the psychological integration of immigrants, Phillip Connor notes that the emotional stress and mental tension immigrants experience can produce high levels of anxiety, even leading to high levels of depression among some immigrants. This has to do with processing the changes that a migration process entails, like cultural change and employment situations. According to Connor, immigrants can find emotional relief and gain deeper understanding of life's challenges through prayer and mass attendance. (Connor 2014, 76–77.) Also regular religious attendance and active participation in the religious community is seen

as having a positive effect on the mental health of many immigrants, especially immigrants of religious minorities (Connor 2014, 79).

Stress and tension, even fear, are also feelings that many of the immigrant interviewees in this study mention when discussing their well being and state of mind. This relates to the fact that several of the immigrant interviewees are or have recently been in the process of seeking asylum in Finland, and the process tends to be very long and contain a lot of waiting and uncertainty of what is going to happen next. Combined with the concern for family members left in the country of origin and the experience of the actual travel to Finland, these immigrants have a heavy mental burden to carry. Even though six of the eight interviewees are not Christian, several explain that they find spiritual support and peace of mind when attending service or mass in churches of Evangelical Lutheran parishes.

According to Connor, immigrants tend to adapt their religious practice to become more like the general public (Connor 2014, 118). Even though Connor refers to immigrants practicing their own faith within a immigrant religious community, many of the Muslims in this study seem to have adapted their religious practice to correspond with that of the majority church. As only one of the five Muslim interviewees report attending a mosque to pray in Finland, the others seem to have been able to adapt their religious practice to the Evangelical Lutheran context. According to three of the interviewees, some congregations have been able to offer service in English and Arabic, with the help of voluntary based translation services.

Erkki, who doesn't think of himself as a very religious Muslim, has been attending service in church every Sunday. When I ask him what the most important reason for him to go to church is, Erkki replies: "*[I go to church to attend] service and church songs and to be invited to God, and to pray.*" For him, the songs, service and prayers in Finnish offer spiritual support even though he doesn't fully understand the language or is familiar with the Christian gospel from before. Even after getting a residence permit, Erkki explains that he will continue going to church, because it brings structure and security to his life.

Jussi attends service every Sunday in the Mikael Agricola church and explains that there is translations service based on volunteers for people who don't speak Finnish: *"[Translation is available] in English, but I listen to that in Finnish because I need to learn. But sometimes I use the translation into Arabic, they have headphones [...] they ask if there is someone there who speak Arabic, they ask him to translate."* . But the main reason for attending service is not improving his Finnish language skills, as Jussi explains: *"Because I don't go there [the Church] just to learn Finnish language. No one tells me "you must go to the mass". I go voluntary for myself"*. Despite being a Muslim, Jussi feels that the environment of the church and being together with other people gives him spiritual support. Attending service regularly meets his spiritual needs and has become an important part of his adaptation process in Finland.

Also Sami has attended service in a Finnish congregation, and says that Arabic translation has been arranged by volunteers. *"Well, sometimes I go to mass. Sometimes, but not always. The service is in Finnish, but there is a translator, who simultaneously translate to Arabic."*. Because the language class Sami attends every Sunday is arranged just before Sunday service, he has joined some of his fellow students and language teachers to attend every now and then. Even though Sami defines himself as not religious and says that he doesn't want to talk about religion, he tells me that he enjoys mass and doesn't mind attending it again.

Juha has connected with the volunteers from the church community that he has met in language class. When I ask him if he has felt any spiritual or mental support from the connections, he says: *"Well, when they see me sad they say "why are you sad?", and keep in touch. I love them. They stay in touch with me on the phone and they are very helpful people."*. Because Juha is very worried about his wife and young child in Iran, and don't have many friends in Finland, the support and prayers of his Christians friends are extremely valuable.

Markku, who is active in especially one Finnish congregation in Helsinki, tells me that he has been also to other churches and chapels in order to find spiritual support. As I ask him if he, as a Muslim, feel comfortable in the Lutheran churches, Markku replies: *"Yes, and I have put candles. Many times in Lauttasaari church and in the wooden church here near in Kamppi...and I can't remember, there's another one as*

*well...*”. By adapting his religious practice to correspond with that of the majority religion in Finland, Markku has found ways of expressing his spirituality.

In addition to providing important social networks, my interviewees report that the employees, community members and volunteers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church also offer them spiritual and mental support. In correspondence with previous research the spiritual support of a religious community helps immigrants deal with their situation when times get hard. Many interviewees find that attending service and also visiting churches outside of service, helps them spiritually integrate. As both Christians and non-Christians report receiving spiritual support from the Church, the next chapter deals with interfaith dialogue.

### **Getting to Know Finnish Society Through Interfaith Dialogue**

Many of the interviewees come from societies where religion is a particularly sensitive and often problematic issue, even the reason for migration. Most Muslim interviewees say, that they have not come in contact with Christianity before coming to Finland and their perception of religion has changed after migrating. According to Connor, immigrants tend to adapt their religious practice to become more like the general public. But changing religious practice does not mean that the religious identity of immigrants change after migration. (Connor 2014, 117–118). In the discussion paper for the DIRECT-project, IOM recognizes the potential of religious communities to function as “cultural mediators” and to engage in intercultural and interreligious dialogue (IOM 2011, 14). Several interviewees in this study, who identify themselves as Muslims, express that they in many ways have adapted their religious practice to correspond with that of the Lutheran Christians through interacting with the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Erkki feels that being a Muslim in Finland is not a problem. For him, interacting with the Evangelical Lutheran Church and Christianity is a new experience, since it was not possible in Iraq. Now Erkki thinks that connecting with Christians and attending service is meaningful, as he finds a lot of similarities in his religion and Christian faith:

