



# **PYHÄJOKI PARISH**

**History, buildings and movables  
of the parish**

## HISTORY OF THE PYHÄJOKI CHURCH

Pyhäjoki is first mentioned as an independent parish in documents from the year 1573. This year is considered as the official founding year of the parish. Pyhäjoki is one of the old mother parishes of Ostrobothnia. It once included the entire Pyhäjoki Valley, reaching as far as Pyhäjärvi on the border of Savo.

The first actual church in Pyhäjoki was completed in 1586. It was a small support pillar church with a 56-meter-high tower, which also served as a maritime landmark. The church, which stood for nearly three hundred years, was dismantled in the 1850s due to its small size and poor condition—but only after the new church designed by C. L. Engel had been completed.

The old church stood near the current bell tower on the old cemetery grounds. In front of the bell tower, there is a memorial marking the location of the former church.

### **C. L. Engel's church**

Plans for constructing a second church were discussed for nearly 80 years, as the old church had proven too small and was in poor condition. The new church was ultimately built with the resources of the old mother parish, based on the designs of C.L. Engel. The consecration took place in October 1844. It was a cruciform church in Empire style with seating for 1,200 people and featured a massive central dome. By the 1960s, it was considered perhaps the best-preserved wooden building designed by Engel in its original form. The church was restored in 1969.



Logs for the construction were transported from across the extensive mother parish area, reaching as far as Käsämäki, which provided the largest timber. So many logs were gathered that not all were needed, and the surplus was later used in the construction of residential houses. One example is a still-inhabited home in Ylinenjoja, built in the 1860s using logs originally intended for the church.

This magnificent church was destroyed by a fire caused by a lightning strike on a midsummer night in 1974. Fortunately, nearly all of the valuable church furnishings were saved. Some of the rescued items are now displayed in the current church and at the Annala local heritage museum.



At the parish hall, visitors can view photographs of the old church taken by the Oulaisten kuvaamo photography studio.

### **The Present Church**

The design of the new church was entrusted to the architectural firm Karvala & Silvennoinen, whose proposal was selected from among 161 entries. At the time, it was the most extensive church design competition ever held in Finland. The dedication ceremony took place on the fourth Sunday of Advent in 1977.

The church was built on the site of the one destroyed by fire. The main entrance of the new church stands almost exactly where the former church's main door once was. The location is known as Neitsyt kallio ("Virgin's Rock"), into which the church foundations were quarried.

The church has seating for 426 people, plus approximately 150 additional seats.

Architecturally, the church represents a modern style. It combines the traditional church's harmonious sacred atmosphere with innovative structural and spatial solutions. The design is inspired by the words of the Psalm: *"Lift up your hearts to God."*



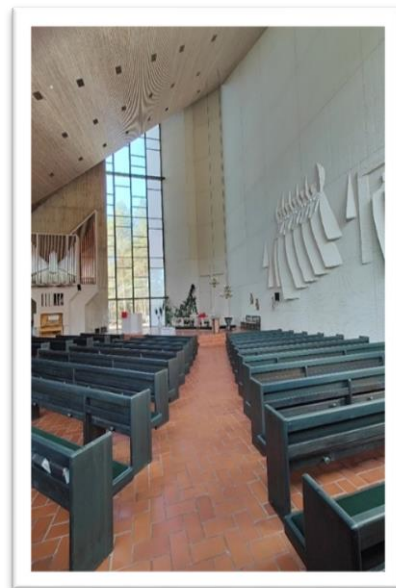


The focal point of the entire building is a symmetrical cross high above the roof, overlooking and protecting the whole parish while shining far out to sea. In this way, Pyhäjoki Church serves once again as a landmark for seafarers—just as it did centuries ago. At the same time, it stands as a reminder to Christians of how the Church is like a sailing vessel, carried by God's wind across the sea of life. The total height and width of the cross is 3 metres.

The church's modern exterior carries deep Christian symbolism as well as echoes of the region's past.

The church hall is sheltered by an upward-curving roof surface, which rises towards the altar wall like a sail rising towards the mast.

