One Family – Many Religions

Religious Dialogue within Multi-Religious Families and Faith-Based Organizations

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I feel humbled.

“If a profound gulf separates my neighbor’s belief from mine, there is always the golden bridge of tolerance.”
– John F. Kennedy
Abstract

The objective of this Master’s research project was to examine religious dialogue from the point of view of multi-religious families and different faith-based organizations. This research attempted to raise awareness of the multiple benefits of religious dialogue society-wise, of the general diversity of faith-based systems and of the role that multi-religious families play. Furthermore, it was studied how different faith-based organizations and other societal factors relate to multi-religious families, and how these relationships could be improved.

This is a qualitative research, to which a few quantitative elements were included. These elements were implemented in the two online surveys that were used for the collection of data, as well as during the data handling process. In addition to a comprehensive analysis on religious dialogue, this research considered the concepts of faith and ethnomethodology. These three underlying theories did not only support the research findings, but were actively used as the basis for the development of the surveys and their analysis. Although this research was based on a Finnish context, it can easily be generalized to any given society because of its impartial and universal basis.

The surveys were designed together with a Finnish NGO called Familia ry, and the findings of this research will be used to help them develop their future work.

Keywords

Religious dialogue, multi-religious family, faith-based organization, ethnomethodology, survey
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1 Introduction

The focus of this Master’s research project lies on religious dialogue. The objective is to describe the power of religious dialogue in general. I intend to find an answer to how extensively religious dialogue is used within multi-religious family units and different faith-based organizations, and to study how these two constructs relate to one another. Furthermore, this research attempts to raise awareness of the general diversity of faith-based systems and of the role that multi-religious families play society-wise. It is hoped that through this research’s theoretical framework and findings, target groups involved could learn more about religious dialogue and its multiple benefits, and that solutions would be found to how multi-religious families could be better supported in a societal level. It is believed that if these families are able to find common ground within their differences, it will translate into society and promote an atmosphere for dialogue between religions.

However, no assumptions in this research will be made to say that all multi-religious families would have difficulties related to the diversity of different faith-based systems; however, it must be acknowledged at this point that it is a possible trigger for smaller-scale conflicts to occur. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that some multi-religious families might need more information and tools to support their family lives. For this matter, faith-based organizations’ role and preparedness to answer to the needs of multi-religious families becomes essential, and that is why it is considered to be important to raise the awareness of religious dialogue within such organizations as well.

This research project is partly using mixed-method techniques, but is mainly a qualitative one based on ethnomethodology. In other words, this research “seeks to describe methods persons use in doing social life” (Sacks, 1984:21), and how individualistic issues can be generalized into societal phenomena. The data collection of this research is based on two online surveys: one for families with multiple religions and one for faith-based organizations. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches are integrated to the surveys as well as to
the analysis phase of the research findings. This mixed-method approach called ‘sequential exploratory strategy’ is used in order to more effectively sample and interpret the survey data, and to better “generalize from the analysis of a single case” (Silverman, 2001:249).

This research project is done in collaboration with a Finnish non-governmental organization (NGO) Familia ry, which focuses on the two-way integration of those who have moved to Finland for different reasons and of those born in Finland (About Familia, 2016). This research will at the same time work as Familia ry’s project with the same name One Family – Many Religions (or Yksi Perhe – Monta Uskontoa in Finnish). In addition to this thesis paper, a shorter report will be written both in English and Finnish for Familia ry to be used in their future work.

2 Idea behind One Family – Many Religions Research Project

The idea for this Master’s research project arose from my own interest in the topics concerned. This research is, in a way, a continuum for my Bachelor’s thesis that focused on intercultural communication. I wanted to continue gathering more knowledge and information about it, this time specifically focusing on religious issues. Moreover, I think it is essential in today’s world to create an atmosphere for dialogue between religions, instead of gaps between religions. Religious confrontation can be witnessed taking place all over the world, and especially after the 9/11 it has become more of a trend than an act of inappropriateness. I believe most of this black-and-white thinking (in addition to its political background) originates from the lack of knowledge related to other religions and their traditions. In all areas of life, from international settings to individuals, this has led to misunderstandings, prejudice, unexpected and unwelcomed surprises, as well as to unnecessary disagreements between people. Even though some of these might be just minor problems, there is always a chance for them to develop into larger macro-level challenges and crisis. Therefore, from an ethno-methodological perspective, I think it is important to first tackle the is-
sues and address the importance of religious dialogue in a micro-level before moving on to other societal stakeholder levels.

For this reason, I wanted to base my research on multi-religious families. I also feel that numerous researches have been conducted about religious dialogue and its results in the context of large international conferences; however, very little has been studied about the use of religious dialogue within multi-religious family units.

Limiting the research focus area to micro-level was also due to resources available for this particular research project: time limits, amount of money that could be used, limited contacts and other individual life duties. Nevertheless, I did feel that it was necessary to at least in a more minor way to include the aspect of faith-based organizations in this project, too. I think it would have been impossible and unreasonable to focus on multi-religious families only without paying any attention to religion and religious dialogue in a more societal and general level. Studies show how churches and other faith-based communities play a notable role for many (multi-religious) families, and according to such studies, enhancing religious dialogue within and between these different faith-based organizations is generally seen as a significant factor. In any way, the role of religious dialogue within multi-religious families will remain as the main focus of this research, whereas the stance of different faith-based organizations towards religious dialogue will be addressed in a more general level.

2.1 Search for the project partner and collaboration with Familia ry

Focusing on religious dialogue was clear, if almost self-evident, to me from the beginning. However, I was not aware of the exact focus or method to use in this research for a long time. I thought that having an organization’s support would in all ways make the project a bit easier since they could help me with providing advice, material and contacts. Hence I started contacting different organizations by posting an email statement about my research idea to a public emailing list provided by Kepa. Kepa “is [a Finnish] NGO platform and an expert on global development” (Kepa, n.d.). It proved to be challenging to find a collabora-
tive partner. The biggest dilemma was, in fact, with religious dialogue; it seemed to be a concept that nobody wanted to talk about in public, a kind of a ‘taboo’. I was, in any way, prepared for such reluctance because of the seeming general attitude of ‘not wanting to challenge the clergy or question the role of religion’ (Raja, 2015). However, it did come as a slight surprise to me as religious dialogue had already gotten high interest and current attention in the media: the legalization of same-sex marriages in the beginning of March 2017 and the refugee ‘crisis’ in 2015.

Finally an NGO called Familia ry contacted me and said that they were soon planning to start a project about multi-religious families and that they would need someone to do that project for them. I was very familiar with the organization already before-hand so agreeing to do the project for them was easy. A few days after we had a discussion about both the project’s and my Master’s research’s aims: We adjusted our ideas to match each other’s goals, and that is how, in the end, One Family – Many Religions research project was formed.

2.2 Familia ry as an organization

Familia ry is one of the oldest and most famous organizations in Finland working in the field of multiculturalism. It was founded already in the 1988 and its office is based in the capital, Helsinki. Familia’s main objective is to support the two-way integration processes of immigrants residing in Finland, and of people born in Finland. Familia ry organizes a large variety of program and activities: Finnish language courses, discussion groups both face-to-face and online, clubs for infants and children, hobby groups for parents, discursions, as well as informative and educational sessions on issues related to multiculturalism. Familia ry has been in part of implementing new private members’ bills to the parliament of Finland and thus affected the general policy making in the country. Familia ry is also an expert in multicultural family –specified issues through its Duo project for multicultural families. Familia ry has a lot of knowledge and experience in issues concerning immigration, multiculturalism and multi-religious-ism. As a result of this research project, Familia ry will get new and val-
uable information about multi-religious families and their use of religious dialogue in order to support their future work. Therefore, in addition to this thesis paper, a briefer informative text of the project’s results will be written both in Finnish and English for Familia ry to use.

3 The Significance of One Family – Many Religions

3.1 Statistics

According to the Family Federation of Finland (2017), or ‘Väestöliitto’ in Finnish, there are currently about 55 000 multicultural couples residing in Finland, and the additional yearly increase is with around 3000 couples. Moreover, more than 160 000 children are living in multicultural families. (Väestöliitto: Monikulttuurinen parisuhde, 2017). It was difficult to get accurate data of the number of multi-religious families living in Finland, but from this high rate of multicultural couples it can be assumed that many of them also share and deal with multiple religions in their everyday lives.

The evangelic Lutheran church has, throughout the years, been the major religion in Finland. However, the number of people belonging to other churches has also risen year after year all the way from the year 1900 until the year 2015. In 1900 nearly a hundred percent of the Finnish population was evangelic Lutherans, whereas in 2015 only 73% of the population belonged under this church group. In addition, more and more immigrants and refugees are arriving in the country which in itself seems to multiply the variety of religions. (Statistics Finland: population, 2016). In order to get a more European perspective on this diversity of religions, according to the information provided by the Churchpop (n.d.), Catholic and Protestant Christians, Muslims, Orthodox and Jews form the five biggest religious groups in Europe.
However, Vexen Crabtree writes that “over the last 60 years, religion in Europe has seen a strong decline. On average throughout the 27 EU countries, only half of its people believe in God and 25.4% directly say that they have no religion [and that] Scandinavian countries are highly atheist.” (Crabtree, 2015). He continues to say that:

“The standard Nordic religious structure combines a secular (non-religious) society with an anachronistic state-backed established church, for example the Lutheran church of Finland. Most people sign up for this church in order to obtain clergy for weddings and funerals. So, although 85% of Finns sign up, it “need not imply a deep belief in the tenets of Martin Luther”. The local sociologist Kimmo Ketola says that "Finns are neither very attached to religion, nor very opposed to it". This is evidenced by the explosive popularity of a website designed to make it easy to resign from the state church. Set up by The Freethinkers of Tampere in 2003, by 2007 over 60 thousand people had used the site to resign and in total the Lutheran Church lost 2.6% of its adherents from 2000-2006.” (Crabtree, 2015).

Based on this, it seems that Finland is a highly secular country where religion does not play a bigger role. This, to my own experiences is true if compared to for instance central or southern European countries. However, it must be acknowledged that these statistics are only indicative. They seem to dismiss the plurality within religions, the different denominations such as the Laestedian and Pentecostal movements, which do have a strong a foothold in the Finnish society. Another remark to be made is that even if religions would not be as visibly practiced as in some other countries, Christianity and its values guide many aspects all the way from politics to school festivities. It is also good to remember that atheism in these statistics is not regarded as a belief system as such. Therefore, it is worth addressing that in this research project’s context, atheism is being referred to as a form of ‘faith’, since in reality, it is a belief system of not believing in gods or of denying the existence of gods (What is Atheism, n.d.).
3.2 Diversity that Brings Us Apart and Its Solutions

From these statistics we can draw a conclusion that our societies today are more and more complex in terms of different cultures and religions than ever before. The question arises, however, on whether or not to encourage or limit this complexity. It has been claimed that the increase of cultural and religious diversity would expose people to difference, and thus increase the acceptance of it. Nevertheless, it has also been stated that instead of creating an atmosphere of tolerance, such diversity-encouraging approaches have in fact created gaps between people from diverse groups. This argument has been supported by saying that the embrace and respect of one’s diversity is beautiful as such, but the problem arises if it is used as a tool to build walls between people from different religious and cultural groups, intentionally seeking to remain separate from all other groups. According to Blaine (2017:11) “Multiculturalism is the name given to beliefs or ideals which promote the recognition, appreciation, celebration, and preservation of social difference. People who espouse multiculturalism value the preservation of the separate voices and traditions […]” (Blaine, 2017:11). To illustrate this idea even better, Kenan Malik writes: “Multicultural policies accept as a given that societies are diverse, yet they implicitly assume that such diversity ends at the edges of minority communities. They seek to institutionalize diversity by putting people into ethnic and cultural boxes […] and defining their needs and rights accordingly. Such policies, in other words, have helped create the very divisions they were meant to manage.” (Malik, 2015). These divisions often have their reflections and negative consequences to micro-level target groups also. That is why it is important to pay attention to multi-religious families, their needs and the work to support them through religious dialogue. As Stewart Black writes: “Research and experience show that the key to successful change is not changing systems, such as information, pay, and communication systems, but rather changing people” (Black, 2014: Preface, n.d.).

