

CHURCH OF NORWAY



The Church of Norway has been a folk church comprising the majority of the population for a thousand years. It has belonged to the Evangelical Lutheran branch of the Christian church since the sixteenth century.

About 83 % of the Norway's population holds membership in the Church of Norway today. The church plays a central role in Norwegian religious life, with a strong commitment to ecumenical relations.





19th century Christian spirituality in Norway was characterised by pietistic revivals. Hans Nielsen Hauge became the most prominent figure. (Painting by A. Tidemand - National Gallery, Oslo)

1000 years of Christianity

The Christian faith came to Norway in the ninth century. It was brought to western Norway by missionaries from the British Isles, and to eastern Norway by missionaries from Germany and Friesland, by way of Denmark.

Norwegian kings played an important part in the country's Christianization, and political interests were an undeniable part of their endeavor, along with the spiritual. King Olav Haraldsson, and his death at the Battle of Stiklestad (north of Nidaros, now Trondheim) in 1030, played a significant role toward uniting the nation in the Christian faith. He was beatified, and is considered the patron saint of Norway. His shrine, at the high altar of Nidaros Cathedral, was a goal for large numbers of pilgrims from all of Northern Europe, until the time of the Reformation when the shrine was removed from the Cathedral.

With its roots in the Catholic Church of the Middle Ages the Church of Norway became a Lutheran church through the Reformation in 1537. At that time, Norway and Denmark were united, and the Lutheran confession was introduced by the Danish king, Christian III. In a certain sense, the Church of Norway has been a "state church" since that time, although this designation fits best for the constitutional form of the church after 1660.

The Norwegian Constitution of 1814 confirmed that the Norwegian state, independent from Denmark, would retain "the Evangelical Lutheran religion" as the official state religion.



The Archbishopric of Nidaros included present-day Norway, parts of present-day Faroes, the Shetland Isles, the Hebrides and the Isle of Man.

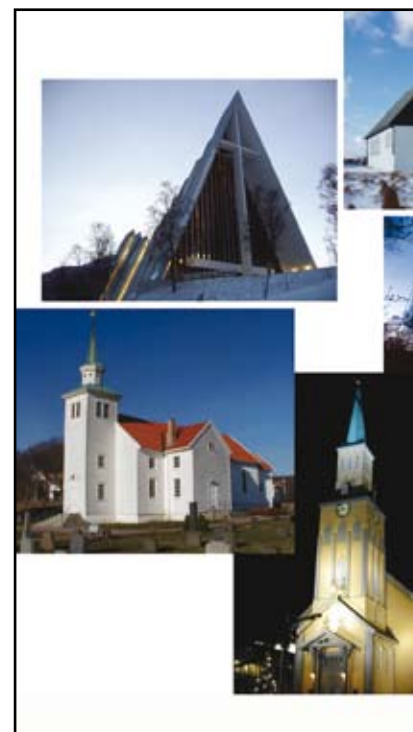
The Church of Norway today

In 2005 approximately 76% of all infants were baptized in the Church of Norway. 1290 parishes have 9000 parish council members, 1400 pastors and 6200 other employees.

The Church of Norway is one of the few remaining state churches in the world today. Its long-standing episcopal order was supplemented by a synodical structure in the twentieth century. Parish Council members are elected by the church members. These councils in turn elect the eleven Diocesan Councils and the 86 representatives to the General Synod of the church. A growing number of pastors are women (19% in 2007) and three of the eleven bishops are women (2007).

The Sami people are a significant part of the Church of Norway. Since 1992 there has been a Sami Church Council. Its task is to develop Sami church life built on Sami languages and cultures.

The King is the constitutional head of the Church of Norway. His authority in this regard is exercised jointly with the government within the Council of State. Until 1989 most categories of pastors were named either by the Council



Norwegian church architecture spans the whole country from the stone churches of the 11th century to the street

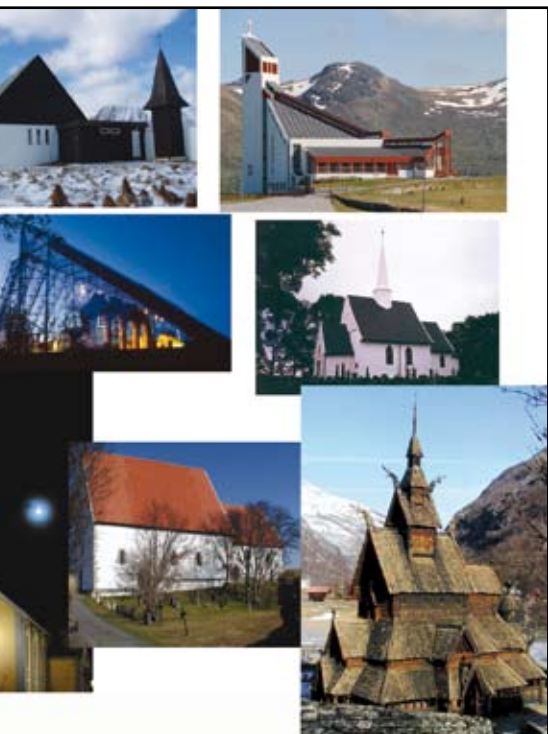
of State or by the Government. Since then all pastors are appointed by the Diocesan Councils, with the exception of deans and bishops, who are still named by the Council of State.

