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## **"Redundancy or Rejuvenation? - The Future of Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Churches as Heritage Buildings"**

As I look at the subject "Redundancy or Rejuvenation? - The Future of Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Churches as Heritage Buildings" let me begin with a quote from the Augsburg Confession (CA article VII): "The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments rightly administered. And to the true unity of the Church, it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, rites of ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike".

Thus the church is not a building but a gathering of believers and so in this context I am looking at the space in which a gathering of Christian believers who belong to the Lutheran denomination takes place. This community of believers gathers primarily in a space in which to worship – and so the sacred space is that where one finds in the Lutheran tradition the lectern, table and font. This of course is the building we know as the church-building. Alongside this there sacred space is space for various activities, be it for children, youth, adults, social or community services. So the sacred and the secular are quite often side-by-side.

The Lutheran tradition is also known for accepting the secularization of a sacred space or de-consecration, the return of a building or worship space to secular use. We also use a secular space in order to participate in the sacred act of worship at a certain time and place, be it the use of a community hall or schoolroom.

In Estonian and Livonian history, the church building has not necessarily been a place used exclusively for worship. For instance the church of Saint Maurice's Church at Haljala, St Martin's Church at Valjala or St. Mary's Church at Põide all served as fortresses at one point in their history. In Haapsalu St. John's church is a former warehouse modified into a house of worship when the castle-church was unavailable. St. Michael's Swedish church here in Tallinn was an almshouse and prison for "wayward women" before becoming a house of worship for a community of the Swedes and Finns who were exiled from their place of worship when it was converted into an Orthodox Church for the Russian Garrison – one of the few, if not only Orthodox church having a Lutheran pulpit incorporated into the iconostasis.

The Estonian Lutheran Church despite changes to geographical and political boundaries, despite shifts in population as well as networks involving transportation and trade, still maintains to a certain extent traditional parish boundaries though no parochial system officially exists and people tend to choose their congregations and places of worship on a

personal basis. Today, this means that a church becomes a base from which to go out into the surrounding community.

The soviet era did two things for the Estonian Lutheran Church, it made congregations with historical buildings become places of resistance and refuge while forcing dependent chapels to become full fledged congregations, in other words they had to stand independently. Intentionally or unintentionally the soviets strengthened the resolve of those left within the parochial boundaries to be guardians of a heritage, as it was hoped, one day would find its place in society again.

Although a network of sacred spaces and places is still identifiable, in the minds of Estonians today the church building that at one time stood in the midst of everyday life has moved to the periphery. To many the church as a whole is redundant since the subject faith and belief has moved from the public to the private sphere of life.

When are churches and chapels redundant and can they be rejuvenated? Redundant when no longer needed and rejuvenated when a building has found new life in the midst of the community in which they stand in and even if they do tend to stand on the fringe – sometimes at the cutting edge of life and culture.

This being said, some churches, chapels, places for burial and smaller houses of worship, such as prayer houses, which were closed and thus neglected, or destroyed in and the aftermath of WW II are gone for good.

In major centers such as Haapsalu, Narva, Rakvere, Tallinn, Tartu or Viljandi houses of worship found other uses, such as for sporting events, entertainment or storage.

The shift of worship and congregational life to so-called “winter churches” located in former parsonages and parish halls have left many smaller congregations with a challenge of what to do with a huge building in the “off or winter season” where climate control and comfort form a tough balance to achieve, especially if dependent upon a small local population with limited resources.

Yet there has been a movement for renewal and rejuvenation – church buildings being returned as spaces for worship and yet open at the same time to much more involving the cultural life of the local community. The creative use of church space has meant a delicate balance and dance between the sacred and the secular, as well as the piety or lack of thereof in the local population. Yet this being said, moving from a traditional place of worship, such as a prayer house, to a renovated multifunctional space can be difficult as witnessed in the case of the Helme-Tõrva church-concert hall. Then again, Karula is an example of a renovated granary being converted into and dedicated as a house worship in 1997 while the old church stands as a conserved ruin next door.

Spaces that were envisioned to be places for culture can reveal traces of the sacred – Take a look at the visual concept in this building, St. Nicholas Church Tallinn - the organ gallery in the back, the altar reredos and raised chancel in the front (a place for the choir), the baptistery

by the door – all we need is a lectern and table, then we have a sacred space with furniture complete.

Other examples of a blend of sacred and secular with the room functioning for both culture and congregation are the Cathedral Church of St. Nicholas in Haapsalu, St. John's Church in Viljandi, St. John's Church in Tartu or the reclaiming of the Alexander Church in Narva, and the design for the future of Tartu St. Mary's perhaps being the most radical.

Sacred space, secular space and multifunctional space including service space for storage, and maintenance – somehow today planners forget vestries and sacristies – today make up a living building. Modern congregations with community centers include kitchens, showers, toilets, social service, recreation as well as arts and culture in mind need a living space accessible for the young and old as well as those with various abilities and special needs.

Historical buildings with the help of a creative mind can be developed for the sacred and the secular as well as the mission of the church at large: Reclaimed churches Tallinn: Bethel, St. Michael's Swedish and Nõmme Church of the Redeemer.

Restored churches as in Põltsamaa St. Nicholas, Tartu St. Paul's which was rebuilt by their respective congregations after the war, are a witness to the resolve of the local congregation. In 1967 St. Paul's Tartu was partially expropriated and now is being reclaimed as a space with multiple use in mind.

Vainupea, Esku (both belonging to the local community) Uulu (owned by Pärnu Elizabeth's congregation).and Pikva (in private ownership, being moved to a new location and open for public worship) are examples of chapels come back to life. The restoration of Halliste St. Anne's is a symbol of rebirth for Estonia in the late 1980's. On the islands two examples rebirth under the influence of the heritage movement and help of friends abroad, in this case Sweden among other places, are the Lutheran churches of St. Olaf in Vormsi reopened 1990 and St. Catherine of Alexandria in Muhu re-consecrated in 1994.

Congregations in partnership with the local community is what keeps the sacred and the secular alive, as well as friends, sponsors and communities from abroad.

Baltic-German families have also played an important role in the restoring and conserving of the heritage of their families, in local parishes as well as places of burial – cemeteries and chapels (including those with crypts).

When are churches and chapels redundant and can they be rejuvenated? Redundant when no longer needed and rejuvenated when a building has found new life in the midst of the community in which they stand – sometimes at the cutting edge of life and culture. A more radical approach to the use of redundant space is not an easy undertaking at this time here in Estonia, for there are the memories of sacred buildings turned into garages, granaries and warehouses, in other words, desecrated. Those memories still influence what happens today in terms of redundant buildings – at the present time it is conservation than radical renewal or reordering which is more acceptable. A new and wider discussion about appropriate use is

needed in light of the present situation, demographics and resources available for restoration and rejuvenation as well as maintenance of churches and chapels, parsonages and parish halls.

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