

## Sermon in Pruchna and Drogomyśl churches in Silesia Poland 3.7. 2022

Dear congregation of Drogomyśl. It is my honor to be able to visit you again after many years. I also bring you the warmest greetings from Arja Huuskonen, the vicar of our Mikkeli Cathedral Congregation. She greatly respects the co-operation between our congregations and wants to develop it in the future.



Today I am here with my wife who is a teacher at the upper level of a local comprehensive school. We have two adult children. Our daughter is working at Cornell University as a researcher, and she is living in New York State with her husband. Our son is finishing his economic studies at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland. The common interest and joy of my wife and I is taking care of our garden.

We have had quite a long official friendship between our congregations. It was my privilege to sign, together with vicar Karol Macura, the very first official congregational friendship agreement on 23. April 2007 between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Evangelical-Augsburg Church of Poland. At that time, I worked as a vicar in the congregation of Ristiina.



Karol and I organized, together with your congregation, many Finnis-Polish youth camps for almost 10 years, for example, pilgrims to the Taizé community in France and Finnis-Polish confirmation camps on Tatra Mountain. Thanks to that there are hundreds of people in the Mikkeli area who have very warm memories of you.

I am happy to know that the international youth work will continue next year with the Erasmus project between Drogomyśl and Mikkeli. Karol and Ville Kämäräinen, the director of the educational department of our congregation, pastor Tomas Bujok and our youth pastor Samu Turunen have already worked hard for the next summer.

It is very important that young Europeans from different countries and backgrounds can co-operate and meet each other also with churches with Erasmus Programs.

Like in many places in Finland nowadays, we have had a large administrative reform. Altogether six congregations were united into one larger Mikkeli Cathedral Congregation in 2013. Today our co-operation agreement with Drogomyśl continues with Mikkeli.

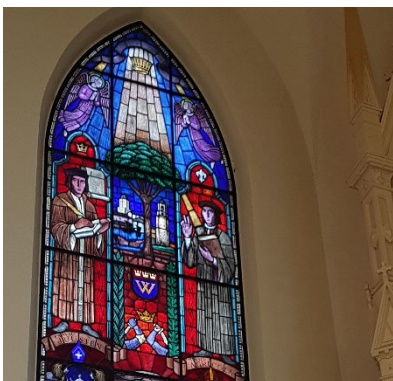
Mikkeli Cathedral Congregation has about 100 workers (summertime 200) with six churches for 40 000 members. We have 20 pastors, 13 deacon, 14 youth workers, 16 workers with children, etc. Arja Huuskonen is the vicar for all pastors who work quite independently in their areas with their own churches which used to be independent congregations. All administrative and support work like IT services, the information department, the economic department, etc, is concentrated in one place in Mikkeli and they have their own superior.



I used to have many confidential posts outside church life, as the Chairman of the Board of the University of Applied Sciences for 13 years. Nowadays, like the Prodigal Son 😊, I want to concentrate on pastoral work mostly in the Mikkeli Cathedral Congregation for the remaining 10 years before my retirement. Because of my working history, I also have a responsibility to take care of relationships with society and the congregation.

Both the city of Mikkeli and the congregation of Mikkeli have quite an unusual name in the Finnish protestant tradition from the time before the Reformation. Mikkeli is Mikael – Elohim – El- who is like God. Mikkeli is the only city in all of Scandinavia which is named after an angel and, in this case, by an archangel.

Here are some pictures from the Mikkeli Cathedral where I work nowadays. In this left stained-glass picture are our first two protestant archbishops of Finland (bishops of Turku): Mikael Agricola (1.) and Paavali Juusten (3.). Mikael Agricola was also a student of Martin Luther in Wittenberg, and he is the founder of the written Finnish language. He gave us the first Finnish New Testament.



During the Second World War, the headquarters of the Finnish army were situated in Mikkeli. In the war against the Soviet Union, Finland lost 12 % of its area and about 100 000 soldiers died, and 100 000 soldiers were wounded. It was 3% of the population. When these stained-glass pictures were installed in the church after the war in the 1950s, there was quite strong symbolism in the fact that Archangel Mikael was protecting the smaller and the weaker against the dragon – the evil.

Here is also the coat of arms of the city of Mikkeli. It is surrounded by flames because every third house (1/3) was burnt by the Soviet Union air bombing. And there is also Marshal Mannerheim's Cross of Freedom with the coat of arms of Mikkeli. Marshal Mannerheim commanded the Finnish army from the headquarters in Mikkeli. Mikkeli is the only city in Finland that got the Cross of Freedom attached to the city coat of arms after the war. After great sacrifices, Finland remained independent.



For that reason, all of Finland is breathing at the same time as the Ukrainian people today. Ukraine is fighting a righteous fight for its freedom and for its existence. Every nation has the right to protect itself.

Finnish people also have great respect for how much the Polish people are willing to help Ukraine. Today we all must hear Jesus's words: *"So always treat others as you would like them to treat you; that is the Law and Prophets."*

Especially in Poland, the Baltic countries, and Finland we know how important is to stay strong together. Ukraine's struggle is our struggle. Even though it is hard, we must always remember that there are righteous people in all nations, whatever their governments might be.

Today we all might understand better how important a strong and united European Union is for all of us. The European Union with its values is also important for different minorities like minor churches and for small nations like Finland and the Baltics countries.

We protestants have learned the principle: *sola fide, sola gratia, sola scriptura* (only faith, only mercy, only writings). True faith in Christ is not something that is happening only inside our minds, in our heads. Today it is time to look at James' words 2: 20 'Fool! Would you not like to know that faith without deeds is useless?' This question is very relevant today for everybody from an ordinary citizen to any leader of the European countries.

Today we can trust the words of Daniel in the Old Testament. What was once true for Israel is true for us today. (Daniel 10: 13, 20-21) *"The Prince of Kingdom of Persia has been resisting me for twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief Angels Princes, came to my assistance. He then said, 'Do you know why I have come to you? It is to tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. I must go back to fight the Prince of Persia; when I have overcome him, the prince of Javan will come next. In all this, there is no one to lend me support except Michael your Angel Prince.'*

God bless Ukraine, God bless all of us. Please, let peace come soon.  
Amen.

Jyrki Koivikko

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This spring 2022 the Mikkeli Cathedral Congregation collected the donation to Drogomysl's Congregation's deacon work. They used the money to help Ukraine's wounded soldiers from the frontline.

