

Religion in Austria

Overview of the religious societies
recognised in Austria

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Vienna, 2025

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1 Introduction

Faith and religion are expressions of the spiritual, traditional, collective and historical experiences of human beings and peoples. Freedom of creed and conscience, and the freedom of beliefs among religious communities, are basic human rights and essential elements of a free constitutional state.

For various reasons, during the 20th century Austria saw a shift in its religious landscape. Freedom of religion in Austria began with the 1781 Patent of Tolerance, and has continued to evolve up to the present day.

But exactly how many churches and religious societies are there in Austria? What does the country's religious landscape look like? How do these churches and religious communities carry cultural identity? This handbook not only provides answers to these questions: it also gives each church and religious community its own voice. Reading this handbook will give you some insight into the origins and teachings of each religion, as well as information about their different structures and the different functions they perform. The diversity illustrated in this handbook clearly shows that Austria reflects the religious heritage of many different nations.

1.1 Historical background

For many centuries, Austria was an almost exclusively Christian country. Other faiths were barely represented within the area that is now modern Austria, with the exception of adherents of the Jewish religion; they have experienced a turbulent history of persecution, toleration and cooperation.

It was not until the 16th century that the confessional uniformity of the Catholic religion was revolutionised by the Reformation: At the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, large parts of what is now Austria became predominantly Protestant. During the Habsburg Counter-Reformation, the population was largely re-Catholicized in those areas in which Protestantism had become

widespread. At the time of Emperor Joseph II, the Roman Catholic faith remained dominant; the Protestant Church of the Augsburg and Helvetic Confessions and the Orthodox Church were tolerated, as were members of the Jewish religious community following Joseph II's Patent of Tolerance in 1781/82.

The concept of equal rights essentially began to emerge during the 19th century. In the wake of the Grundrechtspatent (Law on Basic Rights) of 1849, the year in which a ministry for "Religious Affairs and Education" was first established, the concept was enshrined in the Federal Constitutional Law of 21 December 1867 on the general rights of citizens. One of the provisions of the Constitutional law is that every legally-recognised church and religious society has certain fundamental rights. However, it was not clarified precisely how such legal recognition could be gained until a law passed in 1874. The first ordinance based on this Recognition Act was made in 1877, for the Old Catholic Church.

Prior to 1890, the Jewish religious community was based on a variety of laws, whose differences were harmonised by a uniform regulation contained in the Israelite Law of 1890, which applied to the whole of Austria.

Following the occupation and annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878 and 1908, a large number of Muslims began living in the territory of the monarchy for the first time, and in 1912 this led to the official recognition of the religion of Islam (according to the Hanafi school). Due to the influx of migrant workers from the former Yugoslavia and Turkey, the number of Muslims increased sharply during the last decades of the 20th century, and they were also subject to the Islam Law, which was thus extended to other rites in 1988 (Federal Law Gazette No. 164/1988).

In addition to the followers of Islam many other people of various religious denominations settled in Austria during the 20th century. They sought official recognition of their respective religions, and this was achieved mainly on the basis of the Recognition Act of 1874.

1.2 Freedom of religion in Austria

Individual rights

Religious freedom is guaranteed under Austrian law; the legal sources—starting with the Patent of Tolerance of 1781/82—were enacted over a period of approximately two hundred years. The constitutional guarantee of freedom of belief and conscience provided for in Article 14 of the Basic Law of 1867 can be considered essential for the individual. In connection with the interdenominational law of 1868, this provision guarantees the freedom of every person living in Austria to choose to join a church or religious society, to leave that society for the public sector, or not to belong to any faith at all. Article 63 (2) of the State Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye of 1919, and Article 9 of the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights elaborated further on the fundamental right to freedom of religion.

The right to form bodies corporate

The Austrian legal system can be described as religiously neutral. The State does not identify with any particular church or religious society, and this reflects the principle of religious neutrality. The tasks and goals of the State are based exclusively on the principle of secularity while both respecting and accommodating religious needs. The status of recognised church or religious society brings with it certain guarantees, which are governed by Article 15 of the Basic State Law (which maintains the connection to the general state laws): the right to joint public religious practice, the right to arrange and administer its internal affairs autonomously, the right to retain possession and enjoyment of its institutions, endowments, and funds devoted to worship; In addition: the establishment of private faith schools and the provision of religious instruction in state schools.

Article 15 of the Basic State Law lays down a general principle of equality for legally-recognised churches and religious societies, which carries a requirement for equal treatment and prohibits discrimination according to the principle of equality.

The right of exclusivity, as a principle of the Austrian law on State-Church relations, allows every legally-recognised church or religious society the exclusive right to their name and their religious doctrine, as well as the exclusive care of their own members.

In Austria, the State and the Church are equal partners, who recognise each other's independence and autonomy. The points of contact between State and Church may be regulated by joint contractual agreements. This recognition in public law confers a legal personality to a church or religious society, giving it the status of a public corporation (including legal capacity under private law). One characteristic of these bodies is the performance of functions in the public interest; such functions are not purely religious: they also include social, societal and cultural-political duties, which are encouraged by the State as it sees these tasks as pursuing the common good. The connection between the State and the Catholic Church was formally established with the Concordat of 1933, and was then regulated by further laws governing various aspects of the relationship between the Austrian State and the Holy See. The legal relationship with the Roman Catholic Church is different to other religious societies because of the status of the Holy See as a subject of international law. The legal relationships were regulated in special acts on the external legal relationships of the Protestant Church (1961), the Orthodox Church (1967), the Jewish Religious Society (1890 and 2012) and the Islamic religious societies (2015). The relationships with other legally recognised churches and religious communities are regulated by the Recognition Act of 1874 and by the Oriental Orthodox Churches Act of 2003.

With the enactment of the Law on the Status of Religious Confessional Communities of 1998, a two-tier system was created. In addition to the legally-recognised churches and religious societies, this system also provides for "state-registered religious denominations", which have

their own legal personality, but are not corporations under public law. After “existing as a religious community” for a period of 20 years—of which at least five years must be in the form of a denominational community as defined by this law—the faith can be legally recognised, if certain conditions are met.

In Austria there are currently 16 legally-recognised churches and religious societies, and nine state-registered religious denominations.

1.3 Realisation of the basic right to freedom of religion

The term “freedom of religion” includes freedom of belief (the right to choose a religion), freedom to practice a religion (right to ritual activity), freedom of creed (the right to non-cultic belief) and freedom of conscience.

Under Austrian law (there is a specific Act on the religious upbringing of children), every young person can decide their own religion from the age of 14. Up to the age of 10, only the parents can decide the religion of their child. Between the ages of 10 and 12, the decision still rests with the parents, but the child must be “listened to”.

Up to the age of 14, the child’s religion cannot be changed against their will, and then at the age of 14 the child or adolescent is considered “religiously mature”. All schoolchildren who belong to a legally recognised church or religious society receive religious instruction in their own faith at public schools, and the costs of this are borne by the State.

All citizens are equal before the law, regardless of their faith, and they enjoy the same civil and political rights. The exercise of freedom of religion and conscience is thus guaranteed for everyone in Austria, regardless of whether their church or religious society is legally recognised, or whether or not it exists as a state-registered religious denomination. All churches and religious societies in Austria enjoy special protection: the degradation of religious teachings and the disruption of the practice of religion are treated as criminal offences; places of worship and sacred artefacts enjoy increased protection under criminal law, in the event of theft or damage to property.

1.4 Discussion forums

Contact, exchange and cooperation are essential factors in understanding other people's religions and in living together as a community. Dialogue and cooperation take many different forms, and Austria has many initiatives that serve as best practices for Europe. These include the Church-Pedagogical University of Vienna/Krems, where Christians, Jews, Muslims (Sunnis, Shiites and Alevis) and Buddhists are united under one roof.

In 2012, the informal *Platform for churches and religious societies* was set up. This is where the Old Catholic Church in Austria, the Protestant Church (Augsburg and Helvetic Confessions) in Austria, the Methodist Church in Austria, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Islamic Religious Society in Austria (IGGÖ), the Jewish Religious Community, the Catholic Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) in Austria, the New Apostolic Church in Austria, the Austrian Buddhist Religious Society, the Alevi Community in Austria (ALEVI) and the Free Churches in Austria (FKÖ) regularly exchange ideas and discuss important issues pertaining to the relationship between the State and religious communities.

Another important forum for discussion is the "Ecumenical Council of Churches in Austria" (ÖRKÖ, www.oekumene.at), whose members include 16 Christian churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, and nine congregations or organisations with observer status.

The "Pro Oriente" foundation (www.pro-oriente.at) must also be mentioned in this context. Formed in Vienna in 1964, it has provided a framework for fruitful dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox and ancient Eastern churches. There are also various projects for interfaith dialogue (such as the Coordination Committee for Christian-Jewish Cooperation).

For further information visit www.interreligioe-serdialog.at.



Representatives of the sixteen recognised churches and religious communities meet Chancellor Bierlein and Minister of Education Schallenberg, September 2019
© Federal Chancellery



On 20 February 2020, Federal Minister Susanne Raab invited representatives of the recognised religious communities to a reception at the Federal Chancellery © Federal Chancellery

2 Overview of the legally-recognised churches and religious societies in Austria

2.1 The Catholic Church

Christianity is by far the largest of all the religious communities. Its aim is to help people in Austria to find support, purpose, enjoyment and meaning in life through their relationship with God. The Christian faith has been present in Austria for approximately 1,850 years. For more than a thousand years, Christianity has been the predominant religious power in Austria.

Within the Christian religion Catholic faith has a special place in Austria. Over the centuries, the work of the Catholic Church and its proximity to the ruling house of the Habsburgs has given it a strong presence in Austrian society and culture. With almost 5 million registered worshippers, approximately 57 percent of the Austrian population now belong to the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church has an extensive network of around 3,000 parishes. Almost 4,000 Catholic priests live and work in Austria (this number includes “retired” priests and those performing non-pastoral duties). As the focal points of organised church life, the parishes also have a constant ability to mobilise people for voluntary work. A 2015 study by the Austrian Academy of Sciences, the Institute for Higher Studies and Joanneum Research estimated that the parishes have no fewer than 354,000 volunteers, who help to shape religious life in 4,700 places of worship while also working on cultural, social and educational issues.

Pastoral care

Catholic pastoral care in Austria is provided both by the parish network and by designated teams (working specifically on pastoral care for different groups including the sick, prisoners, the police and the visually impaired). Religious orders have a traditionally high membership in Austria, and they also strengthen the pastoral presence of the Church, not only in the many parishes led by clergymen, but also in the many monasteries around the country. There are more than 700 permanent deacons working in pastoral care; many of them are married men with careers in civil society, who volunteer as pastors. Several hundred pastoral assistants are also active in the field of pastoral care.

Despite a decline in religious practice in Austria, more people attend the services of the Catholic Church than any other regular religious gathering. More than half a million people attend mass every Sunday. At Christmas and Easter, the congregations are even larger. The Sunday service broadcast is still one of the widest-reaching programmes aired by the national broadcaster ORF. The number of baptisms, first communions and confirmations adds up to well over 40,000 each year. More than 10,000 couples per year are married in a Catholic service, in the Catholic Church. A Catholic priest or a specially trained Catholic funeral director accompanies the deceased on their last journey in more than 50,000 cases.



St. Stephen's Cathedral, Vienna

The pastoral support provided by members of the Catholic Church for those experiencing difficult life situations is not recorded statistically, but is of particular importance. The conversations and support given during confessions should be mentioned here, along with the telephone counselling offered in cooperation with the Protestant Church, which conducts around 35,000 conversations annually in Vienna alone. Experts consider that this has made a significant contribution to the decline in Austria's suicide rate, which has fallen by 40 percent since the mid-1980s. From chaplains working in hospitals to volunteers working with prisoners facing deportation, members of the Catholic Church try to help people in exceptional situations.

Social work

The Catholic Church is also very active in the field of social work. The largest Catholic aid organisation is Caritas, whose 16,000 full-time employees and 50,000 volunteers work to assist people in emergency situations. Their duties include looking after around 7,000 people with disabilities, organising more than 1,700 beds for the homeless, and providing two million hours of care each

year, for people in need. Caritas is also involved in more than 500 foreign aid projects to support disaster relief, long-term employment and the reconstruction of destroyed livelihoods, and to provide help for displaced people and children in emergency situations.

In addition to other Catholic social initiatives such as the St. Vincent de Paul Society, it is above all the religious communities that have for centuries been committed to helping people in need in Austria, by looking after people with disabilities or otherwise in need of care. Traditions such as community soup kitchens provide vital support to the state welfare system. There are also many parish volunteers in the social sector. According to the calculations published in this study, if the State had to take on these volunteer services it would need to employ and pay 3,000 people for parish social services alone.

Many Catholics are members of Catholic Action and its various branches, which include the children's and youth organisations Jungschar, Katholische Jugend and Hochschuljugend, and the Catholic movements for women, men, the labour force and for academics. One of the best-known initiatives is the annual carol singing campaign organised by the Jungschar. Each year, more

than 110,000 children take part, under the supervision of almost 20,000 volunteer adults, collecting approximately 15 million euros in donations for long-term projects in 19 developing countries.

Medical services and health care

Health care is also an area in which the Catholic Church, especially through its religious orders, is continuing to make an important contribution today, as it has done for centuries. The 23 religious hospitals, in which many monks and nuns work as volunteers, are run as private, non-profit hospitals on behalf of the federal states: this is an indispensable and also very cost-efficient pillar of medical care in Austria. These hospitals admit more than 500,000 inpatients each year, and provide treatment for 1.4 million outpatients. With 21,000 staff and around 2,500 apprenticeships, the religious order hospitals not only provide excellent medical services and work in cross-provider skill clusters—they also offer social care, such as the outpatient clinic for the disadvantaged, run by the Brothers of St. John of God in Vienna.

