



HENNING TOFT BRO IS THE NEW BISHOP OF AALBORG

Elected after second round of voting sees him overtake his challenger



Bishop Henning Toft Bro in front of the Bishops' House in Aalborg. Photo: Christian Roar Pedersen

With 970 votes out of 1,812 against the 826 votes for his rival, Marianne Christensen, Dean Henning Toft Bro won the run-off election after trailing behind his rival in the first round. At a consecration service on 9th May he succeeds the retiring bishop, Soren Lodborg Hvas, as the new Bishop of Aalborg. Aged 53, Henning Toft Bro is probably the last bishop who can remain in

the seat until he is 70. There is a parliamentary majority for changing to a fixed-term system with a probable maximum of 12 years. The last 3 bishops in Aalborg have served for 25, 16 and 19 years respectively. "I feel happy and humble," said Bishop Henning after the election. "I look forward to bringing my influence to bear on our church in the midst of great change. The biggest challenge will be to make the church relevant all seven days of the week."

Folk musician in Toerfisk

Born in the west coast town of Thyboroen in 1956 Henning Toft Bro studied theology at Aarhus University before becoming pastor of churches in West Jutland and then Rural Dean of Mors.

The new bishop has a considerable range of experience behind him, including working as a fisherman and docker from 1974-76 before his studies. From 1983-95 he was a member of the folkgroup *Toerfisk* (Dried Fish), writing a number of songs and recording CDs both with the group and as a soloist. He has worked on cultural and music programmes for the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, was chair of the governors of Hjerm School for 7 years and has been chair of the Museum for Religious Art in Lemvig since 2004. Henning Toft Bro is married and has 3 children. He is credited with being an experienced churchman, a lucent theologian, a creative artist and a man of the people, notably with the dry wit of the West Jutlander. The first two verses of one of his songs read:

*Live your life while you have it,
Live it in peace and in storm;
See how the birds use the wind-drift
In headwinds life takes on form.*

*Life we live looking forward,
Looking back we see lifelong;
Whatever cramps or saddles it
Often loosens in song.*

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CITIZEN COMPLAINS OVER JESUS IN PASSPORT

The Jelling stone as a motif in the Danish passport upsets Roskilde director



The Crucifixion motif in the Danish passport

50-year-old director of Change Management in Roskilde, Karsten Riise Kristensen, has complained to the Danish Minister of Justice about the picture of the crucified Christ on the famous Jelling stone which appears in his and every Danish passport since 1996. He claims that it infringes his religious freedom.

"I quit the church when

I was around 20. Why should I be forced to carry this religious symbol of a system I have left?" he argues. He is willing to take his case to the European Court of Human Rights, where a recent judgment made it illegal for Italian schools to display crucifixes in the classroom.

Support for Karsten Riise Kristensen comes from a former Minister of Justice, the Social Democrat,

Why should I be forced to carry this religious symbol of a system that I have left?

Ole Espersen, who currently chairs the Legal Rights Foundation. "Passports ought to be completely neutral," he says. "The wisest solution would be to have no Christian or any other religious symbols in a passport."

A historical symbol

However, the legal spokesmen of the three governing parties offer no hope of change. Liberal Party spokesman, Kim Andersen, defends the Jelling Stone as an excellent illustration of Danish history and Danish culture, while Social Democrat spokeswoman, Karen Haekkerup, points out that there is a cross in the Danish coat of arms and the Danish flag. Peter Skaarup of the Danish People's Party argues, "We are a nation that is built on Christian values. We have religious freedom, not religious equality." Further to the political left, Anne Bastrup of the Socialist People's Party says, "I'm not a church member, but the Jelling Stone means just as much to me as it does to those who are. People think of it more as a historical symbol than a religious one."

NEW RITUAL FOR ORGAN DONATION

Loved ones can now say goodbye in a Christian context

The Danish Council of Ethics was established in 1988 in order to advise Parliament and the health authorities and to raise public debate on bio- and gene technologies with relation to humans, nature, the environment and foodstuffs. It has asked the Danish Lutheran church to draw up guidelines for a ritual to provide comfort and peace of mind for those about to lose a person who is brain-dead and has agreed to be an organ donor. In such situations, with tubes and technological terminology and time constraints, there is not the time or peace of mind that would otherwise exist to take leave of a loved one. The responsible council, the Hospital Chaplains Association, has produced the outline below (abbreviated here), which was confirmed by the bishops in January 2010.

Ritual for Organ Donation

...The situation is special in that the patient is brain-dead but the visible signs of death are not present. The patient is attached to tubes providing artificial life. After the ritual these will be removed and the patient will be transported from intensive care to the operating table... Often the death has been sudden and dramatic and the situation is made more difficult by the fact that it is the family or loved ones who have to leave the patient and not vice versa.... The ritual neither legitimises nor condemns the donation, and is only a guideline.

Once brain-death is confirmed and the family or loved ones have agreed to the donation, the ritual can begin. Hospital personnel can call the chaplain and create the framework for the service – table, hymn-books, flowers, candles, communion elements etc. The pastor may wear vestments. There is no time limit. The ritual may be shortened depending on the situation.

