

# THE PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE OF FINNISH AND SWEDISH MILITARY CHAPLAINS IN DIVERGENT OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

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## Introduction

Military chaplains' (MC) work as theology-based professionals is at the focus of three different contextual audiences: the military organization, the church, and changing society. The topical changes in global and societal level are reflected in MC's work as military operational environments experience structural, normative and functional pressure to react to these progressions by altering their own organizations.<sup>1</sup> Important current Western European themes include increasing pluralism, polarization and the growing immigration affecting many countries.<sup>2</sup> Along with secularisation and the privatization of religion there is paradoxically a rise of multiculturalism, religiousness, liberalism and the visibility of these phenomena in the public sphere.<sup>3</sup> Digitalization and technological development are continuing<sup>4</sup>, and the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated this progression.<sup>5</sup> These factors also affect military organizations, that have already been developing ways to respond to changes in the nature of warfare. These include, for example, 1) the diversification

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1 Holmberg & Alvinus 2019, 130–148.

2 Lyck-Bowen & Owen 2019, 21–41.

3 Davie 2015a; Schulze, Mauk, & Linde 2020, 1–5; Rees 2021, 195–210.

4 Schou & Hjelhol 2018; Odone ym. 2019, 28–35; Pelevin 2020, 26–31.

5 Horgan ym. 2020, 1341–1323.

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and complexity of military technology, 2) facelessness, inhumanity and lack of ethics, 3) psychological crisis resilience of soldiers and leaders and 4) emphasis on non-kinetic means such as cyber-attacks.<sup>6</sup>

A change in values and attitudes reflects changes in society - and at the same time causes them. It is predicted that Finland, Sweden and most of the other European countries will be more diverse and heterogeneous in values in the future than before, even though they are characterized as secular and liberal states. A large proportion of the general population supports the idea of common interest and shared values, such as respect for others, equality and freedom of expression. However, there are many uncertainties surrounding the development of an increasingly polyphonic society.<sup>7</sup>

This is where the Finnish and Swedish MCs create and develop their professional identity: competence-related features, abilities, knowledge and skills. The premise is that people with a dual vocation must create a balance between soldier's and chaplain's identity in order to be successful in their profession.<sup>8</sup> Today's rapid speed, blurred lines between work and free time and growth of professional skill set and expectations impose a new kind of demand on MC's profession. Research on MCs in Finland is limited. There are some theological dissertations and publications from the perspective of military science and times of war.<sup>9</sup> In recent years a more systematic approach to the MC's operational environment and profession has been introduced.<sup>10</sup> The research on Swedish MCs is also very scant, with some mainly historical studies on a PhD level available.<sup>11</sup> However, a recent post-doctoral research project launched by the Church of Sweden focused on the current situation of Swedish MCs. Several articles<sup>12</sup> and a book<sup>13</sup> have emanated from this research project, highlighting the experiences of being a MC within the altered expeditionary Swedish Armed Forces (SAF), lessons learned, spiritual wisdom and identity.<sup>14</sup>

The aim of this article is to canvass how does today's military chaplains' competence in Finland and Sweden appear and what does it consist of. Also, we will describe and compare the differences and commonalities between the

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6 The study of the changing war picture is an important part of the operational planning of the Defense Forces. 2021. <https://maanpuolustuskorkeakoulu.fi/-/muuttuvan-sodankuvan-tutkimus-on-tarkea-osa-puolustusvoimien-operatiivista-suunnittelua> (accessed 1.9.2021).

7 The Finnish Prime Minister's Office. Societal Changes (s.a.).

8 Liwski 2021; Grimell 2021b, 1-18.

9 Vuori 2011; Swanström 2014; Tilli 2014; Aalto 2016; Poteri 2018.

10 Liwski & Ubani 2020, 1-22; Liwski & Ubani 2021, 243; Liwski 2022.

11 Gudmundsson 2014.; Hansson 2016.

12 Grimell 2020a, 1-14; Grimell 2020b, 1-18, Grimell 2021b, 1-18.

13 Grimell 2021a.

14 Grimell 2020a, 1-14; Grimell 2020b, 1-18; Grimell 2021b, 1-18.

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countries. Our contribution with this article helps meet the demand for MC studies and brings a unique insight to the Nordic chaplaincies' profession and professional competence in altering operational environments. It is important to include both countries' settings to understand the uniqueness of the profession in both countries. A comparative perspective also innovates for future research and international collaboration.

### *The Finnish military chaplaincy*

The development of the Finnish military chaplaincy has always been associated with the state's history and religio-political realities. Finnish military spiritual care has its origins in the sixteenth century's Swedish state church and later the incorporation to the Grand Duchy of Russia in the beginning of the nineteenth century. The evolution of the military chaplaincy system expanded as the Orthodoxy was introduced alongside Finnish Lutheranism during the Russian rule. The turning points for the profession's development have been the First World War and the Finnish Civil war, after which Finland declared its independence on 6 December 1917. Later, the Second World War, the Winter War and the Continuation War shaped the foundation of the profession of MCs as we know it today.<sup>15</sup>

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) was a state church until 1870. Finland's first freedom of religion legislation was enacted in 1922. Today the ELCF may now be considered a "folk church".<sup>16</sup> As the Lutheran Church and the Orthodox Church have a long tradition in Finnish history and they are still the two largest religious groups in Finland, they have a special status in the Finnish legislation compared to other religions.<sup>17</sup> They are also referred to as "national churches" or "state churches" in spoken language.