*"In Iraq we couldn't get to know other religions. As you know, here we can go to Church, light a candle and pray. As before we couldn't. Couldn't get to know any other religions, especially Christianity. Now I know so much about Christianity. And as we discussed before, Christianity and Islam are very similar to each other. We have the same beliefs, the same thoughts, the same faith."*

Erkki

Juha has experienced some severe difficulties with the different religious groups in Iran, to the extent that it forced him to leave his family and seek asylum in Finland. When I ask him about his relationship with Christianity, Juha explains that he doesn't make a difference between people of different faith:

*"In Iran there are Jews more than Christian..yes. Because I have my network, yeah Jews, there they don't say who's Muslim, who's this or that, I never hear that, never. They are only friends. I don't ask my friends if they are Muslim or something else."*

Juha

With his openness to other religions, becoming active in the Evangelical Lutheran Church has been both meaningful and useful for Juha while trying to make use of his time in Helsinki. He explains his views on humanity:

*"I am Muslim. And I never hear, when I live in Iran, about the were Sunni and Shia. But when I go for Iraq I found it's a big problem, if you are Sunni or Shia..So if I say I'm Shia then some people hate you and if I say I'm Sunni, then some people hate you..And I don't know..what's the plan for that, I don't like being near, to hear that..yeah. And I love some people who are Christian. For me, I am human like everyone and I like everyone like a brother for me."*

Juha

Markku has similar views on religion. As he has been volunteering in the church community while in Finland, Markku explains that the will to help and care for other human beings is a bonding factor for people of different faith:

*"I'm not religious...But what I do is what our God and our Prophet ordered us to do. One of the main things is that we don't have to compare between religions. He ordered us to do that, our Prophet, Mohammed. And I pray, I do good things, I help people, as he ordered us...And now, I have friends...they are [Christian] pastors"*

Markku

Jussi says he was attending a mosque regularly in Iraq, but that has changed in Finland since he can now get to know also other religious institutions. He now visits church frequently, and has not tried to find a mosque in Finland. Jussi explains that he wasn't familiar with Christianity from before: *"I didn't know anything about the [Christian] Church in Iraq. Just I heard some things about the Church, but I didn't visit the Church or anything [...] But after coming to Finland, I go to Church three days a week."* On the question whether he thinks that there is a conflict between his faith and that of Christianity he as got to know in Finland, Jussi, who is a devoted muslim answers:

*"No conflict. All the people help me, and I have my faith. It's very good [...] I have different religion, coming from Iraq, because there they say that Christianity is not okay. Not all people in Iraq of course, but how can I explain this... In Baghdad I couldn't know anything about Christianity. And coming here, I know everything about Christianity."*

Jussi

Comparing Islam and Christianity, Jussi now feels that there is no significant difference: *"I think a lot of things are the same...I don't feel there's anything different between Islam and Christianity. Just between the Koran and the Bible, there is different texts."* By interacting with the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Jussi has gained insights into values and ideas of Christianity, and through that into Finnish society. He says that he needs to know about Christianity because it's the religion in Finland and that he doesn't see a conflict between attending church and being a Muslim: *"No conflict. All the people help me, and I have my faith. It's very good."*

Matti, who describes his religious conviction as Orthodox Christian, compares the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Helsinki to what he was used to in Syria: *"From*

*Arabic Church [there is] not a big difference, but it's okay."* He also says that in a sense going to Church here helps him feel at home.

### **6.3 The Evangelical Lutheran Church as Facilitator of Integration Services**

Both the DIRECT research project by the IMO (IMO 2011) and the ELY-study about integration work done by religious communities (ELY 2014) provide recommendations on how to further engage religious communities in immigrant integration. In addition to spiritual support and leisure activities ELY defines three main forms of activities organized by religious communities, that support immigrant integration. These are language classes, employing immigrants and providing personal support and guidance. (ELY 2014, 12–16.) According to the immigrants interviewed in this study, the Evangelical Lutheran Church has offered them language classes and personal support. One interviewee reported that he had applied for a job within the Church, but didn't get an answer. Moreover, no interviewees had been employed by the Church, although many are active as volunteers.

As has become evident in this analysis, the Evangelical Lutheran Church has offered immigrants support in their social and spiritual integration. In this chapter I consider what other forms of support in integration the interviewees have received and discuss whether they think that the Church can function as integration service provider. Finnish language classes and asylum in church are the two forms of integration services, that were mentioned in the interviews. To relate this study to other research on immigrant integration I also consider how the role of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finnish society and the religious landscape in Finland more generally, affects immigrant integration. Based on my material and according to previous studies, the Church-State relations and religious landscape affects the possibility of religious organizations to engage in immigrant integration.



## Asylum in Church

With the large amount of asylum seekers arriving in Finland after the summer of 2015, many churches opened their doors and offered temporary asylum for those in need. Two of the interviewees in this study have stayed in a church in Helsinki. While staying there, the immigrants naturally connected with other asylum seekers in the same situation as themselves, but also they created contacts with church employees and volunteers. After being transferred to reception centers, both interviewees say that they have kept up contacts with people of the church.

Markku now lives with a family from the church community, that he met while staying in Lauttasaari church. Here's his account of his arrival in Finland: *"I came to Finland in September [2015], I immigrated to Helsinki. And my first day was in Lauttasaari. In the church. We stayed there maybe for a month."* Markku explains, that during his difficult travel to Finland, he mentally prepared himself for the worst, as he could imagine himself even sleeping in the streets. Being offered asylum in church was a huge relief to him, and his gratitude might be part of the reasons for him to continue being so active in the church community even long after he has moved elsewhere.

