

## Article

# Same-Sex Marriage, Toleration, and the Clergy of the Finnish Lutheran Church

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**Abstract:** In this study, I clarify what kind of attitudes the clergy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) have towards same-sex marriage and how they treat people who disagree with them. The empirical research material consists of 534 answers from Finnish clergy. The ELCF has rejected same-sex marriages, while in all other Nordic countries, the Lutheran churches are marrying same-sex couples. However, over half of the Finnish Lutheran clergy support same-sex marriages in the church. My article shows that the main justifications for their attitudes are: (1) theological justifications, (2) legal justifications, and (3) justifications related to the essence of marriage. Most of the priests treated respectfully those who disagree with them, while a third of the priests had negative thoughts. As a background theory I use the Theory of Moral Foundations, which gives useful tools for understanding why the clergy are divided by same-sex marriage.

**Keywords:** clergy; ELCF; Lutheranism; marriage; moral foundation theory; same-sex marriage; sexual minorities; toleration

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Same-Sex Marriage in Finland

Same-sex marriage in Finland has been legal since 2017. Previously, from 2002, registered partnerships had been available to same-sex couples. This provided almost the same rights as marriage for opposite-sex couples, apart from adoption rights and the right to a joint last name. Finland was the last Nordic country to introduce same-sex marriage. However, public support had already been growing gradually before Finland legally recognized same-sex marriage. In 2006, 45% of Finns supported same-sex marriage. In 2017, the corresponding figure was 64% ([Polls and Research 2006](#); [Pew Research Center 2018](#)).

In Finland, religious communities have played quite a prominent role in the debate on same-sex marriage. The main governing bodies, religious leaders, and members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) in particular commented in a lively manner on the laws ([Kallatsa 2020](#)). The ELCF is one of the national churches and the largest church in Finland. In 2020, 67% of Finns belonged to the ELCF. Although the number of members has been declining in recent decades, the ELCF has a significant role as a social debater.

Understanding of marriage in the ELCF has changed over time, and there is no consensus on same-sex marriage. However, the main governing bodies, the General Synod and the Bishops' Conference have accepted the definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman. Hence, same-sex couples cannot be wed in the ELCF. Despite this, tens of ELCF priests began to marry same-sex couples right after Finland legally recognized same-sex marriage. These marriages are legally valid, but contrary to the rules of the General Synod and the Bishops' Conference of the ELCF. The legality is due to the dual role of the priest as the initiator of the marriage. In Finland, a register office wedding is the alternative to church weddings. As the initiator, the priest represents both the church and the state ([Marriage Act 1929](#), 17 §).

The unclear situation in the ELCF is mainly because the members of the Great Synod are more conservative than the employees of the church, including the clergy and bishops.

The employees, in turn, are more conservative than most of the members of the ELCF. Helander and Ketola (2020) have shown that there is a gap between popular opinion and the ELCF's stance on same-sex marriage. This is mainly because the ELCF decision-makers are more religious and older than the general membership. However, attitudes towards same-sex marriage are currently changing. Many surveys in Finland and elsewhere have shown that the attitudes of the clergy and other religious leaders have changed in recent decades (Kallatsa and Kiiski 2019; Tervo-Niemelä 2018; Kirby et al. 2017; Cragun et al. 2015; Niemelä 2014; Whitehead 2013; Cadge et al. 2012; Niemelä 2010; Niemelä and Palmu 2006). In 2006, 36% of the clergy in the ELCF supported the blessing of registered partnerships. Half of the clergy opposed it. In 2018, 69% supported it, while only 22% opposed it. Additionally, in 2018, 56% of the clergy supported same-sex marriage in the church, while 30% opposed it. (Niemelä and Palmu 2006; Tervo-Niemelä 2018).

