

Meeting for Advisory Board and Project Team & Network of ReiMa

“Religion, Meaning and Masculinities: Religion in the Lives of Finnish men”

Hotel Valo, Helsinki

Feb 11-13, 2026

Participants:

Advisory Board

David Voas, Professor of Social Science (*Emeritus*), University College London

Jörg Stolz, Professor of Sociology of Religion, University of Lausanne

Margreet van Es, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies, Utrecht University

Project Team & Network: Researchers and Affiliates

Pietari Hannikainen, University Lecturer in Religious Education, University of Helsinki

Kimmo Ketola, Senior Researcher, Church Research and Education

Marjukka Laiho, Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Eastern Finland

Tiia Liuski, Postdoctoral Researcher, University Eastern Finland

Pekka Metso, Professor in Practical Theology, University of Eastern Finland

Noora Palmi, Doctoral Researcher, University Eastern Finland

Teemu Pauha, University Lecturer in Islamic Theology, University of Helsinki

Jouko Porkka, Senior Researcher (*Emeritus*), Diaconia University of Applied Sciences

Anna Sofia Salonen, University Lecturer in Practical Theology, University of Eastern Finland

Jenni Spännäri, Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Helsinki & University of Eastern Finland

Kati Tervo-Niemelä, Professor of Practical Theology, University of Eastern Finland (PI)

Johanna Vilja Mantere, Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Eastern Finland

Invited Guests

Risto Kaakinen, Senior Chaplain, Finnish National Defence University

Matias Uusisilta, Doctoral Researcher, University of Eastern Finland

PROGRAMME

Wednesday (Feb 11)

12:00 Lunch at Hotel Valo

13:00 Start of the Meeting

13:30 Session 1: Common Ground and New Reflections

a) Inspirations to the Study of Masculinities and Religion

- Studying Men & Religion in ReiMa: Concepts, Situated Experiences and Complex Change (Marjukka Laiho)
- Changes in Political and Value Orientation and Religion among Finns (Kimmo Ketola)
- The Meaning of Confirmation Work for Young People (Jouko Porkka)

b) Presentation of the survey plans (Pietari Hannikainen)

15:00-15:30 Coffee break

15.30-17:30 Session 2: Small Group and Joint Discussion Related to Survey Plans

- Small group discussion (1 h)
 - Group 1 (David Voas & project team)
 - Group 2 (Jörg Stolz & project team)
 - Group 3 (Margreet van Es & project team)
- Joint discussion 1 h

18:00 Relax and Free Time

- Possibility for swimming and sauna at the hotel roof or guided walk in the forest

Klo 19.30 Dinner at Valo Hotel

Thursday (Feb 12)

(For hotel guests and those prebooked: Breakfast at the hotel beginning at 6.30)

9-11.30 Session 3: On-Going Qualitative Research

- (Be)Coming of Age: Older Men, Meaning and Religion in Life Transitions – A Co-Research Approach to Lived Theologies and Masculinities (Jenni Spännäri)
- Reshaping Masculinity Through Fatherhood: A Visual and Arts-Based Inquiry (Johanna Vilja Mantere)
- Discussion with the advisory board

11.30-12.30 Lunch

12.30-14.30 Session 4: Planned Qualitative Research

- Co-Research with Queer Men & Pacifists: Piloting ‘Sensitive Empirical Theology’ (Marjukka Laiho)
- Queering (Non)Religion: Masculinities and Meaning beyond Religion (Anna Sofia Salonen)
- Discussion with the advisory board

14.30–15 Coffee Break

15–16.30 Session 5: Potential Research Opportunities

- How to study young people in the military service? (Tiia Liuski & Risto Kaakinen)
- Discussion with the advisory board
- Discussion on research gaps and potential new perspectives

17.00 Short excursion to city center

- a) Visit to Allas Sea Pool, or
- b) Sky Wheel and walking tour in the center of Helsinki
- c) Independent visit to central sights or museums e.g. Ateneum, Amos Rex, Kiasma

klo 19 Dinner at Allas Sea Grill

Friday (Feb 13)

(For hotel guests and those prebooked: Breakfast at the hotel beginning at 6.30)

9-10.30 Session 6: Continuing working with survey

10.45-12.00 Session 7: General Discussion & Final Remarks

12-13 Lunch

13 End of the Meeting with Advisory Board

(Advisory Board to the Airport)