The floor plan of the church is nearly square. The roof rises steeply above the altar, reaching over 20 metres in height. The chancel is filled with light from a tall southern window, through which the natural beauty of God's creation—bent old pines shaped by time and weather—forms a living altarpiece. The shape of the hall draws the visitor's thoughts upward toward the light—and toward God. The atmosphere inside the church is bright and peaceful, yet also dynamic and thought-provoking.

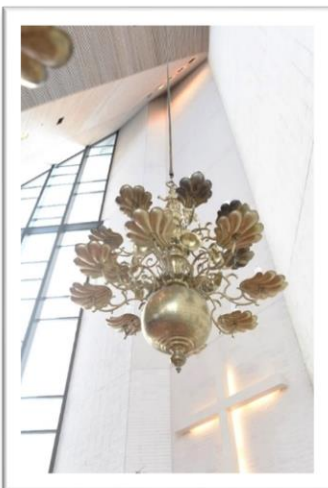
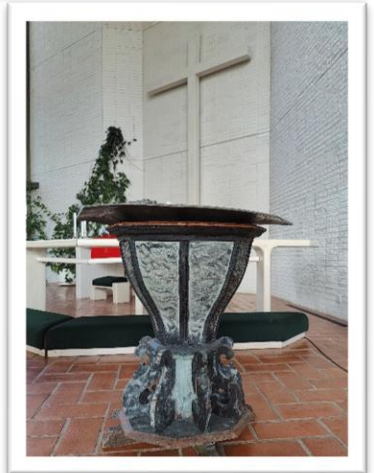
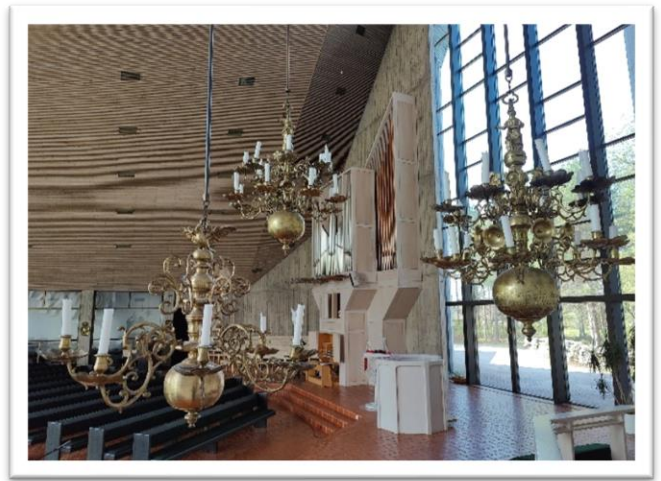


On the wall of the sanctuary is a large brick relief by artist Kari Juva, titled *Kymmenen neitsyitä* (*The Ten Virgins*).

It serves as Pyhäjoki Church's permanent sermon: "*Be watchful.*"

The old church's chandeliers and baptismal font, now placed in the chancel of the current church, carry a message from centuries past—tracing all the way back to the first church of the parish. These objects are connected to powerful human stories from the time of the Great Wrath (Isoviha) in the early 1700s.

During the Great Wrath, nearly all of the church's property was either stolen or destroyed—unless it could be hidden or buried in time. The communion silver, chandeliers, and the belfry's bells were all taken. However, legend tells that the parish's funds were saved thanks to Margareta Bockmöller, the pastor's wife, who fled across the border into Sweden in the autumn of 1714 carrying the church's money with her. Her son-in-law, Nils Mathesius, who would later become the next vicar of Pyhäjoki, brought the funds back to the parish.