Early studies have shown that Finnish Lutheran clergy have manifold attitudes towards homosexuality and same-sex marriage (Kallatsa 2020; Kallatsa and Kiiski 2019). The qualitative study from 2020 pointed out that Finnish clergy talk somewhat about toleration. According to the study, toleration is a problematic concept: Who do priests really tolerate? What kind of attitudes do they tolerate? Do they tolerate the attitudes which are opposed to their own and do they tolerate people who have opposite attitudes to their own? In this article, I first ask what kind of attitudes the Finnish Lutheran clergy have towards same-sex marriages in the church, and second, I clarify the concept of toleration in the thinking of Finnish clergy. As a background theory I use a Theory of Moral Foundations by Jonathan Haidt. Next, I will illustrate shortly some early studies about religion, gender and homosexuality, present Haidt's theory and my empirical data. After it I move on to my findings. My article shows that priests argue their views with theological and legal justifications as well as justifications related to the essence of marriage. Most of them have respectful thoughts towards those who disagree with them, but also negative thoughts were presented.

### *1.2. Religion, Gender, and Homosexuality*

Relationship between gender, sexuality and religion has been examined a lot in earlier research literature (see e.g., Yip et al. 2011; Richardson 2010; Rahman and Jackson 2010; Hunt and Yip 2012; Nynäs and Yip 2012). In many religious traditions, the patriarchal exercise of power and the dichotomy of sexuality (division into two sexes: male and female) have been—and still are—self-evident. However, religions also influence the views of human beings concerning sexuality and gender. As McGuire (2008, pp. 159–61) has argued, religion can both strengthen the traditional ideas but also call strict traditions and action into question.

In the 21st century, many scholars have been interested in particularly the relationship between homosexuality and religion (e.g., Cadge et al. 2012; Whitehead 2013; Cragun et al. 2015; Kirby et al. 2017). In Christian tradition, and in most other religious traditions, sexual partnerships are for a man and a woman. Homosexual partnerships are allowed only exceptionally. According to Herdt (2005, pp. 4112–15), there have been found three forms of the cultural structuring of homosexual activities and organization: (1) Homosexuality is age-structured which means that people of the same sex but of different ages are sexually involved, (2) Homosexuality is gender-reversed wherein a person adopts for example clothes of the opposite sex, and (3) Homosexuality is role-specialized which means that a person, by virtue of his/her social or religious role, is entitled to engage in homosexual activity. In Christian tradition, homosexual acts have usually been forbidden but there are some exceptions. For instance, in the Orthodox tradition, relationships between two men have been blessed in the Middle Ages. The relationships between two male friends have been called “adelfopoiesis”. The scholars have presented many opposing views of the blessed relationships: while some think that the Orthodox church has blessed homoerotic partnerships, others argue that there was nothing erotic in those relationships (See e.g., Boswell 1994; Rapp 2016).

The concept on naturalness is one of the most discussed themes in religion, gender and sexuality. The gender hierarchy—a man is above a woman—has been considered part of the natural order of world (Merenlahti 2015). The notion of naturalness has been a widely discussed theme also in the debate about homosexuality same-sex marriage in Finland (Kallatsa 2020, pp. 162–63). The Nordic debate about gender and sexuality has strongly focused on sexual minorities and their rights in societies and religious communities during recent decades (see e.g., Kallatsa 2020).

In this article, I contribute to the research area of religion, gender, and homosexuality by examining the attitudes of Finnish Lutheran clergy about same-sex marriage, and people who disagree them. The theme of religion and sexuality is often tense—and so it has been recent years in Finland and many other countries when debating about same-sex marriages.

### 1.3. Toleration and Moral Foundation Theory

This article examines the attitudes of ELCF clergy towards same-sex marriages in church and the concept of toleration in the thinking of clergy. The noun ‘toleration’ means “the practice of tolerating something, in particular differences of opinion or behaviour” (Oxford English Dictionary 2021). McKinnon (2006) showed some structural features of toleration on which most contemporary theorists agree. These essential structural features of toleration are:

- (1) Difference: What is tolerated differs from the tolerator’s conception of what should be done, valued or believed.
- (2) Importance: What is tolerated by the tolerator is not trivial to them.
- (3) Opposition: The tolerator disapproves of and/or dislikes what they tolerate and is ipso facto disposed to act to alter or suppress what they oppose.
- (4) Power: The tolerator believes themselves to have the power to alter or suppress what is tolerated.
- (5) Non-rejection: The tolerator does not exercise this power.
- (6) Requirement: Toleration is right and/or expedient, and the tolerator is virtuous, and/or just, and/or prudent.

