

**Come on in!  
The Church is open**





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# Welcome to the Danish Lutheran Church

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In this folder you can read about the Danish Lutheran Church (folkekirken), of which around three-quarters of the Danish people are members.

You can read about how the Danish Lutheran Church works, and about the history of the Church and Christianity in Denmark.

You can read about the Church services and the possibilities for talking to a pastor or another Christian.

You can read about how you can be baptised, what you need to do if you want to get married, and how you can have a deceased relative buried from the Church.

You can also read about the many activities in the Danish Lutheran Church throughout the country. These activities vary from church to church, so you can't be sure that all of them take place in the church in your neighbourhood.

In some churches, there are meetings and arrangements that are aimed especially at asylum-seekers, refugees, and immigrants.

At the back of this folder are the address and phone number of your local church, where you can get further information about the offers and opportunities in your area.





# How can you use the Danish Lutheran Church?



In recent years, a considerable number of refugees and immigrants have come to Denmark. Quite a lot of churches have therefore introduced arrangements that are especially aimed at helping them. These include church services, preparation for baptism, and social and cultural arrangements.

## Church services and baptism classes in English and other languages

Some churches hold services in English. In other churches, the service is translated, for example into Farsi (Persian) and other languages.

Some parishes have appointed pastors with a special responsibility for serving refugees and immigrants.

A number of churches have set up preparation for baptism for people coming from a different religious background who wish to learn more about Christianity and become Christian. The preparation ensures that they receive a thorough knowledge of Christianity before they finally decide if they wish to be baptised.

## Meals and homework help

Some churches hold evenings where they share a meal – perhaps under the headline

'Criss-cross Meals' or 'Eat and Sing'. Often a migrant group is responsible for preparing the food, and the meal is a good chance to get to know one another personally and to learn about one another's culture and traditions.

Some places offer help with homework – both for adults at language school and for children in the *folkeskole*.

## Friendship contact

It can be a great help to have a contact person or friendship family that you can link up with – both while seeking asylum and during the process of integration. This relationship offers good contact with other people, so you are not alone in your new community and feel lonely. It can also be a good way to learn a bit about how Danish society works. You can get answers to practical questions and also learn about the national holidays and special traditions in Denmark. Then you can better understand some of the things that are different here compared with the culture you bring with you from your homeland.

Your friendship contact can also help to explain the contents of letters from the local council, the Danish Immigration Service, and other authorities.



# What does the Danish Lutheran Church offer?

Every Sunday the Danish Lutheran Church holds a service in a local church where the congregation gather to praise and pray to God. Bible-reading, prayers, the sermon and hymn-singing are fixed elements, and as a rule, Holy Communion is celebrated. In some places, the organ music is supplemented with modern rhythmic songs. The number of churchgoers varies. In some churches other people than the pastor take part with hymns of praise, the serving of the bread and wine at Holy Communion, reading aloud passages from the

Bible, and saying prayers. Elsewhere the pastor leads most of the service. There may also be a baptism during the service.

## Talking to the pastor

You can always ask to talk to the pastor. It may be about the big questions, such as life and death, or the meaning of life. It may be in connection with mourning a death, a divorce, an illness, or a depression. The pastor is bound to secrecy by an oath of silence, so you can confide in

him or her and know that what is said remains between the two of you. You can also ask for prayer or for confession from the pastor.

## Special meetings and activities

The church service plays a central part in the fellowship of the congregation. In many places, there are also special arrangements. There may be meetings for senior citizens, baby hymn-singing for parents with infants, or 'God and Spaghetti' services for families with older children followed by a spaghetti meal. Perhaps there is a youth choir or a gospel choir. Some churches hold a series of talks with visiting speakers. In many churches, there are church concerts, and there may be other activities on the programme. It varies from place to place, depending on needs and resources.

## Baptisms, weddings, and funerals

The Danish Lutheran Church is also the framework for baptisms, weddings, and funerals. These Church ceremonies must be agreed with the pastor beforehand.



**TESFU GHEBRU,  
REFUGEE FROM ERITREA**

Tesfu Ghebru was granted asylum in Denmark in 2010. He grew up in a Coptic Orthodox family in Eritrea, and at the age of 13 he began to attend a Protestant church.

