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How the Covid-19 pandemic closed 2000-year-old doors

A case study about the Christian Churches Covid-19
pandemic crisis management and what affect it had on the
parish members.

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Abstract

This study discusses the Christian churches crisis management in one of modern time's most expansive and deadly pandemics, Covid-19. The main purpose of the study is to find out if the churches were equipped with a crisis management plan to handle an external crisis of this magnitude. The thesis also studies to what extent it affected the parishes and their members. The dissertation as well aims to find out whether other actors or decisions could have led to a milder impact on the Church, but also their parish members. Other aspects investigated were emotional and social impacts of active/paused church activities, and whether digital services would replace the physical Sunday services to a degree.

The study employs qualitative methods and social and crisis management theories to explore the topic. Anonymous in-depth interviews with church personnel and parish members allowed deep and honest conversations, providing rich data for analysis. Analysis of the discussions in the interviews demonstrated that the churches were not ready to handle the Covid-19 crisis. The research also presents the importance of faith in hard times and the value of faith in the parish members lives.

The results indicate that a great sadness arose among many members in this crisis. Not only because you could not go to God's house to pray, but because many isolated themselves during the pandemic, which led to poor health, specifically among families with children and the elderly.

Key Words:

Covid-19, Churches, Crisis Management, Lockdown, Pandemic, Christianity

Acknowledgments

*I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart;
I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.*

Psalm, 7:17

I wish to dedicate this Master thesis to my family for the continuous cheers and prayers.

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“I believe that one reason why the church of God at this present moment has so little influence over the world is because the world has so much influence over the church.”

Charles H Spurgeon

Rania, Stockholm

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Topic & Background

We all will probably remember 2020 as the year where we were forced to isolate ourselves due to a worldwide pandemic, Covid-19. The aviation, tourism and the restaurant industries suffered tremendous losses. We worked from home, we shopped online, even our groceries and we FaceTimed our loved ones and elders due to the infection risk. We began working from home more and more, from one Zoom meeting to another our lives became more and more detached from society. As a result, the pandemic made us adapt to the recommended restrictions, but it also forced us to combat the disease alone.

“During the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, governments issued movement restrictions and placed areas into quarantine to combat the spread of the disease. In addition, individuals were encouraged to adopt personal health measures such as social isolation” (Farooq, 2020).

The elderly, the main risk group, were forced to live alone, sitting alone day in and day out when society shut down in lockdowns that we could not control. People suffered in the quiet, and on top of that, meeting points such as churches closed their doors due to government restrictions.

One of our time’s greatest and most deadly pandemics not only hit the health care system but took a toll on the belief system. For the first time places of prayer closed their doors and parishes cancelled sermons and church activities almost instantly (News 4, 2921). Ever since I was a child, the church was a place to turn to. In good times, in bad times and in the worst times. My mother would always tell me, *“Whenever you feel alone, or sad or just emotionally drained, speak to God, turn to him, ask him, pray and you will feel the holy spirit fill your heart”*. I thought of my mother's words more and more as 2020 moved forward slowly but devoured a lot. I could go to church, sit on the pew and feel peace. For someone like me, who goes so infrequently to church I immediately thought of my old grandparents. The church was their safe haven and the only place they socialized. All of a sudden it shut down, almost forced to close its doors. I knew what I felt when I couldn’t go to church on Christmas day or Easter day. I can only imagine how my old grandparents felt when their beloved church closed in a complete lockdown.

I read in the news, that people felt more and more depressed and how social distancing impacted our emotional and social lives. The Swedish Public Health Authority, FHM, published on their website that,

"the Covid-19 pandemic could have several implications for public health. In addition to morbidity and mortality due to the virus, measures to reduce the spread of infection affect many of society's functions and people's living conditions. For example, reduced demand and increased unemployment in certain industries can lead to more people having difficulty earning a living and an increased risk of mental illness (FHM 1, 2020)."

We are all used to the church opening its doors during crisis not the opposite. We don't need to go far, when something tragic happens, the church is the first place to open its doors. In the middle of writing my essay, a terrorist-like attack took place in a small community in Sweden, Vetlanda. The Church of Sweden was quick to express its support and their doors were opened to the public. However, in the middle of a pandemic, it felt like solidarity and empathy had to take precedence.

The questions circulated in my mind, increasing every day. What are the people who need the church the most going to do in these difficult times? How are they going to connect with the divine? Are the churches even prepared to handle a crisis like this? What measures are being taken and what could have been done differently? With a B.A. degree in Communication Science, I wondered about the lack of, communication, and crisis management in the churches. When it comes to shutting down and closing the churches, it perhaps effected people more than anticipated by both authorities and church managements. What short comings has the current Covid-19 crisis revealed and what is needed in the future?

Whilst in the eye of the hurricane, in the middle of fighting over vaccines and over who will be first in queue, my focus was on when things would become normal again and if normal would feel like normal, or if normal now after a pandemic changed its form and would never go back to how it was before.

On the 31st of December 2019 reports from the health authorities in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, presented to the World Health Organization (WHO) several viral pneumonia cases of unknown causes (WHO 1, 2020). The "severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)" (WHO 2, 2020) suddenly flourished, hit hard and knocked us out.

The Covid-19 virus spreads mainly between people during close contact, most often via small droplets produced by coughing, sneezing, and talking (WHO 3, 2020). The time from catching the virus to onset of symptoms is around five days but may span from two to fourteen days (WHO 4, 2020). On the 30th of January, the WHO declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (WHO 5, 2020) and as of 11th of March 2020 a pandemic (WHO 6, 2020) affecting many countries globally one of them Sweden (WHO 7, 2020).

The first confirmed case reached Sweden on 31st of January 2020, when a woman in Jönköping County tested positive after experiencing symptoms when returning from Wuhan (FHM, 2, 2020). By the end of February beginning of March 2020 several cluster cases appeared in Sweden. Most of them due to travellers from northern Italy and Iran (FHM 3, 2020). The first death from Covid-19 was reported on the 11th of March in Stockholm (Läkartidningen 1, 2020). Frighteningly, that would be the start of one of our time's worst pandemics, affecting Sweden not only economically but also psychologically and physically exhausting society.

Unlike many other European countries Sweden did not enforce any lockdown. However, it uniquely kept most parts of society open and gave the public the responsibility to act responsibly. People were expected to follow restrictions and recommendations from the government agency in charge of the response, in this case The Public Health Agency of Sweden (FHM 4, 2020). Restrictions and recommendations in Sweden included social distancing (FHM 5, 2020), restricting travel (FHM 6, 2020) a ban on gatherings and distance education (FHM 7, 2020). Even though the public did take the restrictions and recommendations seriously, the health system was hit hard and capacity was pushed to its limits with every single ICU bed occupied and health care professionals working day and night especially in counties like Stockholm and Göteborg (Läkartidningen 2, 2020).

1.2 Aim and Focus

It is currently uncertain what impact Covid-19 pandemic will have on our mental health and the public health. It is a new global virus that for the first time in history has put a stop to globalization. With severe restrictions, one country after the other closed their borders. The pandemic has certainly scarred in people. The impact it has had is important to study and research in my opinion.

This study investigates the church's role in crisis and how they managed their response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Were they ready for a crisis like this before, if so, did the churches have a manual they went by, or did they go day by day, week by week changing the restrictions due to the Swedish Health Authorities recommendations? Crises before Covid-19 did not shut down the churches like this, not even in wartime.

People have lost their businesses, the messages from authorities have been conflicting and unemployment is at a high peak. This must have caused emotional and psychological stress for people. With nowhere to turn and almost no help from denominations during crisis, this can in the long run have a major aftereffect on how we feel and the increased risk for psychiatric illness associated with Covid-19.

I think that public health emergencies are important to study, and the focus in this study is to do so from a religious perspective, by looking at the Churches role in that area. If the churches now did not have a plan or a way to handle the crisis, could/would it have been easier on the parish members to deal with the crisis if they were prepared by the deacons or the vicariate? The health system has been prioritizing critical patient care, testing, finding a vaccine and reducing transmission, and perhaps understandably, psychological needs have in a way been overlooked during the pandemic. Could/should it have been another authorities/communion's responsibility to support people through the pandemic?

In this research I have chosen to compare three main branches of Christianity (Catholicism, Orthodox and Protestantism) and their management of the Covid-19 pandemic. How did the three different churches deal with the crisis, and did they all follow the same path or was there something specific that stood out in their crisis management? I would also like to compare the three different churches from a digital and communicative perspective, as the Protestant church can be seen as more open to modernisation and digitalisation compared to, for example, the Orthodox church. Therefore, through this study, I would like to see whether the churches were in any way reluctant to take action through digital communication or whether this came as a positive direction in the digital world we live in today?

1.3 Relevance

At difficult times, people often turn to their faith. The closure of the doors of God's house during one of the greatest pandemics of our time could not have been easy for many. I think it

has been extra tough for our elders, who on Sundays could go to church, meet the people they have always spent time with, say a prayer and feel a kind of peace in a routine Sunday ritual.

The service every Sunday was perhaps the only activity they did during the week, and rapidly the Public Health Agency recommended that you no longer could gather and socialize.

Almost all activities were digitalized, and the ecclesiastical activities were closed, almost entirely.

We must understand the effect of Covid-19 and its impact on church members, in order to somehow prevent it from happening again. Through this research, I hope to understand the decisions behind the overall downgrade and how it affected members in the short term, but also long-term. Whether it was negative or positive remains to be seen after this study. But the fact that this study is undertaken is very relevant as we have not yet understood Covid-19's aftershocks and its impact on our social and religious interactions.

It is also very important to keep in mind that even in the Second World War the world did not lockdown as it did during this pandemic. The only comparison I can make, pandemic wise is the SARS outbreak but that virus did not lock down any countries nor churches. If the churches then had a crisis plan, did they implement them on the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak? This can reveal how fragile a religious system can be in times of crisis, therefore it is very relevant to understand the severe situation of church worship termination.

The importance of choosing churches played an extremely important role in this study. I wanted to include churches in different branches of Christianity, but at the same time focus on one city. This was the initial intention that could not be implemented due to pandemic restrictions, reservations from potential interviews, cancelled interviews due to infection risk and other variables that hampered the study. The intention of using "one city's churches" was to compare how the different churches acted during the pandemic. Did geography play a role in dealing with this crisis as far as the churches thought? Due to time and several withdrawal during the process, a decision were made to consider churches from all of Sweden. The crisis management and how the management handled the Covid-19 pandemic could be considered and evaluated even if the choices did not end up being "one city's churches".

For me, there was also a curiosity to know if the churches could in any way have cooperated during the pandemic to make it easier for the parish members. If so, would the members then be willing to go to other denominations or get help from other deacons and priests during this revolutionary Covid-19 pandemic, if available. Thus, if the churches (not depending on the

branch) can help each other in ongoing crises then similar adaptations could be applied to other worldwide crises in the future.

1.4 Research questions and Objectives

By conducting this research, the overall aim is to see if the Churches utilized any “Crisis Management” manuals. If they did not, it explores how they can cultivate their “Crisis Management” manuals so that the three Christian branches can be better equipped in the future and implement a crisis plan. It will do this by addressing the 4 following questions.

1. Examine and investigate the churches “Crisis Management” manuals in times of crisis. How did the churches handle the crisis, and did they have the members best interest in mind?
2. What changes were made during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, and were decisions made during their response compromising, according to both the church and its members?
3. How did these restrictions and decisions impact the parish members, and did they affect their wellbeing and beliefs?
4. How can the outcome of this research help the churches handle crisis like these in the future and what are the recommendations?

1.5 The Churches and their (main standing point) position in the everyday lives of the members

In this chapter I will briefly explain the differences/similarities in the three branches of Christianity. I will explore if there are different perspective on “Crisis Management” and how the churches came to their decisions according to their procedures. I also need to understand how much the church is rooted in the homes of the members. It is also important to understand how the church is fundamentally built and what key values and principles exists for church leaders to decide on behalf of millions to close the church doors. The in-depth study will explore the different ways the churches adapted to new media and how they view digitalization in modern times in relation to the church’s mission.

1.5.1 Catholic Church

The Catholic Church is the church with the most members across the world. With about 1.3 billion members, it is the largest of the Christian denominations. Approximately 17% of the world's population belongs to Catholic Church. The head of the church, The Pope, has his residence in Rome. The Pope is also the Bishop of Rome and head of the Vatican state. Therefore, some refer to it as the Roman Catholic Church. The Holy See (La Santa Sede) is the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome, and it is the Holy See who has diplomatic representatives in more than 120 countries (Stockholms Katolska Stift 1, 2021).

The Catholic social doctrine is a central and fundamental part of the Catholic faith. The foundation of social doctrine comes from the Bible where Jesus's actions showed that God wants justice, mercy, love and forgiveness. Jesus cared for the poor, the outcast, and the sick. He set an example for the believers and the early church was very socially conscious. This has continued throughout the history of the Church. Being human means that we have a responsibility to cooperate, not only within our own family but also in society and within the family that is made up of all the people on earth.

Catholic social doctrine consists of papal encyclicals and other official church documents and deals with various societal issues based on the Catholic Church's view of what a human being is, human dignity, his rights and obligations. The purpose of social studies is to describe and analyze the state of society and then, from a Christian point of view, propose reforms and initiatives. Social doctrine is based on the basic Christian faith, but all people can understand and adopt it.

Social studies comments on society on the basis of non-time-bound, universal principles. These four fundamental principles are:

- The personal principle: every person must appear and be regarded as an inviolable individual with the right to self-determination for the choice of work, the right to education, etc.
- The principle of solidarity: individuals and different groups, when working for their own interests, must take into account the interests of society as a whole.
- The principle of subsidiarity: individuals and groups must have as much freedom and as wide-ranging opportunities for development as possible.
- The principle of the common good: it is every human being's right, duty and responsibility to actively participate in building society.

Other basic themes that exist in social studies are the topics of the poor and the most vulnerable, the topic of property rights, the role of the state, the role of democracy and nature and the environment. Social science is intended to lead to action. It has inspired conflict solutions, social work approaches and democratic reforms, and played a major role in the European thought tradition (Stockholms Katolska Stift 2, 2021).

1.5.2 Syriac Orthodox Church

The Syriac Orthodox Church was founded by the Apostle Peter in year 37 in the city of Antioch and is considered to be the first Christian church to be founded after the Church in Jerusalem. Due to religious and political persecution, the Syriacs/Assyrians were forced to flee their former homelands of Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. This eventually led to the Syriacs/Assyrians coming to Sweden and they still immigrate from Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. In the early 1990s, the Holy Synod of the Syrian Orthodox Church decided to divide Sweden into two dioceses, both led by an archbishop, bishop Benjamin Atas and bishop Abdulahad Shabo.

The Syriac Orthodox Church is an Oriental Orthodox Church with up to two and a half million members worldwide. Patriarch His Holiness Moran Mother Ignatius Afrem II Karim is the head of the church. The Archdiocese of Scandinavia and England was formed in 1974 in connection with the immigration of Assyrians and Syriacs and a bishop was appointed. The vision of the Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese is to live the peace and tranquility that the Church fulfills through Christ. This vision is implemented in the local congregations through social activities for Church members, young and old. The Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese sees itself as part of society and strives for a society where everyone takes an active responsibility through involvement in civil society.

The Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate's deputy in Sweden is one of the two Syriac Orthodox dioceses in Sweden. The diocese has an archbishop as its head and twenty priests who serve the believers. The members of this church call themselves Syriac Orthodox, Suryoyo or Syriacs/Assyrians.

Sociological and anthropological studies point to the central historical role of the Syriac Christian Church in Assyrian cultural life, where the church has functioned as an official representative of its followers to authorities in the Middle East (Deniz, 1999), as well as being both a space for worship and an institution involved in social issues among its members

(Freyne-Lindhagen, 1997). In Europe, the church is divided in two camps, between those who stand by either the Assyrian or the Syriac ideologies (Cetrez, 2011). The church had a central role in the Assyrian/Syriac culture prior to the migration to Europe, but among worshipers in Europe found itself marginalised. The challenges that followed the migration to Europe, with the increased social and political organisation, higher educational levels and an increased gender equality, influenced how followers thought about the church's role within the community. The Syriac church struggled to meet the needs of changing views among the community in Sweden as well as in other countries in Europe (Cetrez, 2011).

1.5.3 The Church of Sweden

The German monk Ansgar is considered to be the one who first brought the Christian message to Sweden in the ninth century, when he came to the market town of Birka in Lake Mälaren. Sweden was later Christianized through German, English and French missions from the beginning of the 11th Century to around 1150 when the dioceses were established.

A decisive event for Sweden's Christianization was Olof Skötkonung's baptism in Västergötland. He was probably baptized by an English missionary. As the country's first Christian king, he contributed to the establishment of Skara diocese. Thus, the Christian church was planted on Swedish soil and the missionary work could continue.

More dioceses were established, services began to be celebrated and churches were built. During the Middle Ages, the Church of Sweden was part of the Roman Catholic Church. Then many of the churches in which we celebrate worship were built today. They were built in the middle of the village as a sign of God's presence in the world. Teaching and health care soon became two important areas of responsibility in the church's life and activities.

During the Middle Ages, the church in Sweden was under the Catholic Pope's leadership. This changed during the Reformation in the 16th Century after which an independent Swedish national church began to take shape with an evangelical-Lutheran confession and the king as the head of the national church. A landmark year in that process is the Uppsala meeting in 1593, when the Church of Sweden's Lutheran confession was adopted. The Church of Sweden lived in close connection with the Christian state (Svenska Kyrkan 1, 2021).

The Church of Sweden has just over 5.7 million members as of 2020. There are statistics for the Church's membership development and for the Church's activities documented by the Church of Sweden (Svenska Kyrkan 2, 2021).

The Church of Sweden holds statistics on the number of members. The statistics reveal changes in the number of members and about how many have been baptized. In March each year, the Member State statistics for the previous year are published. They also keep statistics on their activities and how many people participate in it. By activity they mean, for example, services, weddings and funerals. In May each year, these statistics for the previous year are published (Svenska Kyrkan 2, 2021).

The Church of Sweden:

- was divided into 13 Bishoprics
- was divided into 1,316 parishes (January 1, 2021) in Sweden and 31 parishes abroad
- had 3,400 consecrated churches, of which 2,955 were protected under the Cultural Environment Act.

An important change for the Church of Sweden was the Religious Freedom Act in 1951. Through it, anyone could leave the church without simultaneously joining any other religious community. The last major change took place in 2000, when the previously legislative relations between state and church were almost dissolved. No church bodies are now state or municipal authorities. The previous Church Act was replaced by a Church Ordinance, established by the church council. There, the Church of Sweden defines itself as an evangelical-Lutheran denomination. The Church of Sweden still has nationwide organization with congregations, pastorates and dioceses across the country (Svenska Kyrkan 3, 2021).

The Church of Sweden is an open church. This means that members can be involved and democratically influence decisions in the church, both at local and national level. Either by getting involved, voting in the church election, or both.

In addition to the elected church politicians, bishops, priests and deacons have the right to make decisions on certain issues. They are church leaders and have special training for their assignments. Their responsibility is that the teachings of the Church of Sweden are followed, while the elected representatives are responsible for maintaining democracy. This is called the common line of responsibility (Svenska Kyrkan 3, 2021).

On the 19th September, 2021 the Church of Sweden went to election. Every member over 16 can vote on how they want the Church of Sweden to be governed (Svenska Kyrkan 3, 2021).

1.6 What is the definition of Crisis Management?

There are strategies designed to help organizations cope with emergent and significant negative events. These strategies, crisis management strategies, helps organizations to identify a threat to the organization and its stakeholders in order to counter possible threats effectively. Crisis can happen as a result of unpredictable events or unforeseeable effects of something that had been seen as potential risk. In most cases crises almost constantly require decisions to be made quickly in order to reduce or limit damage to the organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2005).

Nowadays a lot of modern organizations attempt to identify the possibility of crisis before they occur. Many design plans in preparation of crises, so they can deal with them when they occur. Thus, when crises occur organizations can be quick and able to drastically respond to survive (Coombs & Holladay, 2005).

The variety of the contingences required, varies depending on the nature of the crisis. A crisis can affect either health or safety, the organizations finances, the organizations reputation or a combination of all (Coombs & Holladay, 2005). For example the crisis for churches by the pandemic lockdowns affected a combination. When churches close, it does not only affect the financial income but also the health of the members who cannot attend Sunday service anymore or be close to God.

The Covid-19 crisis that began in early 2020 can be expected to become a textbook case study for crisis management. Businesses around the world were forced to shut their doors. Millions of employees were sent home. Essential services struggled to function. History will judge their managements eventually according to their crisis management skills.

2.0 Theoretical Perspectives

In this chapter, a theoretical framework is introduced. To address the issue of church management and handling of the pandemic, we need to examine the decisions made within theoretical perspectives to gain a deeper understanding. This research aims to examine the

impact on members and how they were religiously and spiritually effected by the lockdown of the churches. Therefore, sociological theories are included and applied to this study.

2.1 Crisis Management Approach

Crisis Management Approach — is a theory of accident causation and control where any major incidents or accidents that can lead to a crisis are identified and extensive plans to mitigate the effects of such incidents are developed. Crisis management involves effective planning, organizing, leading, and controlling activities and assets in the critical time immediately before, during, and after a major incident. A risk manager should be actively involved in the crisis management process.

However, it should be noted that the aim of crisis management is not to try to prevent crises absolutely, but to minimize negative results, to have quick and high-quality responses, and to prepare against all types of crises as much as possible. Construction companies can easily be affected by a crisis because initial investment costs are quite high in construction projects and thus may lead to huge financial damages. Therefore, construction companies should analyse the internal and external environment constantly, catch early warning signals to be ready for crises, and respond effectively during to ensure survival. Crisis management in construction companies has some specific characteristics that differ from the traditional management approach.

2.2 Situational Crisis Communication Theory

Crises, or unpredictable events can disrupt an organization's operations and threaten to damage organizational reputations. An organization's communicative response to a crisis can serve to limit or even repair reputational damage. Crisis managers (management) can benefit from understanding how crisis communication can be used to protect reputational assets during a crisis. Coombs (2007) drew mainly on Attribution Theory when "*Situational Crisis Communication Theory*" (SCCT) was developed.

SCCT assumes that an organization's reputation, that is, how the organization is perceived by the publics, is a valued resource that is threatened by crises. A strategic communicative response can best protect the reputational resource by assessing the crisis situation and

selecting a crisis response strategy that fits the crisis situation. Of course, there are concerns other than reputation to address in a crisis, particularly public safety.

The crisis manager should select a crisis response strategy that is appropriate for potential reputational damage a crisis may inflict. The stronger the potential reputational damage the more the crisis response strategy must try to accommodate the victim or victims, that is, those adversely affected by the crisis. The public will expect an organization to do more for victims of the crisis when the organization is held more accountable for it (Coombs, 1995). Crisis response strategies should then mitigate reputational damage by demonstrating that the organization cares for the victims and knows the proper way to behave, thereby meeting public expectations. In support of this claim, Coombs and Holladay (1996) found crisis response strategies to mitigate reputational damage in the case of organizational misdeeds.

