

Led by the Spirit and the Church:

Finland's Licensed Lutheran Lay Preachers, c. 1870–1923

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Abstract

This paper examines the interplay between religious agency and institutional control. The church law of 1869 gave members of the Lutheran Church of Finland the right to apply for permission to preach from chapters. Men who passed the exams became licensed lay preachers, who could take part in teaching Christianity and give sermons in church buildings. The applicants had different backgrounds, skills and motivations. In order to avoid any disruption inside the church, they had to be carefully screened and kept under clerical supervision. However, licensed lay preachers could also be of great help to the Church. In rapidly changing modern society with a growing population and a recurrent lack of priests the Church could not afford to disregard lay aid. My aim is to show how the Lutheran church both encouraged and constrained the agency of the licensed lay preachers.

Introduction

In its church law of 1869, the Lutheran Church of Finland¹ gave laymen the right to apply for official permission to preach. Men who passed the required exams in front of a chapter and met all the other necessary criteria became licensed lay preachers. They could take part in teaching Christianity and give sermons in church buildings. During the first five decades following the church law, more than 300 men submitted their applications. The applicants had different backgrounds, skills, and motivations. It was up to the chapters to decide who was best suited for public preaching and teaching under the Church's guidance and surveillance.

This article seeks to describe lay agency at the intersection of inspiration and institution. Lay preachers had of course been a common sight in Finland long before the 'permission to preach system' was introduced. From the Lutheran Church's perspective, lay preachers were a double-edged sword. If not properly supervised, they could harm the Church with unorthodox teachings and cause disturbance in congregations. On the other hand, among these preachers were plenty of men who wanted to spread the gospel in a way that did not compromise the Lutheran Church's position. With the system of granting permission to preach the Church was trying to set standards to lay preachers and harness the skills of the most promising ones to the building of modern, Lutheran Finland. However, both members of the clergy and the men

¹ Officially known as the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. Here the 'evangelical' does not imply that the church was revivalist in its spirit.

seeking to become licensed preachers had various, often contradicting ideas of what kind of tools this building required and, perhaps most importantly, who should be in charge of using them. This discussion around licensed lay preachers reflects the hopes and fears of the rising civil society, where old power relations had to be renegotiated.

Finnish lay preachers have been widely studied, especially in the context of revival movements. Lauri Koskenniemi has provided multiple studies on the Evangelical Lutheran Association and its travelling preachers, of whom many also applied for the Church's permission to preach.² Erkki Kansanaho has discussed licensed lay preachers as a part of the Finnish home mission.³ There are also plenty of biographies and memoirs of individual preachers, including those who had either obtained permission to preach from the Church or at least applied for it.⁴ However, we are only starting to discover the different motives and expectations related to the system of granting permission to preach.⁵ In this article, I aim to give a general account of the heterogeneous group of applicants, licensed lay preachers' field of work and the different means of control the Church used. My time frame reaches from the church law of 1869 to the ratification of the Freedom of Religion Act in 1923.

Two of the key sources used in this study are permission to preach applications and minutes of the chapters' meetings, where the applications were evaluated. The application process started by sending a letter to the chapter of one's home diocese. During the time frame studied here, Finland was divided into four dioceses. The archdiocese of Turku and the diocese of Porvoo covered the most populous western and southern parts of the country. The diocese of Kuopio was located in the north and the diocese of Savonlinna in the east. The chapters' archives also hold annual reports about the whereabouts and actions of licensed lay preachers. In addition to

² Lauri Koskenniemi, *Suomen Evankelinen liike 1870–1895*, (Helsinki, 1967); *Suomen evankelinen liike 1896–1916*, (Helsinki, 1984); *Maallikkosaarna: evankelisen liikkeen voima*, (Helsinki, 2008).

³ Erkki Kansanaho, *Sisälähetys ja diakonia Suomen kirkossa 1800-luvulla*, (Helsinki, 1960); *Suomen kirkon sisälähetysseuran historia: Sortavalan aika 1905–1944*, (Helsinki, 1964).

⁴ See f. ex. Pentti Laasonen, *Kristuksen asevelvollinen*, K. J. Rahikainen, (Helsinki, 1953); K. A. Wrede, *Minnen från mitt arbete för Herren*, (Helsinki, 1940); Aapeli Saarisalo & Erkki Talasniemi, *Aku Rätty – körttisaarnaaja*, (Porvoo, 1975).

⁵ See Matleena Sopanen, 'Kirkon hajottaja vai rakentaja? Suomen evankelisluterilaisen kirkon saarnaluvan anojat ja maallikkosaarnaajan kriteerit 1870–1923', *Lähde: historiatieteellinen aikakauskirja* 15 (2018), 39–59; Matleena Sopanen, 'Maallikkosaarnaajan paikka. Suomen evankelisluterilaisen kirkon saarnaluvan saaneiden maallikoiden työala 1870–1923', in *Suomen kirkkohistoriallisen seuran vuosikirja* 108 (2018), 116–140. Hannu Mustakallio has studied the applicants of the diocese of Kuopio. See Hannu Mustakallio, 'Saarnalupatutkinnon suorittaminen Kuopion hiippakunnassa 1878–1910', in Timo Kapanen & Nico Lamminparras, eds., *Aatteiden ja herätysten virrassa: Jouko Talosen juhla-kirja*, Suomen kirkkohistoriallisen seuran toimituksia (Helsinki, 2019), 25–37.

these sources, I am using minutes of General Synod, bishops' and synod meetings, where lay preachers were frequently discussed.

The Lutheran church amid modernisation

The new church law was enacted in an era when the Lutheran Church was trying to find its feet in modern Finnish society. In the Swedish kingdom, the Lutheran confession⁶ had been the state religion since the end of the 16th century. Amid modernisation, the old uniform Lutheran culture started to shatter. Urbanisation, industrialisation, migration and different religious and secular worldviews challenged the Church's position and forced it to reconsider its established operations. As in many other parts of Europe, declining church attendance was linked to society's secularisation.⁷ Religion was still important, but it 'ceased to provide a common language', as Hugh McLeod puts it.⁸

In 1809, Sweden ceded Finland, until then its eastern province, to the Russian empire. Tsar Alexander I, an Orthodox Christian, promised to uphold the Lutheran faith of his new province, which was officially known as the autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland until its independence in 1917.⁹ The church law of 1869 strengthened the Lutheran Church's position by formally separating the Church and state: the new law only applied to members of the Lutheran Church, not to all the country's inhabitants. The Tsar and the estates still had the right to approve or discard any modifications made to the church law, but only the General Synod, the highest legislative organ of the Church, could propose amendments to its content. The church law of 1869 tore down some of the old power hierarchies. In 1854, Frans Ludvig Schauman – a professor of theology and the bishop of Porvoo from 1865 to 1877 – was put in charge of preparing the new church law. For Schauman, the Lutheran Church was both an important national institution and a community of believers, so parishioners needed to have some control

⁶ Both the Church of Sweden and the Lutheran Church of Finland accept the Book of Concord as their doctrinal standard. Kauko Pirinen, 'Luterilaisen kirkon tunnustuskirjat', in *Luterilaisen kirkon tunnustuskirjat*, (Helsinki, 2003), 15–27.