In this article, I understand the concept of toleration as described above. As background theory, I use the moral foundations theory by Jonathan Haidt. The theory explains why liberals, conservatives and libertarians have such different intuitions about right and wrong (Haidt 2012). The moral foundations theory has been used widely in many academic disciplines in recent years. For instance, psychologists (e.g., Federico et al. 2013; McAdams et al. 2008) and political scientists (e.g., Graham et al. 2009; Weber and Federico 2013; Kertzer et al. 2014) have applied the theory in multiply ways. In the ELCF, the large debate about same-sex marriage has precisely been seen as a struggle between liberals and conservatives. According to moral foundations theory, differences in people’s moral concerns can be described as follows:

- (1) Care: taking care of others, especially those who are suffering
- (2) Fairness: promoting cooperation
- (3) Loyalty: finding good team players
- (4) Authority: social order and tradition which promotes the success of community
- (5) Sanctity: irrational and extreme values which are important for binding groups together.

Haidt (2012) shows in his theory that the (American) left relies primarily on the care and fairness foundations, while the right uses all five. In this article, I illustrate where the clergy of the ELCF are placed in moral foundations theory, especially from the viewpoint of toleration.

## 2. Aim of the Study, Materials and Method

In this article, I ask what kind of attitudes the clergy of the ELCF have towards same-sex marriages in the church, and what kind of thoughts they have about toleration in the

question of same-sex marriage. The research questions are: (1) What kind of attitudes do the clergy have towards marrying same-sex couples in a church? (2) How do the clergy treat people who disagree with them about same-sex marriage? The empirical research material was gathered in spring 2017 through an online questionnaire and consists of 534 answers from Finnish clergy. The respondents represent about 20% of all Finnish Lutheran priests. The method of this study is content analysis. I have used Atlas.ti to analyze my material. After reading my data carefully several times, I started to code the data by searching themes that will address my initial research questions. First, I found many little themes to both of the research questions. After it, I combined these little themes so that finally I had a few big themes which I call main categories<sup>1</sup>.

The questionnaire comprised both multiple-choice questions and open questions. In this article, I focus on analyzing the open questions where the priests were asked:

“Why do you support/oppose marrying same-sex couples in the church?”

“What do you think about people who disagree with you about same-sex marriage?”

In addition to this, I take into account the answers to the multiple-choice questions which asked about priests’ attitudes towards same-sex marriage in the church.

The respondents of this study represent quite well the whole clergy of the ELCF, even though my main purpose in this qualitative study is not to strive for generalizability. The respondents were from all nine dioceses of the ELCF and represent all age groups. The youngest respondent was 25 years old and the oldest 85. The average age of the respondents was 53 years. Of the respondents, 56% were men and 44% women. They worked in many different positions, e.g., as a minister, chaplain, temporary member of parish clergy, and as a priest in a hospital, prison or school.

In the next section, I will first present clergy’s attitudes towards same-sex marriages in the church (Section 3.1) and their thoughts about people who disagree with them (Section 3.2). Then, I move on applying my findings to moral foundation theory (Section 3.3). The results include some example quotes from the respondents. They are marked with the letter R and a code number.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Attitudes towards Same-Sex Marriage in the Church

Half of the respondents (51%) supported same-sex church weddings, while 40% opposed it. In total, 443 priests out of the 534 respondents answered the open question “Why do you support/oppose marrying same-sex couples in the church?” Nine percent of the respondents were uncertain about their view or did not want to tell it. In this article, I do not analyze the material written by them.

The answers of the supporters and opponents were separated into three categories: (1) theological justifications, (2) legal justifications, and (3) justifications related to the essence of marriage. The justifications are presented in the following table (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Justifications for support or opposition to same-sex marriage in the church. (n = 433) (Each respondent was coded with one or more justifications, or no justifications at all, if not presented).

Justification	Supports (f)	Opposes (f)	In total
Theological justifications	122	137	259 (60% of the respondents to this question)
Legal justifications	106	-	106 (24%)
Justifications related to the essence of marriage	-	61	61 (14%)

In addition to the above, 13% of the respondents argued with other single justifications. Next, I will clarify the three main justification categories.