An organization's reputation is a valuable resource that should be protected from the threats posed by a crisis (Barton, 2001). SCCT offers a set of principles that guide the selection of crisis response strategies to maximize reputational protection. SCCT provides crisis managers with guidelines for understanding which crisis response strategies are most appropriate for a given crisis type (Coombs, 1995). SCCT should be utilized to determine which crisis response strategies to use in combination with the requisite corrective action.

“SCCT identifies how key facets of the crisis situation influence attributions about the crisis and the reputations held by stakeholders. In turn, understanding how stakeholders will respond to the crisis informs the post-crisis communication” (Coombs, 2007).

According to SCCT, the level of threat to an organization's reputation is determined by whether or not stakeholders believe the organization caused the crisis, the organization's crisis history and prior relational reputation, type of crisis, type of crisis response, type of information conveyed by the organization, and how well stakeholders believe the organization has treated them in the past. SCCT research has shown that the threat to an organization's reputation increases as stakeholder beliefs that the organization was responsible for the crisis intensify (Coombs, 1998; Coombs & Holladay, 1996, 2002, 2004).

“Situational crisis communication theory . . . develops a prescriptive system for matching crisis response strategies to the crisis situation.”

2.3 Cognitive Dissonance Theory

“Thus, the inherently social nature of religion, and its relation to social psychology seems clear. Indeed, prominent theories in personality-social psychology have been employed in the analysis of religious behaviour, including dissonance theory” (Brock, 1962).

In situations involving conflicting behaviors, beliefs or attitudes, cognitive dissonance refers to a feeling of mental discomfort. This can lead to an alteration in another behavior, belief or attitude to reduce the discomfort and restore balance.

Festinger (1957), the father of cognitive dissonance, first produced the theory. It emerged following a participant observation study of a cult. The cult believed that the earth was going to be destroyed by a flood, and the most committed gave up their jobs and homes for the cult. While peripheral members were more inclined to admit that their beliefs were wrong and "put it down to experience," committed members were more likely to re-interpret the evidence to show that they were right all along (the earth was not destroyed because of the faithfulness of the cult members).

Festinger's (1957) theory proposes that we have an inner power to hold all our behaviours and attitudes in harmony. It is crucial to keep the inner peace and avoid disharmony (or dissonance). This is the principle of cognitive consistency. Festinger also mentions that when there is an inconsistency between attitudes or behaviors something needs to change to address the dissonance.

Festinger (1957) also proposed that human beings' desire for internal psychological consistency was crucial to them to operate mentally in the “real world”. Festinger continues by arguing that a person that undergoes internal inconsistency has a higher chance to become psychologically uncomfortable and becomes more motivated to moderate the cognitive dissonance. Thus, changes in their lives are justified since stressful behaviors or attitudes can result in adding new parts to the cognition causing the psychological dissonance (rationalization) or by deflecting conditions and conflicting information likely to increase cognitive dissonance (confirmation bias).

Festinger continues in his thoughts and argued that there are people that would inescapably resolve dissonance by believing blindly whatever they wanted to believe. Coping with the

nuances of conflicting ideas or experiences is mentally stressful and it requires energy and effort to believe in things that oppose existing beliefs.

“Notice that dissonance theory does not state that these modes of dissonance reduction will actually work, only that individuals who are in a state of cognitive dissonance will take steps to reduce the extent of their dissonance”.

There are three main areas in cognitive dissonance theory: (1) Forced compliance behavior (2) Decision making and (3) Effort. In this study, the theory of cognitive dissonance will be used to determine attitude change among church members and explore whether decisions taken during the Covid-19 pandemic caused any change in belief, behaviour or attitudes (Festinger, 1957).

2.4 Resilience Theory

The aim of this study is also to see how the crisis affected the members and if there is a possibility for the church to bounce back to a more normal state after the pandemic.

Resilience theory speaks about the strengths that people and systems manifest that enable them to rise above hardships (Rak & Patterson, 1996) such as a pandemic or the lockdowns of churches.

The origin of resilience theory is affiliated with a reduction in emphasis on pathology and an increased emphasis on strengths (Rak & Patterson, 1996). Humans have the ability to adapt to stressful challenges and regain normal functioning quickly. Resilience generally refers to that process, consequently individuals display resilience when they demonstrate positive adaptation (Masten, 2001).

Community resilience is an emerging area in this field. This includes the importance of social support systems (VanBreda, 2001). In this study a particular attention will be given to the church's role as a social community and support system. Resilience theory in social work is explored and the historical tension in social work between *“pathogenesis and salutogenesis”* is emphasised. There are debates concerning the difficulties regarding the evolution of family resilience theory and standards, that are paralleled by the difficulties associated with community resilience theory. Thus, resilience theory has historically seen the community as a risk factor, making life hard for families and communities (VanBreda, 2001).

The “*stressors*” which families must manage are often considered as caused by the wider community, a system above and around the family. Political instability, discrimination, lack of community resources, crime and poverty, have all been described as community stressors that can have negative impacts on families (VanBerda, 2001).

At the same pace that resilience theory has evolved, greater attention has been given to the community as a source of protective factors, mainly in social support where it has been well-explored, researched and documented. Resilience theory then evolved from the immediate family boundaries, incorporating support systems located outside. Examples of that expansion are religious communities, local communities and work (VanBreda, 2001).

3.0 Research Methodology

This chapter will take the reader through the research approach including the methodology and research design. The discussion continues onto empirical data collection, data sampling and ends with a discussion of the trustworthiness of the research conducted.

3.1 Methodology introduction

The research conducted investigates the crisis management of churches and explores their parish members own view on how the churches handled the Covid-19 pandemic. To do this, this research utilises qualitative research methods. To gain the most valid and reliable data, a suitable research methodology has been selected to ensure credibility and trustworthiness. With an acute methodology, the best way to secure results, is used as a guideline through that specific choice of method. This chapter covers the research strategy for collecting data, limitations in the research and the justifications for chosen method. It also diskkkusses ethical considerations and how the data will be analysed.

This is notably so when the research outcome is not willingly convertible into “objective” and quantifiable data. The purpose of the selected methodology used in this research is to ensure data can be used in a way that provides valid and credible answers, that meets the research objectives.

3.2 Researchers role

Although I am a newcomer when it comes to advanced research, I can be considered an insider on the research topic. I am Christian belonging to the Syriac Catholic Church. I intentionally did not choose to interview or conduct any research on my church due to the closeness of belonging to the church. The church my husband belongs to is the Maronite Syriac Catholic church, which I also chose not to conduct any research on because of my proximity to the priest, deacons but also parish members. Hence, I made the choice to conduct my research in the city I recently moved to. The only connection I had to the churches were to the Syriac Orthodox Church. The church priest as well as members were known to me already.

As I mentioned before I am an insider when it comes to Christianity, but not knowing the participants or church members and management team in some of the churches made me see the study from an outside perspective. Still in research I need to take into account my personal background as well as preconceptions and personal opinions. I grew up in the world of the Church. However, this does not mean that during my years I have continuously gone to church. At feasts and festivities, I visit the house of God, but I am not at all as involved as I might sometimes have wished for. The researcher's role in the study is to ask the questions, have a dialogue with interviewees and follow up with field questions if desired, but also control the conversation to keep them on track (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The intention of the interviewer is to understand the participant's perceptions, without imposing any of the researchers' viewpoints onto the respondent. Therefore, the open-ended questions are being conducted, with the possibility to interpret your own thoughts as a participant. It is also crucial in research to be creditable and dependable, but also produce transferable study results. Thus, the research requires that the researcher explains the research study without biasing the participants. The interviews need to be conducted according to the described research design. The collected data must also be analysed and interpreted according to the research design.

3.3 Data collection

All interviews were initially conducted in Swedish, transcribed by the researcher - me - into English and then interpreted for the research. For the parish members in the Syriac Orthodox church the interviews were also conducted in Arabic, and then transcribed into English for the research. All the interviews transcribed will be included in the appendix.

3.3.1 Participant criteria

I have deliberately chosen to interview three members from each denomination. The members were deliberately chosen to belong to different age groups. Gender played a minor role, but I wanted to get a broad picture of how the crisis affected members of different ages. Church members aged 20-39, 40-64 and 65+ were selected from the various churches. One of the criteria for attending, however, was that they actively participated in worship services on a weekly basis. I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of how the crisis affected those who visited the Church most often. I was helped by the church deacons to select members who they thought could contribute to a deeper dialogue and research on how the churches handled the Covid-19 pandemic.

When it comes to church leadership and deaconry, participants were selected by asking the priest or honorary pastor about their recommendations and who had been most active in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic and its effects on church members. No other criteria were set on the participants.

3.3.2 In-depth interviews

In this qualitative research I am using in-depth interviewing as a research technique. This is because my focus will be on conducting intensive personal interviews with a small number of respondents of maximum three church members and two participants per represented church. To be able to research their perspectives on the pandemic and church roles in handling the crisis I might need to ask about their experiences and expectations related to pandemic, the thoughts they have concerning program operations, processes, and outcomes, and deaconry activities. It will also explore any changes they perceive in themselves as a result of their involvement in the crisis management (Boyce & Neale, 2006).

Since this subject matter can be hard to speak about in larger groups or open up about, in-depth interviews have been selected, so that participants feel more comfortable. The method of in-depth interviews also provides much more detailed information, and that is also a factor that played a role in choosing this research technique. *“They also may provide a more relaxed atmosphere in which to collect information— people may feel more comfortable having a conversation with you about their program as opposed to filling out a survey.”* (Boyce & Neale, 2006).

There are limitations for this type of method though. For examples it can be: prone to bias, time-intensive, not generalizable and the one conducting the interviews must be appropriately trained in interviewing techniques and they can be difficult if you are time limited (Boyce & Neale, 2006).

3.3.3 Semi-structured interviews

A semi-structured interview is a verbal interchange where the interviewer endeavours to extract information from another person by asking questions. Thus, the interviewer might have prepared a list of predetermined questions, that can be covered in a more conversational manner. This offers the participants the opportunity to explore what they feel are important topics (Longhurst, 2003).

Semi-structured interviews are in a way conversational and informal in tone, which allow for an open response in the participants' own words rather than a "yes or no" variety of answers. The method is about talking to people, interviewing them, but in ways that are self-conscious, methodical and partially organized. These specific methods are useful when looking into complex behaviours, personal emotions and opinions but as well as collecting a diversity of experiences in a subject matter. When conducting semi-structured interviews, one is not like the other and the preparations requires its own thought and practise (Longhurst, 2003).

Another point of view that needs to be considered is the location where the semi-structured interviews are being conducted. It is important that the participants feel comfortable, but the interviewer needs to feel safe and secure in carrying out the interview with no outside interference. When interviewing and conducting semi-structured interviews, it is very important to take notes, and to record the interview to later be able to transcribe it. The semi-structured interviews will make a significant contribution to this qualitative research, especially in the discussion about meaning, identity, subjectivity, power and the church and its role in crisis (Longhurst, 2003).

3.4 Participant questions - Church Management

1. Did you (as the Orthodox, Catholic or Church of Sweden) have a crisis management plan prior to the Covid-19 Pandemic?
2. What changes were the most drastic and how did you compensate them for the members? What was the largest consequence?

3. When and who decided to completely lock down the churches and later stream services live on social media.
4. Historically the churches have never closed their doors, how do you think this will affect the members behaviours when it comes to attending Sunday service?
5. Can you see the amount of attendance online in contrast to Sunday service in the church? Is there a demographic difference in attendance, e.g., age, sex or location of attendance?
6. What deaconry activities are still active since the Covid-19 pandemic, and what activities did you have to change or completely close?
7. How do you proceed if you really need to talk to someone in the Church/Deaconry about activities or confession?
8. How do you see the reaction from the members to how the management handled the pandemic? Was it positive or negative and is there a difference between different age groups?
9. When the pandemic is over, what changes do you think will remain and what traditions will be returned to?
10. What is the most important lesson of this pandemic when it comes to crisis communication?

3.5 Participant questions – Church Members

1. In this pandemic, what has been most difficult or hard to adjust to when the churches were closed?
2. Do you remember what you thought when the management decided to close the church?
3. As a Christian, what has it been like not being able to perform the Christian rituals, traditions, sacraments fully? Did you still feel a sense of belonging to the church?
4. What is it that you miss the most when it comes to church activities in this lockdown?
5. Do you think the church management handled the Covid-19 crisis badly?
6. What do you personally think they could have done better or improve to prevent or ease future crises?
7. If the churches in the city you live in collaborated in their activities or even Sunday services, would you attend another church in the pandemic?
8. Have you been attending Sunday service or mass on social media?

9. Will you visit the church as often after the pandemic or has it become convenient to attend the service online?
10. What do you as a member think the churches suffered from the most during the Covid-19 pandemic?

3.6 Ethical considerations

In any research project it is essential to consider the ethical aspects. This can, along with the design plan, affect the enquiry and according to “*European code of conduct for research integrity*” they must be considered and respected throughout the research process. The European code guides and apply “*to research in all scientific and scholarly fields*” (ALLEA, 2017).

These principles according to ALLEA (2017) are:

1. **Reliability** in ensuring the quality of research, reflected in the design, the methodology, the analysis and the use of resources.
2. **Honesty** in developing, undertaking, reviewing, reporting and communicating research in a transparent, fair, full and unbiased way.
3. **Respect** for colleagues, research participants, society, ecosystems, cultural heritage and the environment.
4. **Accountability** for the research from idea to publication, for its management and organisation, for training, supervision and mentoring, and for its wider impacts.

Research involves collecting data from people, about people (Punch, 2005). Discussing anticipated ethical issues is mandatory in designing and proposing a study. Researchers must protect their research participants; build trust with them; elevate the integrity of research; guard against neglect and indecency that might reflect on their organizations or institutions; and cope with new, intriguing problems (Israel & Hay, 2006).

I have also employed a consent form (appendix 1) in this research to ensure that the participants understand the purpose of the research and its design, their role in the research and the importance of their participation but also the significant fact that the participation is completely voluntarily and on their own terms. It is also stated in the consent form the amount of time each interview will last, and also that the participants can withdraw at any time during the research. If there is any question the participants hesitate to answer or even

do not want to answer, they can choose not to. They will also consent to interviews being recorded for the researcher to review later, but the data collected will be processed in accordance with the European Union General Data Protection law and protected on a computer with a password. After the research has been completed, collected data will be deleted and removed from any devices.

I have also taken in consideration the protection of the participants privacy and therefore they have been given pseudonym names in the research. The church they belong to is key in the outcome and the result of the study, therefore I have received an approval of the churches they belong to as members. Since the objective information in this research is whether the churches handled the crisis differently, I deemed it important to include which church each participant belonged to.

The focus is to find out if the churches had a crisis plan, but also to be able to understand the decisions made when the churches were forced to close and how they affected the members. A large portion of the data collected will be on individual understandings and opinions that could be influential for future church crisis management but can also be critical of the church, which reinforces the importance of anonymity of participants in this research study.

4.0. Previous research

Since this study is on the current Covid-19 pandemic and whether churches were ready for a crisis of this scale, I did not have any previous empirical findings to investigate specifically relating to the Covid-19 pandemic. When I reviewed existing literature and research, there was not much on the subject. I know that for this essay I chose an under researched topic. However, this was not the biggest obstacle in trying to understand previous research. It has never happened before that the churches shut completely. I personally have not found a time or a crisis that has shut down society and churches as is the case with this pandemic.

As such, it became very clear that there was a void in the research that exists today. The research gap became obvious, but that does not mean that crisis in other areas haven't affected the church in one way or the other. After a clear identification of the research gap, the focus was on pandemics overall and what crisis the church could have gone through previously.

This part of the thesis will identify and clarify the objectives of this research. The literature review will provide the reader with a deeper understanding of both previous pandemics, virus epidemics and other crises in the church, including economic and sexual abuse crises.

4.1 Epidemics and pandemics through history

Firstly, for many people an epidemic (from the Greek and means “upon or above people”) is a quick spread of disease within a short period of time (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2006). A pandemic on the other hand is an epidemic on a large geographical scale, maybe even worldwide or at least affecting a great area of the world. There are though no quantitative measurements that can say when an epidemic becomes a pandemic (Hays 2005 p. xi). One of the earliest epidemics documented goes back to the city of Athens, Greece in 430-427 B.C.E. The historian Thucydides who most likely suffered from the disease himself reported that the epidemic started in the port area and then moved into the city. The documents say that this horrible epidemic took the lives of 25-30 percent of the Athenians in all age groups and segments (Hays 2005 p. 1).

I will narrow down the historical background to two specific influenza epidemics that struck the world. The first influenza pandemic goes back to 1889-1890, where an influenza started spreading from the Russian Empire, modern day Kazakhstan, to the west, transmitting by rail and river to most of Europe's large cities. Within two months cases were reported in Northern and Southern America, northern Africa and far east as in India and Hong Kong. The pattern of the influenza pandemic was almost identical everywhere. The disease effected men and women but also children and the effect were similar across the world where symptoms intensified for the first two weeks, peaked for two weeks and decreased for the remaining two weeks. Exactly how many people were infected is unknown since reports were not kept, but approximately one third to half of the world's population were ill between October 1889 to October 1890. Even though influenza related deaths are low, due to the high rate of illness the deaths increased. The modern historian David Patterson has estimated that the 1889-1890 influenza pandemic killed between 270,000 to 370,000 people in Europe alone (Hays 2005 p. 315-317).

The 1889-1890 influenza was not only the first influenza with a massive worldwide spread but perhaps the first influenza that was properly documented. The revolution of human transport and its importance to disease transmission were illustrated by how the spread

happened along rail and shipping routes. The 1889-1890 influenza became the most deadly epidemic of the century in Europe, but a more serious influenza pandemic occurred around the end of World War I when an influenza pandemic hit Europe. The 1918-1919 pandemic came to be known as Spanish Flu (Hays 2005 p. 318).

Some may refer to it as the Spanish Flu, others as the 1918 flu pandemic, but one thing is certain, this horrible influenza that occurred between spring of 1918 to the early months of 1919 was the most widespread influenza of all time. The influenza that struck the world so hard took an estimated 50 million lives, about 20 million in India alone. The number of sick in this influenza was far higher and in America alone approximately 25-30 million were ill, over 25 percent of the population (Hays 2005 p. 385). The 1918 pandemic has been called the Spanish Flu, but there is no evidence of its origins in Spain. Some scholars say that it was called the Spanish Flu because Spain's neutral role in the war meant there was no censorship on media reporting the pandemic's impact there (American Association for the Advancement of Science, 2006), (Hays, 2005 p. 385).

During a then-raging World War I, the 1918 influenza spread in three phases. The second being the hardest, although the first strike can be traced back to Kansas, USA. In April of 1918 the flu had arrived in western Europe most likely with the arrival of the American troops (Hays, 2005 p. 385). This may have influenced the outcome of the war since it clearly affected the troops and soldiers (Hays, 2005 p. 385-386). The conditions of the Great War encouraged the spread of the disease in many ways. The war in Europe made the contagion very easy because large armies mixed from all over the world. When the United States entered the war in 1917 large masses of people were transported overseas to take part in the war. As soldiers or workers, a lot of Americans were transported on ships that were large and crowded, which made provided perfect conditions for spreading disease between passengers. There were also various imperial subjects enlisted to take part in the war like Indians, Australians, Africans from British and French colonies and others (Hays, 2005 p. 388).

Doctors and nurses were drawn away from their professional medical services for the war, which left the civilian population very vulnerable. This hampered the treatment of civilians. Another important effect was on was the world's wider population, living in larger urban environments. People lived in crowded tenements very close to each other which meant infection spread very easily. Globalized economic and political relationships meant Europe connected with all continents. People and material moving to and from Europe accelerated

during the war and further spread the epidemic and pandemic, resulting in a more significant global epidemic. The reduction of the trans-Atlantic crossing from weeks to days became crucial and the railroads reduced land journeys to hours suddenly made the world a bit smaller (Hays, 2005 p. 389).

These extreme war conditions may have helped spread and accelerate the disease around the world, or at least worsening its effects. The important thing to remember and learn is that this first of its kind influenza pandemic struck almost everywhere. Even far from the war zones, for example Western Samoa and Alaska (Hays, 2005 p. 389). Similarly, to the 1918 pandemic, the Covid-19 virus spread along transport routes and globalized network played a huge part of the rapid spread of the disease, turning it into a pandemic.

4.2 The crisis in the Roman Catholic Church

One of the most discussed and reported crises in the church is the sexual abuse allegations in the Catholic Church. The sexual abuse scandals that have risen in the catholic church have caused harm, not only to the stakeholders of the organisations but also to the church members (Bonini & Boraschi, 2010). The ripple effects caused various degrees of resentment in the congregation and had very negative implications on the Catholic Church. If this would happen in any other organisation, the people involved would have been fired, prosecuted and convicted (Evans & Hefner, 2009). Scholars before me have sought to understand the reason for those scandals, even church authorities have searched for answers to provide solutions so that these events do not happen again. The former – now Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI - enunciated the specific demand for priests and bishops to preclude the abuse of minors from occurring again by *“tackling this issue from the practical, pastoral, and spiritual levels”* (Benedict XVI, 2006, 2010). The Pope in office today, Pope Francis has also made similar calls to act swiftly to address the matter (“Vatican Will Act,” 2013).

Not a single church or a foundation has tried to cover up the accusations against its priests like the Catholic Church. However, the accusations that cannot be taken lightly and must be addressed and taken very seriously. Yet in this crisis in the Catholic Church, not much empirical data was available until 2002. Before that, there were sporadic rumors, accusations and some articles about these serious incidents in which young children were exposed, but what happened in 2002, led to a worldwide discussion on the subject and serious cases were opened.

In 2002 the Archdiocese of Boston was embroiled in sexual child abuse accusations against the Roman Catholic priests. The Boston Globe (Boston Globe Investigative Staff, 2002) as well as other media reported the child sexual abuse committed by the Roman Catholic priests. During that year alone approximately 300 American Catholic priests as well as bishops were reportedly involved and accused of child sexual abuse. This resulted in an incredible amount of media attention which led to the resignation of many who were forced to leave their positions. Others on the other hand were prosecuted and convicted and sentenced to prison (Plante & Daniels, 2004). On December 13, 2002, Pope John Paul II finally accepted Cardinal Law's (leader of the Catholic faith in the US) resignation after a demand from "Voice of the Faithful" (Mehren, 2002). *"Catholics and non-Catholics alike have been furious with Church leaders for not better protecting unsuspecting children and families from sex offending priests."* It is improbable that the Roman Catholic Church has suffered a more difficult crisis in our lifetime.

The Roman Catholic Church in America published the *"Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People."* almost as a crisis management plan if (and when) this kind of crisis could occur again. In connection with the escalation of the crisis and as the world talked about the child sexual abuse within the Catholic Church, some priests managed to handle the situation better than others. Despite this, individual priests and bishops had tremendous difficulties handling the allegations (McRoberts & Heinzmann, 2002). In reaction to the increasing cases of abuses of minors in the United States and the public outrage caused, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) tried to address this critical issue by *"setting certain guiding principles for all the dioceses/eparchies in the United States"*. Office of the Archdiocese, various committees, and USCCB were recommended to follow through with what was outlined in the *"Charter"* (Chan & Scott-Ladd, 2014).