⁷ See f. ex. Eino Murtorinne, *Suomen kirkon historia 3. Autonomian kausi 1809–1899*, (Porvoo, 1992), 297–311, 288–290, 336–351, 354–356; Eino Murtorinne, *Suomen kirkon historia 4. Sortovuosista nykypäiviin 1900–1990*, (Porvoo, 1995), 32–46, 56–59, 88–90; Mikko Juva, *Valtiokirkosta kansankirkoksi: Suomen kirkon vastaus kahdeksankymmentäluvun haasteeseen*, Suomen kirkkohistoriallisen seuran toimituksia (Helsinki, 1960).

⁸ Hugh McLeod, *Secularisation in Western Europe, 1848–1914*, European studies series (New York, 2000), 50.

⁹ Jyrki Knuutila, 'Lutheran Culture as an Ideological Revolution in Finland from the 16th Century up to the 21st Century: A Perspective on Ecclesiological Perspective', in Kaius Sinnemäki, Anneli Portman, Jouni Tilli and Robert H. Nelson, eds., *The Legacy of Lutheranism in Finland: Societal Perspectives*, (Helsinki, 2019), 175–192.

in matters that concerned them. Laymen were given decision-making power at all levels of administration, and in the General Synod, they had the majority of seats.¹⁰

Strengthening the position of the lay sermon was a part of this larger democratisation process inside the Church. Domestic revival movements also had an impact on the new church law. The four big revival movements in Finland – the Laestadians, the Prayer movement, the Awakened, and the Evangelicals¹¹ – had all established their position with the help of lay preachers. The movements have their origins in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.¹² By creating the system of granting permission to preach, the Lutheran Church acknowledged the lay sermon on an institutional level. The basic idea of permission to preach (*venia concionandi*) was already mentioned in the previous church law of 1686. According to Hans Cnatingius, it was mainly used to prepare theology students for the priesthood by letting them assist priests.¹³ The church law of 1869 maintained the concept of assisting theology students, but these future priests are beyond the scope of this paper.

Applicants for permission to preach: Allies or enemies?

Between 1870 and 1923, more than 300 men submitted permission to preach applications. In the populous dioceses of Turku and Porvoo, the number of applicants was significantly higher than in the country's eastern and northern regions. During the five decades examined here, the chapter of Porvoo evaluated 136 applicants and Turku 110; in the diocese of Kuopio, which was the largest of all the dioceses but sparsely populated, the number of applicants was 42. The diocese of Savonlinna was formed in 1897 from the eastern congregations of the older Porvoo diocese.¹⁴ By 1923, it had had 36 applicants.¹⁵

¹⁰ Kauko Pirinen, *Schaumanin kirkkolain synty*, Suomen kirkkohistoriallisen seuran toimituksia (Helsinki, 1985), 104–109, 111–112, 124, 127–128, 132–140, 157–159; Eino Murtorinne, *The History of Finnish Theology 1828–1918*, The history of learning and science in Finland 1828–1918 (Helsinki, 1988), 79–93; Mikko Juva, *Kirkon parlamentti: Suomen kirkolliskokousten historia 1876–1976*, (Helsinki, 1976), 13–17.

¹¹ The Finnish Evangelicals are not to be confused with the Evangelicals of the Anglo-Saxon world. The Finnish Evangelical movement was born in the 1840s when minister F. G. Hedberg experienced a powerful awakening after reading Luther's postils. Lauri Koskenniemi, 'Hedberg, Fredrik Gabriel', National Biography of Finland, (Helsinki, 2001) [URN:NBN:fi-fe20051410], accessed 7 June 2020.

¹² Murtorinne, *Suomen kirkon historia* 3, 110–117, 127–135, 154–163, 178–186, 199–200; Kansanaho, *Sisälähetys ja diakonia*, 66–67, 228–229.

¹³ Hans Cnatingius, *Diakonat och venia concionandi i Sverige intill 1800-talets mitt*, (Stockholm, 1952).

¹⁴ The decision to form a fourth diocese was made in 1895. Murtorinne, *Suomen kirkon historia* 3, 319.

¹⁵ Some aspiring preachers applied more than once before either succeeding or giving up. Eight men approached two different dioceses. The figures given here represent the number of applicants, not the applications.

In terms of the licensed lay preachers' qualifications, the church law gave only loose guidelines:

For reputable and Christian-minded spirits, the bishop and the chapter may, after testing them, give permission to preach and take part in teaching Christianity in the congregation.¹⁶

The church law states nothing about gender, but all the applicants between 1870 and 1923 were men.¹⁷ Considering how critical the Lutheran Church was towards female preachers, this is no surprise. Public teaching and preaching were seen as the domain of men, while women's God-given calling lay in the private sphere of the home.¹⁸ This attitude is also reflected on the administrative level. It was not until 1933 that the General Synod allowed women to take part in the synod's meetings as delegates.¹⁹ There had, however, been famous female preachers in domestic revival movements. Women tended to have a more visible role in the early phases of revivals, but after the movements became more stable and organised, men usually took charge.²⁰ The permission to preach system strengthened the idea that men and women had different religious vocations.

Applicants for permission to preach were generally devout men, who longed to take part in God's work. In 1882, ambulatory school teacher Johan Lehtonen explained to the chapter of Turku that the reason for his humble plea was "a heartfelt desire and love for spreading God's

¹⁶ The church law of 1869, § 106, in Markus Lång, ed., *Kirkkolaki evankelis-luterilaiselle seurakunnalle Suomen suuriruhtinaanmaassa 1869–1908: alkuperäiset säädökset Suomen asetuskokoelmasta*, (Helsinki, 2015), 39.

¹⁷ The first female applicants I have found so far have sent in their applications in the 1970s.

¹⁸ From the 19th century onwards, women also became active agents in Christian caritative and social care. According to Pirjo Markkola, women both upheld and redefined the idea of gender difference, which formed the base for the Christian conception of the world. See Pirjo Markkola, 'The Calling of Women. Gender, Religion and Social Reform in Finland', in Pirjo Markkola, ed., *Gender and vocation: women, religion and social change in the Nordic countries, 1830–1940*, (Helsinki, 2000), 113–145.