### Theological justifications

Both the supporters and opponents of the same-sex church weddings argued with theological justifications. This was slightly more typical of the clergy who oppose same-sex marriages. These priests think that living in homosexual relationships offends against God. Apart from that, it is against the Christian tradition. They argued that a real Christian marriage is marriage between a man and a woman. They wrote that marriage is not for everyone because Jesus confirmed marriage between a man and a woman, and Paul denied homosexual acts. In addition to this, priests think that same-sex marriages are something non-normal and unnatural. Most of them believe that God did not create homosexuality.

It looks as if opposite-sex marriage is sacred for the opponents of same-sex marriages. It follows that the concept of marriage cannot be changed. The priests are scared of changes which can possibly shake the holy opposite-sex marriage. As [Brickell \(2005, p. 103\)](#) has written, heterosexuality is sacred as long as heteronormativity is not questioned. Some priests also wrote about reproduction as a function of marriage. Biologically this can be fulfilled only in heterosexual partnerships. The opponents of same-sex marriages think that possible changes to church weddings would not only affect marriage but also ecumenical relationships between the ELCF and other churches, and established teaching and dogma in the church. According to [Enstedt \(2015, pp. 564, 587–88\)](#), there were the same kinds of arguments in the church of Sweden: when a church allows same-sex marriages, it submits to social and political power, and gives up God, tradition, and truth. R7 summarizes the thinking of opponents of same-sex marriages:

“An employee of the church and a priest, whose mission is to teach God’s will, can’t act with a principle: God says so, but I tell you otherwise”.

The supporters of same-sex marriage also argued with theological justifications. The priests think that Christianity includes human rights. Therefore, it is important to treat everybody equally. It is about both identification (there are homosexuals in the congregations) and recognition (homosexuals are equal to other people). The recognition of same-sex marriages means the recognition of the humanity of homosexuals. R340 argued, “There must be space for all members of a congregation”. An early study showed that same-sex couples often have negative experiences of misrecognition from the institutional ELCF ([Hellqvist and Vähäkangas 2018](#)). As I presented above, opposite-sex marriage is sacred for the opponents of same-sex marriage. Even though the proponents of same-sex weddings do not use the term “holy” or “sacred” as visibly as the opponents, they consider both same-sex and opposite-sex marriages sacred. They argue that the genders of the spouses have nothing to do with the sanctity of marriage. R37 writes:

“Marriage is a sign of love and commitment between spouses, and marriage is holy. Gender or sexual orientation is irrelevant here”.

Where the opponents argued that same-sex marriage is against the traditional Lutheran theology, supporters considered it theologically entirely appropriate. They emphasized Lutheran ethics of charity, Luther’s doctrine of the Two Kingdoms, faith and love, and Jesus’ example in the Bible. They even think that they have a moral responsibility to marry same-sex couples. R4 wrote: “The Great Commandment obliges to marry”. The priests do not see any contradiction between the Bible and same-sex marriages. They represent the same kind of view that [Village and Francis \(2008\)](#) perceived in their study: The Bible can be interpreted symbolically when one finds its true nature. Therefore, the Bible rather gives moral principles than tight moral rules. The priests quoted Luther too. For example, R48 wrote: “Why wouldn’t we marry? Luther said that the kingdom of law enacts law and the church adjusts”.

[Mikkola \(2020\)](#) showed in her study that the ELCF has reflected same-sex marriage on theological grounds that are mostly based on Reformation Era sources. However, my findings show that the clergy argue both for and against same-sex marriage within these kinds of arguments.

### Legal justifications



Only adherents of same-sex marriage argued with legal justifications. None of the opponents mentioned these kinds of arguments. The most common legal justification was human rights. The priests think that prohibition of same-sex marriage is discrimination towards homosexuals. They argued that every member of the church should have the same rights. In addition to this, the ELCF is a juridical actor and that is why it should marry all couples regardless of gender and sexuality. Some of the priests think that the ELCF is breaking the law if it does not marry same-sex couples. R37 wrote: “The Church Law obliges us to marry [ . . . ] but bishops order us to break the law”.

The priests would like to marry all couples equally right now. They are tired of waiting for the decisions of the General Synod or the Bishops’ Conference. As Hytönen (2003) argued in her study, ministers cannot wait for official decisions for years because they are working now in the congregations and meet real couples there who would like to marry.