Catholic institutions are particularly active among those on the “fringes” of life. One example is the palliative hospice work of the Caritas Socialis religious order, founded by the former MP Hildegard Burjan, who was beatified in 2012. Other religious orders and the Caritas organisation also run nursing homes. Catholic institutions oversee shared accommodation for the disabled, run care centres for dementia patients and wards for multiple sclerosis and vegetative coma patients. In this area also, they are on the front line in terms of developing and implementing the highest standards and the latest scientific findings. One example is the master’s course in geriatric care developed by the Catholic organisation “Haus der Barmherzigkeit” together with Danube University Krems. Mention should also be made of the Order of Malta, whose 2,200 volunteers look after the elderly, sick and people in need of care; it is part of the emergency service in Vienna, Tyrol and Styria, and can be reached on the emergency number 144.

Education



Children learn about St. Nicholas at kindergarten

Realising people’s potential through education is a task that the Catholic Church has always taken seriously over the centuries. This mission, which dates back to 1597 with the opening of the world’s first free primary school in Rome, has been fully taken on board by the Catholic Church in Austria. Today, the Catholic Church operates 900 day care centres, almost 300 schools, five teacher training colleges, and two theology colleges (both in Lower Austria: one in Trumau, the other in Heiligenkreuz—this has now become the largest seminary in the German-speaking area), and the Catholic-Theological Private University in Linz. The Church also organises Catholic religious instruction in all schools, including those run by the public sector. Most of the theology students studying at university level can be found at the four Catholic Theological Faculties, which were set up and are maintained by state universities.

The Catholic Church is Austria’s largest private provider of infant day care centres and schools. Around 30,000 children of all faiths attend a Catholic day-care centre, and more than 70,000 attend a Catholic school. A survey conducted by the Main Association of Catholic Parents’ Associations found that the main reasons why parents choose a Catholic private school are the positive educational climate, the individual support for students, the more peaceful atmosphere, a high level of commitment from teaching staff, and a strong performance culture.

Great importance is also placed on adult education. The same study by the Academy of Sciences found that 70 educational institutions, with more than 40 educational establishments run by dioceses and religious orders were among the professional providers of education, registering 750,000 students annually. Teacher training is also available from the diocesan school authorities and the Schools of Teacher Education. Another important service for students is the provision of boarding places, for example through the Catholic university chaplaincies or the Akademikerhilfe student residences.



Service held during the Pope's visit to the Mariazell pilgrimage site

Cultural preservation

Almost all the Catholic places of worship in Austria, including 4,700 church buildings and 4,000 chapels, are listed as cultural heritage, along with 600 monasteries, 1,700 parsonages, 2,000 cemeteries, 2,400 wayside shrines and 350 other religious monuments such as calvary chapels and gardens. All these buildings are maintained by the

Catholic Church, as the public grants only cover a small part of them. Many ecclesiastical cultural monuments have shaped Austrian culture simply by existing as architectural landmarks; they include St. Stephen's Cathedral (the most visited tourist destination in Austria), the great monasteries and the Mariazell pilgrimage basilica.

Cultural heritage involves far more than merely preserving these buildings. Culture can only really be enjoyed to the full if it is kept alive in day-to-day use. By keeping church life active, church buildings can become sources of friendship, strength and joy for all. In practice, this means preparing and holding religious services and celebrations on weekdays, Sundays and public holidays, keeping the places of worship clean, and making sure that thousands of church organs remain in good working order. Other tasks include organising choir performances and church music events, for which there are church-run training programmes. The archives in the monasteries alone contain a treasure trove of 4 million books. Church bells and their chimes are a familiar sound of home for many Austrians. For centuries, local communities have come together to share wonderful, tragic or fearful times in church, or to celebrate, give thanks and pray together. Even in today's secular culture, the Catholic church still has a role as a refuge for the whole of society.

Organisation

The Catholic Church has two forms of organisation: the territorial division into bishop-led dioceses, with each diocese then further divided into parishes, and the religious communities, which are only partially subject to episcopal authority. In Austria there are nine dioceses—Eisenstadt, Feldkirch, Graz-Seckau, Gurk-Klagenfurt, Innsbruck, Linz, Salzburg, St. Pölten and Vienna—as well as the military diocese, which is responsible for all the Catholic members of the Austrian Armed Forces.

Each bishop is independent as the head of his diocese, and is subordinate only to the Pope. The Austrian dioceses either belong to the ecclesiastical province (metropolis) of Vienna (in addition to Vienna

itself there is also Eisenstadt, Linz and St. Pölten), or to the ecclesiastical province of Salzburg (apart from Salzburg also Feldkirch, Graz-Seckau, Gurk-Klagenfurt and Linz). Vienna and Salzburg are thus archdioceses. However, the Archbishops of Vienna and Salzburg have no jurisdiction over the other dioceses, and only have to perform certain supervisory duties. The traditional attribute “Primas Germaniae”, given to the Archbishop of Salzburg, is purely an honorary title.



Holy mass in the Roman Catholic Church

The almost 200 religious orders based in Austria are organised very differently in terms of the autonomy of their individual monasteries or convents. New spiritual movements have also emerged, most of which have not yet achieved the status of a religious order, and there are numerous private associations of believers. The Austrian tradition also includes Catholic associations such as the 12,000-strong Cartellverband, an umbrella organisation that brings together student fraternities, and the Catholic Middle School Association, which has around 20,000 members. The Sportunion, which is one of Austria’s three largest sports organisations with more than 900,000 members, also has its roots in the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church is not a single entity, but consists of many different entities, which are often completely independent. This is one of the reasons why the Catholic Church is such an integral part of Austrian

society and culture. The relationship between the State and the Catholic Church—which was essentially formed with the 1933 Concordat—is the model according to which the State also regulates its relations with other churches and religious societies. This has contributed to a relaxed climate of cooperation among the religious communities themselves, and also between different faiths and the State. The achievements of the Catholic Church in these areas, and their importance for integration and for creating a feeling of belonging, are widely recognised and valued by the population. The “Referendum against church privileges” of 2013, which was directed against the existing State-Church relationship, had by far the lowest support of all the 45 referendums ever held in Austria.

The Catholic Church in Austria has travelled a long road. Its journey began with the first large-scale missionary programme during the 7th and 8th centuries, when the newly-founded monasteries often had to cultivate large tracts of land, and continued with the establishment of a comprehensive network of parishes from the 10th century onwards. The struggles of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation were followed by the threat from the Ottoman Empire, which only ended in 1683.

The confident Catholic Baroque culture which emerged at that time, and which still shapes Austria’s image today, was replaced by the severity of the Josephinian era, when the aim was to make the Church an authority. This resulted in a typically Austrian cooperation between Father State and Mother Church, but it was one that left a problematic legacy for the Catholic Church. 19th-century liberalism, the fall of the Danube monarchy and the House of Habsburg all forced the Catholic Church to alter its self-image. However, those changes made the Church freer as a religious institution—so that in 1952 after the persecutions but also the temptations of National Socialism, it took a clear stance of being a “free church in a free society”.

From that position, throughout all the upheaval and transformation of the 20th and 21st centuries, the Catholic Church has to this day fruitfully continued its work in pastoral, social and health care, and in providing education and other support for the people of Austria.



Two pastors at an open-air service held on Thanksgiving in the wine-growing community of Gols, Burgenland. Even though men and women are equal in all respects, there are still fewer women in management positions © epd/Uschmann

2.2 The Protestant Churches of the Augsburg and Helvetic Confessions in Austria

With the beginning of the Reformation, the striving for reform of church and society also came to the Habsburg countries. The eventful story of the Reformation in Austria resulted in the Protestant faith being banned after the Thirty Years' War; only the so-called "secret Protestantism" survived during that time. For over 150 years, many Protestants remained true to their faith—even without an organisation or a pastor—despite emigration and in some cases forced migration to the east of the empire, and in the face of bible burnings and harassment. The only exception to this rule was Vienna, the imperial capital and royal seat, as the city was home to the imperial authorities and diplomatic missions or "legation chapels".

The Patent of Tolerance decreed by Kaiser Joseph II in 1781 was seen as a great release: Protestant parishes and schools sprang up quickly. From 1848 onwards, more and more restrictions were removed, until Kaiser Franz Joseph I granted the Protestants civil equality with the

Protestant Patent of 1861. The Protestant Church was still under state supervision, and it was only during the Second Republic that it was able to act as a free church within a free state, thanks to the Protestant Law passed in 1961.

During the 19th century, the Protestant church attracted merchants, business people, scientists and artists, especially from Germany and Switzerland. The population of Burgenland—the federal state formed from the German-speaking fringes of western Hungary, which was assigned to Austria in the State Treaty of Saint-Germain (1919) and which has been under Austrian administration since 1921—has a higher percentage of Protestants than any other Austrian state. The Protestant church grew even further, after the immigration during the first few years of the Federal State of Austria; the last big increase in the number of Protestants came after the Second World War, with the intake of refugees from the east (from Transsylvania, the Banat, the Batschka region and from Slovakia).

Kaiser Joseph II had granted tolerance to the Augsburg and Helvetic confessions. The Swiss Reformation (Zwingli and Calvin) had also spread to the Habsburg

Empire during the 16th century, especially in Hungary and the Slavic regions. The common history of the suppression of Protestants also led to a common evolution, which continues to this day. The church bylaws unite within Austria the Protestant Church (“A.B.”, Augsburg Confession) and the Protestant Church (“H.B.”, Helvetic Confession) under a single administration, in the pursuit of fraternal union and common action in the spirit of love. Both churches, united in their history by God, share the same commitment to the path of the fathers and mothers of the Reformation; above all, they share the knowledge that there is salvation in Jesus Christ alone, offered through the grace of God alone and received only through faith.

The Protestant Church of the Augsburg Confession and of the Helvetic Confession proclaims God’s unconditional devotion to his people, which can be experienced through faith. This can take the form of aiding and serving the community and those in need, performing mission work to convey God’s love, and the participation by all churches and Christians as responsible individuals in the life of the nation.

At the beginning of the third millennium, the Protestant Church (Augsburg Confession) comprised 209 parishes with around 271,300 members; meanwhile the Protestant Church (Helvetic Confession) has nine parishes with about 12,300 members. A peculiarity of the Protestant Church in Austria is that there are mixed denominational parishes—both Augsburg and Helvetic—in both confessions.

Structure and duties

The community is the cornerstone of both these Protestant churches: the communities elect a community council as their governing body; a presbytery is elected from the parish council to manage day-to-day business. The presbytery is chaired by the vicar or pastor, who performs the spiritual offices of preaching the word and administering the sacraments.

Multiple Augsburg Confession parishes, generally those of the same federal state, form a Superintendency; members of each presbytery, and the parish priests, form the Superintendential Assembly. The assembly is

chaired by the superintendent, and advises and decides on the spiritual and organisational matters of the Superintendency. The superintendent’s main tasks are to visit and advise the communities and clergy.



Michael Chalupka is the seventh Bishop of the Protestant Church (A.B.) in Austria. Seen here talking to parishioners after his first service as bishop on 1 September 2019 in Windischgarsten, Upper Austria © epd/Uschmann

There are seven Superintendencies in the Protestant Church (Augsburg Confession): the federal states of Salzburg and Tyrol are merged into a single Superintendency, while the parishes of Vorarlberg belong to the Protestant Church (Helvetic Confession). Members of the Superintendential Assembly form the Synod (Augsburg Confession), which is the highest legislative body of the Augsburg church. The Synod is chaired by a president, who is not a clergy person. The external representation of the church is incumbent on the bishop, who is assisted by the Church Council in managing church affairs and conducting official business. This consists of the bishop, two clergypersons and three lay members.

The parishes of the Protestant Church (Helvetic Confession) in Vienna, Linz, Oberwart and in the state of Vorarlberg send their representatives directly to the Synod of the Helvetic Confession. The Church Council of the Helvetic Confession corresponds to its counterpart within the Augsburg Confession, and consists of two clergy-

persons and the chairperson. The national Superintendent is responsible for the spiritual direction of the Protestant Church (Helvetic Confession).

The rules on matters common to both confessions are decided by the General Synod, and the consultation and decision-making process concerning matters relating to the external representation of both churches is also conducted by this body. All the church's spiritual and worldly functions can be performed by men or women, at every level.

The Protestant Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession has three levels:

- Parish
- Superintendential communities
- Church Council (Augsburg Confession)

The Protestant Reformed Church of the Helvetic Confession has two levels:

- Parish
- Church Council (Helvetic Confession)

The main areas of responsibility of the Protestant Church are pastoral care, religious instruction, welfare and social work, and its mission. All holders of office within the Protestant Church (spiritual as well as secular) are elected. "Top-down" appointments are not made, as the Protestant church is founded on a "bottom-up" system. The Protestant Church of the Augsburg and Helvetic Confessions is a founding member of the World Council of Churches (ÖRKÖ), but the two individual churches are also members of the Lutheran World Federation and the World Fellowship of Reformed Churches. Both of them also belong to the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and to the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE).

The 1961 Federal Law on External Legal Relationships of the Protestant Church ("Protestant Law") forms the basis for relations between the State and the Protestant Church in Austria.