¹⁹ The first female theologian graduated from the university in 1913, but it was not until 1988 that the first women priests were ordained. Pirkko Lehtiö, *Nainen ja kutsumus: naisteologien tie kirkon virkaan 1800-luvun lopulta vuoteen 1963* (Helsinki, 2004), 32–34, 218, 260; Pirkko Lehtiö, 'Naisten pitkä tie kirkon virkoihin', in Minna Ahola, Marjo-Riitta Antikainen & Päivi Salmesvuori, eds., *Eevan tie alttarille: nainen kirkon historiassa* (Helsinki, 2002), 196–209.

²⁰ This is a common phenomenon in the global context as well. See f. ex. Irma Sulkunen, *Liisa Eerikintytär ja hurmosliikkeet 1700–1800-luvulla*, Hanki ja jää (Helsinki, 1999); Hanne Sanders, *Bondeväckelse og sekularisering. En protestantisk folkelig kultur i Danmark og Sverige 1820–1850*, (Stockholm, 1995); Janice Holmes, 'Women preachers and the new Orders. A: Women preachers in the Protestant churches', in Sheridan Gilley & Brian Stanley, eds., *CHC, vol. 8, World Christianities c. 1815–1914*, (Cambridge, 2006), 84–93.

word in a non-sectarian way".²¹ Some applicants believed that God himself had called upon them to become preachers. In 1910, teacher Juho Rajavaara wrote to the chapter of Savonlinna that "God wants to use me as his meagre instrument".²² Since licensed lay preachers were officially acknowledged by the Lutheran Church, it was important to make sure they were not only Christian but church-minded as well. The Baptists and Methodists were the first to arrive in Finland in the 1850s, and the Salvation Army and the Adventists soon followed. Pentecostals arrived in the country at the beginning of the 20th century.²³ The system of granting permission to preach could not stop the new groups from spreading, but it did offer the Church another means of control. Priests could refuse to let un-licensed preachers speak in churches, which were the heart of traditional, clerically-led religious life. Strong dissenter sympathies would – hopefully – be revealed in the application process. For example, in 1912 Nikolai Smorodin's application was denied when the chapter of Savonlinna found out he was not only a leading figure in the Russian Pentecostal movement but also 'apparently not a member of the Lutheran Church of Finland'.²⁴

The domestic revival movements had also challenged and reshaped the Church from within. Since the second half of the 19th century, the movements and the Church had, for the most part, managed to co-exist in peace, but confrontations could not be completely avoided. Many priests, including the long-standing archbishop Gustaf Johansson (in office from 1899 to 1930), were strongly opposed to the Laestadians and considered them a zealous sect that did not respect the Church's authority.²⁵ Due to the tense relationship between the Church and the movement, only a handful of Laestadian preachers applied for permission to preach.²⁶ Another

²¹ The National Archives in Turku (hereafter: NAT), Turku Archdiocese Chapter (hereafter: TAC), Applications for Permission to Preach, F I j: 1, 1882.

²² The National Archives in Mikkeli (hereafter: NAM), Viipuri Diocese Chapter (hereafter: VDC), Arrived Letters, Ea: 23, no: 169/1910.

²³ Kimmo Ketola & Jouni Virtanen, 'Protestanttiset kirkot ja yhteisöt', in Kimmo Ketola, ed., *Uskonnot Suomessa 2008*, Kirkon tutkimuskeskuksen julkaisuja (Tampere, 2008), 95–126; Murtorinne, *Suomen kirkon historia* 3, 307–311.

²⁴ NAM, SDC, The Minutes of the Chapter's Meetings, Ca: 16, 15.5.1912, § 20; 23.5.1912, § 36. For more about Smorodin and the Russian Pentecostals, see David A. Reed, 'Then and now: The Many Faces of Global Oneness Pentecostalism', in Cecil M. Robeck & Amos Yong, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism* (Cambridge, 2014), 52–70.

²⁵ Murtorinne, *Suomen kirkon historia* 3, 99–117, 127–135, 142–150, 154–163, 186–188; Gustaf Johansson, *Laestadiolaisuus*, (Kuopio, 1892); the Minutes of Kuopio Synod Meeting (hereafter: MKSM) of 1896, 21–22, 238–239.

²⁶ The permission to preach applications do not always offer clear information about the applicants' religious affiliation, so identifying them as members of a certain revival movement can be quite difficult. One of the known Laestadian preachers is Aatu Heiskanen, who obtained his permission to preach in 1910 in the diocese of Porvoo. The National Archives in Hämeenlinna (hereafter: NAH), Porvoo Diocese Chapter (hereafter: PDC), Applications for Permission to Preach, E j: 1, 1909.

group to cause disagreement among the clergy were the Evangelicals. Men with Evangelical background were frequently seen amongst the permission to preach applicants. The main reason for this was due to the Lutheran Evangelical Association of Finland, founded in 1873, with its travelling booksellers and lay preachers. The Association proclaimed it wanted to support the Lutheran Church. Still, critics complained that some of the Evangelical preachers were only keen to talk about salvation, not about bettering one's ways. They were also accused of openly challenging the authority of local priests.²⁷

Means of control

The chapters were responsible for the practicalities of the permission to preach application process. Aspiring preachers were carefully screened by a bishop, a dean, and two priest assessors. The application comprised a free form application letter, recommendations, and a certificate of character provided by the priest of the applicant's home congregation.²⁸ Applicants were required also to provide information about their education level and possible recommendation letters. The chapter would test the applicants' theological knowledge and practical skills in preaching and teaching. In 1892, the bishops' meeting proposed to the chapters that henceforth they should demand that applicants write a spiritual essay on a topic chosen by the chapter.²⁹ The four chapters of the country had slightly different practices, and there were several attempts to standardise these exams. In 1912, the bishops' meeting proposed that all applicants be tested in practical Bible knowledge, dogmatics, ecclesiastical history, catechisation, and church law.³⁰ However, the requirements were not officially codified until 1932.³¹

The approval rates of the different dioceses varied. In the diocese of Kuopio, approximately half of the applicants passed the exams. The northern chapter was the only one to demand a statement about the applicant's skills and persona, provided by the vicar of his home

²⁷ Koskenniemi, *Suomen Evankelinen liike 1870–1895*, 36–47, 50–54, 118–129, 182–187.

