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## Introduction

Reforms or intended processes of change appear to have become a pervasive characteristic of European Protestant churches in recent decades. These processes seem to have been spurred by a number of tendencies in society in general, as well as in religious life more specifically. Many European churches have been experiencing declining membership rates, which for many have also meant dwindling finances, reduced participation in church rituals, services and activities, and less support of traditional church doctrine. Furthermore, several churches have problems recruiting candidates for ordained ministry as well as for involvement in their democratic structures, such as parish councils. At the same time, newer forms of worship and activities, and different types of involvement and voluntarism, seem to be evolving. On the broader societal level, changed patterns of governance of religion in general and churches in particular also alter the conditions under which churches operate and which they have to relate to. In the northern region, relations between the traditional majority churches and the state have particularly been in focus and have compelled the majority churches to rethink not only their relation to the state, but also their internal organizational structures.

Much research has been conducted on the dynamics of these tendencies and their implications for institutional religion, such as churches. Less research, however, has been devoted to the ways in which churches use various forms of planned and structured institutional and organizational changes in their attempts to respond to these changes and their impact. Over the last ten years researchers have come together at biannual conferences on “Church Leadership and Organizational Change” in order to address these types of questions and further invigorate and stimulate this research field.

The fourth conference, which took place in Oslo, Norway, September 2013, focused on the topic of “Church Reform and Leadership of Change.” In this volume we are delighted to present keynote lectures from the conference, as well as articles based on a selection of the presentations delivered at the conference. This also includes two articles based on Master’s degree theses, exemplifying the growing interest in bringing theories and insights from leadership and organizational studies to bear on church studies.

Together, the articles address a variety of issues within the overall topic. Some deal with church reforms specifically. In the article based on her key note lecture, Isolde Karle focuses on the nature and characteristic features of pervasive reform processes in the Protestant church in Germany, and articulates some of the questions and dilemmas evoked by applying organizational reform ideas to churches. Andreas Aarflot identifies the historical background and traces the development of the recent reforms of the relations between state and majority church in Norway, revealing the various underlying ideas that played into this interesting process. Ulla Schmidt compares reforms in the Church of Norway to public-sector reforms, asking whether the former simply emulate the latter.

Another set of articles addresses the issue of how leadership of change also opens for changing patterns of leadership. Searching for new ways of fruitfully conceptualizing and understanding church leadership, Bim Ridderspore and Johanna Gustafsson Lundberg explore management of meaning, whereas Hege Steinsland discusses the idea of dual leadership. In her article, Karen Marie Sø Leth-Nissen gives an example of one prominent change which needs to be addressed by church leadership, namely that of leaving the church and the underlying stories and rationales people might have for relinquishing their membership in majority churches. Two articles deal with the more specific question of changes in leadership of ordained ministry on the organizational pastoral levels. Harald Askeland analyzes a reform in the Church of Norway to restructure leadership of local ministries through the organizational entity of the deanery and the function of the dean, whereas Per Hansson compares the Church of England and the Church of Sweden with respect to regulations and practices for clergy discipline.

A further group of articles explores how existing organizational structures in churches are used and function when it comes to governing and renewing church activities at the local level. Kjetil Fretheim uses a case study to investigate and describe the actual functions of leadership and governance of local church life undertaken by a parish council, whereas Maria Åkerström, also working with case studies, explores examples of the renewal of local church life in light of the notion of social entrepreneurship.

All in all, the articles explore the complex phenomenon of church reforms and leadership of change from a variety of angles: thematically, methodologically and theoretically.

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