

## Report to the Nordic Bishops' Conference 2022

*The Church of Sweden*

### Trends in Church Membership

Research on sociology of religion has drawn attention to the significance of uncertainty and crises in relation to religiosity, where better material conditions, predictability and security are assumed to lead to a lower degree of religiosity.<sup>1</sup> The Corona pandemic has not had a clear effect on religiosity in Swedish society in general according to the Pew Research Center – during the first wave of Covid 19 an increase of 2 percent. At the same time, however, there is a clear trend break with fewer members leaving and more members entering the Church of Sweden. Although, the net effect means a continued loss of members, where especially the low baptism rate has had a negative impact. In 2021 the Church of Sweden had 5.6 million members, or 53% of the population.

Women and elderly members are less likely to leave the church. The probability of exit is particularly high among young, urban men and especially if you live in Stockholm. The probability to leave the church increases with higher income and education. The relationship with the church through baptism and confirmation affects membership positively, as expected.<sup>2</sup> Reason for resignation is mainly lack of faith, financial reasons and that the membership does not feel meaningful.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, more state that the Church of Sweden fulfills an important function in society. During the pandemic, the proportion has increased from 40 to 58 percent, and slightly more also experience that the Church of Sweden puts into words what is important in their everyday lives.

#### **Increased interest in voluntary work– but the pandemic hit hard**

The study *Av fri vilja på fri tid på 2000-talet*, which examines voluntary work within children and youth activities in the Church of Sweden, shows that the amount of volunteers have increased during the last decade. The study shows that family background and upbringing play a role in who later in life does voluntary work in the Church of Sweden's child and youth work, but also that they are not a homogeneous group. There are various paths into voluntary work. A change over time, however, is that young people who does voluntary work, place greater emphasis on the content of the work and external factors such as friends as a reason for being active, while older people rather highlight internal motives such as feeling meaningful. The study also shows that the congregations' choice to cancel or resume activities during the corona pandemic has had major negative consequences for the commitment.

#### **"We do not cancel, we make changes"**

The restrictions in the wake of the pandemic have meant that the Church of Sweden, like other churches and religious communities, has had to find new ways in parish life. During the corona pandemic, the church has contributed with spiritual, social, and practical support. The Church of

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<sup>1</sup>Pippa Norris och Ronldad Inglehart 2004, *Sacred and secular*, samt Pippa Norris och Ronldad Inglehart 2014, "Are High Levels of Existential Security Conducive to Secularization? A Response to Our Critics" i Stanley D. Brunn (red.) *The Changing World Religion Map*, s. 3389-3408

<sup>2</sup>Bromander & Jonsson 2018; Andreas Sandberg, Josephine Ganebo Skantz & Ingegerd Sjölin 2019, *Dop i förändring*; Tigran Babajan & Pernilla Jonsson (2021), "Leaving a folk church: Patterns of disaffiliation from the Church of Sweden", *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*. Liknande mönster ses i de nordiska huvudstadsregionerna se Lüchau, Peter & Andersen, Peter B (2012), "Socio-economic factors behind disaffiliation from the Danish national church", *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, vol.25, (1), 27-45; Urstad, Sivert Skålvoll (2017), "The Religiously Unaffiliated in Norway", *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, vol.30, (01), 61-81.

<sup>3</sup> Bromander & Jonsson 2018, s. 15.

Sweden met people's existential questions, growing loneliness and anxiety through extended opening hours for the “jourhavande präst”. Parishes helped with the purchase of food and medicine for the elderly and others in risk groups. This took often place in collaboration with other organizations, the municipality, and state authorities.<sup>4</sup>

During the first wave of the pandemic, the worship service was rapidly digitized. Before the restrictions were introduced, 12% of the congregations had ever had a digital worship or devotional. Three months after the introduction of the first restrictions, the corresponding figure was 84%. A clear majority, 68%, of these parishes then had digital activities at least once a week.<sup>5</sup> In October 2021, almost a third of the respondents to the Church of Sweden's survey to members stated that they had participated digital worship, or both digitally and on site during the past 12 months. The digital transformation has been more common in cities and the vicar's leadership has been important. Working in teams and the vicar's previous experience of social media increases the likelihood of using digital formats.<sup>6</sup>