In this era of growing diversity special intervention is needed in the field of collaboration and acceptance between and within different religions (Dijker, 2015:582). Stockholm Resilience Centre’s report (2016:4) continues with this idea by stating that: “A necessity in times
of global change is awareness of uncertainty and surprise, and the will to experiment, innovate and learn within and between different actor groups, knowledge systems and cultures to respond to these changes”. In order to get long-lasting results, paying attention to religious dialogue and its active use through focusing on the “global ethics of care and a consensus on human rights” use is crucial (Rasmussen, 2008:231). Tsang, Rowatt and Shariff (2015:609) continue this by saying that “all major religions have some form of a golden rule that encourages people to treat others as they wish to be treated, meaning people should treat each other compassionately. This compassion is to be extended to all others, not just to one’s kin or to fellow believers.” Forward (2001:66-68) refers to this ‘golden rule of religions’ as ‘global religious consciousness’. Its key message is that people, regardless of their religious (or any other) background, share global understanding of kindness, peace, harmony and love. Hence, the theoretical framework of this research, in turn, emphasizes collaborative methods between people of other faiths, and the things that we share despite of our faith-based differences. Religious dialogue is used to encourage people to communicate and share their ideas in peace and harmony, in order to avoid unnecessary disagreements and conflicts. As Swidler (2002:71) writes: “This global ethic [of religious pluralism, human rights and obligations, as well as the right for freedom] can be evolved, and constantly be extended, by consensus through perpetual dialogue among women and men of all religious and ethical persuasions.”

4 Religious Dialogue

The need for religious dialogue is inevitable: the coexistence of nearly 7 billion people of different views, beliefs, cultures, religions, habits and looks has never been the easiest task. The increase of religious and cultural diversity in all given societies has formed a vast complexity of relationships, systems and ideologies. Not in all cases has this been a bad phenomenon, and there are examples of relatively successful and peaceful multi-religious communities. However, these complexities have caused conflicts all the way from misunderstandings within families to international wars and brutal mass-violence. I believe that one
of the biggest reasons for these conflicts is misunderstanding. When we do not know, we assume. And because we as assume, we misinterpret. I am a strong supporter of shared knowledge, and believe in its power to change people's mindsets and behavior. Thus, I also believe in the power of religious dialogue and to its potential in supporting multi-religious families and societies at large.

Different religions and their representatives have often been regarded as opponents (Gibson & Grant Purzycki, 2010). Through centuries there have been numerous debates, filled with judgments and assertions, about the good and the bad of religions, about who is wrong and who is right. According to Ahrens (2003:29), “some people claim that the heart of the matter lies in the fact that religion is the currency of violence”.

“Although we have to admit that religion is one element of identity that can often contribute significantly to violence, faith should not be seen as an ingredient that fuels the explosion of conflict into violence and war but rather as a foundation that can support efforts to build peace. It is primarily through a process in which groups and individuals first seek a deep understanding of their own religious traditions and then share their religious convictions and traditions with others that meaningful dialogue can be fostered.” (Cilliers, 2002:48).

Küng (1991) argues that the emergence of peace between religions will only be accomplished through successful dialogue processes. Forward (2001:87-88) continues this by saying that “since religions have so often marginalized the other, who is seen as different and inferior, dialogue becomes a way of seeing them as human and faithful. Dialogue can therefore lead to the mending of difficult, even utterly broken, relationships.” According to Cilliers (2002:50-55), religious dialogue “is a peacebuilding and conflict transformation process that provides opportunities for people from different religious backgrounds to address central values such as justice, reconciliation, truth, mercy, and forgiveness from their respective traditions. This process can be illustrated metaphorically through the concept of ‘building bridges for the understanding of interfaith differences. […] It is more important for peo-
ple engaged in interfaith dialogue to have a joint discovery of what is ‘true and right’ than to achieve a ‘religious victory’ as if the dialogue were a debate”. (Cilliers, 2002:50-55).

In order to find this ‘joint discovery’ as a basis for all social contacts between individuals of other faiths, we need religious dialogue. Lissi Rasmussen has divided the concept of religious dialogue into four different subcategories, of which the following two categories will get a greater attention in this research: discursive dialogue and diapraxis, also known as ‘dialogue in practice’. Discursive dialogue occurs when “exponents of different faith communities meet to discuss the theological, philosophical and ethical basis of their traditions or faith issues. The purpose is to learn about each other’s religious traditions and faith by listening to one another’s views on a certain topic. This may help to break down preconceived ideas and misconceptions about the other, to understand and appreciate the background and context of the other religious tradition, and to establish mutual trust.” (Rasmussen, 2008:227).

This research aims to explain religious dialogue first from discursive dialogue’s perspective; what religious dialogue really is about and why it is needed. The aim is not, however, to assume that all multi-religious families or faith-based organizations would be actively engaged with religious dialogue, or even if they were, that it would be the only tool to increase overall wellbeing and understanding within multi-religious families and between groups of other faiths. However, we must admit that it is an effective tool. My aim here is to therefore, first, examine religious dialogue in a more general level; what it is in theory, and explain and reason why I think religious dialogue is beneficial. Secondly, the results gained from the two surveys will help to analyze the role of religious dialogue both within multi-religious families and different faith-based organizations. In addition, it will be examined how religious dialogue and multi-religious families are taken into account in the services that faith-based organizations provide.

Through discursive theological explanation of religious dialogue, it is hoped that the target groups involved would get valuable information about religious dialogue’s benefits, and would find ways in order to actively start using it as part of their daily lives and routines. This process is called diapraxis or dialogue in practice. It is about putting discursive reli-
gious dialogue into action through discussion and collaboration with people of other faiths. Religious dialogue can occur both visibly and non-visibly, from large international conferences to one-on-one conversations. As explained before, micro-level perspectives of religious dialogue are in the core of this research project. The concept of diapraxis will become more visible in the section 7 ‘Analysis of the Research Findings’, where the role of religious dialogue in practice, both within individual families and different faith-based organizations, will be analyzed more thoroughly.

4.1 What Is Dialogue?

In order to examine religious dialogue, one must first get acquainted with the concept of ‘dialogue’. Dialogue, simply said, is communication between two or more people (Bennett, 1998:2). However, it is a far more complex form of interaction than just that: dialogue can be described as “thinking and sharing thoughts together” (Aarnio & Enqvist, 2001:14). According to Mendes-Flohr (2015: overview), “Dialogue is, first and foremost, the art of unmediated listening. One must allow the voice of the Other to question one’s pre-established positions fortified by professional, emotional, intellectual and ideological commitments.”

Dialogue does not necessarily attempt to solve any problems, nor does it make an assumption of united resemblance. Instead, its purpose is to work together for a shared goal and understanding: “inclusion of a collaborative task and flexible process of interaction” are vital for a successful dialogue process (Abu-Nimer, 2002:23-24). S. Wesley Ariarajah (1999) explains this more thoroughly by saying:

“Dialogue is not so much about attempting to resolve immediate conflicts, but about building a ‘community of conversation’, a ‘community of heart and mind’, across racial, ethnic and religious barriers where people learn to see differences among them not as threatening but as ‘natural’ and ‘normal’. Dialogue thus is an attempt to help people to understand and accept the other in
their ‘otherness’. It seeks to make people ‘at home’ with plurality, to develop an appreciation of diversity, and to make those links that may just help them to hold together when the whole community is threatened by forces of separation and anarchy.” (Ariarajah, 1999:13-14).

To continue this idea of a shared ‘community of conversation’, in a dialogue setting everyone should have the right to equally engage in a conversation, and to be respected for whatever their ideas or opinions might be. Different ideas, even those that are contradictory and against each other, should be allowed to be shared in an open and supportive atmosphere. (Aarnio & Enqvist, 2001:15). This shared understanding is achieved by “testing, checking, questioning and reshaping” what has been said (Mönkkönen, 2002:33-34). According to Forward (2001:12-13), dialogue is – first and foremost – about learning: “[dialogue] participants are risk takers because they themselves learn and change; dialogue does not allow them just to inform and hope to transform others”. Aarnio continues to say that “the critical step is to be open to the possibility that one’s own beliefs and perceptions could be questioned” (Aarnio, 1999:33). A key factor that differentiates dialogue from a ‘normal’ discussion setting is that most discussions are defensive and aim to prove the opinion’s righteousness, whereas in dialogue there are no correct opinions or ‘winners’ (Isaacs, 2001:39). According to Panikkar, “the most immediate assumption of the dialogical dialogue is that the other is not just an other (alius) and much less an object of my knowledge (alium), but another self (alter) who is a source of self-understanding, and also of understanding, not necessarily reducible to my own.” Thus, instead of paying attention to ‘who is wrong and who is right’- setting, focusing on exploring the real meanings behind the participants’ statements is essential (McLeod & McLeod2011:152). As ACES (The Academy of Central European schools) puts it: dialogue’s goal is “to unfold shared meaning”, whereas discussions are based on gaining “agreement on one meaning” (ACES, 2008:1).

4.2 Religious Dialogue Specified
The idea and need for religious dialogue stems all the way back from the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948. According to its 18th article about freedom of religion: “everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance”. (UN, 1948). This freedom of religion “enjoins upon all of us the equally non-negotiable responsibility to respect faiths other than our own, and never to denigrate, vilify or misrepresent them for the purpose of affirming superiority of our faith. Members of each faith should listen to how people of other faiths perceive them. This is necessary to remove and avoid misunderstandings, and to promote better appreciation of each other’s faiths.” (Abimbola et al. 2008:39).

Religious dialogue - also known as interfaith dialogue or inter-religious dialogue - falls under dialogue’s many categories and closely follows its principles. However, what distinguishes religious dialogue from any other form of dialogue is that religious dialogue has the spiritual, faith-driven focus: It is “a conversation among people of different faiths on a common subject, the primary purpose of which is for each participant to learn from the other so that he or she can change or grow […]” (Smock, 2002:6).