The Reformed City Church in Vienna. This is the church of the Protestant Church (H.B.), Vienna Inner City. Founded in 1782, after Joseph II issued the Patent of Toleration it opened at Christmas 1784. The church only took on its current shape with tower and street entrance in 1885, a few years after the Protestant patent was issued by Kaiser Franz Joseph © Pfarrgemeinde HB Wien Innere Stadt.

2.3 The Orthodox Church in Austria

Background

With the “Orthodox Law” of 23 June 1967 (Federal Law Gazette No. 229/1967), the Austrian National Council enshrined in law the “external legal relationships of the Greek Orthodox Church in Austria”, thus recognising the church as a public-law entity; in doing so, it also honoured the centuries-old presence of the Orthodox Church in Vienna and Austria.

The Orthodox Church has no central record of its membership, and so the number of Orthodox Christians in Austria can only be estimated. Currently it is estimated that approximately 600,000 Orthodox Christians are living in Austria. They are led by several Orthodox jurisdictions (patriarchates and regional churches) which comprise a large number of parishes, as presented below. To ensure the regular coordination and interaction between the Orthodox Church in Austria and the Austrian authorities and society, the Orthodox Bishops’ Conference in Austria (OBIKO) was founded in 2010. OBIKO represents all the Orthodox jurisdictions active in Austria, and advises on important pastoral and social issues at its annual meeting.

Important testimony to the history shared between the Orthodox and Austrian traditions comes from the cemeteries of St. Marx (1030 Wien) and Vienna Central (1110 Wien), where a number of important Orthodox public figures are buried.

Since 1992, the Orthodox Church has been giving Orthodox religious instruction in Austrian schools (at all levels from elementary to high school, and including general educational and vocational schools). It has its own office, the Orthodox Education Office for Austria, which currently has two specialist inspectors.

Greek Orthodox Church—Metropolis of Austria

Greek Orthodox Church—Parish of the Holy Trinity

Greek Orthodox Church—Parish of St. George

The beginnings of Hellenism in Vienna and Austria can be traced back to the marital ties formed between Byzantine princesses and the Babenberg rulers, including the marriage of Theodora Komnene to Henry II Jasomirgott (1141–1177) in 1148. After the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople (now Istanbul) in May 1453, many Byzantine scholars and traders emigrated to Western and Central Europe, which resulted in the formation of many Greek diaspora communities, churches and schools. This wave of emigration, facilitated by the Peace of Passarowitz (now Požarevac) in 1718, enabled free trade between the Habsburg Empire and the Ottoman Empire. Consequently, many Greek traders—mostly from Macedonia, Epirus, Thessaly and the Aegean Islands—came to Trieste and Vienna to start a new life.

Following the intervention of Prince Eugene of Savoy (1663–1736), Emperor Charles VI (who reigned from 1703/1711–40) allowed the formation of the Greek brotherhood “Zum Heiligen Georg” in 1723, which transferred the responsibility for the religious and pastoral care of Orthodox adherents living in Vienna. Charles VI’s daughter Maria Theresia (1740–1780) confirmed and extended this privilege, as did her son Emperor Joseph II (1780–1790). The church of this brotherhood, which is now the oldest Orthodox Church in the Republic of Austria, was built in 1802 at Griechengasse 5, on the property of the von Karajan family in Vienna’s 1st district. It then underwent a full external and internal refurbishment, thanks to donations from the Dumba family of Greek bankers and industrialists, based on plans by the architect Franz Wipplinger (1742–1812).

While the Greeks with Ottoman citizenship belonged to this community, the Greeks of the Habsburg Empire founded the “Holy Trinity” brotherhood. The privileges of both brotherhoods were confirmed by Emperor Joseph II and his successors. The Church of the Holy Trinity has stood at Fleischmarkt 13 (1010 Wien) since 1787. What is now the Greek Orthodox cathedral in Vienna owes its current appearance to the architect Theophil von Hansen (1813–1891). The mid-19th century renovation of the building was financed by the well-known Sina family of bankers and traders. The outer facade was renovated according to the neo-Byzantine style between 1983 and 1994, with the support of the Federal Monuments Office and the City of Vienna, to restore the Holy Trinity Cathedral to its original splendour.

The Greeks in Vienna also founded their own national school, which was recognised by an imperial court decree in 1804. The school still exists today, and can be found at Fleischmarkt 13. In the 2019/2020 school year, 380 children between the ages of four and eighteen were enrolled, and regularly attended religious, history, cultural and language classes. The Greek National School in Vienna is currently the oldest existing Greek school outside of Greece.



Celebration of the Great Blessing of Waters on the Vienna Danube Canal, January 2015 © Metropolis of Austria



Icon of the Holy Trinity in Vienna's Greek Orthodox Cathedral © Metropolis of Austria

In 1922, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople founded the Archdiocese of Thyateira and the London-based Exarchy for Central and Western Europe, to which all Greek parishes in Europe became subordinate. From 1924 to 1936, Vienna was the seat of the Exarchate for Central Europe, led by Dr. Germanos Karavangelis (1866–1935). On 17 February 1963, the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople founded the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Austria and the Exarchate of Italy and Hungary, which is based in Vienna. Archbishop Dr. Chrysostomus Tsiter (1903–1995) was elected as the first Metropolitan of Austria. After his resignation, Italy achieved the status of its own Metropolis. Tsiter's successor was Archbishop Michael Staikos (1946–2011), who was succeeded in December 2011 by the Archbishop Dr. Arsenios Kardamakis as Metropolitan of Austria and Exarch of Hungary and Central Europe.



Panorthodox Youth Meeting in Vienna, October 2019
© Studio Banac

In addition to the long-standing congregations and the two new ones in Vienna, the Church also has congregations in Graz, Innsbruck, Kufstein, Leoben, Salzburg, Traiskirchen, Linz and Bregenz, which are looked after by clergy from the Metropolis of Austria. In 2015, building work began on Austria's first Orthodox monastery in St. Andrä am Zicksee in the region of Burgenland. (<http://www.orthodoxes-kloster-maria-schutz.at>). In the spirit of the ecumenical movement, the Metropolis of Austria does much to promote dialogue between Christian churches, for example through the "Pro Oriente" foundation set up by Franz Cardinal König and the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Austria (ÖRKÖ).

Antiochene Orthodox Church of Ss. Peter and Paul

The Antiochene Orthodox Church belongs to the community of Byzantine Orthodox Churches, and is the autocephalous church of the Patriarchate of Antioch. It is one of the 5 historical patriarchates (Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem) in the pentarchy.

Antiochene Orthodox Christians and clerics have been working in Austria for a number of years. The number of followers has risen significantly in recent years, especially due to the arrival of refugees from Syria. In 2018, the church officially applied to the Republic of Austria for the parish of Ss. Peter and Paul, also requesting the status of legal personality under state law.

The Serbian Orthodox Parish of St. Sava

Serbs living in Vienna founded their own parish in 1860. Until that time, they had worshipped at the Greek Orthodox churches of St. George and of the Holy Trinity in the empire's capital city. During the second half of the 19th century, a group of wealthy Viennese Serbs, who were high-ranking officials and employees of the monarchy and led by Councillor Georgije Stojaković (1810–1863), decided to found a Serbian Orthodox parish. In a letter from the Kaiser dated 27 September 1860, Hofrat Stojaković was authorised to establish a provisional committee, and to undertake contact with the Vienna police and the Ministry. The meeting on 27 November 1860 was attended by around 1,000 Serbs living in Vienna.

The church bylaws were approved, and this marked the start of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Vienna. It was dedicated to St. Sava (1173/76–1236), the first Serbian archbishop of the autocephalous Serbian medieval church. The Serbian Orthodox Church of St. Sava bought a piece of land at Veithgasse 3 in Vienna's 3rd district of Vienna, for the sum of 27,000 guilders. The church and house took three years to build, and they were finally consecrated on 19 November 1893; the ceremony was attended in person by Emperor Franz Joseph I (1848–1916). Archpriest Mihajlo Mišić (1864–1924) was appointed as the first pastor of the new Serbian Church of St. Sava.

The period between the construction of the church (1890–93) and the First World War (1914–1918) can be described as the most fruitful in the life of the Viennese Serb community. After the Second World War (1939–1945), many Serbian emigrants came to Vienna. For this reason, the Serbian Orthodox Patriarchate in Belgrade founded a diocese for Western Europe in 1969, to which the Viennese parish was also affiliated. In 1974, with the help of various church organisations, primarily the Protestant Church, a meeting place for Serbian-Orthodox workers in Austria was established at Steinergergasse 3 (1170 Wien). The venue soon became a parish centre under the dynamic and enthusiastic direction of its priest Drago Govedarica, who died in 2005. For many years, this meeting point was the church's main centre for pastoral, religious and social care

in Vienna and Austria as a whole. The centre underwent extensive renovations in 2001, and was dedicated to the Assumption of Mary.

In 2002, the Serbian Parish acquired a building designated by the City of Vienna for religious purposes, located at Engerthstrasse 158 (1020 Wien). It became the Church of the Resurrection of Christ. The building was originally a tram garage, which was later converted very successfully into a church. The consecration ceremony was held on 26 October 2002. In 2006, a hall was added to the first floor, along with two towers, which were consecrated on 30 September 2007 in a separate ceremony.

In 2014, the Roman Catholic Church (Archdiocese of Vienna) donated the Neulerchenfeld church building (Neulerchenfelderstraße 47, 1160 Wien) to the Serbian Orthodox Parish, which moved out of its former home in Steinergasse (see above). The new church was dedicated to the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin.

As early as 6 December 1990, at the suggestion of Bishop Lavrentije (Trifunović), the Bishops' General Assembly of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Belgrade divided the diocese of Western Europe into two: the diocese for Britain and Scandinavia based in Stockholm, and the diocese for Central Europe (Germany, Austria and Switzerland) based in Himmelsthür (Hildesheim). Constantine Djokić was elected as the first bishop of the new diocese for Central Europe. In May 2011, the diocese for Central Europe was renamed the Bishops' Plenary Assembly, and the diocese for Austria-Switzerland was created. The territory of Italy was also incorporated into this new diocese, based in Vienna. Bishop Irinej Bulović of Bačka (Novi Sad) was elected as the administrator of the newly formed diocese. Bishop Andrej Čilerdžić has presided over this diocese since 2014.

Apart from Vienna, there are Serbian parishes in Vienna Newtown, St. Pölten, Tulln, Gmunden, Wels, Enns, Braunau am Inn, Linz, Graz, Klagenfurt, Salzburg, Bregenz, Innsbruck, Kufstein, Saalfelden and Feldkirch.

The Romanian Orthodox Church Congregation of the Holy Resurrection

In 1885, the Romanian Orthodox Church became independent (autocephalous) and was declared a patriarchate in 1925. Over the years, political relations between Austria and Romania have strongly influenced the settlement of Romanians in Austria (mainly in Vienna). Many Romanians came to Austria's capital, particularly during the time when the Habsburg Empire included several Romanian provinces: Transylvania (1688–1918), Little Wallachia (1718–1739), Banat (1718–1918) and Bukovina (1775–1918). Along with the political relations, economic links were also forged between the two countries. As early as the 15th century, trade was flourishing in many different sectors. Cultural relations between the Romanian community and Vienna were also established at an early stage. Romanian students—initially with Latinized names—enrolled at the University of Vienna as early as the 14th to 16th centuries (they included Latislaus Wolochus, 1391; Johannes dictus Oláh, 1398; Simon de Oláh, 1527). Over the decades that followed, there was a sharp influx of Romanian students to Vienna. They formed two cultural societies, which in 1871 merged into one, the famous academic-literary society “România Jună” (“Young Romania”). A number of prominent literary, artistic and scientific figures emerged from this society. Since 1683, an altar has stood near Betty Roose Weg (1120 Wien). It was built by the Romanian prince Șerban I Cantacuzino (1678–1688) to mark the spot where he and his soldiers would offer their daily prayers to the priest. The Romanians founded their own Orthodox Parish at the end of the 19th century. The first step was to rent an apartment at Löwelstraße 8/2 (1010 Wien), which was named the Chapel of the Holy Resurrection. It was consecrated on 7 January 1907, and placed under the jurisdiction of the Metropolis of Czernowitz. A priest and a cantor were also appointed, and a choir was formed, initially under the direction of the composer and conductor Gheorghe Dima (1847–1925). In 1967 the old chapel was restored, painted, and given a new iconostasis, made from oak. This first place of worship soon became Vienna's primary centre for Romanian religion and culture. A Romanian school was

also opened here. In 2003, the wish for another new place of worship in Vienna was fulfilled, with the construction of a Romanian Orthodox church and community centre in Vienna's 11th district (Simmeringer Hauptstrasse 161). This church was dedicated to St. Andrew, the patron saint of Romania. St. Andrew's Church in Vienna was solemnly consecrated by His Beatitude Daniel I, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church on 14 June 2009. Vienna now has another Romanian Orthodox Parish, dedicated to St. Anthony the Great (Pouthongasse 16, 1150 Wien). It was donated in 2014 by the Roman Catholic Church (Archdiocese of Vienna). A new Romanian Orthodox church is currently being built in the Leopoldstadt district (1020 Wien) with a series of frescoes strongly inspired by the Voroneţ monastery in Bucovina. Romanian Orthodox churches have also been founded in Salzburg, Graz, Linz, Knittelfeld, Klagenfurt, Feldkirch, St. Pölten, Vienna Newtown and Innsbruck. The Romanian Orthodox Church in Austria is part of the Romanian Orthodox Metropolitan Region for Germany, Central and Northern Europe, founded in June 1994 by His Eminence Dr. Serafim Joantă.