Today there are twenty-six Lutheran MCs in the Finnish Defence Forces (FDF), including senior chaplains and the Field Bishop. In addition, four Orthodox chaplains work as fee recompensed employees. MCs may also be included in peace-keeping and crisis management troops' strength of the operation at times<sup>18</sup>, but these are special missions and differ from regular work. There are no representatives of other religions in the FDF. The relationship between the Lutheran MC's work in the FDF and the ELCF has long traditions and roots, but the MCs are state officials, and the state pays their salary. The work of MCs is directed to everyone, regardless of their religious beliefs or spiritual background.<sup>19</sup>

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15 Poteri 2018, 83–125.

16 Church and state (s.a.).

17 Kotiranta (s.a.), 1-26.

18 Rauhanturvaajan käsikirja 2020, 40.

19 Liuski 2021.

In previous studies, the relationship between the Finnish MCs and their church varies from very close to almost estranged; even though their pastoral identity is rather strong, their sense of belonging to the military organization may be even stronger.<sup>20</sup> The MC's work is led by the Field bishop, who belongs to the General Staff. The Field Bishop's position in the administration<sup>21</sup> of the ELFC is seen as a link between the two separate institutions, which is necessary for the spiritual resilience of the country in possible cases of martial law.<sup>22</sup>

### *The Swedish military chaplaincy*

Swedish pastors have been present within the military organization for almost five hundred years.<sup>23</sup> When the armed forces were organized by the state of Sweden during the sixteenth century, the Lutheran spiritual care of those days became embedded in the military culture.<sup>24</sup> The Church of Sweden remained as a state church until the year 2000, when it was decided that the state and the church should be separated. However, the parting did not cut the myriad connections between the Church and the SAF in practice. The relationship between the SAF and the state church was obvious and unchallenged from various perspectives: most of the service members were members of the Church, both organizations had for so long been governed by the state, and most MCs were clergy from the Church of Sweden.<sup>25</sup>

Today, pastors<sup>26</sup> who conduct military spiritual care approach their spiritual assignments from an inter-religious perspective, and their work is open to the religious diversity that exists in Sweden. However, it seems reasonable to suggest that military chaplaincy in Sweden is still led by the influence of Christianity, especially regarding religious practices and traditions, but also by the influence of clergy from the Church of Sweden.<sup>27</sup> In fact, recently conducted research on military spiritual care suggests that Lutheran church practices continue to be embedded within military culture.<sup>28</sup>

The term MC has various meanings and connotations within a Swedish context and a MC can be employed:

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20 Liuski 2021.

21 Episcopal conference and the church assembly.

22 The Finnish cumulative electronic questionnaire data. 2021.

23 Hansson 2016.

24 Gudmundsson 2014.

25 Grimell 2020a, 1-14.

26 From both the former state church and the free churches.

27 Grimell 2020a, 1-14.

28 Grimell 2021a.

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by the Church of Sweden to perform some pastoral assignments within a traditional congregation while also serving a regular Swedish military regiment/base/flotilla located within the same geographical area

by the SAF to conduct pastoral/spiritual work within a Home Guard Battalion on occasions such as larger military exercises (around 10 days per year).

fully by the SAF and positioned within a regular military regiment/base/flotilla/garrison

on a part-time contract by the SAF amid a deployment cycle to an international conflict zone.

with a reserved position within the military organization which would be activated if mobilization was required as a result of a national threat.<sup>29</sup>

Currently there are about 28 MCs who are employed to serve both local congregations and permanent units which exist within the same area. 42 pastors are employed by the SAF to serve within the Home Guard Battalion organizations on occasions, while also being fully employed within the Church of Sweden. Combinations of these types also exist among MCs. They are led by the Chief of Chaplains.<sup>30</sup>

#### *Differences and similarities between the Finnish and Swedish MCs*

Despite the shared conceptual foundation, there are differences between the Finnish and Swedish MCs and their professions. Especially the distinctions that arise from socio-cultural level are reflected in the military and its operational environment.

The first fundamental difference is the employer of the MCs in each country. In Finland, the state pays the MCs' salary whereas in Sweden the payer is the church, except in deployment to conflict zones and within the Home Guard, when SAF becomes the employer.<sup>31</sup> When the church serves as the employer, the MCs are conducting duties both within the congregation and the military – the assignment within the SAF may vary from 10-50% depending on the nature of the employment as a whole.

Secondly, when it comes to MCs' organizational positioning, the Finnish MCs are administratively a part of the Training field and its Functioning ability sector from the ethical perspective, which defines the main lines of their work.<sup>32</sup> In Sweden, the

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29 Grimell 2020a, 1–14; Grimell 2020b, 1–18.

30 Grimell, 2020b, 1–18.

31 Grimell 2020b, 1–18.

32 Poteri 2018, 291.

MCs settle organizationally in the church and/or in the military. Most of the MCs have their organizational foundation in the church and operate more independently within the military organization, excluding the deployment.