The United States of America is not the only country to have had a crisis like this in the Roman Catholic Church. Allegations towards priests and bishops in England (The Guardian International, 2021), France (France24, 2021), Ireland (Euronews, 2021), and India (CNN, 2019) have also caused crises concerning sexual child abuse in the Roman Catholic Church.

4.3 How the economic crisis in Greece affected the Orthodox Church?

In 2009 a devastated economic crisis hit Greece and its citizens. The lack of transparency in the public sector, shocking structural ineffectiveness, domestic tax avoidance and corruption,

as well as state favoritism and the lack of accountability – especially amongst the economic elites, politicians and professionals – worsened the crisis.

In the early 2000s, neoliberal ideology encouraged overconsumption which succeeded in partially covering structural deficiencies in the Greek economy and society at large. A general underproduction associated with an over-inflated public sector which was used to absorb a surplus of labor, and meet employment policy objectives furthered problems (Diamantouros, 2013). Unemployment hit new heights (24.6% in September 2015 (Eurostat 2016) and especially affected the younger population (49.5% in September 2015 (Eurostat 2016)). There were increasing lay-offs, job losses and business closures in both the public as well as the private sectors, which led to severe wage cuts that were followed by loss of earnings and higher taxes. This in turn affected the standard of living and the living costs. The Greek financial crisis turned quickly into a political and socio-economic crisis with blistering rises in poverty, 35.7% were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2013 (Eurostat 2015). UNICEF reported in 2014 that the child malnutrition and poverty rates increased from 23% in 2008 to 40.5% in 2012 (UNICEF, 2014).

Under the leadership of Ieronymos, the archbishop of Athens and All Greece, the Orthodox Church of Greece (OCG) responded to the crisis with numerous social welfare programmes. In the greater Athens area alone, the OCG created many soup kitchens and also clothing and food distribution centres. The OCG also offered shelters, financial aid, free medicine and medical care to all people in need. This was offered not only to Greeks but also to migrants. Not only did the OCG help people materially but also provided “*psychological treatment and spiritual support*” with centers set up for legal, economic and tax advice by professionals. The different institutions of the Greek Orthodox Church spent 122 million Euros on their social and charitable work, an increase from 96 million spent in 2010 (Ignatios and Almyros 2014).

Large gaps emerged in the welfare areas that were usually filled by the state, and were now being filled from the OCG, thus filling the formal, bureaucratic and institutionalized services that could not be fulfilled by the Greek state. The OCG continues to provide and offer material, social support as well as psychological to vulnerable people in order to complement the insufficient social care services and cover the needs families who are not able to provide for themselves. Even if the OCG often works in partnership with the state of Greece, the OCG is also considered by law (Law 590/1977) the official partner of the state to protect its

inhabitants as well as the soil (Petmesidou and Polyzoidis 2013; Fokas 2007). “*People from all walks of life often turn to the OCG in extreme conditions of personal and family problems, illness and death*” (Fokas 2007).

4.4 The SARS pandemic

In China, Guangdong province, bordering Hong Kong an outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) first appeared. On the 16 November 2002 the first case of infection was traced to Foshan, China, with typical symptoms of a virus (Zhong & Zeng, 2005).

Not until the 10th of February 2003 did the Chinese authorities report this to the World Health Organisation (WHO). The outbreak was noticed after 305 cases and five deaths were identified. The WHO issued a global alert first on 12 March 2003 regarding a cluster of cases of grave atypical pneumonia in hospitals in Hong Kong, Hanoi and Guangdong (WHO, 2003). Three days later the WHO gave an “*emergency travel advisory*” (WHO, 2003a) warning and later in that same month on 24 March, the WHO could finally describe the clinical features of SARS. SARS-CoV, a novel coronavirus, was identified as the infectious agent accountable for SARS outbreak in April 2003 (WHO, 2003b).

The number of SARS cases reported in 2002/2003 totalled 8,434 with 813 deaths. Between 16 November 2002 and 11 June 2003, mainland China was by far was the most affected area and reported 5,327 probable SARS cases, with 348 persons dead (WHO, 2003c).

Jim Yardley of the New York Times wrote in May 2005 that during that year not a single case of the SARS virus had been reported, neither in late 2004. This was the first winter since the great outbreak without one single case of sickness since late 2002. The SARS outbreak that caused hundreds of deaths worldwide by June 2003 has occurred outside of a lab since then (New York Times, 2005).

5.0 Results

In this chapter I aim to presenting the findings from the interviews conducted with the different participants. Before this I introduce the pseudonyms.

5.1 Introduction to results

CD– Catholic Church Deacon

CM1,2,3 – Catholic Member 1,2,3

CSP – Church of Sweden Priest

CSM1,2,3 – Church of Sweden Member 1,2,3

PSOC – Orthodox Church Priest

SOM1,2,3 – Syriac Orthodox Member 1,2,3

Due to Covid-19 restrictions and recommendations, some interviews are conducted remotely. This should not affect the quality of data collected though, since the rest of the interviews were conducted through Zoom Meetings. Online video interviews have become a commonly used medium for conducting interviews, especially in a pandemic such as Covid-19.

There will also be a division in this section into two, firstly the answers from the church management and secondly the answers from the members. At the end of this chapter, I will also compare the answers from the management and the members and identify if there were any misunderstandings or the results pointed to a big difference in understanding. The results will also be presented in a question-and-answer format.

Due to the current circumstances with the Covid-19 pandemic, it has not been possible to interview people within the Swedish Church from the same foundation. That is why there is a difference in the outcome of the answers. The priest within the Swedish Church and member 1 come from the same diocese. However, Members 2 and 3 are members of another diocese. In the case of the remaining churches, the church management and the members belong to the same congregation.

5.2 Church Management Results

- *Did you (as the Orthodox, Catholic or Church of Sweden) have a crisis management plan prior to the Covid-19 Pandemic?*

A resounding no came from both the Catholic and Syrian Orthodox congregations. No emergency plan for pandemics had been issued before. The Catholic church deacon, who spoke for the congregation only did not know if the main Church had any emergency plan, nor for other similar crises, but it is believed that it is not something that has been needed before. However, the Swedish Church had emergency plans to provide, exactly what the local priest did not know. What the priest knew for sure, however, was that it was not an

emergency plan in a pandemic. CSP continues and explains that: *“where I serve is a military city, which means that there have been some exchanges with the Swedish Armed Forces, which has contributed to the existence of a crisis plan, for example, what happens if there is a crisis or an act of terrorism. such types of events. It existed but it was not adapted for a pandemic.*

- *What changes was the most drastic and how did you compensate them to the members? What was the largest consequences?*

The three churches represented all replied that the biggest change was the closure of the churches. One major effect and burden was to deny the congregation entry to the church premises. Refusing prayer, lighting a candle or Sunday Mass attendance has been demanding both on the boards but also on the parishioners. CD explains though that they were quick to take measures that were good for the congregation. They held several masses a week and also broadcast services digitally. Another important adjustment was that they were able to give communion out in the parking lot to those who wanted it. It was very important, according to the CD.

The priest of the Swedish Church spoke about the elder's difficulties in the digital world, and that the younger members maybe thought that broadcasting it was a great compensation, however the members over 80 years found it difficult. The Church of Sweden made drastic changes in the deaconry work, and they began to call their elders either by phone or through Skype. The bible studies for example now took place through Skype. The one issue that hurt the most according to CSP were *“several of our servants from the past have slipped very much outside and have been for a very long time now where you try to use phone calls or the like but, but time is not enough to have such close contact with everyone...”*

In the Syriac Orthodox Church, the congregation priest mentioned the economic loss, and how that affected the church negatively. The Church had an income from the congregation and activities and now for more than a year the church has no income.

- *When and who decided to completely lock down the churches and later stream them live on social media.*

PSOC explains that it was not a total lockdown at first when the limit of the Swedish state was set to a maximum of 50 people, however it was later changed to a maximum of 8 people. But it was not a choice the church leadership made easily, but they had to comply with the

Swedish restrictions. PSOC continues and says *“we could not do anything else. It was just to obey it. And the best outcome for the parish, for them to be able to attend Sunday service was to stream it live. So that they could attend sermon, also church news and happening every Sunday.”*

The final decision to close the Catholic Church came from the Cardinal Anders Arborelius. He decided for the Catholic Diocese of Sweden that the churches should close down. Of course, with respect for the restrictions CD continues. Instead of calling the masses official masses like before we started to have small private masses in the Catholic Church, he explains. *“You can't ban us from prayers, we have rights. The right to perform our faith. We've called it private services.”*

The Church of Sweden went their own way in this matter and let the board in every congregation decide for themselves. The archbishop did not force a lockdown, but most of the churches followed the national restrictions. CSP explains that it is the vicar who has the ultimate responsibility for how to conduct activities in those circumstances.

- *In history of time the churches have never closed its doors, how do you think this will affect the members behaviours when it comes to attending Sunday service?*

The Syriac Orthodox Church and its members wish to return to their church as soon as possible, hopefully with a deeper faith. The priest of the congregation goes on to explain that today we have a cold faith, and when one gets further away from God the faith almost disappears. The faith has no place in the everyday life anymore, especially in a pandemic. When you go back to the Holy spirit, you go back to your Lord in faith.

CD answers on how the Catholic Church members may have affected the behaviour by saying it's been both, some really enjoyed the mass online while others never would change a behaviour. Some members have become hungrier to attend services, while others have chosen to stay at home only. Not because they may have lost their faith, but because they have been afraid of Covid-19. However, the Catholic deacon does not believe that behaviour has changed because many in the congregation point out the same thing and that is that they do not get the same feeling of a service that is broadcast online. Being able to be in the church and receive God cannot be obtained electronically, according to the Catholic deacon.

The priest within the Swedish Church has himself worried that the members have changed their behaviour. If a long time goes by without access to the Church, you may not seek out

the Church again after the pandemic. Therefore, the CSP believes that it has a great job ahead in calling members back and explaining that the church has reopened and that the activities they participated in have now resumed.

- *Can you see the amount of attendance online in contrast to Sunday service in the church? Is there a demographic difference in attendance, age, sex or geographical orientation?*

The Church of Sweden have noticed a geographical difference. This is because they accept a large number of refugees and when they then get their residence permit, they are usually moved to another city. They have continued to see services online and there saw greater geographical spread of attendance. As for the difference in age groups or genders, they cannot see a clear difference. This can easily be explained by the usage of a computer or phone to watch the service, where there are several behind the screen watching together, so no exact statistics can be seen, CSP continues.

In the Catholic Church, they see a clear difference in the number of members following the services. Not specifically geographically or a difference in gender, but a difference in number of attendees. There are more people who want to come to church. In terms of age, the deacon goes on to say that it is mostly middle-aged people who follow the services via streaming.

The Syriac Catholic Church has a wide geographical spread. Their Facebook page is one of the most visited within the Syriac Orthodox Church and they have members who have family and friends all over Sweden. Therefore, they often see a wider geographical spread.

Regarding age or gender, they cannot speak as they have not got any statistics. At a regular Sunday Mass there can be up to 1000 members at the service, and it is streamed to between 50-60 and 300-400 members online, says PSOC.

- *What deaconry activities are still in active defiance the Covid-19 pandemic, and what activities did you have to change or completely close?*

The Syriac Orthodox Church shut down all activities altogether. Neither Sunday school, choir activities, youth activities nor festive parties were allowed under these restrictions, the PSOC said.

The Catholic deacon explained that the role of a deacon differs depending on which church they belong to. For the deacon within the Catholic Church, all spiritual work has continued as usual. The deacon goes on to say that his work as an exorcist, for example, has continued as

usual. There are several people with whom the deacon is in close contact, who are deemed possessed by an evil spirit. Members who have needed the deacon and the deacon's expertise in certain areas have not been denied this. Most church activities related to CD as a deacon have also been continued. However, it is other activities such as Sunday school and similar activities that have had to adapt to the restrictions, CD recounts.

Within the Swedish Church in the church in which the priest works, most of the deacon activities have been put on hold. A volunteer job for the homeless and lonely in Riga has been paused during the pandemic. As have home visits to the church's older members. The priest goes on to explain that they had an international café that is now paused. The CSP explains that they have not been able to coordinate it in the same way, but the help has been provided in other ways.

- *How do you proceed if you really need to talk to someone in the Church/Deaconry about activities or confession?*

The priest of the Syriac Orthodox Church was quick to reply that a conversation with the priest was enough for either confession or for burial or baptism.

The same answer was given to by the Catholic deacon. A phone call or email is sufficient for contact with the Church. On Wednesdays and Saturdays, the deacon is present at the church and then they can visit the deacon within the Catholic Church on those days.

When it comes to the Church of Sweden, they have had a contactable deacon available throughout the pandemic. To cover the times that the church is open, they have had a continuous schedule at work. You could also call or send an email to the Swedish Church to meet a priest or deacon, but then meeting must be scheduled.

- *How do you see the reaction from the members in how the management handled the pandemic, positive/negative and is there a difference between different age groups?*

The priest of the Church of Sweden would not describe it as a dissatisfaction, more that the members are tired. They are tired of everything else being open, but the church remaining closed. CSP says: *"I hear when I run into people in the city all the time that the shops are open, the restaurants are open, people sit and crowd in different places, but we are not allowed to gather for a service and that is, it is kind of disappointing. Not how the churches have handled it, but how society has handled it."*

In the Catholic Church the deacon says that in the congregation, has not had much disagreement or big differences. The deacon continues and explains that the congregation priest has been very careful, reminding people about the restrictions. CD shared how the Communion is done where *“if you come to the communion make sure it is two meters behind and be sure to follow the restrictions. But now he has changed it too, so we must not come to the communion, but the priest comes to the members of the church. Even to those in the back.”*

In the Syriac Orthodox Church, the response was similar. PSOC says the parish *“is sad and angry, they don't care about the leadership of the church and how they handled it. But they just want to get into the church. That is their goal, day by day they want the pandemic to pass.”*

- *When the pandemic is over, what changes do you think will remain and what traditions will be returned to.*

We can start with what will be kept, CD explains. *“Streaming and teaching are so easy over the internet. That it's so easy, that asset. The digital Zoom and Meet, these means.”* CD continues and says that what the parish members will return to is clearly the *“Eucharistic!”* *Obviously. It's a must. Every Catholic missed Eucharistic, it's the biggest!* CD also speaks about the human encounter, the smiles and hugs that are so important to the members. That is something that will bring back the members to the Church.

The Syriac Orthodox priest says that no changes will be kept. All the changes even the live streaming during the pandemic will not be kept after the pandemic. The parish members needs to come back to church and the Syriac Orthodox Church will return to its normal form.

The Church of Sweden believes we will learn from this pandemic for future similar situations. Personally, the parish priest says that he thinks that digital meetings can be useful to keep, as you don't have to travel as often. However, the parish priest says that he believes that the members will go back to their old routines quite quickly *“simply because we are emotional people who want to meet and want to take this little chat to the coffee. We want those pieces.”* However, the priest does not believe that anything will change in the liturgy and therefore not in the traditions.

- *What is the most important lesson of this pandemic when it comes to crisis communication.*

The Church of Sweden priest explains that *“it's hard to get people to hold out. And somewhere in February you stopped seeing the light in the tunnel. And it is not something that we control, but that is probably what is very clear that you have to have a deadline or a clear change anyway that we have not been able to offer because the state rules look like they do.”*

On the other hand, the deacon of the Catholic Church spoke of Jesus return, and explained the important lesson for Christians to *“be ready for his return. As he promised.”* CD continues by saying, we have always been persecuted as Christians and if you live in faith you also know that persecution exists. CD continues by saying, if there is a crisis, it cannot be a disaster because you have your strong faith on which you base your life and provide firm foundations. We walk the way of the cross, and Jesus says, take the narrow road, walk through the narrow gate. We have no other way! We must be prepared, Jesus has said the son of man has nowhere where he can put his head to rest when they asked him. We can't be better than Jesus himself. We have, are and will always be persecuted! We're going against the tide in the world.

PSOC can't answer for the whole congregation but says that for himself *“I can think like this that... I think as I said we were cold in faith for a while, so we must be much, much closer to God and renew our life with God and keep a commandment with Him and uh. Love him and to keep God's commandments in our hearts.”*

All the churches were also asked if they thought that the Swedish government and the restrictions were unfair and pointing at the churches, all churches replied that they believed that during this pandemic the churches were unfairly treated as several malls and shops were closed for a single day, but the churches shut immediately when the rules and restrictions were imposed by the Swedish state.

5.3 Church Member Results

- *In this pandemic, what has been most difficult or hard to adjust to when the churches were closed down?*

The Syriac Orthodox congregation members answered this question in a similar way. All three of the members spoke about not being able to go to church. The most difficult aspect of

the lockdown in this pandemic has been not being able to visit church, especially every Sunday and on the Christian holidays like Easter and Christmas.

Two of the members, SOM1 and SOM2 also spoke about the difficulties not being able to take their children to church activities. They could not attend activities like Sunday school or holiday celebrations but also children missed out on the community they had there. They miss their friends from church SOM2 explains it.

“In the Catholic Church, they found it especially difficult not being able to practice their activities. Both CM1 and CM3 are involved in church activities such as confirmations and Sunday school. It was very difficult to relate to when the church was shut down. Another difficulty that the members of the Catholic Church point out is not being able to come to the holy building to receive God. They are, of course, talking about the Eucharist, which is an important part of Catholic Mass.”

It is also the case that, due to their participation in the Church, members CM1 and CM3 have been able to attend weekly services, whilst CM2 has not. This may have affected their response as they have not missed out in the same way. However, CM2 has been able to follow services around the world due to many churches choosing to livestream their services. CM2 has also been able to watch Sunday services in their native language, which has been appreciated.

The Swedish Church has responded in two different ways, and this may be because they belong to different dioceses, but CSM1 believes that the most difficult thing has been not being able to go to the church physically while the other two members believe that the most difficult thing during the pandemic has been that a maximum of eight people are allowed in church. CSM1 talks about the community that children miss out on in church, as well as the lack of spirituality from a lockdown. Instead, the two members of the same diocese talk about an activity that they introduced with the pandemic "Kaffevagnen" and how they have met members and churchgoers outside the church or in the church square as an alternative.

- *Do you remember what you thought when the management decided to close the church?*

Member CSM2 and CSM3 both believe that it was a good decision that management made. CSM2 explained it like this: *“The whole world has noticed that it is a serious disease that is*

very contagious, and we have also noticed it. So we've had to accept it, and it's contagious fast and we don't want people to die.” While CSM3 said *“well, I guess I didn't think anything more than that they're in charge.”*

CSM1 who belongs to another church also felt that it was a good decision. They needed to limit the spread of Covid-19 and that's why the decision was made, which was the right one according to CSM1.

In the Catholic Church, they literally expressed themselves angry. All three of the members of the Catholic church spoke about anger, frustration, disappointment and sadness. CM2 narrates it like this; *“that was terrible! I thought it was terrible. I was angry. Instead of opening the churches to call out to the lord. That's how they close the churches. I felt an anger.”*

Even in the Syriac Orthodox Church there was a lot of frustration, anger, but above all sadness among the members. They compare the decision to losing an arm or leg or having a limb that is amputated. At this parable, the Syriac Orthodox members felt unjust when the decision came from the management. As SOM3 explains *“of course I got angry and annoyed. Why should they make such a decision for everyone? We say that it is a square meter limit, then you should easily be able to bring more than 50 people into the church, but it was regulated to eight persons.”*

- *As a Christian, what has it been like not being able to perform the Christian rituals, traditions, sacraments fully? Did you still feel a sense of belonging to the church?*

In the Catholic Church, the answers were almost unanimous. CM1 responded by saying that the Christian people have always been a special people, where they always find ways to prayer and faith. CM1 goes on to say that there have always been underground churches, persecuted Christians, explaining that *“you may not be able to do it completely, but the commitment is getting bigger. I can't say I miss anything because I make sure I get everything. One way or another!”*

CM3 explains it in a similar way, that you have instead become stronger in faith and that you feel close to God. For CM3, it has made it easier for her to be part of the Church and to be able to receive God in the Church.

CM2 on the other hand turned to a sisters monastery nearby and could receive the Eucharistic through them, and that according to CM2 it has been a privilege but they expressed understanding that other Christians have not been able to embrace God in the same way.

The Syrian Orthodox Church showed greater disappointment in its responses. SOM1 considered broadcasting digital services as a good option, but that it was not solution-focused enough. A disappointment at the availability of the church building was clearly demonstrated in the SOM1 response.

SOM2 sees good fortune in having participated in the choir activities and thus had greater access to the church, but at the same time has a greater understanding of those members who have not had that opportunity at all throughout the pandemic.

The most interesting response in the Syriac Orthodox Church came from SOM3 who turned to the Church of Sweden to feel a belonging to the faith. Every morning SOM3 went to the local church belonging to the Church of Sweden noting *“every morning I go to the Church of Sweden, a Protestant church. I go into the church building, make cross signs, say a prayer and go out. Every weekday! I'll have a cup of coffee, they'll offer it, and then I'll go on into the day.”* SOM3 also mentions that since the church was a daily part of their life, they pray more at home and tries to recite "The Lord's Prayer" and "Hail Mary" prayers at least daily.

The Church of Sweden members responded in a similar way. CSM1, who belongs to a different diocese from other participants, talked about the spiritual aspect and how one can personally feel an affinity for God wherever you are. But pointed out the importance of physical attendance as a key tendent of Communion in the Church.

The other two members, CSM2 and CSM3, based in another diocese, spoke of a large affinity in to church, which is mostly based on access to prayer and faith, as they had access to the church throughout the pandemic. What stands out in the answers, however, is the compassion for other members who have not had the same opportunity to attend church. That could be because the information about prayer has come shortly (in time) before a service and that members have not had the opportunity to receive the information in such a short time.

- *What is it that you miss the most when it comes to church activities in this lockdown?*

In the Catholic Church again, the answers are very similar. Members miss the Sunday services where they can receive eucharist. But also, to be able to teach Christian teaching, to the children, for example, in Sunday school. CM1 explains that the hardest thing has been not

“to be able to tell you that Jesus is alive! To be able to share the joy of the holy spirit together, that's what I miss.”

In the Swedish Church, members also tell of the absence of children's activities and not being able to have children in the church. CSM1 explains that *“to be able to celebrate the service together but also to have the children in the Christian community means a lot to me.”*

CSM3 on the other hand spoke about the elderly and how CSM3 misses to having them, in the church and taking part in their weekly activities. Most of the members are home alone, widows, and the activities kept them active and connected with the outside world. CSM3 says that the personal contact is missed.

Within the Syriac Orthodox Church, members talk about the children and how they are losing out on important activities since Sunday school has closed. They do not miss a special activity but miss community aspects more. SOM3 expresses the feeling like this: *“I miss the community the most, the great socializing I had in church. What I miss most is being able to go down to the room after a prayer and just hang out. Drink a cup of coffee, eat a Danish pastry after the service and just get to talk to family, friends and acquaintances and hang out. The day feels so much better after a Sunday service and after the great love I got in church. I miss this so much!”*

- *Do you think the church management handled the Covid-19 crisis badly?*

When it comes to the Church of Sweden none of the members felt that the management handled the lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic badly, not immediately at least. Two of the members (CSM2 & CSM3) spoke about doing what's right in a bad situation. CSM2 even said *“No, they did what they could with restrictions from the state.”* while CSM3 spoke about *“it's better to be careful from the start when you know it might get bigger.”*

CSM1 also spoke about the downsides. What now? Did the management think about a replacement or was it just a complete lockdown without any hesitation? CSM1 spoke intensely about the situation requiring a lockdown in the beginning but now after a year, the management needed to do more. Based on the crisis situation, a lockdown was needed. Based on meeting the members, the feeling was that something else needed to be done.