### **Baptism and funerals during and after the pandemic**

The pandemic meant a sharp decline in baptism. Before the pandemic, the number of baptisms decreased by 3.3 percent per year on average, compared to 32 percent between 2019 and 2020. For the monthly baptism figures, the number of baptisms decreases sharply in connection with stricter regulations in 2020 and 2021. This easing of regulations can also explain the unusually high baptism rate in the months of July, August, September, and October in 2021. However, the increase did not fully compensate for the previous decrease. In total, this means 16,500 fewer baptisms than forecast for the period 2019-2021.

Changes in the Church of Sweden's funeral tradition have taken place during the years 2010–2020. The pandemic meant that the death rate increased, but fewer were buried according to the order of the Church of Sweden. The declining number of Church funerals is partly because fewer and fewer of those who die are belonging to the Church of Sweden. However, also among members it has become more common with non-confessional ceremonies or no ceremony at all. In 2020, 64 percent of all deceased were buried in 2020 according to the Church of Sweden's order, which is to be compared with 81 percent ten years earlier. Among members, the proportion who were buried according to the Church of Sweden's order has decreased from 95 to 90 percent.

## **Challenges and priorities**

The Church Board has decided on three major goals of the work in a more long-term perspective: To strengthened ability to contribute to a parish life meeting contemporary challenge, to strengthened commitment within Church of Sweden to a sustainable society in Sweden and the world, and to effective governance and administration in the church, so that the congregations can concentrate on their mission to spread the gospel in words and actions. Within these major goals the Church Board has identified several challenges and priorities for the years 2023 – 2025:

- A need to increase knowledge and understanding of Christian faith.
- Lack of mental health and well-being, existential anxiety, especially among young people and elderly.
- Climate change.
- The ongoing process of reconciliation between the Church of Sweden and the Sami people.
- Need to secure future skills supply within the Church of Sweden.
- An economically viable Church of Sweden.

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<sup>4</sup> Fransson, Gelfgren & Jonsson 2021a, *Svenska kyrkan online: att ställa om, ställa in eller fortsätta som vanligt under coronapandemin*, s. 31–34.

<sup>5</sup> Fransson, Gelfgren och Jonsson 2021a, s. 45

<sup>6</sup> Fransson et al 2021a, 47–48, 72–76

- Digitalisation

## The Church of Sweden's apology to the Sami people

24 November 2021 was the date of a unique, special, and solemn service of worship in the national sanctuary of Uppsala Cathedral. (<https://vimeo.com/649625329>) The Church of Sweden's General Synod, Sami, community representatives and international witnesses come together. The time had come for the Church of Sweden to make its apology to the Sami. The apology was delivered by Archbishop Antje Jackelén (<https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/samiska/speech-of-apology>). This followed a long process of hearings and preparation.

2006 saw the publication of the report *Samiska frågor i Svenska kyrkan (Sami issues in the Church of Sweden)*. This led to the first *Ságastallamat* dialogue conference in Kiruna in 2011, which in turn gave rise to the research documented in *Vitboken (The White Paper)*, the stories compiled in *Nomadskoleboken (The Nomad School Book)* and the book *Samerna och Svenska kyrkan (The Sami and the Church of Sweden)*. All of these were published in 2016.

At the initiative of the Sami Council in the autumn of 2019, the Central Board of the Church of Sweden working committee decided that the Church of Sweden's apology would be presented on two occasions, at the Church of Sweden's General Synod in Uppsala Cathedral but also in Sápmi. This second time will take place in Luleå Cathedral on October 23, 2022.

Linked to the Church of Sweden's apology to the Sami the Central Board of the Church of Sweden together in June 2021, with the Boards of every diocese in The Church of Sweden, agreed on eight objectives:

- Preach the Gospel in the Sami languages and in the Sami cultural context, with respect for the Sami spiritual and ecclesiastical tradition.
- Make Sami spirituality, theology and ecclesiastical tradition visible within the Church of Sweden.
- Help strengthen and revitalise the Sami languages in the activities of the Church of Sweden.
- Increase knowledge and awareness of the Church's historical relations with and abuse against the Sami and the consequences of these.
- Expand knowledge of and respect for the principles of indigenous rights within the Church of Sweden and in society.
- Increase the influence and participation of the Sami in the Church of Sweden.
- Strengthen the identity and spiritual development of Sami children and young people.
- Promote transnational Sami ecclesiastical life.