The objective of religious dialogue is to be aware and to understand each other’s behavior, values, and assumptions as well as religious and cultural traditions, and through this, shape our behavior and improve our communication skills (Danielian et al., 1998:157). When we learn about different religions around us, we also familiarize ourselves with different cultural codes of conduct that can help us communicate and behave more appropriately (Koester & Lustig, 2010:52). Or as Collier (1997:41) puts it: “Attention to the property of shared norms gives us the ability to determine what is appropriate from the point of view of the group members. Comparing norms of conduct across groups and identifying norms in intercultural conversations is helpful in figuring out how to improve our own individual effectiveness as a communicator.” The main intention of religious dialogue is to; indeed, increase our understanding of and acceptance towards other existing religions. Finding collaborative
methods between different religious groups and individuals through raising the awareness of other faith-based systems, their traditions and beliefs is the key.

Religions are often attitude-driven and play a considerable role in how successful the religious dialogue processes will be. Carrette (1999: n.d.) writes that “religion is a part, a central part, of the cultural conditions of knowledge”, and according to Verkuyten, (2009:48) the religious group where one belongs to, “tells others who you are, to which group you belong, and what this group membership means to you”. Hence, we could say that religion does work as one of the categorical characteristics that distinguishes one from the others. It is about ‘who I am’ and ‘who they are’, about individual’s perceptions and feelings towards the other (Verkuyten, 2009:45-46). This is not to say that individuals representing another religious group would in all cases be viewed negatively or that all religious encounters would be doomed to fail; however, according to Jasinskaja-Lahti and Mähönen (2009:112), there lies a big risk that individual perceptions first change into general preconceptions and thereafter to prejudice and unfavorable behavior towards the other religious group. As Track (2003) writes: “Our encounter, our perspective of experience, is always determined by expectations and fears, by the ingrain patterns of our experience; in practice, encounter is determined by our good and bad experiences with these or those others and by the resulting judgments and prejudices.” (Track, 2003:385).

In order to prevent and tackle such prejudice-biased attitudes and behavior, Abu-Nimer (2002:17) has defined three stages that should occur in successful religious dialogue processes. These stages “are necessary for achieving and maintaining positive change in [dialogue] participants’ attitudes to the ‘other’:

1. Alternative cognitive processes through new information and analysis (change in the head)
2. A positive emotional experience in meeting the other through the construction of a safe and trusting relationship (change in the heart)
3. Working together on a concrete task or action that enforces the positive attitudinal change (change through the hand).” (Abu-Nimer, 2002:17).
Abu-Nimer (2002:17) states that “when employing the above elements in interfaith dialogue or training, participants often utilize their spiritual identities (beliefs and values) to pursue transformation or change in their perceptions of a conflict. In the change that occurs through spiritual framework, dialoguers not only receive new information, have a positive emotional experience, or accomplish a joint project, but also make a deeper human connection with each other through their spiritual encounter. When this ‘deeper spiritual connection’ is made in the interfaith dialogue, it becomes the main source for the individual’s commitment to social change, peace work, and taking the risks to confront one’s own evil.” (Abu-Nimer, 2002:17). Or as Thelle (2003:132) puts it: “One’s own spiritual home looks different when experienced and shared in dialogue with persons from other faiths, and that has to be integrated in a new self-understanding.”

However, “the purpose of these dialogue efforts is not to reduce religion to some common affirmation like ‘we all believe the same thing,’ for this is neither true nor helpful to prompting understanding” (Steffen, 2015). Instead, understanding our own faith-based ideologies can help us understand difference amongst groups of people and other cultural worldviews, heritage and customs. “The goal is not to convert, to assert the superiority of one faith or to conflate different religions (diluting them into one common denominator), but to appreciate similarities and differences between religions and for participants to understand how their faith shapes their positions on particular issues.” (Hayward, 2010:22). Williams (2013:30-31) continues this idea by stating the following: “Discussing truth is not about correcting or falsifying any faith's beliefs, but it is about hearing and listening to the other side, discovering what is 'true' for others, and developing mutual understandings and respect”. Addressing the significance of shared knowledge can never be enough, and as Panikkar (1999:9) puts it:

“the more we come to know the religions of the world, the more we are sensitive to the religiousness of our neighbor. […] We begin to realize that our neighbor’s religion not only challenges and may even enrich our own, but that ultimately the very differences that separate us are somewhat potentially within the world of my own religious convictions.” (Panikkar, 1999:9).
4.3 What Is Faith?

There have been numerous definitions presented for the concept of ‘religion’, and since the main focus of this research lies in religious dialogue, it is necessary to define what is meant by religion in this research’s framework. The term ‘religion’ might come across as fallacious, because it leaves out the possibility of other non-god-based belief systems, and because it often carries “negative connotations in the popular mind” (Mayer, 2004:411). Therefore, a term ‘faith-based system’ seemed most relevant to use in this research. According to Crabtree (2016) faith often includes “spiritual explanations of our place in the world in an attempt to answer questions about ‘why we are here’; worship of deities and/or supernatural entities (including ancestors); conceptions of ‘holy’ and ‘sacred’ activities ideas and objects; set rituals, calendar events based on the changing seasons, distinctive dress codes (especially for religious professionals), codes of morality and action that are given a mandate from a supernaturally great being, from a supernatural force or from the will of the Universe itself; and, a caste of privileged and exalted professionals who have particular claims to be in touch with transcendental forces.” (Crabtree, 2016).

Hallencreutz (1977:36) states that faith is a universal element shared by all human beings: it is about confidence, about life and death, peace of mind and a belief in someone or something. Dijker (2015:612) continues this by arguing that all religions have in common the need and desire to help, to act in a good manner and to facilitate pro-sociality. In other words, a faith-based system, in this research project referred as ‘religion’, could be described as “the view of life and the way of life” (Samartha, 1981:19). It is about searching for the meaning of life and existence, about survival or annihilation, about “the concern for one’s neighbor and doing good works” (Blaine, 2007:119). According to Dalfeth, a combining issue related to all religions and faiths is that they share an idea of the good and the bad, and an understanding of transcendence. People of all faiths aim to live according to the good, in
other words have meaningful lives and avoid the bad, so that their transcendence would be as positive as possible. (Dalferth, 2007:50-52).

Based on the universality of faith and its deep link into the human identity, we could claim that everybody has faith; either faith in god(s) or no god(s). Furthermore, “today creeds, cultus and cultures from different religions are interacting on one another and interpenetrating each other and are relativized more than ever before. Therefore, differences in religion and culture may exist in the unity of the same faith […]” (Thomas, 1967:19)

To conclude this with a clarification, all faith-based systems - monotheistic, polytheistic or atheist – as well as different denominations in for instance Christianity (Evangelic Lutherans, Methodists, Catholics, et cetera) are regarded as ‘religions’ in this particular research.

5 Criticism of Religious Dialogue and Foundations to Combat It

Despite of its inevitable need, usefulness and benefits, religious dialogue has also faced some negative feedback and assertions over time. In the next paragraphs I will go through some of the biggest stumbling blocks in religious dialogue and present possible solutions to them, based on the four main foundations for an effective interfaith dialogue presented by Jaco Cilliers (2002). These foundations are: justice, reconciliation, forgiveness and truth. The purpose of the foundations is to combat the critics and challenges religious dialogue has faced, and to ensure the quality and progressiveness of all interfaith dialogue settings.

The first foundation for effective interfaith dialogue, justice, declares that one should define and recognize the justice and injustice that has been committed, and in consequence, admit the wrong-doings of the past (Cilliers, 2002:50-51). This “requires the recognition of religious freedom as a fundamental right of the human person, and of religious plurality in the body-politic” (Thomas, 1967:33). However, people easily have the tendency to evaluate (to either approve or disapprove) the other person or group belonging to a different religious
background (Barna 1998:173-187). This being the case, acknowledging the justice done by the other party and, in contrary, admitting the own injustice committed, may be insurmountably challenging. As Smock writes:

“Participants may not even approach the process with a deep knowledge of the theology and history of their own faith community. More significant, they are likely to carry into the process a set of preconceptions and prejudices regarding the beliefs and practices of the other religious community in the dialogue. When differences in religious belief and practice generate differences in convictions about how a society should be structured, the potential obstacles to effective dialogue multiply.” (Smock, 2002:9)

The second foundation focuses on reconciliation. It is described as the process of “healing and acknowledgement of collective and individual injuries. […] Reconciliation occurs when members of conflicting groups mutually acknowledge their side’s collective wrongdoing against the other. Such acknowledgement takes place when there is enough security and trust in the group to walk through the parties’ history.” (Abu-Nimer, 2002:25). This is especially important when different faith-based organizations come together, but such challenges might also occur in a family level. Two individuals coming from entirely different religious backgrounds, if especially hurt or victimized by the other religion, may have preconceived assumptions of the other and may find it hard to set a common ground for the multiple religions to harmoniously exist within one family. Hence, negotiating about these issues as well as compromising is a key. In especially a family level it is important to remember that there are different ways to say ‘I’m sorry’; verbal communication is not the only tool. Reconciliation is indeed attached to symbols, deeds, and emotional communication (Gobin, 2002:35). As Gopin (2002:35) states: “We must pursue dialogue as reconciliation, but with great humility and elasticity, ready and willing to combine it with or supplant it with other modes of reconciliation”.

It is important to remember that differences in language, such as connotations, meanings of the words and style of language, as well as non-verbal interpretations - gestures, postures
and body movements - play a huge role in people’s communication (Barna, 1998:173-187). This should be kept in mind when people from different religious and cultural backgrounds come together. Paying attention to possible cultural elements governing the communication is vital. Gobin (2002) suggests that for successful negotiations between different faith-based organizations, “religious diplomats and peacemakers must be trained in the detection of other gestures of reconciliation, actions and deeds that mean much more, and are trusted much more, than words. They must train themselves to detect deleterious processes of engagement that result from missed symbolic and nonverbal opportunities, and to invent strategies to consciously align or engage the culturally and religiously familiar conciliatory paths of adversary groups.” (Gobin, 2002:36-37).