Thirdly, the compulsory nature of the Finnish conscript service gathers large groups of young people from diverse backgrounds together to serve in the military. This adds to the heterogeneity as well as to the overall religious diversity within the troops. In previous research it has been remarked that this kind of composition of people makes the militaries' operational environment appear as a cross-section of the prevailing society.<sup>33</sup> Sweden has had long historical roots with the mandatory military service, although peacetime conscription was deactivated between 2010 and 2017. Conscription was reactivated during 2017 and in 2021–2022 about 5800 individuals are called up by the SAF.<sup>34</sup>

When it comes to the similarities of these two countries' chaplaincy, they appear on a practical and theological level and in the questions related to job description in times of peace and deployment. The theology-related similarities include the know-how of spiritual / pastoral support and the ecclesiastical work. The profession-related similarities between Finland and Sweden occur, for example, in supporting the military community, crisis work, preparedness and acting as a teacher. They both also cooperate with different stakeholders, such as the military health care sector, and the support they provide is one of the essential tasks in both countries. They monitor the operational capability and spirits of the troops and support the commander and other management in creating a situational picture whenever needed. The MCs act as a reliable listener to the staff and they are bound by absolute confidentiality both in a confession and in a pastoral conversation.<sup>35</sup>

The conscripts may need supportive conversations, and the commanders can trust in MCs' expertise to handle the situations that arise in both Finland and Sweden. The similarities on a daily level basis also include lessons for conscripts. The subjects focus on functioning ability, management of the deceased and the garrison-related special features in which the MCs are in charge. In Finland, the teaching is nowadays secular and there is an option for religious services supporting one's ethical functioning ability.<sup>36</sup> In Sweden, ethical training and moral reflection are also important aspects of the duties which MCs conduct.<sup>37</sup>

Crisis preparedness, along with its planning, is one of the duties in which MCs have an active role in both countries. They participate in planning, training and

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33 Liuski & Ubani 2021, 243.

34 Sveriges Befolkningspyramid, 2021.

35 Poteri 2018, 299, 300.

36 The Finnish thematic interview data. 2019.; The Finnish cumulative electronic questionnaire data. 2021.

37 Grimell 2021a.

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implementation of the psychosocial-spiritual support of the garrisons in the event of a crisis. This also takes place in a multi-professional cooperation, and it is not uncommon that the MCs are also persons in charge of this activity.

### *Previous research*

There is an evident gap in the European scientific journal articles on MCs in Europe. Only 44 articles have been published in two decades, of which the majority are from a military historical perspective.<sup>38</sup> A modern-day point of view has been established in some articles, such as one study regarding the role of UK and German MCs who accompany soldiers on international military and peace-keeping operations.<sup>39</sup> The American research tradition emphasizes their military operations' views and focuses on psychological aspects, such as PTSD.<sup>40</sup> This aspect is missing in the European studies.

The studies on professional competence that extend to the field of military chaplaincy include research on chaplains' as well as military officers' competence. There is also a surprisingly substantial amount of research related to health care chaplains' professional competence.<sup>41</sup> It can be noted that the professional standards or competencies for chaplains are mentioned more in the official chaplains' certifications and qualifications by the chaplain associations than in scientific research.<sup>42</sup>

The very first studies regarding the MC's profession underlined clarification of the roles for each working individual. As early as in the 1950s, Burchard pointed out that a possible role conflict between the secular employer (military) and the theological commission of the MCs must be solved in order for them to perform well in their profession.<sup>43</sup> Later, in the 1980s, Wilkinson described how "the very existence of the military chaplains is a paradox. Their role is replete with paradox".<sup>44</sup> This perspective has also been underpinned in the 2010s by Grace Davie, who wrote about the ambiguities in the role of the MCs and especially the role of the chaplain in relation to the two institutions which they serve.<sup>45</sup> This leads us to the important conclusion that although time passes by and the profession evolves, the same undertone about the ambiguities remains through the decades. It also should be considered as one of the main features of the MC's profession and therefore

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38 Liuski & Ubani 2020.

39 Barker & Werkner 2008, 47–62.

40 Whitworth, Casey & Stewart 2021, 390–403; Meagher ym. 2018; Besterman-Dahan ym. 2012, 151–168.

41 Kim ym. s.a., 1–10.; Cook 2004, 59–69.

42 UK Board of Healthcare Chaplaincy. *Spiritual Care Competencies for Healthcare Chaplains; The Common Qualifications and Competencies*. The Board of Chaplaincy Certification INC.

43 Burchard 1954, 528–535.

44 Wilkinson 1981, 249–257.

45 Davie 2015b, 39–53.

important to mention while speaking about professional competence. However, it must be said that in the 2020s the research has brought a new descriptive term for the MC's profession instead of ambiguities, i.e., "contrasting".<sup>46</sup>

The core features of the military officer's profession have been distinguished, for example, from a Swedish perspective. There the cornerstone of the military expertise is wrapped around the concept of an armed combatant. The officers' professional skills are highlighted as "formal theoretical/scientific and practical knowledge, the officer's ability to combine a military logic with public administration skills, a strong moral/ethical/legal foundation, as well as the individual and collective responsibility for professional development".<sup>47</sup> In Finland the officers' competences can be stated to be similar to those of highly ranked Canadian officers. They include, among others, credibility and influence, commitment to military ethos, ethical reasoning, organizational awareness, analytical thinking and action orientation.<sup>48</sup>