13-16 Finland meeting: reflections from the meetings and future steps

16:00 Meeting ends

APPENDIX 1: ABSTRACTS

Session 1: Inspirations to the Study of Masculinities and Religion

Studying Men & Religion in ReiMa: Concepts, Situated Experiencing and Complex Change
(Marjukka Laiho)

This presentation situates the study of men, masculinities, and religion within the context of the current project, ReiMa. It begins by acknowledging the conceptual complexity of key terms such as men, masculinities, and other categories central to ReiMa, including religion and lived experience. The presentation then revisits core notions from the project plan, with particular emphasis on situated experiencing as a shared and central theoretical and methodological lens. Finally, it looks ahead to the coming days by arguing that ReiMa examines a complex change that calls for multi-method approaches, rich and manifold data, and methodological innovation. Through multiperspectivism and multimethodology, it becomes possible to explore the intersections of religion, meaning, and gender in dynamic and even unanticipated ways.

Changes in Political and Value Orientation and Religion among Finns
(Kimmo Ketola)

The presentation offers some preliminary, surveybased observations on how the religiosity of young Finnish men and women is connected to their value and political orientations. Over the past decades, Finland has undergone exceptionally rapid secularization. However, rapid changes in values and attitudes do not concern religiosity alone; various shifts and growing differences among genders can also be observed in political and societal values. These findings raise questions about the interconnections between religiosity, gender, and value and political orientations.

The Meaning of Confirmation Work for Young People: Social Learning, Religiosity, and Well-being among Finnish Confirmands
(Jouko Porkka)

Recent empirical research in Finland indicates a notable shift in young people's relationship with religion. Although long-term secularisation trends remain strong, studies suggest a growing openness toward Christianity among adolescents, particularly among boys. This paper examines the nature and significance of the confirmation period in the lives of young people in Finland and analyses its relevance for their faith and well-being within this changing context.

The analysis focuses on three interrelated themes: (1) developments in young people's religiosity and their openness to Christian belief; (2) the perceived

significance of confirmation work for well-being; and (3) the role of confirmation experiences in alleviating loneliness and fostering social connectedness.

The presentation draws on a longitudinal survey conducted among Lutheran confirmands in Finland between 2019 and 2025. The empirical material comprises nearly 130,000 responses from young participants. Comparable large-scale datasets on youth religiosity are rare even in an international context. Owing to its exceptional size and longitudinal design - employing a consistent methodological framework across consecutive years. The dataset provides a particularly robust foundation for analysing changes in the religious orientations of young people connected to the Lutheran Church.

Session 3: On-Going Qualitative Research

(Be)Coming of Age: Older Men, Meaning and Religion in Life Transitions – A Co-Research Approach to Lived Theologies and Masculinities

(Jenni Spännäri)

Aging brings diverse social, physical, and identity-related challenges for many men, while traditional masculinity norms can inhibit help-seeking and emotional support. What role do religion and religious communities play amid these challenges? This presentation examines older men's religiosity, meaning-making, and masculinities during life transitions through a co-research approach emphasizing lived religion and lived theologies.

Previous research on religion in life transitions has focused primarily on women, yet men's experiences of fatherhood, widowhood, retirement, and aging deserve particular attention. This study asks: How do aging men negotiate their religious identities, social roles, and traditional versus progressive masculinities within changing social contexts?

The research employs participant-oriented ethnographic methods within a Finnish Evangelical Lutheran congregation's men's activities (morning coffee gatherings, work camps, Bible study groups, "men's masses"). Data collection comprises interviews, surveys, and participant observation conducted collaboratively with informants over an extended period. Central to the methodology is the concept of *kohtaaminen* (encounter/meeting) - approaching research participants not as objects of study but as co-researchers and knowledge producers who actively shape the research process through their own theological articulations and embodied practices. Rather than imposing predetermined analytical frameworks, the research process allowed meanings to emerge through everyday practices, conversations, and shared experiences.

Men's discussions emphasized "brothers' support" (atmosphere of trust, safety), "longing for the father" (relationship with one's own father, fatherhood, God-image), and seeking meaningfulness in community. Congregational activities provided space for processing life's profound questions, distinguishing them from everyday meeting places. For informants, religion functions not as a coping mechanism but as a meaning-making system. Religious communities can offer aging men space for practicing alternative masculinities - space for vulnerability, emotional intimacy, and spiritual growth beyond traditional and hegemonic masculinities.