Within the Catholic Church the members spoke about the management's pain as well and how this could not have been an easy decision for them. They referenced the pain of closing the church gate and almost forcing their members to watch Mass at home, maybe even alone.

An understanding of the restrictions and regulations was obvious in the answers by the members. CM1 said that the management had to adapt to the government's recommendations and did the best during the crisis situation.

"I mean, what do you do? When you get something above you!" CM3 spoke about the situation and the decisions made by the bishop and priests of the Catholic Church.

When it came to the Syriac Orthodox Church members answering this specific question the answers varied enormously. SOM3 answered rather quickly that the church did not make a bad decision and they handled the Covid-19 crisis as well as they could.

SOM1 and SOM2 on the other hand, had a lot to say about how the church management handled the Covid-19 crisis. As they put it in their own words: *"I don't think it's the management team at all. It's higher than that. Because when we asked, it was the patriarch's decision. It wasn't our priest at all. And our priest was against lockdown. He was against us not being there. And he tried to open up."* When asked who the final decision makers were, the two patriarchs of the Syriac Orthodox Church were mentioned (Benjamin Atas & Abdelahad Shabo). It was also claimed by the member that it is the majority that rules, even if it does not benefit the weak.

SOM2 believes that it is the members themselves who called for this decision. When there was a 50-person limit, it wasn't respected. "Our people cannot follow rules." SOM2 believes, however, that the state handled the crisis very poorly, as malls and other gatherings could be adapted to 1 person per 10 sqm but not within the churches. It was very poor decision according to SOM2.

The members of the Syriac Church also mention the lack of engagement from the management. There were several possibilities to adapt to the situation better. For example, to have a weekly schedule, where members could sign up to weekly Sunday services. Another adaption could have been having several services per week. SOM1 and SOM2 wanted better communication with the parish members, which was one of the main problems, the miscommunication within the church.

- *What do you personally think they could have done better or improve to prevent or ease future crisis?*

All the members of all branches saw improvements due to the decisions that the management took. Most of them had to do what was practical and applicable.

The members of the Catholic Church spoke about how their congregation priest came out to the benches to give out the communion and only the oblate without the wine. An adaptation made so as not to create congestion at the altar. Another adaptation that was made that was considered good by the Catholic church was the splitting of members into different groups who could attend different services. The decision to hold more services over more days a week, was a decision made by the parish priest that members appreciated.

CM2 spoke about the divinity and the unpredictable, *“one thing they could have done is accept God's will.”* The member felt that this is God’s will, so it shall be. CM3 mentioned that we never saw this coming and that we could not be prepared beforehand, but in the future, we have the ability to handle a crisis better. *“We have the resources that it's kind of in our DNA. But that we feel safe, that there we can gather instead.”* either outside or digitally is something to consider further for the future.

In the Syriac Orthodox Church, the members would have loved to see better administration, where a schedule, rules and regulations adapted to the crisis so that more people could take advantage of the Church. This could be done either by the youth-board or caretaker so that the church and its activities would not shut down completely again if this were to happen. Members need the Church more than ever during a crisis and this was something that all three members of the Syriac Orthodox Church pointed out. The caretaker was ultimate responsibility for distancing, security and compliance with rules and ensuring the Church would be accessible, but of course not prepared for a total lockdown.

Within the Church of Sweden members CSM2 and CSM3 could not see any improvements or ideas to prevent similar situations in the future.

“We've learned a lot about how to deal with it. You get more careful, but you learn new things, to deal with. Otherwise, it would have just been flat. But when you learn something new, it becomes hills and valleys. Here and there!” -
CSM3

“The diocese has done a very good job in this church. They have been in constant contact with members, if not physically with home visits so over the phone. In the best way they could have done and in my opinion it has gone well.” - CSM2

CSM1 placed a lot of blame on the state. *“I think more that you need to talk to the state about religious freedom. Somehow, it's been a while and it's pretty absurd to be able to go to a mall, but not be able to go into church.”* CSM1 believes that there has been an injustice in the treatment of religious communities, where accommodating them has not/never been relevant.

When it comes to CSM1’s local church, not enough work has been done to adapt to the crisis. In the future, should this happen again, CSM1 believes they will have to work more to adapt to the wishes of the members as well and not look blindly at how the management wants it or how the state has set it up.

- *If the churches in the city you live in collaborated in their activities or even Sunday services, would you attend another church in the pandemic?*

The Church of Sweden members could see a collaboration between the churches in the city they live in. Although the first initiative has not been taken today from any part. Even if there is no hesitation to the possibility of a collaboration or attendance to other churches in future crisis.

Hence the Catholic Church members were not willingly to go to other churches or collaborate with other churches. CM1 almost immediately answered no. The idea of visiting another church was not considered. The same answer came from CM2, responding that *“I'm not bound to any church. I love going to my parish. But I would not be able to receive the holy communion in the Church of Sweden, for example. I can't do that. Orthodox, I could imagine, if it were nearby.”*

Also CM3 responded in a similar way, where going to the Orthodox Church could be a possibility, but not to the Church of Sweden *“because I attend a Mass physically to receive Jesus. Otherwise, I might as well watch my TV.”*

Members of the Syriac Orthodox Church gave similar answers to the Church of Sweden members. They would attend and collaborate as well as co-work with other churches in the community they live in. SOM3 attended the Church of Sweden throughout the pandemic and found no harm in that. *“No, no, I have absolutely no problem going to another church. I see all churches as the house of God.”* SOM1 spoke about Christians as one and that a *“church is a church. I do not convert to another community or religion if I were to enter another church or parish hall. I think as long as you, within your brain and heart, you're a Christian, it doesn't matter.”*

- *Have you been attending Sunday service or mass on social media?*

Within the Syriac Orthodox Church, the members have attended Sunday service through either Facebook or television.

The Church of Sweden members have also watched the Sunday services either on television, Facebook or the church own website.

For the members of the Catholic Church, CM1 had not attended services online, but CM2 and CM3 participated in online services via Facebook or YouTube. CM2 likes that there are more services online now, that's been an upside of the pandemic. CM2 believes that the services in their mother tongue have been rewarding and appreciated: *"I have listened to masses from Spain and Colombia. It's been amazing. The churches have been very active during the pandemic. I know the priests in Colombia have given Mass outside. Outside the church. Worship outside the church."*

- *Will you visit the church as often after the pandemic or has it become convenient to attend the service online?*

The Swedish Church members all agree that the physical meeting is part of the community within the Church. It is important and you cannot take it away from the members. Digital will never replace the physical. CSM1 describes it like this: *"I will run in and shout hallelujah."*

Similarly the Syriac Orthodox Church members all agreed that they miss church and that digital alternatives will never measure up to the personal physical encounter. SOM1 describes it as a good way to start your day, *"I miss so much going to church. So, there is no one, there is no better start to a day than being able to be there."*, while SOM2 says, *"it's not the same feeling as standing in there under the roof and hearing live on the priest."*

The three Catholic Church members said they would never find it convenient to attend mass online, and would prefer to go to church on Sundays. CM1 expresses it like this: *"here's the thing, no Catholic can find it convenient to watch a Sunday Mass online. For the most important thing is physical and that's sacred eucharistic."* CM2 states, *"coming to church is an oasis for me. God's presence, security, etc. There's no comparison."*

The members of all churches speak about the feeling and emotions they have in church, something the digital never can replace. An emotion, something that fills the heart or soul, is not as fulfilling online as when you are in God's house.

- *What do you as a member think the churches suffered from the most in this Covid-19 pandemic?*

In the Syriac Orthodox Church, the suffering from the lockdown is great. Members are clearly seen to have had a negative impact, including in their response to this question.

SOM3 tells us with an intensity in their voice that the biggest loss has been *“that they have forbidden the congregation from their faith, from praying, from the Church. I think everyone suffers the most. Why have they banned us? Why have they forbidden the people from believing or praying?”*

SOM1 and SOM2 also witnessed a loss of trust in church leadership. Members should have had more access to the Church during the pandemic. SOM1 also talks about the financial loss from collections during services. They also spoke about facts that was seen between the fingers, not taken seriously by church management. The fact that management have known that people can't come to church during the pandemic and is not what the Church stands for. Not being able to receive your parishioners in God's house at least for a prayer or to light a candle.

Also, amongst the members of the Swedish Church the answers were about the lack of access. Not being able to see worship or be a part of it meant they suffered tremendously. CSM3 speak about trying to stay together as best they can in the congregation. *“I have tried to keep in touch with the people who, in my group that I usually have. That we call them often every week. Or walk by with soup lunch.”*

In the Catholic Church they have noticed a lot of suffering among both management and members. CM3 thinks that everyone suffered in different ways, *“After all, we as a people suffered from the fact that we could not receive Jesus or perhaps be worshipped and pray in the Church as much as one is normally used to. And I have heard that many priests suffered from the fact that they could not give Jesus.”*

CM2 as well as CM3 spoke about the obligation to return to church. CM3 mentioned the children and the young people, questioning if they would even return to the church after the pandemic. It would be a great loss for the churches if they do not. There is great fear that some children and young people have been lost. *“Yes, that's my biggest fear, the sadness if that's the case. We hope not, but it is something that we all wear.”*

CM1 spoke of the Catholic Church as a a community in a society within in a wider society. CM1 continues my explaining it like this *“You have your family, the Catholic Church is an universal church so there are different traditions there are different people who come from different countries they have different ways of being so they have their traditions at home, they come to the general tradition and they live in a different tradition you understand. And then you meet in the general in the church tradition. And it's so amazing.”*

6.0 Discussion of findings

By applying the previously discussed theories to the findings, two angles will be utilised to discuss the results. From the managements point of view and from the member perspective. The discussion will be based on the theoretical framework that is presented previously.

6.1 Discussing Crisis Management approach & Situational Crisis

Communication Theory

When applying Crisis Management Approach to analyse the results there would have been no effective results at all. The churches in general were not ready for a crisis of this magnitude. Two of the three churches (Catholic and Syriac Orthodox) had no crisis plan at all, and the third, Church of Sweden had a crisis plan or an emergency plan but did not include anything regarding a pandemic, like the Covid-19 pandemic. No guidelines nor plans ahead that would help handle the situation could be found. The churches responded to the situation as it came and tried to make the best out of a bad situation. Restrictions and regulations as well as recommendations from the Swedish government were applied instead. For the first time in history the churches in Sweden were almost forced to close down, an almost complete lockdown.

When discussing the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and how the organisation is perceived by its members, the discussion varies depending on the questions asked. The valued resource was/is not threatened by this Covid-19 pandemic, but as we know we are not speaking of a company but a belief system. To keep the reputation of the churches was not considered or thought of before by the church managements but the consideration here was the public safety and that was a given priority by all churches. Keeping their members safe, came before the organisational reputation.

Since there were no crisis plans prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, none of the churches had a specific crisis manager or a representative assigned to deal with the situation from a crisis communication perspective, but those affected by the crisis (members mostly) acquiesced to the leadership's decisions. Since all the members also indicated that they did not enjoy the digital services as much as the physical, no reputational damage needs to be considered, because of the lack of damage done by the organisational mistakes according to parish members.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that even in crisis, the management as well as the parish members remained strong in their beliefs, that what god has written for them is almost set in stone. What is destined to be shall be, and therefore even in an endemic phase or future crisis, the Syriac Orthodox and the Catholic congregations are not planning on establishing crisis plans, but the Church of Sweden will change their existing crisis plan and extend it to incorporate pandemic responses.

6.2 Discussing Cognitive Dissonance Theory and Resilience Theory

The Covid-19 pandemic was a crisis that was new not only for the churches but for their members. Historically, this was a first and during crises, church members tend to turn to the church. In this crisis, churches were shut down, some suddenly and without warning. Younger people who could turn to social media could easily adapt and follow online services. The elderly, without the technical ability, were almost left to fend for themselves. Although adaptations were made to help the vulnerable, it was not enough.

It was mental health that many members worried about. Not being able to receive God through communion was a big problem, but not being able to meet, have that community or social aspect made many feel bad. These aspects are important, specifically in Sweden, where for much of the year we live trapped indoors in perpetual darkness. An alteration in behaviour as Cognitive Dissonance Theory points to, wants to reduce discomfort and restore balance.

Festinger (1957) pointed out the human need to operate mentally in the “real world”.

Festinger also argued that people that undergo internal inconsistency have a higher chance of becoming “*psychologically uncomfortable*”, thus they become more motivated to moderate the cognitive dissonance. This can be applied to the emotions regarding the decisions that were made by management with no consideration of the members, but later the members

deflect on the conflicting information and even perhaps rationalizes it. Believing blindly in the information received from the higher authority and following them without hesitation.

When it comes to bouncing back from a crisis or hardship a discussion about Resilience Theory is necessary. The strength that parish members and the churches manifest are in some eyes divine. To be able to bounce back to normal state, would in a secular state like Sweden be almost impossible. But the members in this study all show a willingness to go back to church, now more than ever. The faith has grown, the spirit is warmer and the emotions and affections to respective churches greater. This Covid-19 pandemic has been a trial, it has been hard, difficult and challenging, but most if not, all members speak about the day they can return to church, the day they can take God and Jesus into their hearts and the day the children can go back to normal activities. Maybe even in secular Sweden we need the churches more than we know, or maybe this was a challenge or a trial from above, but what we know is that the churches as well as the members are ready to rise from the ashes.

As the Resilience Theory is affiliated with a reduction of emphasis, humans have the ability to adapt to stressful situations such as the Covid-19 pandemic, and their return and revitalization are going to be quick. As suddenly as the churches had to close, people can bounce back. Resilience often demonstrates positive adaption and these results have shown that in the end, a positive reaction from people who see light at the end of a long tunnel.

7.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

We already know that never before have the Christian churches completely closed their doors to the believers. What we also know is that the Church, all around the world, grew stronger in crises and praying Christians often found solace in the Church. In prayer or in conversations with their vicar or friends in their community they could process the crisis.

What we on the other hand also know is that in modern times, we have never had to take these extreme steps towards the total dismantling of our societies. Never before (in modern times) have we seen an equally large-scale pandemic in which countries closed their borders, immediate restrictions were enforced and the recommendations from authorities were a total lockdown from the world.

A race against the clock began! We now depended on science more than we were depended on religion and faith. Which mega-company in medicine would be the first with a Covid-19 vaccine and when could we return to our normal lives?

This study was intended to discover if there was an emergency plan for a pandemic, but also to be able to find traces of cooperation during crises between the churches. The results in the study, in many eyes could be surprising. Not only that the study was the first of its kind as a comparison between Christianity, crisis planning and the Covid-19 pandemic, but also how the churches handled the situation during this extremely difficult time, in a global pandemic.

My first recommendation, which is the most obvious and clearest in this study, is that churches must review their crisis management and emergency plan. For example, the Orthodox Church, in my opinion, still does not see how badly the pandemic affected its members and must undergo a reconstruction in its position and decision-making bodies. In addition, be more accommodating about what members want and desire. Although it is a vicar's purpose to preach God's deeds (the pandemic being one of these), one must also look at the well-being of the members, and the wishes of the members towards their church premises. Adjustments could have been made to allow members to pray and attend Sunday Mass. But higher forces within the leadership put a spanner in the works.

This study concludes that the Church of Sweden is the Christian community that fared best in the pandemic, according to members. However, an emergency plan in other areas could be reviewed, redesigned and adapted for the pandemic. With quick decisions, where recommendations and restrictions from the state were reviewed, the Church could quickly be there for the members. However, the Swedish Church's additional receipt of income from the state and not only from its members perhaps meant the economic position was more secure and that this stability enabled better decisions that could benefit the assembly.

Although the Catholic Church also made the most of an impossible situation, the Catholic members were not in as great a crisis as the Orthodox members. The Orthodox members felt lost, almost like an identity crisis. However, the Catholic Church was very concerned about the desires of its members, which was receiving the Eucharist. With extended opening hours and several services, good results were achieved. This in itself resulted in members missing the Church, but one could understand the pandemic in a different way as the most important ritual of Mass was catered for.

Surprisingly, however, there was no cooperation between the churches at all. Not even a discussion on the subject of cooperation was held. Each church for itself, each member for themselves and each vicar for himself. Instead of taking each other's hand and helping each other, almost even in a pandemic there was a pride that prevented cooperation.

Had the churches cooperated better, the churches would have done better, not only financially but also emotionally, spiritually, in prayer, and in fellowship. I personally do not believe that the state facilitated the work of churches during the pandemic, and I believe that the religious communities would have been better off with a more open church landscape, where treatment, openness, love and inviting congregations, would have led to a pandemic that, specifically for the elderly, would have felt shorter.

For further research, it is interesting to know what other religious communities (Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, etc.) acted during the Covid-19 pandemic, if they had a crisis plan and how it affected their members and their mental health. Although other religious communities today compared to before the pandemic are better equipped for an upcoming crisis, unlike eighteen months ago when the Covid-19 pandemic terrified an entire world.

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Appendix 1

Interview Consent Form

Purpose of Interview: The study aims to explore the Churches “crisis management” during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is being undertaken as part of the principal researcher’s thesis for the Master Programme in Religion in Peace and Conflict at Uppsala Universitet, Sweden. I agree to participate in a research project conducted by Rania Altoun from Uppsala Universitet in Uppsala, Sweden.

1. I have received sufficient information about this research project and understand my role in it. The purpose of my participation as an interviewee in this project and the future processing of my personal data has been explained to me and are clear.
2. My participation as an interviewee in this project is completely voluntary. There is no explicit or implicit coercion whatsoever to participate.
3. Participation involves being interviewed by a researcher from Uppsala Universitet. The interview will last approximately 30-60 minutes. I allow the researcher to take notes during the interview. I also may allow the recording of the interview and subsequent dialogue by audio/video tape. It is clear to me that in case I do not want the interview and dialogue to be taped I am fully entitled to withdraw from participation.

4. I have the right not to answer questions. If I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to withdraw from the interview and ask that the data collected prior to the withdrawal will be deleted.

5. I have been given the explicit guarantee that the researcher will not identify me by name or function in any reports using information obtained from this interview, that my confidentiality as a participant in this study remains secure. Personal data will be processed in full compliance with the European Union General Data Protection Regulation. The researcher may be contacted (rania.altoun.0637@student.uu.se) for any questions concerning data protection.

6. I have carefully read and fully understood the points and statements of this form. All my questions were answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

7. I obtained a copy of this consent form co-signed by the interviewer.

Participant's Signature: Participant's Name:

Date:

Researcher's Signature:

Date:

For further information, please contact principal researcher Rania Altoun at

rania.altoun.0637@student.uu.se.

Transcriptions of the interviews

Interviews with 9 parish members:

Interview 1:

Transcribing the interview with a member (CM1) of the Catholic Church. Original language in the interview were Swedish, I have transcribed the interview and translated it into English. A brief introduction to the subject was presented as well as a consent before the start of the interview.

It is relevant to state that CD & CM1 are married, so CM1 has a lot of insight in the congregation but also her heart belongs to this specific parish.

R – Rania

CM1 – Catholic Church member 1 (Female – Late 50's - Catholic since birth)

Interview starts:

R – In this pandemic, what has been most difficult or hard to adjust to when the churches were closed down?

CM1 – All our activities! All the activities and ideas and dreams that you had to develop the church. That's all.

R - Do you remember what you thought when the management decided to close the church? CM1 – Yes, I was angry (laughing out loud)!

R – You got mad? Why would you do that?

CM1 – Yes, but that's it. Why close the church? Maybe it's the infection in the church. While local traffic and so on are packed with people. And shopping malls and shops have absolutely no crisis management. But we in the churches are going to have a crisis.

R - Did you feel that the churches were exposed more?

CM1 – Absolutely, they're vulnerable! But I wasn't surprised, I have to say.

R - As a Christian, what has it been like not being able to perform the Christian rituals, traditions, sacraments fully? Did you still feel a sense of belonging to the church?

CM1 – Yes indeed more than ever.

R - So it wasn't hard not to perform all the sacraments or all the traditions etc?

CM1 – You know, we Christians are a special people and if, if you say yes to the calling of your life, then nothing can be stopped, no one can stop you. You just find a way. The underground churches are located. How do you think they do it? You find a way and you get more, it's the other way around. You get more involved, and you get, I try, uh. You help each other so that everyone can have that need fulfilled as much as possible. You may not be able to do it completely, but the commitment is getting bigger. I can't say I miss anything because I make sure I get everything. One way or another!

R - What is it that you miss the most when it comes to church activities in this lockdown?

CM1 – To be able to tell you that Jesus is alive! Actually. Because there are a lot of people we miss who come here! And that community and, uh, to explore together who the Lord is, that's what I miss actually. To be able to share the joy of the holy spirit together, that's what I miss.

R - Do you think the church management handled the Covid-19 crisis badly?

CM1 – No, I don't think so. For them, it was also a huge pain, to be honest. That you had to hold private masses. It's a pain to have to close the gate at a Sunday mass and it's ploughing on and you have to refer to the next Mass. Or also refer to the streaming and you understand it's a pain, but we've tried to keep and you follow the government's rules and yet we have our control here and we know roughly how we can divide and how each church's crisis management suits that church and that church. I am not saying that we are exceeding, but we must still be able to be a little flexible. For example, that we could have used all the premises available. That you use the lower floor where eight people can sit. So we try to adapt and to the opportunity that church building gives us.

R - What do you personally think they could have done better or improve to prevent or ease future crisis?

CM1 - Wait, I have to think! What could they have done better? I mean, I don't think, I don't think the churches could have done better actually. They have really cherished safety and if I now take our Church, Father K he always reminds you to keep your distance. There are also church hosts. Not on weekdays but on Sundays when it is crowded. There are church hosts who go around making sure they keep their distance and there's sanitizers in front of you and he Father K comes with the communion but we don't have the wine. Just the bread. And he has opened up to confession, confession is as usual because it is only Father K and one person. Now with the pandemic, he confessed in the corner, but we actually have a confessional room. People didn't really feel comfortable because it's full of people. But now he uses another room that is larger where you can also open the window. He has really tried, we probably make mistakes or forget but our vicar has really tried to keep the rules to the extent possible.

R – Number seven. If the churches in the city you live in collaborated in their activities or even Sunday services, would you attend another church in the pandemic?

CM1 – No, no definitely not, because I feel, I know that on weekdays it's almost always the same people who come so I feel safe and I know I can trust them. If you feel sick, I know that that person stays at home. It's a trust you have in each other.

R - Have you been attending Sunday service or mass on social media?

CM1 – Since I'm a missus, I'm teaching here, so I'm here every Sunday. Every Sunday I teach.

R - Will you visit the church as often after the pandemic or has it become convenient to attend the service online?

CM1 – You know, I can go to church every day. So for me, it hasn't mattered. I've always been here.

R – But if you had been a person who watched online how important is the mass.