Strong lay movements in the last two centuries, organized through domestic “inner mission” and societies for mission abroad, have shaped the Church of Norway by gathering groups under lay preachers in prayer houses.

Church relations

Strong commitment to missionary activity brought international awareness and knowledge of other cultures to local parishes in the mid-nineteenth century. Grass root contact with Christians from other traditions has remained a significant feature of the Church of Norway. And in the twentieth century the ecumenical movement has shaped the church's identity and profile in significant ways. It is among the founding and active members of the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation and the Conference of European Churches.

The Church of Norway participated actively in the establishment of the Christian Council of Norway in 1992, which merged in 2006 with the Norwegian Council of Free Churches. It is the first ecumenical body in Norway with both Pentecostal and Roman Catholic membership.



...e periode from the stave (wooden) churches and Romanesque
...mline concrete of the 21st century.

In 1996 the Church of Norway signed the “Porvoo Common Statement”, by which Nordic and Baltic Lutheran churches and the Anglican churches of Great Britain and Ireland affirm each other's proclamation, sacraments and ministries.

The agreement with the Methodist Church, signed in 1997, “The Church – A Community of Grace”, links the Church of Norway with the Methodist Church of Northern Europe. And the “Leuenberg Concord” (1973), between the Reformation churches in Europe, was ratified and signed by the Church of Norway in 1999.

The Church of Norway is actively involved in international missionary and humanitarian work, and has a longstanding and strong commitment to churches and countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It has close partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, and has signed formal agreements of cooperation with the Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil, and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa.



Numerous Christian organisations working with children and youth regard their activities as part of the parish work in the Church of Norway.



The signing of the Porvoo Agreement in the Cathedral of Nidaros on 1 September 1996. (NTB-photo: Gorm Kallestad)



The Church of Norway General Synod meets once a year. The General Synod has 86 members, including the eleven diocesan councils. All bishops are members of the General Synod.

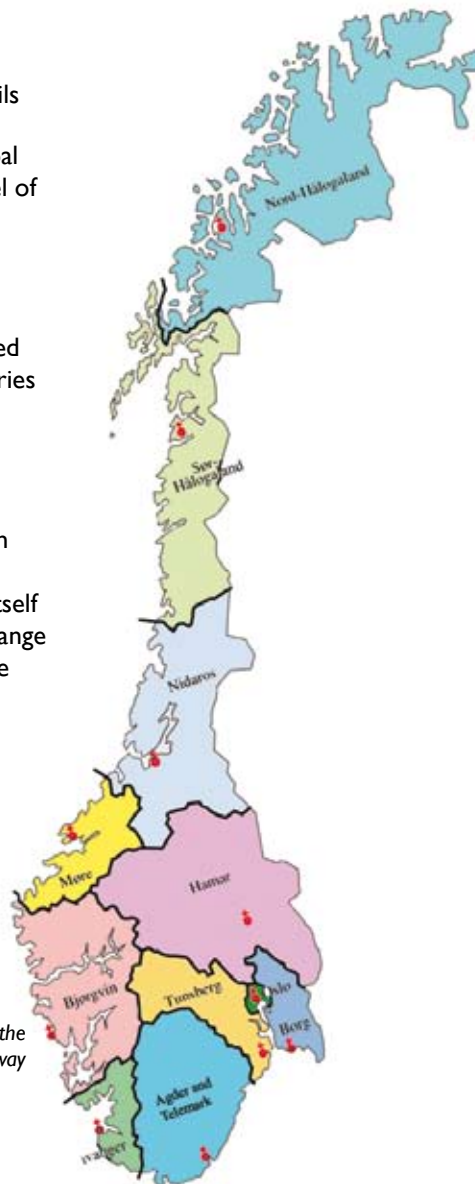
Church of Norway figures

- A membership 3.9 million – 83 % of the population
- 76 % of all infants were baptized in the Church of Norway 2005
- Approximately 100 people attend each service
- Approximately 70 000 services are held per year
- 11 dioceses
- 103 deaneries
- 1290 parishes/congregations
- 1600 churches/chapels
- 1400 pastors
- 6200 employees in other categories
- 9000 elected members of Parish Councils

According to Norwegian church law, Municipal Councils are obliged to finance a certain level of activity in the Church of Norway parishes. In 2006 the total grants from the Municipal Councils amounted to approximately NOK 1.9 billion.

In addition, the Parliament (Stortinget) granted more than NOK 1.2 billion to cover the salaries of the clergy as well as diocesan and central church administration.

Currently - The future relationship between church and state is currently the subject of a broad discussion, involving both the church itself and the political parties. Any fundamental change in this relationship must be decided on by the Norwegian Parliament.



There are 11 dioceses in the Church of Norway

CONTACT

Church of Norway General Synod
Church of Norway National Council
Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations
Church of Norway Sami Council
Church of Norway Bishops' Conference
Church of Norway Information Service
Address: Rådhusgata 1-3, Oslo
P.O. Box 799 Sentrum, N-0106 Oslo, Norway
Telephone: +47 23 08 12 00 Telefax: + 47 23 08 12 01
E-mail: post.kirkeradet@kirken.no
Web: <http://www.kirken.no/english>

Cover photo: Hidra Church, Rolf M. Aagaard, Aftenposten