

Church of Norway to improve inclusion of native Sami people

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Oslo, Norway, January 6 (ENInews)--The (Lutheran) Church of Norway in the next four years will be implementing a plan to enhance the role of the indigenous Sami people in church life.

"We want Sami church life to be an equal and natural part of the church, and the Church of Norway to be a multicultural fellowship," said Jens-Petter Johnsen, director general of the Church of Norway National Council. He spoke with the Church of Norway Information Service.

The Sami are an indigenous people in the northern parts of Norway, Sweden and Finland, and on the Kola Peninsula in Russia. There are an estimated 50,000 to 65,000 Sami in Norway, leading their traditional life in rural areas, but also living in Oslo and other cities. The Sami language belongs to the Finno-Ugric family.

In a 2011 decision, the Church of Norway General Synod said the Sami should be given space to form their own life within the church and be recognized as an indigenous people who are a natural part of the church.

Ways to enhance the role of the Sami in church life from 2012 through 2016 will be the creation of new posts for pastors, deacons and other church workers, teaching of the Sami language and programs of recruitment, liturgy, Bible translation and church history.

Historically, the attitude to Sami language and culture has varied in church and society in Norway. As late as in the first half of the 20th century the Sami language was not taught in schools or even Sami core areas.

Christianity reached Sami areas in medieval times, both in its Catholic and Orthodox form. Since the Lutheran reformation in Denmark-Norway in 1536-1537, most Sami in Norway have been Lutheran, although there are still some Orthodox Sami. In Sami

areas, Church of Norway pastors have long conducted the liturgy in the indigenous language. Some have also acquired sufficient skills to use the language in sermons and everyday dialogue. Recent years have also seen Sami pastors.