

A kind request regarding the congregational meeting on 24 January 2021 and future congregational meetings

Purpose of request

This request is written because we believe that in the procedure leading up to the 24 January 2021 congregational meeting some unintentional bias may be created, leaving certain voices unheard within the vote. This affects the voice of the whole church and compromises the democratic process. We kindly request that these issues are addressed and solved by the date of the meeting, to ensure a fair democratic participation for all active members of Immanuel Church.

Problems identified

The date of the 24 January 2021 congregational meeting was announced on 22 November 2020 and in the digital newsletter sent out on 18 December 2020 it was announced as a digital meeting.

However, according to the proposed procedure, one of the most important parts of the meeting, the voting on the calling of a pastor, is not done digitally and has a deadline set on 15 January 2021, more than one week before the congregational meeting. This part of the meeting is of such importance that decisions can only be made by a two-thirds majority¹.

For this reason, we consider the information about the congregational meeting insufficient. Furthermore, we consider the timing of the meeting inappropriate to enable equal participation of all members. We think that the postal voting procedure with deadline set long before the congregational meeting might create unintentional biases against the international and Korean part of the congregation for the following reasons:

1) Many people are, despite Covid-19, travelling to spend Christmas with family. This includes people travelling within Sweden as well as those traveling to other countries. Those travelling out of the country are likely to be away for longer, particularly now with possible quarantine requirements. These realities are likely to take away the possibility to vote before the deadline on 15 January. This violates paragraph 3A of the Congregational Bylaws of the Constitution of Immanuel Church, which states that each member present at the congregational meeting has one vote.²

2) Among the participants at the international worship services are many people who are less familiar with the way democracy works in Swedish society, including church. Many active participants in the international fellowship are not yet official church members or are registering just now, as the importance of this has only become clear to them recently.

¹ According to paragraph 3D of the By-Laws of the constitution of Immanuel Church. See <https://www.immanuel.se/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/11/IMKConstitution-eng-2016-04-17-beslutad.pdf>.

² See constitution document: <https://www.immanuel.se/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/11/IMKConstitution-eng-2016-04-17-beslutad.pdf>

Although we recognize that communicating the importance of membership is not the Board's responsibility, it is democratically important that the voting procedure is communicated early enough for those who are not yet members to be able to fix this.

Regarding the meeting on 24 January 2021, we therefore request

- 1) That paragraph 3A of the Congregational By-laws is respected, and everyone who is a member of Immanuel Church on the day of the congregational meeting and is digitally present at that meeting has a possibility to vote.
- 2) That all votes which arrived in church before the start of the congregational meeting are counted as valid.
- 3) That the mailbox at the main entrance of the church can be used for casting votes and this mailbox will be checked for votes regularly, including just before the congregational meeting.
- 4) That all members will be able to check whether their vote has been counted. This, since formally the vote should be open³, and because people might be insecure about whether their vote has come in in time. In addition, we would like to ask to report the numbers of invalid votes and the reason why they are deemed invalid.

Regarding future meetings, when there is a need to depart from common practice at a congregational meeting, we request

- 1) That this is communicated to all members at least two weeks before elements of the meeting (including the earliest voting or decision possibility). This communication should contain clear information on the entire proposed procedure and should be done via the ways used now, as well as via church digital mailing lists, the church website, and announcement during the worship services.
- 2) That it is ensured that everyone who is a member at the time of the congregational meeting and is present at the meeting has the possibility to vote, propose amendments and make a voting statement.⁴
- 3) That all information shared for which it can reasonably be desired, will be available in Swedish, English and Korean.

Being truly committed to the Immanuel Church congregation as a Christian fellowship for people from all over the world, we kindly request the Board to address the above-mentioned issues and to allow voting from all active members on or before January 24, in accordance with the church by-laws.

³ According to paragraph 3D of the Congregational By-laws.

⁴ This might mean that the results of the votes will not be announced at the meeting, but only in a later meeting or via another way of communication.

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