Soon after Tesfu Ghebru came to Sandholm asylum centre in Denmark, he saw an invitation for an English-language service in Copenhagen. He went along with another Eritrean asylum-seeker, because they wanted to find a church where they come into contact with Danish Christians.

"It means a great deal to us to go to church, not just to celebrate God but also because in church we find a social fellowship as brothers and sisters in Christ," says Tesfu Ghebru, who lives in Næstved and works in a warehouse in Ringsted on Zealand. He still goes to church in Copenhagen every other week to take part in the international services.





# What do we believe?

BY BISHOP MARIANNE CHRISTIANSEN,  
HADERSLEV DIOCESE

The Danish Lutheran Church contains many church voices, and each parish and church has its own particular way of being a church and a congregation. There is a great variety, but what gathers our Church into one is our belief in the triune God, revealed in Jesus Christ the Son of God, as the liberator of joy.

## Faith alone constitutes our relation to God

Through the Gospel of Jesus Christ we know God as the Creator, who has created the world, every being and every person. We know God as Jesus Christ, who acts with mercy in the world and preaches his word. And we know God as the Holy Spirit who is always in the world and among us and creates faith, hope, and love.

The core of our Church and our faith is an understanding of the Gospel as a liberating, joyful message. We do not need to *deserve* God's love, for we already have it, because of Jesus Christ and what he did for us. For the Evangelical-Lutheran Church it is a central belief that God has become the man Jesus Christ and has entered the world and our life in order to bear it. He bears the sin and guilt and death that are our life-conditions as human beings. Faith in God's mercy – God's love and forgiveness of our imperfection – constitutes our relation to God. This is not something



we ourselves have to achieve. Faith is the Holy Spirit's gift to us.

In consequence of this belief that we cannot do anything for God in order to be saved follows the Evangelical-Lutheran idea of 'the priesthood of all believers'. This means that every person who is baptised is priest, bishop, and pope! This in turn means that we have the same relation to God whatever our church status.

These ideas find specific expression in our Church structure. The Church is led by the church members. It is the individual congregation that calls its pastor to serve them.

## The Gospel brings joy

Martin Luther (1483-1546, a German monk and reformer) understood the Gospel as

being the good news which we cannot help but sing and tell, so that people can hear it and be happy! This focus on the joy that the Gospel brings has influenced the way that the Evangelical-Lutheran Church holds its services. We sing a lot when we worship. Our joy receives extra expression through singing and making music.

A number of passages from the Bible are also read aloud during the service, and their interpretation in the preaching is also important. The joyful message of the passages from Scripture, together with their interpretation in the hymn-singing around them, is therefore a special characteristic of our Church.

## Baptism and Holy Communion

The two sacraments in the Lutheran Church are also a special characteristic of our faith. These are Baptism and Holy Communion, and both are an integrated part of the Sunday service.

Baptism is the covenant between God and humanity that forms the foundation for the rest of our lives, meaning life accompanied by Jesus Christ. You can only be baptised once.

Holy Communion is a recurring ceremony in memory of Christ and what he did for us. But it is also a means of 'embracing' the Word/Jesus Christ not as a symbolic act but in reality. In our Church, we have the principle of an open Holy Communion, which means that you do not need to be a member of the Danish Lutheran Church in order to participate.

**THE DANISH LUTHERAN CHURCH.** The Danish Lutheran Church is the largest church community in Denmark. Around three-quarters of the population are members of it. Among the pastors in the Danish Lutheran Church the numbers of female and male pastors are almost equal.

**MEMBERSHIP.** At Baptism you become a member of the Danish Lutheran Church. You can also join the Church if you have been baptised in another Church. You do not have to be a Danish citizen in order to be a member.

**CIVIL REGISTRATION.** In Denmark – apart from in South Jutland – the Danish Lutheran Church is responsible for civil registration. This means that all births and deaths are registered at the local church office (the *kordegn* office), whether or not the parents of the new-born baby or the deceased person are members of the Danish Lutheran Church.

**THE CHURCH AND THE PLACE OF BURIAL.** Outside many churches, especially in the countryside, there is a churchyard. Everyone can be buried in the churchyard, even if they are not members of the Danish Lutheran Church. In many of the larger cities, the place of burial is separate from the church. In some of these, special areas are set aside for the graves of Jews, Muslims, and other Church communities.