Due to the lack of a systematic study or a theoretical description of the military chaplains' professional competence, this article utilizes an existing definition of clerical professional competence. It was presented in a research in which Salvation Army chaplains and their managers provided data about their expectations of chaplaincy personnel and about the pastoral care interventions undertaken by chaplains:

The composition of the chaplains' professional competence was described as:

- chaplaincy skills, attitudes and practices
- pastoral and spiritual interventions
- group-specific skills
- decision making<sup>49</sup>

In the first section on the chaplaincy skills the desired features are, for example, being a good listener, emotionally composed, interested in people, aware of their working context/environment and having an ability to engage faith and theology while developing the community they work in. Among the attitudes it is valued among other things that the chaplains are non-intrusive into a person's situation. The chaplains have respect for other disciplines, professionals and team members. They are also clear about their professional role.<sup>50</sup>

The chaplains' practices themselves are built by spending time/building rapport, and the patience to sit with, listen to and understand clients and staff.

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46 Liuski & Ubani 2021; Grimell 2021b, 1–18.

47 Berndtsson 2019, 190–210.

48 Jukka Leskinen (toim.), *Sotilaspsykologia maanpuolustuksen tukena* 2018. Page 130. Original reference: Rankin & Williams 2015. Not accessible.

49 Carey & Rumbold 2015, 1416–1437.

50 Carey & Rumbold 2015, 1416–1437.



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The chaplains must understand boundaries and their work context. It is important to be transparent on what chaplaincy can and cannot offer. Chaplains must be team-workers rather than arrogant or ego-driven professionals, as they may work ecumenically, in multi-faith teams and with multi-faith organizations.<sup>51</sup>

In the second section of the pastoral and spiritual interventions the main task is to provide pastoral support to people in need. This includes chaplains being able to build relationships with people and interact easily, as it can lead to important conversations on a deeper level. Pastoral and spiritual related skills can be considered as a capability to think holistically and creatively. It also includes enabling people to find their own answers and abilities within themselves. In a counselling situation the chaplains must have a good knowledge of what can and cannot be done as well as an ability to accept different points of view, understandings and experiences of life.<sup>52</sup>

Thirdly, group specific skills include, for example, education, professional expectations and desired attributes. They comprise the mastery of ritual and worship activities as well as liturgical knowledge. Chaplains working in certain organizations, such as military or health care, have gained their expertise first in a formal scientific education and through professional specialization. The informal learning comes through life and working experience alongside semi-formal environmental learning, such as professional role models.<sup>53</sup>

The last part related to chaplains' professional competence was referred to as the decision making. This category covers the selection, training and possible organizational culture change. It was also pointed out that future chaplains should have the skills, attitudes and practices that the organizations and employers need.

## Research Procedures and Data Analysis

The data used for this research was manifold and it was collected separately in many instalments among the Lutheran MCs in Finland and Sweden (Table 1).

Table 1. The research data.

Country	Year	Data type	N
Finland	2019	Thematical interviews	9
Finland	2021	Cumulative electronic questionnaire	13
Sweden	2020	Thematical interviews	12

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51 Carey & Rumbold 2015, 1416–1437.

52 Carey & Rumbold 2015, 1416–1437.

53 Carey & Rumbold 2015, 1416–1437.

The Finnish data consists of previously used thematic interviews (N = 9) of Lutheran MCs, in which the profession and professional identity of the Finnish military chaplaincy perspective was generated. The interview data was gathered in early 2019 for antecedent research, but made purposely deeper in its themes for further investigation. Interviewees were selected heterogeneously based on their geographical location, work history and experience. They were asked to participate via e-mail. The interview framework was based on top-level concepts: organization and work environment, professional identity, professionalism, multiculturalism, and the future of the profession.

In addition, a cumulative data gathering was performed in May 2021 for this study (N = 13). An open electronic questionnaire included 16 components that canvassed themes of professional identity and its development, occupational competence and the understanding of the MCs' individual and collective expertise – all answered with their own words and insight.

The Swedish data consists of thematic individual interviews (n = 12) with MCs, which were conducted during a post-doctoral project about military spiritual care during 2020. The sample selection employed a purposeful approach with the intent to recruit well-experienced participants.<sup>54</sup> There was a wide variation among the participants regarding age (which spanned from approximately 30–60), missions and backgrounds. The sample included eight males and four females. Many of them had been on one or multiple international deployments. All the participants were ordained pastors employed by the Church of Sweden, who were assigned as MCs at the time of the interview. The interview framework employed a bottom-up approach to describe military spiritual care and lessons learned, and for example, wisdom among the interviewees<sup>55</sup>.

The qualitative data analysis method selected for this study is called template analysis. It is a way of thematically analysing textual data, for example as in this case, thematic interviews, and open-ended questionnaire answers.<sup>56</sup> As it lacks a ready-made set of coding, the analysis for this study started with reading the material through several times and developing a coding template based on the data, which was revised and refined. We created a coding template that summarises specifically the professional competence-related features in relation to our research questions. The main a priori codes defined in this study were MCs' professional characteristics, abilities, and knowledge; pastoral and spiritual interventions, group specific skills and decision making.

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54 Merriam & Grenier 2019.

55 For additional information see Grimell 2020a, 1–14.

56 What is Template Analysis? (s.a.) <https://research.hud.ac.uk/research-subjects/human-health/template-analysis/what-is-template-analysis/>.