GREETING

INTRODUCTION

HYMN

READING e.g. Psalm 23 or Rom. 8 "Who can separate us from the love of Christ?" Or Rev. 21 "There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

PRAYER

e.g.
Our God and Father in Heaven!
We are gathered around (name's) death-bed and must realise that he/she is dead.
(Name's) body is still alive, but as a human being he/she is dead and we cannot get him/her back.
As living people we have hope – for that is how You have made us.
So we place our hope in You,
You who have given us life together with (name)..
We ask You to look after him/her and us who remain behind.
Heavenly Father! We ask You to be with us in both life and death, for You are our hope now and for ever! Amen

LORD'S PRAYER

BLESSING

HYMN

CHRISTIANS CAN NOW MARRY IN A VIKING CHURCH

On Maundy Thursday a reconstructed Viking church was consecrated by Bishop of Ribe, Elisabeth Dons Christensen. The church lies with other Viking reconstructions in Bork Viking Harbour near Hemmet in West Jutland and can now be used for services, baptisms and weddings – provided you bring your own pastor! For the church belongs to no particular parish. Ringkøbing-Skjern Museum director, Kim Clausen, says that the stave church is a copy of one from around the year 1000, just as Christianity was getting into its stride in Denmark: “We don’t know exactly what it looked like, but in nearby Vorgod remains have been found of the previous church and it’s the postholes from there that we’ve used as our starting-point.”

For a while the Nordic myths did battle with Christianity, so the church includes a wooden carving of the one-eyed Odin in line with the original found in a



The new Viking church at Bork Vinkingeavn. Photo: Ringkøbing-Skjern Museum

Norwegian stave church of the time.

The little church was filled to the brim and many stood outside listening to the loudspeaker relay of the service, after which the bishop performed the first baptism in the church – a boy named ‘Thorbjørn’.

CONFIRMATION KNOWS NO CRISIS

Every year in late April or May three-quarters of all 14-year-olds are confirmed through the Danish Lutheran Church. The coming-of-age ritual is prepared through the preceding winter with pupils beginning the school day once a week at their parish church. This year around 38,000 youngsters are being confirmed, 53% from Jutland, 25% from Zealand and the remainder from Funen and the other islands.

The content of the confirmation teaching is the tenets of the Christian faith and an understanding of the rituals of the Morning Service. Most churches require their youngsters to attend at least 8 Sunday services as well as follow the confirmation classes – taught by the church pastors or catechetes. Parents are invited

to meetings in the course of a season and pastors are always on hand to answer questions. But for most youngsters the party overshadows the pledge.

The day itself is a major family celebration costing somewhere between USD 5,000 and 10,000, and despite the economic crisis, this year is no exception. One measurement of the consumer cost comes from the Danish Limousine Center, which provides cars to ferry children to church and back. Here Gudrun Moeller says, “Last year we had not a single approach, this year we’ve already had 40! Our most popular limousine is a Hummer, which costs \$550 an hour to hire.” A similar amount is paid for a dress, according to Panayotis Bridal Gowns.

News in brief from church life in Denmark

Young Conservatives leave the church in protest. In protest at the continued linking of church and state, Young Conservatives are asking their members to leave the church, because of its favoured position in Danish society by which all taxpayers automatically contribute to the Lutheran church, irrespective of their faith or lack of it. Paradoxically, even when people leave the church, they still pay towards its pastors’ wages, so the Young Conservatives see their movement as a deliberate provocation.

Falling church attendance. A Gallup poll for *Berlingske Tidende* asked 1,003 representative Danes over 18 about their church attendance. The percentage results were as follows, with figures for 2002 given in brackets:

Often: 4 (6)
Regularly 9 (11)
Xmas/Easter 13 (12)
Very rarely 52 (55)
Never 16 (21)

Bible and Hymn marathons. Reading the whole Bible or singing all the 791 hymns in *The Danish Hymnbook* is becoming increasingly popular. In Ringkøbing Deanery, for instance, somewhere between 60 and 90 participants have been meeting in local churches to sing around 20 hymns an evening and then enjoy social fellowship. They sing more or less chronologically but take the church festivals into account in their efforts to reach their goal by the spring of 2011.

NEW INTERCHURCH COUNCIL CHAIR

International and educational experience comes to the fore



Hanna Broadbridge, Chair of the Interchurch Council.

In March Hanna Broadbridge was unanimously elected as the new chair of the Interchurch Council, or to give it its full title: The Council on International Relations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. She is known to readers as the co-editor of *Church News from Denmark*, and has a broad personal knowledge of churches in many countries, including the living conditions she has experienced as an EU election observer in Africa and the Balkans and on visits to Israel/Palestine. "I will never forget seeing an emotional Nelson Mandela casting his vote in Durban in 1994 at the first free elections in South Africa," she says.

As a current university examiner in English and former English lecturer at the Danish Educational University she has also been involved in education at the highest levels, while teaching high school English in Randers, together with her husband, Edward.

She has been active in St. Clemens Church Randers for over 40 years – the last 15 as chair of the church council. She also sits on the South Randers Rural Dean's Council and in the new Diocesan Council for Aarhus. Her first major participation as Interchurch Council chair will be at the General Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation this July in Stuttgart.

THE CHURCH HAS A FUTURE ON FACEBOOK

One in five pastors now on Facebook

The arrival of cyberspace networks has been embraced by many of the new young pastors and not a few of the older ones, according to responses from 1,040 pastors to a questionnaire recently sent out by Peter Fischer-Nielsen for his PhD project in Sociology of Religion at Aarhus University. "The social media are an obvious means to attract people into the church," he says,

"especially at a time when congregations are dwindling"

Bishop of Lolland-Falster, Steen Skovsgaard, agrees that this is one way forward, "especially in relation to young people. If they receive the right invitation, they will come. That's how they are these days. Perhaps we should begin to understand the church also as a *digital meeting-place*."

NB: TO ALL OUR READERS

New format for Church News

From next month, *Church News from Denmark* will be changing its format and date of issue. Articles will be produced on a rolling basis and gathered in an electronic newsletter to be issued on a monthly basis with in all 10 issues a year. We hope this will keep readers even better up to date with our news.

Please send us your feedback

We would like to hear your opinion about Church News from Denmark - whether favourable or critical. Reactions are welcome by e-mail:

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