

President's Report 2018

The year has been very busy in our congregation with many changes and a lot of new activities.

This was the 2nd year for our pastor Mia Hagman. After learning to know our congregation and setting up a solid basis for our spiritual life's weekly activities during her 1st year, she has brought in many new ideas and initiatives to enrich our congregational life. At the same time, she has actively encouraged co-operation with other local, especially Finnish speaking, Christian entities. New activities include e.g. Light and Joy Events (Valon ja Ilon illat), weekly Sorrow Group and prayer meetings, many regular weekly and other events at Lepokoti FARH, Freedom Reigns event, Family-Fun Fellowship afternoon events. In Lepokoti, Marja-Liisa Palonen's voluntary work has been very helpful. Also inviting visiting speakers/preachers has brought extra variety to our Sunday services. All this has given members and visitors plenty of opportunities to hear and learn eternal, living Word of God.

Co-operation with pastor Dexter's congregation has continued smoothly, and by their request we have granted them additional time on one Saturday in each month. As a new contribution to the local community we have agreed to provide the meeting place for a local English speaking AA group.

Sunday Services starting time at 9.00 AM has been a bit challenging for some parishioners. The council decided to test during October – December if 10.00 AM for Finnish service and 11:30 AM for English service would function better. Unfortunately, this was too tight schedule, especially for pastor and music director and also many parishioners felt that the service was run thru too hastily. The Council ended up to a compromise: since mid-January 2019 the Finnish service has started at 9:30 AM and English one at 11:30 AM.

Year 2018 has wa a year of personnel changes. Our trusted and diligent office manager Hanna Kiuru decided to go for new challenges and Sarai Paavola started to take care of our office services on June 1st, 2018. Hanna helped with Sarai's job orientation and covered also her vacation weeks. At the same time we have also started to modernize and improve some of our office routines.

After many years of service with good merit as a treasurer, John Konkola decided to retire. The Council appointed Sari Mustonen as a new treasurer starting officially on June 1st, 2018.

I want to thank our many volunteers who have provided their invaluable support in various tasks, in kitchen, in garden, taking care of the building, during the Sunday services, organizing events and many other activities. We also arranged two successful Working parties/talkoot, one in April and one in November.

We agreed with the Lutheran Church of Finland that we take their web-platform and build our web-site on that. They provide their platform, tools, service, training, support and hosting for free. Most of the congregations in Finland and also Finnish congregations abroad use the same system. Thanks to our office manager's and pastor's efforts we finally opened our new Finnish and English webpages in December 2018. Now, also electronic giving or donations via our web-site are possible.

Mission work thrives in the heart of every living congregation. This applies to us, too. Hope For Women team continued their prayer meetings and discussions about the women in The Holy Bible. The donations they collected enabled 12 times 0,5h Christian educational radio programs for women in East-India region Odiya. This was done via Finnish mission organization SANSA and TWR radio stations. Another successful achievement was our Christmas project to donate a home to one Caribbean family. One generous parishioner donated one house alone, thus our total result was \$7200, two houses for happy families via Food For The Poor organization. We have also paid \$2600 to support ELCA's mission activities, like previous year.

Year 2018 was also a year of new members. We warmly welcome all of our 37 new members. That is 20% of our total membership. Of course, we also lost some sisters and brothers when good Lord saw their time had come. In 2018 we celebrated the confirmation of five persons.

Many actions are necessary to keep our premises functional. Sanctuary carpet renovation was completed in November for \$8400. Kitchen roof emergency fix for \$5400 was done by Bossler Roofing. The Fellowship Hall entrance awning replacement was done (\$1340). Lauri Kanervikkoaho was the key person to coordinate these and he also organized parking lot seal-coating and painting with pastor Dexter's help. We had huge AC problems during the summer, and they were handled with the vendor Hoppell. For fellowship hall we received a piano as a donation.

The Lutheran Church of Finland provided us their €15000 yearly financial support. Still, our congregation continues to struggle with big economic challenges today, and in the future. We can't continue like before. Our loss in 2018 was shocking \$80,000. We need to find new ways to ensure our future. Therefore, The Future Planning Committee has been working hard to prepare a plan for the Annual Congregation Meeting to discuss and to decide, how to proceed. To better understand the value of our premises, we ordered Church premises appraisal work from Economic Appraisers.

Congregation's Committees and some other bodies prepare their own annual reports. Especially Activity Committee, Property and Building Committee and Future Planning Committee have continued their work actively.

Improvement areas for the new council: Re-establish the currently discontinued or missing committees and, evaluate which ones are needed and restructure them to optimize their contribution and value.

I want to thank every member of our congregation and especially all staff, council members and volunteers for their invaluable efforts. Volunteer work is necessary to our survival and well-being, Let's continue together to take good care of our fellowship in Christ.

*This is the day that the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

Pertti Pietarinen
Council President