

10,000 Leave Church of Denmark Amid Atheist Campaign

BY STOYAN ZAIMOV / ChristianPost.com



As many as 10,000 people left the Church of Denmark between April and June, due in part to a nationwide atheist campaign urging people to question the divinity of Jesus and the importance of believing in God. Statistics showed that those 10,000 are almost double the number who left the faith between January and March, which has led the Danish Atheist Society to celebrate the news.

"Surveys have long shown that not many Danes are devout Christians," Danish Atheist Society chairman **Anders Stjernholm** noted. "The withdrawals express the fact that people can't really see why we should have an institution like the Church of Denmark that has incredible influence and takes one's money."

The questions that were posed in banners around the country included: "Why believe in a God?" "Why should faith cost something?" and "Did Jesus and Mohammed speak with a God?"

The Church of Denmark—the official, state-supported religion—has been experiencing a steady decline in expressions of belief, as have state-sponsored religions in a number of European countries in recent decades. All Danish citizens become members of the Church when baptized, but can withdraw their membership by joining another religion, or leaving faith all together. **Still, church leaders remain optimistic**, arguing that the record number of people leaving will not have a lasting effect.



Anders Gadegaard, the dean of Copenhagen's Church of Our Lady, said that even though many are leaving the faith, **the number of baptisms is also on the rise**. "Spending millions (of kroner) on advertising for withdrawals will have an effect. But at the same time, we are seeing an increase in the number of enrollments (and) a rising interest in belonging to the Church of Denmark," he added. On a bus campaign earlier this year, the Danish Atheist Society provided short and easy instructions for leaving the church, which led 3,000 people to use a website specifically devised for making the process easier.

Recently, Norway saw a similar effect when the official Lutheran Church put up a web page providing an easy way for people to renounce their membership. Reports indicated that 15,053 members of the flock opted to leave in a span of four days.

Church council leader **Kristin Gunleiksrud Raaum** said that despite the mass exodus, the church remained committed to being transparent and will continue to allow people to leave with less hassle. "We will continue to have a broad and open national church. But no one should be a member of a religious community against their will, and therefore I am glad that this self-solution is in place. Those who are mistakenly listed as members of the Norwegian Church or who do not wish to be members can now easily change their status, and it will give us a more accurate registry," Raaum concluded. ★