Juha is an asylum seeker, who also stayed in church for a short time. He has been transferred from one place to another during his year in Finland, and is still waiting for a decision about residence and asylum. When he first arrived he was directed to a reception center in Kaarlenkatu, but soon he was transferred: *"...And from there we were transferred to Koskela. I stayed four days there and then I go for the Agricola Church, and we lived in the Church for like ten days and then we were transferred to the Munkkiniemi..."*. Juha explains to me about the living conditions and atmosphere in some of the reception centers, and says that the ten days he stayed in the Mikael Agricola Church were the best of his time in Finland this far. Juha did not come in contact with the Evangelical Lutheran Church before seeking asylum in church, but has continued his contact with the church community after that. Even after moving to Munkkiniemi, Juha started to attend language class in church there.

Beside physically offering asylum seekers a roof over their heads, providing asylum is, according to the interviewees, a good way of introducing the church community to immigrants. While staying in church, Markku and Juha have made vital connections to members of the majority population, which promotes their integration through bridging social capital. But here seems to be also a bonding aspect of the connections initiated while staying in church, as both interviewees say that they will continue interacting with the church community and attending activities in church. Juha, who is a Muslim, even says that if he can get his wife to Finland, he wishes to introduce the church community to her.

### **Language Classes organized in Church Facilities**

Finnish Language classes are offered to immigrants in different parishes in Helsinki. Four interviewees in this study say that they regularly attend some of these classes. For many immigrants the class has been their first contact with the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and many also say that this is where they have created the most important social connections to members of the majority population. According to the study by ELY about religious communities participation in integration, there is a huge variety of language represented by employees of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and that should be utilised in immigrant integration. Especially in the very beginning, if the command of Finnish is non-existent, immigrants can benefit from language classes and translation services in the church context. (ELY 2014, 14.)

Sami did not go to church before he was invited to join language class by a representative of the congregation:

*"So, when I lived in Munkkiniemi, a person came there to invite all asylum seekers, who lived in Munkkiniemi to go to class. So I went there and got acquainted with the place and the people. I felt that it was nice to study [the Finnish Language] there. I did not go to Agricola [church] before the Finnish person invited us there [...]." (Own translation)*

Sami

After that, Sami has been going to language class every Sunday. Even though he also studies the Finnish language actively on his own, and commands it well enough to

conduct the interview with me in Finnish, Sami finds it useful to keep going to the class. He explains, that the social aspect of the class is almost equally important as the learning the language.

Also Matti, Juha and Jussi say that they go to language classes in church on a weekly basis. Matti is Orthodox Christian and attends service also in Arabic when possible, but finds the language classes in Finnish parishes a nice way of bonding with the church community and bridging to Finnish society by connecting with native Finns. Both Juha and Jussi are Muslims, and they again see the language classes as an effective way of at the same time learning Finnish, connecting with the general population and familiarizing themselves with the church and it's community.

According to Connor, many religious centers have language classes where immigrants can improve their language skills, but also gain information about the host society. By attending these classes immigrants can become active in the religious community and further participate as volunteers themselves, which can affect their integration into society at large. (Connor 2014, 71.) For some of the interviewees in this study, who have actively attended language classes in church, participations has introduced them to the church community and given them opportunities of participating as volunteers, for example as translators and handing out hymn books in service. Hence language classes in the Evangelical Lutheran Church can be useful for immigrants on many levels of integration.

### **Church as Provider of Integration Services**

Based on the experiences and views discussed in this chapter, I will finally consider whether the immigrants I have interviewed think that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Helsinki should provide more comprehensive integration services to immigrants or if the social and spiritual support they already offer is enough.

Sami, who says that he is not religious, attends language class in church every Sunday. There he has made friends with native Finns, who volunteer as language teachers. For Sami the social aspects of participating in activities in church are the most important. He enjoys the language class and is a quick learner, and he sees that learning Finnish

is the absolutely most important thing regarding his integration in Finland. As the church offers him the opportunity to study Finnish, I ask him if he would think that he could get other support from there as well. But Sami thinks that the volunteers he knows from church are most valuable as friends: *"I don't ask my friends [from church] if they could help me find a job [...] The main reason [I interact with them] is that they are nice people, and that has helped me adapt here [in Finland]."* (Own translation).

Juha has similar thoughts on whether he would feel comfortable in asking for help with practical things from the people he knows in the church community. Even though Juha explicitly says that finding a job and being able to work is the most important thing for his integration, he would be looking for help with that somewhere else: *"I don't like that, for I like them as friends, I don't want to use them for that. Yeah. If I have to find work I will find it myself."* Also Juha emphasises the importance of friendships and social support from the church community, and doesn't think it's appropriate to require help beyond the social support.

Also Erkki share the views of Juha and Sami regarding the church as provider of integration services. He attends service regularly and says that a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church is close friend of his. But when I ask him if he thinks that it would be a good idea to arrange integration services in the Church context, Erkki replies: *"Now I have so many people, friends from there. I meet them in Church. Yeah. But it doesn't change anything, they are friends, just friends. They don't help with looking for an apartment or with the residence permit or anything"*. Erkki has a residence permit and has thus been offered support for his integration by the municipality of Helsinki. He thinks it is useful to separate social services and religious communities. Although he feels strong support from the Church, it is the support he gets through his social networks.