The brass baroque-style chandelier, with its 16 candle arms, was cast in Stockholm in 1776. It was purchased mainly with donation funds left by the widow Anna Jacobintytär (also spelled Jaakontytär) from Rautio. According to the engraving on the chandelier, she was born on December 15, 1700, and died on February 6, 1772. The inscription reads:

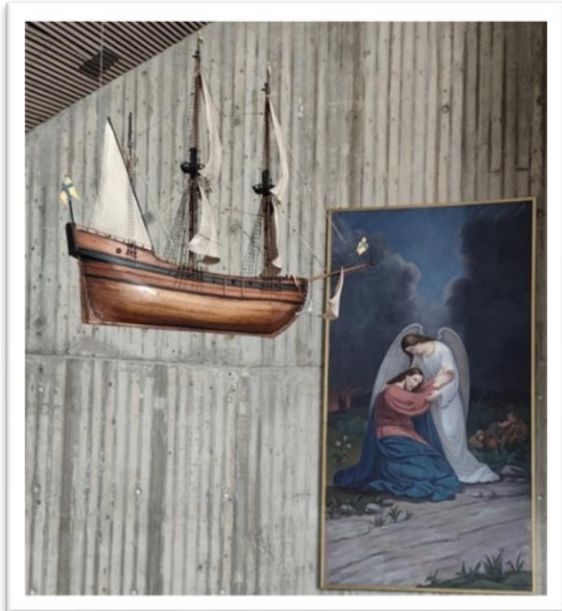
*"Vähän ennen autuaallista eroansa maailmasta hän sääti 500 taaleria kuparirahaa tähän kynttilä-kruunuun Jumalalle kunniaksi ja hänen huoneelleen kaunistukseksi."*

*("Shortly before her blessed departure from this world, she bequeathed 500 copper dalers for this chandelier, to the glory of God and the beauty of His house.")*

According to oral tradition, Anna Jacobintytär had vowed as a young woman to donate a votive offering to the church if she survived the horrors of the Great Wrath. During the war, she reportedly hid in a threshing barn beneath dead bodies to avoid capture by Russian soldiers. Under cover of night, she made her way to the shore and escaped by boat to Sweden.

The brass chandelier, originally crafted for the church built in 1586, was later transferred to the C. L. Engel-designed church upon its completion. It was rescued from the devastating fire of 1974 and now hangs in the present church, along with other chandeliers saved from the blaze.

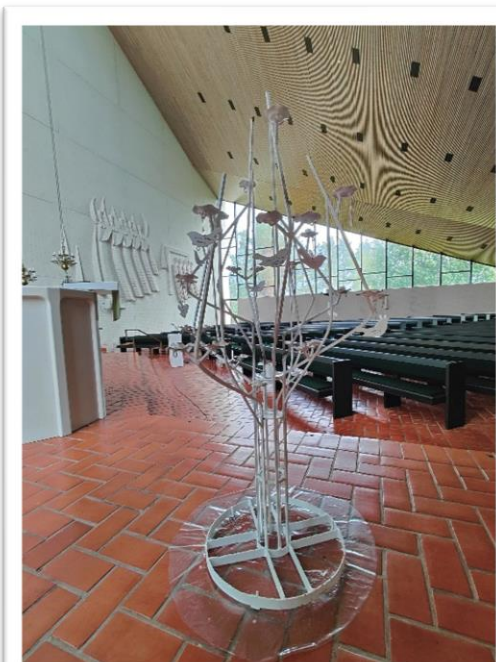
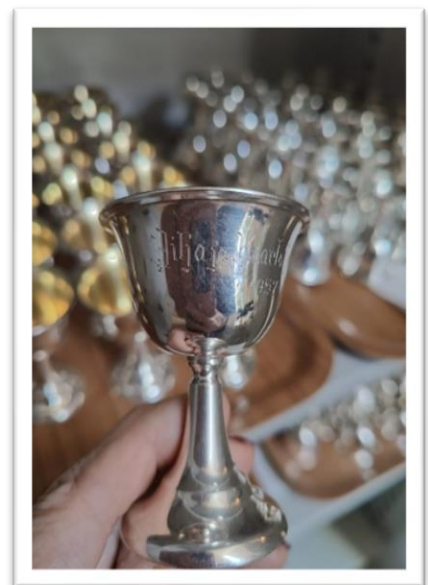




The old altarpiece, Jesus in Gethsemane, painted by Konstantin Lagerstam in 1903, was also preserved from the fire. The painting depicts the herb garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus is still alone and withdrawn—moments before beginning His journey toward fulfillment.

A model ship, symbolizing the Church navigating the sea of life, was crafted by Toni Iso-Pahkala and donated in 1998 by the Pyhäjoki Local Heritage Association (Kotiseutuyhdistys).

