

# Some flashlights of the work done by the Jewish mission organizations in Finland

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## General Description of the Activities

During almost two decades in Finland the activities of the LCJE have been organized by a national local working group with an abbreviation “JUST” as its’ title (formed of the Finnish words “Juutalaisevankelioinnin Suomen työryhmä”, the Finnish working group of the Jewish Evangelism). The number and the representation of the group members have been varying from 5 to 10 members representing mainly those Lutheran and neo-protestant operators that have the meant activities on their agenda. Through all the years there have been the representatives of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM), the Finnish Lutheran Mission (FLM), the Finnish Lutheran Overseas Mission (FLOM), the Friends of Israel, the Free Overseas Mission (nowadays Fida Int’l), Patmos Foundation for World Mission and some local Lutheran and Pentecostal congregations represented in the working group.

What has the working group achieved? From the very beginning at early 1990’ies there have been **two regular activities** annually taking place. **First**, in the spring time a **prayer gathering** has been organized somewhere in the capital area in the premises of one of the participants of the JUST working group. The intercession has concentrated on the Jewish evangelism and the Messianic Jews. The prayer occasions have been prepared by the working group members with the help of dividing the tasks as to the gathering of the prayer items from various corners of the world. Always some musical elements as well as short Bible studies or devotions have been an important part of the gatherings. **Second**, during the autumn **one whole day**, “**Jesus to Israel –seminar**” has been planned for the topic of evangelism among the Jews. The day has consisted of some presentations/lectures given by foreign or domestic speakers, followed by discussions with the participants. All this has taken place before noon. In the afternoon the crowd has been divided to the workshops with various topics to deal with. At the end of the day some essential themes of the group discussions have been drawn together. In the evening still a separate evening occasion has been organized with the main speaker of the seminar day as a key note speaker and some music - and dance – added to the program.

Between the main annual activities a lot of discussions on the theme of Jewish Evangelism at various forums, as well as personal encounter between Jews of Finland and us, have taken place. Through all the way within Finland a low profile in the evangelism has been preserved.

Some publishing activity has been performed, and as the most visible fruit of this was the translation of the section “**Jewish Evangelism: A Call to the Church**” (edited by Tuvia Zaretsky) from the Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 60, edited by David Claydon (Pattaya 2004), from English to Finnish in 2008. The booklet was warmly received by those actively attending the JUST activities, and the amount of the first print (1500 copies) has almost been sold out.

## General Observations on the Finnish Situation

In Finland there is a remarkable number of organizations for expressing the friendship towards the State of Israel. In most cases the motive behind the friendship activities is spiritual. Mostly these associations don’t show openly any kind of missionary attitude towards the Jews. In any case they have in the mind the idea of conveying the message of Jesus as the Messiah for the Jews by their deeds; for example the way of behavior, attitudes and the vocabulary chosen in the discussions.

Some of the activities have a lot to do with the Russian Jewry: Many kinds of camps for the Russian Jews at various age groups are organized in Finland during the vacation periods by the friendship and missionary societies.

As well as the friendship organizations acted effectively when there was the great immigration of the Jews from the former Soviet Union – also through Finland - to Israel in the 1990'ies, likewise they may have a central role to play in this respect also in the future.

The small Jewish community of Finland consisting of approximately 1300 members has been left to live most of the time in their own peace, without any planned evangelism campaign. Mostly the evangelism that has taken place has been private discussions or something alike on personal level. Within the Finnish concept of the freedom of expressing one's faith there is an unwritten rule of not disturbing anyone by direct attempts of conversion. Organizing open and free dialogue occasions is acceptable, and in those contexts an interesting exchange of the principles of faith may take place. I don't see in a short run any quick change of activities as to the evangelizing the Jews in Finland. By continuing the regular annual activities of JUST we in any case provide the attendants with some of the tools for this evangelism – and we may find, God willing, one day some ways to courageously reach out to the Finnish Jewry better than we have done so far.

The part prepared by Magnus Riska:

In Finland, the congregations and missionary organizations involved in the activities of LCJE have not functioned on a high level in evangelising the Jews. As a matter of fact, the Jews are as few as 1300. In Finland, a Jew is able to worship in two cities, as there are two synagogues: in Helsinki and in Turku. I am happy to say that the relations between the Church and the Synagogue are friendly.

Since our last conference in Keszthely in Hungary 2007, we have organized two events per year: a prayer evening in spring for Jewish evangelism and a one day Seminar in autumn. In autumn 2007 our European LCJE coordinator Jean-Paul Rempp was our guest speaker. Among other things he shed light on the evangelistic efforts among French-speaking Jews. In 2008 we had invited Professor Antti Laato, who lectured about our Jewish roots.

Last year Steve Cohen visited us from the Apple of His Eye Ministry, St. Louis, Missouri. Steve brought a strong message about the importance of evangelism among the Jewish people. He stayed with us for about 10 days and visited various congregations and was also interviewed by a Christian broadcasting company, which airs its programs on the TV7 Channel in Finland. He also challenged us to use email among other things to reach out to the Jewish society. We discussed this and realised that there are some contradictions in this field deriving from different cultural backgrounds. In Finland for example the use of e-mail addresses for direct evangelism among Jews would not be acceptable as regards to privacy laws.

In LCJE Finland we have also seen a need for more Finnish material concerning Jewish Evangelism. In 2008 we therefore translated two documents into Finnish: 1. *The Willowbank Declaration on the Christian Gospel and the Jewish People* (1989) and 2. *Jewish Evangelism – A Call to the Church*, Lausanne Occasional Paper from Pattaya (2004). Both texts are now available in one booklet, *Juutalaisevankeliointi – kutsu seurakunnalle. Uudistunut näky, sydän ja kutsu* (2008).

Finland is often described as the “Country of a thousand lakes”. On the other hand, it could also be described as the country with a thousand organizations, or even the country of a thousand Israel

friendly organizations! I admit that the last description is a bit exaggerated. The organizations that evangelize among Jews are not that many, however. The Finnish pioneer in this work is the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM) that began their work in Eretz Israel already in 1924. Some of you may be familiar with the Shalhevetyah-center in Jerusalem, which is a fruit of FELM:s work. Later FELM has been accompanied by Finnish Lutheran Mission (FLM), and the Finnish Lutheran Overseas Mission (FLOM).

At present both FLM and FLOM have workers at the Caspari-Center in Jerusalem. FLOM, has also been working with Messianic Jews in St. Petersburg. For some time ago FLOM sent a family to Ukraine in order to work there with Jews for Jesus. Fida International, a part of the Pentecostal movement in Finland, sends youth groups doing outreach in Israel annually. Moreover, Patmos Foundation for World Mission has been working extensively among Russian immigrants. In all, we are very grateful for the present cooperation, and recently one of our workers made a tour in Finland with a representative for Jews for Jesus Ukraine in autumn 2010.