CM1 - Here's the thing, no Catholic can find it convenient to watch a Sunday Mass online. For the most important thing is physical and that's sacred eucharistic. And when I'm home at night, I also watch streaming at another mass from America, I watch several masses. But it's not like going to church.

R – One last question. What do you as a member think the churches suffered from the most in this Covid-19 pandemic?

CM1 – Not being able to come and visit Mary, not being able to physically receive the holy Eucharistic and the community with each other. That's what they're suffering from, the members. That you build each other up here. It suffers the most. It's a very special community we have in the Church. It's a community in a society. Or a community in a society in a society.

R – All right, then you'll have to explain yourself more.

CM1 – You have your family, the Catholic Church is an universal church so there are different traditions there are different people who come from different countries they have different ways of being so they have their traditions at home, they come to the general tradition and they live in a different tradition you understand. And then you meet in the general in the church tradition. And it's so amazing.

R - It remains to thank you! Thanks a lot!

Turns off the recording, interview ends.

Interview 2:

Transcribing the interview with a member (CM2) of the Catholic Church. Original language in the interview were Swedish, I have transcribed the interview and translated it into English. A brief introduction to the subject was presented as well as a consent before the start of the interview. I have only transcribed the part of the interview that was relevant to the research. That is, where I ask my questions. At the beginning of the interview, we presented ourselves briefly and talked sporadically about our everyday lives, so that the interview would flow more smoothly. That part is not transcribed.

R – Rania

CM2 – Catholic Church member 2 (Woman – 72 years – Catholic since birth)

Interview starts

CM2 – Should we start?

R – Absolutely! I'll ask you my first question. In this pandemic, what has been most difficult or hard to adjust to when the churches were closed down?

CM2 – Uhhh yes, you can make this question very short or very long. I hope I can answer. I find it so hard not to be able to visit the temple itself. For us, it is so important to come before the holiest. For us, it is important to feel this security that you feel when you enter the church. If I come into church after a day when I've been annoyed or sad or something. Then after an hour of Mass or prayer, it begins with the voice, hope, joy and gratitude that I am a Catholic. I believe in God and I have this relationship with God. And it's been terribly difficult. But my husband and I are part of the risk group and we have tried to be able to come to church from time to time. With many measures like mask and everything, social distancing to mainly confess us and maybe be in the church the times there haven't been so many people.

I belong to J-parish and always go there. In the church I find God, it has the open roof and you have contact with heaven directly. It always gives me peace and it gives me this longing for one day to come to heaven, or hope so. That's what I've been missing. I've missed all my good friends there. This congregation in all cases there is a very nice affinity. There are a lot of people who are very deeply believers. To go to church, to be there, it means a lot to me. That, as I said, partly my encounter with God, other like-minded people like me who have a

strong faith. I like our vicar very much. I've had an online masses every day. Those of us who believe must accept or know that this is an ordeal. God wants us to go through this. He's the one who allows it, it's not the humans. It's the Lord's plan. And it has made me sit at home with my husband and we have prayed a lot more than when we go to church. We've asked the rosary for Mother Mary and we've lit candles. It has allowed people to grow spiritually to the relationship with God, in spirituality and I see that, not only me but I have talked to other people about this we have grown.

We've gotten cleaner, purification, we've gotten closer to God. God speaks to us. He speaks to our hearts. We're going to have hope. It's an ordeal just like our old prophets. God wants it, we can thank God for this. Unfortunately, the world is corrupt and the devil does exactly what he wants. But at the same time there are people who have come back to God, who cry to God. In many Catholic countries there are people who are passionate about not losing their nerve, not losing hope. That God has plans for all of us for the whole world to always repent. That's the thing. We're going to get back to him. He gives us with his gentle hand. He could destroy people like this (snapping her fingers) but he wants to give us a chance. We will turn to Him and teach our children that there is a God. The devil doesn't have as much power. Those of us who have been home have had to pray for all the suffering and for all the people who have died. Men have also caused this, people have become so corrupt that this is god's wrath. God, he's great, you can't say God is merciful-like as I can do anything. I can't do that. God he forgives us and forgives us, but there comes a day when God, He must make us react. Many believers ask for things, God I want a job, God I want this, etc. But God he wants a relationship. If your own child looks at you strangely once, it hurts very much, it hurts your heart. And so I think, I wonder how much God suffers. He gives so much love and it costs nothing, it's free. And if people knew how much God could give us that He spoils us even. Then the churches would be full. Unfortunately, however, this has not happened, but perhaps one day. You have to pray on your knees, so we just have to keep going in this position of praying.

I may have already answered the remaining questions, but I just have to praise the Catholic Church. Our vicar has worked much harder now during the pandemic than they usually do. I am thinking in particular of our Church but also other congregations that have had up to seven masses on weekends. Just to give everyone a chance to come. There are many older people who do not have access to the internet or know the electronic, to go to Zoom for example. What is Zoom. I also didn't know what it was before the pandemic. Then they have

given a chance to the elders to come to church, meet God, and receive the holy communion. Because when we have confessed and received the holy communion, you feel a calmness, especially me who is older. I've chosen to get closer to God because I don't know how long I have left on earth. So yes, the Catholic Church has done a lot, especially our cardinal, who has written letters to the government but unfortunately he was not heard about the maximum limit of eight people. But was rejected.

Sometimes I have felt that we have to accept what the authorities are saying as well. There are no exceptions. But shopping centers haven't been closed, which has annoyed people. Ikea, for example, it was full of cars. The government has been weak there. But what are we going to do, unfortunately we have to obey the authorities and the priests have followed as best they can. That's what we can do. What we can do is pray. Prayer, prayer, and prayer again. But it is for us who are believers. If you were to tell people who don't believe, you'd think you're weird. You know what I did when I took the first dose of the vaccine? Then I told the nurse if I could bless my vaccine? I prayed loudly over the vaccine, I made the cross sign. The nurse reacted and thought it was very nicely done.

R - Let us move on to the second question. Do you remember what you thought when the management decided to close the church?

CM2 – That was terrible! I thought it was terrible. I was angry. Instead of opening the churches to call out to the lord. That's how they close the churches. I felt an anger.

R – As a Christian, what has it been like not being able to perform the Christian rituals, traditions, sacraments fully? Did you still feel a sense of belonging to the church?

CM2 – I have had the privilege that I have been able to visit the sisters monastery in Stäket and there you are doing very well. They've been healthy the whole time. So there I have been able to receive the holy sacrament, Eucharistic. But of course you feel, if I say this to us Christians, it's felt like this. It's almost like they cut off our arm. That we're not whole, that we've lost something.

R - What is it that you miss the most when it comes to church activities in this lockdown.

CM2 – It's Mass and holy Eucharistic. I miss that the most.

R - Do you think the church management handled the Covid-19 crisis badly?

CM2 – I don't think they've handled it badly. In our congregation, from what I've seen in any case, the priests, Father K, who is the vicar, have been very clear about what applies. It has been sensitive to what recommendations the bishop and cardinal have made. You have to follow them. They've done great. Hand sanitizer, careful social distancing. They've made arrangements for people to come to church.

R - What do you personally think they could have done better or improve to prevent or ease future crisis?

CM2 – I think that if we were to find ourselves in this situation, we could prepare better by having masses outside. One thing they could have done is accept God's will. The priests have done what they could. There's nothing more they've been able to do. Sure, they've protested the government's decision. The answer has always been negative. It's hard to prepare for something that's never happened before. The whole world has been affected.

R – But your church has had the opportunity to stream the church or mass and then that Father K, goes out to the parking lot with the communion.

CM2 – I've heard that, I haven't been through it, but I've heard that's been good.

R – Yes, it is a measure that your congregation did, sit in their own car, listen to Mass and then Father K comes out with the Eucharistic.

CM2 – But that's what I'm saying. They have tried to do everything possible to make the people feel that they have not given up. Don't feel abandoned. To gain the strength to continue to fight and stick to God.

R - If the churches in the city you live in collaborated in their activities or even Sunday services, would you attend another church in the pandemic?

CM2 – I'm not bound to any church. I love going to J parish. But I would not be able to receive the holy communion in the Church of Sweden, for example. I can't do that. Orthodox, I could imagine, if it were nearby. But yes, why not. There is a modern prophet who speaks of unity and that we should all unite. So of course I don't mind. But at the same time, when you're used to going to a church, you don't want to go anywhere else.

R - Have you been attending Sunday service or mass on social media?

CM2 – Yes, I have!

R - Is that Facebook then?

CM2 – I've used YouTube the most, but also Facebook both.

R – But then it's your own diocese or have you seen services from other parishes as well?

CM2 – Since I am Spanish speaking, I have listened to masses from Spain and Colombia. It's been amazing. The churches have been very active during the pandemic. I know the priests in Colombia have given Mass outside. Outside the church. Worship outside the church.

R - The weather permits it more in Colombia than in Sweden.

CM2 - Of course, what I want to say is that they have done it because they do not want to close the churches. They have protested more than they have in Sweden.

R – But before the pandemic, you never used social media to listen to trade shows, did you? That's something new with the pandemic, isn't it?

CM2 – Yes, yes, it's new. I think mass should be heard in god's house. But now that there weren't opportunities, it's been amazing that they were able to arrange for us to stream the mass. It's not the same thing. I can pause and stop via streaming. It's not the same contact with the God. Like they cut an arm. There's something missing. There's an emptiness.

R - Will you visit the church as often after the pandemic or has it become convenient to attend the service online?

CM2 – No, I'm going to church!

R – It has not become comfortable to sit at home.

CM2 – No, the Church needs our support. The vicar wouldn't be too happy if everyone was sitting at home. Coming to church is an oasis for me. God's presence, security, etc. There's no comparison.

R- Then I come to my last question. What do you as a member think the churches suffered from the most in this Covid-19 pandemic?

CM2 – It wasn't easy. You mean the church itself?

R The congregation itself, the foundation?

CM2 – I imagine it must be tough for the priests and deacons to see the churches empty. It must hurt their hearts. A priest is very happy if the church is full on Sundays. It's their

mission. I think the priests have had a very tough time. Imagine how tough we've had it, they've had a lot tougher times.

R – But you don't think the churches suffered financially?

CM2 – I don't like talking about money. Sure, it's a collection every Sunday.

R – Do you think they've lost some of their members.

CM2 – Some people walk away from the lord, they lose the relationship. It can be difficult for the priests who have built a church that really blooms. And then all of a sudden, half of it comes because of the pandemic. Of course you get sad. But now you have swish and members swish money.

R – But then also in prayer, rituals or liturgy? It's a sacrament, how do you do it in a pandemic?

CM2 – From what I understand, this has not been the case in the pandemic. But we have prayed every day for those who cannot take the last sacrament. I've thought a lot about those who can't get last confession or last anointing. I've been praying for them.

R – That was my last question, I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart!

CM2 – I will speak from my heart, and I wish you well! Amazing subject! You're a chosen girl!

R – Thank you, bye!

CM2 - Good luck, bye!

Turns off recording.

Interview 3:

Transcribing the interview with a member (CM3) of the Catholic Church. Original language in the interview were Swedish, I have transcribed the interview and translated it into English. A brief introduction to the subject was presented as well as a consent before the start of the interview. I have only transcribed the part of the interview that was relevant to the research. That is, where I ask my questions. At the beginning of the interview, we presented ourselves briefly and talked sporadically about our everyday lives, so that the interview would flow more smoothly. That part is not transcribed.

R – Rania

CM3 – Catholic Church member 3 (Woman – 30 years – Catholic since birth)

Interview starts - Recording on

R – First question! In this pandemic, what has been most difficult or hard to adjust to when the churches were closed down?

CM3 - I mean, my life is circulating in being in church. It's my second home. Um, in the beginning, it was very difficult for the teaching to be cancelled. I'm a catechism for confirmations. That you would sign a list in order to be able to participate in the mass. That all of a sudden there would be, or that everything would change. So that was probably the biggest thing at the beginning, when the pandemic kicked off. But then I've had a huge advantage that, it hasn't been a Sunday Mass without attending church. And I also got to participate during Easter, all the holidays. So, I'm one of the few who has spent time in church physically and hasn't followed live streaming. Uh, I haven't been affected like many others that I know haven't been able to go to church. I think I've been an exception.

R - Is it a choice that management has made or a choice that members have made?

CM3 – What do you mean?

R – That you were on this list. Have you been selected according to certain criteria?

CM3 – Well, I have different roles in my congregation. One, that I teach. Two, that I'm responsible for everyone who teaches, uh then I read, readings. I'm a lecturer and that's really what allowed me to be a part of it. So, I had to help with the readings.

R – OK, then I understand!

CM3 – That's it, I volunteered. Otherwise, I might not have had that opportunity.

R - Let's move on. Do you remember what you thought when the management decided to close the church?

CM3 – I was... Wow, that was a mixture of emotions. Sad, angry and frustrated. Because the church got like, that is, it was just "now you're shutting down." While other places, like shops and other public places got different rules. And it made me very sad and angry. Disappointed that they didn't have an understanding that this isn't a place that you go to just because.

Without one, there is a great spiritual meaning to why we go there, and it is not taken into account.

R – Mm I understand. Let's move on. As a Christian, what has it been like not being able to perform the Christian rituals, traditions, sacraments fully? Did you still feel a sense of belonging to the church?

CM3 – Yes, because of my different roles. I always felt part of it. I never stopped, or we stopped teaching at first, but then we started again. So it was kind of like we have a group, and we have a responsibility. It helped me stay in church. So sometimes it could be a little hard to know, if I wasn't in the first eight, I'm not allowed to go into mass. But I still believe that this crisis has brought me closer to God in a different way. To really understand that, oh, I'm affected by the fact that I can't go to church or can't attend Mass. It gave me an inner insight into how important it really is. It's not the usual routines I go to the gym, you know sometimes you have your everyday routines. This became a deeper understanding that this is important. I'm doing my best, I felt like I was getting stronger in faith instead of being further away. For me, I got closer to God.

R – What about the Christian sacraments, communion, for example?

CM3 – I haven't missed a single Sunday.

R – Yes, you said that, yes, but then I understand. You were never gone, but more involved now in the pandemic?

CM3 – I participate on certain weekdays. I've been able to confess every month. That part hasn't changed for me.

R – No, I understand. Let's move on. What is it that you miss the most when it comes to church activities in this lockdown?

CM3 – I think it was all children's and youth activities. Except for the teaching. We have always had sports holidays with DonBosco and autumn holidays with DonBosco so the whole winter break we have arranged different activities with the children but also meet certain months, and we chose to cancel that. Actually, my great fear was losing the children, more than me distancing myself from the church. The teaching has been ongoing. But everything else disappeared and I've missed that a lot.

R - Do you think the church management handled the Covid-19 crisis badly?

CM3 – You mean the state?

R – No, church leaders, church decision-makers.

CM3 - I mean, what do you do? When you get something above you! I think they have done the best they can based on the situation. They encouraged not to teach at the beginning of the pandemic and then with new restrictions you would run digitally. And now you drive in smaller groups of eight people. So, I still think the bishop has done his best based on the restrictions that exist.

R – Did your own teaching go from physical to digital? Your teaching?

CM3 – My teaching never did. But we took a little break at the beginning. Because we didn't know what to do, but then we drove physically again. I have a very small group. There's eight of us.

R – That's lucky.

Cm3 – But I think that's what made me not have to stop.

R – Yes, I understand. Let's move on. What do you personally think they could have done better or improve to prevent or ease future crisis?

CM3 - A So the digital, uh I think you have this idea that the digital also works. It will never replace a physical encounter. But instead of shutting down operations, it can be a Bible group or a women's group whatever, the teaching. Everything, I mean, can still be done digitally. And don't be like this, because it was a time when it was completely dead. Many catechisms and many leaders who did not dare to venture into the digital world. And there we have probably lost many, but also that parents may not feel comfortable with Zoom. That is why I believe that digital, when physical does not work, I think digital will be the replacement at the moment. That we have the resources that it's kind of in our DNA. But that we feel safe, that there we can gather instead. Unless we can see each other physically.

R - If the churches in the city you live in collaborated in their activities or even Sunday services, would you attend another church in the pandemic?

CM3 - Oh, interesting question, so if all the Catholic churches were closed? Would I go to another one?

R – Or that if the churches were to cooperate in the city you live in, then it is not only the Catholic but the Orthodox or the Swedish Church. If they were to collaborate on activities or services in order to perhaps make maximum use of the resources themselves, would you consider going to another church?

CM3 – Activity-wise, I'm open to participating in the ecumenical. But when it comes to attending a church service, I would almost feel close to the Orthodox. Because I attend a Mass physically to receive Jesus. Otherwise, I might as well watch my TV.

R – Mmm, I understand, let's move on. Have you been attending Sunday service or mass on social media?

CM3 – Some everyday fairs I have participated in live. But Sundays I've always been to church.

R – What social platforms have you used?

CM3 - Facebook.

R – Facebook, yes. Let's move on. Will you visit the church as often after the pandemic or has it become convenient to attend the service online?

CM3 – I don't like seeing the Sunday Service on a screen. So, I won't, I don't feel like it's going to replace. If I want to, I'll go physically.

R – Then we arrive at the last question in this interview. What do you as a member think the churches suffered from the most in this Covid-19 pandemic?

CM3 – I think everyone suffered in different ways. After all, we as a people suffered from the fact that we could not receive Jesus or perhaps be worshipped and pray in the Church as much as one is normally used to. And I have heard that many priests suffered from the fact that they could not give Jesus. Be there just as much for us. And the catechisms or those who have not taught like the rest of the congregation also have the right to pray. What happens now to our children and young people, if we start after the pandemic, will they come back? Or have we lost them? So that there are different, in how you feel, I think depends on which group in the church you belong to. There is great fear that some children and young people have been lost. Yes, that's my biggest fear, the sadness if that's the case. We hope not, but it is something that we all wear.

R – I understand, that's the last question. I'll have to thank you very much.

CM1 – Wow, how fast it went!

R – It wasn't that bad! I'm going to turn off the recording.

Interview ends - Turns off recording

Interview 4:

Transcribing the interview with a member (CSM1) of the Church of Sweden. Original language in the interview were Swedish, I have transcribed the interview and translated it into English. A brief introduction to the subject was presented as well as a consent before the start of the interview. I have only transcribed the part of the interview that was relevant to the research. That is, where I ask my questions. The small to introduce ourselves in the beginning of the chat in the original recording is not transcribed.

R – Rania

CSM1 – Church of Sweden Member 1 (Woman – 29 years – Church of Sweden since birth)

Interview Starts – Recording on

R – Should we get started?

CSM1 – Yes.

R - The questions are in English, so I'll ask them in English if you don't mind.

CSM1 – Should I answer in English?

R – No, you can answer in Swedish, I'll transcribe everything later.

R - In this pandemic, what has been most difficult or hard to adjust to when the churches were closed down?

CSM1 – Wow, so many things, but the hardest part has been not being able to go to church physically. Because it's been such a community gathering point where I've been able to take my children to and where I've been able to feel that there are several who look after my children and show love and care for them. And then a spiritual perspective, it's been incredibly difficult, like, much of Christian spirituality to be able to reflect one's faith with other people, to celebrate worship and stuff like that. It's like not being in the church building the way I've been before.

R – Mm, I understand. Do you remember what you thought when the management decided to close the church?

CSM1 - A So it was a bit gradual so in a way I think you felt more and more like limited to be able to go to church. So that in a way it was gradual but in a way, I can say that we had a date and that was in November or October shift. And then everything was digital. What was the question again?

R – Mmm, do you remember what you thought when the management decided to close the church?

CSM1 – Yes, but I thought it was right, somehow. Up here, or at least this part of Sweden, we wouldn't have had the pandemic as widespread as elsewhere. So we could have gone quite a long time and still been able to meet, when there were 50 restrictions. And in our church, that's so small, it was 30. But there and then the infection had increased so much in society that I thought this was right. We as a church and community would not become infected or contribute to cohabitation.

R – I understand, let's move on. As a Christian, what has it been like not being able to perform the Christian rituals, traditions, sacraments fully? Did you still feel a sense of belonging to the church?

CSM1 – I was into this before, the spiritual thing. That's being. That the physical exists and is a big part of the faith. Because the other week I got a reminder of what happened a year ago and then last Easter there was a Communion picture, where we took Communion with the others in the congregation and I felt how I cried, because it had just been Easter before that. And it was extremely difficult, because Easter is by far the most important holiday where we celebrate Christ that has arisen and there is so much community and so much, yes, but the whole of Easter is to live your way into belief and the liturgy is formed around it as well. To live in Christ's suffering and resurrection, so it was really hard.

R – Mmm, what is it that you miss the most when it comes to church activities in this lockdown?

CSM1 - Yes, but it is probably the service yes, it is to be able to celebrate the service together but also to have the children in the Christian community means a lot to me. To be with other Christians and other people.

R – Mm I understand. Do you think the church management handled the Covid-19 crisis badly?

CSM1 – Ehhm, no, I don't think so on the whole, then maybe I can feel that, sometimes I can feel, but what do you do now? So when you don't meet people the same way, what do you do now? What are you doing to replace this and this and this? I can question that quite a bit. Because I think that you have time to spend but from one point of view, which you might be able to do is to adapt things more according to the situation and offer more so that, no, I think like this. What has been done on the basis of the situation, based on the crisis situation, I think, but then when the crisis, now it has been a while. What do you offer now?

R – Mm I understand. What do you personally think they could have done better or improve to prevent or ease future crisis?

CSM1 - On a local level or on a national level?

R – Inside your church?

CSM1 – Okay, because I can think nationally. But within our church. It depends on what kind of crisis it is; I think. That's a good question I have to think can't answer right away like that.

R - What about a national one?

CSM1 - No, but it has a lot to do with politics. I think more that you need to talk to the state about religious freedom. somehow, it's been a while and it's pretty absurd to be able to go to a mall, but not be able to go into church. It is an absurd feeling as a Christian and certainly within other religious communities to be able to walk in a shop or mall but not be able to go to church. But in the local way, I'm not going to say that man. I can see that some people who have worked have tried to adapt and tried to work in my local church. While others and it is probably in the same criticism as I mentioned earlier that not much is being done to adapt. How do we adapt to a situation like this, how do I make sure to serve mine, that is, the people I lead how do I serve them in the best way based on the situation I'm in, and I still think that a crisis like this shows what leadership you have? And then there are probably, some, because I think that it is more than just the priest who is the leader the church has other employees and other leaders as well, and then I speak from that perspective. How have you kind of adapted? And there I can see that different leaders have done it differently.

R – Mmm, I understand, let's move on. If the churches in the city you live in collaborated in their activities or even Sunday services, would you attend another church in the pandemic?

CSM1 – Mmm?? Uhhh if it was a nearby church. No, but I didn't. There has been an opportunity to be able to go to church where you can register and things like that. Our church is so small that a person has been able to register in addition to those who are involved, but no.

R – No! Let's move on. Have you been attending Sunday service or mass on social media?

CSM1 - Yes, I have.

R - what social platforms have you used?

CSM1 - It's been Facebook. foremost. Then there's been a bit of Skype, but nothing that I've had the opportunity to go on, or really been interested in either. But Facebook has been. This has been broadcast through the service, both our local church here and what is in the pastorate. Then we've had some Bible collections that the pastorate has had that I've been to. but mainly Sunday services I have seen.

R – Mmm, next question. Will you visit the church as often after the pandemic or has it become convenient to attend the service online?