The communion chalices, at least partially funded through donations in 1957, bear the engraved names of the donors. One silver chalice, gilded on the inside, made by Auran Kultaseppä Oy.



A mission candelabrum, titled *Elämänpuu* (*Tree of Life*), was donated by long-serving vicar Aaro Leipälä and is placed near the pulpit. A candle is lit in it on the Sunday following a funeral, in memory of the deceased.

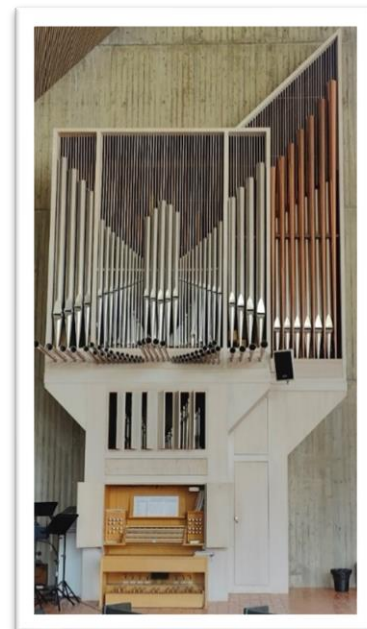
A baptismal bird ornament is also placed in the candelabrum, bearing the name and baptism date of each newly baptized child.

In the summer of 2024, the church's current furnishings and liturgical items were inventoried. Each item was photographed and recorded into a digital archive. A total of 130 items were catalogued.

## The Church Organ

The organ was built by Urkurakentamo Tuomi from Sotkamo. It is catalogued as Opus 35 and features 26 stops, three manuals, and a pedalboard. The disposition, façade, and scaling of the pipes were designed by Asko Rautioaho. The voicing (intonation) was carried out by Juhani Tuomi.

The organ has a total of 1,814 pipes. The main organ façade is composed of tin pipes from the Principal stop and horizontally mounted copper pipes from the Trompette stop. On the right side of the manual divisions is the pedal division, whose visible façade pipes belong to the Posaune and Principal stops.



The Subbass and Choralbass stops in the pedal division originate from the organ of Haapavesi Church, built in 1896 by Petter Lybäck from Kronoby. This connection to the past is intentional, as the organ of Pyhäjoki's previous church was also built by Petter Lybäck in 1886.

The organ underwent a major renovation in 2004. As part of the project, new ladders and a tuning platform were built for the pedal division, a tuning console was added for the third manual, and the pipes were re-voiced. The renovation was carried out by Kalevi Määttä and Erkki Niskanen of Sotkamon Urkurakentajat Oy.

## The Poor Man Statue ("Vaivaisukko")

By the eastern cross-wing entrance of Pyhäjoki's former church stood a "vaivaisukko", or wooden poor man statue, carved in 1855. With one hand outstretched, the figure silently begged coins for the parish's poor relief fund. The statue was carved by Justus Närki, a conscripted soldier (ruotusotamies).

The wooden statue was rescued from the church fire and now stands sheltered in the vestibule of the current church, protected under a wooden canopy. The vaivaisukko was restored in 1995 by kotiseutuneuvos (local heritage councilor) Kalle Tirilä and again in 2019 by Marja-Liisa Mäkinen, after which it was placed indoors to shield it from the elements.

The figure wears a long, dark grey, close-fitting, double-breasted coat with ten buttons. He has black trousers and dark shoes. His right arm is extended in a pleading gesture. The man has a grey beard and hair, and an expressive face. The coat is reinforced with metal bracing, as is the coin slot under the beard. On the gable triangle of the canopy, a Bible verse is painted in Fraktur



script: Deuteronomy 15:11. Additional verses, Tobit 4:7 and 4:9, are inscribed on the back wall above the man's right and left shoulders.

