

Parishes 1626–1929

The seven Swedish parish formations established abroad resembled, in many respects, the parishes within Sweden. The overseas parishes were intended to offer Swedes living abroad worship services and parish life in their own language. They emerged over a long period of time and have roots reaching back as far as the seventeenth century. The parishes are (with year of establishment in parentheses): the Sofia Parish in Paris (1626), the Ulrika Eleonora Parish in London (1710), the Gustaf Parish in Copenhagen (1901), the Victoria Parish in Berlin (1903), the Margareta Parish in Oslo (1911), the Olaus Petri Parish in Helsinki (1922), and the Swedish Parish in Buenos Aires (1929). Those established around the turn of the twentieth century arose from motives that were both religious and nationalistic, characteristic of the period.

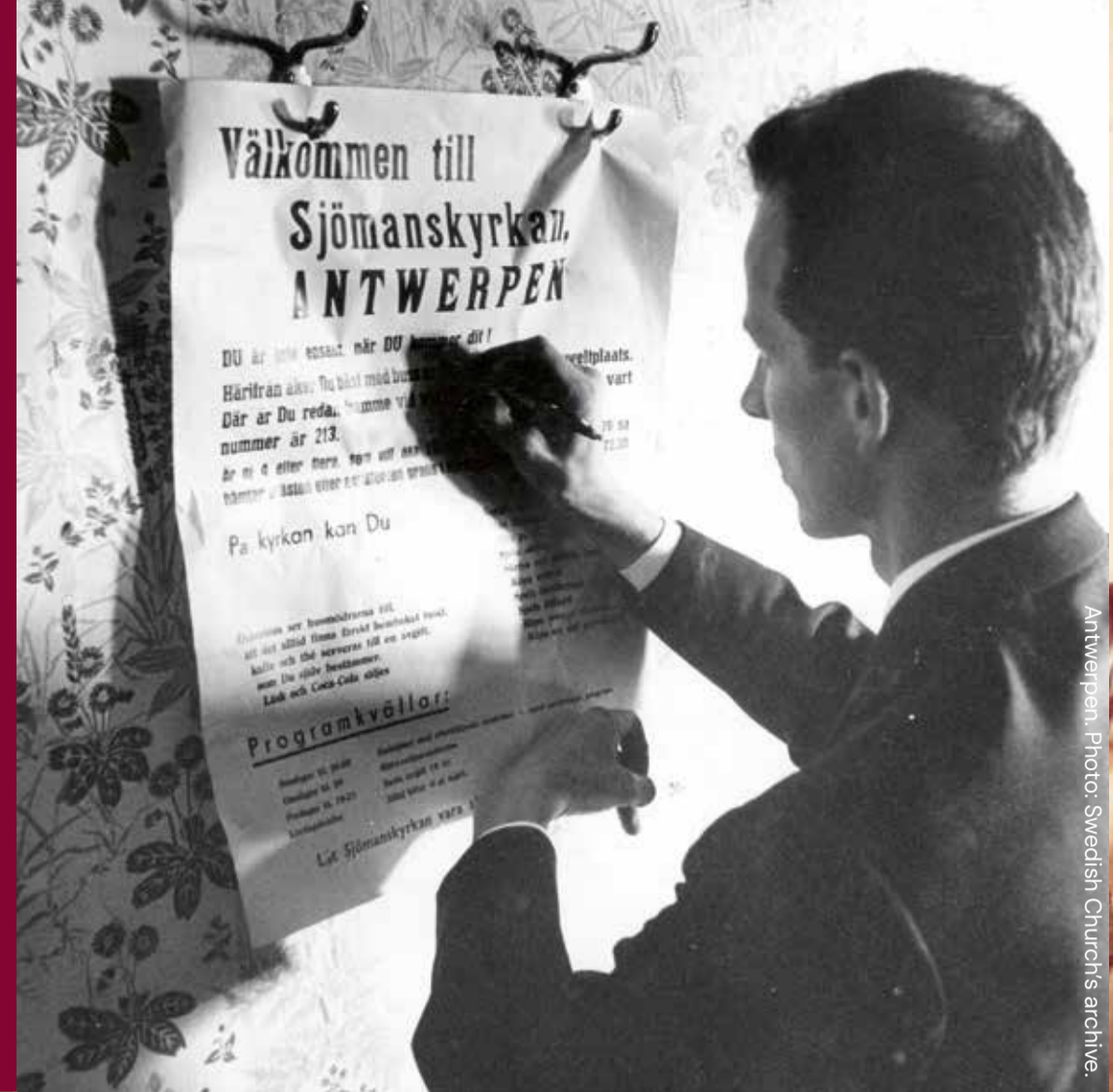


Traditions & Economy

Throughout history, Christmas celebrations, Christmas bazaars, Lucia processions, and other expressions of Swedish culture and identity have played a significant role in Swedish churches around the world. They have provided opportunities to gather in fellowship, but also to work together. The economic importance of Christmas bazaars for the survival of the churches abroad should not be underestimated. The often exceptional voluntary commitment, renewed year after year, generates a substantial—and absolutely essential—income for church activities. To be able to spread light in the darkness and preserve a part of one's Swedish identity through Lucia, to gather around the nativity scene, listen to the priest's Christmas sermon, and share a meal with familiar flavors means a great deal to Swedes living far from their homeland. The Church is, and for more than 400 years has been, an important bearer of culture.



**Church
of Sweden**



A Safe Haven for Seafarers

The first Swedish seamen's chaplain was sent abroad in 1709, to Constantinople. It was also there that Swedish seafarers' welfare work was initiated by EFS in 1869. The EFS seamen's mission was supported by those influenced by the neo evangelical revival, and its primary aim was to convert sailors to a Christian way of life. Understanding of social welfare efforts, however, was limited. The seamen's church work that later developed within the Church of Sweden had a different character. The social needs of seafarers were placed at the centre, and the Church's efforts were shaped by those needs within a folk church approach. The Gospel was to be offered to all Swedish seafarers, together with social care and support. Visits to ships were combined with reading rooms and libraries, and eventually with buses transporting sailors from ship to seamen's churches, offering an environment removed from harbour taverns and prostitution.