CSM1 - I will go to church once it opens and I will run in and shout hallelujah. No, but I don't think the digital replacement, it's passive worship that I don't feel very comfortable in.

R – Mmm, last question. What do you as a member think the churches suffered from the most in this Covid-19 pandemic?

CSM1 - Not being able to see worship, being apart, I think. I think a lot of people feel just like me and that's what they're suffering from. There's so much from a deaconal perspective, too. Where I feel there is so much for the Church to do later in society but also within the Church. Those who are vulnerable become more vulnerable as well.

R – Do you think the state has treated the Church unfairly?

CSM1 - Yes, I think so! As I said earlier, you can question how you view religious freedom, and that sometimes it feels like capital is the most important thing and keeping capital going is what governs. It's very capitalist. And so in relation to the way the state talks about cultural life and stuff like that. The churches are not being counted because it is the same, but

ministers. The churches have to raise their voices themselves in order to even be included in the mindset, I can experience it as. I can't imagine what it's like for other religions.

R I understand. But thank you, that's the last question!

Interview ends – Recording off.

Interview 5:

Transcribing the interview with a member (CSM2) of the Church of Sweden. Original language in the interview were Swedish, I have transcribed the interview and translated it into English. A brief introduction to the subject was presented as well as a consent before the start of the interview. I have only transcribed the part of the interview that was relevant to the research. That is, where I ask my questions. The small to introduce ourselves in the beginning of the chat in the original recording is not transcribed.

Important to include is that this member is a volunteer in the Church of Sweden.

R – Rania

CSM2 – Church of Sweden Member 2 (Woman – In her 50's – Born into the Syriac Orthodox church, now member of the Church of Sweden for 30 years)

Interview Starts – Recording on

R - Let's get started! In this pandemic, what has been most difficult or hard to adjust to when the churches were closed down?

CSM2 – It is most difficult for us in the Church of Sweden that during the pandemic we have only brought eight people into the church. But at the same time, throughout the pandemic, we have had an activity called "Kaffevagnen" that we have had all year round, summer and winter where we have stood outside the church or in the church square and offered coffee and bun. Sometimes soup and food. People came and talked to us, asked questions. We asked how they were feeling, and what we could help with if it was food or soup, if they felt bad, we can call and help and stuff. The Church of Sweden here, in my parish, has been very much there for the people. We help those who cannot afford it and it is an activity that is planned to continue after the pandemic. We have a deacon and a vicar to help with food distribution. We also help to buy clothes for those who can't afford it, so our church has really stood up during these difficult times. We as members have not noticed much difference in commitment, but it is more that we cannot visit the Church. It's hard for people to come here.

R - The church doors are open, can you come in and pray?

CSM2 – Absolute! From 9:00 to 4:00, the doors are open, and you can come here. On Sundays from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., the doors are open for those who want to come and pray, with a limit of eight people. Even the Coffee Cart, too. And all Sunday we serve the Coffee Cart.

R – Mm, I understand. Do you remember what you thought when the management decided to close the church?

CSM2 – The whole world has noticed that it is a serious disease that is very contagious, and we have also noticed it. So we've had to accept it, and it's contagious fast and we don't want people to die. That is why they have reacted quickly and that has been good. My personal opinion is that you should come by yourself, there is morning prayer every morning where we pray and keep our distance. But it's for us who work, so I live with it and haven't noticed it that much.

R – I understand, let's move on. As a Christian, what has it been like not being able to perform the Christian rituals, traditions, sacraments fully? Did you still feel a sense of belonging to the church?

CSM2 – yes, ooooh yes. As I said, there are those who do not have the opportunity to come, it is difficult or they cannot. They don't get the right information, but I know what's going on and what activities or rituals are being held. Then I'll come because I've embraced that information. For me, it hasn't been a huge difference.

R – Mmm, what is it that you miss the most when it comes to church activities in this lockdown?

CSM2 – Yes, what I miss most is the children's room, the open preschool. Sunday school. Because I myself work at Sunday School but also am responsible for open preschool. But I miss the fact that there are always children and youth in the church. There's not as much anymore. But some I meet in smaller groups of no more than five young people. We can go for walks, we can have a coffee, we can just sit and talk! Sometimes in church, but now that the weather is nicer, we can be out more, and we sing together or play together. I miss that the most! It works fine!

R – Mm I understand. Do you think the church management handled the Covid-19 crisis badly?

CSM2 – No, they did what they could with restrictions from the state.

R – Mm I understand. What do you personally think they could have done better or improve to prevent or ease future crisis?

CSM2 – The diocese has done a very good job in this church. They have been in constant contact with members, if not physically with home visits so over the phone. In the best way they could have done and in my opinion it has gone well.

R – Mmm, I understand, let's move on. If the churches in the city you live in collaborated in their activities or even Sunday services, would you attend another church in the pandemic?

CSM2 – Absolutely, of course. I want all churches to work together. We're all Christians. We're going to work together and ask each other questions. We all have different backgrounds and different traditions. It's really, I don't want a problem with that.

R – Ok! Have you been attending Sunday service or mass on social media?

CSM2 – Yes, this church is live. Digital services every Sunday. But I've seen from other churches. But it's not the same feeling as when you're at a real church service and that's what I miss. I want members to come back to church. Services like before.

R - Is it on Facebook you've been watching or what?

CSM2 – No, we broadcast on Facebook but also on the church's website.

R – Mmm, next question. Will you visit the church as often after the pandemic or has it become convenient to attend the service online?

CSM2 – No, when you come here and have the physical meeting, you miss it. That part is important to come to church, with a church service and communion. But we can't do that now because we don't give out communion. But a lot of people are asking for it and they're going to come back to church.

R – Mmm, last question. What do you as a member think the churches suffered from the most in this Covid-19 pandemic?

CSM2 – It's been a very good job, and there's nothing they can do. All churches in Sweden have done their best if it is the Syrian Orthodox or The Church of Sweden, everyone has done what they could from the situation. Now you just must fight. There's nothing more they can do.

R I understand. But thank you, that's the last question!

Interview ends – Recording off.

Interview 6:

Transcribing the interview with a member (CSM3) of the Church of Sweden. Original language in the interview were Swedish, I have transcribed the interview and translated it into English. A brief introduction to the subject was presented as well as a consent before the start of the interview. I have only transcribed the part of the interview that was relevant to the research. That is, where I ask my questions. The small to introduce ourselves in the beginning of the chat in the original recording is not transcribed.

R – Rania

CSM3 – Church of Sweden Member 3 (Woman – 67 years old – Born into the Finnish Congregation, now member of the Church of Sweden).

Interview Starts – Recording on

R - In this pandemic, what has been most difficult or hard to adjust to when the churches were closed down?

CSM3 – Not being able to take people in. It was tough, especially when it's been cold outside. It's a different story now that it's summer. Now you can meet outside, or in the church square, but not when it has been cold.

R – Has it been closed here?

CSM3 – The church has always been open, we can't meet as many people as we want, but there are eight people at most. There are rules that we have to follow.

R – Mm, I understand. Do you remember what you thought when the management decided to close the church?

CSM3 – Well, I guess I didn't think anything more than that they're in charge. So that it may be, but since I'm a member of the church, we've had morning prayers. We have had different opportunities for prayer and going to church. But we don't have to be there all on the same day.

R – I understand, let's move on. As a Christian, what has it been like not being able to perform the Christian rituals, traditions, sacraments fully? Did you still feel a sense of belonging to the church?

CSM3 – Well there hasn't been any major god service and there's been a lot of streaming and things that are a little different but this particular personal connection hasn't been the same as before. Plus, I have a special group that we've been celebrating the service with, they haven't been able to come here.

R - Are they older people?

CSM3 – They're my countrymen, most of them are home alone, many are widows. And they are not allowed to come here, so, if possible, we will visit them at home with soup lunch. They have someone to contact us, so they don't forget us.

R – Mmm I understand, what is it that you miss the most when it comes to church activities in this lockdown?

CSM3 – I guess it's the services, but it's also the choir activities. I mean, I'm not in the choir, but listening to them, it's so beautiful when it's sung.

R – Mm I understand. Do you think the church management handled the Covid-19 crisis badly?

CSM3 – No, it's better to be careful from the start when you know it might get bigger. And then a little at a time let go, so more people can come to church. Or, for example, have two different services. One group comes before the other.

R – Yes, you mean it's been the case that you've had different services?

CSM3 – Yes!

R – Mm I understand. What do you personally think they could have done better or improve to prevent or ease future crisis?

CSM3 – We've learned a lot about how to deal with it. You get more careful, but you learn new things, to deal with. Otherwise, it would have just been flat. But when you learn something new, it becomes hills and valleys. Here and there!

R – Mmm, I understand, let's move on. If the churches in the city you live in collaborated in their activities or even Sunday services, would you attend another church in the pandemic?

CSM3 – Yes, I could!

R – Mmm, let's move on. Have you been attending Sunday service or mass on social media?

CSM3 – Well, I've done a few of them.

R – What social media have you used?

CSM3 – It's mostly if they show them on TV, I don't have such a big phone. But I've been watching TV.

R – Mmm, next question. Will you visit the church as often after the pandemic or has it become convenient to attend the service online?

CSM3 – No, I'd rather be there when it's real. It's only when it's cold and miserable that you can sit at home.

R – But if you don't, you want to come to church.

CSM3 – Yes, yes, of course!

R – Mmm, last question. What do you as a member think the churches suffered from the most in this Covid-19 pandemic?

CSM3 – It's hard to think anything about it, it's going to be, but we've tried to stay together as best we can. I have tried to keep in touch with the people who, in my group that I usually have. That we call them often every week. Or walk by with soup lunch.

R – It's appreciated by them?

CSM3 – Yes, really, but it's more for me. Then I know they're alive. Because they're older. You sit for a while and talk about all sorts of things because the person who is alone at home gets a visit and who has time to sit. And we have had that during the pandemic. We leave the soup but make sure to sit there for a while. Because it has been important, to stay in touch but also for the elderly to feel an affinity.

R – I understand. But thank you, that's the last question!

Interview ends – Recording off.

Interview 7:

Transcribing the interview with a member (SOM1) of the Syriac Orthodox Church. Original language in the interview were Swedish, I have transcribed the interview and translated it into English. A brief introduction to the subject was presented as well as a consent before the start of the interview. I have only transcribed the part of the interview that was relevant to the research. That is, where I ask my questions. The small to introduce ourselves in the beginning of the chat in the original recording is not transcribed.

R – Rania

SOM1 – Syriac Orthodox Church Member 1 (Woman – 34 years – Orthodox since birth)

Interview Starts – Recording on

R - In this pandemic, what has been most difficult or hard to adjust to when the churches were closed down?

SOM1 – Not being in church! That nothing was as usual. All the holidays, uhhh, and the church didn't have either or. So it wasn't solution-focused, it was now closing and so it's closed. And we pick a few people to come, period!

R – Mmm, I understand. Let's move on to the next question. Do you remember what you thought when the management decided to close the church?

SOM1 – Uhhhm, I was... So there were a lot of emotions. There were so many emotions. At first I felt anger, so I got very angry. And that was, it was an anger that didn't subside. So as soon as I thought about the church as soon as I thought about our Sunday School or who could be there or not be there. Then it became that I could get angry. And then when the first holiday came, it was sadness. Like someone died. Because you're so into, over the years, being able to go to church. It almost felt like you'd lost a part of yourself.

R – Mmm, let's move on. As a Christian, what has it been like not being able to perform the Christian rituals, traditions, sacraments fully? Did you still feel a sense of belonging to the church?

SOM1 – Yes, I do. Because they chose to broadcast digitally. Go live. But I still think you're a church leader, so you can be solution focused. You can listen more to the congregation. You can open, so you don't have to open when everyone can go. But you can open drop-in time. If there's too many, you can lock up. Just to light a candle, just to be in church. Breathe, smell all that missing.

R – Other Christian communities had more services per day, this action was not done in the Syrian Orthodox Church?

SOM1 – No! I know that the Coptic Church held services on both Saturdays and Sundays. And then you had to sign up and then it was about, what I understood that three families get to come and then it was a list that you had to follow. You as a family had exactly the same time, exactly the same day. Week in, week out. So, it wasn't something they lost, you had to come, and you found solutions.

R - Because the Syrian Orthodox Church in M is one of the larger churches in the city, isn't it? Could more have been adapted?

SOM1 – Mmmm, I think you could have found so many more solutions.

R – Was it that you weren't willing or able to cope? What do you think it was because you didn't go to that length?

SOM1 – I think I can give my opinion. I think the people they wanted there; they were there! And those who weren't that important to them weren't there. That's how I experienced it, and that's how I felt. And that's why, when they chose, they were the ones who got to be there on Sundays. I was pretty angry.

R – Were they the same people every Sunday or was it different?

SOM1 – Some people were there every Sunday, and then there's the choir. The choir will be replaced, but they may be. I don't know how many of them can be up there, but they're being replaced. But they're supposed to be there. But what about the rest of us? Never mind that I'm also the leader of Sunday School. I'm thinking, the rest of us. Parishioners. We want to light a candle, let's light a candle. Don't lock the door! But they've locked the doors, so people haven't been able to get in. They have been outside the door and members have been told not to come in. Yes, and what are you afraid of? What are you afraid of? If you have a faith, then you also believe that God and Jesus can heal and... What comes from God, it's something... You're being tested! God won't give you trials like you can't! And is it written that yes but SOM1 she is going to die in Corona. She's going to be in the hospital like this and this many days and then she's going to die. Point! Then you have to accept it. I think if you have that belief, what are you afraid of?

R – Mmm

SOM1 – If we say, if you're a church leader. If you work in the church, if you volunteer in the church. Then you have to have, outwardly, you have to show that our faith is strong. And we believe in this, and we have these rules, and we follow those rules.

R - What is it that you miss the most when it comes to church activities in this lockdown?

SOM1 - So it's not a special activity that I miss but, but what's most difficult to be without is all the holidays. So, Sunday School had just started again, and the children were so used to coming. Now my kids keep asking, when are we going? And it's hard to say no you can't be there, no it's Corona. I feel like we may not forget, but the children. It is a danger that we do not bring the children, the little we can take with them is not the same as going to church.

R – And now that we're doing this interview, it's for the Orthodox Church, quiet week. And then it is by far the most important holiday in Christianity. How do you see the coming week?

SOM1 - So the church in M has been really good at activities on holidays. On how it's supposed to be. I grew up saying it's not like this. And when I got to M and all the routines, rules and traditions were proper. And you had vision from other countries as well, then you learn the right thing. How it's supposed to be! And then it's also tough not being able to follow it year after year. It'll be something you're used to. It's sad not being able to, because even last year I thought. And I told the priest, too, but put things outside the door. Tell me you can come and get this and this time. You can stand outside with communion. Let's walk around the church on Palm Sunday. Uhhmm but no there were other plans and other closures.

R - Do you think the church management handled the Covid-19 crisis badly?

SOM1 – I don't think it's the management team at all. It's higher than that. Because when we asked, it was the patriarch's decision. It wasn't our priest at all. And our priest was against lockdown. He was against us not being there. And he tried to open up.

R – Was it the patriarch of Södertälje?

SOM1 – Yes! And our priest opened up at the beginning and I was there once of all the weeks. But unfortunately, our people don't really understand how to make rules, how to respect that you can't sit next to your friend or your grandmother or grandmother. That there's a taped cross on the seat, then you can't sit there. To one row of benches is closed, then you must not open the row of benches and sit down. They don't understand. And I think that's why they've chosen to be so strict.

R - So the decision-makers were the two patriarchs of Södertälje, Benjamin Atas and Abdelahad Chabo?

SOM1 – Well, they're in as a piece of advice. The majority simply wins.

R - What do you personally think they could have done better or improve to prevent or ease future crisis?

SOM1 – I think you could do as much as you bet on everything else! Why do we think it's so fun to get involved in weddings or parties? Why do we have, when there are parties organized by church guards sometimes. Well, then you have to bring out parishioners, you and you are guarding this week. You make sure everyone's doing well and everyone's sitting where they're supposed to be. If you don't, you're going to have to ask them nicely to get out of there.

R – Do you mean church hosts?

SOM1 – Yes, making sure it's orderly. Or you can introduce it as the Coptic Church. And even if you are not allowed to be there during the service, you can open, although you can open the church that it is open during the day. Then you have to go and light candles, you have to pray. It doesn't have to be exaggerated that I or someone else needs to be during the service. Because there are many hundreds of people who want to be there.

R – But do you think the service itself can be shortened and done more times per day?

SOM1 – I don't think so! Because the Syrian Orthodox, it's built in a special way. It follows the same routines every week. Except for the sermon and if there's anything special that week. The priest has to follow that program, I think.

R – I mean communion, Eucharistic, that part is probably the important one. Just so the members can share it. Because within the Syrian Orthodox Church it's mass confessional and every Sunday you confess to being a collector. This is not the case in other congregations. Could you have changed the liturgy?

SOM1 – I think it's dangerous to go in there and poke it. And it's not as simple as we think. And I think the mass closure was due to the hairy restrictions and unfortunately, I do not understand what happened in Sweden and to shut down the churches. They went hardest on the churches. It is not about a particular ethnic group; it is about all churches. We have a singing teacher where I work that constantly reminds us of when we discuss that the

restrictions are not eight people, but if you are in a sitting audience if they do not move, they can be fifty people.

R – Are you saying that's the case in church?

SOM1 – Yes, it should be in church, so why don't you let us in?

R - If the churches in the city you live in collaborated in their activities or even Sunday services, would you attend another church in the pandemic?

SOM1 – Yes, I have no problem going to other churches. None at all. Church as a church. I do not convert to another community or religion if I were to enter another church or parish hall. I think as long as you, within your brain and heart, you're a Christian, it doesn't matter.

R - Have you been attending Sunday service or mass on social media?

SOM1 – Mmm, every Sunday!

R – What social media have you used?

SOM1 – Facebook. Facebook only. And when there hasn't been anyone broadcasting live from the church, or the church side. There has always been a parishioner who has been in the church and broadcast live. And then you've mass-divided so people can find the broadcast.

R - Penultimate question now. Will you visit the church as often after the pandemic or has it become convenient to attend the service online?

SOM1 – I miss so much going to church. So, there is no one, there is no better start to a day than being able to be there. And I think you're eternally tired, you're down. It's because you don't get to meet other people, but you get to sit there and listen and hear god's word and the priest who preaches, and you get to clear your mind from the past week. Pray, light candles, there's no other way to start a Sunday. And I'm going to go wait till it opens.

R – So what is the most important part that you miss most, in the service itself, the liturgy itself?

SOM1 - For me, preaching itself is the most important thing. And then, where the priest explains and tells you if you understand. All my childhood has been done. But now it's translated, and you understand what he's saying and you're more well-read yourself. You want to listen all the time.

R - What do you as a member think the churches suffered from the most in this Covid-19 pandemic?

SOM1 – What do you mean?

R – For example, did they suffer financially, or did they lose members, from the fact that the children could not go there or what did the Church suffer most from during the pandemic?

SOM1 – I believe both financially and that the parishioners were not allowed to be there. When there's not a routine that people go there and that they have the collection and that people swish, um, they're like that, they're waiting for people to contribute. That's their entire income. It's going to go away a little bit, sure I'll listen to the service. But when I'm not there, it's easy to forget to swish your collection. Even though it's so simple. It's easier to swish than to rattle for coins. But I think they're suffering very, very much.

R – Do you think the priest suffers from not being able to fulfil his calling?

SOM1 – Yes, I think so, or I know it! Because unless he has, that is, that he should preach in front of empty benches, I don't think a single priest wants to do it. You see the joy of holidays, when there are a lot of people and when people crowd. You can see the joy when he preaches. I think there's a fear of losing parishioners. Some people think it's super cool to watch live, but others want to be there. As a parent, you don't have to silence your children at home, you can sit in your pyjamas, you can do other things while listening to the service. I think a lot of young people find it comfortable. When they reopen, I don't think you should remove the live streaming. Because I think a lot more people are watching live than going to church. Those of us who went every Sunday will continue to do so. But those who haven't gone, they might be watching live because it's easy!

R – Then I was done! I'll thank you!

Interview ends - Turns off the recording.

Interview 8:

Transcribing the interview with a member (SOM2) of the Syriac Orthodox Church. Original language in the interview were Swedish, I have transcribed the interview and translated it into English. A brief introduction to the subject was presented as well as a consent before the start of the interview. I have only transcribed the part of the interview that was relevant to the

research. That is, where I ask my questions. The small to introduce ourselves in the beginning of the chat in the original recording is not transcribed.

R – Rania

SOM2 – Syriac Orthodox Church Member 2 (Woman – In her 40's – Orthodox since birth)

Interview Starts – Recording on

R - In this pandemic, what has been most difficult or hard to adjust to when the churches were closed down?

SOM2 – It's just a matter of the church?

R – Just you as a member of the Church and your commitment to the Church.

SOM2 – Ok, the hard part has been that you kind of can't go there. My children haven't been able to have any activities. My children were active in church activities and I was active in Sunday school activities. So, you've kind of missed getting there. The children have missed meeting their friends at church. Then you've known they're in the church. There's been a missing point of impact. Yes, just to be there, when you've felt that now I want to go to church to pray, it hasn't been possible. It's been closed. Everything else has been open. But the churches have been closed. It's been a little prejudiced.

R – I understand, let's move on. Do you remember what you thought when the management decided to close the church?

SOM2 – Yes, I was thinking oh my God, how's this going to end? That was my first thought. Because I thought first of all that you really needed to get there to have peace, to pray to follow your faith. The kids, that we went to church. Now we can't even get there. You got the kids on the train. It's hard to apply anything when you're not allowed to do it. When you can't be there. So that was my first thought, what will happen to the people who need this believer, the blessing of the priest, may feel safe, be able to pray. Being able to get help in the spiritual, that's what I was thinking. How will it end for our young people?

R – Yes, I see. As a Christian, what has it been like not being able to perform the Christian rituals, traditions, sacraments fully? Did you still feel a sense of belonging to the church?

SOM2 – Yes, absolutely. I've been lucky enough to be in the choir, too. We've had to walk a few choir members every Sunday at a time. Max 8 people then. I'm lucky enough to be able

to get there after the service and take communion. But I think of everyone else who hasn't been so lucky, who's not in the choir. It's felt tough anyway, even if you've got there at some point like that, once a month or every other week, it's felt heavy. Because that's what I want, but I haven't been able to go there. Communion, yes, it was hard.

R – But let's move on. What is it that you miss the most when it comes to church activities in this lockdown?

SOM2 - Sunday school activity for children up to 12 years old. Then we've had the deacons from 12 years and up then, because then they get to be on the altar and they've had their own activities. The young people have had an activity, youth meetings. The choir has had activities, they have had Christmas dinners, they have had Easter activities, a lot of family traditions and family activities that have disappeared even during the pandemic that have made you not get to meet too many people, you are not allowed to gather. You're just supposed to be with the people you hang out with all the time. Yes, there are a lot of such activities.

R – I understand. Do you think the church management handled the Covid-19 crisis badly?