*Ei köyhät pidä puuttuwan maalda: sen tähden käsken minä sinua ja sanon: anna aina kätes weljelles / jota tarwitsepa ja köyhä on sinun maallas. 5. Moos. 15:11*

*(For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land. Deuteronomy 15:11)*

## The Bell Tower

The construction of the bell tower, completed in 1739, was overseen by Johan Simonsson Knubb. Its architectural form originates from Southern and Central Ostrobothnia, where similar towers were built before the era of the Great Wrath. The design of the tower is known as the Ostrobothnian Renaissance bell tower.

The tower houses two church bells.

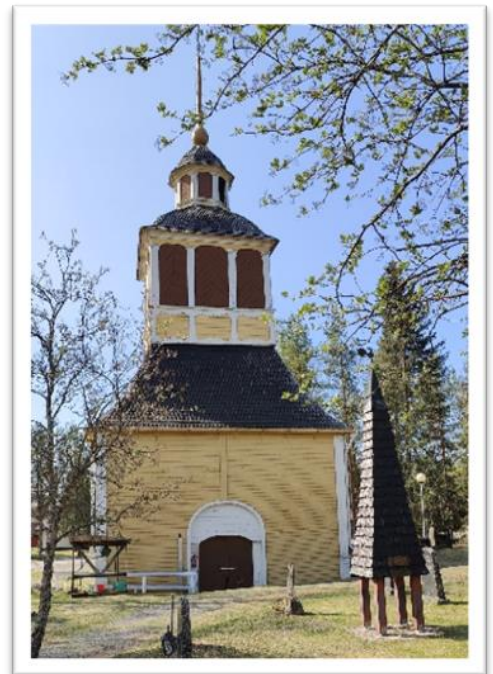
The smaller bell, weighing approximately 500 kilograms, was cast in 1725 at Gerhard Meyer's foundry in Stockholm. It originally hung in Pyhäjoki's first demolished bell tower. It was later moved to the current tower, from where it called parishioners to worship until it cracked on a frosty New Year's night in 1995. The cracked bell was then relocated above the main entrance of the parish hall, making it now in its third placement.

In 1746, a second and significantly larger bell was commissioned from the same founder. It weighs 673 kilograms and remains in use today.

To replace the cracked bell, a new one was commissioned from Eljas Juutilainen's foundry in Kaavi. The side of the new bell bears the biblical inscription: *Kaikki, joissa henki on, kiittäkää Herraa. Halleluja.* (Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Hallelujah.)

Over time, due to the raising of the old cemetery ground, the base of the bell tower had sunk, and its lowest logs had deteriorated. Following a thorough renovation in 2024–2025, the bell tower has been elevated by one meter and will be completely restored. The goal is for the bell tower to continue serving the parish for the next 300 years.

The structure features a walk-through passage, and there are plans to reopen this route during major church holidays, restoring the tradition of walking through the tower into the churchyard.