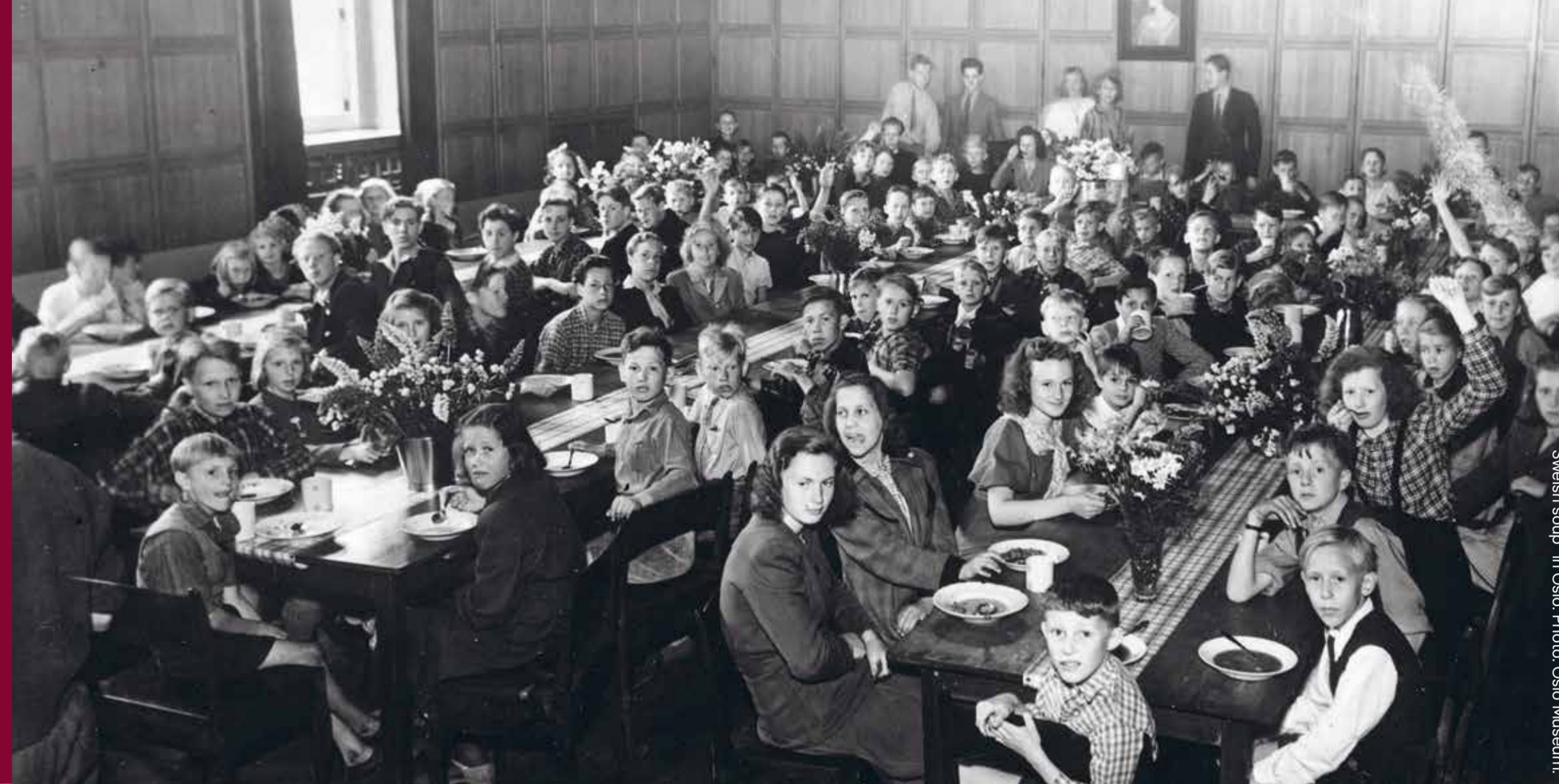


Present — in the midst of life

When people find themselves abroad, a sense of unfamiliarity often arises, as they do not have the same knowledge of local laws, regulations, or health insurance systems as they do at home, and their mother tongue is replaced by another language. The diaconal responsibility toward society means that the overseas parishes and their staff assume significant responsibility for people with a Swedish language identity who are in distress while