²⁸ In the archives of Porvoo Diocese Chapter, only applications submitted before 1902 have survived, but the minutes of the chapter's meetings also offer information about the applicants. In the case of Savonlinna and Kuopio Dioceses, applications are scattered among other documents. Note that in 1923, the diocese of Kuopio was renamed as the diocese Oulu. Two years later, the diocese of Savonlinna became the diocese of Viipuri. For applications, see NAT, TAC, Applications for Permission to Preach, (hereafter: F I j); NAH, PDC, Ej: 1; The National Archives in Oulu (hereafter: NAO), Oulu Diocese Chapter (hereafter: ODC), Arrived Letters 1870–1923 (hereafter: Ea); NAM, VDC, Arrived Letters 1897–1923 (hereafter: Ea).

²⁹ E. Haahtela, ed., *The Minutes of the Bishops' Meetings*, 17.5.1891–5.2.1909, (Sortavala, 1936), 16.

³⁰ *Suomen kirkon julkisia sanomia*, No. 1 (1912), 18–19.

³¹ *Maallikoiden saarnakoulutus ja -tutkinto: Suomen evankelis-luterilaisen kirkon piispainkokouksen 14.9.1999 asettaman työryhmän mietintö*, (Helsinki, 2001), 4.

congregation. In the archdiocese of Turku and the diocese of Porvoo, the pass rate was around 54 per cent and 68 per cent, respectively. In the diocese of Savonlinna, nearly 70 per cent of the applicants passed. In addition, plenty of applications remained incomplete. To finish the required exams, applicants had to travel to the administrative centre of their diocese and present themselves before the chapter. This required both time and money, which for some applicants were in short supply. Lack of money, time and/or interest are probably the main reasons why only a fraction of Finland's lay preachers applied for permission to preach. For the average preacher, the chapter's approval was more an additional feather in their cap than an absolute necessity.

Licensed lay preachers were expected to work under the clergy's guidance, and the less they moved, the easier it was to keep an eye on them. The church law stated that the licensed lay preachers' field of work was 'in the congregation', but it remained unclear whether this meant a local, specific congregation or the whole of Finland. When the topic was discussed in the General Synod meeting of 1893, the delegates eventually agreed that it was up to the chapters to decide how much leeway preachers could have.³² For example, in the dioceses of Kuopio and Savonlinna permission to preach was usually valid for only one, predetermined congregation.³³ In 1912, the bishops' meeting recommended that permission to preach should only be granted when the applicant had been called to serve a specific congregation or a reputable Christian association. Annual reports were another form of surveillance. In 1907, the archdiocese of Turku asked parish ministers to give an account of the number of licensed lay preachers living or working in their congregation and describe what kind of impact their work had had on local religious life. Five years later, the bishops' meeting advised all chapters to follow the archdiocese's example.³⁴

In addition to licensed lay preachers, the Lutheran clergy also tried to keep all un-licensed preachers under clerical supervision. Among them were both domestic and foreign preachers, men and women from various denominational backgrounds. However, the Church had little control over these often itinerant preachers. The new church law had abolished the Conventicle

³² The minutes of the General Synod Meeting (hereafter: MGSM) of 1893, 940–954, Annexes, the Church Law Commission's report no: 19.

³³ There were exceptions to this rule. For example, the Vyborg Bible Society's preacher Antti Ahvonen was granted a permission that was valid in all the congregations where the Society operated. NAM, VDC, the Minutes of the Chapter's Meeting, 20.12.1910, § 50.

³⁴ *Suomen kirkon julkisia sanomia*, no: 1 (1912), 18–19.

Act of 1726, which had forbidden public religious meetings outside the Church. According to the church law, vestries could prohibit preaching in public, but only if the preacher in question taught against the Lutheran doctrine or caused a general disturbance. Priests were also encouraged to visit religious gatherings as often as they could.³⁵ However, for large and remote congregations, local religious authorities might not hear about visiting preachers until they were long gone.³⁶

Lay preachers – both licensed and un-licensed – were frequently discussed within the Church institution.³⁷ The General Synod met every five years and considered propositions initiated by synod meetings, dioceses and individual delegates.³⁸ It was suggested, for example, that preachers who wished to preach outside their own parish should always meet with the local priest or vestry before organising any meetings. Some wanted their skills to be tested in a similar way as licensed lay preachers.³⁹ In the General Synod meeting of 1886, lay delegate Sandbacka suggested that only ordained priests or men with permission to preach should be allowed to preach in public.⁴⁰ Changing the church law was not easy, since a proposal to do so needed to gain a three-quarters majority in a General Synod vote.⁴¹ Finding common ground in regard to lay preachers proved to be especially challenging.

In the Protestant tradition, lay preaching is often justified by the principle of the priesthood of all believers. According to Martin Luther, bishops, priests, and laypeople are all servants of God's word and are, in principle, equals. Based on their faith and baptism, all believers are spiritual priests. Luther's words have often been interpreted in the sense that all believers are entitled to preach, which makes an ordained ministry redundant. According to many scholars, though, this was never Luther's intention.⁴² The concept of the priesthood of all believers was

³⁵ The church law of 1869, § 33, in Lång, ed., *Kirkkolaki evankelis-luterilaiselle seurakunnalle*, 19.

³⁶ MTSM of 1875, 76; the Minutes of the Porvoo Synod Meeting (hereafter: MPSM) of 1892, 82; MGSM of 1886, 602, 606.

³⁷ See f. ex. MTSM of 1875, 74–88, 198–201, Annexe no: 1; MTSM of 1880, 74–84, 203, 205–217; MPSM of 1880, 43–52; MPSM of 1890, 196–208; MPSM of 1892, 80–93; MGSM of 1876, 290–306; MGSM of 1886, 212–224, 581–607; MGSM of 1893, 940–954. For a summary of the General Synod discussions about lay preachers, see Kansanaho, *Sisälähetys ja diakonia*, 242–257.

³⁸ Before 1893, the General Synod only met once a decade. Juva, *Kirkon parlamentti*, 18–19.

³⁹ See f. ex. MTSM of 1875, 85–87; MGSM of 1876, 293–294, 299, 304–306; MPSM of 1892, 79–80; MGSM of 1893, Annexes, the Church Law Commission's report no: 19.

⁴⁰ MGSM of 1886, Annexe no: 18, 53–54.

⁴¹ Church law of 1869, § 456, in Lång, ed., *Kirkkolaki evankelis-luterilaiselle seurakunnalle*, 161.