The Russian Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas

The history of the Russian Orthodox Church in Austria is closely linked to the development of relations between Austria and Russia on the one hand, and to the existence of Orthodox communities in old Austria on the other. The efforts to found a Russian Orthodox Church in Vienna date back to the time of Tsar Peter I (who reigned from 1682–1725) and continued for several decades. Since diplomatic relations were established between Austria and Russia in 1700, there has been a “Russian colony” in Vienna, a community of Orthodox Russians. Russia's first accredited ambassador to Vienna, Count Michael Bestuzew-Ryumin, made the first attempts to establish a permanent Russian church in Vienna. In 1762, the first Russian Orthodox priest, Simeon Matwejew, came to the city. The services were initially held in a room in the Russian ambassador's residence. In 1765, the Vienna Embassy Church rented its own premises, which also contained the apartments of the priest and his staff. A Russian Orthodox parish was thus established in Vienna, and it would grow to encompass not only the Russian community, but also many members of the Slavic population of Austria-Hungary. The community's growth reached its peak during the 42 years in which the archpriest Michael Rajewskij (1842–1884) was the Russian Orthodox priest in Vienna. During that period, plans were drawn up for a separate church building for the Russian Orthodox parish in the city. The plan was finally implemented between 1893 and 1899. The church, built in honour of St. Nicholas, was constructed on the site that had been acquired for the imperial Russian embassy in Vienna's 3rd district, between Reisnerstrasse, Bahngasse and the former Richardgasse (today known as Jaurèsgasse). The growth of the Russian Orthodox community in Vienna was interrupted by the First World War. During the inter-war period, the Church of St. Nicholas remained closed, and was only reopened towards the end of the Second World War. During that time, the congregation used rented premises that were adapted to allow religious services. Since 1946, the St. Nicholas Church has been the bishopric of the Russian Orthodox bishop for Vienna and Austria. The Russian Orthodox Diocese of Vienna and Austria was

founded in 1962, and was officially recognised in 2013. The diocese is subordinate to the Patriarchate of Moscow under Patriarch Cyril I. In 2020 Alexij (Zanochin) was appointed Bishop of the Diocese of Vienna and Austria. In addition to Vienna, the Russian Orthodox Church also has parishes in Graz, Linz, Salzburg, Innsbruck and Laa an der Thaya.

Bulgarian Orthodox Parish of St. Ivan of Rila comes under the jurisdiction of the Bulgarian Patriarchate in Sofia, and is part of the diocese of Western and Central Europe led by the Bulgarian Orthodox Metropolitan Antonij (Mihalev).

The Bulgarian Orthodox Church of St. Ivan of Rila

There is historical evidence to show that Bulgarians were living in Vienna as early as the middle of the 17th century. In the autumn of 1656, for example, the Bulgarian Catholic Bishop Petar Parceвич met Emperor Ferdinand III (1625–1657) who gave him nobleman's status. Bishop Petar Parceвич, who obtained a doctorate in theology in Rome and spoke fluent Greek, Latin, Italian, Wallachian, Armenian and Bulgarian, was entrusted by the Kaiser not only to carry out ecclesiastical missions in Bulgaria and Moldavia, but also with purely secular missions in Warsaw, Venice, Rome and Ukraine. The efforts of the Bulgarian community in Austria to found their own Orthodox church date back to the 19th century. Shortly after 1800, the cause was taken up by Bulgarian merchants and emigrants living in Vienna. However, it seemed there were always insurmountable obstacles. In 1967, Archpriest Nikolaj Schiwaroff, Dr. Kyrill Todoroff, Elisabeth Willner, Georgi Neikoff and Anissim Christoff founded the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in Austria. The first Bulgarian religious service was celebrated on 24 December 1967 at the Russian Orthodox Church in Vienna. A year later, the Church Council was elected, and on 10 May 1969, the Bulgarian Orthodox Parish of St. Ivan of Rila was reported to the Republic of Austria in accordance with the provisions of the Orthodox Law. Since 25 December 1993, the parish in Vienna's 4th district has had its own church at Kühnplatz 7. Since 1990, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in Austria has been represented by Episcopal Vicar Ivan Petkin, who also heads the parish in Vienna. The parish gazette has been published four times a year since October 1991, in Bulgarian and German, and has a circulation of up to 2,000 copies. In 2017, a new Bulgarian Orthodox Church was inaugurated at Dunklergasse 21 (1120 Wien). The

2.4 The Jewish Religious Community

Historical sources report that Jews were already resident in Vienna at the beginning of the 10th century. As a result, their right of settlement was not restricted to certain residential areas near the ducal palace; they were free to buy houses in other parts of the city as well. It was only due to anti-Jewish sentiment among the people of Vienna that a ghetto was built in the 13th century, in the area of what is now called Judenplatz.

At the end of the 13th and 14th centuries, the Jewish community of Vienna enjoyed the reputation of being the leading community in German-speaking Jewry. The “wise men of Vienna” included the Rabbis Isak Or Sarua, Avigdor ben Elijah ha-Kohen and Meir ben Baruch ha-Levi. However, the financial plight of Duke Albert V and the widespread hatred of Jews among the city’s Christian population led to the cruel persecution of 1420–21, after which many Jews were expelled from Austria. Many of them later died as martyrs.

Only a small number of Jews lived in Vienna during the 15th and 16th centuries. A functioning Jewish community did not emerge again until the beginning of the 17th century, in the area now known as Leopoldstadt; in 1632 there were around 500 families living in 136 houses. This community owes its outstanding position in the world of Jewish scholarship, not least to the rabbis Jom-Tow Lipman Heller and Sachbtaj Scheftel Horowitz, who worked among them. However, these untroubled waters did not last long. Again, it was the deeply rooted anti-Jewish sentiment among the population that was responsible for the Kaiser’s decision to drive the Jews out of Vienna. Individual Jews, endowed with special “privileges” limited to their own person, only began to return to Vienna gradually, after 1675. The other displaced Jews moved to Fürth in Bavaria, to Brandenburg, and to other cities in Germany, enriching Jewish community life in their new homeland. Prominent newcomers to Vienna included “court Jews” such as Samuel Oppenheimer, Samson Wertheimer (who was appointed Chief Rabbi of Hungary in 1693) and Diego Aguilar, the founder of the Sephardic Community in Vienna, which gained recognition from the authorities half

a century before the official establishment of an Ashkenazi Jewish community, due to the Turkish citizenship of the Sephardic Jews.

It was Maria Theresa’s son, Emperor Joseph II, who in many ways paved the way towards emancipation in the 19th century, by issuing the Patent of Tolerance for Austria in 1781. It should also be mentioned that Vienna was the centre for Hebrew printing in Central Europe at that time, and was the focal point of the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) movement between the end of the 18th century and the first decades of the 19th century.

In 1826, the city synagogue was built as a symbol of a compromise between the supporters of religious reform and Jews with a traditionalist attitude; this compromise was also expressed through the appointment of Isaak Noah Mannheimer as preacher and head of the religious school.

Jews took prominent positions in the revolution of 1848, and were granted equal rights in 1849, first of all unofficially and then constitutionally in 1867. 1848 was also the year of the official founding of the Jewish religious community. In 1852, the community gained provisional recognition as the Jewish Community in Vienna, followed in 1868 by the definitive bylaws, recognised by the authorities, which later—based on the Israelite Act of March 1890, which governed the organisation of the Jewish Religious Community—attained the form that is to a large extent still valid today.

The Jewish Community of Vienna thus became the only Jewish community to be recognised by the authorities, as an umbrella organisation that brought together Jews from all the various traditions of Judaism and from different synagogues.

After centuries of oppression following the 1848 revolution, the Jewish people of Vienna have gained freedom and can live happily, which is something that has great cultural significance for Jewish people themselves, but also for Vienna and the whole of Austria. In the late 19th century and early part of the 20th century, Vienna was the centrepiece of Zionism, the Jewish national movement. Dr. Theodor Herzl (1860–1904) lived and worked in Vienna, and eloquently gave voice to the Jewish people’s 2,000 year longing for a state of their

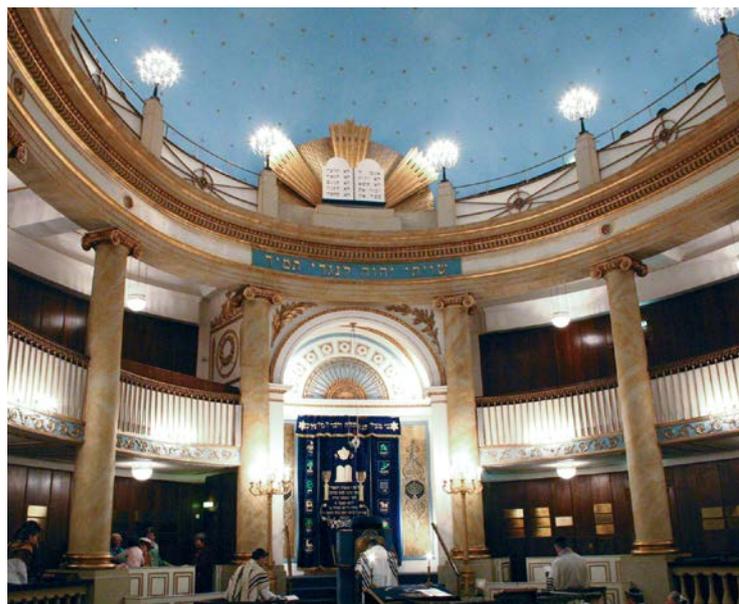
own, in his book “Der Judenstaat”. Up until its almost complete annihilation between 1938 and 1945, Viennese Judaism was characterised by remarkable achievements in all areas of culture and science.

In 1938, Vienna was home to approximately 180,000 Jews. Only a few hundred members of that Jewish community survived the persecution, displacement, and physical annihilation that befell them. The Jewish Community of Vienna, which was re-established after 1945 and now has almost 8,000 members, may be the direct successor of the pre-war community in legal terms, but not according to the composition of its members, many of whom are people who have been displaced from elsewhere in Europe and who have sought a home in Austria.

The Jewish Community of Vienna is the largest of the Jewish communities in Austria’s Jewish Religious Community (Linz, Salzburg and Innsbruck), which has a total of just over 8,000 registered members; it is estimated that there are a further 4,000 to 6,000 Jewish people in Austria.

Structure and duties

The Community Board is the highest political organ and body of this religious community. Its 24 members are directly elected by the parishioners for a four-year term. This body elects from among its members the members of the representative college and the members of the individual committee, as well as a president and two vice-presidents. The committees are responsible for preparing the matters to be put to the Community Board for a decision. The task of the president and the vice-presidents is to lead the monthly meetings of the committee, and to represent its political, administrative and budgetary decisions to the outside world. The overall management of the administration falls to the two Secretaries General, one of whom is responsible for all matters pertaining to the ideals of the community (relating to culture, public relations, social affairs, education, security and so on). The other secretary deals with commercial and organisational matters. The rabbinate of IKG Vienna, which is autonomous in all matters of religion, deals with all matters relating to spiritual affairs and religious law, as well as external representation.



Interior of the City Temple, Vienna © Ouriel Morgensztern

Paragraph 3 of the bylaws of the Jewish Community of Vienna states that it is the task of the Community “to ensure the satisfaction of the religious needs of its members within the lines of the state border and to maintain and promote the institutions required for this purpose.”

In particular, the Community is responsible:

- for the establishment, running and maintenance of the institutions of divine service and ritual, for the regular holding of daily public services, for koshering and washing;
- for the appointment of a rabbinate, for the employment and remuneration of rabbis, other religious functionaries and administrative officials and servants of the community;
- for the provision and supervision of religious instruction;
- for the existence and maintenance of 43 cemeteries, of which the Jewish sections in the Vienna Central Cemetery (Gate 4) in particular are still occupied, for the burial of the deceased in accordance with the rite, without prejudice to the relevant laws and regulations;
- for looking after the many mass graves of Jewish martyrs on non-Jewish burial sites;

- in accordance with their means, for the provision and maintenance of existing institutions and foundations of the religious community and for the erection of new ones dedicated to giving instruction, assisting the poor, widows and orphans, to nursing and care for the elderly, and for charitable and humanitarian purposes in general, and to preserve the spiritual character of all such institutions and foundations.



Bar Mitzvah celebration © Ouriel Morgensztern

Specifically, this means, among other things:

- The Jewish Community of Vienna maintains a large synagogue in the city centre, the “*Wiener Stadttempel*”, completed in 1826. It also runs 22 prayer houses.
- The association maintains the “Zwi-Perez-Chajes School”, an educational institution that includes a kindergarten, a preschool, an elementary school and a grammar school. Its mission is to impart well-founded Jewish knowledge to the children of this community, as well as providing secular education. The school plays a valuable role in the integration of the children of Russian-Jewish immigrants.
- It ensures that all children in the community receive religious instruction as part of their ordinary education.
- The Community also supports the strictly Orthodox Talmud Torah elementary and secondary school “Machsike Hadass”, the Orthodox Lauder Chabad elementary and middle school (which is also dedicated to the integration of children of Russian-Jewish immigrants) and a further three Orthodox afternoon schools, which offer intensive instruction in various religious subjects to children who do not otherwise receive sufficient religious education.
- The Community runs a retirement home with 30 rooms, a nursing home with 209 beds including dementia places, and a retirement complex with 38 apartments.
- The Community supports more than 1,000 people on low or no incomes by providing monthly allowances, one-off temporary assistance, visits to the sick, language courses and advice on social issues.
- Through cultural events at the community centre, the organisation seeks to cater for the interests of its members, and also to act as a bridge for contact with the non-Jewish environment.
- The Community fights anti-Semitism with all its strength.



