

SPAIN: Spanish evangelicals opened 16 new worship places every month in 2018

There are 4,238 evangelical places of worship in the country. Evangelical Christians are the religious minority with the greatest presence in the country.

By Daniel Hofkamp

Evangelical Focus (07.01.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2SD5noW> – Evangelicals opened 16 new places of worship every month in Spain in 2018, according to the latest annual report of the national Observatory of Religious Pluralism.

The official figures of this agency of the Spanish Ministry of Justice show that there were 4,238 evangelical places of worship in December 2018, an increase of 197 new places compared to those registered in December 2017.

The government's statistics include Adventists and Anglicans under the category of evangelicalism, but the largest evangelicals denominations in Spain are Assemblies of God, Baptists, Brethren and independent churches.

The figures confirm the positive trend of growth of the last years.

The Roman Catholic Church still owns most worship places in Spain – 23,019.

Evangelicals, the faith minority with most places of worship

Evangelicals represent the biggest percentage of temples among minority faith groups: 58.5%.

Muslims follow, with 22.5% and a total of 1,632 places of worship; Jehovah's Witnesses, with 627 spaces, 8.27%; and the Orthodox, with 216 temples, 3%.

With fewer worship places are Buddhists (171), Mormons (115), Jews (39), Baha'is (45), Hinduists (25) and Sikhs (22).

Catalonia, Andalusia, Madrid

The December report showed statistics by regions, offering a comparison with the 2013 data.

In these five years, the places of worship of religious minorities have increased in all the Autonomous Communities (the 17 regions of Spain).

Catalonia -where there are already about 1,500 temples- Andalusia -1,131 places of worship- and Madrid -1,020- are the regions where there are most evangelical church buildings.

The regions where fewer new openings of places of worship have occurred are Melilla -29 compared to 28 in 2013-, Asturias - just two new places of worship in the last five years, with a total of 82- and Cantabria with 52 places of worship, only 7 more than in 2013.

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KAZAKHSTAN: Kazakh Baptists

raided, fined on Easter Sunday as 'illegal'

World Watch Monitor (04.05.2017) – <http://bit.ly/2q35uzI> – Tammar leads a church of young Uyghurs in Kazakhstan. On Easter Sunday, as 20 of them gathered, there was a sudden police raid, including members of the anti-terrorist team. All 20 had to sign a form saying they were at this 'illegal' meeting, and Tammar was fined \$900. At first, he wouldn't sign, but his wife Nadina advised him to. He had to borrow money to pay the fine.

A week after the raid, Tammar found a dead dog in the garden – he took it as a warning his family was being watched. The shock and stress caused a pregnant Nadina to miscarry at five months.

Police raided meetings of at least two Baptist Churches on Easter Sunday, April 16th, including in the central city of Temirtau and the southern city of Taraz.

Kazakh authorities insist—despite the country's international human rights obligations—that religious communities must gain state registration before they are allowed to meet. Anyone who defies these restrictions risks raids by police and other state officials. Such raids on congregations of the Council of Baptist Churches are frequent; they choose to hold their church services without seeking state registration.

Its Church members visited the General Prosecutor's Office in the capital Astana twice in 2017, Dmitry Yantse, on its Council, told Forum 18. Baptists informed the state Office that the churches' decision not to seek state registration "is their conviction and not a whim."

However, Kazakh police also have the right to fine individuals

without a court hearing. On Easter Sunday, they issued four fines – totaling about nine months' wages – with no court hearings.

Since the start of 2017, police and courts have enforced about 20 fines on Baptist community members; Dmitry Yantsen told Radio Free Europe's Kazakh Service of a "new wave" of raids against their communities across Kazakhstan.

Separately, a court in the southern city of Almaty has banned a Protestant church from meeting for three months, according to another report from Forum 18. The court also fined members for holding a church service in a place other than its registered address. An Indian associated with the church is appealing against a fine and deportation order.

An official of Almaty's Religious Affairs Department, Karshyga Malik, told Forum 18 that the administrative cases against the church and the Indian are among 33 it's launched since the start of 2017. The cases are meant to punish those who meet 'illegally' or who meet in other than the registered places, as well as those who distribute religious literature and talk to others about their faith without state permission.

Imprisonment

While Protestant communities are having to pay fines, some others are imprisoned for their faith. On 2 May the court in Astana sentenced Teymur Akhmedov, a 61 year old bus driver (who suffers from cancer) to five years' imprisonment for talking about his faith. As a Jehovah's Witness he met with seven young men who claimed to be students but turned out to be secret police informers. His sentence also includes a ban from conducting "ideological/preaching activity in the area of religion" for three years after the end of his sentence. Another man arrested with him on similar charges, Asaf Guliyev, was sentenced to five years' restricted freedom.

This comes in the wake of a Supreme Court ruling in

neighbouring Russia on 20 April, where the court ruled in favour of the government and outlawed the Jehovah's Witnesses as an "extremist" group. According to the Ministry of Justice the group had distributed materials that incited hatred against other groups.

Pressure on Christians slowly increasing

World Watch Monitor reported a year ago on a number of 'Easter raids' on churches by the authorities as well. Where President Nazerbayev in 2015 appeared to be positive about the influence of Protestant churches, the pressure on Christians was slowly increasing, said a charity worker then.

Kazakhstan is 43 on the World Watch List of 50 countries where it's most difficult to live as a Christian.

Legal details

Administrative Code Article 489, Part 9 gives police officers the right to fine individuals without a court hearing for "Leadership of an unregistered, halted, or banned religious community or social organization."

This was first given under the 2015 revision of the Code of Administrative Offences. Such fines are first known to have been imposed in 2016, also against Baptists.

The fine can rise to 100 Monthly Financial Indicators (MFIs), or \$725 US.

(According to February 2017 average income figures from the Statistics Committee this is about three months' local wages. However, some of those fined are unemployed or pensioners on lower incomes, such as 70-year-old Ivan Yantsen, a Baptist known to have been given such fines this year).

□It's possible to challenge police-imposed fines through the courts or a Prosecutor's Office. However, this process is more difficult (as with court convictions) than lodging an appeal

to a higher court against a lower court decision.

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