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After this the emerging themes were organized into meaningful clusters and defined by how they related to each other within and between the groups. The themes that permeated are referred to as integrative themes. This study took both descriptive and interpretive perspectives into consideration during the data analysis. After these work phases we carefully compared and illuminated the findings through the theoretical base. Each data type was handled as one ensemble, as the group of MCs was so small that there would be a danger of identification of the respondents by the professionals.

## Results

The overall picture of the military chaplains' professional competence is presented here through the chaplaincy skills, attitudes and practices, pastoral and spiritual perspectives, group-specific skills and decision making.

### *Military chaplaincy skills, attitudes and practices*

Even though the MCs academic foundation comes from a formal university education and a theological degree, their professional functioning is aimed at the demands of the military organization. This means that regular chaplaincy skills, such as performing services or providing pastoral care, are only one part of the job description.

Based on Finnish interview and cumulative data, the most important skills of the Finnish military chaplains' profession include a strong capability to cooperate, being empathetic, having expertise, a good resilience and tolerance to mental stress. The constantly changing working environment sets increasing demands for wide-ranging know-how, autonomy and self-direction as well as theological and spiritual knowledge.

The organizational environment makes the Finnish MC's role more that of a trainer or even an educator, which leads to a reality in which the MCs must master an increasing amount of knowledge.<sup>57</sup> The MCs' main responsibility as trainers is in the field of soldiers' ethical functioning ability, which is also closely related to the entities of leadership training, management of the deceased, combat stress and crisis support, as well as the encountering of different religions. In other words, the required expertise shifts from purely theological substance knowledge to that

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<sup>57</sup> The Finnish thematical interview data 2019; The Finnish cumulative electronic questionnaire data 2021.

of an all-rounder specialist, which also covers pedagogical, psychological and sociological aspects.<sup>58</sup>

In Sweden the MCs are likewise unique professionals with theological basic training and military experience. Above all, they are existential, ethical and religious practice experts. The feature which the employers in the SAF want the most from a pastor, is having someone who can conduct spiritual care, field sermons, blessings and funerals, and can cater for the religious/spiritual and ethical dimension whenever this is required. These are also the features that surface most among the Swedish interviewees themselves, which underlines their pastoral side while they serve as MCs.<sup>59</sup>

The Finnish MCs also have a collective, confidential attitude towards new situations: “we will figure it out”. Based on available data, the MC’s profession is rather lonely in its core, as in some garrisons the MC may be the only representative of the profession.<sup>60</sup> From these premises, the MCs need proactiveness and self-sufficiency to work autonomously and sustain motivation in their daily functions. A high emotional stamina is needed, which helps them to be effective under stressful conditions. This feature could be described even as spiritual resilience, where there is an “ability to sustain one’s sense of self and purpose through a set of beliefs, principles or values while encountering adversity, stress, and trauma by using internal and external spiritual resources”.<sup>61</sup> The ability to multitask helps the MCs perform in their work. This includes dealing with several issues and details, mastering unities and adapting to new and changing situations.<sup>62</sup>

The Swedish have turned out to be practical and flexible, as situations may change very fast and decisions must be made rapidly. The MCs are pragmatic about many things, from carrying weapons to spiritual counselling. For example, if there is no room for private conversation when counselling a service member, they walk outdoors. There the confidant can talk both freely and privately. The pragmatic, “troops over theological contradiction” approach is illustrated regarding firearms. Instead of having a theological reasoning or argumentation regarding carrying a weapon, they rather resolve it in a generalized and condensed way: “if I am to serve this unit pastorally then I will do it fully and adjust to the military context and condition”.<sup>63</sup>

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58 The Finnish thematical interview data 2019; The Finnish cumulative electronic questionnaire data 2021.

59 Grimell 2021a.

60 The Finnish thematical interview data 2019; The Finnish cumulative electronic questionnaire data 2021.

61 Manning ym. 2019, 168–186.

62 Bakker, Tims, & Derks 2012, 1359–1378.

63 Grimell 2021a.

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The MCs' professional knowledge is strongly practical in both countries. This kind of organization or practice-based learning can be seen as a process that manifests itself in many different forms depending on the operational environment in which the work is carried out. It differs according to an individual's characteristics, personal professional level, position in the military organization, intentionality of their learning, and formalisation of the learning activities.<sup>64</sup>

A pre-designed, clear academic training path specifically for professional MCs in Finland is lacking and the expertise required at work is built on one's own initiative. As the MCs are defined as having an expert role, only the frames are set by the FDF and everyone can fill those settings with nuances which they feel are important in order to manage their work.<sup>65</sup> This seems to underline the fact that inside the organization/profession is a will to avoid the MCs becoming labelled as merely theologians. The MCs participate in training organized by the FDF, the church and other actors, as well as in international collaboration. They may also participate in general and sectoral in-service training in military educational establishments based on a needs assessment.<sup>66</sup>

Training is sought on the basis of needs identified in development discussions. When asked about this topic, the answers of the MCs were varied, which again showed the contrast of their work. The location of their office influences the MCs' training needs, as each garrison has its own special characteristics. An even deeper understanding of issues related to, for example, the ethics of violence and war, the development of the work community and operational capabilities was highlighted in the data.<sup>67</sup>

The Finnish analysis also pointed out that the organization should consider the additional training more from the MCs' point of view, even though they are a small, specialized group inside a larger organization. The training coming from the ELCF or the organization itself does not fully meet the needs of the MCs. In other words, they should be listened to more and the need for training should be determined less in advance. Furthermore, the possibilities of collective learning and knowledge sharing among the MCs professional groups should be investigated more closely. Based on the data, the Finnish MCs are lacking shared meetings that would be informal but arranged by the employer.<sup>68</sup> As the professional group has the same

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64 The Finnish thematic interview data 2019; The Finnish cumulative electronic questionnaire data 2021.