abroad. This may involve situations such as death and accidents, substance abuse, exposure to crimes such as sexual assault, or individuals who have been sentenced to long prison terms. In cooperation with Swedish diplomatic missions, the overseas parishes carry out extensive work in support of individuals—a contribution that is highly valued by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.



**Church
of Sweden**



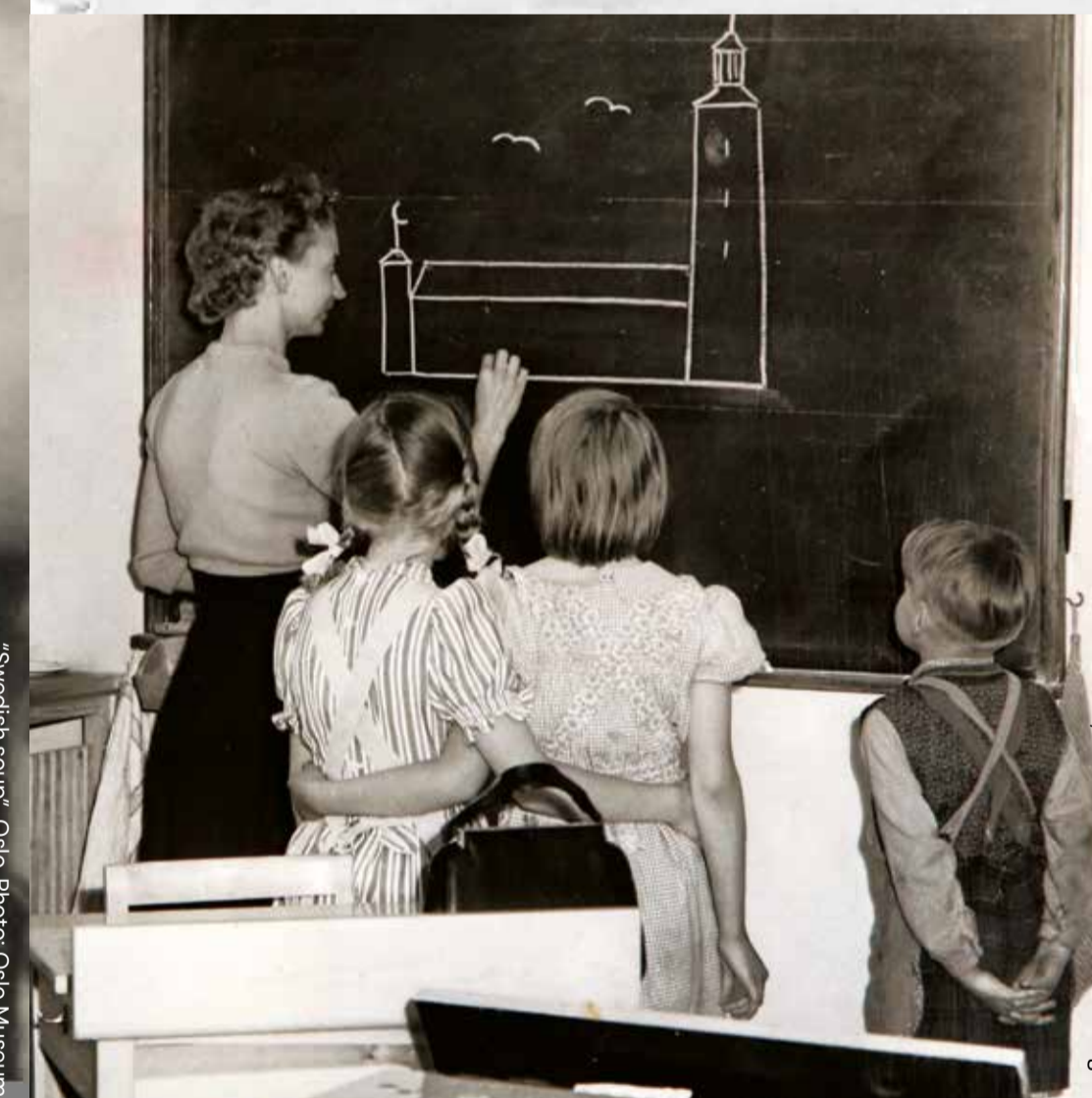
Swedish soup, Oslo. Photo: Oslo Museum.



