

Room 6

Unique autonomy Independence of the parishes in the Bremen Evangelical Church (BEK)

Origin of the special autonomy of the congregations

Bremen's position as a free imperial city with imperial immediacy, i.e. independent of all sovereigns and officials apart from the emperor, also enabled the city to regulate its ecclesiastical affairs independently.

Bremen's parishes were originally predominantly Reformed parishes and are still autonomous in matters of faith, conscience and doctrine. This is due to the Reformed understanding of ministry, according to which the congregations are organised on a democratic basis and are responsible for their own religious life.

Administrative union and the Bremen Senate

It was not until the introduction of a standardised hymnal in Bremen in 1873 that an administrative union between Lutheran and Reformed congregations was established, which largely resolved the denominational disputes between the congregations. From the Reformation until the Bremen state constitution came into force in 1920, the church was under the control of the Bremen Senate, which also represented it externally.

Congregations, BEK and EKD

To this day, the BEK has a special structure within the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD). Every Protestant congregation in Bremen has the status of an individual church, which is loosely united and represented in the EKD via the umbrella organisation BEK. The BEK only manages purely secular matters centrally, such as finances, buildings and personnel, in order to relieve the congregations of administrative tasks.

Captions:

Seal of the Bremen Protestant Church until 1996 --- The coat of arms is centred on the Hanseatic cog with the Bremen key emblazoned on its sail.

Judge at the Higher Regional Court Brigitte Böhme --- The first woman to hold the office of President of the BEK from 2001-2013.

First Protestant Hymnal of the Bremen parishes from 1873 --- You will find an original copy in the display case on the left under the light protection cover.

The cathedral cantor Carl Reinthaler was also a member of the "Hymnal Commission" --- Reinthaler left his mark on Bremen's musical life. You will encounter him again in room 6, for example, in Brahms' German Requiem.

Constitution of the state church & status of the congregations

Shortly after the Bremen state constitution of April 1920, the first Bremen church constitution came into force on 14 June 1920. The church was now detached from the state, with the exception of the collection of church tax. The Bremen Evangelical Church also received no state benefits.

The church constitution was intended to reflect the unique character of church life in Bremen. The constitutions of the individual congregations remained valid, and their freedom of faith, conscience and doctrine were to be expressly preserved. Today, the congregations of the BEK are independent legal entities in the legal form of a public corporation, each with its own constitution, its own confession and its own organisation.

Is there a state bishop in Bremen?

There is no actual head of the church in Bremen. According to the constitution, the governing body is the parliament - the church congress.

The Church Committee is responsible for representing the church externally, implementing the resolutions of the Kirchentag and conducting administrative business.

The President and the Treasurer fulfil their offices on an honorary basis. Both are laypersons. The Secretary is the highest theological representative and spokesperson of the Church Committee. He has no right to issue instructions to the congregations.

The office of secretary therefore differs significantly from that of a bishop, president or regional superintendent of other regional churches.

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