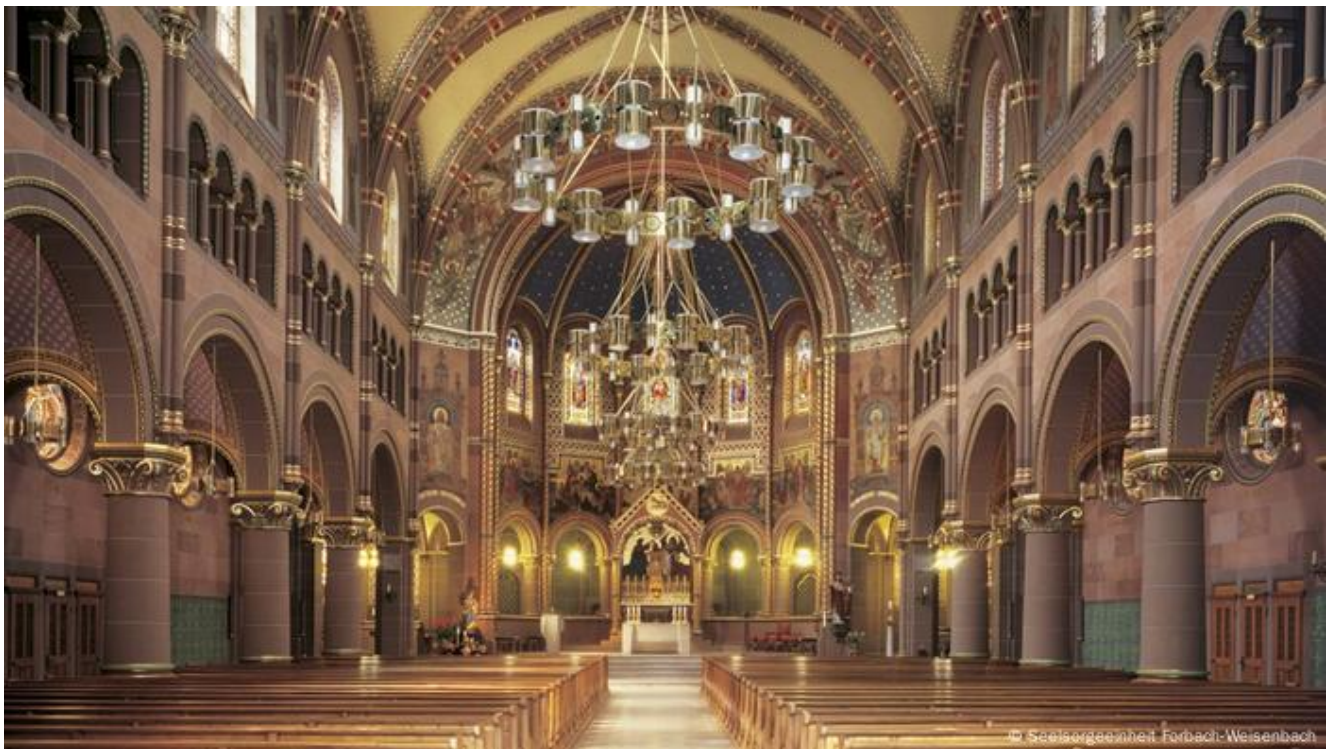


German churches lose 430,000 Catholic and Protestant members in 2018

The Catholic and Protestant churches both lost over 200,000 members last year. The losses have hit the churches hard, as members of both churches pay up to 9% of their taxable income as church taxes.



Germany's Catholic Church lost 216,078 members and Protestant churches lost some 220,000 in 2018, according to data published on Friday by the German Bishops' Conference and the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD).

In total, around 23 million German citizens are still members of the Catholic Church and 21.14 million are members of the Protestant churches. The two groups account for 53.2% of the country's total population of over 83 million.

Read more: The main differences between Catholics and Protestants

Hans Langendörfer, secretary of the German Bishops' Conference, described

Friday's figures as a "worrying" statistic.

"Every departure hurts," said Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, president of the EKD. "Since people today, unlike in the past, decide out of freedom whether they want to belong to the church, it is important for us today to make even clearer why the Christian message is such a strong basis for life."

Falling for years

Church membership can officially be renounced by making a declaration in person at a local government agency, sometimes a district court. There is no need to provide any reason for wanting to leave.

Unless they renounce their membership with an official declaration, members of the Catholic and Protestant churches pay up to 9% of their taxable income as church tax, generating billions of euros in income for both organizations. The money is automatically deducted, just like payroll taxes or social insurance.

Read more: Germany mulls introducing 'mosque tax' for Muslims

Church membership in Germany has been falling for years.



Cologne Cathedral, currently under repair

Membership set to halve by 2060

A study published by the University of Freiburg in May concluded that the number of people belonging to Germany's two main churches will drop by half by 2060.

The main reasons for declining membership in the two churches include adults leaving the church, fewer baptisms and an aging population, the researchers said.

The study predicted that the combined membership in the two churches will drop from about 45 million now to 34.8 million by 2035 and 22.7 million by 2060.

Although no statistics exist regarding the reasons for the departures, surveys conducted by officials in recent months suggest a connection to sexual abuse scandals involving the Catholic Church.

sri/jm (AFP, kna, dpa, epd)

Source:

<https://www.dw.com/en/german-churches-lose-430000-catholic-and-protestant-members-in-2018/a-49649698>

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