⁴² See f. ex. Timothy J. Wengert, *Priesthood, Pastors, Bishops. Public Ministry for the Reformation & Today*, (Minneapolis, 2008), 4–16, 19–21, 27–30; Eduardus Van der Borgh, *Theology of Ministry. A Reformed Contribution to an Ecumenical Dialogue*, Studies in reformed theology (Leiden, 2007), 7–12.

a starting point for several debates in Finnish synod and General Synod meetings as well. Many priests and lay delegates insisted that restrictions to lay sermons were against the principle of the priesthood of all believers and the spirit of the new church law. Restraining lay sermons would signify a return to the era of the Conventicle Act. In modern Protestant society, there was simply no room for a purely priest-led Church. Some delegates were reminded that lay preachers had had an important role in the early Christian church, and even the apostles had been laymen. Restrictions could also harm the Church if reputable, church-minded preachers became too cautious and stopped spreading God's word. Naturally, heresy should be fought, but only with spiritual weapons.⁴³

Priests and lay delegates who were in favour of restricting the lay sermon argued that the principle of the priesthood of all believers had been gravely misunderstood. Every member of the Lutheran Church had the right – even the obligation – to spread the gospel, but not in public. All believers were equal, but only some were called upon to become preachers. In addition to an inner God-given calling, aspiring preachers needed the approval of other believers. In the very first General Synod meeting in 1876, minister Bergh reminded that Luther himself was strongly against self-ordained 'corner priests'.⁴⁴ Many critics emphasized that they had nothing against lay agency *per se*, but it was necessary to make sure that only preachers with good reputations, Christian lifestyles and the right kind of views got to say their piece. True friends of the Church would be only too happy to obey stricter rules. It was the clergy's responsibility to protect the parishes from disarray and false prophets since the parishioners themselves tended to be both easily pleased and too often taken by their curiousness.⁴⁵

Of course, these concerns were by no means new or unique. For instance, the Church of Sweden had been balancing different domestic and foreign religious associations and their lay preachers since the early 19th century. In 1856, some sort of middle ground was found when the Evangelical Homeland Foundation (Evangeliska Fosterlandsstiftelsen) was established to organise the domestic mission field. The Foundation was based on the Lutheran confession, but it was still an independent agent that challenged the old church order. The Foundation and

⁴³ See f. ex. MTSM of 1875, 74, 76, 78–79; MGSM of 1876, 292, 295–298, 300–301; MGSM of 1886, 584–586, 598, 600–601; MPSM of 1890, 203–204; MGSM of 1893, 943–944.

⁴⁴ MGSM of 1876, 295.

⁴⁵ See f. ex. MTSM of 1875, 76–78, 79–80–86; MGSM of 1876, 294–295, 299, 301, 303–306; MGSM of 1886, 602–603; MGSM of 1886, 212–224, 592–599, 602–605; MTSM of 1890, 15, 77–78; MPSM of 1892, 81–93.

its leading figure, lay preacher Carl Olof Rosenius gained critique among the Swedish clergy.⁴⁶ The Finnish priests followed Sweden's religious development closely, sometimes with concern. In the 1890 synod meeting of Turku, vicar Troberg claimed that because Swedish lay preachers had been given too much power, they had started to envy clergymen and wished to become priests themselves.⁴⁷

The debates over lay preachers were partially due to the different theological schools the priests represented. By the 1890s, most of the leading Finnish theologians had become supporters of Beckian Biblicism, a fundamentalist interpretation originating from the theology of Johann Tobias Beck. The Evangelical movement also had supporters among the clergy. Doctrinal differences caused friction between the Beckians and the Evangelicals, and the travelling preachers of the Lutheran Evangelical Association were often at the centre of arguments. For Beckians, the Bible was the only guiding star congregations needed; associations caused unnecessary hassle. Many of the Evangelical priests supported the Lutheran Evangelical Association's work and hence took a positive stance towards the free lay sermon.⁴⁸ Some evangelicals, however, thought that more severe restrictions were in order.⁴⁹ The Lutheran Evangelical Association itself dismissed several preachers for their undisciplined behaviour. At the end of the 19th century, the Association divided due to doctrinal disagreements.⁵⁰

Even though the General Synod found it hard to agree on anything related to lay preachers, it did manage to make one alteration to the law. In 1893, delegates decided that the permission to preach could be withdrawn if needed.⁵¹ The idea was first initiated in the General Synod meeting of 1886 when dean Lindelöf expressed his concern that licensed lay preachers were out of the reach of proper disciplinary actions. Since the preachers did not hold permanent office in the Church, they could not be expelled like priests. Furthermore, the vestries' control over visiting preachers was not exerted over visiting priests nor licensed lay preachers.⁵² The

⁴⁶ Kansanaho, *Sisälähetys ja diakonia*, 21–28.

⁴⁷ MTSM of 1890, 49.

⁴⁸ Koskenniemi, *Suomen Evankelinen liike 1870–1895*, 64–68, 115–117, 190–205, 240–245; Murtorinne, *Suomen kirkon historia* 3, 167–174.

⁴⁹ See for example dean Rosengren's speech in the General Synod meeting of 1886. Rosengren was one of the founding members of the Lutheran Evangelical Association. MGSM of 1886, 588–590.

⁵⁰ Koskenniemi, *Suomen Evankelinen liike 1870–1895*, 99–108, 248–273; Koskenniemi, *Suomen evankelinen liike 1896–1916*, especially 17–30, 36–40, 48–56.

⁵¹ MGSM 1893, 940–954.

⁵² MGSM of 1886, 581–583, 607; Church law of 1869, § 33, in Lång, ed., *Kirkkolaki evankelis-luterilaiselle seurakunnalle*, 19.

change was ratified in 1895,⁵³ but the first preacher had lost his license five years earlier. Constantin Boije (1854–1934), a former missionary student and a member of an old noble family, had obtained his permission to preach in 1875 in the diocese of Porvoo. He soon became known for his connections to the free churches, but it was not until Boije became the head of the Finnish Salvation Army in 1890 that the Lutheran Church decided to cut ties with him.⁵⁴

Taking away a licensed lay preacher's right to speak in churches was the ultimate disciplinary sanction. By 1923, only six preachers had had their permission revoked. However, the decision was not always irreversible. In 1912, the chapter of Kuopio removed permission to preach from the carpenter Joel Halonen because of his connections with the Jehovah's Witnesses. In 1921, Halonen approached the chapter again and asked to have his permission restored. He had now become the head of a boys' workshop in the city of Kuopio, which was run by a local home mission association. The chapter was not unanimous in its decision, but it finally decided to return Halonen's permission to preach.⁵⁵ Halonen had managed to prove that his loyalty was, after all, with the Lutheran Church, and he had found a way to be useful in the field of Christian work.