Reshaping Masculinity Through Fatherhood: A Visual and Arts-Based Inquiry (Johanna Vilja Mantere)

This paper examines contemporary fatherhood as an everyday context in which masculine identities and meanings are negotiated and reconfigured. Drawing on qualitative empirical material from 27 fathers living in Finland, this study focuses on how men experience, practice, and represent fatherhood in relation to their loved ones, their own values and masculine ideals and norms that stem from previous generations and cultural expectations.

The analysis is based on individual and group interviews as well as visual data consisting of fathers' self-produced or self-selected photographs and portrait images taken of them. The study explores how fathers balance between different identity positions, and how these positions are expressed both narratively and visually. The visual material sheds light on how fathers represent themselves, and are represented by others, as caring, responsible, and relational subjects, while also revealing tensions related to adequacy, vulnerability, and gendered expectations. By combining narrative and visual analysis, the paper highlights fatherhood as a space of identity negotiation and reorganization of values, where masculinity is reshaped rather than abandoned.

In the next stage of the research, these findings will be brought back to the participating fathers in a collaborative analytic dialogue, inviting them to reflect on the interpretations, articulate points of resonance or disagreement, and identify elements they consider missing or misrepresented. Building on this dialogical process, the study will extend into an arts-based phase in which co-researcher fathers create a performance work drawing on dance, theatre, and spoken word. This artistic component aims not only to deepen the research insights but also to make the lived complexities of fatherhood publicly visible through creative and embodied forms of expression.

Session 4: Planned Qualitative Research

Co-Research with Queer Men & Pacifists: Piloting ‘Sensitive Empirical Theology’ (Marjukka Laiho)

This presentation offers initial insights from two case studies: sexual and gender minorities - specifically queer men, masculinities, and religion - and the potential for researching conscientious objectors as pacifists. The starting point and empirical focus lie with queer men who are active in faith communities and/or (L)GBTQIA+ communities. These men, falling outside hegemonic cisgender masculinities, often experience specific tensions and trauma at the intersections of religion, gender, and identity. I argue that this case calls for a particular form of methodological sensitivity, which I conceptualize as ‘sensitive empirical theology’ (Laiho & Salonen, manuscript in process). Structured through the three phases of preconstruction, deconstruction, and reconstruction, the presentation introduces initial insights into both this novel methodological model and its empirical application and future plans. Queer autoethnography, therapeutic approaches as well as collaborative knowledge production are noted as essential traits in this approach. Finally, I extend the case of queer men to the context of conscientious objectors and consider how sensitive empirical theology might be applied to the study of pacifist theology in times of heightened security agendas.

Queering (Non)Religion: Masculinities and Meaning beyond Religion (Anna Sofia Salonen)

Queering is a process that disturbs, challenges, and deconstructs categories and norms related to gender and sexuality. Drawing from this approach, queering (non)religion aims to problematize religion and nonreligion as concepts, questioning the normativities and social constructs associated with them. This paper applies queering to the study of religion and nonreligion, exploring its value in relation to the study of religion and gender, particularly men and masculinities. The underlying premise is that focusing solely on religion may obscure the multiple meaning-making processes in people’s everyday lives. Adding nonreligious perspectives to the analysis of religion is crucial, but if applied in dichotomous manner, it risks reinforcing unnecessary divides rather than dismantling them. Therefore, delicate analytical tools are needed to explore the intersections between religion, nonreligion, and gender. Drawing from my previous research at the intersection of religion, nonreligion, and critical posthumanist and new materialist theories, I first outline insights into how to engage in queering (non)religion in theoretical and methodological terms. I then discuss how this approach can be utilized to understand how men construct identity and exercise power, freedom, and agency in their everyday life, how they negotiate contradictory identities, what they consider important, and where they seek

meaning beyond religion. This analysis helps both reveal more nuances and set meaningful boundaries for investigating the role and meaning of religion in the lives of men in Finland.

Session 5: Potential Research Opportunities

How to study young people in the military service?

(Tiia Liuski & Risto Kaakinen)

The presentation outlines research possibilities for studying religion, faith, and masculinities among young Finnish men after military service. It highlights why the post-service phase offers a natural and understudied context for examining these themes. We also provide insights for how such a study could be practically and ethically carried out.