

## Some legislation on religious and belief communities

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HRWF (05.12.2016) - The total population of Norway is about 5.2 million. The National Statistics Bureau estimates 74 percent of the population belongs to the Church of Norway.

The National Statistics Bureau reports Christian denominations other than the Church of Norway have 297,000 registered members, or 53 percent of all religious and life-stance registrations excluding the Church of Norway. The Roman Catholic Church is the largest with 96,000 registered members. Pentecostal congregations have approximately 39,000 registered members. Membership in Muslim congregations is 141,000. Muslims are located throughout the country, but the population is concentrated in the Oslo region. Jewish congregations have approximately 750 registered members. There are two official Jewish congregations, one in Oslo and one in Trondheim. Buddhists, Sikhs, and Hindus together constitute less than 5 percent of registered members of religious groups.

The Norwegian Humanist Association is the largest life-stance organization registered with the government. It has a registered membership of 88,000.

Immigrants make up the majority of members of religious groups outside the Church of Norway. Immigrants from Poland and the Philippines have increased Roman Catholic Church membership. Immigrants from Muslim countries, including Iraq, Pakistan, and Somalia, have increased the size of the Muslim community. All of these groups have greater representation in cities than in rural areas.

### **Registration of faith communities**

The registration procedure of faith or belief communities is part of the **Act relating to faith communities and others** issued on 13<sup>th</sup> June 1969.

Relations between official authorities and faith or belief communities take place through regional officials, here called the County Governor (i.e. *Fylkesmann*; there are 19 *fylke*, or regions, a territorial and administrative entity between state and municipality).

The community registers with the County Governor (section 14) and provides the following information:

- Complete name and address of the community
- Basic creed and doctrine
- Information about the organisation, activities and membership
- Names of board members (if there is such)
- Name and sphere of responsibility of each spiritual and administrative leader.

Denominations with congregations in various regions (*fylke*) either register as one entity under one name or let their congregations register separately.

Some communities choose to have one central registration, e.g the Roman Catholic Church or the Methodist Church, whereas others let each local congregation take care of their own registration—two examples being the Muslim communities and the Pentecostal congregations.

Every year before 1<sup>st</sup> March the faith or belief community is required to send a short written note to the County Governor on its activities during the last calendar year

(Section 16). The community is also to notify the authority if there are any changes within the community as regards doctrine or leadership.

Non-registered communities cannot apply for the right to perform wedding ceremonies.

### ***Governmental funding***

The government provides financial support to all registered religious and life-stance organizations based on the number of members reported to the government.

Any registered faith or belief community has the right to receive governmental grants, but must apply for these to the County Governor each year before 1<sup>st</sup> April. The written application must state the number of members in the community on 1<sup>st</sup> January of the same year. The Norwegian Humanist Association is also funded by the state.

The amount given to faith or belief communities depends on their membership and is calculated by the Department of Justice every year, using government funds allocated to the state church and its membership as its basis. The amount per member is the same for all communities. The amounts are channelled to the faith communities according of the type of registration they have chosen: either to the central entity (i.e. Methodist congregations) or to the local entities registered separately (i.e. Muslim and Pentecostal communities).

The state grant must be used for "religious purposes". The communities must record their expenses and submit an accounting to the County Governor each year before 1<sup>st</sup> March. The community board or a registered accountant must sign the account.