Swedish church in Rotterdam after the bombing. Photo: Svenska Kyrkans arkiv.



Swedish soup, Oslo. Photo: Oslo Museum.



School children, Berlin. Photo: Victorforssamlingen.



Burnt down church, Berlin. Photo: Victorforssamlingen.

The War Years in Europe

As early as the seventeenth century, when Sweden was engaged in prolonged wars, priests were sent abroad with Swedish seafarers and soldiers. During the war years of the twentieth century in Europe, several Swedish parishes assumed a significant role. To mention a few concrete examples: in Oslo, church premises became dining halls where thousands of children received a daily meal known as “Swedish soup”; in Berlin, both the vicar Forell and Perwe cooperated with the resistance movement by forging identity documents and certificates. Swedish churches were destroyed in bombing raids, but in many places, there were resourceful staff members—such as the priest Hjorth in Rotterdam—who, thanks to hidden insurance documents, ensured compensation for reconstruction. In Hamburg, food parcels donated by Swedes Worldwide (SVIV) were distributed to resident Swedes.



Sommarkollekt

till våra ungdomar världen över
Gåvopostgiro 90 16 03-1

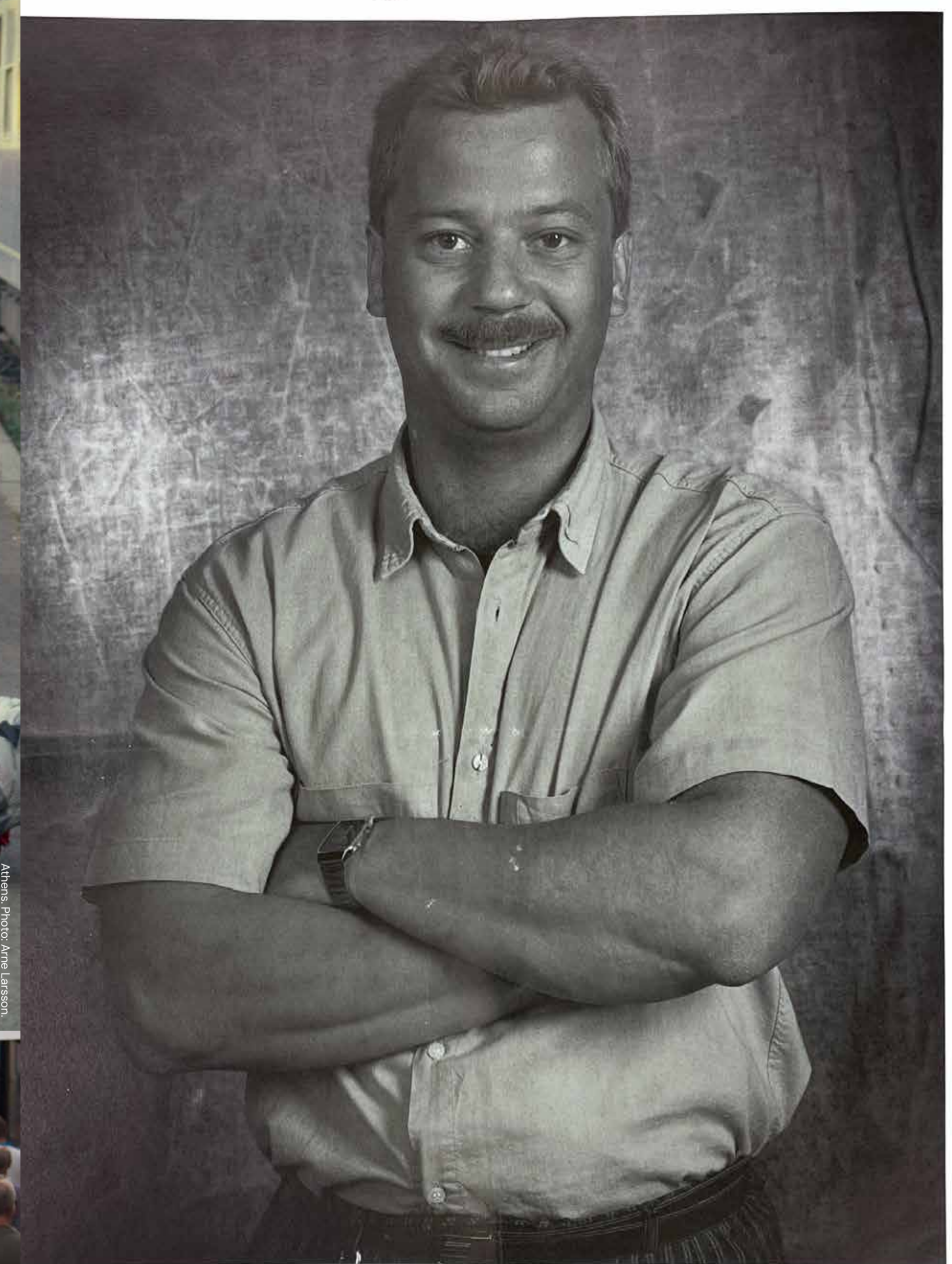


Svenska kyrkan i utlandet

Poster from Sweden Church's archive



Gör som långtradarchaufförerna



Atens, Photo: Arnel Larsson



land, Photo: Magnus Nilsson



Spain, Photo: Lena Sjöström



Wien, Photo: Carl Anders Nilsson

Besök din kyrka utomlands

Svenska kyrkan i utlandet — SKUT

Poster from the Swedish Church's archive

Tourists & Drivers

In the 1950s, the development of charter tourism began. At first, travel destinations were primarily Mediterranean countries and the Spanish Canary Islands, later expanding to other countries, including Thailand. The guiding principle was that the Church of Sweden would follow its members as they journeyed out into the world. It soon became clear that openness toward the Church was significantly greater abroad than at home, and the Church—serving as a Swedish outpost—came to gather people who would not otherwise have been churchgoers. Through its activities in tourist destinations, many discovered the Church of Sweden in a new way: the Church was open, welcoming, and social. It offered support when needed. This generated considerable goodwill for the Church of Sweden.



