

MOST IMMIGRANTS TO DENMARK ARE CHRISTIANS

Every month a new church is formed among the migrant populations



The newly-published book. The website www.migrantmenigheder.dk will also carry news in English

Immigrants are on average forming new Christian churches every month, with over 60 new congregations in the past 4 years. The latest figures in a book from the Council on International Relations and the Churches' Integration Service mapping out the new churches, put the number of new Danes attending Sunday services at c. 15,000, compared with 10-14,000 who attend Friday prayers in the mosques. There are at present 212 migrant Christian congregations compared to 114 Muslim mosques (2006).

Payback time?

45 of the new churches use the local Lutheran church facilities to hold their own services. While many of the immigrants are Roman Catholics from Eastern Europe, the percentage of Baptists and Pentecostals is also high, due, it is suggested, to the freer, more energetic form of worship they employ. In Svendborg Baptist Church, for instance, there are more new Danes than native Danes, and the older members of the church welcome them as an enrichment of their church, according to the report.

Ghanaian pastor Tony Acheampong of the International City Baptist Church in Copenhagen has gained over 200 members since it opened in 1989. "I'm deeply grateful that the missionaries brought the gospel to Africa," he says. "Now it's our turn to give back something of what we have received."

Integration via co-operation

To gather information and co-operation proposals 'The Danish Lutheran Church and the Migrant Churches' project was started on the initiative of all the bishops of Denmark – "a historical decision", says Joergen Skov Soerensen, head of the Council on International Relations, "and a historical movement in that so many churches were involved."

But Chair of the National Association of Parish Councils, Inge Lise Pedersen, warns, "The truth is that we haven't got very far yet. It's especially a problem in the city parishes, where they've barely realised that there are dark-haired, brown-eyed Christians living among them. We ought to be more open, not least for our own sake."

Asked whether he isn't encroaching on 'foreign' territory Bishop of Haderslev, Niels Henrik Arendt, says that there is no question of the Lutheran church attempting to 'gain a foothold' among the migrant churches. "We have simply neglected them for too long. Improved co-operation with their churches will be a strong element in integration," he says.

Elisabeth Krarup de Medeiros, advisory officer in the Churches' Integration Service, adds, "We have prepared the way to some extent with our book and website, www.migrantmenigheder.dk, but if the parishes don't follow up on it, nothing will happen. The new book and website together make an excellent start."

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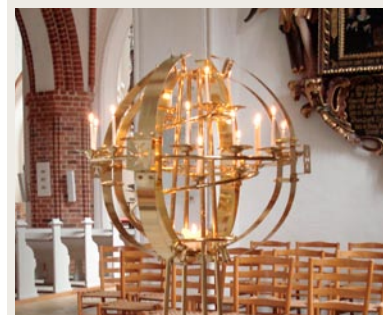
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COMBI-CHURCH DESIGN WINS COMPETITION

'New life in the Church' will be more performance-oriented



While 7 of the 10 Copenhagen churches listed for closure are joining forces in a single

parish, one of them is on the way to becoming a 'combi-church'. This is the result of an international architects' competition to combine traditional worship with ideas for 'New Life in the Church', as the project was called.

With financial backing of a number of church organizations and trust funds the competition elicited no fewer than 47 proposals to turn Gethsemane Kirke in the Vesterbro area into a church for local activities above and beyond church worship. The local co-op, the pub and the library have all closed down, but new life is planned for the church by the winners of the competition, Krydsrum Arkitekter, whose homepage at www.krydsrum.dk gives an idea of the new atmosphere they are seeking to create. Lars Christian Balslev, chair of Vesterbro City Churches Council says, "Our aim is to develop the church so that in both its content and physical form it will be better suited to the needs of a modern and young population."

"The winning project succeeded in creating a 'both-and' solution"

(René Kural, Architect)

More sports, more performance

Among the innovations are indoor sports on the church floor and a mobile glass fibre 'performance box' on rails with built-in lighting and digital screens, while solar panels are set to power the new 'multi-house'. The church tower will become a viewing platform and an art gallery. René Kural, the man behind the idea, is pleased with the results. "The project will enable the church to become a local rendezvous for schools and day-care centres among others," he says. "The winning project succeeded in creating a 'both-and' solution, so there may be games and sports on the church floor, but the altar and the font will remain. The next step is to find the 30 million Danish crowns to finance it – and that's our project for 2009."

THE PASTORAL VOW – AND THE DAILY REALITY

Who do pastors serve – and for how long?