An imam leads the ritual prayer at a mosque in Vienna's 15th district. © Islamic Religious Society in Austria

2.5 The Islamic Religious Society in Austria

Islam, one of the largest religions in the world with currently over a billion adherents, is also one of the largest religions in Austria, with around 700,000 members (all Muslims taken together). Islam has been officially recognised since 1912, on the basis of the Islam Law (of 12 July 1912 on the recognition of Islam as a religious society according to the Hanafi school).

The largest Islamic religious community is the Islamic Religious Society in Austria (IGGÖ).

In 1964, the Muslim Social Service Association set itself the goal of preparing formally and materially to set up an Islamic religious society. In 1979 the Federal Ministry for Education and the Arts approved the foundation of Vienna's first Islamic religious society and the bylaws of the Islamic Religious Society in Austria. The first organs of the Islamic Religious Society were elected on the basis of these bylaws. In 1987/88, following a decision by the Constitutional Court, the restriction limiting recognition to the followers of the Hanafi school ceased to apply.

The Islamic Religious Society in Austria enjoys public-law status in Austria. It is known to the public by the acronym "IGGÖ". At the time of the 2015 amendment to the Islam Law, the IGGÖ came up with a new set of bylaws, which, among other things, restructured the organisation internally.

So-called Kultusgemeinden are autonomous communities within Religious Societies composed of several mosques. In addition, individual mosques can exist as legal personality without belonging to an autonomous community. In addition to the Kultusgemeinden and mosque communities, there are "specialised associations" (although they are not associations within the meaning of the Association Act).

These institutions are responsible for meeting the religious, social and cultural needs of their members, and for providing the necessary facilities. The Kultusgemeinden and mosque communities as well as the specialist associations, are all institutions with legal personality. With its 29 religious communities and other mosque communities, the IGGÖ currently has almost 400 mosques.

Organs of the IGGÖ

- The Supreme Council is the highest administrative body of the Islamic Religious Society in Austria. It takes the necessary decisions on any matters within the sphere of activity of the Islamic Religious Society in Austria, unless they are expressly within the remit of another body. It ensures that these decisions are implemented, and then monitors the management of all branches of the Islamic Religious Society in Austria. The Islamic Religious Society in Austria is represented externally by the Leader of the Supreme Council, who is also President of the Islamic Religious Society in Austria.
- The Shura Committee is the legislative body of the Islamic Religious Society in Austria. It lays down the principles and guidelines for the performance of all the functions of the Islamic Religious Society in Austria. Among other things, this body is responsible for defining and developing the IGGÖ's functions.
- The mufti, together with the Advisory Committee, decides on religious issues in the Islamic Religious Society in Austria, for both the Sunni and the Shiite members. He belongs to the Supreme Council in an advisory capacity. He is elected by the members of the Shura Committee with a simple majority at the proposal of the Supreme Council. A mufti must have the necessary religious and educational qualifications.

The position requires at least a degree from a university for Islamic Studies, or a doctorate from a traditional Islamic school.

- The Imams Council is the specialist body of the Islamic Religious Society in Austria for instruction on worship and moral teaching. The Council members are mufti, and the leading imams of the religious communities.
- The Advisory Committee is the specialist body of the Islamic Religious Society in Austria for doctrine of the faith (in particular the teaching of the Islamic communities in Austria) and for religious matters.
- The arbitration tribunal is the constitutional control body of the IGGÖ.
- The audit committee of the Islamic Religious Society in Austria consists of three auditors. The auditors are elected by the Shura Committee, at the proposal of the Supreme Council. The auditors are responsible for the ongoing control of business matters, and for the overall financial management of the Islamic Religious Society in Austria, its committees and other institutions. Their audits check the accurate keeping of accounts, and the use of funds in accordance with the Community bylaws.



The fountain in the courtyard of the IGGÖ, dedicated to its founder, Dr. A. Ahmad Rahimsai. © Islamic Religious Society in Austria

The aims of the Islamic Religious Society are to preserve and cultivate the religion of Islam among its followers. All bodies and employees of the Islamic Religious Society must have an appropriate religious education, and be able to speak German as the official language.

An appropriate religious education consists of living as closely as possible by the rules of Islam, and of advising, instructing and prompting others to follow these rules.

One of the most important tasks of the Islamic Religious Society in Austria is to provide Islamic religious instruction for around 75,000 schoolchildren. The 600 teaching staff of the Islamic Religious Society are paid by the Austrian government for their work.

The Islamic Religious Society also levies religious taxes.

Vienna is also the meeting point for a number of international Islamic conferences. In 1986, the conference of the Muslim World League was held here, followed in 1988 by the largest Islamic conference to deal with the problems facing Muslims in Europe. When the city of Graz was named European Capital of Culture in 2003, it hosted a conference of the heads of Islamic centres and imams from Europe. During the Austrian Presidency of the EU in 2006, the IGGÖ organised a conference of European imams and pastoral workers, in cooperation with the Austrian Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the City of Vienna. Both conferences adopted important declarations, which received a great deal of attention both in Europe and in the Islamic world.

However, the Islamic Religious Society in Austria sees itself primarily as a down-to-earth Austrian institution. It is guided by the shared belief that it is connected to the religion of Islam and agrees that its teachings are to be implemented in accordance with the Federal Constitution of the Republic of Austria, and with Austrian laws. Men and women work together as partners in this respect. The Community addresses the concerns of Muslims in Austria, but wants to make its contribution towards building a multi-religious and multi-cultural society in Austria through dialogue and active cooperation with the other

legally-recognised churches and religious societies. The Islamic Religious Society in Austria supports efforts to integrate new immigrants of the Muslim faith.

It feels connected to the global Islamic community, and also wants to maintain friendly relations with the Islamic nations, without ever becoming dependent on any foreign state.



A Muslim man reads from the Koran, the holy scriptures of Islam. © Islamic Religious Society in Austria

2.6 The Armenian Apostolic Church in Austria

The apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew brought the Christian faith to Armenia, from which the name “Armenian Apostolic Church” originates. Formal confirmation or recognition took place in the year 301. At that time, the beautiful Hripsime fled with a group of other Christian women to Armenia, where she hoped to be able to live in religious freedom. She rejected the proposal of the pagan king Trdat (Tiridates) III, because he was not a Christian. Trdat then had her and most of her companions tortured to death. When Trdat realised what he had done, he repented deeply, and fell seriously ill. On the advice of his sister, the king spoke to Gregor (later known as Gregory the Illuminator), a Christian monk who had been imprisoned by Trdat for years due to his Christian faith. With God’s help, Gregory converted the king, who for the first time in the history of the world introduced Christianity as the official religion for an entire country. Shortly after that, Christ revealed to Gregory the exact place where he should build a church. Today, this is the site of the Cathedral of St. Etchmiadzin, the Holy See of the Armenian Apostolic Church near the capital city of Armenia.

A wall mosaic near the entrance of the Armenian Apostolic Church of St. Hripsime in Vienna commemorates the martyr’s victory over Tiridates. Gregory the Illuminator and St. Hripsime are popular figures in the Armenian Apostolic Church. St. Gregory is also worshipped in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

The Armenian Apostolic Church is a consciously traditional church. Its traditions and collected wisdom are still current, thriving and relevant today. The Holy Mass is celebrated in the ancient Armenian language. Many of the liturgical texts, which draw their sacred power from the past and the promise of future eternity, were written in the first centuries of the Common Era.

After private preparation and a public confession of guilt, Holy Communion is given to the faithful as a *naschkar* (wafer), which is dipped in wine directly from the chalice by the serving priest. By virtue of the One Baptism mentioned in the Nicene Creed, all Christians are welcome



Armenian Church, Vienna © Armenian Apostolic Church in Austria

to take part. The sacrament is generally offered at every mass—except during the Great Lent before Easter. The word “sacrament” comes from Latin and means, among other things, dedication or blessing. The Armenian word is խորհուրդ/*khordurd* or “secret”. The sacraments are administered with signs; the concrete, external ones are obvious, but the (vitaly important) internal reception of God’s grace is sacred and cannot be explained. The Armenian Apostolic Church recognises seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, penance, communion, marriage, consecration and anointing of the sick. Baptism, which is usually administered with water and Holy Myron (oil), usually takes place at the same time as confirmation and first communion.

Only men are admitted as priests, who can either marry or remain celibate. The highest office for married priests is that of *kahanas*. However, celibacy is a prerequisite for holding higher offices such as the *vardapet* (an ecclesiastical scholar and guardian of church traditions), bishop, patriarch or *catholicos*. The highest office for women is that of deaconess. There are only a few nuns in Etchmiadzin, and the number of monks living in the monasteries of Armenia is relatively small.

In the Armenian Apostolic Church, apart from the main centre of the Holy See in Etchmiadzin, there are also three other spiritual centres: the Catholicosate of Cilicia in Antelias near Beirut (Lebanon), the Patriarchate in Jerusalem and the Patriarchate in Constantinople. Since 1999, His Holiness Karekin II has been Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of all Armenians, and has his seat in Etchmiadzin. This office is the highest in the Armenian Apostolic Church. The Catholicos is elected by clergymen and lay people.

From the beginning this church has played a crucial role in the culture, language and identity of the Armenians. Despite long years of often brutal foreign rule, the religion has not only been preserved, but also developed and consolidated. The Armenian Church was, and remains, aware of its Christian role as the servant of the faithful. It made a significant cultural and historical contribution in this regard early in the 5th century, when the monk Mesrob Mashtots was commissioned to create an alphabet for the Armenian language. The alphabet meant that the Good News could be proclaimed more effectively among the Armenian people, allowing them to experience their religion in their own language. The alphabet was created within a few months during the year 405, and with just a few changes, it remains in use today.

Աս Բբ Գգ Դդ Եե Զզ Էէ Ըը Թթ Ժժ Իի Լլ Խխ
 Ծծ Կկ Ըը Զձ Դդ Ծճ Խմ Զյ Ին Ծշ Ոո Զչ Պպ
 Ջջ Ռռ Սս Վվ Տտ Րր Ցց Ռրու Փփ Բբ - Եև Օօ Ֆֆ

The modern Armenian alphabet: 36 basic letters with 3 extensions to allow sounds from other languages

A cherished tradition of this church is to run local schools, so that children can receive specific instruction in religion, language and culture. Having become a diaspora people due to their tumultuous history, the Armenians have taken their church with them everywhere. As a complement to the local public schools, Armenian schools are of particular importance in the teaching of cultural heritage in countries far from home.

The history of the Armenians in Austria dates back to the 16th century. The initially very small community,

mostly made up of merchants in the service of the House of Habsburg, has grown steadily since that time. The Armenian Apostolic Church Community has been legally recognised in Austria since the end of the 18th century. The first serious efforts to establish a house of worship for the community came at the end of the 19th century. In December 1912, under the leadership of the priest Aristakes Fesslian from Suczawa, a home chapel was set up in Vienna's 1st district, at Dominikanerbastei 10. As more and more Armenians came to Vienna, the desire for their own church was expressed more and more often, until the time came in 1964: the church's building association acquired a house and adjoining land in Vienna's 3rd district, at Kolonitzgasse 11, with the intention of building a church in the courtyard. At that time Rose Tricky, an Armenian born in Smyrna whose maiden name was Hripsime Haladjian, was visiting Vienna from London. Deeply touched by her experiences during the Armenian masses she attended in Vienna, she offered to donate a church to the community. The foundation stone was laid on 28 June 1964, and Rose Tricky attended in person. On the same day, a group of architects from Yerevan was also visiting Vienna, as we would say "by chance". The group included the architect Eduard Sarabian, who agreed on the spot to produce the plans for the church. The Viennese architect Walter Dürschmied was entrusted with the project management. Many Armenians and Armenian communities from all over the world donated to the building of the church. The solemn consecration of the Church of St. Hripsime, a name with a long tradition and a modern relevance, took place on 21 April 1968.

The Republic of Austria officially recognised the Armenian Apostolic Church as a religious society on 12 December 1972. In 1981, the Hovhannes Shiraz Saturday School was founded, so that children of Armenian origin living in Vienna could receive an Armenian education.

The Armenian Apostolic Church in Austria is subordinate to the Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin. Together with its Coptic, Syrian, Ethiopian and Indian counterparts, it represents one of the ancient Eastern churches. The Catholicosate is represented by a Patriarchal Delegate for Central Europe and Scandinavia, based in Vienna,

whose jurisdiction includes Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Scandinavia (Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland).

In 2013, His Holiness the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of all Armenians appointed Karekin II, Archimandrite Tiran Petrosyan as Patriarchal Delegate of the Armenian Apostolic Church for Central Europe and Scandinavia, to replace the former Patriarchal Delegate, Bishop Haigazoun Najarian. The Archimandrite was ordained as bishop in Etschmiadzin in 2019, by His Holiness Catholicos Karekin II.

Today, approximately 7,000 Armenians live in Austria, around 3,000 of them in Vienna. In addition to the congregation in Vienna, there are also younger communities in Graz and Linz.

The Armenian Apostolic Church in Austria maintains close relationships not only with its own international sister congregations, but also with other denominations and faiths. The Church is a member of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Austria and is also very active in the field of ecumenism, thanks to decades of intensive collaboration with "Pro Oriente".