65 The Finnish thematic interview data 2019; The Finnish cumulative electronic questionnaire data 2021.

66 Poteri 2018, 299.

67 The Finnish thematic interview data 2019; The Finnish cumulative electronic questionnaire data 2021.

68 The Finnish thematic interview data 2019; The Finnish cumulative electronic questionnaire data 2021.

goal in their work, theoretically there would not be any competitive component, but the collective knowledge sharing would benefit the whole organization.<sup>69</sup>

It is important for the Swedish MCs to learn about military culture and the context. Many interviewees testify to the powerful contrast between serving in a traditional congregation and serving within a military context. A lack of military cultural competence would impair the capacity of the MC to conduct spiritual care. The increasing amount of military knowledge provides better hermeneutical tools and develops MCs' skills in spiritual care, counselling and sermons. The interviewees displayed much military knowledge, which resonates with their well-developed military identities.

### *Group-specific skills and decision making*

The fundamental organizational settings direct the group-specific skills in different emphases in each country. It is also notable that even if the MCs' professional work is changing and evolving in a bureaucratic, occasionally rigid institution in both countries, the work itself is also changed by the MCs. The critical group-specific skill in both countries is to adapt to the MCs' hybrid identity from the beginning. Without figuring out one's professional identity it would be impossible to perform a stable professional status and grow in to the profession of a MC. The understanding in both Finland and in Sweden is that the MCs' professional identity has a hybrid form, but the approach to it is a bit different in each country.

Based on the Finnish data, the MCs adopt an autonomous, professional expert identity, which reflects organizational priorities and combines them into an individual work-based self-concept and understanding how the theological perspective is related to their work.<sup>70</sup> This kind of hybrid identity combines the traditional (theological) identity with organizational identity.<sup>71</sup> This appears to occur quite fluently according to those MCs who remain in the profession the process is continuous. They appear to adapt to the MC's professional identity well and adjust to the changing operational environment resulting from organizational, societal and global changes. It was brought up in the interviews that it takes at least two years to "get accepted" by the rest of the community, so it takes time and patience at the beginning to grow into the role of MC. This includes integrating oneself in the military's hierarchical organization culture as well as learning its *modus operandi*, that is in some situations built-in and without words. The motto at the beginning could be: "be present, be available. Don't throw yourself at people and don't try

69 Moser 2017, 674–709.

70 The Finnish thematic interview data 2019; The Finnish cumulative electronic questionnaire data 2021.

71 Currie & Logan 2020.

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to make major reforms in the beginning". Some newcomers may experience this as a cultural shock, as the working environment differs dramatically from a congregational environment. Their audience is very different, and you have to "come up by yourself with something to do" at first. No-one fills the calendar ready for the MC. The accepted, experienced MCs have an expert status among the operational environment in which they work.<sup>72</sup> The same processual developmental steps apply to Swedish MCs; the chaplain should be present among the troops and should seek them out and participate in their activities. According to the interviewees, this was the only way to establish a relationship, earn the soldiers' trust and become accepted. Sitting in an office and waiting for the troops to seek spiritual care was doomed to failure.<sup>73</sup>

The Swedish MCs hybrid identity consists of a military cultural identity and an identity as an ordained pastor within the church of Sweden. There are certainly overlaps between these two cultural and professional identities, but there are also distinctions. Like their Finnish colleagues, they must earn their place in the military community, but the acceptance and trust from the troops comes in different situations. For example, the Swedish MCs may choose to be fully armed amid deployment, like any other soldier. This is optional, since they are non-combatants. But all Swedish MCs, as far as the previous study can tell, choose to be fully armed with assault rifles, handgun and additional combat gear during their deployments. Such a decision also included combatant training during the pre-deployment phase. Being fully armed like any other soldier allows the Swedish MCs to join units during lighter missions and patrols. Basically, the MCs could stay very close to the troops and require no armed escort since they could protect both themselves and their unit. In fact, several of the interviewees had found themselves in attacks or hostile situations in which they would have used their firearms if contact with the enemy had been made.<sup>74</sup>

To serve as a chaplain under military conditions in the Swedish Armed Forces requires an ability to maintain integrity despite a potential radicalization of military identities during deployment to conflict zones such as Afghanistan and Mali. All deployed chaplains are fully armed, which may already suggest that the identity of a pastor may be compromised to some degree. However, all the MCs reported clear boundaries, for example, no one blessed firearms, although one interviewee thought that it was acceptable to bless a patrol car.<sup>75</sup>

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72 The Finnish thematical interview data 2019; The Finnish cumulative electronic questionnaire data 2021.