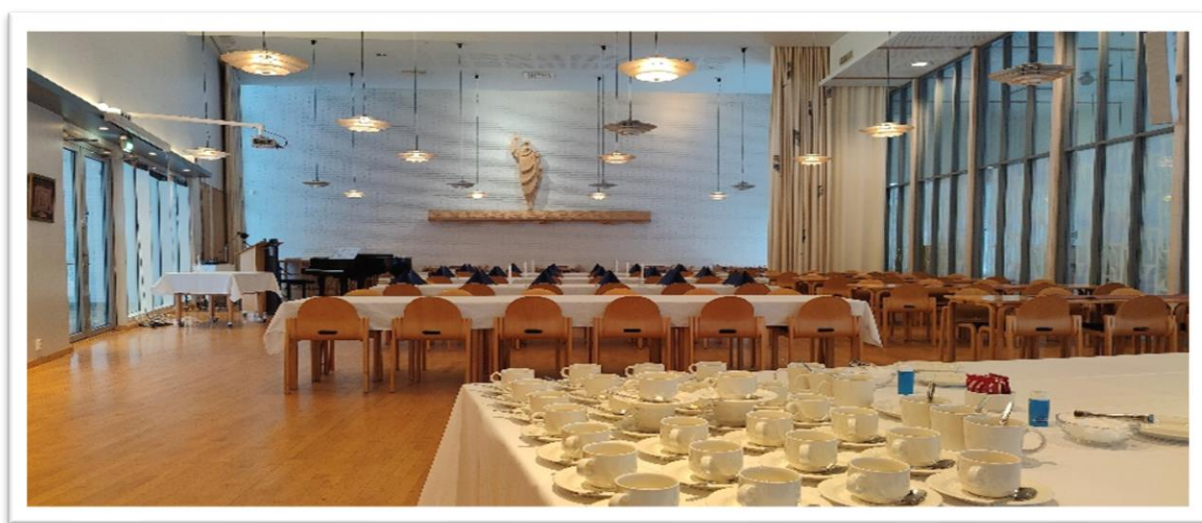


## The Parish Hall

The current parish hall was built in 2001 on the site of the previous one. The old parish hall, constructed in the 1950s, had served as a substitute for the church facilities after the fire. It was demolished in 1999 when the decision was made to build a new hall.

The new parish hall was designed by the architectural firm KSOY, Karvala, Koskinen & Co. Its floor area is 600 square meters, and the main hall has seating for 144 people. With flexible arrangements, the space can accommodate up to 190 table settings.

On the back wall of the parish hall is the relief *He näkivät Jeesuksen (They Saw Christ)*, sculpted by artist Kari Juva in 2003. Carved from aspen wood, the relief depicts Jesus approaching across the water.



### Legends Related to Aspen Wood:

"According to legend, the aspen tree betrayed Mary and the baby Jesus during their flight from persecution, and as punishment, it must tremble forever. In another legend, the aspen quivers because Jesus' cross was carved from aspen wood."

At the parish hall, there is also a small bronze sculpture signed by artist Kari Juva in 1977, depicting the figure of Christ. The base is believed to be made from logs salvaged from the church that burned down in 1974. The sculpture was previously displayed in the old parish hall.

The hall can be rented for various family occasions: weddings, memorial services, baptisms, and birthday celebrations. It also serves as a venue for the congregation's own events.

The parish hall also houses the parish office/finance office, as well as the offices of the deacon, cantor, and vicar.



## Sarpatti

The Sarpatti house for children and youth was completed in 1987. It has a total floor area of 346 m<sup>2</sup> and was designed by the architectural firm Karvala & Sivennoinen.

The facility is almost entirely dedicated to children and youth. It hosts daycare groups, family clubs, growth group meetings, Gospel Cafés, and activity evenings called SarpattiÄxön for primary school-aged children. It is also a regular meeting place for scouts. In addition, the building is used for various leisure clubs for slightly older participants.



## The Granary

Near the parish parking area stands the Granary, one of the oldest buildings in Pyhäjoki, built in the early 19th century. The activities carried out in this loan grain granary have ensured the continuity of (Greater) Pyhäjoki's agriculture for centuries. The building is classified as a regionally valuable cultural site. Today, the granary serves as a storage facility for the parish.

Near the Granary stands a memorial donated in 1997 by the war veterans of Pyhäjoki:

*"From this area, the men of Pyhäjoki  
departed  
to the Winter War and the Continuation  
War.*

*Fatherland  
You called us  
to defend the land of Finland  
We heard the call  
we did our duty  
Our homeland remained free"*