2.7 The Syrian Orthodox Church in Austria

The Syrian Orthodox Church is one of the earliest Christian churches. Its origins trace back to the missionary work of the apostles Paul, Barnabas and Peter in Antioch, and to Thaddeus and Thomas in Edessa. To this day, the Church mainly celebrates its liturgy in the Aramaic language.

Until the Council of Ephesus in the year 431, the Syrian Orthodox Church developed in accordance with the Church of Rome and Constantinople. Theological and political disputes in the 5th century led to the Patriarchate of Antioch's rejection of the Council of Chalcedon decisions in the year 451. It then established its own tradition separately from the other patriarchates of the Catholic Church. Although not as clearly as with other ecclesiastical movements, in the West, the Syrian Orthodox Church was increasingly referred to as monophysite. Today's ecumenical studies have repeatedly shown that ultimately, this church only emphasised the identity of the Incarnate with the Son of God in the sense of the resolutions of the Council of Ephesus, and this was subsequently interpreted as monophysitism. With regard to the rejection of the resolutions of the Council of Chalcedon, political circumstances in the Middle East have often proved decisive.

Today's adherents of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch now live in Western Europe, Istanbul and, as a result of emigration, in small numbers in Tur Abdin (southeast Turkey) and Anatolia. Other followers live in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, Australia, India and in South and North America.

In the early 1960s, migrant workers and their families came to Austria from Turkey. They mainly worked in the textile industry and in the area around Vienna in gardening, catering and other manual trades.

Their spiritual lives were entrusted to the priest Abuna (Father) Emanuel Aydin. Originally from eastern Turkey, he had studied theology in his homeland and in Lebanon and later studied theology, canon law and civil law in Vienna and Rome.



His Eminence Mor Dionysios Isa Gürbüz, diocesan bishop of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch in Switzerland and Austria © Syrian Orthodox Church

In 1974 the first Syrian Orthodox parish was founded in Vienna. It bears the name Mor Ephrem, and has been under the spiritual direction of Father Aydin ever since. The Archdiocese of Vienna provided the Syrian Orthodox congregation with the old parish church of Lainz.

In 1998, the Syriac Orthodox Church gained recognition as a religious society in Austria.

In 1999, Prof. Emanuel Aydin was ordained by Patriarch Mor Ignatius Zakka Iwas in Vienna, as a chorepiscopus.

In the same year, the Syrian Orthodox Church was admitted to the World Council of Churches in Austria.

Today, the Syrian Orthodox Church in Austria consists of three parishes.

Mor Ephrem Parish (Changes since 2015)

In 2015, the Mor Ephrem parish of the Syrian Orthodox Church took over the Catholic parish church of St. Mary of Mount Carmel in Stefan-Fadinger-Platz in the Favoriten district of Vienna.

The religious order of the “Shod Carmelites” moved the church and the adjacent monastery to the Syrian Orthodox Metropolis for Austria, where the parish of Mor Ephrem has held its services ever since. Currently, the rooms of the monastery are mainly used to house refugee members of the Church.

After a long renovation of the church hall, a new community centre was opened on 20 October 2019 as a venue for religious and cultural activities. Early in 2019, Abuna Aphrem Gowrea was called from Syria, to take over as parish priest for Mor Ephrem.

The parish currently has around 330 families registered as official members.

Parish of Ss. Peter and Paul

On 30 June 2002, at the request of his community, Sami Ücel from Tur Abdin was ordained in Vienna as priest of the second Syrian Orthodox parish, by His Eminence Mor Julius Jeschu Cicek, the then archbishop of the Archdiocese of Central Europe.

Sami Ucel studied at the Steyler Missionare College in Mödling near Vienna, graduating in 1999 with a Master’s degree in theology.

On the initiative of a community group, the parish unanimously decided on 27 July 2002 to name the newly founded parish after the day of the ordination of its new priest, Sami Ucel. So it was that 29 and 30 June, the saint’s day of Ss. Peter and Paul, was adopted as the official name of the parish and was approved by His Eminence Archbishop Julius Cicek.

The parish of Ss. Peter and Paul has for many years been “at home” in the Catholic parish of Gartenstadt at Galvanigasse 1–3 (Vienna), where it celebrates Sunday services, holds Vespers on Saturdays, and provides pastoral care.

The parish currently has around 130 families registered as official members.



Holy mass at the Syrian Orthodox Church on 15 August 2019, led by Bishop Mor Dionysios Isa Gürbüz together with clergy and church members from all three parishes
© Syrian Orthodox Church

Parish of St. Mary Mother of God

In 2008, some of the families working in the parish of St. Ephrem decided to buy the former Baumann guest house at Leopoldauer Platz 93, 1210 Wien, in order to convert it into a cultural centre.

Three years later, a prayer room was set up for the local community in part of the cultural centre. Initially, it was entrusted to the Syrian Orthodox monk priest Abuna Saliba Er.

Abuna Saliba was ordained as a monk in 1996 and as a priest in 2004. After graduating from the University of Chichester, he completed his Master’s degree at the University of Cardiff. Brother Saliba is currently finishing his doctoral studies in theology, in Vienna.

In 2013, this small community led to the formation of the third Syrian Orthodox parish of St. Mary Mother of God. Since then, the parish has been under the spiritual direction of Abuna Toma Kassibrahim, who in August 2013 was brought from the turmoil of the Syrian war to Austria, to the newly founded parish of St. Maria Mother of God in the Leopoldau district of Vienna.

Abuna Toma completed a 4-year study of theology at the monastery of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate Saydnaya, in Damascus. In 2008, he was ordained as a priest for the parish in Ras-el-Ain, where he worked for

4 years, ending with 7 months in Hasaka until he was forced to give up his parish when war broke out.

In 2016, a kindergarten was built in Vienna-Leopoldau on the adjacent land with the old fire station building, which was also bought, and leased to the St. Nicholas Foundation of the Diocese of Vienna.

The same year saw the completion of the designs and plans for the first Syrian Orthodox church and parish hall to be built in Austria. The ground-breaking ceremony took place on 25 November 2018, and the foundations of the Church of Holy Mary Mother of God were laid on 25 March 2019.

On 3 November 2019, a solemn ceremony was held to mark the laying of the foundation stone for the Holy Altar of the new church in Leopoldau, and the first Holy Mass was celebrated in the shell of the new church.

In the spring of 2020, the church and cultural centre will be completed with the construction of a parsonage, alongside the new church. It will contain 19 apartments to accommodate the clergy of the Syrian Orthodox Church and the elderly, and will also have a youth hall in the basement.

The newest of the three parishes currently has around 120 families as official members.

The membership of the Syrian Orthodox parish in Austria has grown from around 500 in the mid-1970s to more than 5,000 adherents today. The growth in numbers is partly due to migration, and the Syrian Orthodox Christians who have fled from Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, but also to the families raised in Vienna by the early members of the church community. Almost 80 percent of today's worshippers have since acquired Austrian citizenship.

According to the bylaws of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch, dated 15 November 1981, the Vienna parish is subordinate to the Patriarchate of Antioch and the entire East, which is based in Damascus, and thus to the Patriarchal Vicariate of Switzerland and Austria. Since 2 February 2006, the bishop of this diocese has been the Metropolitan Mor Dionysius Isa Gürbüz based at the Monastery of Mor Augin, in Arth (Switzerland). The bylaws of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch in Austria (SOKÖ) dated 14 September 2002 apply to the parishes in the same way.

Despite its name, the Syrian Orthodox Church is not an Orthodox church as defined in the Federal Law on External Legal Relationships of the Greek Orthodox Church in Austria. Instead, it is an ancient Oriental or non-Chalcedonian church, which is one of the oldest Christian religious communities. For the past 45 years, the Syrian Orthodox Church has maintained its independence, and has been able to fully meet the religious needs of its adherents.

2.8 The Coptic Orthodox Church in Austria

The Coptic Orthodox Church is the first church in Africa whose adherents are the successors of the pharaohs. Its origins trace back to the apostle Mark, who founded the church in Alexandria in the year 61. The Coptic Church in Egypt is also considered to be the cradle of Christian monasticism. St. Anthony the Great founded the tradition of monasticism in Egypt, and laid down the cornerstones of monastic life with the commandments of chastity, obedience and voluntary poverty. It was a way of life that would spread from Egypt all over the world. The Coptic Orthodox Church also belonged to St. Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria and leading ecclesiastical scholar. St. Athanasius established the Nicene Creed, recognised by every Christian in the world, and fought against the heretic Arius. The persecution and martyrdom of Christians reached its peak in the third and fourth centuries CE, but the religion has been considered a church of martyrs ever since the first century CE.

The situation would only improve in the fourth century, during the era of Constantine the Great. Monophysitism was discussed at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. The Copts were accused of being monophysites, but that was not the case, as they condemned monophysitism. This was the reason for the split. The Copts are miaphysites, which means that they believe in the two natures (divine and human), in the one nature of Christ, and in the existence of both natures at the same time. Proof of their belief is the Copts' confession at communion that this is God incarnate.

The Coptic Orthodox Church has maintained its doctrine of the perfect unity of the two perfect natures of Christ: divine and human. The Coptic Orthodox Church is in full ecclesiastical and sacramental communion with the other Eastern Orthodox churches. By the seventh century, the Copts already numbered around 24 million Christians in Egypt. Manuscripts show that the conquerors in Egypt collected 24 million gold pieces as bounties (which equates to 1 gold piece per head).



Youth work is of particular importance in the Coptic Orthodox Church © Coptic Orthodox Church in Austria

It was only in the 20th century that the Coptic Orthodox Church, which is almost 2,000 years old, opened up beyond Egypt, transforming into a global church. A global ecclesiastical hierarchy was set up to take care of Coptic emigrants, and around 550 churches were founded worldwide. The Coptic Orthodox Church observes the seven sacraments: baptism, Mayrounanointment (confirmation), the Eucharist, penance, ordination, marriage and anointing of the sick. Baptism is usually administered to infants, who are immersed three times in holy water. According to the Coptic calendar, the church year begins on 11/12 September, and is marked by seven major festivals: Christmas (7 January), Epiphany, Annunciation, Palm Sunday, Easter, Ascension Day and PentecoSt. Great importance is attached to worshipping the Virgin Mary, the apostles, the martyrs and other saints.

During the 20th and 21st centuries, there was a revival of the Coptic Church, brought about by Pope Cyril IV. 1971 saw the inauguration of Pope and Patriarch Schenouda III, based in Cairo, and who died on 17 March 2012. His appointment marked the beginning of a golden era: since then, not only has the number of adherents of the Coptic Church increased, but there has also been a rise in the number of young people in the monasteries, churches and theological colleges. Today, the Coptic Orthodox Church comprises at least 17 million people worldwide (15 million in Egypt and 2 million abroad).

Since 18 November 2021, the head of the Coptic Orthodox Church has been Pope Tawadros II. Between 23 May and 4 June 2013, he visited Austria where he consecrated five Coptic churches.

A Coptic parish has existed in Austria since 1976, and has been led by Father Johannes Elbaramosy. His duties have also included looking after the Copts in Switzerland, Denmark and Germany. In the 1960s there were only a few Coptic families in Austria; most of them had come to the country as students or business people. During the first few years, the Copts were guests at the Greek Church, then at the Catholic Church in Wagramer Strasse, in the 22nd district of Vienna. Father Johannes forged a close relationship particularly with the Benedictines, in whose monastery he lived as a guest for 24 years, and where he was also able to receive his Coptic parishioners.

Today, Austria's Coptic congregation comprises around 10,000 adherents, who are mainly based in Vienna and Graz, but also in Linz, Klagenfurt and Tyrol. Since 2000, the congregation has been led by Bishop Gabriel, whose pastoral care extends beyond Austria to the German-speaking part of Switzerland. He looks after the Austrian community together with 18 priests.

As the number of followers grew, so did the desire to build their own church. On 25 April 1998, Pope Patriarch Schenouda III laid the foundation stone for the church at Quadenstrasse 4–6, in the 22nd district of Vienna. As is the tradition of the Copts, the building brings together the art of East and West. The special atmosphere of the church is created by the legacy of the pharaonic culture. In art, modern Copts see themselves as the descendants of the pharaohs. Pharaonic art lives on in Coptic monasteries, churches, paintings, frescoes, icons and wood carvings; Coptic hymns evoke Pharaonic melodies which have been given Christian lyrics. This has kept the music of the pharaohs alive within the Coptic Church.

In Graz, the Copts have also established their own church, by converting an old factory at Wiener Straße 246. As monasticism is central to Coptic religious life, in November 2001 the Coptic community acquired Obersiebenbrunn Castle, formerly owned by Prince

Eugene, in Lower Austria. Along with a monastery, the new development will accommodate an ecumenical meeting centre and theology school. The legal status of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Austria has also been improved. In April 2003, the law on the "external legal relationships of the Oriental Orthodox Churches in Austria" ("Oriental Orthodox Church Law") came into force, under which the Coptic Orthodox Church was granted the status of a public-law corporation. This has created a uniform legal basis for the Eastern Orthodox Churches in Austria, placing the Coptic Orthodox Church on an equal footing with the other two Eastern Orthodox churches in this country: the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Syrian Orthodox Church.

2.9 The Old Catholic Church

The Old Catholic Church emerged from the inner-Catholic resistance to the two dogmas of the infallibility and episcopal omnipotence of the Pope, rules which were made generally binding in 1870. Those Catholics who did not accept these dogmas for reasons of faith called themselves “Old Catholic”, as they professed the faith of the one, undivided, old, Catholic and Apostolic Church of the early centuries. This led to the formation of “Old Catholic Action Committees”, whose representatives—among them the Munich provost and church historian Ignaz von Döllinger—met in 1871 for the “First Old Catholic Congress” in Munich to discuss the way forward.