Church of Sweden



Mobile Priests

Local responsibility has given rise to newer overseas parishes. The regional church in Switzerland began as a locally initiated effort and was mobile from the outset, with worship services and gatherings held across the country. Over the past ten years, a centrally organized mobile ministry has been established. The mandate of the mobile priests includes outreach work, worship services, administration of the sacraments, and a societal responsibility carried out in cooperation with embassies, consulates, and other diplomatic missions—work in support of individuals that is highly valued by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Locally, volunteers are responsible for practical arrangements. Swedes living far from places where there is a Swedish parish are thus given the opportunity to participate in the festivals of the church year, have their children baptized, and have someone to talk to. This way of working aligns well with the ecclesiology of the Church of Sweden.





Parish Life

The parishes and other activities within the Church of Sweden Abroad are tasked with celebrating worship, providing education, and carrying out diaconal work and mission. The work of the Church of Sweden Abroad is oriented in much the same way as that of a parish in Sweden. However, the missionary dimension is particularly pronounced, as people who may previously have felt indifferent toward the Church of Sweden in their home country encounter parishes that, in both word and deed, engage with individuals in a wide range of situations—often difficult ones—thereby offering them a renewed experience of the Gospel. The diaconal responsibility toward society is extensive and constitutes an essential part of the work of the Church of Sweden Abroad. People with a Swedish language identity living abroad are subjects of the ministry, and their engagement and needs largely shape the parishes of the Church of Sweden Abroad and their activities.



**Church
of Sweden**