73 Grimell 2020b, 1–18; Grimell 2021a; The Finnish thematical interview data 2019.

74 Grimell 2021a; Grimell 2021b, 1–18.

75 Grimell 2021a.

The working environment imposes differences to the relationship between the professional representatives and the church when compared to regular, congregational chaplains. It also reasserts the position of each institution relative to MCs. Even if the religious and spiritual elements are strongly present in the MCs' everyday work, the analysed data showed that the Finnish MCs want to distance themselves professionally from the ELCF and its statements as an organization, and underline their position as FDF's employees. Reasons in addition to the nature and setting of the work might be the criticism that the profession faces in some public conversations, and the fact that their work needs justification occasionally. If the MCs would be connected closer on an organizational level to the ELCF, this might cause negative attention to the profession and misunderstandings regarding the MCs' work.<sup>76</sup> This is a somewhat contrasting perspective regarding the MCs' profession and indicates the kind of issues that are being dealt with, at least on the public level. In the working environment these questions are absent.<sup>77</sup>

In Sweden, the challenges traverse in another direction as the initial setting is different. The contradiction revolves around navigating two different types of identities while resolving the issue of having too little time for military spiritual care. This was brought up by those MCs who are employed by the church, so that they have one foot in each institutional context.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, the MCs tend to fall between two chairs, since they are not included in the formal military organization. This employment condition clearly affects the MCs in a negative way.<sup>79</sup>

Bringing "soft skills"<sup>80</sup>, such as emotional intelligence, empathy and friendliness, appears to be one of the unique traits of the MCs in addition to their theology-related skills. Specifically, presence, cooperation and problem-solving are emphasized in the Finnish data, although many other features of these skills could also be mentioned. These soft skills harmonize the stiffness of the bureaucratic military environment and mixing them together helps the organization to achieve its main goals and accentuate the exclusivity of the profession.<sup>81</sup>

The cooperative orientation appears in multiple dimensions, and it permeates all the work that the MCs do. It is carried out on organizational, professional and individual levels. For example, for those whose job description includes administrative and developmental work, it means keeping in touch with different quarters at home

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76 The Finnish thematical interview data 2019; The Finnish cumulative electronic questionnaire data 2021.

77 The Finnish thematical interview data 2019; The Finnish cumulative electronic questionnaire data 2021.

78 Grimell 2020b, 1–18; Grimell 2021a; Grimell 2021b, 1–18.

79 Grimell 2021a.

80 Rao 2018, 215–224.

81 The Finnish thematical interview data 2019; The Finnish cumulative electronic questionnaire data 2021.



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and abroad together with building international networks. Especially those who operate more in the field benefit from having an active and visible presence in their work. The work includes interprofessional as well as collegial communication. The individual level cooperation becomes concrete when MCs encounter people. In the Finnish data, cooperation skills were emphasized as the most valuable professional characteristic to have by the majority of the respondents.<sup>82</sup> The Swedish MCs described cooperation with the military healthcare sector as particularly important for their work.<sup>83</sup>

Problem-solving skills are also valued highly among the Finnish MCs. This supports the fact, along with cooperation, that they act as impartial professionals at the interface with leading position officers, employees and conscripts. The MCs' own professional ethics demand that they strive to be amicable and solution-oriented and to avoid taking sides in situations of conflict. It is revealed in such circumstances that one of the characteristics of MCs' work is that they move effortlessly up and down within the military hierarchy, unlike the regular officers.<sup>84</sup>

#### *Pastoral and spiritual perspectives*

Though the Finnish MCs have a professional role as state officials and soldiers and might have taken an organizational distance to the ELCF, they are ordained chaplains, too. The MCs support people mentally and spiritually and develop the ethical, mental and social functioning of their troops.<sup>85</sup> It is important to respond to those needs that the community wishes, and depending on the situation to adopt different roles. The roles the Finnish MCs have expressed related to pastoral and spiritual interventions are, for example: a parental figure, a bridge builder, an advocate, a trusted person, a balancer, an expert, a necessary tool in the commander's toolbox.<sup>86</sup>

The support is performed regardless of anyone's spiritual or religious background. Annually about 23 000 conscripts start their military service in Finland and almost every religious group is represented. The situation is emphasized in the metropolitan area and Southern Finland while in some parts of the country the conditions are the opposite. For example, in the Guard Jaeger Regiment, a brigade-level unit based on the island of Santahamina in Helsinki, about 70% of the conscripts are Lutheran and 20% are irreligious. The rest of the conscripts

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82 The Finnish thematical interview data 2019; The Finnish cumulative electronic questionnaire data 2021.

83 Grimell 2020b, 1–18; Grimell 2021a.

84 The Finnish thematical interview data 2019; The Finnish cumulative electronic questionnaire data 2021.

85 YIPalvo 2017.

86 The Finnish thematical interview data 2019.

may be, among others, Muslims, Orthodox, Catholics, Pentecostals, Buddhists, Hindus, Jewish, Jehovah's Witnesses, Adventists, Baptists, Sikhs. The FDF or the MCs are not allowed to record any religious statistics and it wouldn't even be possible, as there is many religious groups lack official registration, or their roll of members might be imperfect. Usually, the MCs are also unaware of the person's religious background, and it may sometimes come up in an informal discussion.<sup>87</sup> The standard situation is that the MCs are valued among both staff and conscripts across denominations and the basic principle is that the possibility of practicing one's religion is maintained within the framework of service duties.<sup>88</sup>