As member of a Foreign language congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Sanna reflects on the possibility of religious actors to participate in immigrant integration:

*"...The Church and Christians should be more active, be more powerful. Because with government control sometimes the Church is a bit weak, we don't have the power to say anything or they cannot say anything, because that doesn't work. As arrange it with the refugees, then you can arrange it, but the government says then you can't tell them about Christianity, about religion, because they have their own religions. Because, it's a place of God. We shouldn't only receive the refugees and put them to eat and sleep there, and cannot do anything religious. Yeah. It's quite good talk. Now days we have a week-chat, we have a group there...so every week they have some text sent..sent to everybody and we read it. I think Chinese Church, they do already a lot of work."*

Sanna

Sanna refers to the recent increase in asylum seekers coming to Finland, and the fact that the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a result gave temporary asylum to many of them. Because Sanna is a devoted Christian and values the spiritual support she receives from her church community, she thinks it is problematic that the Church would be required to offer help outside of the context of Christianity. As she feels strong bonding with the Chinese language congregation and has been pleased with the integration services she was offered by her municipality when she first arrived in Finland, Sanna would not feel comfortable with integration services offered by her religious community.

Matti, who is Eastern Orthodox Christian, says that his life is in Church. But with his difficult situation he feels bad about being a burden to others by bothering them with his problems. I ask him to consider ways in which the Church could offer him help in his integration process, and Matti feels that the spiritual and social support he is already getting from the church community and the pastor who is his friend, is as much as he can require. He says: *"Yes, but just to talk. I don't like being a problem to others...I feel this."* Matti shares the ideas of non-Christian immigrants about the value of social support from the Church. But he is also concerned with the fact that the Evangelical Lutheran Church is a religious organisation, and thinks that the emphasis of Church activities should be on spiritual aspects of people's lives.

According to the IMO discussion paper on engaging religious communities in integration, there is a lack in the capacity of many religious communities to facilitate integration related services and support. Among the reasons for this incapacity to

facilitate integration, is the unavailability of information and access to proper means. (IOM 2011, 16.) None of the interviewees in this study felt that they would be comfortable in requiring integration services from the Church, apart from voluntary based language teaching and asylum in emergency situations. Because language is so important in immigrant integration, and all of the interviewees in this study are able to communicate in English or Finnish, I would assume that the findings would look different in another context. Immigrants who don't speak English or Finnish might still feel that a congregation operating in their mother tongue could be a very useful provider of integration services.

### **About the Role of Religion in Finnish Society**

Although I did not initially ask my interviewees about their ideas on the role of religion in Finnish society, this was a theme that came up in many of the interviews. Muslims tend to bring up the fact that religious freedom here in Finland has given them the chance to familiarise themselves with Christianity. The visible absence of religion in the public sphere is also a theme that many interviewees bring up regardless if they report being Christian, Muslim or not religious.

The commonly accepted idea of the secularization of Europe and its citizens, has led to a tendency of European societies to increasingly abandon religion as a defining factor, while emphasizing secular values such as democracy and human rights. As a result religion has in general been considered a problem, which often precludes the possibility of approaching and dealing with religious issues in a pragmatic and sensible manner. (IOM 2011, 5.) This idea of secularization is especially visible in Finland, as it is considered one of the most secular countries in the world with over 22% of the population not officially confessing any religion in 2013 (ELY 2014, 5).

According to Tuomas Martikainen, the research on immigrant religions is reaching a consensus that the nation-state structures of modern times, entailing Church relations and national identity, are important features affecting the outcome of the settlement process of immigrants (Martikainen 2014, 48). In the case of our study, I understand that it is not solely the immigrants themselves and their religious conviction that affect

how they choose to express their religiosity, as the wider context of the nation state of Finland and its society sets the framework for their actions. Martikainen also notes, that as states today have reinvented their role, the changes in political economy have had both intended and unintended consequences for religions (Martikainen 2014, 47). Thereby I am going to discuss some of the ideas related to religion in the Finnish society that were articulated by my interviewees.

Sami says that he isn't a Muslim, neither a Christian, but that he used to be a Muslim. So I carefully ask him if he still feels that faith has had any affect on his integration in Finland, as he is regularly attending church here. Sami thinks for a while and answers: *"No, no it's [faith is] not important. Here I feel, that my life is easier, not difficult [...] It's easier here because I don't need religion."* (Own translation). As other interviewees, who describe themselves as Muslims, have explained that here in Finland they for the first time have the chance of getting to know other religions, Sami sees that of distancing himself from religion has made his life here easier.

Sanna, who is a member of the Chinese congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, continued her regular church attendance after moving from China to Finland. For her, it is important that her husband is also a Christian, but she was surprised when finding out that Finnish Christians generally don't attend service:

*"In the beginning I was wondering, my husband, because as a Finnish, there are a lot of people are Christian, but they don't normally go to Church. Yeah...which is..in China we say, that if you have this belief, then you should go to Church regularly, like in weekends. So when I was in Shanghai I went there very often..."*

Sanna

According to Phillip Connor, the organizational structure of religious organizations in Europe is designed to enable worship, but not to create centers of religious communities as in the United States. Combined with the state policies of Western European countries, this can result in religion being a barrier for immigrant integration in Europe. (Connor 2014, 73–74.) Religion being a barrier refers mainly to immigrant religious communities, and how the way they can act within a society

affects immigrant integration. As the subject of study here is the majority religious organization in Finland, the outlook is somewhat different.

From his previous experience, Jussi is not used to religions engaging in dialogue with each other. He emphasises the fact, that in Finland he can choose what religious organisations he interacts with:

*“Here, if someone need something or want to know something, here Christian people they can go to the Mosque or something. People cannot tell them “you cannot go”. Same with Muslim people. Here we can go to the Church. Of course. We can choose despite our background.”*

Jussi

According to Tuomas Martikainen, attitudes towards immigrants do play a considerable role in the lives of immigrants. Attitudes and opinions have an impact on immigrants’ possibility to obtain work, enjoy life and even possibility to choose where they live. Non-Christian groups are the ones who experience most religious prejudice in Finland. (Martikainen 2004, 75–76.) The fact that the non-Christian interviewees in this study have chosen to interact with the Evangelical Lutheran Church, even if there was a possibility for them to find a religious group representing their own religion, might indicate that they are aware of the effects that prejudice can have on their integration. Choosing to interact with the dominant religious organization and being able to adapt their religious practice to that context, seems a functional strategy from this point of view, as none of the interviewees reported that they have been met with prejudice.

