

# THE CHURCH, JUDAISM AND JEWS

Theological and practical reflections on the relationship between The Church of Norway, Judaism and Jews today.

## **A mandate for a committee**

### **Background**

Its relationship to Judaism and the Jewish people is important for the church. It is a matter of the church's self-image, its interpretation of the Word of God, its mission, its historical inheritance and some of the greatest and darkest mistakes in the course of its history.

This is also an important context for the Church of Norway's self-critical, theological reflections on the role and task of the church in society today. The church wants to learn from its mistakes, be an observant participant in society and work for a more just society with reconciliation, trust and good relations between people.

The Church of Norway needs to renew its theological reflections on its relations with Judaism and Jews. This will also implement recommendations from the General Synod (KM 15/16) *Religious encounters and Dialogue (Religionsmøte og dialog)*, where the Synod asks the Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations to increase their work on the Church of Norway's relationship to Judaism. The Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations want therefore to appoint a committee which can contribute to fulfilling this request. A number of European churches and ecumenical organisations have already done a considerable amount of work on the topic, which has also been the subject of a great deal of new research. The increasing polarisation of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians and increasing antisemitism in the West underline the importance of the issue.

In the Church of Norway, the Bishops' Conference has considered questions concerning the church's relationship to Jews and Judaism. The Council on Ecumenical and International Relations has participated in dialogue with Jews in Norway and internationally, in efforts to combat antisemitism and in political and human rights issues connected with the conflict between Israel and Palestine, often based on ecumenical cooperation and relations with the Church of Norway's sister church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. The Norwegian Church Ministry to Israel has also devoted a considerable amount of effort on Christian theological issues concerning Judaism and the Jewish people.

Renewed consideration of the Church of Norway's relations with Judaism and Jews will require a broad theological approach that also includes insights from social sciences and ecumenical and historical studies. With their differing mandates, the Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations will be able to cooperate on forming a committee to study the issue.

## **Task**

With this background, the Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations will appoint an expert committee to prepare a report on the Church of Norway's relations to Judaism and Jews, including

- the church's perception of itself in its encounter with Judaism,
- the church's perception of the Jewish people, the country and the state of Israel,
- missiological questions,
- the church and antisemitism,
- Christian Zionism and Christians' support for Zionism.

The committee will discuss important contemporary issues connected to each of these themes. The committee will propose concrete recommendations, actions or other responses for the Church of Norway to consider.

## **Membership**

The committee shall have a broad professional and theological structure. Its members should have competence in

- biblical theology,
- systematic theology,
- church history,
- political history,
- practical theology,
- interreligious studies,
- human rights,
- research on antisemitism,
- ecumenical questions,
- missiology.

The committee should be put together on the basis of relevant competence, not institutional representation. In addition, it shall include a bishop and a member of the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations' Theological Board.

The executive committee of the Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations have the task of assembling the committee and appointing its leader and deputy leader.

The Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations provide the committee with secretaries and with finance.

## **Process and schedule**

The committee is to be appointed in the spring of 2021 and should deliver its report in the autumn of 2023.

The Committee should arrange meetings and consultations as the work continues, among others with the Norwegian Centre for Holocaust and Minority Studies, The Jewish Community in Norway, the Norwegian Church Ministry to Israel and other persons and milieus that the committee finds necessary.

The committee shall organise a public consultation halfway through the process.

The committee or its working parties can make relevant study trips.

The Bishops' Conference and the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations will receive the committee's report and consider it in their respective organs.