The decision entails the eight commitments as objectives and SEK 40 million in funding for the work over ten years. It meant that an action plan for continuing to work to meet the Church of Sweden's commitments for the 2022–2031 period would be developed in close dialogue with the Sami Council and the dioceses. For further reading:

<https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/filer/1374643/Worship%20agenda%20in%20English.pdf>

## A World of Neighbours – from programme to self-organized network

In 2018 the Archbishop initiated the programme *Interreligious Praxis of Peace – A World of Neighbours* aimed at strengthening collaborations and envision the work done by religious communities and faith-based organizations working with and for people on the move in Europe.

The programme identified the practitioners - people working in faith-based organizations or communities either directly with people on the move, with the communities welcoming them or in the wider setting of social cohesion and the vision of an inclusive and socially cohesive society - as changemakers. Empowering them is an increasingly critical factor in how immigration and integration unfold in Europe. Over the last four years the initiative has brought together practitioners from

different religions and countries in Europe in thematic workshops, seminars, online lectures, and trainings.

In February 2022 a final week-long online meeting, “A Week of Neighbours” was held, under the auspices of the Archbishop. The week showcased 60 open-for-all events bringing attention to topics like storytelling and migration, self-care for people on the move and practitioners, interfaith collaborations for integration and social cohesion, recent research in the field, and the borders of democracy. The closing session “Keeping our humanity LIVE!” can be viewed here:

<https://aworldofneighbours.org/keeping-our-humanity-live/>

The programme now enters into a new phase, where the work and vision is carried on by the practitioners in the A World of Neighbours network. The network today consists of a core group of 50 practitioners based in 20 European countries. The network held their first physical meeting in May 2022 and can be followed by the website [www.aworldofneighbours.org](http://www.aworldofneighbours.org)

## Memorandum of Understanding between Church of Sweden and the Episcopal Church

Since 2010 there have been dialogue on how to describe and perhaps formalize the relation between Church of Sweden and the Episcopal Church. The two churches have lived in close communion already since the 18:th century when pastors of Church of Sweden in North America started to serve in the Episcopal Church without reordination, our two churches shared a common table of Holy Communion. During times the relation has been manifested in different forms of cooperation.

“Report on the Grounds for Future Relations between the Church of Sweden and the Episcopal Church” was presented and received by the General Convention of the Episcopal Church and the Synod of Church of Sweden in 2015. The process to formalize the relation started in autumn 2021 and a proposed Memorandum of Understanding and a decision is planned to be taken during summer at The General Convention of the Episcopal Church and during autumn in the Synod of Church of Sweden.

The proposed Memorandum of Understanding is based on the writings in the Porvoo-agreement. One section is describing what we agree upon related to theological and ecclesiological matters. One what we promise to do and work on within the relation. This part will give space for different ways of developing the relation and suggest that a contact group with representation from the two churches will be formed.

## A Program for Christian Education

Since 2017 The Church of Sweden has been working with *The Program for Teaching and Learning*. The program’s main target is to increase the knowledge and familiarity with Christian faith and tradition for the members of the Church of Sweden and others and it is meant to apply to all parts and levels of the church. One of the tasks of the program is to identify and share these experiences so that we learn from each other. Another task is to address the topic of working more strategic, cohesive, and conscious with education, teaching and learning in the congregations. The program will reach it’s end by the end of this year and some examples of what has come out of the program are:

A digital bank of resources for teaching and learning has been created to be a site where you can share your best methods and materials with others when it comes to teaching and learning about Christian faith. As today, over 15’000 co-workers in the Church of Sweden are connected to the digital bank.

