

HANDOUT 2.2.2

RELIGION IN GERMANY: INFORMATION PACKET

Religion in Germany

Denomination Breakdown

Religion	of Nation %
Christianity: Evangelical Protestants	29.30 %
Christianity: Roman Catholics	29.20 %
Islam	4.88 %
Judaism	0.24 %
Other Religions (Christianity)	5.75 %
No Religion	31.00 %

Source: (2011). Religionen & Weltanschauungs-gemeinschaften in Deutschland: Mitgliederzahlen. REMID. Retrieved September 31, 2012, from http://www.remid.de/remid_info_zahlen.htm

Religious communities and the state in Germany

Relations between religious organizations and the state are governed by constitutional law applicable to religious organizations.

Religion and the Basic Law

The most important provisions governing the relations between church and state in Germany are found in Article 4 of Germany's constitution, the Basic Law, and in the articles of the German Constitution of 11 August 1919 (Weimar Constitution), which are an integral part of the Basic Law under its Article 140. For historical reasons, the constitutional provisions governing the relations between church and state are

Religious instruction

Under Article 7 (3) of the Basic Law, religious instruction shall form part of the regular curriculum in state schools. Such instruction is compulsory for members of the relevant religious organizations. However, children may be excused from religious instruction at their parents' request; students over the age of 14 may also request to be excused.

Under Article 141 of the Basic Law, the provision making religious instruction part of the regular curriculum in state schools shall not apply in any state in which state law provided otherwise on 1 January 1949; this was the case in the city-states of Bremen and Berlin.

Religious instruction as part of the regular curriculum is intended to convey the values and doctrines of the relevant religious organization; religion classes intended only to provide neutral information about one or more religions is not the kind of instruction referred to by the Basic Law.

Although the states are responsible for supervising school curriculum, the curriculum for religious instruction is to be set in cooperation with the religious organization and "in agreement with their principles". Organizing religious instruction in schools is the responsibility of the states, as part of their responsibility for education. Under certain conditions, religious organizations are entitled to have religious instruction in their faith taught at public schools. Among these conditions are that their constitution and the number of their members give assurance of their permanency; the organization must also have a clearly defined membership so that it is possible to determine who is required to attend religious instruction. They must also have a designated representative to the government who is authorized to define the organization's principles to be followed when giving religious instruction. Further, the religious organization must not threaten the fundamental constitutional principles, the basic rights of third parties protected by the state, or the basic principles of the liberal constitutional law on religious organizations. The religious organization does not have to be a corporation under public law.

According to rulings by the Federal Administrative Court, schools may introduce non-confessional ethics curriculum for students not taking religious instruction. Public schools may offer classes on ethical issues.

Church tax

All religious and ideological communities with corporation status may levy taxes (Article 140 of the Basic Law in conjunction with Article 137 (6) of the Weimar Constitution).

The church tax is not a state tax. Only members of the relevant religious or philosophical organization are subject to the tax. Organizations with the right to levy taxes may decide whether to do so.

The states are responsible for the specific legislation on the church tax and determine the details in consultation with the religious and philosophical organizations entitled to levy taxes. Because this is a matter for the states, the law on church taxes varies from state to state, so only the general structures can be described here.

In most cases, church tax takes the form of a surcharge on income and wage tax. This surcharge ranges from 8% to 9%, depending on the individual state. The church tax is subject to management by the church administration. However, the relevant legislation of all the states gives churches the option to delegate management to the state tax offices. If they choose this option, the churches pay the state tax offices a management fee amounting to between 2% and 4.5% of church tax revenues.

Source:

Bundesministerium des Innern. (n.d.). *Religious Communities and the state in Germany*. Retrieved July 2011, from Churches and Religious Communities: <http://www.bmi.bund.de/>

Islam in Germany

The Federal Government distinguishes between Islam, one of the three major monotheistic religions of the world, and Islamism, an extremist political ideology.

The Federal Government considers the integration of Muslims in Germany and the promotion of peaceful co-existence with them as one of its most important policy tasks. Between 3.8 and 4.3 million Muslims of immigrant origin live in Germany, according to a study of Muslim life in Germany.

The Federal Ministry of the Interior also promotes inter-religious dialogue, which reinforces what all religions share and thus also public trust in social cohesion.