Licensed lay preachers at work

In addition to the ideals of the new church law, there was also a good practical reason for the Church to be interested in lay preachers. Finland had suffered from a recurrent lack of theology students since the beginning of the 19th century. The first big drop came in the 1860s, the second at the beginning of the 20th century, and the third in the 1920s. According to the church historian Eino Murtorinne, the priesthood became less appealing in the course of on-going modernisation. Young upper-class men now had more potential career options. There were also financial factors since only a limited number of well-paid pastoral offices existed.⁵⁶

In a land with a growing population, the low number of priests became a major challenge for the Church. In 1912, it was estimated that there were about 3,639 parishioners per priest, and

⁵³ Church law of 1869, § 106, in Lång, ed., *Kirkkolaki evankelis-luterilaiselle seurakunnalle*, 39.

⁵⁴ NAH, PDC, the Minutes of the Chapter's Meeting, Ca: 182, 30.11.1875, § 3, Ca: 197, 10.1.1890, § 32; 27.2.1890, § 40; 3.4.1890, § 18; 10.4.1890, § 32; 8.5.1890, § 39; 5.7.1890, § 18; Markku Heikkilä, 'Boije af Gennäs, Constantin', National Biography of Finland, (Helsinki, 2010) [URN:NBN:fi-fe20051410], accessed 8 September 2019.

⁵⁵ NAO, ODC, the Minutes of the Chapter's Meeting, Ca: 62, 21.11.1912, § 24, Ca: 71, 3.2.1921, § 25; NAO ODC, Ea: 259, no: 22/1921.

⁵⁶ Murtorinne, *Suomen kirkon historia* 3, 233–234.

in the metropolitan region of Helsinki some priests had congregations of more than 10,000 people.⁵⁷ This was not uncommon in the wider European context. Anthony Steinhoff, who has studied urban religious culture in Germany, notes that in Hamburg and Berlin, for example, there were about 8,000 people per priest at the beginning of the 20th century.⁵⁸ In Finland, the under-developed road network posed another problem. Especially in large and remote parishes, priests struggled to fulfil their duties. One factor in this was the priests' tendency to stay in office until they were very old or passed away. Some congregations were even left without a permanent priest. Especially in the northern diocese finding long-term clergymen was often difficult.⁵⁹ The lack of priests is evident in the numerous applications for permission to preach. Applicants bring up the situation when describing their motives, and priests ask for lay assistance in their recommendation letters. In 1894, the chaplain Lilius and vicar Kiljander tried to persuade the chapter of Porvoo to give teacher Albin Suhonen permission to preach:

"In Rähäranta village, which is located on the crossroads of Antrea, Räisälä, Muola and Valkjärvi parishes, a talented preacher would be necessary, and since we are already elderly men, it would be good for us as well to have some help at hand, if needed."⁶⁰

The annual reports written by local vicars differ in detail. Still, when combined together from all the dioceses, the reports give a good general idea of what the work of a licensed lay preacher entailed.⁶¹ Local circumstances and personal relationships with priests determined how much responsibility and freedom the individual preacher had. According to the reports, licensed lay preachers would most often organise prayer meetings and catechism and Bible classes, hold Sunday schools, assist at confirmation and help with the teaching in ambulatory schools. Some offered pastoral care to the sick and helped priests with office work. The recommendation letters reveal that many of the permission to preach applicants were already familiar with these types of tasks. Interestingly enough, some priests had even allowed lay men to occasionally preach and hold services in church. According to the church law, this was permitted only for

⁵⁷ Eero Hyvärinen, ed., *Kertomus Suomen evankelis-luterilaisen kirkon tilasta vuosilta 1908–1912*, (Kuopio, 1913), 18.

⁵⁸ Anthony Steinhoff, 'Religion as Urban Culture. A View from Strasbourg, 1870–1914', *Journal of Urban History*, vol. 30, No 2 (2004), 152–188.

⁵⁹ On the diocese of Kuopio, see Hannu Mustakallio, *Pohjoinen hiippakunta: Kuopion-Oulun hiippakunnan historia 1850–1939* (Helsinki, 2009), 485–491; MKSM of 1922, 62–73.

⁶⁰ NAH, PDC, Ej: 1, 1894.

⁶¹ Besides the Porvoo diocese chapter, the reports are scattered among other arrived letters. NAH, PDC, Ed: 7:1; NAT, TAC, E VII; NAO, ODC, Ea; NAM, VDC, Ea, Eb.

priests and licensed lay preachers.⁶² The shortage of clerical staff seems to have been the main reason behind these priests' decision. For instance, according to vicar Skogström's recommendation letter, teacher David Hämäläinen had held services in the chapel of Konginkangas because the chapel did not have its own priest. Hämäläinen worked in Konginkangas between 1870 and 1871 but did not apply for permission to preach until 1873.⁶³

The case of David Hämäläinen is not unheard-of. In some remote chapelries like Konginkangas, it was common for teachers to officiate at services in the local church.⁶⁴ These so-called teacher-preachers often became long-lasting substitutes for priests. One precondition for obtaining a post like this was to become a licensed lay preacher. Some of the permission to preach applicants are open about their motives and their wish to become qualified as teacher-preachers.⁶⁵ Since the application process could take months or even years, some men worked as teacher-preachers for a long time before becoming officially qualified for the job.⁶⁶ Licensed lay preachers from other occupational groups also held services, but to my knowledge, not before passing the preacher exams at a chapter.

During the time frame studied here, claims for better clerical surveillance of lay preachers did not cease. Nevertheless, at the end of the 19th century the emphasis shifted: instead of finding ways to restrict lay preachers, there were now more attempts to organise lay agency and make it part of the Church's everyday activities. One reason for this change of heart was the Act on Dissenters, which in 1889 allowed people to leave the Lutheran Church and join another Protestant community. The Act clarified the dissenters' position, but it did not completely alleviate the tensions between them and the Church.⁶⁷ The Church also started to focus increasingly on home missionary work, which aimed at awakening people. Before the Freedom of Religion Act in 1923, all Finns had to belong to a religious community. For the absolute

⁶² The church law does not specifically say that licensed lay preachers can hold service, but according to the annual reports, this was a common interpretation. If needed, a trusted parishioner, for example the sexton or a member of the vestry, could also hold a simplified service. The church law of 1869, § 27, § 29 and § 106, in Lång, ed., *Kirkkolaki evankelis-luterilaiselle seurakunnalle*, 17, 39.

⁶³ NAT, TAC, F I j: 1, 1873.

⁶⁴ Sofia Kotilainen, 'From religious instruction to school education: elementary education and the significance of ambulatory schools in rural Finland at the end of the 19th century', in Mette Buchardt, Pirjo Markkola & Heli Valtonen, eds., *Education, state and citizenship*, NordWel studies in historical welfare state research (Helsinki, 2013), 114–137.