The 130-year-old pastoral vow is coming under scrutiny as its interpretation is being stretched this way and that. Signed by the ordained pastor and counter-signed by the bishop the vow promises among other things that "to the best of my ability I will set myself against the misuse of the holy means of grace and oppose such teachings as contradict the creed of the Danish Lutheran Church."

Call to modify the vow

According to the vow pastors promise to serve God and the Danish church but not as such their congregations! In an online blog Pastor Benedikte Bock Hansen of Gammel Haderslev recalls how she was overwhelmed by all the tasks facing her in her early years as a pastor. She consequently set up her own 'house rules' for survival:

- The majority of the conversations I have take place between 08.00 and 15.30
- I will not employ a nanny so that I can attend to my work
- I will only have one evening meeting a week
- I won't answer the phone between 16.00 and 20.00

How should the pastoral vow be interpreted? In her newly-published book, *Praesteløftet* (The Pastoral Vow) Kristine Garde, an expert in church law, proposes that a bishops' commission should modify the vow to meet the needs of modern pastors. No one today knows what can be rightfully required of a pastor, since the 1877 vow only sets the *framework* for the pastoral calling – while also mentioning the 'final account'! "It's no good the church closing its eyes to the conditions under which pastors work nowadays," she says.

Retirement age extended

Another legal change in working conditions has already been passed. Last summer the obligatory retirement age of 70 was removed by parliament, and now the representatives of the pastors and the parish councils have agreed on 75 as the end of the line for Danish pastors. The same goes for other church personnel: organists, parish clerks/sacristans, vergers and sextons.

Chair of the Pastoral Association, Per Bucholdt Andreasen, says that "it is part of the general trend towards optional longer employment, and we acknowledge that we have a high degree of independence in our work. But new policies for seniors will now be required, including opportunities for more flexibility and for scaling down activities."

CANDLEMAS MAKES A WELCOME RETURN

Throughout Denmark churches are celebrating Candlemas again. 'Candlemas' comes from the Latin *candelarum missa*, meaning literally Mass of Lights. It is celebrated on February 2nd, forty days after the birth of Jesus, when Mary was allowed to return to the temple with her baby.

Candlemas was a holy day (i.e. a holiday) in Denmark until 1770, and its comeback as a church celebration halfway through winter is an interesting phenomenon. Danes are fond of their candles and burn them at every opportunity in the winter months, including live candles



The new light-globe in Nyborg Kirke. Photo: Nyborg Kirke

on their Christmas trees. At the Candlemas service in St Lukas Church, Aarhus, for example confirmation candidates carried candles in procession and read their own poems about light and darkness.

In Nyborg Kirke the return of Candlemas is linked to the purchase last year of a light globe for the church. Pastor Kirstine Arendt held a service this year with Christ as the Light as its focus. "Of course we were also celebrating the coming of the lighter months," she says. "We read Seven Lessons, beginning in semi-darkness with the Creation and 'Let there be light'. As we progressed, so more and more candles were lit."

"GOD CAN'T SAVE DENMARK"

Queen Margrethe II ends every New Year's Address to the nation with 'God save Denmark!' But after 3 years of doctorate study Peter Lüchau of Copenhagen University, argues that the words are simply part of the civil religion of Denmark and are no longer taken seriously.

'Civil religion' covers the beliefs and rituals that a nation uses in particularly important situations or moments. When an American president says 'God bless America', there is a genuine and general endorsement of the entreaty. But Peter Lüchau says that when we are told by politicians that Denmark rests on Christian values, it is purely wishful thinking. "If you ask the average Dane whether it's important to be a Christian to be a Dane, only roughly 30% would agree. It's far more important to speak the language, to respect the laws

and to *feel* Danish. The days of entreating God to save Denmark are a thing of the past. It's more an appeal to nationalism with a Christian streak rather than to a serious existential Christianity."

His figures and conclusions fly in the face of most other experts on Danish civil religion. Last year the same university's major inter-faculty initiative, 'Religion in Denmark in the 21st Century', concluded that the church and Christianity continue to play a central role in the Danes' self-understanding and the country's social cohesion. Peter Lüchau accepts that "the Danes' religiosity is stable, but Christianity cannot 'gather the nation' together. Danes no longer want or expect God to save Denmark."

News in brief from church life in Denmark

Bishops criticise Israeli bombing

8 Danish bishops wrote a strongly-worded criticism of Israel for its bombing last month of a clinic supported by Danish church funding. The bishops rarely agree on joint action, but Bishop of Haderslev, Niels Henrik Arendt, explained that the criticism was not directed against Israel as such, but against the bombing of a humanitarian target. Two bishops declined to sign, arguing that the risk of being seen to take sides in such an inflamed situation overrode all other considerations.