In order to reach the state of reconciliation, forgiveness is needed. Forgiveness, the third foundation, is simply about asking for forgiveness and forgiving to others (Cilliers, 2002:54). It might seem to be the easiest task to perform, but in reality, forgiveness is one of the most difficult issues both individuals and religious groups struggle with. According to Baumeister, Exline and Sommer (1998:84) forgiveness is difficult because “the victim loses more than the perpetrator gains [and because] the debt cannot be precisely repaid in a way that will satisfy both parties”. Difficulty of forgiveness has also been associated with individual pride and/or betrayal to (one’s own) religious group; forgiving to others makes one appear weak in front of the ‘opponents’ (Baumeister et al. 1998:95-96). Sanneh (2003:146) questions whether it is even possible to find such (forgiving) uniformity of religions; can we ever reach a common ground between different religions, creating space for apology and forgiveness? We have to accept that differences exist and that it will always be so, however; forgiveness remains essential in all encounters between people with different religious backgrounds, because it is part of the common ethics, values and morality that people across all cultures and religions share (Wilson, 2003:190). Indeed, Jones (2001:42) talks about this uniting power of forgiveness gained through faith: “If forgiveness is liberation, it is also a recovery of the past in hope, a return of memory, in which what is potentially threatening, destructive, despair-inducing, in the past is transfigured into the ground of hope.”
Last but not least, “the purpose of focusing on truth during interfaith dialogue is to seek and discover the ‘truths’ within a religious tradition that form identity and provide opportunities for cooperation and engaging in joint discovery of different traditions” (Cilliers, 2002:55). According to the fourth foundation, in order for a religious dialogue to succeed, “it must be totally loyal to truth and open to reality” (Panikkar, 1999:62). However, religious dialogue has often been criticized about the preferred outcomes and biases each participant carries and brings along to the conversation, as well as about its (perhaps unconscious) in-built aspects of exclusion: “In the dialogue field we cannot ignore the fact that religious traditions, in addition to providing a spiritual basis for life, are also sociological realities, and that they have been used, misused and abused throughout history by power groups in the social and political fields to achieve ends that have little to do with human well-being.” (Ariarajah, 1999:16). Religious dialogue has been used as a way to change the mindsets of the ‘wrong-believers’, in order to “try to change their minds rather than leave them in ignorance” (Forward, 2001:84). Panikkar continues this by stating the following: “A believing member of a religion in one way or another considers his own religion to be true. Now, the claim to truth has a certain built-in claim to exclusivity. If a given statement is true, its contradictory cannot also be true. And if a certain human tradition claims to offer a universal context for truth, anything contrary to that ‘universal truth’ will have to be declared false.” (Panikkar, 1999:5).

According to Laurence (n.d.), “it is inappropriate […] for one faith group openly to demean or disparage the philosophies or practices of another faith group as part of its proselytizing.” (Laurence, n.d.) Moreover, “we affirm that while everyone has a right to invite others to an understanding of their faith, it should not be exercised by violating other’s rights and religious sensibilities. At the same time, all should heal themselves from the obsession of converting others.” (Current Dialogue, 2008:39).

Needless to say, such defensive starting suppositions, often bound by preconceptions and prejudice towards the other group, may well hinder impartial discoveries of the truth, and hence destroy the efforts for a successful dialogue process aiming at collaboration and common goals. Albeit inspecting other religions and their representatives with open eyes and admitting the wrong-doings of the present and past might become impossible tasks to complete, they are the tasks that must be completed.
5.1 The Role of Power

The above mentioned four foundations are the basic principles for guiding religious dialogue; however, they cannot be followed or achieved if the dialogue setting is bound by any power relations. Swidler (2002:67) writes that “freedom is of the essence of being human”, and thus “it cannot be stressed strongly enough that respect for freedom of opinion, of conscience and religion, together with the principle of non-discrimination, are preconditions for an authentic dialogue” (Maurer, 2011:12).

Sometimes we can be “imprisoned in a doctrinal straitjacket” (Swidler, 2002:67). In other words, if our ideas, motives and values are dictated by higher powers and authorities, how trustworthy can the dialogue setting be, and in such case, is it really open to truth and reality? (Samartha, 1967:145). Therefore, it is crucial to address “the imbalance of power that exists outside the dialogue room” (Abu-Nimer, 2002:21).

Challenges with democracy and freedom of speech might work as conscious or unconscious parts leading the dialoguer’s behavior and thinking, especially if the participant comes from a societal background where religion and state are tightly interwoven (Banawiratma, 2002:52-54). Moreover, visible and invisible rules, power relations and hierarchies govern all forms of communication, since people with different social statuses regard different things as important (Hall, 1997:47). As Track (2003:374) puts it: “To talk about a free play of opinions and convictions, of interests, powers, and forces, resulting without difficulty in a balance of interests and power, ignores the determination with which people stand up for their own interests, strive for power and want to be in charge, cling to their convictions and even to mutually exclusive claims to validity”. Hence, it is crucial to pay attention to the roles the involved religions play in people’s lives, and to who has power over what and whom. In addition to acknowledging these facts, it should be ensured that the space for dialogue would be as neutral as possible, equal status of participants should be enhanced, and
that the needs of minority group(s) would be considered. Only when these aspects are fulfilled, one can focus on the real dialogue itself. As Panikkar puts it: “The first function of the dialogue is to discover the ground where the dialogue may properly take place” (Panikkar, 1999:70).

6 Methodology

One Family – Many Religions is for the most part a qualitative research because it is building on a social reality of religious dialogue. However, my aim here is to “report ‘findings’ rather than ‘results’” (Austin and Sutton, 2015: n.d.). Quantitative elements were included in the surveys and data collection, only, in order to support the theoretical background and to gather more generic information through individual opinions and real-life experiences.

The qualitative framework of this research is based on an ethnomethodology. It emphasizes the fact how (all) qualitative data are social constructs. That is to say that people’s cultural and social backgrounds, experiences, ideologies and other ‘life factors’ affect the way how they see and construct their world and its realities. Thus, ethnomethodology examines the methods “through which people come to develop an understanding of each other and of social situations” (Silverman, 2001:123). It “describes reality in terms of the there being multiple realities perceived and experienced by individuals”, and instead of trying to prove the research question right or wrong, “broader generalizations are generated from the collected data” (Squirrel, 2010:6). Fox and Miller (2004:36) explain this by saying that “social realities are built from the ‘bottom up’ (from ordinary interactions to general social processes)”. And as Wetherell and Potter (1992:171) suggest, ideas first become ideologies, and then take the form of social action: “an argument becomes ideological through its use, construction and form of mobilization”.

In this research setting, ethnomethodology is used to describe the role of religious dialogue within multi-religious families and different faith-based organizations, and how these two
relate to each other. The results will be based on their individual viewpoints and experiences. The interest will lie in whether religious dialogue itself shapes or has an impact in the formation of their social constructs (family well-being and relationships, organizations’ social audience and activities etc.). This will help to understand the many discourses that lie behind people’s ideas, perceptions, behaviors and habits. As Kardash and Maynard (n.d.:1486) point out, ethnomethodology “makes it possible to investigate how members of any grouping achieve, as practical, concerted behaviors, the sense of formal truth and objectivity as this sense is necessarily embedded in their everyday casual and work lives”.

Since the goal of ethnomethodology is to spread generic knowledge of the issues examined, it is hoped that as people become more aware of the benefits religious dialogue has to offer both family- and organization-wise, it could be better implemented in their everyday lives and activities. Eventually, through such common practice, religious dialogue could be used as an assistive tool for more stakeholders, as well as help to create methods to prevent misunderstandings and prejudice society-wide.

6.1 Method of Inquiry

The data collection for One Family – Many Religions was done through two online surveys. However, there was only one survey made in the beginning, the one for multi-religious families. The participants for this survey were informed about it/had spotted the information for the most part through Familia ry’s network. I had only contacted one family myself. In the beginning of this year, I made a short ‘advertising leaflet’ about the project that also included the link for the online survey. The leaflets were spread and advertised by Familia ry on their Facebook- and webpages.

Anybody belonging to a multi-religious family could participate in this research. People who were interested to take part were given two options in the beginning: they could either fill in the survey online, or alternatively, participate in an interview. The interviews would have
the exact same questions and answering options as the online survey, and the interviews could have been done either face-to-face or by for example Skype, according to what the participant would have found most convenient. Nonetheless, none of the participants wanted to participate in the interview, all of them filled in the survey online. This survey was filled in by 9 persons representing 9 different multi-religious families.

Nevertheless, both Familia ry and I felt that having just one survey was not sufficient enough. In addition to examining the role of religious dialogue within multi-religious families, we felt that it was important to add the aspect of faith-based organizations too, as they are so closely linked to the everyday lives of multi-religious families. It is also one of Familia ry’s intentions to raise awareness of multi-religious issues at a more societal level (Familia ry, 2016). Hence, we thought that in order to involve the faith-based organizations’ viewpoints into this research, they should be: first, adjusted to the theory framework and second, added to the data collection. In any way, the questions intended for multi-religious families in the first survey would not have been suitable or appropriate for faith-based organizations. Thus, another online survey was created for them. This survey also had an option for an interview, but all the participants chose to fill the survey online. An inquiry to fill in the survey was sent to different faith-based organizations working in the capital area; however, in my slight disappointment, only four organizations took part in it.

The survey for faith-based organizations had five (5) main questions, and the survey for multi-religious families twelve (12) main questions. The reason to have more questions for the families was because, in anyhow, they are in the centerpiece of this research project, and because less than 12 questions would have seemed too little, in terms of the research then being too vague or only ‘scratching the surface’. Additionally, examining faith-based organizations only and their role to religious dialogue would have been such a large topic on its own that it would have almost entirely needed its own research. Hence, we just wanted to get the core ideas about their stance to multi-religious families and religious dialogue.

Both surveys were semi-structured, including open-ended as well as closed-ended (yes/no) questions. The time to answer the surveys was until the February 28th, 2017.
6.2 Framework for Designing the Surveys

In the design and implementation of the surveys, the next guidelines were followed as well as possible: validity, objectivity and reliability.

Validity refers to the correspondence between the theoretical framework and the research observations; in other words, validity answers to questions if research measurements respond to and indicate the reality of the research’s participant(s) (Peräkylä, 1999:294). As Squirrel (2012:74) points out, “the methodology and methods should be appropriate to the purpose of the evaluation and the research questions [because] they will influence the data that can be collected and this will affect what the evaluator can report upon.”

Since this being a qualitative research examining a highly social context, I did not want to use methods that would be too calculative or narrow: I wanted to ensure that the participants would have enough ‘space’ to answer, and that their responses would not be too much limited or dictated before-hand. Hence, encouraging open discussion was important. In order to safeguard that the research results would be open to reality, I chose to use as many open-ended questions as possible. I thought that since religious dialogue as a concept is so wide, it must also be associated with a variety of ideas about its benefits or non-benefits and the use in real life.

Anyhow, a few quantitative elements were added into the research in order to get more accurate data. They could also help to develop and test theories better than entirely qualitative research approaches (Seale, 1999:125). That is why both of the surveys are semi-structured; they have both open-ended questions as well as a few yes/no – questions. In my opinion a semi-structured survey was the best and most efficient form for collecting the data for this particular research.
Additionally, in a valid research it is important that the questions should be designed so that the respondent understands them, and that vice versa, the responses should match the questions (Seale, 1999:34-38). Because the research was based on a Finnish and multicultural context, the surveys were written both in Finnish and English and it was stated that the participants could use one of these two languages to respond. This was done to ensure that everybody would be able understand the questions as well as be able to respond in the language that was more convenient for them to use. In addition, a lot of emphasis was put on to the wording of questions. According to Pew Research Center (n.d), “the choice of words and phrases in a question is critical in expressing the meaning and intent of the question to the respondent and ensuring that all respondents interpret the question the same way. Even small wording differences can substantially affect the answers people provide.” Cannell and Kahn (1954:553) continue this by saying:

“In the construction of questions the primary criterion for the choice of language is that the vocabulary and syntax offer the maximum opportunity for complete and accurate communication of ideas between the researcher […] and the respondent. The language of the question must conform to the vocabulary level of the respondent […], and the choice of language should be made from the shared vocabulary of respondent and researcher.” (Cannell and Kahn, 1954:553)

Familia ry helped me in the designing of the surveys in order to safeguard the right wording of the questions, as well as ensuring that the questions would be easy to understand, linked to the everyday lives of the participants, and matching with the theoretical framework. Here are a few examples of the wording issues in both surveys:

- Multi-religious family was referred as ‘a couple or a family with multiple religions’, in order to make it clear to the participant that a multi-religious family can also be a couple without children
- Both terms ‘intercultural communication’ and ‘religious dialogue’ were used in the questions because I thought that using the term ‘religious dialogue’ only would seem
too vague and too far from real-life experiences to these families. I felt that the word ‘culture’ or ‘cultural communication’ would be easier to understand as a concept than religious dialogue - in anyhow, religion is part of culture (de Jong, 2009:109). I did not want the survey for multi-religious families seem too scientific or theoretical, as the participants were regular families, and as the issues concerned were linked to everyday lives of these families. Furthermore, as I did not know the survey participants beforehand, I could not assume that they would be familiar with academic language. Because of this fact, the concepts of intercultural communication and religious dialogue were briefly explained in the survey model.