⁶⁵ See f. ex. the application of Manasse Ojanen. NAT, TAC, F I j: 2, 1909.

⁶⁶ Kaarle Wesala, *Muistiinpanoja*, (Self-published, 1935) 94, 98.

⁶⁷ Kansanaho, *Sisälähetys ja diakonia*, 253–255; Juva, *Valtiokirkosta kansankirkoksi*, 168–183; Murtorinne, *Suomen kirkon historia* 3, 347–351.

majority, this was the Lutheran church. The Orthodox community was the largest religious minority, comprising just 1.7 per cent of the population in 1900.⁶⁸ However, the Lutheran Church was well aware that a growing number of its members were only nominal Christians.

The Church was especially concerned about the working class. The labour movement's cause had some support and understanding among the clergy, but the fear of socialism was nourished by the statements of the leading socialists.⁶⁹ Lay agency was needed more than ever in the battle against secularisation. In the General Synod meeting of 1908, dean Bergroth supported a proposition which aimed at strengthening home mission via association work. Bergroth stated that the clergy needed 'the help of laymen, who have been enlightened by God's word, especially during these times, when God-deniers, the apostles of unbelief so diligently roam around countries and continents, spreading their destructive ideas.'⁷⁰ The spirit of the era had also encouraged some permission to preach applicants to take action. In his application letter to the chapter of Turku, written in 1913, teacher Olavi Mäkinen expressed his willingness to fight 'the atheist and materialistic worldviews that are trying to plant their seeds on our beloved church's spiritual field'.⁷¹

A home mission can also refer to caritative care, where the emphasis is placed on taking care of people's material and social needs. Before the end of the 19th century, Finnish home missions were largely organised by the voluntary sector.⁷² The early twentieth century saw a rise in the number of Christian associations.⁷³ An increasing number of permission to preach applicants found work in Christian associations instead of local congregations. Men working for the Finnish Missionary Society, the Finnish Seamen's Mission, the Finnish Sunday School Association, and a myriad of regional home mission associations submitted their applications.

⁶⁸ Statistics Finland: Population structure [http://www.stat.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk_vaesto_en.html], accessed 7 June 2020.

⁶⁹ There are plenty of studies that discuss the Church's position in regard to the working class, the General strike of 1905 and the Finnish Civil war in 1918. See f. ex. Murtorinne, *Suomen kirkon historia* 4, 19–22, 32–34; Esko Hartikainen, 'Kansa vai kaikkivaltias?', in Pertti Haapala, ed., *Kansa kaikkivaltias: suurlakko Suomessa 1905*, (Helsinki, 2008), 137–162; Ilkka Huhta, *Papit sisällissodassa 1918*, (Helsinki, 2010); Ilkka Huhta, ed., *Sisällissota 1918 ja kirkko*, Suomen kirkkohistoriallisen seuran toimituksia (Helsinki, 2009).

⁷⁰ MGSM of 1908, 291.

⁷¹ NAT, TAC, F I j: 2, 1913.

⁷² This was partially due to the power shifts between the Church and secular authorities. Poor relief had come under municipal control after the Local Government Acts of 1865 and 1873, which differentiated between the municipal and parochial administrations. Murtorinne, *Suomen kirkon historia* 3, 206–209.

⁷³ Markku Heikkilä, *Kirkollisen yhdistysaktiivisuuden leviäminen Suomessa: virallisen jäsenorganisaation kehitys 1900-luvun alusta toiseen maailmansotaan*, Suomen kirkkohistoriallisen seuran toimituksia (Helsinki, 1979), especially 93–97, 117, 153; Murtorinne, *Suomen kirkon historia* 4, 70, 74–79, 98–99.

The biggest individual group among these applicants are the preachers of the previously mentioned Lutheran Evangelical Association. By demanding or at least encouraging their employees to apply for official permission to preach, associations could show their support and loyalty to the Lutheran Church. Many of these associations employed priests or were otherwise closely connected to the Church, but they were still independent organisations. Becoming a licensed lay preacher could also be beneficial to one's career. For example, when Juho Alarik Varski approached the chapter of Turku in 1923, he was working as a temporary travelling preacher for the Finnish Mission Society. The terms of Varski's permanent employment required that he applied for permission to preach.⁷⁴

Licensed lay preachers could never completely replace the priests. The church law of 1869 stated that laymen could only administer the sacraments – meaning baptism and Holy Communion – in an emergency.⁷⁵ However, in 1907 the synod meeting of Turku discussed the possibility that selected licensed lay preachers be given the temporary right to baptise children, bless the dead, and give Holy Communion. The idea came from the Archdiocese's chapter. Assessor Björklund emphasized that this type of proposition would never have been made in "regular circumstances", but the prolonged lack of priests had forced the chapter to test uncharted waters. In reality, there was already a precedent where the boundaries between laity and clergy had been stretched. Teacher Pietari Toikka received his permission to preach in 1906 in the Archdiocese of Turku. A year later, the congregation of Ikaalinen chose him to work as an additional priest for a fixed term of five years. The parishioners and the local clergy had been asking the chapter of Turku to provide them with another priest, but due to the prevalent lack of clergymen, the chapter was unable to fulfil their needs. Toikka was allowed to baptise children and occasionally administer Holy Communion to the sick, but he did not have other priestly duties.⁷⁶

After a long debate, the Turku synod decided to send the proposition to the General Synod meeting of 1908. Many delegates found the proposition unfair to ordained priests, who had spent years at university to achieve their current positions. Blurring the boundaries between the laity and the clergy might also confuse people and weaken the Church from within. Others countered that the proposition's whole purpose was to help priests and relieve their workload,

⁷⁴ NAT, TAC, FI j: 3, 1923.

⁷⁵ The church law of 1869, § 39 and § 63, in Lång, ed., *Kirkkolaki evankelis-luterilaiselle seurakunnalle*, 20, 28.

⁷⁶ Sopanen, 'Maallikkosaarnaajan paikka', 131–134.

not to question the clergy's or the Church's authority. Ultimately, the General Synod decided to discard the proposition. The same basic principle was presented in slightly different forms in the General Synod meetings of 1913, 1918 and 1923. Finally, the delegates agreed that teachers working on some of the more remote islands in the Gulf of Finland could administer the sacraments.⁷⁷ As in Toikka's case, the decision was reached out of local needs and necessity.

Who is a worthy preacher?