In order to do justice to the significant socio-political task of Muslim integration, in September 2006 the Federal Ministry of the Interior initiated the German Islam Conference with the aim of improving religious and social integration of the Muslim population in Germany. The German Islam Conference is a long-term institution of dialogue between representatives of federal, state and local governments and of Muslims in Germany.

Source:

Bundesministerium des Innern. (n.d.). Islam in Germany. Retrieved July 2011, from Churches and Religious Communities: <http://www.bmi.bund.de/>

Jewish life in Germany

Germany today is home to the third-largest Jewish community in Europe, numbering about 110,000 overall. Before the Nazis came to power in 1933, Germany's Jewish congregations had around 560,000 members. After the Shoah, in 1950 only about 15,000 Jews were left in Germany. Until about 1985, Jewish congregations were threatening to disappear as their ageing members died.

From 1991 to 2009, about 212,000 Jewish emigrants and their families from the countries of the former Soviet Union moved to Germany. Many of them were received by Jewish congregations here.

The Central Council of Jews in Germany

Founded in Frankfurt (Main) in 1950, the Central Council of Jews in Germany is the most important representative of the Jewish community in Germany. The Central Council sees itself as representing the political interests of all Jews in Germany and is open to all religious currents within Judaism. It is a corporation under public law which exclusively and directly pursues charitable aims. The Central Council currently has 108 member congregations with about 105,000 individual members. Berlin's Jewish community is the largest in Germany, with about 11,000 members.

Tasks of the Central Council

In addition to representing Jewish interests to the Federal Government, one of the Central Council's main tasks today is helping Jewish immigrants from the countries of the former Soviet Union become integrated in the Jewish congregations. To do so, the Central Council focuses on educational and training seminars, language courses, civic education seminars, religious instruction and other integration measures.

The Central Council also plays an active part in the political and social life of the Federal Republic of Germany. One priority is promoting mutual understanding and respect between Jews and non-Jews.

Progressive Judaism in Germany

Apart from the Central Council, other congregations with a liberal-progressive orientation began forming in the mid-1990s and are now organized in the Union for Progressive Judaism in Germany registered society which currently has about 20 member congregations with roughly 4,800 individual members. The union's regional associations in Schleswig-Holstein and Lower Saxony have been members of the Central Council of Jews in Germany since 2005.

The Federal Government and the Jewish community in Germany

The Federal Government feels a special responsibility for the Jewish community and opposes all attempts to forget or deny the Nazi genocide of the Jews. The Federal Government takes action against antisemitic tendencies and works to assist those who have taken on the task of eradicating the roots of antisemitism and racism.

This is why the Federal Government supports organizations which advocate understanding and cooperation between Christians and Jews, in particular the German Coordinating Council of Associations for Christian–Jewish Cooperation and the International Council of Christians and Jews.

On 27 January 2003, the national Holocaust Memorial Day, the Federal Government and the Central Council of Jews in Germany signed a national agreement, placing their partnership on a long-term legal footing.

Under the agreement, the Federal Government pledged annual funding for the Central Council to carry out its interregional tasks of preserving German-Jewish cultural heritage and building up the Jewish community, as well as its integration policy and social tasks. Because the Central Council declared in the agreement that it is open to all currents within Judaism, it is expected to use the government support for the benefit of the entire Jewish community. Funding since 2008 has amounted to €5 million.

The following interregional Jewish institutions also receive federal funding:

- the College of Jewish Studies in Heidelberg, which was founded in 1979 to renew the research and study of Jewish culture, history and religion in Germany;

- the Central Archives for Research on the History of the Jews in Germany, located in Heidelberg;
- the Abraham Geiger College at the University of Potsdam and its Jewish Institute of Cantorial Arts. The Abraham Geiger College was founded in 1999 as the first rabbinical seminar in Germany since the Shoah. The Leo Baeck Institut, founded in 1955 with centres in Jerusalem, London and New York and a branch of its archive at the Jewish Museum Berlin, is dedicated to researching the history and culture of German Jewry.

Federal funding for maintaining abandoned Jewish cemeteries in Germany: According to a 1957 agreement between the Länder and the Jewish community, federal funding pays half the expenses for the preservation and upkeep of abandoned cemeteries of the former Jewish congregations in Germany.

Source:

Bundesministerium des Innern. (n.d.). Jewish Life in Germany. Retrieved July 2011, from Churches and Religious Communities: <http://www.bmi.bund.de/>