Juha has encountered different kinds of ideas about interacting with the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a Muslim by other immigrants. From his comment it is clear that Juha has some understanding of the relationship between the Church and the Finnish state: *“I know some people, like people from Somalia. They say you should not go to the Church, they say that if you go you are a Christian. Some people have...Bad relations to this government.”* By relating the Church to the government in Finland, Juha acknowledges its potential as provider of bridges to the general population and society at large.



Sanna again ponders about the possibilities of religious organizations to engage in for example integration and participate in wider discussions about Finnish society. According to her, the secular state limits actors like the the Evangelical Lutheran Church in many ways: “...*Because with government control sometimes the Church is a bit weak, we don't have the power to say anything or they cannot say anything, because that doesn't work*”. Sanna sees this as a problem, as she thinks it is odd to expect the Church to offer services without relating them to faith.

Heikki, who also reports attending a Mosque in Espoo regularly, comments about the possibility to interact with different religious organizations in Finland by explaining that religion is a problem where he comes from:

*"Another problem is religion. I'm a Muslim, and as you know, there are many different groups. And I am Shia. Before there was the taliban and now ISIS, and they want to kill the Shias, I don't know why. This is a great problem for me. Maybe you understand.."* (Own translation)

Heikki

For Heikki, religious freedom in Finland has given him the chance to approach other religions than Islam, and he has chosen to interact with both the Evangelical Lutheran Church and a Muslim community. Based on the experiences of the interviewees in this study, it seems that religious freedom in Finland does not only mean the possibility for immigrant to establish minority religious organizations, but invites them to interfaith dialogue and allows them to expand their understanding of religions more generally. In the light of the material of this study, it seems that religious freedom has a greater impact on immigrant integration than the secularization discourse.

Inger Furseth, Helena Vilaça, Enzo Pace and Per Pettersson conclude their edited volume by stating that the relation between migration, religion and the welfare state is crucial when making sense of the policies towards migrants in Europe. They also note, that immigrants are in fact central agents in the religious and cultural transformation currently happening in Europe as part of a broader social change. (Furseth et al 2014, 252–254.) Hence I suggest that the inter-religious nature of the connections to the Evangelical Lutheran Church, that many immigrants in this study represent, could be examined further in the light of this religious and cultural transformation.

## 6.4 Discussion

In my contribution to this study I have presented and discussed the views of immigrants on the multicultural work of the Evangelical Lutheran Church by looking at how they consider that their interaction with the Church has affected their integration. First I approached the themes from a social capital perspective, looking at the bonding and bridging effects of social networks created in church. Then I moved on to considering the spiritual aspects of support provided by the Church and interfaith dialogue as support for integration. To answer my second research question I sum up the chapter by considering the possibilities of the Evangelical Lutheran Church to function as integration service provider. As the theme was frequently brought up by my interviewees I included a discussion of the role of religion in Finnish society, and how it affects immigrant integration.

The unique position of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finnish society compared to for example other immigrant religious communities allows immigrants to create networks that seem to have both bonding and bridging effects. The most important way of supporting immigrant integration according to interviewees is the creation of ties to majority members of Finnish society (bridging), while the context of it being a community of people of faith serving as bonding factor. Spiritual support was also mentioned by several interviewees as the reason they attend activities organised in the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Also non-Christian immigrants found spiritual support in church and considered interfaith dialogue as a natural part of their interaction with the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

The importance of interfaith dialogue as means of integration is stressed by several non-Christian interviewees. For them, getting to know Christian traditions helped them understand the functions and values of the Finnish society in general. According to Phillip Connor, immigrants have a tendency of adapting religious practice to correspond with that of the general public (Connor 2014, 118). It appears that even if Muslim immigrants are not able to fully participate in Service, for example the Holy Communion, many have been able to find ways to express their faith within a

Christian context. When talking about adapting religious practice Connor refers mainly to immigrant religious organizations becoming more like those of the majority religion and to the fact that the religious attendance of immigrants tend to become more like that of the general public (Connor 2014, 118). The findings of my study suggests rather a more inter-religious take on adapting religious practice, which could be an interesting starting point for further investigation.

Considering the role of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in immigrant integration in Helsinki, some common ideas were expressed by my interviewees. The asylum seekers in this study, who had stayed in church, considered it a welcoming and safe environment, where they were immediately able to form connections with volunteers and church employees. The social networks they were able to create in this context were seen as important for their social integration. Language classes are another form of multicultural activities organised by the Church. According to my interviewees, attending these classes supports both their structural and social integration, as they are able to learn Finnish and make Finnish friends there. These language classes are useful especially for asylum seekers, who don't have a residence permit and hence are not entitled the official integration plan and services. But because of the social aspect of the classes, also interviewees, who have been granted residence in Helsinki say that they continue attending them regularly. In some churches the language classes are held on Sundays before Sunday service, and hence many interviewees say that they have started to attend service as well after class. Even though the language classes are explicitly not spiritual activities, they might serve as a springboard for immigrants of other religions to acquaint themselves with Christianity.