Newly written texts about Christian faith and tradition have been published on [www.svenskakyrkan.se](http://www.svenskakyrkan.se), 25 texts about the most central perspectives in Christian faith (for example Christening, The Lord’s Prayer, The Bible, Eucharist etc.) and 20 texts about life perspectives, for example loneliness, courage, good and evil, shame, friendship etc. Short films with people giving their

views on the central perspectives are also produced and published. Within the program, material, and methods to use these texts and films to enhance the education of Christian faith will be produced.

Financial support has been given the 13 dioceses with the purpose to give the dioceses opportunities to find ways to work with teaching and learning in whatever way suits the diocese best. The diocese of Linköping has just started a pilot education for “*The Lead Writers of Tomorrow*”. An education where individuals between 20 to 30 years of age will learn the art of writing articles and columns for newspapers as well as be taught about the theological landscape of today.

A course in writing articles and how to express your thoughts on social media in a good way will be given. The education is aimed for individuals who already have writing as a part of their employment in the Church of Sweden and its target is to give these individuals the courage to give their thoughts on Christianity a larger voice in the public space.

## Pastoral education

The Church of Sweden Institute for Pastoral Education has increased its number of ecclesial students training for ministry in the established four profiles of church musicians, deacons, pedagogues, and priests from 147 in 2014 to 315 students the last semester, with somewhat half of them training for clergy. During 2022 is the institute running and developing a new form of training, combining one week a month at campus in Uppsala with three weeks in between built by educational parts in parish, digital lectures, and individual studies.

An initiative is taken to investigate the direction of clergy training in the future and is to be carried out as an expert inquiry. The investigation covers both the disposition of academic theological education as well as parts with diocesan responsibility and of course the final training at the institute for pastoral education and educational needs beyond that. The commission is to result in a report to the national board of Church of Sweden by October 31.

## The Church of Sweden hymnbook

The Synod has decided to revise the Swedish hymnbook. The work has started and will be done in two steps. Step one is now ongoing. That means people can submit suggestions for new hymns to a digital e-service. This period is open to all. The collection will run throughout 2022. After that, congregations can tryout a selection of hymns. Step two concerns the revision of The Swedish Hymnal 1986. Copyright and economic issues are first investigated. When it is fully elucidated, the revision starts.

## The Church of Sweden Worship Book

The work with the Worship Book continues in the form of new translations into the languages acknowledged as official minority languages in Sweden. The Worship book is now available in Finnish, the Sámi languages, Meänkieli, Romani languages, English, French, German, and Spanish. This year will also the translation into Swedish Sign language come to an end.

## Pastoral letters from the Bishops´ Conference

There is an ongoing work and tradition within the Bishops´ Conference in publishing pastoral letters on various topics for Church of Sweden and society. A letter on the Eucharist was published 2019 and one on Christian education was published 2021.

## Archbishop election

Archbishop Antje Jackelén is retiring in autumn 2022. At a service on Sunday 30 October, she will lay down the staff and cross, which will be passed on to the Archbishop elect Martin Modéus. Archbishop Antje Jackelén is the 70<sup>th</sup> Archbishop and the first woman to hold the Church of Sweden’s highest office.

# Church of Sweden

During the spring 2022 the process of election has been. The Archbishop is elected by members of all the cathedral chapters and diocesan boards, as well as by the members of the Central Board. Since the Archbishop is also the Bishop of Uppsala Diocese, the deacons and priests of Uppsala Diocese who hold a position in the diocese or parish are eligible to vote, as well as an equal number of electors who have been appointed by the parishes of the diocese.

In a nomination election, those eligible to vote nominate at least five candidates for the Archbishop election. After being declared authorized to stand for election, they then become official candidates in the archbishop election. None of the candidates received more than 50 percent of the votes in the first round, and therefore there became a second round between the two candidates who received the most votes.

The process of electing a new Archbishop was completed in June 2022. The installation service of Archbishop elect Martin Modéus takes place on the 4<sup>th</sup> of December 2022. Martin Modéus (b 1962) is bishop of Linköping since 2011, Doctor of Theology (Old Testament exegesis) since 2007, and priest in the Church of Sweden since 1986. A more comprehensive presentation of the elected Archbishop, including a CV, is found here: <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/linkopings-stift/biskop-martin-modeus>