

*How the Laestadians, an extra-  
conservative cult present in Finland,  
Scandinavia and  
North America, violate women's  
rights*

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# Archbishop: Laestadians' Birth Control Ban "Lifestyle Choice"

Archbishop Jukka Paarma says his recent appeal for the Conservative Laestadians to relax their restriction on birth control relates to lifestyle choices and not to the doctrines of the Laestadian movement.

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The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church says it does not want to comment on Laestadian doctrines. Archbishop Jukka Paarma says different views on various issues do not threaten the unity of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

"There are hardly any differences on the core aspects of faith. What comes to watching television, using birth control or going to the theatre are more or less lifestyle matters that different church branches can hold various opinions on," says Paarma.

The Finnish League for Human Rights recently drew attention to the Laestadians when it remarked that birth control is linked to human rights.

Conservative Laestadians are considered an exception in Finland's thoroughly secular society. The puritanical lifestyles shared by the movement's members and the religion's restrictions, such as those on the use of birth control, repeatedly make headlines.

## **“Laestadians Don’t Need Bans”**

The Conservative Laestadian movement’s leadership, however, denies the existence of indoctrinated bans. Laestadian leaders say their members inherently know right from wrong.

Conservative Laestadians believe they are the only true representatives of God’s kingdom on earth. Although conservative in their views, Laestadians are not opposed to women in the clergy. This is because Laestadians don't consider male Lutheran ministers righteous clergy members.

“We believe that we are at the core of the Lutheran faith,” says Olavi Voittonen of the Central Association of the Finnish Associations of Peace, a conservative Laestadian organisation.

# Sins in Conservative Laestadianism

- – Premarital sex is a sin.
- – Contraception is a sin.
- – Homosexuality is a sin.
- – Wearing any makeup is a sin (as well as colouring your nails).
- – Having piercings and/or tattoos is a sin.
- – Dyeing your hair is a sin.
- – Any music from the last century is horrifyingly sinful.
- – Being a professional athlete/actor is a sin.
- – Going to the cinema is a sin.
- – Having a TV is a sin.
- – Alcohol, drugs, gambling and swearing are sins.
- – Being a female priest/preacher is a sin.
- – Movies and kissing are frowned upon.

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# Conservative Laestadians Confirm Pedophile Suspicions

The Central Committee of Conservative Laestadian Congregations (SRK) has admitted dozens of cases and suspicions of pedophilia and incest have come to its attention within the movement. The SRK says from 70 to 100 cases or suspicions have come to light. Some lay preachers are also involved.

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Child Welfare Researcher Johanna Hurtig from the University of Tampere says the first of the current cases date back to the 1980's. The SRK claims also earlier cases are included.

Proceedings in some 30 cases are currently underway from the last decade. The SRK issued an internal report on the issue on Thursday.

The Chairman of the SRK, Olavi Voittoinen, admitted the committee had dealt incorrectly with the issue over the years.

"Insufficient care has been given to individual victims," Voittoinen said.

Secrecy has shrouded the cases and in some incidences the abuse of confessional confidentiality had been used to cover up matters.