#### Justifications related to the essence of marriage

The opponents of same-sex marriages reflected on the essence of marriage. None of the supporters justified their attitudes in this way. In this category, the priests think that marriage is only for a man and a woman. Same-sex relationships cannot be called marriage because they do not meet the definition of marriage. Thus, the gender of the spouses is an inseparable part of the essence of marriage. Same-sex marriage is not real marriage.

The priests think that same-sex marriages are a threat to real marriage. Real marriage is holy, and as R179 argued, “same-sex marriage mixes the holy concept of marriage”. The holy concept of marriage includes underlining the difference between the sexes, heterosexuality and children as a goal of marriage (Charpentier 2001). The priests considered heteronormativity to be a self-evident fact.

### *3.2. Tolerating Other Opinions*

The clergy were asked: “What do you think about people who disagree with you about same-sex marriage?” Well over half of the priests wrote some kind of positive thoughts and emotions, while a third of them had negative ones.

#### Respect and understanding

Most of the respondents wrote respect and understanding thoughts and emotions about people who disagree with them about same-sex marriage. In total, 322 of the 534 respondents raised such positive thoughts. The clergy described their thoughts using the following words: respect, understanding, empathy, mercy and wisdom. Most of them (n = 227) wrote that they respect all people, despite their views of same-sex marriage. R46 emphasized the unity of Christians: “They are sisters and brothers in Jesus, and we should take notice of what unites us”. Many priests (n = 87) said that they try to understand opposite views even though it may be difficult. For example, R95 wrote:

“I think that many people who disagree with me try to find God’s will from the Bible and they try to live as Jesus teaches us to live. They have come to different conclusions in their interpretation than I do. Let God judge what He thinks about our Christian lives”.

A few priests wrote they feel empathy (n = 4), mercy (n = 3), and joy (n = 1) when they think of people who disagree with them. Three priests said that they think people who disagree with them must have some special wisdom and that is why they have such views.

Priests who had respectful and understanding thoughts about people who disagree with them both supported and opposed same-sex marriage in the church. In total, 168 priests (52% of those who had positive thoughts) supported same-sex marriage, while 132 (41%) opposed it. The remainder had no clear opinion. Therefore, it seems that both supporters and opponents tolerate different views quite steadily. However, it is notable that there are more supporters than opponents in my data which is worth to keep in mind while observing my analysis.

#### Worries and unsuccessful efforts

One third of the respondents ( $n = 189$ ) had negative thoughts about people who disagree with them about same-sex marriage. There were five kinds of argumentation: difficulty with cooperation, anxiety, wrong options, individual characteristics and pity.

The priests who wrote about the difficulty cooperating ( $n = 60$ ), told that they have very large difficulties understanding why some people disagree with them. Some of them told that the connection to the opposite side had totally broken. R148 wrote that she tries to understand, but it is impossible: "I would like to respect their views, but I am not able to. Their views are totally against the core message of Christianity. Their view of man is scary, hostile and discriminatory". Quite a number of respondents ( $n = 58$ ) experienced a high level of anxiety. They were sad and worried about the conflicting situation between the supporters and opponents of same-sex marriage in the church. In total, 58 priests thought that people who disagree with them are totally wrong. Some of them had very strong opinions that people on the opposite view position themselves as God and finally that they will go to Hell. In addition, 58 respondents judged other people for their individual characteristics. R94 and R134 represent this kind of view:

"Sometimes I wonder at their coldness and cruelty and lack of empathy. I think they must have some mental problems". (R94)

"They haven't realized research results, they have difficulties with their own sexuality, and they project their negative emotions onto others". (R134)

Some respondents ( $n = 38$ ) feel pity for people with the opposite view. These priests consider them, for example, cruel, narrow-minded, and uncivilized.

The respondents with negative thoughts were most usually supporters of same-sex marriage. In total, 113 priests (60% of those who had negative thoughts) supported same-sex marriage in the church. Correspondingly, only 65 priests (34%) opposed same-sex marriage. Thus, supporters of same-sex marriage are significantly more often intolerant of opponents of same-sex marriage. This is quite an interesting result considering that several studies have reported that conservative Christians tend to be less tolerant people (e.g., [Burdette et al. 2005](#)).

