

The Surprising Truth of Where Ulf Ekman's Former Church Is Now

When Word of Life, a Swedish megachurch, had their founder step down last year after his conversion to Roman Catholicism, chaos could have ensued. Instead, the opposite happened.

The church, known for advocating unity, replaced Ulf Ekman with Joakim Lundqvist and saw attendance increase by 20 percent.

"We've been talking about unity a lot, but myself and the rest of the pastors have always done so in the sense that unity is based on the things we all have together—not on the exclusive Catholic doctrines," Lundqvist told *Charisma* CEO and Founder Steve Strang at an international leadership networking meeting in Miami.

Though Lundqvist admits to a "turbulent year," Ekman left one year ago this Sunday, Lundqvist and other leaders rallied together with their congregation and network to walk the road ahead.

"For everything he has meant for the church and for me, I want to honor him," Lundqvist says of Ekman. "I think it's a commandment of the Lord to honor your father and mother, even when they make decisions you cannot support, but on the other hand, I want to make clear that we as a church and I as a pastor am not going down the same road. We're an evangelical charismatic church, we have always been and we will stay that way."

Lundqvist, the senior pastor of Word of Life church for nine months before Ekman retired from ministry and a member of the church for 17 years, says members of the congregation, while

confused over Ekman, were open to moving forward.

“To clarify what this meant and did not mean for us as a church took a while, but it’s been a year now and we can truly see the grace and protection in the Lord,” Lundqvist says.

The Word of Life network is now 600 churches strong as they continue to focus on the commonalities between themselves, not the differences. None of their churches have left the network as a result of Ekman’s conversion.

“For my sake and for Word of Life, it’s important for us to clarify we’re building our future on the same evangelical foundation as has been ours from day one, We keep believing that unity is a beautiful thing, an important thing. However, unity should be based again in what we have in common ... and I’m not too sure the goal of unity is that we would become one and the same thing. I think we as churches are different parts in one big body. As long as we live in an attitude of love and blessing toward one another, our differences can be a good thing,” he says.

Part of that unity was answering questions church members may have had after Ekman’s conversion.

“It was a lot of hard pastoral work, a lot of questions to answer,” Lundqvist says. “We opened the church every night and we were there to answer questions. But of course, some of them not even we could answer, (like) how does Ulf Ekman deal with Catholic theology and doctrine?”