

We must fly a blue-black-and-white flag, not a white flag

Tomorrow, 5 June, will mark the 100th anniversary of the ordination of Jakob Kukk, the first Bishop of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, at the Charles XI Church in Tallinn.

A crosier with decorated silver top was crafted for the first Bishop of the independent people's church, and it has been preserved up to this day. The Bishop's crosier is distinctively decorated with the Estonian national-style cross ornaments, and its crook bears an image of the blue-black-white flag on both sides

Using national colours and flag symbols on a bishop's crosier is very unique. This shows that, one hundred years ago, the ordination of the first Bishop of the free people's church of the young Estonian Republic had a symbolic meaning to the whole country and nation. The flag colours on the crosier conveyed the message that the Estonian people had their own Estonian church in Estonia.

The state and the church of Estonia are blood relatives. The shared history of the independent Estonian nation state and the independent Estonian people's church began in St. Petersburg in 1917, when 40,000 Estonians marched in a peaceful demonstration under their national flags from St. John's Church to Tauride Palace to demand autonomy for Estonia from the Provisional Government of Russia.

The independence of Estonia was finally won at the price of the blood shed under that same flag in the battles of the War of Independence.

Back in the days of the War of Independence, the Military Chaplain Service of the Estonian Defence Forces was established by a directive of Commander-in-Chief Johan Laidoner. At the time he was elected the first Bishop of the Estonian Lutheran Church, Jakob Kukk was serving as the military chaplain of the 1st Division in the War of Independence. In today's terms, he was a chaplain.

The young state and the young church were fighting side by side, with what physical and spiritual military equipment they had, for the survival of the people of Estonia and the independence of our country.

Over the course of more than a hundred years, even in the most complicated times, in the days of hunger and poverty, the Church has never given up its spiritual service to the people of Estonia nor ceased to pray for the nation and its leaders. And it has continued to do so in times of peace.

I must admit that today's Flag Day has a somewhat sad undertone to it. As the Head of the Church, I am not sure whether the Estonian state, whose Defence Forces gave the Estonian church its first bishop during the days of the War of Independence, is able to value the intercessions of the church these days, having made the acting chaplains redundant. What will the defence capability and the people's will to defend be like in a country that has voluntarily abandoned intercessions? It is my sincere hope that the blue-black-white flag, and not a white flag, will be raised in the face of an enemy.

The Church will continue to pray. We will continue to pray for our country, our people and the leaders of our people. I will pray for God's continued blessing also today.

May Almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, bless this flag, and our free country and its leaders and people. Amen.

Urmas Viilma

Archbishop of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church

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