- In the survey for faith-based organizations, I referred to faith-based organizations with terms ‘church or congregations’. This was because initially I thought that it would make it clearer for the participant what a faith-based organization is, however in hindsight, using these two terms proved to be a mistake. I noticed that they limited the participant to believe that the survey was meant for religious organizations only, thus, excluding other faith-based systems such as atheism or animistic beliefs (nature-connected religions). This, of course, was not the purpose.

Paying attention to the right wording also allows the research to be more objective. Objectivity refers to the “efforts to assure the accuracy and inclusiveness of recordings that the research is based on.” (Peräkylä, 2004:283). It is about avoiding biased interpretations in the (survey) questions and from the researcher’s side (Squirrel, 2012:44). Squirrel (2012:58) continues to write that “evaluator’s self-awareness is essential to understanding how their own limitation may be impacting their capacity to collect data and to make sense of it”. In order to be objective, it was important that my own value preferences (‘religious dialogue is important’ or ‘it is a great tool for multi-religious families’) would not show in the survey questions (or later in the analysis phase). That is why a lot of attention was paid in the framing of the questions as well as in the inclusion of open-ended questions in order to manifest the realities and the honest opinions of the participants (Daly, 2007:144). Moreover, all the closed-ended questions always had the possibility to answer ‘no’ or ‘I am not sure’. It is self-evident that since all research is human product, it is impos-
sible for the researcher to be totally impartial and to avoid value-based assumptions: there is a constant risk for contrasts between realism and idealism (Silverman, 2001:54). Nonetheless, I tried my best to “de-emphasize the authority of authors to pronounce on social reality, preferring instead an approach that supports multiple perspectives and polyvocality” (Seale, 1999:73).

Objectivity is also related to different power positions: since the issues of religious dialogue are often bound by power relationships, it was thus crucial for me to avoid creating any power imbalances in terms of the data gathering as well. To explain this better, I would like to quote Glassner and Miller (2004) who state the following:

“The issue of how interviewees respond to us based on who we are – in their lives, as well as the social categories to which we belong, such as age, gender, class and race – is a practical concern as well as an epistemological or theoretical one.” (Glassner and Miller, 2004:127-128).

Based on this – in retrospect – it seems like a positive factor that none of the participants wanted to do an interview, but on a contrary, decided to fill in the surveys online. This is because interview settings may elicit (social) power imbalances between the researcher and participants (Squirrel, 2012:83). Not being in a close face-to-face contact can allow more space for thinking, consideration, and multiple, honest, perspectives. It may additionally lessen social pressure and bias from both sides (participants vs. researchers), as well as decrease any preconceptions about the other (Track, 2003:385).

Last but not least, reliability was one of the aspects considered in the surveys. Reliability is “the degree to which the finding is independent of accidental circumstances of the research”; in other words, the same findings/results can be obtained with a different research method and/or by different observers (Peräkylä, 2004:285). According to Silverman (2001:231), surveys – themselves – can already be regarded as reliable methods because they are usually well-standardized. To ensure the reliability of the surveys, their questions were made to be as general as possible. They were not tight to for instance any specific environment, society
or country. The limitation about the participants either residing in Finland or having a Finnish nationality/background, if residing abroad, was made only to help the researcher better understand the participants’ context and discourses. This can help to make sense of the connotations linked to religions and religious dialogue (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2009, n.d.). Even though One Family – Many Religions is based on a Finnish context, it is designed so that it could easily be generalized to any other society. Although the case sample for this research is rather small, the topic of religious dialogue is universal, and hence a matter that people across cultures can relate to. Seale (1999:107-109) states that:

“All case study […] will generate greater benefit if it can be a reliable guide to what happens elsewhere. The goal of generalization therefore seems worth pursuing if at all possible. […] However, “qualitative researchers cannot study every context to which readers might wish to generalize results. Put simply, this means that readers must always make their own judgments about the relevance of findings for their own situations. […] Additionally, if the case is study is logically connected to and well-reasoned through reliable theory, it can be easily generalized “to some other population of cases”. (Seale, 1999:107-109).

However, the limitations about participants’ residence or nationality were not made visible in the questions in any way because before entering the survey, such limitations had already been made. That is, people who wanted to take part were already informed of them. Additionally, I did not want the questions themselves limit any participants from participating or from giving authentic responses, no matter what the current location of the participant was. This allows other researchers use the same questions in any given society, with any given multi-religious families or faith-based organizations, and with other methods (for instance interviews).

Another aspect of reliability is that “multiple differing interpretations are unacceptable; as it is assumed that a single valid version is the goal of research” (Seale, 1999:41). In order to achieve this goal, the research questions were designed so that they would, as well as possi-
ble, be in line with the theory basis and serve the purpose of this research project. Fox and Miller (2004) state that: “Asking questions that address themes that are part of, or implied by, two or more perspectives is a form of analytic bridging. The questions allow qualitative researchers to focus on aspects of the perspectives that are – at least potentially – compatible”. (Fox&Miller, 2004:47). Or as Peräkylä (2004:283) writes: “The aim of social science is to produce descriptions of a social world – not just any descriptions, but descriptions that in some controllable way correspond to the social world that is being described.”

6.3 Data Handling

The surveys were created using the Google Forms platform for online surveys. The answers were then copy-pasted to Microsoft Excel, and the given data was restored and categorized according to certain themes. Each category includes answers with same answers (yes/no/I am not sure) or similar viewpoints. These answers were then modified so that one or a few sentences were created to match with the original responses’ ideas. This type of categorization data sampling (also referred as ‘coding’) is part of quantitative methods and often applied to support the interpretation of qualitative data (Approaches to the Analysis of Survey Data, 2001:14-15). This method was used for two reasons. First, for ethics: There was no permission asked to openly publish each survey answer individually in its original form (I did not see a need for this), and in order to safeguard the privacy of survey participants it had to be ensured that no identification could be made to any of the survey respondents. Secondly, I felt it was important to capsulize the main points of the original answers, as some of them were multiple chapters long and therefore a little complex to understand. This helped in keeping the focus clear and simple; both for the researcher and the readers. The aim with this was to “do less, more thoroughly”, as Wolcott would say (Wolcott, 1990:62).

Thereafter, all categories were given a numerical value; for instance, ‘five people were in the opinion of so-and-so’. This type of data handling is called the ‘sequential exploratory strategy’, which purpose is to “use quantitative data and results to assist in the interpretation of
qualitative findings”, and to help “explore a phenomenon.” (Creswell, 2003:215). It also helped to count “the frequency of certain types of responses” (Squirrel, 2012:113) and to “generalize the findings to a population and develop a detailed view of the meaning of a phenomenon or concept for individuals” (Creswell, 2003:22).

6.4 Ethics

In the process of conducting this research project, there were a few ethical aspects that needed to be considered. Safeguarding the anonymity of research participants and protecting confidentiality of the research findings/data were the main ethical considerations that took place.

According to Daly (2007:244), the research participants should be informed of “the voluntary nature of their participation and that they can withdraw at any time, [of] the purpose of the study [and about] how the results will be used”. All the ‘advertising leaflets’ as well as emails sent about the project clearly stated that this is a voluntary research where all the survey (and possible interview) data would be handled with full anonymity and confidentiality. Additionally, it was stated that the findings of this research would be used as part of this Master’s thesis paper as well as for improving the future work of Familia ry. This same information was written the second time on the starting page of bot surveys, or told to the participant via a telephone call. Participants were not required to let me or any of the Familia ry’s staff to know if they had filled in the surveys or not. The surveys did not ask for the participant’s identity or organizational background either. Hence, no responses can be connected to anyone in particular.

Nevertheless, the organizational background (in the survey for faith-based organization) of the person responding, was visible in part of the survey answers if (s)he her/himself had stated it; however, this was not, by any means, required or asked for. Admittedly, it would have been beneficial for the research’s sake to be aware of the faith-based systems/religions behind the organizations that took part in the survey. This is because it would have helped in understanding the discourses and context behind the statements; in other words, defining the
main reasons for so-and-so responses. However, the names of the faith-based organizations were not asked because: 1) I wanted to keep the survey entirely anonymous, and 2) I was afraid that had the survey been non-anonymous, it might have hindered some organizations from participating. As the Canadian online magazine The Star states in its article *The importance of online anonymity: Geist*; “people are emboldened by anonymity to speak out in a manner that would otherwise be unavailable if they were forced to identify themselves” (2014).

Another way to protect participants’ privacy was to use the coding technique in the data handling and categorization process. This was done so that no identification could be made to any of the survey respondents. Moreover, the original survey answers can only be visible in the Google Forms platform that requires an individualized user account and I am the only one who had/has an access to this account.

Another area of ethics includes a just and an impartial treatment of research participants. Since I was not in a face-to-face contact with any of the participants, this was done by taking the wording and terminology of the questions into larger consideration. According to Current Dialogue (2008:39), one must be “sensitive to the religious language and theological concepts in different faiths”, because “one’s own spiritual home looks different when experienced and shared in dialogue with persons from other faiths” (Thelle, 2003:132). Following this aspect was important to me because it is one element of religious dialogue, and because if not followed carefully, it could potentially be one of the stumbling blocks for successful dialogue processes (Samartha, 1981:72). Paying attention to these issues was also done because I wanted the research to be as honest and open to reality as possible; I did not want my own biases, opinions or assumptions (religiously oriented or not) to be reflected in the questions, nor did I want them to affect the participants’ mindset or responses in that given time.
The main findings of the surveys were that firstly, “religion functions in the formation and transformation of family relationships as well as in the maintenance of family relationships” (Vermeer, 2014:407), and that characters of religious dialogue are being actively used within multi-religious families. Secondly, the role of faith-based organizations is both meaningful and inevitable in the lives of multi-religious families, and faith-based organizations’ general stance towards religious dialogue seems to be positive. However, society's role in enhancing and increasing the awareness of religious diversity and dialogue was seen essential for both the multi-religious families and faith-based organizations involved.