**10 BISHOPS.** Geographically the Danish Lutheran Church is divided into 10 dioceses, each of which is led by a bishop. In each diocese there is a pastor who is appointed with special responsibility for asylum-seekers who want to know more about the Church.





### SALAM GHAZI OG ZINA RASSAM, REFUGEES FROM IRAQ

Salam Ghazi and his family fled from Saddam Hussein's rule in Iraq in 2000. That year Salam Ghazi reached Denmark, but his wife Zina Rassam and daughter Meena stayed in Jordan before arriving here five years later. The family were granted asylum in 2008. In Iraq, they were part of a Chaldean Catholic Church in Baghdad.

The family spent a number of years at Sandholm asylum centre and began to go to the international services at various churches in Copenhagen.

"It was very important for us to go to church. We experienced freedom, and it was nice to meet and talk to other people. It is harder if you just sit at home. The fellowship means a lot. This way we also get to know Danish culture," say Zina and Salam, who now live in Birkerød on Zealand, but still attend the international services in the Copenhagen area. They have finished 'Danish Language School' but have not yet found a job. Meanwhile their daughter is in high school.



# The History of Christianity in Denmark

Christianity was introduced into Denmark over 1,000 years ago. Today around 80 per cent of the population are members of the Danish Lutheran Church or another Church community. Roughly, 7 per cent are members of other faith communities – Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and other faiths.

## Traces of Christianity back to 700 CE

Christianity was officially made the religion of the Danes by King Harald Bluetooth in 960. However, research has shown that already around the year 700 there were signs of Christian mission in Denmark.

The many country churches throughout the land testify to the spread of Christianity over the following centuries. There are over 2,300 parish churches in Denmark – and nearly 75 per cent of them were built before the Reformation in 1536.

## The Reformation

The Danish Church is an Evangelical-Lutheran Church and has been so since the Reformation in 1536, when King Christian III decided that the Church should no longer be Roman Catholic. In

the following years Lutheran Christianity was the only denomination that was allowed in Denmark.

## The Struggle for Religious Freedom

After a number of years, other faith communities were given concessions. Foreign embassies were allowed freedom of religion in their own areas, so from 1671 Catholic masses were held in a chapel at the French embassy. In 1682, Jews were allowed to build a synagogue in Fredericia. Other concessions followed, but complete freedom of religion was not introduced into Denmark until 1849 as part of a new constitution. At this point, the absolute monarchy was abolished and replaced by a democratic form of government.

The Constitution states that "the Evangelical-Lutheran church is the Danish Lutheran Church and is supported as such by the State" (Article 4).

Today, in addition to the Danish Lutheran Church, there are many other Church communities in the country. There are also faith communities of Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and other faiths. All in all, there are over 275 recognised Church and faith communities in Denmark.

## There is more information at these websites:

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### **[www.asylsamarbejde.dk](http://www.asylsamarbejde.dk)**

Here you can find information about the Danish Refugee Council, which coordinates the work of the Danish Lutheran Church for asylum-seekers and refugees. On their homepage there is a list of pastors who have a special responsibility for asylum-seekers.

### **[www.tvaerkulturelt-center.dk](http://www.tvaerkulturelt-center.dk)**

The Intercultural Christian Centre is a network and resource centre under the Danish Lutheran Church for parishes, migrant congregations, and Christian work among refugees and immigrants in Denmark.

### **[www.folkekirken.dk](http://www.folkekirken.dk)**

Here you can find information about the

Danish Lutheran Church and its work, about its faith foundation, and what you need to do if you want Baptism, confirmation, a wedding or a funeral, or wish to join the Danish Lutheran Church. The homepage also has links to local parish churches and to statistics about membership numbers.

### **[www.km.dk](http://www.km.dk)**

This is the homepage for the Ministry for Ecclesiastical (Church) Affairs, containing information about the ministry and the laws that govern the Danish Lutheran Church.

### **[www.andretrossamfund.dk](http://www.andretrossamfund.dk)**

This part of the above ministry's homepage contains information about the laws that govern other faith communities in Denmark. Here there is also a list of recognised faith communities.

*Contact the Danish Lutheran Church (folkekirken) in your area*

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[ Tilføj lokale kontaktoplysninger her ]

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