### 3.3. *Why Are the Lutheran Clergy Divided?*

"Why good people are divided by politics and religion" is Jonathan Haidt's subtitle on his book cover ([Haidt 2012](#)). In this section, my aim is to apply Haidt's moral foundation theory to my findings. I ask: Why are the Finnish Lutheran clergy divided by same-sex marriage, and why do some priests tolerate opposite views better than others?

I argue that all five moral foundations are reflected in the thinking of priests. The clergy who support same-sex marriage with human rights are linked to the foundation of care ([Haidt 2012](#), pp. 153–58, 178). They want to care for every church member who wants to marry in the church, sexual minorities, too. They feel strong empathy towards people who are in discriminated position in the church. At the same time, some opponents of same-sex marriage are in some way linked to the care foundation, too. Even though they oppose same-sex marriages, they understand that same-sex couples must also have the possibility to contract partnerships. They cherish marriage between a woman and a man but at the same time some of them want to improve the situation of sexual minorities in the church in other ways.

The fairness foundation ([Haidt 2012](#), p. 159) appears in the supporting arguments particularly from the perspective of the Golden Rule. The clergy empathize with the principle of "nothing about us without us". This means that they want to give voice to the sexual minorities who are really affected. They want to put themselves in sexual minorities' place. From the perspective of the opponents of same-sex marriage, this is not a matter of fairness or justice. They think marriage is an order ordained by God, and therefore, it is not allowable to change it.

The sanctity ([Haidt 2012](#), pp. 170–73) foundation is a moral foundation for many priests who oppose same-sex marriage. Opposite-sex marriage is sacred for them. They

think it is the real Christian marriage, which has a strong symbolic value. Where the opponents use occasionally the term “holy marriage,” the proponents do not mention it significantly. However, some of them argue that sanctity of marriage does not depend on the sex of the spouses.

Where the care and fairness foundations can be visibly, and the sanctity foundation partly, found in both the supporting and opposing arguments the final two foundations are typical only of the opponents of same-sex marriage. They feel loyalty (Haidt 2012, pp. 163–64) towards the ELCF as an employer and towards God. They think that all priests should follow the official rules of the ELCF and God’s will. Many of these priests argue that they “do not insist on going it alone” which means that they are deeply committed to the Christian ideology and the rules of the ELCF. Likewise, they experience that the church and God are authorities (Haidt 2012, p. 168), and they must be respected. Certainly, it is possible that proponents of same-sex marriage also feel loyalty (for example towards sexual minorities) and probably even respect authorities, but it is not clear in my empirical data.

My findings show that clergy who tolerate opposite views well may be either supporters or opponents of same-sex marriage. However, intolerant priests usually support same-sex marriage. Therefore, priests who oppose same-sex marriage accept both their own and opposite views. Supporters of same-sex marriage tolerate more usually only the views that agree with them, and they have difficulties in tolerating opposite views.

From the perspective of moral foundation theory, priests who feel respect and understanding emotions lean especially on care, fairness, loyalty and sanctity. The care foundation makes people sensitive to signs of suffering and need (Haidt 2012, pp. 153–58, 178). It makes people despise cruelty, and especially priests who feel empathy lean on the care foundation. The original triggers of the fairness modules are acts of cooperation or selfishness that people show towards us (Haidt 2012, p. 159). Cooperation with all their colleagues is most important for the clergy; agreeing with everybody is not so important. The clergy stress that everyone has a right to their own view. The original trigger for the loyalty foundation is people who are good team players (Haidt 2012, p. 163). Respectful and understanding priests think all Christians are their team players. Thus, they feel loyalty to both supporters and opponents of same-sex marriage. As for the sanctity foundation, there are some extreme values which are important for binding groups together (Haidt 2012, p. 179). For the clergy, Christian unity is this kind of value. The main goal is to adhere to the unity. These priests allow disagreements to keep the connection going between all Christians.

The clergy who have negative thoughts about people who disagree with them on same-sex marriage lean particularly on loyalty and sanctity. Where the understanding clergy are loyal to all Christians, clergy with negative thoughts remain loyal only to people who agree with them. These priests want to gang up with people of like mind. According to Haidt (2012, pp. 164, 178–79), these kinds of people have strong links to love and hate, and sometimes they even want to hurt those who betray their group. From the viewpoint of the sanctity foundation, the clergy have their own extreme values that they stick to at any cost.