According to Finnish MCs the religious and spiritual issues in everyday life, especially in Christian denominations, concern with a possibility to attend to a service / Mass, religious holidays, confirmation classes and meeting with spiritual representatives. With Muslim conscripts the topics include, for example, diet, prayers, and Ramadan.<sup>89</sup> In Islam there is an idea that a person with a faith in God is always more reliable than an atheist. Therefore, the MCs are highly respected among Muslim conscripts. Additional reasons for Muslims to lean on the MCs are their strong commitment to religious practises and the non-Islamic roots of Finnish society and culture.<sup>90</sup> An interesting detail within the FDF is that the total number of conscripts attending to military environment's devotional services is greater than the number of conscripts belonging to the ELCF. In other words, the official religious and spiritual activities led by the MCs cross possible religious boundaries.<sup>91</sup> This indicates that the MCs succeed in providing meaningful support also to those who belong to a religious minority, and they live up to the organization's expectations.

While the spiritual care within the Swedish Armed Forces has an inter-religious intent and approach, the great majority of the MCs are pastors from the Church of Sweden and some are pastors from the free churches. This suggests that the potential capacity to conduct spiritual care, and particularly counselling of service members from non-Christian religions, may be limited. However, the MCs have a broad and inclusive theological approach which allows spiritual conversations with both Christian and non-Christian service members.<sup>92</sup>

What stands out as the most prominent skill set among Swedish MCs was their capacity to apply the churchly toolbox (or skills) in the military context. Sacred rituals, prayers, blessings, sermons, communions, baptisms, confirmations and preaching were employed and hermeneutically adjusted to varying situations within Sweden

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87 Ranta 2021.

88 The Finnish thematical interview data 2019.

89 The Finnish thematical interview data 2019.

90 The Finnish thematical interview data 2019; Ranta 2021.

91 The Finnish thematical interview data 2019; Ranta 2021.

92 Grimell 2020b, 1–8; Grimell 2021a.

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and during deployment to conflict zones. Those MCs who had been deployed to conflict zones also displayed advanced military cultural and operational skills and even combat experience.<sup>93</sup>

## Discussion

This study combined multi-method qualitative data on both Finnish and Swedish military chaplaincy and what kind of features the professional competence of today's Lutheran MCs consists of. Both historical and societal settings as well as the current research results indicate that the MCs share a conceptual theological foundation of the profession, from which their professional competence is built. The professional surface level is similar, but the deeper orientation from which they operate differs. This includes the relation to employer, the church, the MC's position in the organization and the nature of the operational environment. The differences in these factors cause the profession to develop and grow with different emphases.

The results indicated that the practical clerical features are also the same, but that the Swedish MCs face ethical questions at some level in action, which are usually resolved pragmatically. The Finnish MCs face the differences to regular congregations quite drastically at the beginning of their careers, and in the absence of a clear training path to the profession this may cause dilemmas. Those MCs who solve the controversies and adjust to the military environment tend to stay longer in their profession.

The MCs' work in both countries is acquired by practice-based learning. It was pointed out that the Finnish chaplains are more heterogeneous as a professional group, and this may be a subconscious feature for the organization. They are also expected to have wider competence in several fields of knowledge, and they need to adopt new skills along the way as the organization adjusts to societal and global changes. It is notable that regional differences on professional know-how appear to be more substantial in Finland and have an effect on the MC's daily work. These factors require resilience and autonomy to manage their work, and causes uncertainties regarding their competence. Additionally, Swedish MCs tend to be left on their own by the church to figure out how to think, for instance, regarding carrying firearms during deployment. There is a heavy burden put on the individual shoulder of an MC to make such a decision on their own. The use of firearms against another human would imply that the ordination vows have been compromised.<sup>94</sup>

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93 Grimell 2020b, 1–18; Grimell 2021a.

94 Grimell, 2021a.

Both Finnish and Swedish MCs can also be attached to situated professionalism, where the development of professional identity is seen as individuals growing into their role in dialogue first and foremost within the military context and culture. It then takes shape as a community of practice in which the MCs interact with each other and write the common playbook, which the individuals apply.

Asociocultural theoretical approach can be employed to further the understanding of this identity construction by suggesting that professional competence equates to identity by illustrating professional characteristics, abilities, knowledge and skills<sup>95</sup> embodied in the MCs' professional identity. A sociocultural take on professional identity development indicates that it is mediated by culture, context, language and social interaction.<sup>96</sup> To MCs this means functioning in an operational environment in the hierarchical culture of the armed forces, where they use both theological and organization-related military language. The social interaction takes place between regular fellow chaplains, individuals and groups but is strongly coloured by the context in which it occurs.

This study has its limitations as well as its strengths. One limitation is that the same interview-guide and/or questionnaires could have been employed with the Finnish and the Swedish samples. However, this study was made after the two thematical interview studies had been completed and used primarily in another study. We resolved this issue by selecting similar interview questions to analyse, while also sending out complementing electronic questionnaires to the Finnish MCs. Furthermore, the Swedish samples were quantitatively smaller than the Finnish. This means that the Finnish samples are more reliable as they apply to the majority of MCs working in the FDF during the data collection period.

In future, a wider comparison between Nordic or European countries would be welcome. Furthermore, it would be interesting to see how the organizations themselves consider the profession of MCs and their contribution to military work.

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95 Mulder 2014, 107–137.

96 Johnson & Golombek 2011.

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