The purpose of this section is to further explore the research findings gathered from the surveys. I will study and explain the results, and through linking those to the theoretical framework test their accuracy in relation to this research’s aims. I will first have a look at the survey for multi-religious families, and thereafter move on to the survey for different faith-based organizations. The English versions of the questions and their responses can be found in the appendices at the end of this thesis paper. This allows the reader to have the responses alongside with their analysis, and in this way the original survey structure can be kept in its initial place and format.

7.1 Survey for Multi-Religious Families - Analysis

The first two questions of the survey (“How many religions are at present in your relationship/family?” and “What are the religions that are present in your relationship/family?”) were implemented to explore the spectrum of religions in the families in question. This information is not necessarily significant for religious dialogue as such, but it does illustrate the versatility of different religions and faith-based systems within individual families, let alone within societies generally. This supports the fact that finding methods for a peaceful
coexistence of religions is a current theme, thus creating a considerable need for religious diapraxis (dialogue in action).

The questions three and four (“Do you think it is useful that there are multiple religions in your relationship/family? – why, explain.” And “What are the strengths of having multiple religions in your relationship/family?”) were asked to find out how multi-religious families view and define themselves. Now in hindsight, it has to be admitted that these questions were overlapping a bit and I could have designed them more carefully. However, I do find that the answers provided to question number three allow viewpoints that the question number four would have alone excluded. That is, it allows the participants to evaluate and explain both viewpoints: the usefulness or non-usefulness of having multiple religions in a family. Additionally, having these both questions allows an open and an unbiased approach to both the strengths and challenges of multi-religious families: they do not make any assumptions that having multiple religions within one family would be either a positive or a negative factor.

As we can see from the results to these questions, most participants had either a positive or neutral viewpoint to the multiplicity of religions in their families. Most were in the opinion that multiple religions allow a generally more open worldview and that it increases acceptance and tolerance. Six people saw multi-religious-ism as a factor that increases mutual understanding and respect for each other's beliefs, and five people said that it helps to be more aware of the discourses that affect people's choices. Moreover, it was stated that having a multi-religious family increases religiousness in total, which was seen as strength for these families. Only one participant was in the opinion that having multiple religions in a family causes constant disagreements. According to the rest, religion was seen as such a neutral part of the family life that it was almost invisible, and therefore not seen as specifically useful or harmful. I found this surprising because even though “the family is the place where the intergenerational transmission of religious beliefs and practices takes place and thus is of crucial importance for the persistence and continuation of religious traditions and communities” (Vermeer, 2014:402), the findings of this research show that many multi-religious families do not regard the fact of having multiple religions as something special or
extraordinary; it seems to be just a normal feature and element for these families. This might be due to the fact that these families are already so accustomed to having multiple religions that they have become ‘blind’ to religious differences, or because of the secular nature of Finnish religious culture as explained in the section three.

Questions five and six (“Have you had any challenges or difficulties related to having multiple religions in your relationship/family? - If yes, what kind of challenges?” and “What kind of methods have you used to prevent such challenges and to overcome them?”) were to find out what possible challenges multi-religious families might have faced, and to see if religious dialogue was among the methods to overcome them. Six people responded that they had had challenges in the families due to having multiple religions, however, when asked about the methods to prevent or overcome them in question number six, four people claimed that they did not have any bigger challenges, and therefore no methods were needed. One potential reason for such mixed information could be that the word ‘method’ was not fully understood in a sense that for many it might come across as a too scientific term. In other words, some might have thought that ‘method’ does not include everyday aspects of life and relationships such as discussion or sharing. There was a brief explanation of religious dialogue (as a method) after the question number six, however, I did not want to include it before the question five because I did not want to make the participant feel that it would be the only method that I was looking for to find in the answers. By doing this I was trying to avoid any assumptions coming both from the researcher’s and participants’ side.

Anyhow, despite of such ambiguity, in question 5 participants were also asked to describe the challenges they had had. Three participants stated that dealing with and combining different religious ideologies and traditions in the daily lives was difficult. In addition, teaching children about multi-religious-ism or about god(s) was said to be challenging. Linked to this, two were in the opinion that the lack of or non-willingness to communicate and collaborate about religious issues was a challenge. Moreover, it was said by two participants that the pressure from other families and the society in general, as well as prejudices from the outside were seen as the most challenging factors of having multiple religions in a family. The responses validate Vermeer’s statement about how religion affects the family relationships
and their formation (Vermeer, 2014:407). This makes understanding each other’s religious traditions and special features necessary in multi-religious families (Hytönen, 2003:221).

When asked about the methods to prevent and overcome possible challenges in the families, four people were in the opinion that discussing religious issues as well as compromising from both sides was essential. This factor is also supported by Harley (n.d.) according to whom, it is vital for multi-religious couples to talk about their religious differences and to pay attention to the “the feelings of his or her spouse to follow the religious teaching” (Harley, n.d.). Additionally, according to one participant it was important to pay more attention to the role religions play in children's life.

In conclusion to questions five and six, it is important to note that religious dialogue was the only method used to overcome the challenges the families had had in the past related to multi-religious-ism. This was the response of five families with challenges, and there was only one family with challenges that had not used religious dialogue, or any other methods for that matter. In total there were five out of nine families (with and without challenges) that admitted to have used methods in their daily lives that included aspects of religious dialogue. This is to prove the topicality and extent of religious dialogue within multi-religious families and the benefits it has to offer for them.

Question number seven (“Have you used intercultural communication and/or religious dialogue to support your relationship/family life? -If yes, how?”) seems to be overlapping with question number six (“What kind of methods have you used to prevent such challenges and to overcome them?”), and indeed these two provide the same answers. However, I wanted to include both of these questions in the survey because the sixth question allows space for all possible methods to be used in order to support the family lives, whereas the seventh question is specifically targeted to examine religious dialogue. Its purpose is to evidence whether or not religious dialogue is a tool that plays a considerable role in the lives of multi-religious families. According to the responses, all five participants who admitted to have used religious dialogue within their families saw it significant to discuss the different religions and
their traditions with each other, as well as to talk about how these religions affect the daily lives and each family member individually.

Additionally, in the question eight (“Do you think that intercultural communication and/or religious dialogue is/could be a useful tool for your relationship/family?”), five people saw religious dialogue and intercultural communication as useful tools for their families, three were not sure about it and only one person said ‘no’.

The responses given to questions six, seven and eight, answer to what this research wanted to explore: more than half of the respondents considered religious dialogue to be an important support tool for their families, and elements of religious dialogue were used and implemented in the daily lives by the majority of the multi-religious families. Some of this religious dialogue probably occurred unconsciously; that is, the families might not have been aware of its use, or they had not considered it as a specific ‘tool’ or ‘method’. However, the responses confirm that religious dialogue does play a meaningful role, both in its extent and validity, in the lives of multi-religious families.

The questions from nine to twelve focus merely on the general role and position of religious dialogue and multi-religious families society-wise.

In question number nine (“Have you faced prejudices, discrimination or racism in general due to the fact there are multiple cultures and/or religions in your relationship/family?”), more than 60% of the respondents admitted to have faced prejudices, discrimination or racism related to having multiple religions in their families. These preconceptions from the outsiders can be explained through religion’s role in the perception of the self, the individual and the others; they are part of the process that defines who we and they are (Stewart et al., 1998:159-164). Liebkind (2009:29) continues this by stating that since religion “is about our deepest ethnic awareness and identification”, it “influences [our] present conditions, perceptions and behavior.” If these perceptions are negative to start with, they can easily take the form of prejudice, discrimination and racism (Liebkind, 2009:29). This supports the fact stated earlier in this thesis paper about how small-scale issues can easily become issues that
touch entire communities; all levels of society are in constant communication, having an effect on one another. The role of religious dialogue plays a great importance as a mediator between these different levels. According to Eboo (2007:xv) religious dialogue “is a form of proactive cooperation that affirms the identity of the constituent communities while emphasizing that the wellbeing of each and all depends on the health of the whole. It is the belief that the common good is best served when each community has a chance to make its unique contribution.” Through religious dialogue “the boundaries between groups, and processes of social exclusion from ‘us’, can be renegotiated and changed as people come to embrace new understandings of ‘who they are’ and what they value and believe” (Reynolds et al. 2012:62). Religious dialogue is thus helping to prevent from and combat the “faulty and inflexible generalizations” that affect the everyday lives of multi-religious families (Jasinskaja-Lahtı & Mähönen, 2009:113).

To continue with this, questions number ten and eleven (“How would you describe the position or stance of multireligious couples/families in the society?” and “Do you think that the special features of your family (primarily having multiple religions) are taken into account in the services provided by the society? For example: family counselling, peer support groups, schools, different organisations, other social services, churches. What could be done so that these services would pay more attention to your family's special features (of having multiple religions)? Suggestions?”) clearly indicate how multi-religious families see their stance in the society: according to the majority of them, they are viewed negatively or as ‘not-important’, and there seems to be a lack of understanding towards such families’ features and needs. Moreover, majority of them had wished for more counselling and supportive methods for multi-religious families, and for more discussion and education about multi-religious issues at schools and in general. Despite of this, seven out of nine participants responded that there is, in fact, enough support or guidance available for multi-religious families. This, in my opinion, is a little contradictory, however can be explained through the following: it might be that the perceptions of multi-religious families of themselves and about how others view them are linked with negative preconceptions. This goes back to Liebkind’s ideas of self- and ethnic identification presented in the earlier chapter. According to Verkuyten, the slightly negative preconceptions from the multi-religious families’ side to how oth-
ers view them can be explained through social identity theory. It “indicates what a person is from a social perspective: one’s location or place in society” (Verkuyten, 2009:47). Thus, the services and support provided for multi-religious families can in fact be more extensive than thought or known-about, but the general knowledge of multi-religious families and issues is still considered to be generally vague and prejudice-oriented.

The question number twelve (“How could intercultural communication and interreligious dialogue be increased at the societal level?”) is to conclude the survey with how religious dialogue and intercultural communication could be increased at the societal level. 80% said that raising the awareness of multi-religious issues and families as well as of the importance of religious dialogue was crucial from the surrounding society. It was acknowledged in the responses that more work towards decreasing prejudices and discrimination should be done. This clearly answers to the research aims and questions, and is another evidence of how an important role religious dialogue plays in the prevention of prejudice. As Wright and Baray (2012:229) state, “interpersonal contact between members of different groups, under specified conditions, can reduce prejudice.”