SOM2 - That is, yes those who have decided that the churches must be closed down but everything else can be open, then when they say it is 10 square meters per person, but the church is huge so you can have up to 10 or there can be more than 8 people in the church, it is huge in area so that everyone gets maybe 100 square meters now and not 10 square meters each. So that they could have been a little clearer about those who have made these decisions. For example, the Swedes on the winter break who were skiing, how long was the queue on the ski slope. There were no distances.

R – But you mean the government decision-makers?

SOM2 – Yes!

R – And what about the church leadership, how have they handled the crisis? Have they handled it badly?

SOM2 - So no I don't think so, under those circumstances and it is the restrictions we have received they have handled it very well and even we have had a period where you have been able to be 50 people in the church so they have chosen not to have it anyway. Because it's just chaos, you know people don't take into account that it's 50 or that you should, if it's stopped

and they're not allowed in. Then they'll be. So, I think management has made a good decision under that restriction and the decisions it has had to go after. And then you have to hope they make the right decision for what they think.

R – But could they have made some improvements in a different way?

SOM2 – Absolutely they could have done that. they could have made it possible to register for a church service the week before and then someone in charge, the youth board, or the ordinary church board at the door and dots of the one who comes and if you have been to church one week you will not come next. So, everyone gets the chance. So, a small system like that I would actually have liked to have seen that they would have done so that people could still have the opportunity to register and come to church instead of it being completely closed. yes, there have certainly been opportunities for improvement.

R - What do you personally think they could have done better or improve to prevent or ease future crisis?

SOM2 - Be clearer and, as I said, have a system. For example, I would like to come to the service this week and then they have it written down and you know that next week other members will be allowed to come. And it has been a bit so and so sometimes, that after the service, people have thought that you have been able to come by to be able to take communion anyway as well as that there is someone there. I understand it's not easy for the priest he can't say no to his parishioners but at least the church board that they could kind of make the decision and take the time to stand there, no but now there are so many and now get to sign you up for next week. So, you get in like a routine.

R – But that you can have more services during the week spread out? Instead of a Sunday service more on a Sunday. What do you think of that?

SOM2 - I think it's going to be hard because you work on weekdays, who's going to go. I don't know how often the priest can do one service per day and how many will come. many of the members work Monday to Friday between 8 and 5 so if I want the chance to go, it is for me personally Sundays Saturdays or Friday evenings.

R – Mmm, I understand. If the churches in the city you live in collaborated in their activities or even Sunday services, would you attend another church in the pandemic?

SOM2 – If all the churches were to work together?

R – Yes, it is regardless of church affiliation, but it could have been Catholic, Protestant or Orthodox. If they were to cooperate.

SOM2 - Yes, absolutely, if there were to be any representative from that church why not. No, why not if it would keep the kids going, for example, why not. So that they have activities that make them stay in the Church, or within that circle that she gets this anyway, yes talked about our Christianity as well as our religion. yes, why not. better than them being out and about in the city centre or somewhere else, so of course.

R - Have you been attending Sunday service or mass on social media?

SOM2 - Yes, I do, Facebook, our church streams live via Facebook. and some other churches also Via Facebook otherwise it is not really whole services I have looked at via Instagram. it's shorter clips.

R - Is it just your church you've followed on social media or have you seen services from other churches?

SOM2 – Yes, I have seen from other churches in Sweden but also services from abroad.

R - Then we have two questions left. Will you visit the church as often after the pandemic or has it become convenient to attend the service online?

SOM2 - No, it's not the same way. It's not the same as being in church. Yes, for a pandemic, the best thing you could have done was to stream online. But it's not the same feeling as standing in there under the roof and hearing live on the priest so obviously.

R – But you're going to get back to an old habit. You don't feel like it's nice to pause the service then click back and stuff.

SOM2 - No, because then I don't feel like we've been part of the service, if I have to sit and click it off, I haven't got anything out of it and then I don't have to look at it either. So I want to be live on site feel and hear. When you are several then it becomes like in a different way but to sit and watch live on a screen.

R – But now you have been to the Church more than all other people have been able to receive in your congregation, you have received Jesus in the Eucharist and visited the church building. What do you think has been most difficult for members who haven't had the same privilege as you?

SOM2 – The hardest part has probably been, there are probably some who say I had hoped that I could go too or, I think the hard part has been that some people have thought yes lucky those who get to go. We can't go. That you kind of know that there are people who are in need but can't get there. That you know that someone is sick who really needs it, that it is someone older who really needs, it is like their only socialising in these times. It's probably been the hardest, that there are those in need but who haven't been able to go where it's probably been difficult actually.

R - Then we have reached the last question. What do you as a member think the churches suffered from the most in this Covid-19 pandemic?

SOM2 – Not being able to have your congregation in church. The fact that they've known that people can't come to church is kind of not what the Church stands for not being able to receive your parishioners. And that's probably been the hardest part. The church has been empty.

R – You also mentioned at the beginning that how you saw that shops and malls were open. Do you think the churches have been treated unfairly?

SOM2 – Yes, absolutely, I think so. Everything they've talked about in terms of distance and surfaces and 10 square meters per person why doesn't that apply to the church. Why should it apply to clothing stores, is it important that they should be open? Is it important that clothing stores are open? There's so much online you can buy now. And people don't care, nobody wears masks, nobody keeps their distance. Everybody goes and peck at those clothes you're going to buy. Isn't it full of bacteria? So, I kind of feel a little bit what the basics have they made the decisions on? In the same way when we had distance education for the young people. why? Shut down all malls. Why do you have distance in schools because they're the ones who need to get out? they need to learn. So, I think they've treated the churches unfairly, absolutely I think so.

R – Thank you for this conversation!

Interview ends – Recording off

Interview 9:

Transcribing the interview with a member (SOM3) of the Syriac Orthodox Church. Original language in the interview were Arabic, I have transcribed the interview and translated it into

English. A brief introduction to the subject was presented as well as a consent before the start of the interview. I have only transcribed the part of the interview that was relevant to the research. That is, where I ask my questions. The small to introduce ourselves in the beginning of the chat in the original recording is not transcribed.

R – Rania

SOM3 – Syriac Orthodox Church Member 3 (Male – 80 Years old – Orthodox since birth)

Interview Starts – Recording on

R - In this pandemic, what has been most difficult or hard to adjust to when the churches were closed down?

SOM3 - For me, the hardest part was when every Sunday, every week, I went to Sunday service and then all of a sudden, I was no longer able to visit but had to watch a service on television. It upset me very much, there is a church, for example, why should it be closed.

R - I understand, let's move on. Do you remember what you thought when the management decided to close the church?

SOM3 – Yes, of course I got angry and annoyed. Why should they make such a decision for everyone? We say that it is a square meter limit, then you should easily be able to bring more than 50 people into the church, but it was regulated to eight persons. Only the priest and all the deacons are eight people. Then there was never an opportunity for us members to go from scratch. Why eight? Why on such a large area only eight?

R - Yes, I see. As a Christian, what has it been like not being able to perform the Christian rituals, traditions, sacraments fully? Did you still feel a sense of belonging to the church?

SOM3 – Now personally from the time the church was shut down. I make the cross sign, then every night I pray "Father Ours" and "Ave Maria" before I go to bed to sleep. It's a ritual I've done for myself. But of course, I can never get away from the church, I belong to the church. But I've made the best of the situation. I was in church every day to not be able to go there for over a year.

R - So you still feel an affinity?

SOM3 – Every morning I go to the Church of Sweden, a Protestant church. I go into the church building, make cross signs, say a prayer and go out. Every weekday! I'll have a cup of coffee, they'll offer it, and then I'll go on into the day.

R – Ok. What is it that you miss the most when it comes to church activities in this lockdown?

SOM3 – I miss the community the most, the great socializing I had in church. What I miss most is being able to go down to the room after a prayer and just hang out. Drink a cup of coffee, eat a Danish pastry after the service and just get to talk to family, friends and acquaintances and hang out. The day feels so much better after a Sunday service and after the great love I got in church. I miss this so much!

R – Mmm. Do you think the church management handled the Covid-19 crisis badly?

SOM3 – No, absolutely not. I don't think they did anything wrong. If there is something that harms the Church and they take steps to preserve the health of the church, then I do not think that is wrong.

R - What do you personally think they could have done better or improve to prevent or ease future crisis?

SOM3 – What can management do if the state makes the decisions? In the unlikely event that they violate the restrictions, the municipality will give them a fine. They did what they could have done. Now they have banned the Church from carrying out activities for more than eight, then you can only follow.

R – How do you see the possibility of more services per day or for more days a week?

SOM3 – Yes, before the Corona pandemic we had more services. Every day at four o'clock in the afternoon there was a service. Every, every day except Saturday and Sunday. But after the pandemic, everything was cancelled.

R – They closed the gates to the churches quite immediately, don't you think there were other possibilities to make things easier for parishioners?

SOM3 – I don't think they could. But if you excuse me for saying this, the Church of Sweden is open daily from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. with prayer, coffee and pastry. The church is open, but in our church the doors are closed. In the Protestant church you can go there, give your collect whatever it is, if only five crowns, light a candle, drink your cup of coffee and hang out with

those who are there. With us there is no such possibility! why? Leave the church doors open! And he who wills can say his prayer or light a candle, make a sign of the cross and leave. No, in my church, there's no such possibility.

R - If the churches in the city you live in collaborated in their activities or even Sunday services, would you attend another church in the pandemic?

SOM3 – No, never, never! As I said, the Syrian Orthodox Church is closed, so I'm going to the Protestant church. No, no, I have absolutely no problem going to another church. I see all churches as the house of God.

R - Have you been attending Sunday service or mass on social media?

SOM3 – I watch television.

R - On the TV! Will you visit the church as often after the pandemic or has it become convenient to attend the service online?

SOM3 – Nooooo, when the churches reopen, and there are priests and deacons praying, and the congregation goes back to prayer, it goes without saying that I do too!

R – You're not thinking it's convenient to watch The Service on TV?

SOM3 – No, no. The Church is preferable, one listens personally to worship with the whole congregation. Even the sermon!

R - What do you as a member think the churches suffered from the most in this Covid-19 pandemic?

SOM3 – That they have forbidden the congregation from their faith, from praying, from the Church. I think everyone suffers the most. Why have they banned us? Why have they forbidden the people from believing or praying? I ask and keep in touch to see when the restrictions will ease. I plan to go to Israel for my third pilgrimage, and I miss it! I'm waiting to leave. But it's all closed, that's what I'm told. It's all cancelled! You miss returning to normal where you can feel free, free of your faith but also in how you live.

R – Thank you for this conversation!

Interview ends – Recording off

Interviews with 3 persons from church management.

Interview 1:

Transcribing the interview with the priest of the Church of Sweden. Original language in the interview were Swedish, I have transcribed the interview and translated it into English. A brief introduction to the subject was presented as well as a consent before the start of the interview. I have only transcribed the part of the interview that was relevant to the research. That is, where I ask my questions. The small to introduce ourselves in the beginning of the chat in the original recording is not transcribed.

R – Rania

CSP - (Priest – Male – around 30 years – member of the Church of Sweden since birth)

Interview starts – Recording on

R – Can we start?

CSP – Yes of course!

R - My questions are in English if you want, I can read them out in English.

CSP - Yes, it's fine.

R – You can answer in Swedish if you want, I will still transcribe everything.

CSP – Yes.

R - All right, let's get started. Did you (as the Church of Sweden) have a crisis management plan prior to the Covid-19 Pandemic?

CSP - And I will respond based on local conditions within the pastorate and there are emergency plans that, as they tried... No, there were emergency plans I didn't keep a close eye on them, but the vicar and the deputy vicar had their eye on them fairly, but the pandemic was not on that alert, but right where I serve is a military city, which means that there have been some exchanges with the Swedish Armed Forces, which has contributed to the existence of a crisis plan, for example, what happens if there is a crisis or an act of terrorism. such types of events. it existed but it was not adapted for a pandemic.

R - okay, I understand! because in the two-thousand-year history of Christianity, churches have never really been shut down in this way as they did during the pandemic. How do you see it?

CSP - I am very critical of shutting down in the way we have done. And above all, to do it for a long time. I can think for a few weeks, I can think for a limited time, but I think it has not been handled well. I think a lot of people in the Church feel that that criticism is above all that, at first it was a limitation yes but how many that can be understood, not more than 50 for example. Or if you had set per square meter count. But I think you felt in November that when it closed down to eight that now it's a month you're aiming for and now it's been going on for six months. And if it had been understood from the outset that this would run the risk of last six months, I think many would have protested quite loudly. And now you don't really know, I think those who know me, including that here you wish you could protest. But now you can feel that you have agreed to it for so long and then you do not really know how to protest now in a sensible way.

R - I understand! Let's move on. What changes was the most drastic and how did you compensate them to the members? What was the largest consequences?

CPS - So of the pandemic?

R – Yes.

CSP - So by far the biggest thing is to shut down our churches completely in practice and just switch to having digital collections. The district church where I work there, we were quite productive, and we already started, already at Easter last year, to make our own live broadcasts with a mobile phone on a tripod and try to broadcast so that some members 70 plus could also have a chance and try to be in some corner while we waited for better times already there. And we started little Bible talk groups online and stuff. We have become very familiar with Skype very many people who work by us. because we have got over different types of call groups to yes it became Skype in our case. Such a forum. What I find difficult in it is that there is often a generational aspect to this how easily one can absorb the digital. Where several of our servants from the past have slipped very much outside and have been for a very long time now where you try to use phone calls or the like but, but time is not enough to have such close contact with everyone and I know that some other members of the Church have tried to have contact with each other and so on but that it is , I see that the younger ones may think that it is or that it goes quite well like this even if it is a bit tough, but for those a little older who are not so technical 80 plus or whatever it would be, it is a big, yes you get very outside and very isolated.

R - I understand, let's move on. When and who decided to completely lock down the churches and later stream them live on social media.

CSP - There you get 2 answers because we have, in the church where I'm there there's a local board that I, I sit on as well. No voting rights, but I sit there every time, and there, we make decisions. or I made the decision to broadcast live in our Facebook group there last Easter and they made the decision the week after that we continue to do so and then we had started to transition even before it was completely shut down to the digital. Which I think was good and I wish the pastorate had tried to do it too. Then the 8-person rule was announced then we had a board meeting that week and it was decided that we are closing now, because there is no point in postponing it for a week because we will not get to gather anyway. And then it's just as well for infectious safety reasons just start. the pastorate waited another week before, until the actual date it had set. and tried to broadcast live in that context and then it is the vicar who makes the decision in that case.

R - So it's not the archbishop?

CSP – No, but I know there are some churches they tried to have services of 8 people in some other places. And that it is within each parish or pastorate depending on the local structure, it is the vicar who has the ultimate responsibility for how to do in those contexts.

R So you don't have any services of eight people?

CSP - We reopened for services of 8 on test two laps. And then, now there are some also in different places in the pastorate and that depends very much on both the traditions and conditions of local district churches. In churches where we have people from many different countries and where the language shortage is very great, there we have not opened up for 8 services because there it is difficult to communicate.

R – I understand.

CSP - We did a variation in my district church where we took, we had the live service and then a place where you could book and come as usual visitors and come in these recordings the digital services that take place during regular church service time I will say. So, we didn't record in advance, we have a church service when it's supposed to be. Um, while others have that they don't have a live broadcast, but they have one or two where there's maybe a smaller core that usually comes to church service, it's easier to divide them into two. That's how you're done, and you've run pre-ordering on them too.

R – Mm, I understand. Let's move on. In history of time the churches have never closed its doors, how do you think this will affect the members behaviours when it comes to attending Sunday service?

CSP - Yes, and that's something I've been a little worried about myself. especially for those who are 70 plus who have been more or less away for a year. Then I'm going to close the church doors, there's also an aspect to your question. because if the church is practically closed all the time then I think there is a greater risk that you will not seek out a habit again because then you cannot continue to build your relationships or the like compared to the church during the week is open and it is possible to go in there a little sporadically, light a candle , say a prayer, say hello to one of the people who works, and then the relationships remain in a completely different way. there will be a wait and not a foreclosure. and there I think there will, I suspect there will be one, that you will see more people coming back to churches that have had some kind of openness during the pandemic in that way still.

R – I understand.

CSP – But then, then I think, at the same time, it's a lot about how we work together once it opens. I think if we just think that now we open the church doors and celebrate, people will come back then I think it will be a lower effect if we try in the first few weeks to contact those we have been missing for a long time, "But hey now we are up and running hope you will" to try to get this vi-feeling that finally we get to gather. To get this finally feeling for those who have been at home for a long time. Then they are more likely to take up this old habit again.

R – Let's move on. Can you see the amount of attendance online in contrast to Sunday service in the church? Is there a difference in attendance, age, sex or geographical orientation?

CSP - Yes, if you start with geographical orientation, we have more people who have people, yes but some relative who is watching. But then there's the local church I'm in that district church and we've had a lot of work with newly arrived people, refugees. And in addition to people moving abroad or fleeing further after many rejections, it is also the case that if you get a residence permit, you are sent on to another city. And there you can see that there are some of them who have started attending our digital services. So there has been a different spread in that way. In terms of numbers, I have been able to see from the statistics that it is partly, when we managed to get better sound, so increased by 50% of how many people were

there after one or two weeks. Then it was kind of more fun. And I can see that the longer it goes on, the more it decreases apart, because people get tired of it.

R – But in age group and woman/man?

CSP – It is difficult to assess from the statistics from the broadcasts. Because people log in with a phone or computer, but you sit several times.

R – Yes, ok, I understand.

CSP - Age groups I would say it's somewhere between 80 upper limit goes. of the ones we have. and we have some that are over 80, but we have managed to make it relatively easy and even those who are not so technical managed to get in. on the other hand, the number of visitors is lower than it is a physical service. That's a clear reduction via streaming.

R – How many did you used to be on a Sunday without the pandemic?

CSP - Our peek in August, September was 60. And I've been working there for three years anyway. Usually there are 45-50 of us on a normal Sunday. But we have had a period where we have increased year by year. When I started, we were maybe 32 on average. and would have had a few years without a regular priest and it has an effect that people want to go somewhere where you feel who is coming. So, for that reason, there has been an increase for a few years.

R – But let's move on. What deaconry activities are still active defiance the Covid-19 pandemic, and what activities did you have to change or completely close?

CSP - In deacon work? Well, partly, of course, devotionals in old people's homes are usually counted as deacon work. they've had to be shut down. we have a commitment to Riga, to the homeless and alone, and it has been put on hold for a large part of the pandemic. And our international café we have had to put on hold or at least redo in the form of broadcasting it in the form of a devotional online. That is what we have actually paused, I would say. Or have fundamentally redesigned. We in the local church where I am help many in asylum cases and get to help with practical things with accommodation food and clothes and help with being taken to the healthcare system and so on, it has been as usual quite a lot. You can't organize it the same way, but the help has been the same. where they can come during the week and you get to make an appointment, sit in other ways, to keep distance and so on but we have still helped as best we can. and that's what our diaconal help stands. but the number of home visits

is down to almost zero. but you try to take over the phone to help in that way. we had a period where we had to help people shop who couldn't go to the supermarkets. and we did so until the shops had got off to a good start with the fact that you could order food from them and get it home run so we had a few months where we did this regularly. I think that's what I remember now.

R - I understand. Let's move on. How do you proceed if you really need to talk to someone in the Church/Deaconry about activities or confession?

CSP - We have an open church in the weeks and then we have invested in trying to be there constant so that we can be open. A lot during the weeks we're there so we can cover. So that we are not so many employees in the premises but that we cover the area. If anyone comes in and wants to talk to a priest, we'll call or go to the priest and ask if he has time right now. If you can't contact a deacon or priest, you book an appointment. The same with me that my colleagues write a message that there is someone who wants to meet, you have some time and then you book a meeting. So, if we do that, you can be seen physically, but otherwise it's the phone. But since there are some who do not speak Swedish very well, body language helps a lot.

R – Okay, I get it! How do you see the reaction from the members in how the management handled the pandemic, positive/negative and is there a difference between different age groups?

CSP - They're not dissatisfied, it's not the word I want to use, but the word I think everyone feels now is that you're tired. At the beginning as I said before there in November then you thought this is maybe a few weeks or a month and then everyone understood it is just to bite together a little more. Now I think everyone feels that everything else is open, I hear when I run into people in the city all the time that the shops are open, the restaurants are open, people sit and crowd in different places, but we are not allowed to gather for a service and that is, it is kind of disappointing in it. Not how the churches have handled it, but how society has handled it.

R – Mmm, When the pandemic is over, what changes do you think will remain and what traditions will be returned to.

CSP - I think, many people say that even within the Church of Sweden even within my pastorate here say, but we get to take the opportunity and learn from the difficult and take it

with us as well. I personally wish that web meetings and so could be left because it is quite difficult to travel all the time within the pastorate in order to meet but my suspicion is such things will go back to the usual quite quickly simply because we are emotional people who want to meet and want to take this little chat to the coffee. We want those pieces. What I see that I will have more freedom to do is we funerals and have a mourning house, because I have had to have all the mourning houses digitally now, so it has meant that if someone has a sibling in Gothenburg, for example, we could still have a meeting at the same level because we could connect in different places. And I can think that if you see that there is a person who lives scattered, you can take it digitally for everyone to participate. I take that with me as a practical thing, you could do that.

R – But in the liturgy? Because when you go to church, there are sacraments, for example, communion. How do you take it digitally?

CSP – In the liturgy? difficult. It's mine, that's my tragic truth. we have not had so that people have been able to come and make an appointment in my church at all. We have had it 2 in the other churches in my pastorate during the pandemic on a few occasions. but it has been difficult, you have had to speak Swedish because the information has come quite quickly and in Swedish you have needed to know where to check and you have had to call the parish expedition to make an appointment and so on.

R – How often have you given communion now during the pandemic?

CSP - So in my church, once we've had Communion service and that was in connection with Maundy Thursday Mass. It's weird to have without. I don't know for sure how many there have been bookable but if I were to guess maybe 8 times in total. I think that's not going to change, I don't think we're going to bring that much liturgical. When it comes to liturgy, these are just limitations, and it inhibits the interaction very much as well. In the past, before the pandemic, we have been a church with great activity. It has been a lot about removing during the pandemic, which has made everyone want more. So, I don't think we're going to take that much liturgical inspiration out of it.

R – All right, let's get to the last question. What is the most important lesson of this pandemic when it comes to crisis communication?

CSP - Apart from this one with different languages, we've practiced a lot on it, but not the other district churches. that it's really important because we're a multilingual church. If you

ignore it, that's enough, it's hard to get people to hold out. and somewhere in February you stopped seeing the light in the tunnel. And it is not something that we control, but that is probably what is very clear that you have to have a deadline or a clear change anyway that we have not been able to offer because the state rules look like they do.

R – Do you think the churches have been treated unfairly?

CSP - Yes, without a doubt! You talk about football and cultural events every two weeks, but you don't talk about people's right to practice their religion. His faith and its rituals. and to talk about Easter dinner but not be able to sit with their loved ones. I know a lot of people suffer from not being able to celebrate Easter together and I understand it has to be tough. That alone shows somewhere the total inability to understand the enormous pressures under which we religious communities live in these times.

R – Thanks!

Interview end - Turns off recording

Interview 2:

Transcribing the interview with the deacon of the Catholic Church. Original language in the interview were Swedish, I have transcribed the interview and translated it into English. A brief introduction to the subject was presented as well as a consent before the start of the interview.

