

Dear Praying Friends in Europe –

Our freedom to share our faith publicly is something we easily take for granted. But if we examine how Europe is developing, we see many cases where this freedom is under threat. Many have tried to silence Christians, their values, their truth, and their gospel before. But God almighty instructs us: “Open your mouth, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the poor and needy” (**Prov. 31: 8-9**). We are called to boldly proclaim the truth that has been gifted to us by grace. We must not be ashamed of sharing what the Lord calls good and true. The apostle Paul asked the Galatians: “Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?” (**Gal. 4:16**). Are we aware that the simple truth of our Christian testimony can be perceived as a challenge? And yet Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, so we must not tire in pursuing his path.

Protecting Free Speech in Europe

How should we respond to a world that is increasingly estranged from Christian beliefs? This is a question that Finnish Member of Parliament Päivi Räsänen and Bishop Juhana Pohjola are confronted with.

In April 2021, Päivi Räsänen was shocked to learn that she was accused of “hate speech” for publicly voicing her deeply held beliefs on marriage and human sexuality. The former Minister of the Interior, mother of five, and grandmother of seven now faces a daunting trial on 24 January in Helsinki for having published a pamphlet on marriage over 17 years ago, for taking part in a discussion on a radio show in 2019, and for tweeting a picture of Romans 1:24-27.



As an active member of the Finnish Lutheran church, Räsänen had addressed the leadership of her church and questioned its official sponsorship of the LGBT event ‘Pride 2019’, accompanied by an image of a Bible text. What followed were several lengthy police interviews about her views. Over a year later, the Finnish Prosecutor General brought three criminal charges against Räsänen. If she is found guilty, Räsänen could face a maximum sentence of two years in prison, or a hefty fine.

But with the support of ADF International, Räsänen is standing strong to protect free speech: “I will defend my right to confess my faith, so that no one else would be deprived of their right to freedom of

religion and speech. The more Christians keep silent on controversial themes, the narrower the space for freedom of speech gets for everyone.”

Rev. Dr. Juhana Pohjola was consecrated Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland this August and assumes his new role at a very challenging time. He faces criminal prosecution for publishing the pamphlet that Räsänen wrote on human sexuality for his church congregation in 2004.

The Christian human rights organisation ADF International supports both of their cases to protect freedom of speech and religion for all, across Europe.

(See www.ADFinternational.org/freespeechontrial/ for details).

Let us pray

- for a just outcome of their trial, **which starts on 24 January.**
- that no one would be intimidated into silence, but that people would be encouraged to share their deeply held beliefs with confidence.
- that the freedom to share Biblical beliefs with others would be safeguarded in Finland and beyond.
- That the right to freedom of speech and freedom of religion would be upheld so democracy can flourish.

French Presidency of the Council of the European Union

France has taken over this role from January to June 2022 with the title of its programme being "Recovery, strength and a sense of belonging." President Macron is known as a Europhile and welcomes the opportunity to steer the EU towards being "more sovereign, greener, more humane and more digital". More than 400 meetings of EU ministers with various responsibilities are on the agenda.

This presidency also coincides with the French presidential election in April, which has caused some people to say the French EU presidency should have been postponed.

Additional Prayer Points:-

1. Ask God for mercy with the new Covid wave of infections. May our hospitals cope without a new lockdown. May we slowly but surely come out of this pandemic.
2. Pray for wisdom and forbearance in the discussions between NATO and Russia. The Ukraine should not be abandoned, but also the paranoid attitude of the Russian government should be taken into account. May no lives be lost and may the Kingdom of God continue to grow in Russia and the Ukraine.

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