

Faroe Islands

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FAROE ISLANDS

(draft version of 14 August 2014)

I. Social Facts

The Faroe Islands are in the Atlantic Sea, north of UK, west of Norway and south of Iceland with nearly 50.000 inhabitants, with 20.000 other Faroe Islanders living abroad. 83% are members of the Faroese Folkchurch, which is an evangelical-Lutheran established church. 10% belong to the influential Plymouth-brethren, established in 1880 by Scottish missionaries (low-church, no baptismal of small children). 3-5% other Christian groups (Pentecostals, Adventists etc); the Catholic Church has up till 170 members. – Only 4% are without any church relation; the islands are a society, where religious faith and religious arguments are influential also in political and social contexts.

II. Historical Background

The Faroe Islands were first settled in the 600's by monks from Ireland. Vikings took over, but Christianity was re-introduced in 999. An independent diocese was established 1111 under the archbishop in Lund (then Denmark); from 1152 the diocese became part of Nidaros in Norway. - The Danish king, since 1396 ruling over Denmark-Norway-Iceland, incl. the Faroe Islands, introduced Reformation in the entire Kingdom in 1536, however with some Faroese delay due to long distances and Counter Reformation. The independent diocese disappeared in 1557 and Faroe Islands became a deanery under the bishop of Copenhagen. –The Faroe Islands were kept part of Denmark after the Peace of Kiel in 1814. - Danish was the official language also in Church until both languages became equal in the 1920'es. - The Faroese dean became vice-bishop (referring to the bishop of Copenhagen/Denmark) in 1960. In 1990, a Faroese diocese within the Danish church was re-established and a bishop appointed.

In 1849, Faroe Islands got freedom of religion by the Danish constitution. The Catholic Church tried to reestablish. From 1931, two catholic priests and a group of Franciscan sisters succeeded in establishing a congregation and a school with very good reputation. The school is now, due to lack of resources, taken over by public authorities.

Politically, a system of Home Ruling in the Faroe Islands was established by Danish law in 1948. Here, Faroe Islands was identified as an independent nation of people within the Danish state. - Home Ruling authorities in Faroe Islands have legislative and administrative powers, based on public elections. The Faroe Islands have authority to conclude international treaties. They are not a member of the EU. The Danish assignment to the European Convention of Human Rights covers Faroe Islands, but neither ECHR nor UN-treaties are implemented into Faroese law.

III. Legal Sources and Basic Approaches to Religion and Belief

The Danish constitution is fully into force in the Faroe Islands. – Accordingly, the Evangelical-Lutheran Church is the Folkchurch and as such supported by the state (§ 4) and organized by law (§ 66). – These powers were in 2005 as part of a general Law on Delegation of Powers to the Faroese authorities transferred to the Faroese parliament. – Consequently, the Faroese Folkchurch was established by Faroese law of 7 June 2007; the law came (symbolically) into force on the Faroese national day.

IV. Individual Freedom of Religion and Belief.

The general scope of protection, the status of minorities, the activities protected and limitations are the same as in Denmark.

V. The Legal Status of Religious Communities.

The Folkchurch is established as a combined episcopal-congregational church, organized from below in a geographical structure of local congregations with priests for every third church and with local congregation councils, caring for organizational matters. The local councils are independent legal persons, whereas the church as such more is to be seen as a branch of public authority. - There is no law on other religious communities.

VI. Religious Autonomy

Rituals etc now gain legal authority through authorization by the leader of parliament on proposal from the bishop through the Faroese government and based on committee-deliberations within the church. Both the bishop and the government have also influence in cases, where a priest might be seen as outside Evangelical-Lutheran confession; a final structure for such cases has to be found.

VII. Education

Opposite to all other Scandinavian countries, confessional evangelical-Lutheran Christianity is taught as school subject in the Faroe Islands. – Theological education comparable to West-Nordic theological university faculties, supplemented with a one-semester-course in Faroese church affairs, offered by the University in Torshavn, is required as precondition for appointment as a priest in the Faroese Folkchurch.

VIII. Religion and Personnel Matters

Priests in the Faroese Folkchurch are civil servants, as are the Danish. An agreement on salary and working conditions was concluded with the Faroese Ministry of Finances in 2009. – The first female priest was ordained for service in 1977.

IX. Finance

The Folkchurch is financed through the same combination of local and national church taxes, supplemented with economic support from the Faroese law on Budget as is the Danish. A new Faroese law on church economy came in force in 2007.

X. Religious Assistance in and Access to Public Institutions

The Folk Church keeps the registration of inhabitants and has the authority regarding funerals in the Faroe Islands, such as in Denmark. – The church is very visible in the Faroe Islands. The Faroese National day, the 29th of July, *Ólavsøka* (after the Norwegian king and Saint Olav Haraldsson who united and Christianized Norway) is opened by two subsequent processions. First, bishop, priests and politicians go to the Cathedral to attend a feast-service (by the Bishop). Secondly, they go in procession to the Parliament to open the parliamentary session (by the leader of Parliament).

XI. Religion and Family Matters

Faroe Islands have both civil marriage and religious marriage in church with civil authority, as has Denmark. – Abortion is prohibited by law; there is no law recognizing couples of same sex. – A central argument behind establishing an independent Faroese church (and independence of EU) was to escape these developments.

Select Documents

Law nr 137 of 23 March 1948 with later alterations on Faroese Home Ruling

Law by the Danish Parliament nr 578 of 24 June 2005 on Delegation of Select Areas to Faroese Authorities

Law by the Faroese Parliament nr 60 of 7 June 2007 on establishment of the Folkchurch on Faroe Islands

Select Bibliography

Jákup Reinert Hansen: Nyordningen af Folkekirken på Færøerne [New Establishment of the Folkchurch on Faroe Islands] in Balslev-Clausen et al *Bekendelse og Kirkeordninger*. Kirkeretsantologi 2010, Anis 2010, p 175-191