Beyond offering temporal asylum and hosting language classes, the Church as facilitator of integration services is seen as problematic by the immigrants interviewed in this study. Because of the strong emphasis on social connections and friendships in the church communities, immigrants don't feel comfortable asking for economic or otherwise material help or help with housing and job opportunities. Both Christian and non-Christian interviewees seem to understand the Evangelical Lutheran Church as offering primary spiritual and social support. This finding is compatible with both the ideas of some of the Church employees interviewed in this study and with the IOM

discussion paper on the DIRECT-project, which states that it is important to remember that religious communities are primarily concerned with meeting people's spiritual needs (IOM 2011, 18). The creation of social networks in the church context is on the other hand seen as important and meaningful by all interviewees.

According to many interviewees who have attended activities in Finnish parishes, translation services have been arranged on voluntary basis, which has allowed immigrants who don't speak Finnish to participate in for example Sunday service and Christmas parties. Also the Finnish language classes that interviewees have attended rely on volunteers from the church community. This kind of voluntary basis for organising multicultural activities and other activities in the parish seems natural to all interviewees as everyone express their altruistic will to help and participate, even though most are in a very vulnerable position themselves. As the Evangelical Lutheran Church is undergoing structural and organizational changes at the moment, this insight might support development towards a more voluntary-based structure.

As previous research on immigrant religions and integration has focused mainly on minority religious groups and organizations, this study adds a new perspective to the discussion by considering support from a majority religious organization for immigrants representing minority religious groups. The findings indicate that the Evangelical Lutheran Church might not be aware of it's full potential in supporting immigrant integration.

## **7. Combined Discussion**

In this quantitative study we discuss the Evangelical Lutheran Church as integration service provider by interviewing Church employees and immigrants participating in Church activities. From the perspective of employees of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the following research questions are discussed in this analysis: "*What does multicultural work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church entail?*" and "*How can the multicultural work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church support immigrant integration?*". The material collected by interviews with immigrant participants in Church activities is analysed in order to answer the question "*How has interacting*

*with the Evangelical Lutheran Church affected the integration process of immigrants?”. Through answering these questions we also consider “What kind of services that support integration should be provided by the Evangelical Lutheran Church according to immigrants and Church employees?”.*

The Evangelical Lutheran Church has offered multicultural work in some format since the 1970’s, but has become more active in working with immigrants during the last couple of years. The multicultural work offered by the Church can be divided into faith-centered work and work that goes beyond religion. Most parishes presented by Ida’s interviewees offer some form of multicultural work, be it language courses or through diaconia work. There are a number of congregational groups in foreign languages in the Metropolitan area of Finland. These groups offer (some) immigrants the possibility to worship in their own language and connect with people from their native country. These congregational groups can offer a feeling of inclusion and support for the immigrant and can enhance their bonding social capital. They also function as a bridge to the Finnish society, by providing practical information and support related to integration, and to local Finnish parishes, by encouraging their members to visit them. The employees in Finnish parishes feel that their strength lies in bridge-building, and as they do not have many immigrant members, they do not enhance bonding social capital as much as the foreign language congregations.

According to all immigrants interviewed in this study, the Evangelical Lutheran Church has offered them support in their integration process. As the interviewees represent different religious backgrounds, it seems the Church can function as bridge-builders regardless of faith. The most central support that the immigrants interviewed in this study have experienced in the context of the Evangelical Lutheran Church is that of creating and maintaining contact with persons of the general Finnish population. Also the support of and friendship with employees of The Church is valued as important in the integration process and for the welfare of immigrants. As the friendships and communal belonging is so highly valued by immigrants, they don’t see that the Evangelical Lutheran Church is the right place to ask for help in integration related questions like housing or finding a job, but prefer seeking such

support elsewhere. Hence the idea of engaging the Church in integration on an official level is met with scepticism from the point of view of immigrants who are active in the Church community.

In the discussion paper on engaging religious communities in integration IOM stresses that religious organizations serve first and foremost people's spiritual needs, and any other role is secondary to this (IOM 2011, 18). This view is also stressed by both Church employees as well as immigrant interviewees in our study. Sanna is an active member in the Chinese congregational group. By referring to the words of the pastor of her congregation, she reflects on the role of the Church in immigrant integration:

*“Actually I think most Chinese people when they move to Finland they in the beginning..if they have any questions or needs they always ask the Church for help. But I was thinking that if..if they don't believe in God, they still think they can get this help from the Church. My opinion is and also [the pastor] said [...] That he wishes that people would, of course he didn't say "we will not help if you are not Christian", but he said that, and I wish, that if they come to Church, at least to listen to some mass... Yes, not just that you get help from the Church. But for me I think personally, that the Church could also help, if they can do it. But of course the Church is not the place, who have to do this. [...] But they do, they have good networks, if they can do that. Like [the pastor of Chinese congregation], he has already so much work, he cannot have the energy or time for the "help we with this, can you do that". So..how do you say it..of course it would be nice if Church could help, but...”*

Sanna

Even though Sanna thinks the church community should provide help and support for its members, she sees that church employees already have their hands full and should mainly be concerned with meeting the spiritual needs of people. Thus, she doesn't think that the church should be responsible for providing integration services for immigrants. Church multicultural worker Martha has similar ideas, as she stresses the fact that the Church's main responsibility is to spread God's love and by that show charity to people regardless of nationality or faith. The Church also provides activities that go beyond religion, but these activities need to be motivated by Christian teaching and should not be taken out of the Christian context.

The Church has become more active in working with immigrants, which depends to a large extent on the growing number of asylum seekers arriving in Finland. The Church operations are mainly executed by employed staff, and the role of the volunteers has hitherto been somewhat limited. The multicultural work in the Church, which officially started in 1989, is mainly operated by employed staff. As the multicultural work has increased in the Church during the past year, the voluntary engagement of both Church members and local citizens, native Finns and immigrants, has increased. The Church is over all foreseeing an organisational development towards becoming more voluntary based. As the Church opens up their operations for more active involvement by volunteers, it gives at the same time an opportunity for immigrants to participate practically in the congregation. Being actively involved in religious communities has, according to Connor (2014, 220), a positive effect on immigrant integration as well as on their emotional and mental health. Conrad, who works as a pastor in a Finnish congregation, value immigrant participation in the Church. He says that immigrants can “show us how to do things”.

