

Greek churches "face disaster" as crisis deepens

by [Jonathan Luxmoore](#)

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(ENInews)--A senior Greek Protestant has warned that minority denominations "face disaster" due to the country's worsening economic crisis.

"Heavy taxation, high unemployment and all our other difficulties are fast-forwarding us to collapse," said Dimitrios Boukis, general secretary of the Greek Evangelical church, which has 29 congregations in two regional synods in Greece and other communities abroad.

"We receive no state support and are fully dependent on our members, and we're already short of pastors because we can't afford them. The pastors we have are having to handle everything because we can't employ staff, so some congregations will end up without any spiritual care."

The Evangelical pastor, a central committee member of the Conference of European Churches, was speaking as President Karolos Papoulias made a last-ditch attempt to persuade Greece's politicians to form an emergency government after the two main parties responsible for enforcing a harsh fiscal stability plan were trounced by smaller radical groupings in May 6 elections.

In an ENInews interview on May 14, he said church incomes had fallen 40 percent in the last year, after dropping 30 percent in 2010-11, causing "great difficulties" in pension provisions and other areas of parish finance.

He added that young Christians from the Reformed church in Hungary had made a "modest donation" in 2011, but said there had been "no response at all" from other churches to his requests for help.

"I've explained our problems in conversations with Christians around Europe, and we'd willingly go on requesting assistance," the general secretary told ENInews. "But this crisis sadly hasn't provided any motor for ecumenical co-operation. Although

there's been some joint work at local levels, the official churches haven't used the opportunity at all."

Greece's Socialist opposition, Pasok, which received just 13 percent of the vote, became the third party to fail to form a coalition on May 12, prompting emergency talks with Papoulias.

However, political analysts said a common approach was unlikely to occur in Greece, which is committed to deep cutbacks in pay, pensions and public-sector jobs in return for two early 2012 EU-IMF bailouts of 240 billion euros.

Among other church reactions, the president of Greece's Roman Catholic Bishops Conference, Bishop Fragiskos Papamanolis, told the Rome-based Servizio Informazione Religiosa that Greece had been "led to poverty" by austerity plans.

He added that taxes on the Catholic church had risen 48 percent in the past year, making most dioceses unable to pay.

"People are starving here, and we've nothing left to give those who knock on our doors," he said the bishop, whose church's four archdioceses have 50,000 ethnic Greek members and around 150,000 foreign adherents.

Minority churches have often complained of discrimination in Greece, where the Orthodox Church of Greece traditionally claims the loyalty of 97 percent of the population of 10.4 million.