In Austria, with a parish resolution of 6 October 1871, the St. Salvator Town Hall Chapel in Vienna’s 1st district was handed over to the “anti-Vatican-minded Catholics” for use, allowing Pastor Alois Anton to celebrate the first Old Catholic service in the chapel on 15 October 1871. The next day, Cardinal Rauscher imposed a local interdict on the Salvator Chapel, which was only repealed in 1969 by Cardinal Dr. Franz König. Old Catholic church services were held in Warnsdorf in North Bohemia (16 October 1871) and in Ried im Innkreis (Christmas Day 1871). These three towns became the focal points for the church congregations that sprang up over the years that followed. Only after several attempts, and lengthy disputes, did the Imperial and Royal Minister for Culture and Education recognise the Old Catholic Church in Austria, in an ordinance of 18 October 1877.

At the First Ordinary Synod (5 May 1879), the draft church constitution, drafted by Prof. von Schulte, was presented. The “Synodal and Community Regulations” were adopted and the Synodal Council was elected, with its first president being Carl Linder. The synodal assembly of 9 June 1879 decided on a number of reforms, such as lay people contributing to decisions made by the church and community leadership, the introduction of the mother tongue in church services, the abolition of compulsory celibacy and the obligation to confess in person. It was not until 1888 that the Old Catholic Church found an diocese administrator in Pastor Amandus (also known as Milos);



Election of bishops at the Extraordinary Synod, 2007;
© Old Catholic Church of Austria

the State refused to approve the election of a bishop, as the necessary financial conditions were not yet satisfied. However, in 1896 the bishopric of Vienna was moved to Warnsdorf. Although during the early decades the Old Catholic Church had to contend with many difficulties such as lack of clergy, having to travel long distances to visit the faithful, and financial worries, the number of Old Catholic believers increased considerably in the following years. In 1901, a branch congregation was formed in Graz, which in 1909 gained the status of congregation in its own right. In 1904, a branch of the parish of Ried im Innkreis was established in Linz. After the end of the Danube monarchy, Austria’s three remaining parishes of Vienna, Ried im Innkreis and Graz merged to form an independent diocese. It was approved by a decree passed by the Department of Culture of the Ministry of the Interior and Education on 26 March 1921. The diocese administrator was Pastor Adalbert Schindelar, who was elected bishop in 1924. In 1922, Salzburg, which had previously belonged to Ried, achieved the status of independent parish. After 1938, the Old Catholic Church of Austria and later its counterpart in what was then Czechoslovakia, merged with the “Catholic Church of the Old Catholics of the German Empire”

according to imperial law. This forced merger resulted in a number of changes. First, a church contributions order and a central church contributions office had to be set up, and the “Synodal and Community regulations” had to be adapted to the changed circumstances. This was accompanied by the centralisation of the entire church administration. During the 1940s, the parish of Vienna was divided into six independent parishes. After the war ended, the biggest problem was restoring the places of worship that had been damaged during the conflict, and building new churches to replace the ones destroyed by bombing. The financial situation was strained to say the least, but the Austrian church was able to obtain the help of foreign churches. It was only with the “Federal Law on Financial Aid to the Old Catholic Church” (1960) that a certain degree of consolidation took place. In 1980, the Old Catholic Church in Austria received a new set of bylaws, which were approved by the Federal Ministry for Education and the Arts with a decree dated 11 December 1980.

The Old Catholic Church—which in Austria has around 9,500 members—is a national church. Its constitution is episcopal-synodal, which means that its leadership and administration are performed in cooperation between the bishop and the clergy and lay people (both women and men) who are elected to the Synodal Council.

The bishop is elected by the Synod and is ordained after being appointed by an Old Catholic archbishop or bishop with the assistance of two other bishops in apostolic succession. The bishop is the spiritual leader of the church, and is responsible for the maintenance of the confessional process and the liturgy. The spiritual office has three levels: deacon, priestess or priest, and bishop. Following the synodal resolutions of 1991 and 1995, all offices are in principle also open to women. The Synodal Council assists the bishop in administrative tasks, with particular regard to the administration of church assets. The church leadership is formed of the bishop and the Synodal Council. The Synodal Council consists of three clerics and six lay members, who are elected by the Synod for a six-year term. The bishop and chairperson of the Synodal Council represent the church externally. The Synod is the supreme legislative body of the Church,

and meets every three years. The bishop, the clergy, the Synodal Councils of the lay class and the members of congregations who can only hold secular office (both women and men) have the right to vote. The bishop, the clerical body, the Synodal Council and the parishes have the right of application.

Today, the Old Catholic Church in Austria consists of twelve parishes. The pastor is supported by a parish council consisting of at least three and a maximum of 15 church councils (made up of women and men). The parish assembly, made up of the adult members of the parish, has the right to submit applications to the Synod and to elect the priest, the church councils and the members of the Synod (women and men).



The 2019 Ordinary Synod, in the Old Catholic parish of Vienna West “Heilandskirche” © Old Catholic Church Austria/Deacon Eva Repits

The Old Catholic Church of Austria belongs to the Union of Utrecht, which is the union of the independent Old Catholic national churches represented within the union by their bishops. The Union is based on the “Utrecht Declaration of 1889”, the catholicity of the ministry, and the liturgy common to all the churches. The bishops and their theological advisors meet regularly at the International Old Catholic Bishops’ Conference (IBK), whose ex officio president is the Archbishop of Utrecht. The IBK is responsible for all matters relating to the maintenance of the fellowship of

Old Catholic Churches, and for their relations with other churches. It has the authority to issue doctrinal statements and to conclude agreements with other churches, on behalf of the Old Catholic Church Fellowship.

This can only be done with the consent of the bishops, and after each bishop has consulted with his or her local church. IBK resolutions can only be binding and constitutionally put into effect after the consultation process has obtained the greatest possible consensus and has been accepted by the church members. Consequently, the IBK's decisions do not necessarily have to be implemented in the same way and at the same time in every church in the Union of Utrecht. International Old Catholic Congresses are held every four years, while the International Old Catholic Theological Conference is held every year. There is also an International Liturgical Commission, an International Old Catholic Lay Forum, an Old Catholic Anglican Bishops' Conference and an Old Catholic Anglican Theologian Conference, all of which serve to debate topics of common interest.



Ordination of Rev. Dorothee Bührma, Salzburg (in the church of the Deaconry Centre, where the United Methodist Church now holds its services) © EmK/Bernhard Pöll

2.10 The United Methodist Church in Austria

The United Methodist Church grew out of a religious revival movement within the Anglican Church during the 18th century. The initiator of this movement was an Anglican vicar and Oxford professor of theology, John Wesley (1703–1791). Wesley led some very effective missionary work in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. After the Enlightenment and the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, England found itself in a state of profound social and societal transformation. John Wesley primarily addressed the socially disadvantaged working population, whose concerns were not being addressed by the church. He preached in the streets, in town squares, and in open spaces. At the heart of his sermons was the call to a sacred life, lived in love and service to others. Wesley's constant struggle to eliminate social ills has remained a defining principle of Methodism to this day. For example, Wesley made a significant contribution to England becoming the first country to ban the slave trade by means of a parliamentary resolution. The religious renewal within the Anglican Church led to a separate church being established in the newly formed United States in 1784. At Christmas of that year, the Methodist Episcopal Church was established in Baltimore, with the consent of John Wesley. The Methodist movement quickly spread around the world. By the time John Wesley died in 1791, there were 135,000 Methodists. In the year 2000, the Methodist denomination had 80 million adherents in 138 countries. The United Methodist Church in Austria is part of the worldwide "United Methodist Church".

The United Methodist Church is present in Europe, Africa, Asia and the USA, and has 12 million members. It is part of the Church of Jesus Christ, which is followed by all Christians in the apostolic creed. This is why everyone can participate in church life, regardless of race, skin colour, nationality or economic status. As the United Methodist Church, being part of the "one holy, universal, apostolic Church", believes that the Lord of the Church calls all Christians to be as one, it strives for unity in every aspect of church life.

The United Methodist Church in Austria currently has 1,400 members in nine parishes: Vienna, Graz, St. Pölten, Linz, Ried im Innkreis, Salzburg and Bregenz. Methodist work in Austria was started in 1870, in Vienna, by the preacher Christian Dieterle. State recognition was granted in 1951. The church's current bylaws state as follows:

- Article 1. (1) The church bears the name *Evangelisch-methodistische Kirche in Österreich*.
- (2) It consists of a single religious community as defined in the national legal provisions on the recognition of religious societies and extends its activities across the entire federal territory of the Republic of Austria. Its seat is in Vienna.
- (3) The United Methodist Church in Austria is part of the worldwide United Methodist Church.
- Article 2. (1) The articles of faith of the United Methodist Church are laid down in the Church Ordinance.
- (2) The United Methodist Church is a Protestant church. It believes that the Scriptures are the foundation of the Christian faith, and, as a guideline for Christian life, they contain all that is necessary for attaining salvation. The Church holds fast to the Apostles' Creed and thus professes to be part of the one holy Christian Church.

The internal structure of the United Methodist Church cannot be understood without the institutions of its conferences, which are advisory and legislative bodies; they give the Church a structure, while combining its diverse expressions of life in a meaningful way. At local level, the

conference consists primarily of lay people, while at all other levels (both regional and worldwide) ordained and lay people are represented equally. This conference structure allows the United Methodist Church to combine extensive freedom at the local level with simultaneous responsibility for the Church as a whole. The local congregations form district conferences, and through these they are integrated into the annual conference (Synod) and thus into the entire United Methodist Church. The district conference includes anyone from a local church who has held any role or responsibility in that church. The district conference meets at least once a year, under the chairmanship of the Superintendent. It is the occasion at which the pastor and other church officials give an account of their work.

The “Annual Conferences” (Synods) are the basic bodies of the United Methodist Church. The Synods are usually composed of an equal number of pastors and lay people. Pastors are accepted into the Annual Conference as life members, when they are ordained. The lay representatives are elected by the district conferences for a four-year term. The entire work of the Methodist Church in Austria is organised as an annual conference. The exact tasks of the annual conference are laid down in Articles 5–8 of the bylaws of the United Methodist Church in Austria, in line with the regulations of the worldwide United Methodist Church. The annual conference is always chaired by a bishop. The bishop responsible for Austria, Dr. Patrick Streiff, is based in Zurich. If he cannot attend, the Superintendent will stand in for him.

Several annual conferences are combined into a central conference, whose mandate includes the election of bishops. The conferences will assign areas of activity to the bishop, and each of them will form a bishopric. The bishop is responsible for his or her administration of the Central Conference. Globally, the highest authority is the General Synod, which can legislate on all matters relating to the Church as a whole. The Central Conference and General Conference are held every four years. There are currently three central conferences in Europe.



Service held in the Methodist Church, Vienna Fünfhaus
© EmK/Bernhard Pöll

The United Methodist Church in Austria belongs to the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe. This includes Synods in the following countries: Algeria, Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Macedonia, Austria, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Switzerland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Tunisia and Hungary. The United Methodist Church is a founding member of the World Council of Churches in Austria. Since 1990 it has had an official pulpit and communion fellowship with the Protestant Church (AB and HB). The fellowship includes mutual recognition of ordination, and cooperation in many areas such as religious instruction.

Since its beginnings, the United Methodist Church has regarded it as being fundamentally important, during a time of increasing lack of faith, to invite people into a relationship of faith and “to spread scriptural holiness over the land”. According to the Methodist understanding, sanctification in accordance with the Scriptures can be expressed by living a responsible life in politics, society, culture and the family, which is determined by love for God and for all people.

2.11 The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Austria

God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ are at the heart of the divine worship and theology of this Church. Jesus Christ died on the cross for the sins of the world. Like all Christians, the members of the LDS Church celebrate Christmas and Easter. The scriptures consist of the standard works of the Bible and the Book of Mormon, which is considered further testimony to the existence of Jesus Christ.

The LDS Church was founded in the north-eastern United States on 6 April 1830. Its global headquarters are in Salt Lake City, Utah. The first Austrian congregation was founded in Haag am Hausruck in 1901, and the Church has been officially recognised in Austria since 1955.

Just a few years after the Church was founded, a group of missionaries travelled to mainland Europe via England. Orson Hyde, a member of the Mormons who belonged to the LDS Church's leading body, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, came to Austria in 1841. In 1883, missionaries were sent to Vienna. In the same year, the first baptism took place in Lambach, Upper Austria. Paul Haslinger was the first member of the LDS Church, in what is now the Republic of Austria.

Johann Huber was a farmer living in the village of Rottenbach, near Haag am Hausruck, at the turn of the twentieth century. One day he received a visit from a former schoolfriend, the carpenter Martin Ganglmayer. The two friends found many interesting topics to discuss: Martin Ganglmayer had emigrated to America, where he joined the LDS Church. Johann Huber listened to the message with great interest, and was baptised on 27 April 1900 in Munich.

Huber made no secret of his conversion, and soon everyone in the area came to hear of it. He was harassed and persecuted as a result. The Church's first meeting house was the Michelmeierhof in Rottenbach. These troubled waters were only calmed with the end of the First World War and the entry into force of the religion-related provisions of the State Treaty of Saint-Germain. The church community was centred around Haag am Hausruck,



Church headquarters in Vienna, Austria © Frank Helmrich

and was now able to grow more freely. However, church services were still disrupted and some members were evicted from their homes.