*“But I really truly believe that the more we can integrate immigrants and smaller immigrant communities within our parish structures and kind of allow them to work within our parish structures, the better it is for our parish work. They will show us how to do it. They know how to do it. They have to teach us. So I really think that we are here to learn something. And this is the reason why we have to completely change this idea that there’s this strong Finnish Church here that has its own mode of operation and then we have these small communities here ... we should bring them to the center and say that ‘help us to be a church again, to be a community’”*

Conrad, Vicar

Conrad explains that many immigrants have experienced voluntary based Church cultures in their country of origin. Their experiences are valuable for the Church as the it is becoming more voluntary based in its operations. Conrad states as well that the Church should be more active in embracing smaller religious communities, and opening up the Finnish Church culture to the influence of other Church cultures in the world. By doing that, the Finnish Church would be able to develop into a community again, says Conrad.

It has become apparent that the interviewees who work in Finnish parishes feel that their role in integration is not as large as that of those who work in foreign language congregations. The employees in Finnish parishes feel that they are not able to support immigrant integration through bonding, in other words, by creating networks and relationships with other immigrants and native Finns. The reason for that is mainly a language issue. The parishes where they work do not, at least on a regular basis, offer services in other languages than Finnish, and they feel that their parish operations aren't as multiculturally open as they would like. They feel that their strength lies in bridge-building, through practical integration support such as providing information about the Finnish society, offering language courses or discussion groups, or opening up their facilities to asylum seekers. The context in the foreign language congregations is completely different, as the essence of those employees' work is multicultural. The interviewees who work there experience their work as both supporting integration through bonding and bridging methods. This is confirmed by the one interviewee with immigrant background, who is a member of a foreign language congregation in Helsinki. She has both bonding and bridging experiences of social connections in the church community and has also received important spiritual support.

Based on their experiences, many immigrant interviewees in this study do not share the views of the Church employees who work in Finnish congregations about not being able to support immigrant bonding. Immigrant respondents report that they feel strong bonding also in Finnish congregations, since interpreting in for example Sunday service in different churches they have visited has been arranged through voluntary work. It should be noted that all immigrant interviewees in this study are in the special position of knowing the English language, so their ability to participate in Church activities is not the same as for other immigrants, who don't know English or Finnish. They have thus been able to participate in religious activities even though there is no congregation that operates in their mother tongue. This experience of bonding is thereby not necessarily representative for immigrants in general.

The immigrants interviewed in our study feel that Finnish parishes can also support bonding experiences despite the fact that Church employees stress the limitations of Finnish parishes' multicultural work. The IOM (2011, 21) discussion paper states that



religious communities are often unaware of their own potential in integration. It says that many migrant religious organizations do not realize that the work they are doing is actually affecting the integration of their members. By comparing the experiences of immigrants attending church and Church employees in our study it is evident, that this applies to the Evangelical Lutheran Church as well. Especially the positive impact on the integration of non-Christian immigrants who are not members of the Church has not been fully acknowledged by Church employees.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church is a religious organization, but that does not mean that it can only support Christian immigrants. Immigrants with other religious beliefs experience that the Church can support their spiritual needs as well. Through engaging immigrants from different faiths, the Church can also foster and uphold an interfaith dialogue, which is considered supportive in integration (Misane 2011, 23). The findings of our study support this idea, as several immigrant interviewees feel that through interaction with the Evangelical Lutheran Church, they can get acquainted with Christian traditions and praxis, which gives them useful insight into Finnish society and culture. IOM (2011, 14) suggests that religious organizations can function as “cultural mediators”, which correlates well with the experiences of the immigrants interviewed in this study.

Previous research focus to a large extent on migrant religious organizations and their role in immigrant integration. We have chosen to study the role of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in integration, as the Evangelical Lutheran Church is the largest religious organization in Finland and has thus a unique opportunity to impact integration. Previous research on immigrant religions usually limit spiritual support as something only attainable from their “own” religious organizations. In our study, it becomes evident that immigrants have received religious support from the Church, even though they might have different religious beliefs. This idea is also supported by Katri Kyllönen, who defines this research gap in studies on immigrant integration. In her study on the role of religion in conflict mediation, she has seen indications of the Church being important for the integration of immigrants of other faiths or denominations. (Kyllönen 2012, 166.) Our study has similar indications and we recommend further research on this subject.

It is also important to study the role of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in integration from the viewpoint of ecumenical and interfaith dialogue. As the Church is the largest religious organization in Finland, they have a certain responsibility to initiate and uphold ecumenical and interfaith dialogue with other religious organizations.

## **8. Limitations and Final Remarks**

This study gives insight into the current situation of multicultural work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Helsinki. It brings forth the experiences of both Church employees working with multicultural issues and immigrants with different backgrounds who have participated in activities organized within parishes of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. From these perspectives, we have discussed the possibilities of engaging the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the integration of immigrants and considered how the Church has participated in supporting asylum seekers and refugees in the past year. It also shows which activities and what kind of support the immigrant interviewees consider relevant for their integration.