Men from all layers of society submitted their applications in the hope of becoming licensed lay preachers. The biggest professional group – comprising approximately 40 per cent of all the applicants – were teachers. There were also several ambulatory school teachers, who offered basic education for small children and were usually paid by the congregation. Sextons, cantors, and organists were also common applicants. Applications were made by numerous men who earned a living from manual labour: farmers, carpenters, shoemakers, tanners, tailors, factory workers, and mechanics, to name a few, approached their local chapters. All in all, nearly 60 different professions are presented in the applications for permission to preach.

Even though chapters might have preferred some applicants over others, permission was granted to all kinds of men. Only the Savonlinna chapter decided to establish any profession- or education-related criteria for the aspiring preachers. In 1900, the eastern chapter decided that all men applying for permission to preach had to present a graduation certificate from an upper secondary school, teacher seminar, deacon institute, or missionary school.⁷⁸ A number of priests expressed their doubts about letting uneducated men speak in church. Preaching at a public prayer meeting was thought to be completely different from preaching from a pulpit, which symbolised the Church's authority. Again, not all clergymen shared this view. Some priests claimed that parishioners might find lay preachers even more approachable than priests, since they could relate to the simple and straightforward language they usually used.⁷⁹ There might have been some truth to this notion. From the first half of the nineteenth century, the Anglican Church had also used lay agents in its work in urban congregations. Bible Women and Scripture Readers visited the sick, dispensed charity, and persuaded people to attend

⁷⁷ MGSM of 1908, 371, 395–396, 1137–1142; MGSM of 1913, 1406–1422; MGSM of 1918, 389–400, 563–564; MGSM of 1923, 481–485, 531–543.

⁷⁸ NAM, VDC, the Minutes of the Chapter's Meeting, Ca:4, 29.8.1900, § 40.

⁷⁹ See f. ex. MTSM of 1875, 77–78; MTSM of 1890, 44; MPSM of 1875, 41–42; MGSM of 1876, 297.

church. According to Hugh McLeod, this type of work often proved to be more fruitful than the interaction between the clergy and the working-class parishioners.⁸⁰

At the end of the nineteenth century, the talk about lay preachers' education and the church's home missionary ambitions led to the idea of special lay preacher schools. One of the leading contributors of this concept was dean Otto Aarnisalo. The efforts of Aarnisalo and like-minded priests bore fruit in 1901 when the Missionary Society started training preachers exclusively for the home missionary field. Aarnisalo was also the head of the Finnish Home Mission Society, which run the country's only existing deacon institution, founded in 1901.⁸¹ Aarnisalo wanted to start preparing two kinds of deacons: some would focus on Christian social work, while others would become professional lay preachers, who could also temporarily substitute for priests. In 1910, the diaconal institute started to offer courses for lay preachers. Both the home mission students of the missionary school and the diaconal institute's preacher courses had to apply for the Church's permission to preach at the end of their studies. Despite high hopes, the schools' results were modest. Between 1901 and 1911, only ten home missionaries graduated from the Missionary Society's school, and the majority of them remained in the Society's service. Due to financial difficulties, the diaconal institute had to wind up the preacher courses after just five years.⁸²

Lay preacher schools were the result of a long debate. By the turn of the century, even the most hesitant clergymen openly acknowledged that the Lutheran Church needed the assistance of active laypeople. It was widely agreed that laypeople were well suited to social and educational work with children and young people. Youth work was much needed, because after finishing confirmation school around the age of 15, there were no firm ties between young people and the Church.⁸³ The laity could also support God's work in the domestic sphere. When it came to public preaching, however, opinions varied. The idea that one could study to become a professional lay preacher and have a long-term post in the Church institution was met with both enthusiasm and suspicion. Some shunned the idea that a lay preacher would hold an office like

⁸⁰ McLeod, *Religion and society in England*, 16–19, 26, 113.

⁸¹ At first, the deacon institute was run by The Evangelical Society of Sortavala, but the newly established Finnish Home Mission Society bought it in 1905. Kansanaho, *Suomen kirkon sisälähetysseuran historia*, 28.

⁸² Toivo Saarilahti, *Lähetystyön läpimurto: Suomen lähetysseuran toiminta kotimaassa 1895–1913*, (Helsinki, 1989), 153–161; Kansanaho, *Suomen kirkon sisälähetysseuran historia*, 27, 77–80, 82–83.

⁸³ See f. ex. MTSM of 1917, 125–131.

a priest, even if it was temporary. Lay preacher schools might also attract people who were more interested in making a living than serving God.⁸⁴

Licensed lay preachers had to constantly balance being innovative and submissive. When reading the annual reports about licensed lay preachers, it soon becomes clear what kind of qualities priests appreciated in their lay assistants. The ideal preacher was hard-working, humble, obedient and not seeking personal glory. Permission to preach applicants seemed to understand the kind of personality traits the chapters favoured. "I would humbly like to assure you that I have not made my plea out of any personal ambition", sexton Juho Ristreimari wrote to the Savonlinna chapter in 1910.⁸⁵ Teacher Jaakko Kolanen explained to the chapter of Turku in 1872 that he did not seek permission to preach light-heartedly. Should they decide to grant him the permission, Kolanen understood that he would be accountable not only to the chapter but 'to God's righteous judgement on the last day'.⁸⁶

Conclusions

Licensed lay preachers of the Lutheran church of Finland operated in a liminal space, located somewhere between laity and clergy but not quite belonging to either of these categories. Many of the permission to preach applicants sought institutional approval for their inner call to spread God's kingdom, either because they wanted to show their support to the Lutheran Church or avoid conflicts with priests. Some applicants also hoped to enhance their career prospects. In a best-case scenario, applicants' motives were compatible with local congregations' or dioceses' needs. Due to a recurrent lack of priests, home missionary goals and the overall spirit of the rising civil society the Lutheran church could not overlook the issue of lay preachers. Lay preachers were a common starting point for arguments among the clergy. The clergymen's opinions were influenced by different theological schools, local circumstances in dioceses and congregations, as well as previous encounters with lay preachers. On the legislative level, the system of granting permission to preach remained practically unchanged during the five decades examined here. In local parishes, however, the official guidelines of the church law were often interpreted in a way that best fulfilled the community's needs. Future research on

⁸⁴ See f. ex. MTSM of 1871, 206–207; MTSM of 1890, 43–45, 48, 56; MKSM of 1907, 91; MTSM of 1912, 111, 114.

⁸⁵ NAM, VDC, Ea: 29, no: 425/1910. Ristreimari's application is mistakenly archived with letters from 1913.

⁸⁶ NAT, TAC, F I j:1, 1872.

the regional level might tell us more about how the licensed lay preachers managed walking a thin line between institution and inspiration.