In conclusion, the clergy who tolerate opposite views well, lean on four of moral foundations, while other priests lean on only two of them. According to Haidt (2012, p. 179), people who are politically on the left rely primarily on the care and fairness foundations, whereas the right uses all five. Therefore, it is usually easier for conservatives to understand liberals than vice versa. The opponents of same-sex marriage (conservatives) use all five foundations, while the supporters (liberals) use only two of them. The priests who experience the most tolerating emotions use four of the moral foundations, while the priests with negative and intolerant thoughts use only two foundations. This might be one explanatory scheme for the question of why the Finnish Lutheran clergy is so divided.



#### 4. Conclusions

The aim of this article has been to answer the following two questions: (1) What kind of attitudes do the clergy have towards marrying same-sex couples in a church? (2) How do the clergy treat people who disagree with them about same-sex marriage? The background theory of the study has been Jonathan Haidt's moral foundation theory.

My article shows that the clergy of the ELCF justify their attitudes towards same-sex marriage using three different kinds of arguments: (1) theological justifications, (2) legal justifications, and (3) justifications related to the essence of marriage. From the perspective of moral foundation theory, the supporters of same-sex marriage are based especially on the care and fairness foundations and partly on the sanctity foundation, while the opponents of same-sex marriage are based on all five foundations (care, fairness, loyalty, authority, and sanctity).

In addition, my findings show that most priests had a positive attitude towards people who disagree on same-sex marriage with them. Both supporters and opponents of same-sex marriage tolerated different views quite steadily. They based this on the care, fairness, loyalty, and sanctity foundations. One third of the respondents had negative thoughts about people who disagree with them on same-sex marriage. The respondents with negative thoughts were most usually supporters of same-sex marriage. However, it is important to keep in mind that there were more supporters than opponents in my total data which may influence this result. These respondents leaned on the loyalty and sanctity foundations. The finding that the proponents more often have negative thoughts about those with opposing views may arise from the fact that they have had to support the right of sexual minorities in the vanguard of social development. When one needs to present one's view which is new in the society and church, it is necessary to emphasize that one thinks otherwise than those upholding traditional heterosexual norms.

In the public debate, supporters of same-sex marriage are generally considered to be tolerant. Opponents are often called intolerant and narrow-minded. However, an early study ([Kallatsa 2020](#)) showed that the concept of toleration is problematic. My findings in this article strengthen this observation. It is easy to tolerate views and people that agree with our own. However, it is much more difficult to tolerate opposite views. Those clergy who have conservative attitudes towards same-sex marriage are more often more tolerant from this point of view. However, there are many kinds of priests both in the conservative and liberal clergy groups.

In addition to the above, 17% of the clergy had both positive and negative thoughts and emotions about people who disagree with them. The question is not only black and white, but there are many perspectives to clarify in the future. One of the most interesting viewpoints is on how individually or group-oriented/communal priests form opinions. I have focused on a very individual perspective in this article, but emotions are seldom only individual, personal and subjective; on the contrary, they are relational, social, and cultural ([Riis and Woodhead 2010](#)). My research results give reliable guidelines for future studies. The data for my study was gathered in 2017, which means that the attitudes of priests may have changed in part during recent years. However, the respondents represent as much as 20% of the Finnish Lutheran clergy, and they represent the Finnish clergy well, so the results of my study can be considered indicative.

Misunderstanding of other people is one of the biggest factors which divides the ELCF. One of the respondents in my data crystallized the challenge well: "I would like to understand, really! But it is damn difficult!" (R216). This article has given at least one viewpoint on the question of why the clergy are divided. The idea of the moral foundation's theory is to lead to understand different convictions, tolerate different views, and even settle the differences. Different moral foundations separate people, but in learning to understand them, they can also help to make peace. Tolerance has been one of the key terms in the Finnish debate on same-sex marriage, and it has been seen as something worth pursuing. However, as [Saarinen \(2009, p. 361\)](#) has written, tolerating everything is complete indifferent. Everyone draws the line of tolerance somewhere, and therefore it is

difficult to argue who is more tolerant than others. means complete indifference. Everyone draws the line of tolerance somewhere, and therefore it is difficult to argue who is more tolerant than others.

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**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> More about the content analysis, see e.g., (Miles and Huberman 1994; Mayring 2000).

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