The fact that this is a joint thesis has most certainly affected the process and outcome of the study in many ways, and even if it has not resulted in flaws, this aspect needs to be at least briefly discussed in terms of the relevance of this study. Writing a thesis together has not only given us the chance to study a subject that is of interest to both of us from different angles, but also enabled us to broaden the perspective and hence give the study more substance than a master's thesis written by only one student would have. The process of writing together has additionally resulted in mutual support and motivation, and having someone familiar with the subject to get direct feedback on any ideas from has been an indispensable asset. Positioning ourselves as researchers we represent quite different backgrounds and relationships to religion, which adds value to the ways we have been able to approach our subject.

According to Tuomas Martikainen, immigration and integration related issues in Finland are considerably political, and the public discussion of them often arise deep emotions (Martikainen 2004, 38). On the other hand religion and faith related issues are generally considered a private matter in Europe (Furseth et al. 2014, 255). By

combining these themes, our thesis deals with a somewhat complex and sensitive subject, which may have an affect on both the process and the outcome of it.

As Amica has interviewed immigrants, of which none have Finnish citizenship and some don't have a residence permit, she feels that her own position as a native Finn has most likely had an impact on the interview situations as well as the outcome of the interviews. Another thing related to the situation of the interviewees is the fact that most showed in the interview situation a strong need to talk about things that weren't relevant to this study, and Amica felt obligated to let them do that. Also, and with direct support from the findings of this study, most interviewees showed a will to establish friendship with Amica, as she represents the majority population and holds the keys to multiple possible further networks in Finnish society. As the wish to continue the contact in many cases was mutual, Amica has kept up contacts with several interviewees after the interviews. The personal involvement with the interviewees can have some effect on the way Amica present and discuss her interviews, although not to the extent that it would distort the conclusions.

Because of practical reasons, Amica's interviewees were required to speak English. Because it is not the mother tongue of either the interviewer or any of the interviewees, it has affected ways in which the themes of this study have been approached and discussed. Especially when discussing abstract and spiritual aspects of integration, Amica felt that the used language affected how the interviewees were able to convey their ideas. It is also relevant to acknowledge that the fact that all interviewees know English has had a great impact on their integration process. Because of their language skills, the immigrants interviewed in this study have been able to communicate with people and accessed information in ways immigrant's with no or limited command of English or Finnish are not. Hence the conclusions drawn from their accounts are not necessarily representable of immigrants in general. This does not take away the results of our study, but gives it a context and opens the floor for further research.

It should also be noted, that from the part of Amica's material, this study represents the views of eight interviewees with experience of congregations in Helsinki metropolitan area, and these views may differ from immigrants in general or

immigrants in other parts of Finland. Also the terms and titles used by the immigrant interviewees vary somewhat from the once used by the interviewees who are employees of the Church, as the two groups most certainly hold different understandings and knowledge about the Church as an organization. This results in some differences regarding the themes and approaches in Amica's and Ida's analyses. Seen in a more general context, the differences in understandings of the Church as an organisation holds probably true if considering the views of church employees and any other person not involved in the Church organization as well.

All but one of Ida's interviews were conducted in English, which is not Ida's nor the interviewees mother tongue (except for one). In the last interview, the interviewee spoke Finnish, which is not Ida's mother tongue either. As a foreign language was spoken during most of the interview situations, it affects how and what is said and also how things are interpreted when analyzing the interviews later on.

Ida's interviewees hold different positions in the Church, as some work in a congregational groups in a foreign language, some in a Finnish parish and some not for any specific parish. This study gives a taste of how employees in these different positions experience multicultural work and its impacts on integration in their work, but further research focussing on employees in these specific positions separately should be conducted in order to give a more comprehensive insight to the Church's multicultural work. By studying the perceptions of employees in these different positions separately, one could also find differences and similarities in how multicultural work is approached and understood in different positions in the Church.

We have put a lot of effort into the coherence of both the text and the content of this thesis by referring to the same theories, using the same methods and writing in the same style. Further we have together agreed on the structure and main objectives of the thesis. We have largely both contributed to all sections, by dividing the work equally and somewhat by interest, and naturally each of us has written our own chapters analyzing the research material. Thereby we consider the study to be comprehensive and meet the goals we have set for it.

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## Appendix

### Ida's semi-structured interview questions

1. How long have you been working in the Evangelical Lutheran Church? How long have you been working at your current job?
2. Please describe the work that you do.
3. What do you think about the role of religion in integration?
4. What do you think about the role of religious organizations as integration service providers?
5. How would you describe the multicultural work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church – in general?
6. Do you have immigrant members in your church?
7. How is the multicultural work visible in your church/Is it visible?
8. Please describe the activities that you would consider multicultural that your church organizes.
9. What is your experience of the multicultural activities in your church?
10. Do you think that the multicultural activities in the church has an impact on the immigrant' integration? If so, in what way?
11. Have the current refugee situation have a visible impact in the Church?
12. What do you about the role of the Church in integration in the future?

### **Amica's semi-structured interview questions**

1. Please tell me about yourself. About your background and the personal information you would like to share.
2. How would you describe your relation to faith and religion? What is your relation to Christianity?
3. What have been the most important factors affecting your adaptation here in Finland?
4. What are your general thoughts about immigrant integration in Helsinki metropolitan area? How have you been met and supported?
5. What activities have you attended in congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church? Have these activities affected your integration? Have you received support from the church community?
6. Has your faith had any affect on your migration and integration process?
7. Do you think the Evangelical Lutheran Church could or should have a more central role in immigrant integration in Helsinki?
8. About future interaction with the Church
  - a. If you are in the process of seeking asylum in Finland, will you continue your contact with the Evangelical Lutheran Church if you get a residence permit? In what way?
  - b. If you are permanently living in the Helsinki metropolitan area, how do you wish to interact with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the future?
9. What are your future dreams?

Finally, is there anything you would like to add or any questions you want me to answer?