Media’s role as an educator was seen as especially important in the dissemination of awareness and in prejudice-reduction. Media’s role in spreading religious messages and in shaping people’s preconceptions is, however, another study area of its own that would require a much larger investigation than it is possible to do within this research’s framework. Nonetheless, briefly said, it seems it has become media’s task to “legitimize the alleged necessity [...] to control and contain religion. [...] New forms of mediation not only transform religious discourses and practices but religion also features in films, videos and TV programs in a framework of entertainment or ‘infotainment’” (Meyer and Moors, 2006:5). However, this ‘infotainment’ is not always used as a channel to purely spread awareness, but to question, to judge and to even encourage to hate those of other faiths. To stop this scary trend, media should be instead used as a channel to spread awareness and acceptance through religions. Nonetheless, because of its power to impact people’s attitudes and ideologies, it becomes our great responsibility “to ensure that our understanding of social media and its impacts are constantly evaluated with what’s happening in the world” (Amedie, 2015:18)
7.2 Survey for Faith-Based Organization – Analysis

Faith-based organizations seemed rather reluctant to participate in this survey, and hence the sample for this survey consists of only four participants from four different faith-based organizations. That is why it is worth noting that the results of this survey are only indicative and that such small sample does not provide with a sufficient amount of scientific proof to either support or challenge the research question. However, this is a fact that the researcher could not affect since answering the surveys and participating in this research was totally voluntary. Additionally in either case, I do consider the survey results to at least somewhat display the general opinions and attitudes of the majority of all faith-based organizations concerning religious dialogue and multi-religious families. Moreover, they do support the theoretical framework of this thesis paper, and the previous studies on the relationships between faith-based organizations and (multi)religious families.

The first two questions of this survey ("What is your church's or congregation's general attitude or opinion about multireligious relationships or marriages?" and "Has your church or congregation paid attention to multireligious couples and families in the services and activities you provide? – If yes, how?") attempt to find out the general attitudes of faith-based organizations towards multi-religious families. Half of the respondents seemed to have a positive outlook towards multi-religious families, nevertheless, the other half was in the opinion that multi-religious relationships were not encouraged, and hence there was also no need to pay more attention to them or their needs. Nonetheless, what it comes to question two, three out of four respondents said that they would have paid attention to multi-religious couples and families in their services and activities. This raises a question of reliability: were the organizations open to reality in their responses? This question seems valid since the organizations were rather reluctant to participate in the research to begin with.

No matter what the right answer was, faith-based organizations seem to play an important and inevitable role in and to the lives of multi-religious families. This claim is reasoned by Ash (2002:44), according to whom, religion is an interwoven part of multi-religious families.
that dictates many areas of life. As Vermeer (2014:405) states, “religion is, for instance, found to promote getting married, to procreate or to influence attitudes about spousal roles (formation of family relationships), to influence divorce rates, sexual fidelity or parenting processes (maintenance of family relationships) as well as to affect the way people deal with domestic violence (transformation of family relationships)” (Vermeer, 2014:405). According to Ariarajah (1999:87-88), multi-religious families need faith-based organizations’ help in especially service- and legal-based issues, as well as in every-day communication and family life. Vermeer writes about this by saying that “for religious messages about family life and child rearing to be heard parents must be socially integrated in a religious community” (Vermeer, 2014:411). Nonetheless, multi-religious families often have to deal with their challenges alone; many studies show that such families do not get a sufficient amount of (or if any) support and help from their extended families and religious communities (Ariarajah, 1999:87-88).

“Precisely at the time when the couple need guidance, support and help, the religious communities to which they had belonged (in some cases continually for more than twenty years) turn their back on them, refusing to offer a ceremony and gradually withdrawing from the couple for fear of being accused of interference. [...] A careful study of the attitudes of religious communities shows that much of the way inter-religious marriages are handled still reflects the times when religious communities treated one another as mutually exclusive or rival groups. Therefore, the primary focus of regulations governing inter-religious marriages is punitive. They are designed to discourage and prevent such marriages, or when they do happen, to use them as opportunities for ‘conversion’.” (Ariarajah, 1999:93-95).

Based on this, it becomes even more essential for all faith-based organizations to pay more attention to multi-religious families and their needs.

The questions from three to five review faith-based organizations’ relationship to religious dialogue in general. In questions number three (“Do you think that churches and congrega-
tions (in general) should pay more attention to multireligious-ism in the services they provide?”), fifty percent were in the opinion that more attention should be paid to the multireligious-ism in the services that different faith-based organizations provide. Three out of four respondents also considered religious dialogue to be an important aspect in the services that their own organization provides (in question number four: “Do you consider religious dialogue to be an important aspect in the services you provide?”). This same amount applies to question five (“Do you think that religious dialogue should be increased between different churches and religions? - If yes, how could it be increased?”). Additionally, all organizations who agreed that religious dialogue should be increased between different churches and religions, said that raising the awareness of different religions through discussion is a key for successful dialogue processes within faith-based organizations.

These responses prove that ‘the need’ for religious dialogue within faith-based organizations is not only an assumption made from the researchers’ side; it is a necessity for them. According to Colwell (2014:10), religious dialogue is important for the work and collaboration of these organizations because it “is now an important expression of recognizing God’s call to unity”. Moreover, “when we turn to interfaith dialogue we see striking similarities in the convictions and beliefs as to what is achievable” (Colwell, 2014:11).

The importance of religious dialogue society-wise and between different faith-based organizations can also be supported by its significance to multi-religious families. This has been evidenced through earlier studies, of which Maarit Hytönen says the following:

“Ecumenical convergence creates new possibilities for the problem-solving of the challenges multi-faith marriages might face, and for the strengthening of each individual’s own faith. The two-church-tradition, as its best, enriches the life of the married couple, the children and the entire family. The possibilities for the pondering of special features of multi-faith couples happens best within the negotiations and collaboration between different religious churches”. (Hytönen, 2003:221).
8 Evaluation of the research project

The focus of this research was clear to me from the very beginning; I wanted to study religious dialogue from the perspective of multi-religious families and different faith-based organizations. I also knew how I would want to gather the data, that is, through either interviews or the surveys, which in the end were the method used. The surveys were planned and published before setting up the final research aim or question. I wanted to have the surveys available online as soon as possible so that:

1) Family and I would have enough time to ‘advertise’ them and to get more contacts,
2) Participants would have enough time to respond to the surveys, and so that
3) I would have enough time in the spring for the sampling and analyzing of data, and for reading and writing the theory parts for this thesis paper.

Framing the final research aims and question proved to be rather difficult after designing the surveys. This was because the research method(s) are designed to provide answers for the research question (Creswell, 2003:114). Silverman (2001:220) states that difficulties in defining the research question may also affect research credibility. Anyhow, according to Creswell, “the [research] questions are under continual review and reformulation…” (Creswell, 2003:107). Now in hindsight, I find it much less complicated had I defined the final research aims and question before designing and publishing the surveys. Since this was not the case, the research aims and question were defined and modified several times to match with the survey questions and focus of this research. Not having a clear research goal or question designed, also made the selection of appropriate theory frameworks and models a little difficult. Even though it was clear in my head what I wanted this research to manifest; however, I had difficulties in expressing that in writing. I especially had challenges in structuring the text in the beginning and was not quite sure about what to include and what to leave out; I many times found myself falling into the trap of complexity of theories and of trying to add too many aspects. This is why the surveys, too, might sometimes come across as slightly
‘poorly planned’, especially in terms of question overlapping. However, having those questions seems important now, even though they provided with similar answers. As explained earlier, such questions (for example 3 & 4 and 6 & 7) allow the researcher to have an unbiased and non-assumptive approach to the issues involved. This is one of the main elements of a valid and reliable qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003:601).

Similar answers to different questions might also be due to the possible misunderstanding or the multi-dimensionality of the concepts. Daly (2007:70) writes that “the way we define families has become problematic in an era when diversity is the norm”. I believe this same challenge occurs with the concepts ‘religious dialogue as a method’ and ‘faith-based system’. Even though they were explained in the surveys, they should have probably been clarified better. For instance, it should have been stated in the surveys (as it states in this thesis paper) that the term religion refers to all faith-based systems, including atheism and different religious denominations. Coherence with/between the terms used in the surveys and in this thesis paper should have been, in any way, practiced more. Some terms in the surveys were only used to help the participant better understand and relate to the themes. For example, the term ‘intercultural communication’, combined with religious dialogue, was used in the surveys because the word ‘religious dialogue’ alone would have presumably come across as too scientific for the participants. Now in hindsight, it would have been wise to include the term ‘intercultural communication’ in this thesis paper as well in order to increase reliability, even though the link between religious dialogue and intercultural communication was briefly explained in the section 4.2.

Questions with many "I am not sure" answers were probably slightly perplex to understand them correctly, or they were questions that the participant felt uneasy to answer, or questions that would have taken more time to ponder about. It might also be that for some participants some of the questions were not really necessary or current in their life situations; for instance, if the participant did not see anything special about having multiple religions within their family, they might have thought that there is no need to answer the question or to think more about it. However, I think it is worth noticing that no matter how carefully the research and its method of inquiry were planned; there is always a chance for unreliable and incoher-
ent information to occur. As Silverman (2001:232) states, “what people say in answer to interview [or in this case to survey] questions does not have a stable relationship to how they behave in naturally occurring situations”. Golafshani (2003:599) continues this idea by saying that:

“Test-retest method may sensitize the respondent to the subject matter, and hence influence the responses given. We cannot be sure that there was no change in extraneous influences such as an attitude change that has occurred. This could lead to a difference in the responses provided. Similarly, Crocker and Algina (1986) note that when a respondent answer a set of test items, the score obtained represents only a limited sample of behavior. As a result, the scores may change due to some characteristic of the respondent, which may lead to errors of measurement.” (Golafshani, 2003:599).

However, when considered from another perspective, these different interpretations did not affect this research in a negative way as such, but instead, added versatility. I think it is only a matter of stating that as many people there are, as many interpretations are valid (Rutherford & Ahlgren, 1990:89-90).

It has to also be admitted that the results of this research were somewhat predictable beforehand. This could be due to the small sample of research participants. Even though this research was advertised through many channels and hence got a fairly large audience, the interest to participate was not as high. There could be many reasons for this but I believe, as explained in the beginning sections, that one of the biggest reasons was the general “unwillingness to discuss religious issues, preferring silence to possible insensitivity” (Ranjan, 2014). In anyhow, the aim of this research was not to prove the research question right or wrong, but to focus on the general findings that in this case supported the theoretical framework and the research aims.

Despite of some of the complexity I faced during this research process, I am happy with the end result. I think I was finally able to come up with a research topic that is both needed and
current, and not much studied in the past. I was also able to choose and limit my theory basis, and propose valid and manageable research goals and questions that both the surveys and the theoretical framework were able to support and answer. The theoretical framework was studied carefully and followed well, and the process of this entire Master’s research project was thoroughly explained in order to make it clear and transparent to the reader. Both the areas of success as well as shortcomings of this project were acknowledged so that the end result would be as honest and objective as possible, thus allowing space for development. In defiance of the challenges, I think I was able to finalize a thesis paper that is both consistent and coherent, and easy to follow.

9 Conclusions

The objective of this Master’s research project was to find out what kind of role religious dialogue plays within multi-religious families and faith-based organizations, and to examine the extent of its use. The attempt was to raise awareness of the significance of religious dialogue generally, of the diversity of faith-based systems and of the role that multi-religious families play in the society. Additionally, it was examined how different faith-based organizations as well as general attitudes affect the lives of multi-religious families.