The deacon's wife sat with us during the interview and commented on some questions, but they are not transcribed neither included in the analyse or conclusion.

R=Rania

CD = Catholic Deacon P (Male in his 80's, Catholic since birth)

R - P, first question. Did you at the catholic church have a crisis management plan prior to the covid - 19 pandemic?

CD - Not in the congregation! Now I don't speak for the Church in general, the foundation. I speak for the congregation. No!

R - Lets go to the second question. What changes was the most drastic and how did you compensate them to the members. So, what was the largest consequences?

CD - It's preventing people from coming to Mass, uh, that was the biggest thing. But it was the greatest thing that parish members did not have access to the Church, to come to Mass. And uh, yes, we've been very good handling the crisis, I have to say here. We've had distance and we've got two people, if it's a family, they got to sit together. but otherwise, they had to sit on either side of the bench. Since we were only allowed to have 8 people in the church, so mmm, we have had many Services. V in need we also have with the crisis management, in the church parking lot, you could follow the service via streaming and get the holy communion out in the parking lot, they came to the gates after the Service. Even if it hasn't always been necessary. Some have come to church, and some have taken the holy communion in the parking lot.

R - When and who decided to completely lock down the churches and later stream them live on social media.

CD - Our Cardinal! Anders Arborelius.

R – And he made the decision for the entire Catholic Foundation throughout Sweden?

CD - For the Catholic Diocese of Sweden. Yes, for the entire Catholic Diocese. But of course, it's the government's decision and the big one for what we're complaining about today. The Church is the one that has been treated the worst. I heard a few days ago about a church that had become a museum, and there they were allowed to be many more than 8 which according to the law is the maximum number in a church.

R - So it is really a decision made by the highest authority in Sweden within the Catholic Church?

CD – But the church has never really closed in Sweden. You can't ban us from prayers, we have rights. The right to perform our faith. We've called it private services. Or the cardinal has called it private masses. It's private services we have, so it's not official big masses like before. But of course, we are clear and tell people. And the church is open! It's open to worship. So, you can come in and say your prayer and then leave, with the sacrament.

R – But now that I got here, the doors were locked?

CD – No, we have special times for that. Not now! It's from Wednesday through Sunday. Then it's full speed, the church is open. Monday, the vicar is available by phone.

R – Father of the collection is actually available 24/7 even if he has an "official" day off?

CD – Yes, absolutely, he's available all the time.

R – During a regular service, before the Covid-19 pandemic, how many did you used to be during a Sunday Service?

CD – Close to a hundred. But it varies greatly, on a Sunday it is packed, and people sit all the way out in the church square. But more than a hundred. The churches are well attended!

R - Let's take question four out of ten. In history of time the churches have never closed its doors, how do you think this will affect the members behaviours when it comes to attending Sunday service?

CD - Both! Some have become hungrier and thirstier. Others have not come here, and it does not have to be because they have lost their faith, but it may be due to fear. Fear because of Corona. But it is noticeable that some people really, we are filled with fire more than before, I have to say.

R - So you don't see that behavior has changed? So, when we go back to normal, the people, the members will come back to church?

CD – Yes

R – Not that you feel comfortable having this distance, electronically.

CD – A lot of people have said it's not the same thing! No, not the same thing. It can never be the same thing. The most important thing for us Catholics is the Eucharistic adoration, that you long for. It will never be replaced, not within the Catholic Church, never.

R – What if we take the younger generation? Has their behaviour changed?

CD – Yes, yes, you might say that then. I don't know for sure, because I do still educate.

R – I can understand if the elders want to come to church and feel connected here, but the younger ones feel comfortable streaming the services? They can still participate in the mass from home.

CD – I haven't noticed any difference. As for the presence of youth in the Church. But it can also depend on the parents, it may also depend on it. But this is a church that, we've invited the saints. It is the Salesians (Don Bosco's) who are here. Our church priest is a Salesian, a real one. And then there are young people mainly there at his classes. So, it could be that they too, not could be it is so, he attracts them. He has a big heart for the youth. Because he's so

good at teaching and he's doing active work. He does all sorts of things, as soon as it is sports holidays or big school holidays, we have organized the youths here, and there are many children and young people who come in activities such as cooking. Especially during Corona pandemic, we have had activities with the youths, it is organized but it is active. As well as children, a lot of children.

R - What about Sunday school? Have you had a Sunday school?

CD – We have Sunday School every Sunday. A max of 8 children in every group. Normal days Sunday school is every other week for each group. We have two groups that takes turn. That's why now during Covid we have Sunday School every week, different age groups. We have a dialogue with the parent during the weekdays, to know who will attend and the children are divided into groups of eight. We spread out the children in the room and various stations where the children who participate sit scattered and with social distancing. The church doesn't want to take away Sunday classes. It's important.

R – Deacon P, we move on to the questions. Can you see the amount of attendance online in contrast to Sunday service in the church? Is there a difference in attendance, age, sex or geographical orientation?

CD – Yes, yes, yes. There's a difference, there's a difference. On streaming, not many people follow! It's so weird, really. But people want to come here so badly. You can't get away from that.

R – Those who are via streaming are mostly young people then?

CD – No, middle age is mostly on streaming. And a little older, maybe.

R - So there's no difference in gender, via streaming or those coming to church?

CD – No, no!

R – And no difference in age?

CD – Yes, it could be! It's like I say I've never seen any youth watch streaming, or yes but very, very few.

R – But geographically, have you gotten any attendance far from? Outside the municipality? Who has logged in to watch?

CD – Yes, there are some!

R – For example if you live down south or up north?

CD – Yes everyone can participate, there have been some from other municipalities.

R – Let's move on to the next question then. What deaconry activities are still active defiance the Covid-19 pandemic, and what activities did you have to change or completely close?

CD – Being a deacon within the different churches is different. You have different purposes in your office, we have Caritas in the Catholic Church. I have, I'm in, you might say. I'll help with everything. I'm in on everything and I'm helping the pastorate council. I'm with the vicar with everything. But my task before God in the congregation is spiritual.

R – And you've continued to do that?

CD – Yes, the spiritual. It's become even more. Because God has given me a gift that is, it's totally him. I don't exist. It's his way through me. And it's for people who have evil spirits, demons. There I have done a lot in my service.

R – Wow, this makes me more curious. Is it a ritual or how does the process itself work?

CD – It's both! But first, it's a gift! Because I noticed very early on that God had given me that gift. You know...

R – No, my heart almost hurts. You have to be a specific person to be able to perform an exorcism.

CD – It's God, he's giving you a gift. What can you do?

R – I say that because I haven't seen it happen right away, so maybe I'll connect it to the film industry and that world.

CD - (Laughing out loud) No, that's absolutely not correct. This isn't Hollywood. Sometimes it can be quite close but mostly excessive.

R – No, but I mean, how does a person come to you and admit something like that!? That could be shameful, right?

CD – No, but you can also look at people without them having to say anything. Man gets so attacked; they can't sleep at night. They're being haunted. Today, today I got a call about this. The person has waited a long time.

R – By calling or with you going to...?

CD – Yes, by calling, and that means the situation has become terrible. In order to tell me how things have changed in his life.

R - So you're performing a real exorcism, is that what the church says?

CD – Yes, I do, and I have. But in fact, it is in the Catholic Church that the bishop appoints the priest to be the exorcist in the diocese. Not every priest can say I'm going to do that, or I can, you must ask the bishop for that. Let's say that if I'm going somewhere to another city to pray for someone and then maybe, because I was sitting around thinking about this, I'm going to go home to the person. And since it's not in the congregation, I want to know if I should have to ask the bishop for permission. I'd love to because I love the bishop. We have a good relationship. But then when I say bishop, I mean the cardinal. Because he's a bishop, it's the same with The Pope in Rome, he's the Bishop of Rome. So that this is the thing you have to be able to respect for that particular obedience and because it is to be able to instruct through the bishop to be an exorcist in the diocese. Then it's his job, you can't walk past it. But he knows who I am and has given his permission.

R - So during the Covid-19 pandemic you have not been able to perform these tasks as you usually do?

CD – Yes, I usually do. They can come here. And then I won't go ask the bishop for permission.

R – I mean have you taken any extra precautions during the pandemic? For yourself, for your safety?

CD - The distance, and often those who are really in need they go nowhere because they themselves feel mentally unwell. They isolate themselves. There are, there are, it's very different. I can tell you; this is not something that you are told you will recover from immediately. It's a long process. I mean, if you listen to the Catholic exorcist in Rome, he's now deceased, Father Amorth, he himself said that people think they're going to come here and yes then I'll be liberated there will be an exorcism. But that's not the case. In most cases, most cases as soon as they arrive, they come back.

R – But as a deacon, do you take confession?

CD – No, not that sacrament!

R – No, so it's really just...

CD – I have a duty of confidentiality... In soul care conversations with people. But just like the priest, what I can't do is give them the absolution. But I can bless everything else.

R - Can you baptize?

CD – I baptize, wed and I bury. All! I just, just the transformation of the bread and the wine, the Eucharistic prayer. That's how I stand with him. And at that moment, I'll take the whole congregation with me.

R - Then there are differences, big differences between churches and what a deacon can do?

CD – Yes, that's right, there are differences.

R – But do you still do it in the pandemic. Wed, baptize and pray at funerals?

CD - Yes, yes. I'll do it! But at funerals I have spoken out, or rather my wife does not think I should perform funerals because of the risk of infection.

R – Maybe you had too much on your plate?

CD – There was a mountain on the plate according to the wife! At funerals there are a lot of people coming from outside, at a church service it is for most parishioners, everyone knows everyone. At a funeral, there can be a lot of people coming from outside.

R – But the funeral act itself, the prayer itself. Does it happen in the church?

CD – Usually the coffin enters the church hall, but not now with Corona. Now no coffins are allowed into the church. We have the whole funeral ceremony in the cemetery or churchyard. We have a little chapel.

R – That's what I mean in Corona... That's why the coffin can get into the church.

CD - Exactly! No, no, now in the pandemic, the coffin can't come in. But at the beginning of the pandemic, early 2020, we still had funerals in the church.

R – Did those people pass away in Corona?

CD – No, no, not corona they were old. They died of Cancer.

R - Because a year ago, it wasn't the same restrictions as now. A year ago, the authorities where more unsure what Corona was? The restrictions were then lighter, now they are stricter.

CD - Exactly. Because I personally haven't had funerals in a while. Nor have I seen information exactly how we have done exactly. You'll have to ask Father K.

R – I will interview him as well. Next question. How do you proceed if you really need to talk to someone in the Church/Deaconry about activities or confession?

CD – They call me or email me. I'm always available still. And on Wednesdays, I'll be at the church. During the afternoon. And I meet people on Saturdays.

R – You have not been afraid of getting infected in Covid-19, taken extra precautions? With the members of your office?

CD – No I haven't. I have to be honest. My wife is more careful than I am. And thanks to her, I've kind of listened to what she's said.

R – A Do you realize that your reliability to God is so strong?

CD – Yes, you could say that!

R – If it's meant to be then it is meant to be?

CD – Yes, you can see it that way. There is a meaning to it all, but what I mean is that I can get infected at Hemköp. Before I go in, I pray that I will be vaccinated with the precious blood of Jesus Christ. And I go in.

R – Do you want to take the vaccine.

CD – I'll take a spiritual vaccine.

R – But are you going to take a medical vaccine?

CD – Yes, I have. I've already taken the first dose, but I don't know if I want to take the second dose. And now I will see where the spirit of God leads me, whether I take the second dose or not.

R – Number eight! How do you see the reaction from the members in how you handled the pandemic, positive/negative and is there a difference between different age groups?

CD - Here in the congregation, we have not had much disagreement. We haven't had such big differences. Um, I think people... Our priest has been so careful to say, almost naggingly, that he really does it because he is responsible and he has said, Father K, let's think about keeping your distance and if you come to the communion make sure it is two meters behind and be

sure to follow the restrictions. But now he has changed it too, so we must not come to the communion, but the priest comes to the members of the church. Even to those in the back.

R – Do you have communion every Sunday?

CD – Yes! Always. But during Corona there have not been two characters, just the bread.

R - Is it the case that you have removed the wine during Corona?

CD – Yes, not for us we can't do that, but for the members and the congregation.

R – Let's move on. When the pandemic is over, what changes do you think will remain and what traditions will be returned to.

CD – Um, that's a good question! We can start with what will be kept! Streaming and teaching are so easy over the internet. That it's so easy, that asset. The digital Zoom and Meet, these means.

R – So what has been missing the most, what traditions will members go back to?

CD – Eucharistic! Obviously. It's a must. Every Catholic missed Eucharistic, it's the biggest!

R - When this is over, this ritual will return to normal.

CD – It always existed, it didn't disappear, it's always part of the mass. But it's clearly the community as well. To be able to hug each other all that is so incredible yes. We've always had a great community. You feel a little bit like you're in the diaspora, after, when it gets back to normal then it's going to be a big party.

R – Last question P to you. What is the most important lesson of this pandemic when it comes to crisis communication.

CD – Hmmm yes, for us Christians to be ready for his return. As he promised.

R – Do you think it's far away?

CD – It's hard to say, any signs. There are many false prophets already. We also have strong prophets. For example, John Paul II. A lot of people think, not too many it goes without saying, he says the wall should fall in Germany. Boom, it fell. People don't think about things like that. And no one expected that to happen. He told Bush don't go into Iraq, look what happened.

R – But if there were to be another pandemic in 10 years' time, are you better prepared?

CD – Yes, I think so. But I think we were prepared right now. When you live in faith. We have always been persecuted as Christians and if you live in faith you also know that persecution exists. If there is a crisis, it cannot be a disaster because you have your strong faith on which you are based and you stand firm on the fundament. We walk the way of the cross, and Jesus says, take the narrow road, walk through the narrow gate. We have no other way! We must be prepared, Jesus has said the son of man has nowhere where he can put his head to rest when they asked him. We can't be better than Jesus himself. We have, are and will always be persecuted! We're going against the tide in the world.

R - Thank you please for your time P!

CD - Can I say a prayer for you?

R - Of course!

CD - ...

Interview ends – Recording off

Interview 3:

Transcribing the interview with the priest of the Syriac Orthodox Church. Original language in the interview were Swedish and Arabic, I have transcribed the interview and translated it into English. A brief introduction to the subject was presented as well as a consent before the start of the interview. Also, a consent was signed from both parts.

R=Rania

PSOC = Priest Syriac Orthodox Church (Male in his late 50's, Syriac Orthodox since birth)

Interview starts – Recording on

R – Can we start? I will ask the questions in Swedish, and you can answer them either in Swedish or Arabic. I will transcribe them all.

PSOC – Yes, ok good, you can continue!

R - Did you at the Syriac Orthodox Church have a crisis management plan prior to the covid - 19 pandemic?

PSOC – No, no we had nothing. Everything went on as normal prior to this in the church. I don't think anyone believed this could ever happen. The only crisis we have had before was

economic, but this kind of crisis no nothing. Everything was perfect. But this plan we had before had nothing to do with Covid-19.

R – No! What changes was the most drastic and how did you compensate them to the members. So, what was the largest consequences?

PSOC – Economic, both economic and spiritual. The economic part, eh, we didn't have any income to the church. We had an income from the church activities as parties in the church hall, but since March 2020 we have had nothing.

R – But for the members? What was the largest consequences?

PSOC – Yes, they have lost a lot. Too much, from their relationship to God. Because they used to come every Sunday and every feast day to the church. Not only that, but there were also members who came every day. We had afternoon prayers at 4:00, and then after that we had Bible reading. During Covid-19, these activities were cancelled. For example, the elders they used to tell me I miss church, I'm longing to go to church. For the elders their lives are around the church. That is the biggest loss for the church.

R – I see. When and who decided to completely lock down the churches and later stream them live on social media.

PSOC – No, not completely close it down. They allowed us to celebrate Sunday services with a certain amount of people attending. First 50, later when we came to the end of November or later in the middle of December it went down to four people attending and the later in the middle of January or February the allowance went back to 8 people. Two days ago, the restrictions changed again to 50 persons in church. But that is not completely opening the church.

R – I mean was it the managements call to close the church; you went with the government's restrictions?

PSOC – Yes exactly! No, the church management had to follow the Swedish restrictions. We could not do anything else. It was just to obey it. And the best outcome for the parish, for them to be able to attend Sunday service was to stream it live. So that they could attend sermon, also church news and happening every Sunday. If anyone past or if something new happened, sending it live enabled the members to still know what was going on and attend service.

R – Was it a decision you made alone? Streaming the service?

PSOC – No together with the youth, the priest the management. And we saw other churches take the same path so why not our church!

R – Ok, through history of time and the church 2000-year history, the doors have never closed like this to the churches... This is the first the churches close their doors like this...

PSOC – Due to the pandemic!

R – Yes, ehm, how do you think this will affect the members behaviours when it comes to attending Sunday service?

PSOC – Nooo, nooo. I always prayed to God to make these days shorter so that the members could come back to church. With a warm spirit, or a warmer spirit then before. They will see when we move away from God what is happening, and when we get closer to God what is happening. I hope that the parish, not only the parish, also me and everyone, that we have been given a great lesson by our cold faith. It's the cold faith. And we go back to the Holy Spirit to warm up and continue our relationship with God in a better way.

R – I understand, can you see the amount of attendance online in contrast to Sunday service in the church? Is there a difference in attendance, age, sex or geographical orientation?

PSOC – Whether it's different in gender or age, I don't know. But there are a lot of people online. Sometimes, eh....

R – More than those who go to Sunday Mass?

PSOC – It depends, it's upside down. On a Sunday, maybe 1,000 people who are online on another Sunday might only be 50 – 60 online. We've discovered it's upside down, it's different every time. We can't say exactly, but average 300-400 every Sunday.

R – There are still many!

PSOC – Yes, that is, our Facebook page it is very scattered. It is not only to our members here in the city, but also to relatives outside the city, friends, anyone who wants to.

R - What deaconry activities are still active defiance the Covid-19 pandemic, and what activities did you have to change or completely close?

PSOC – We've actually shut down all the church's activities. We don't have any activities anymore. It's just the youth activities started a little bit in two months September to October. But they were unable to continue to do so because of the restrictions.

R - So Sunday school completely closed...

PSOC – Nothing, nothing.

R - Choir activity shut down!

PSOC – Nothing, nothing.

R - Confession?

PSOC – Nothing!

R - So all the activities within the church? Has the church closed its door?

PSOC – Exactly, it's just anyone who wants to come to visit the church one by one or two and two.

R – And how do you do that?

PSOC – You have to talk to the janitor or priest to visit the church!

R – There is no possibility to light a candle, or say a prayer?

PSOC – Yes there are, but one by one!

R – OK, I understand!

PSOC – And some specific times. I mean, I can't be in church 24/7 for drop in.

R - Are you making a schedule?

PSOC – Yes, that's right! Then about activities, it depends on the number! We can never do for a few people, there are always too many of us. That's why we've shut them down.

R – OK I understand. Next question. How do you proceed if you really need to talk to someone in the Church/Deaconry about activities or confession?

PSOC - You contact the priest.

R – Even if you want to confess?

PSOC - In the church there are two different confessions. You can confess individually with a priest, and you can confess in a general way. At the beginning of the month, every first Sunday of the month, there is a general confession with communion to the congregation. And anyone who wants to confess individually with the priest can do so.

R - Even during Corona?

PSOC - Always!

R – Always, ok. How do you see the reaction from the members in how you mentor the pandemic, positive/negative and is there a difference between different age groups?

PSOC – No, the congregation is sad and angry. They don't care about the leadership of the church and how they handled it. But they just want to get into the church. That is their goal, day by day they want the pandemic to pass.

R – What adjustments have you made? For example, during holidays.

PSOC – Nothing, everything is the same. So, the holidays and Sundays this year have been the same.

R – Although you adapted Jesus' funeral ceremony to the parking lot this year!

PSOC – Yes, yes, yes. We did a special thing this year when we celebrated Good Friday, we took Jesus' coffin out to the parking lot. Because after the Good Friday ceremony, the congregation would go under the church for blessing and then bring a small jar of vinegar that Jesus tasted, on the cross. So that the congregation would not be far away from this ceremony, we thought that out in the parking lot we could adapt it. We put the coffin in one place and the congregation comes with their cars to get blessings and leave.

R – Was it appreciated?

PSOC - Very appreciated! While the choir sang hymns, it was so appreciated. It gave a spiritual feeling to the congregation.

R – Mmm I understand. When the pandemic is over, what changes do you think will remain and what traditions will be returned to.

PSOC – No changes that we have made in connection with the pandemic, we will keep.

R - What about live streaming?

PSOC – No we will continue as before, with church services. Of course, we must be more prepared than before, we must beware, we must have a future plan. We do not yet know if we will be completely out of Covid-19. It might come back in a year or two.

R – Do you think you will have a crisis plan?

PSOC – No, no, I don't think so. We're not the ones planning what's going to happen to the Church. Let's just keep going. So, we Christians we make no plans, we make no plans in the church. We just pray and put everything in God's hands. When we pray, we say, "God, it's all in your hands, you're going to work, and we're going to follow you"! But then what the state says and what the municipality says, we have to obey.

R – Yes, but absolutely!

PSOC – It applies to everyone, not just us! If it had just been us in church, that would have been a different question.

R – OK, then we have reached the last question. What is the most important lesson of this pandemic when it comes to crisis communication?

PSOC – It concerns everyone I can't answer for everyone. You're going to put this question to the congregation. But myself, I can think like this that... I think as I said we were cold in faith for a while, so we must be much, much closer to God and renew our life with God and keep a commandment with Him and uh. Love him and to keep God's commandments in our hearts.

R - Then I must ask you a supplementary question. Do you think the churches were unfairly treated when the malls could be open? Shops could be open, but churches were forced to close.

PSOC – Uh I can't say it's right. Because I don't want to see with just one eye, but with both eyes. An eye that concerns me and the abstract eye concerns the state and the municipality. The state and the municipality see the church as an association, as a place, a gathering place. And they don't want gathering places because there's no use for these. For example, it is not a place that gives anything back to the state, where, for example, you buy and sell, where there is a benefit to the state. No, people are just there to pray. In their way, they may be right, but in our way, yes, they were unfair.

R - Because in the store it's one person per 10 square meters, but the church got a No. Even if the church is large and can bring in many.

PSOC – But it's like you say, it's a store. It's not a church, a local or an association. Me and you are sitting here, but there's no use to the others. We're not going to lose anything from not sitting here.

R – But the members are doing really bad, aren't they?

PSOC – Exactly! That's why I told you I can't say yes from both eyes, but yes from one eye and no from the other.

R – No, I mean if the state benefits from the stores being open, tax, we say. Then maybe the church members who feel mentally unwell outside the church must seek treatment. There will be a cost to the state on the other side as well.

PSOC – It doesn't matter to them. It's not just the church, many places and businesses have gone bankrupt because of the pandemic. We must thank God and the church for their support. They have supported the Church from their own pockets. Every Sunday they have swished the church, if it is 20 KR or 50 KR or 100 KR, then the church has set up instead of collect money that we used to have every Sunday.

R – That's good.

PSOC – It's not our church! It's God's church! And God will not leave his church!

R – No, thank you kindly for the call

Interview ends - Recording off