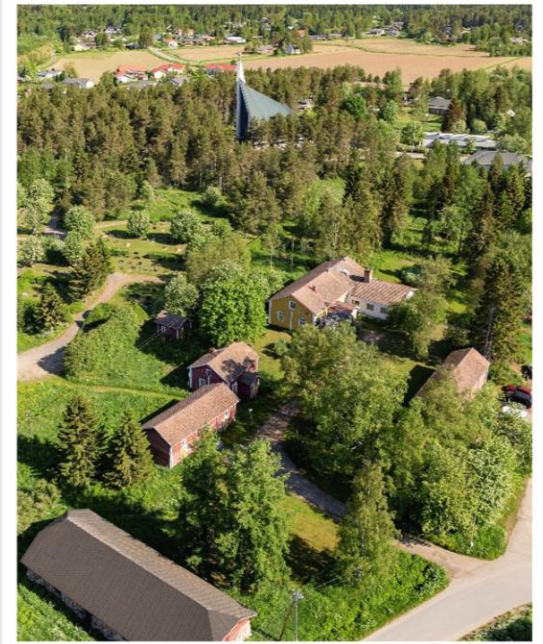


## The Vicarage

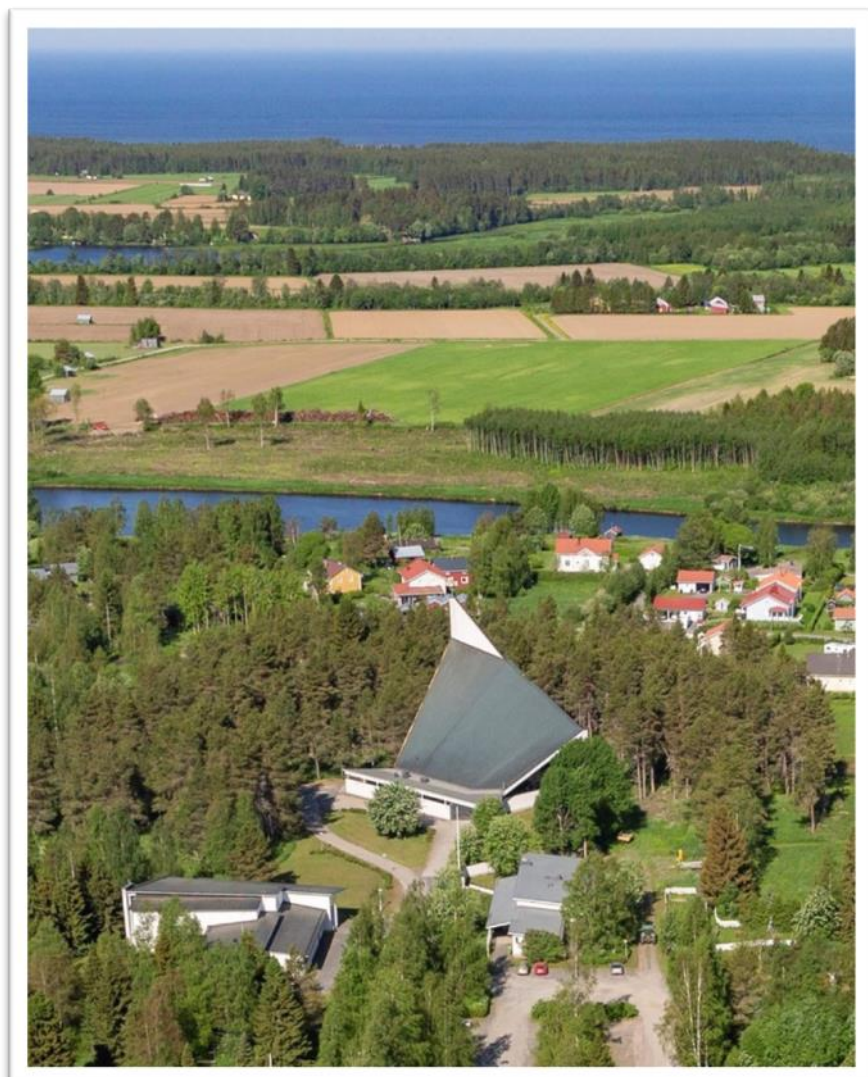
The vicarage courtyard includes several buildings: the main building constructed in the 1850s, with a wing added in 1954; a farmhand's cottage; a three-part shed/stable; a four-part shed; a stone barn; a sauna; and a root cellar.

The history of the vicarage buildings dates back to the 19th century, and the entire vicarage courtyard is considered a culturally and historically valuable site both regionally and nationally.

The vicarage was sold in 2023 and now houses the Cultural Center Villihanhi Association (Kulttuurikeskus Villihanhi ry).



**The church grounds**, with its buildings and cemetery, form a wide, cohesive park in the heart of the village center. The area is a pleasant place to rest, featuring old pine trees shaped by sea winds and charred trunks that serve as a reminder of the church fire.







The church is a community  
for you,  
in every stage of your life.  
The parish is  
a community for everyone.

Come, and rest a while.



References:  
Viisi kirkkoa  
Vetten laijoilta