New party, new policy

Following internal disagreement with the Social Liberal party, MP Simon Emil Ammitzboell has formed a new centre-right party, Borgerligt Centrum, whose policies include three on religious matters: the separation of state and church, the teaching of *all* religions in schools rather than just Christianity, and the removal from the church of the registering of births. He himself is an atheist, but welcomes all and sundry into the party; "Christian, Muslim, Jew – you're equally Danish," says Ammitzboell.

The Lord's Prayer and Morning Assembly

Denmark's Humanist Association has started a debate on the use of the Lord's Prayer in morning assemblies of public schools, arguing that together with all other prayers it should be excluded by law from all public schools. The vast majority of schools hold a morning assembly at least once a week where songs and hymns are sung, but "prayer has no place in the public school system," says association chair, Erik Bartram. The Minister of Education will leave the decision to the individual schools.

THE DANISH SEAMEN'S CHURCH OF NEW YORK

Closely linked to Denmark, but a continent apart

Founded in 1878 and housed in a 'brownstone' at Brooklyn Heights, the Danish Seamen's Church is a base for many Danes living in or visiting the Tri-States.

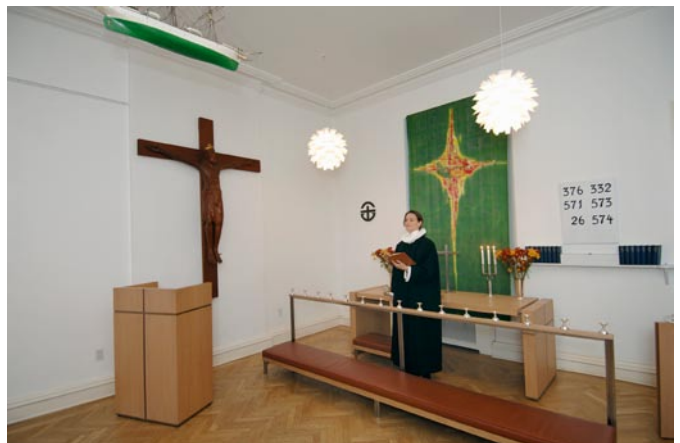
Pastor Kristian Hein tells Church News how his church is a thriving religious, cultural and social community of mostly Danes and their families, a number of whom attend the church's Danish language course. The church also sends out a Danish language newsletter every quarter to 2,000 subscribers, and being largely self-financing, it does a lot of fund-raising too. Only the pastor and the two curates are paid from Denmark.



The facade of the Danish Seamen's Church in New York. Photo: www.dsuk.dk

The Sunday service follows the Danish Lutheran liturgy and is attended by 40-70 people, while some 6,000 a year in all pass through the church doors. The Danish Network (mainly 18 to 35-year-olds) meets on Thursdays and, following a Danish Lent tradition, 120 children 'knocked the cat out of the barrel' last year!

In September Pastor Julie Sloek arrived as curate with her husband and two children. She told Kurt Balle Jensen for the magazine *Nyt, the Danish Church Abroad*, "Quite a few of our members are 3rd or 4th generation Danes who are curious about their roots, so we hold cultural evenings with songs and talks about Denmark. And pastoral care is important, especially for the bereaved, who sometimes feel they are a long way from home."



Julie Sloek in front of the altar of the Danish Seamen's Church in New York. Photo: Joergen Ploug, www.ploug-foto.dk

DENMARK'S FIRST PILGRIM CENTRE

Since its opening in 2004 Denmark's first pilgrim centre in Viborg has gone from strength to strength. Now it is enjoying the services of Pastor Anette Foged Schultz, who has been appointed as the first 'pilgrim pastor' in Denmark. With her considerable practical experience and her publication of *Pilgrim Walks with Children and Youngsters* in 2006, she has "worked to get pilgrimages into the church and will now work to get the church into pilgrimages," as she puts it. She sees pilgrimages as reflecting life's movement from start to finish with the option of 'walking together' with fellow-pilgrims.

Among its other ventures the centre is holding an exhibition of icons in early February, all painted by 86-year-old Bent Gildsig in traditional byzantine style. He has donated 45 icons (so far) to the centre, explaining that "I can't take them with me."

Chair of the centre, Kis Bødker, says that pilgrimages and icons are two sides of the same coin, namely a spiritual search among modern people that leads back over 1,000 years of Christianity's history to former ways of living 'the good life'.

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:

interchurch@interchurch.dk