

Liechtenstein parishes may lose subsidies

by [Jonathan Luxmoore](#) in the [July 26, 2011](#) issue

Churches in Liechtenstein, one of the world's smallest countries, could face financial disaster with government plans to withdraw state subsidies under new legislation, according to a Protestant leader.

"This will be a drastic change—we depend on financial support, and there'll be no chance of obtaining it if the new law goes ahead," said Markus Meidert, president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Liechtenstein.

"This is a predominantly Catholic country, and the Catholic Church is unhappy with the plans as well. But the new law will be especially hard and treacherous for smaller churches like ours, [which] have none of the Catholic Church's resources."

A bill before Liechtenstein's 25-member parliament proposes to end the Catholic Church's status as official state church and also withdraw state subsidies from recognized religious communities.

Meidert said in an interview that state grants account for half the current budget of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, which has no means of generating income like Christian churches in neighboring Germany and Austria.

The Catholic Church accounts for 78 percent of the 36,000 inhabitants of Liechtenstein, situated between Austria and Switzerland, and receives 300,000 Swiss francs yearly from the state budget, as well as additional funds from the country's 11 municipalities.

Under the government-sponsored reform package, the Catholic Church would lose its state-church status with "full protection from the state" as laid out in Liechtenstein's 2003 constitution. The church's guaranteed role in education and religious teaching in schools would also end, and the state would fund only those programs and services that benefit the collective good. —RNS/ENInews