All in all, I think that One Family – Many Religions is a successful research project. As it was hoped, the theoretical framework and the research findings were able to answer the aims of this project. They helped to display the benefits of religious dialogue and provided with a lot of valuable information about multi-religious families and different faith-based organizations. They offered new insights to religious dialogue and to its use as a method for the different stakeholders involved, and helped to possibly break down some preconceived ideas about them. Furthermore, even though the sample was rather small, I think this research can easily be generalized to any given society because of its ethno-methodological perspective, and because of its neutral approach both theory-wise and in the survey questions. That is, they do not specifically target or limit this research to be conducted in a Finnish context on-
ly. I think the research findings allow a comprehensive viewpoint to the topics discussed, and the information received is both needed and appreciated because of its current, yet timeless, theme.

In this research project, the significance of religious dialogue has been addressed with such extensity that ignoring it would seem unreasonable, if not even impossible. It is a topic of high importance; however, a topic not necessarily as extensively used in practice. It seems that multi-religious families are a growing phenomenon, and that more awareness of their needs as well as of the general diversity of religions should be raised society-wise. More guidance and support is needed, and much work for the prevention of prejudice should be done. This can only be done through inclusive methods that acknowledge and internalize religious dialogue in their everyday practices. The multi-religious family units have the power to use religious dialogue within their constructs to break through diversity within society. Additionally, the role of different faith-based organizations seems inevitable in the lives for and of multi-religious families, and hence, it becomes their higher responsibility to tackle these issues and to become the sources of support.

For future considerations, it might be wise to conduct a practical research where multi-religious families would be brought together with different faith-based organizations, thus increasing their collaboration and awareness of each other’s needs and services. Additionally, it would be of high importance to study how media affects our perceptions of people of other faiths, and how this image could be changed into a more positive one. Either way, I think any research concerning religious dialogue would be essential in today’s world of diversity, as we have so many times witnessed.

To conclude this, I would like to end this thesis paper with the following words by Philip Potter in Samartha’s *Courage for Dialogue - Ecumenical Issues in Inter-Religious Relationships*:
“We have glimpses of the deepest perception of faith, but we know that this perception of faith cannot be carried on alone. There are many others in the wilderness, people of other living faiths, people of other ideologies or of none; we cannot pass them by. The dialogue which is called for is a face-to-face existence of loving together and struggling together as we seek community. Above all, in the wilderness we have discovered that we are indeed a fellowship as the pilgrim people of God.” (Samartha, 1981:62).
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Bibliography


Surveys

Invitation to survey for multi-religious families

HEY YOU!

Do you live in a family of two or more religions? How is this shown in your daily life?

Familia ry/ Familia NGO is conducting a small-scale research called Yksi Perhe - Monta Uskontoa / One Family – Many Religions. The research will bring the challenges and strengths of multi-religious relationships and families into public.

The aim of this research is to increase interfaith communication and religious dialogue within families and between different religions in a more societal level. Individuals living in multi-religious relationships and families can receive valuable information and tools to support their family lives, and to strengthen their multidimensional identities. As a long-term goal the research will raise public awareness of the special features of multicultural and -religious families, as well as improve the services aimed at them.

The research will be held either through anonymous interviews or by filling out our questionnaire (a link to the questionnaire at the end of this page). Are You living in a relationship or family of two or more relationships? Familia ry needs volunteers to share their story. You can be an individual, a couple or an entire family.

The research will be conducted and interviews held by a Uppsala University Theology Master student Marianna Kemppi. The results will also be used in her final thesis project. All the interviews and the questionnaire will be anonymous and confidential. Please contact us as soon as possible!

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION AND HELP!

Fill out the questionnaire here (http://bit.ly/2ikdUuc) or make an appointment to an interview! Time to participate until 28 February 2017!

Familia ry Yrjönkatu 29 A, 4. kerros, 00100 Helsinki
Marianna Kemppi: tel. xxxxx
Invitation to survey for faith-based organizations

HEY!

Familia ry/ Familia NGO is conducting a small-scale research called Yksi Perhe - Monta Uskontoa / One Family – Many Religions. The research will bring the challenges and strengths of multi-religious relationships and families into public.

The aim of this research is to increase interfaith communication and religious dialogue within families and between different religions in a more societal level. Individuals living in multi-religious relationships and families can receive valuable information and tools to support their family lives, and to strengthen their multidimensional identities. As a long-term goal the research will raise public awareness of the special features of multicultural and -religious families, as well as improve the services aimed at them.

The research will be held either through anonymous interviews or by filling out our questionnaire (a link to the questionnaire at the end of this page). This questionnaire has been sent to representatives of various different religious churches and congregations.

The research will be conducted and interviews held by a Uppsala University Theology Master student Marianna Kemppi. The results will also be used in her final thesis project.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

Please participate by using our short questionnaire here (http://bit.ly/2jw8eOv) or make an appointment to an interview!

Time to participate until 28 February 2017!

Familia ry Yrjönkatu 29 A, 4. kerros, 00100 Helsinki
Marianna Kemppi: tel. xxxx
Survey for Multi-Religious Families – Questions and Answers

(Link to this survey: http://bit.ly/2ikdUuc)

1) How many religions are at present in your relationship/family? (9 answers)

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 3 religions</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2) What are the religions that are present in your relationship/family? (9 answers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evangelic Lutheran and Islam</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelic Lutheran and Catholics</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelic Lutheran and hinduism</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam and atheism</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelic Lutheran, Islam and &quot;spiritualism”/something else</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelic Lutheran, Islam and atheism</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholics and “spiritualism”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3) Do you think it is useful that there are multiple religions in your relationship/family? (9 answers)
Positive viewpoint (6 answers):
Multiple religions allow an open worldview and many different viewpoints to everything.
It increases mutual understanding and respect for each other's beliefs.

Neutral viewpoint (2 answers):
Having multiple religions is not useful nor harmful; it is just a thing one has to live with.

Negative viewpoint (1 answer):
Having multiple religions causes constant disagreements.

4) What are the strengths of having multiple religions in your relationship/family? (9 answers)

Positive viewpoint (5 answers):
It gives a more open worldview and increases acceptance and tolerance.
One becomes more aware of the discourses that affect people's choices.
It allows the couple/family have more faith in God or to be more religious.

Negative or neutral viewpoint (4 answers):
Religion is such a neutral part of the family lives that it is almost invisible;
> no special strengths due to multi-religious-ism in the relationship/family.
5) Have you had any challenges or difficulties related to having multiple religions in your relationship/family? (9 answers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am not sure.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If yes, what kind of challenges? (7 answers)

- **Different religious traditions (3 answers):**
  Religion and their traditions are present in different ways in the daily life: how to deal with this and what to teach children about multi-religious-ism or about god(s) is challenging.

- **Pressure and prejudice (2 answers):**
  Pressure from the society and other families, prejudice from the outside.

- **Lack of discussion (2 answers):**
  Lack of/not wanting to communicate and collaborate about religious issues in the relationship.

6) What kind of methods have you used to prevent such challenges and to overcome them? (9 answers)
Appendix 1

Dialogue (5 answers):
Discussion about religious issues and compromising from both sides is the key.

Religion's role in children's life: discussion about religious issues with children as they grow up.

No methods (4 answers):
No bigger challenges > no methods to prevent them.
Everybody's free to believe in what they want to believe, no need to interfere or discuss these issues.

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Intercultural communication and religious dialogue is about explaining one’s cultural and/or religious special features to others. This dialogue will increase shared knowledge on a variety of things, and enhance collaboration. In addition, it will diminish and prevent the amount of for example disagreements, conflict situations and prejudice.

7) Have you used intercultural communication and/or religious dialogue to support your relationship/family life? (9 answers)

| Yes | 5 |
| No  | 4 |

If yes, how? (5 answers)
### Aspects of religious dialogue (all 5 answers):
- Discussion about the different religions and their traditions.
- How the religions affect the daily life and each family member individually.

#### 8) Do you think that intercultural communication and/or religious dialogue is/could be a useful tool for your relationship/family? (9 answers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am not sure.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### MANY RELIGIONS

#### 9) Have you faced prejudices, discrimination or racism in general due to the fact there are multiple cultures and/or religions in your relationship/family? (9 answers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10) How would you describe the position or stance of multi-religious couples/families in the society? (9 answers)

Negative viewpoint (6 answers):

The role of multi-religious couples and families is invisible and they are not regarded as important in the society.

Multi-religious couples and families do not get enough support or guidance.

In highly religious countries usually only one (the main) religion is allowed, others are seen as 'pagans'.

Positive viewpoint (2 answers):

The stance of multi-religious couples and families is good.

No viewpoint/ I am not sure. (1 answer)

11) Do you think that the special features of your family (primarily having multiple religions) are taken into account in the services provided by the society? For example: family counselling, peer support groups, schools, different organizations, other social services, churches. (9 answers)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What could be done so that these services would pay more attention to your family's special features (of having multiple religions)? Suggestions? (9 answers)
No viewpoint (3).

More services for multi-religious couples and families (2 answers):
Counselling and advice, peer support groups, educational sessions, other events.

More teaching for children (2 answers):
More teaching about different religions and worldviews for children in kindergartens and schools.

Education at a societal level (2 answers):
More education and knowledge about multi-religious issues and families for everyone.

12) How could intercultural communication and interreligious dialogue be increased at the societal level? (9 answers)

Raising the awareness (7 answers):
Through raising the awareness of religious dialogue and discussion, multi-religious-ism and multi-religious families in general (in the media, schools, work places, between different religious organizations).

Through raising the awareness of multiculturalism and working towards the decreasing of prejudices and discrimination.
Through raising the awareness of similarities between different religions, not focusing on religious extremism only. Media has the key role in this.

No viewpoint./ I am not sure. (2 answers).
Survey for Faith-Based Organizations – Questions and Answers

(Link to this survey:  http://bit.ly/2jw8eOv)

1) What is your church's or congregation's general attitude or opinion about multi-religious relationships or marriages? (4 answers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive viewpoint (2 answers):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multi-religious relationships and marriages are common within our religious community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Such relationships and marriages are totally accepted and there is support available.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative viewpoint (2 answers):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being in a relationship let alone marrying a person from another religion is not encouraged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>because this is not 'allowed', paying more attention to multi-religious couples is not necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No stance towards multi-religious relationships or marriages.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2) Has your church or congregation paid attention to multi-religious couples and families in the services and activities you provide? (4 answers)

| Yes | 3 |
| No  | 0 |
| I am not sure. | 1 |
If yes, how? (4 answers)

**Positive viewpoint (3 answers):**
Multi-religious couples and families are taken account individually, no general 'guidelines' for this.

Everyone's welcome to participate the activities and it is hoped that more people would participate in them, regardless of the participants’ religions.

**Negative viewpoint (1):**
They are taken care of in the legal level; there is no bigger need to pay attention to multi-religious couples or families in the services or activities provided.

3) Do you think that churches and congregations (in general) should pay more attention to multi-religious-ism in the services they provide? (4 answers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4) Do you consider religious dialogue to be an important aspect in the services you provide? (4 answers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5) Do you think that religious dialogue should be increased between different churches and religions? (4 answers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If yes, how could it be increased? (3 answers):

- **Raising the awareness of different religions through discussion (all 3 answers):**
  Information about different religions should be spread across all societal levels (incl. Churches, schools, the media).

- People should discuss about their own religions and those of others more often.

- Different religions and their traditions should be better integrated and appreciated in the society.