



ALVAR AALTO

## The Church of the Three Crosses by Alvar Aalto

After the Second World War, the Finnish state-owned forestry company Enso-Gutzeit wanted to develop a new industrial community in Imatra, to replace the one in Enso which had been annexed to the Soviet Union. Three former villages in the rural municipality of Imatra that were relatively distant from each other were merged and Alvar Aalto was commissioned to prepare a master plan. The industrial community also required church amenities, and thus Aalto was commissioned in 1955 to design a new church.

Aalto worked on the design of sacral buildings throughout his career, but several of his designs never went beyond competition proposals. Of his realised churches, the Church of the Three Crosses in Vuoksenniska is unique. The small sculptural parish church, rising up amidst pine heath, embodies the free and imaginative aspect of Aalto's architecture. The church can be said to be Aalto's response to the development of modern church architecture in central Europe and its significance can be compared to the Notre Dame du Haut in Ronchamp, France, designed by Le Corbusier and completed in 1954.

The main church space of the Church of the Three Crosses can be subdivided into different types of spaces, the most sacred of which is the altar end and its pews, and the organ and choir balcony. Opposite this, at the southern end of the building, one could play volleyball or badminton without disturbing the other activities, the architectural complex or the sacral nature of the church. For the everyday parish activities, a kitchen and meeting room were built in the basement.

Aalto, together with his office collaborators, designed the church interior, completed with its lamps, church collection baskets and candle holders, in the spirit of a total work of art. The church complex also comprises a 34-metre-high sculptural concrete campanile, as well as a vicarage that encloses the southern courtyard. The church has been listed in several different contexts as being one of the most important of Aalto's works.

### Restoration and fund raising

The gradual renovation of the church began already in 2012 under the direction of architect Tapani Mustonen and his skilful team. Unfortunately, fund raising has turned out difficult and slow. For that purpose, a highly appreciated initiative has been launched in Japan by Architect Andrea Hikone. Alvar Aalto Foundation fully supports her campaign and its purposes and hopes the best possible results to the effort.

Helsinki June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Tommi Lindh  
CEO / Alvar Aalto Foundation

## The Church of the Three Crosses at Vuoksenniska

After the Second World War, the Finnish sacral building faced a new era. The need for the new spaces was urgent due to the urbanization, the large number of children, the new parish activities, and the post war reconstruction of the country. Also, the architectural ideas altered, and modernization reached the sacral architecture – a quarter of a century later than in industrial or residential building.

Alvar Aalto's Vuoksenniska Church, completed in 1958, is regarded as a landmarking building in Finland. It started a new phase of modernish in sacral architecture. It also provided multiple functions for the parish use including modest indoor sports facility, lecture room, and canteen. The sacral character and architectural expression started to diminish in many cases as churches became merely parish centers, but not in Aalto's innovative building. Despite the complex variety of uses the Church of the Three Crosses has a clear impression of a sacral building, articulated by the over 30-meter-tall campanile.

The Church of the Three Crosses is considered Aalto's response to the development of modern church architecture in central Europe and its significance can be compared to Le Corbusier's masterpiece the Notre-Dame-du-Haut in Ronchamp, France. Being simultaneously a pioneering achievement of modern architecture and a new step in the tradition of sacral architecture the Church is a key building in Alvar Aalto's highly appreciated curriculum.

### Contemporary status

The Church of the Three Crosses is an architectural monument in a number of fields e.g., in Aalto's career, in European modernism, and in Finnish sacral building. Despite its immense and early recognized values, the state of conservation of the Church is far from adequate. Highly appreciated specialists of restoration of modern architecture, led by architect Tapani Mustonen have been designing the interventions in balance with the significance of the Church. But sufficient funding is unfortunately lacking.

DOCOMOMO Finland deeply regrets the status, yet fully understands the economic difficulties the parish has. Within these circumstances the volunteer initiative by architect Andrea Hikone's and A.H. Architects is more than welcome. DOCOMOMO Finland gives all the possible support to her fund-raising campaign.

Helsinki June 15<sup>th</sup> 2021

Petteri Kummala  
chair / DOCOMOMO Finland

## Support the Church of the Three Crosses -restoration project

The owner of the Church of the Three Crosses, Imatra parish (in Finnish: Imatran seurakunta), is a non-profit organization in Imatra, Finland. Parish has its own decision-making body and as an individual part of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland, it has the right to levy tax and receive a share of state tax. Majority (approx. 75 %) of the Finns belong to E-LCF via local parishes. The organization and administration are provided for in the church law. This public legal status requires the principle of transparency and disclosure in all of its activities. Local parishes are responsible for their social tasks such as church record keeping, cemetery maintenance, social services and church repair.

Imatra parish has a cultural and architectural masterpiece in its hands: the Church of the Three Crosses a.c.a. Vuoksenniska church. Architect Alvar Aalto started planning the church in 1955 and a few years later in 1958 construction was completed. Over the years Finland's harsh climate has unfortunately caused significant damage to the church and it needs urgent restoration measures. In the first place, the restoration project started in 2016 but was suspended a year later due to lack of funds. In November 2020 the parish was forced to close down the church due to moisture problems.

Imatra parish can manage all its social tasks except one – church repair. Levied tax funds are not enough to finance a massive restoration project. Total restoration costs are estimated to be around 2 MEUR. Imatra parish needs external support to complete a thorough restoration project.

Together with 13 other sites, the Church of the Three Crosses has been proposed to the Finnish tentative list "The Architectural Works of Alvar Aalto – a Human Dimension to the Modern Movement" for UNESCO World Heritage.

More information:

- Andrea's contacts here?
- [https://youtu.be/VaeK0AB\\_Ic0](https://youtu.be/VaeK0AB_Ic0)
- [Church of the Three Crosses \(Vuoksenniska church\) - Alvar Aalto Foundation | Alvar Aalto - säätiö](#)
- [Alvar Aalto architecture proposed for UNESCO World Heritage List - Alvar Aalto Foundation | Alvar Aalto -säätiö](#)
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