

Report of the National Committee in Denmark

In this short report we have identified five issues which have been of general concern on national level during the past year.

1. Reform of governance and structure of the ELCD

The long-awaited report by the Commission on the Administration of the Danish Lutheran Church was published in early April 2014. Eighteen months in the making, the report makes four central recommendations:

- The state's ear-marked grant to the church should be replaced by a non-earmarked grant to the church exchequer (fællesfonden).
- A democratic church institution should be established, the Church's Joint Committee, with control over the church exchequer and a sphere of authority in the church's internal affairs
- The Episcopal Collegiate should be given statutory form
- The internal affairs of the church should continue to be regulated by royal decree (i.e. through parliament) or by regulation

These recommendations were made by a large majority of the commission and were welcomed by Minister of Church Affairs, Marianne Jelved. The plan is to complete all consultations within 6 weeks and table a white paper in parliament in June. Party political negotiations will be completed by September and a bill presented at the opening of parliament on 7 October 2014.

2. Dispute over baptism practice

During the weeks before Christmas 2013, a dispute over baptism practice broke out between the ELCD bishops and an ELCD pastor primarily working with migrants. In short, the pastor was employed for a three year project. Prior to this he was a pastor in a migrant church established by himself, originally associated with the Pentecostal movement but later independent. The three year project aimed at (in due time) making his migrant church, in which he continued to serve as a pastor, a self-sustaining Evangelical-Lutheran congregation associated with and independent from the ELCD (in Danish a 'valgmenighed'). This has not happened yet. The dispute arose from the pastor's practise of baptising migrants without ensuring that all of them became members of the ELCD. The bishop of Fuen (and later all the bishops collectively) remained firm on the stand that ELCD pastors' baptism practice must entail membership of the ELCD. The pastor, on the other hand, argued that his migrant church (of which several of the migrants he baptised became members) functions as induction to the ELCD in the long run, for people coming with significantly different backgrounds, cultures, languages etc. Therefore ELCD membership cannot be expected immediately. The bishop and the pastor have agreed to speed up the process of making the migrant congregation a self-sustaining Evangelical-Lutheran congregation associated with and independent from the ELCD (a 'valgmenighed'). The case caused a heated debate in the media.

3. Women clergy feel more pressure than their male colleagues

A recent survey on the clergy's psychological working environment by the Ministry for Gender Equality and Church Affairs reveals that women priests feel the strain of their

job far more than their male colleagues. 60% of them answer that to some degree, to a considerable degree, or to a high degree, they feel drained by the never-ending call on their time and commitment.

4. New Knowledge and Study Centre for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark

It has been decided to set up new Knowledge and Study Centre, including allocating funds for the running of such a centre. The centre is to gather knowledge about the ELCD and its relation to the Danish people. It will have 3-4 employees and will be located in Aarhus.

5. Baby Hymn-singing brings in a whole new congregation

As a new 'fresh expression', Baby Hymn-singing has enjoyed rapid growth since its general inception in Denmark in 2003. A recent study by Christina Skovgaard Iversen and Gitte Ranfelt Laugesen of its use in the Aarhus area documents its benefits for parent and child alike. It is "reaching out to a part of the community that is usually not associated with church" they write in their Danish study with the English title: Taking a child by the hand is taking a mother by the heart. Though the study was carried out in the Aarhus area, the Baby Hymn-singing concept is found in many local congregations throughout the country.