From the turn of the century until the beginning of the First World War, several missionaries were active in Vienna. A small congregation was formed, and its membership grew from 21 to 46 people during those years. In 1914, the missionaries were called back to America, and shortly afterwards the community was dissolved. In 1920, the Vienna congregation was reinstated, and has existed ever since, without interruption.

Apart from the handful of earlier conversions, regular missionary work began after the First World War, in the provincial capitals of Linz and Salzburg. The communities in Graz and Klagenfurt, Innsbruck, Dornbirn, Bruck/Mur, Wels, St. Pölten and Vienna's Newtown emerged after the Second World War. The LDS Church gained official State recognition with the ordinance of the Federal Ministry for Education of 27 September 1955.

The first church building was constructed in 1937 in Haag am Hausruck, followed by another in Salzburg, in 1953. The first church-owned parish hall in Vienna was finally consecrated in 1961. This was followed by other meeting houses in Vienna and in the rest of Austria. All the buildings were erected without public funding.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Austria is divided into two administrative districts. The Vienna Austria district was formed on 20 April 1980, and includes the federal states of Vienna, Lower Austria, Burgenland and Styria. On 19 January 1997 it was joined by the Salzburg Austria district, which encompasses the federal states of Upper Austria, Salzburg, Carinthia and Tyrol. Vorarlberg is part of another district within the Church organisation. A district spans multiple parishes and functions independently. It is presided over by the district president, who has two advisors. The leadership of the districts and congregations is performed voluntarily by lay priests.

By the end of 2019, the Church had 16.3 million members worldwide. In Austria, it has 17 parishes with around 4,700 members. The LDS Church is represented in Austria by the Church Council.

The global administration and setting of guidelines is the responsibility of the First Presidency, consisting of three men, and the Council of the Twelve Apostles, who are based in Salt Lake City. The First Presidency and the Council of Twelve members travel around the world to meet with local leaders and members.

The bishop is the honorary leader of a community, and mainly performs pastoral and charitable duties. He is assisted by church officials (men, women and young people), who also contribute to the active life of the community on a purely voluntary basis. A well-organised plan of visits helps the bishop to give support to church members and other people in need. The bishop works closely with the leader of the community's women's organisation. The involvement of all members in church work is a distinctive feature of the LDS Church.

The bishop, who is married, performs his duties alongside his ordinary job. Bernd Scheuch, bishop of the Graz community, talks about his responsibilities: "I can only speak for myself, but I wouldn't know how to help or advise someone, or assist them with family matters if I myself hadn't experienced the delights and difficulties of partnership, the joy and challenges of having children in everyday life". The church encourages its members to follow the example of Jesus Christ, and to show tolerance

and brotherly love for fellow humans. The LDS Church undertakes aid projects for people in need, globally and in Austria. Welfare programmes help promote individual growth. With regard to health, the church rules state that alcohol, nicotine and drugs should be avoided. The Church teaches that it is important to support the State and respect its laws.

The value of the family is one of its central principles, and that the tenets of Christian living are best illustrated and practised within the family unit. Parental responsibility is strongly emphasised, and the church encourages family prayer sessions and weekly family evenings at home, to provide regular opportunities for intergenerational debate. Family discussions also allow parents to pass on important values such as honesty and altruism.

An excerpt from the publication "The Family—A Proclamation to the World" says: "We call on responsible citizens and government officials around the world to promote policies designed to preserve and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society." This proclamation was made on 23 September 1995 by the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.



Address given during Sunday service © Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Austria



The photo shows the street side of the church building of the New Apostolic parish, Vienna-Penzing. It does not have the typical New Apostolic architecture. According to the liturgy of the New Apostolic Church, there are generally no pictures, statues, bells or bell towers. The design of the main sacred room in the church centres around the altar, which is where the Word is proclaimed, and Holy Communion is celebrated. Adjoining rooms are often available for church activities outside of service times.

2.12 The New Apostolic Church in Austria

As a reaction to the consequences of the French Revolution (1789–1793), there was a revival and intensification of intellectual life in many religious circles in Europe at the beginning of the 19th century. Christians prayed for the renewed outpouring of the Holy Spirit and for the renewed sending of apostles. They also hoped to see a revitalisation of Christian life within the religious communities, which they saw as being mired in formalism and ritual. An “apostolic” movement emerged, which then took on an ecclesiastical structure between 1832 and 1835, after twelve apostles were called through prophecies. The distinguishing feature of what was now known as the Catholic Apostolic Church was that it was headed by apostles, who gave the gift of the Holy Spirit through the laying-on of hands, in order to prepare the faithful for the soon-awaited return of Christ.

The first churches of the new apostolic faith sprang up in Albury and London, England. From the second half of the 19th century onwards, the New Apostolic Church developed from these beginnings, which can be said to have started with the Catholic-Apostolic Congregation of Hamburg in 1863. There have been New Apostolic Christians in Austria for about 100 years. The church was recognised by the state in 1975.

Christian Church—Jesus as King— Bible as the basis of faith

The New Apostolic Church is based on the teachings of Jesus and, with the apostles, it continues the task of the early Christian church, in which the apostles also continued to work on behalf of Jesus. The New Apostolic Church sees service as a way towards God, and sees itself as part of the Church of Jesus Christ, the body of Christian faith communities in which the triune God is worshipped and praised during divine service, and in which unity, holiness,

universality and apostolicity are available in a number of ways and to differing degrees. The New Apostolic faith is based on the Holy Scriptures (in German-speaking countries, according to the Luther edition of 2017).

Within the ecumenical movement, New Apostolic Christians are involved at local, regional and national level.



The picture shows the altar in the church building of the New Apostolic parish, Vienna-Donaustadt. The altar is a holy place, consecrated by God. In the New Apostolic Church, it has a double function: it is the place of proclamation and the place of preparation for Holy Communion. Its sacredness is not impaired by the fact that sacred acts are only carried out at certain times of the day or week, during a religious service.

The three sacraments

Holy baptism with water, baptism with the Holy Spirit or Holy Sealing (dispensing of the gift of the Holy Spirit by an apostle) and Holy Communion are the sacraments of the early Christian Church, and they are administered today in the New Apostolic Church. Baptism with holy water is a ritual, recognised as such within the Christian churches.

Religious values

The commandment of Jesus: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. [...] You shall love your neighbour as yourself”, is the life direction for New Apostolic Christians. The joyful expectation of the Second Coming of Jesus is kept alive during the church services. The word of God, spread by the Holy Spirit as the guiding force, is passed on by the apostles (spiritual leaders), ministers and deacons.

Liturgy

During the church services, the gospel of Jesus Christ is spoken in free preaching, without a script. The highlight of the service is the celebration of Holy Communion, which is offered to all believers after the common prayer “Our Father” and the forgiveness of sins. The musical arrangement of the service, which includes a choir and orchestra, is a special expression of the solemn encounter with God. In addition to the sacraments, the faithful receive a special blessing to mark a confirmation, engagement, marriage or wedding anniversary. Funeral ceremonies are conducted by the minister or an apostle. Remembrance and prayers for the deceased are also an integral part of worship, and are particularly prominent at three church services each year.

Social values and activities

Like other people, the members of the New Apostolic Church go about their daily tasks and enjoy the beauty of life, although of course, like other people, they are not spared from suffering. In all of this, the awareness that all life originates from God shapes their appreciation and respect for fellow human beings, regardless of their origin, background, living conditions, religion, illnesses or disabilities. Concern for the protection and preservation of human life and the endeavour to create an environment worthy of the future generations is also derived from this. This positive attitude to life is based on trust in salvation through Jesus, and eternal communion with God. In this way, New Apostolic Christians are integrated into society and are free to develop their personalities, as how people conduct their private lives is solely down to the individual. The church members take responsibility, fulfil their duties, are active at work, and have friends both inside and outside the Church. The offer of individual pastoral care can help and support them in a wide variety of life circumstances.

Position within the state and society

As an institution, the New Apostolic Church is also aware of its Christian responsibility towards society, and its contribution takes the form of cooperation with other churches and its charitable commitment.

The New Apostolic Church has no political or economic goals. It is financed purely from the contributions of its members. The money is spent in accordance with the principles of non-profit. The church's annual accounts are audited by an independent auditor.

Structure and offices

The structure of the New Apostolic Church enables a minimum of centralised control. The Chief Apostle heads the circle of Apostles worldwide, and with them, leads the Church, with Christ being its Head. The Chief Apostle is the last instance in matters of faith and issues doctrinal statements after consultation with the District Apostles.

The catechism, published in 2012, offers a systematic presentation of the New Apostolic doctrine of faith.

The official hierarchy of this church dates back to early Christian times, and has developed according to the needs of its parishes. Women fulfil a variety of tasks in the church parishes.

New Apostolic ministers

The faithful are cared for in the parishes by deacons, ministers and apostles (apostles, district apostles and chief apostles). These pastors, who are ordained into their office by the laying-on of hands, are mostly volunteers with jobs and families. Other aspects of voluntary work include the religious instruction, which is given by teachers appointed by the church in accordance with a state-approved curriculum, and the musical direction of church services performed by organists, choirs and orchestras.

Church leadership

The pastoral care of the parishes in Austria is in the hands of Apostle Philipp Burren and Bishop Peter Jeram, who lead the seven Austrian church districts with around 5,000 members in 45 parishes across the country.

Bishop Peter Jeram is the church president and representative of the New Apostolic Church in Austria. He is supported in this role by the permanent representative of the Church President, Hirte Walter Hessler, who represents the church in its relations with other churches and religious societies, and towards the state organs of the Republic of Austria.



The picture shows the bread and wine offered by a priest of the New Apostolic Church. Holy Communion is a celebration of joy and thanksgiving. It is taken in remembrance, as a confession and in fellowship. The substance of the bread and wine is not altered by the consecration or the reciting of words. Instead, there is consubstantiation: the substance of the body and blood of Jesus is added. All baptised Christians are invited to celebrate Holy Communion. In addition to Holy Communion, New Apostolic Christians know two other sacraments: water baptism, and the baptism of the Spirit.



The Vesak festival at the Vienna Peace Pagoda, in memory of the birth, the enlightenment and the death of the Buddha
© Austrian Buddhist Union

2.13 The Austrian Buddhist Union

Buddhism, which dates back more than 2,500 years, is one of the world's great religions. In his teachings, the Buddha first studied our world and its laws. Building on this, he then indicated a way that allows the individual to work with the mind to overcome suffering by gaining knowledge, adopting positive behaviour and developing the ability to help others.

The path and goal in Buddhism

The goal of Buddhism is Awakening or the attaining of Buddha, the Enlightened State. This means, on the one hand, complete freedom from suffering and, on the other, realisation of the true nature of mind and the development of all the qualities resulting from this insight. In order to be able to achieve this, we need to start from where we are right now. This is why the first two statements

in the Buddha's "Four Noble Truths", called the "Truth of Suffering" and the "Truth of the Cause of Suffering" refer to our current state. In a kind of inventorial analysis of our world, the Buddha showed the extent to which our lives are shaped by dissatisfaction and problems, and also that the cause of all this suffering lies in our own lack of understanding of what "reality" truly is.

The Buddha clearly stated that our persistent misconception of Self and the phenomena of the world as truly and inherently existing lead to afflictive, obscuring states of mind and deeds resulting from them. Negative actions and the impressions they leave in the mind, then cause further suffering and problems. This process of Dependent Origination, which is inherent in every act of body, speech and mind, is referred to by the Sanskrit term "karma". Karma means "action" and refers to the fact that every deed is followed by an effect that corresponds to the nature of the respective action. Consequently,

wholesome actions will always result in joy and happiness, while the effects of unwholesome ones will inevitably be suffering and problems. The concept of karma does not at all mean that we are subject to a predetermined fate. Quite on the contrary, we ourselves determine what we are doing, and because through our motivation and every single action resulting from it we create our own karma and thus constantly shape the quality of our lives.

In the context of the individual's misconception of himself and of the outside world, he establishes a very personal relationship with everything that happens to him. He can only experience things in the light of his own subjective experiences and is therefore completely trapped in this view of his world. This process, which continues from life to life, is known as the conditional cycle of existence.

Understanding the context of our present situation goes hand in hand with recognizing that, like any sentient being, we inherently have Buddha Nature, the potential for attaining the Buddha-state. With the "Truth of the Cessation of Suffering" and the "Truth of the Way"—the third and fourth of the "Four Noble Truths"—the Buddha set forth the goal of Enlightenment as well as the path to attaining it, showing that each and every one of us is capable of overcoming this misconception of ourselves, our environment, and our mistakes.

Essentially, the way towards this objective is to gain control of your own mind through correct ethical behaviour, meditation and wisdom. By adhering to this path of spiritual development, we deepen our love and compassion for all beings on the one hand, and our insight into the nature of all phenomena on the other. This gradually leads to the weakening of the ego-centered state and the associated suffering, and ultimately, to the attainment of the Buddha-state.

Meditation and mindfulness are tools used for this spiritual training. Meditation clears the mind, so that we gradually come to realise its unlimited nature. With this awareness, we also develop the ability to see ourselves, all other sentient beings, and our environment according to reality, and to detach ourselves from the various ideas, concepts, interpretations, hopes and fears that hinder such direct perception.

Wholesome behaviour, which are actions performed with the motivation of doing good for others and ourselves, will support our spiritual development. They create a harmonious life, and the basis for the inner strength that is important for the practice of meditation.

In Buddhism you are asked to take total personal responsibility: The Buddha only showed us our path; it is up to the individual as to whether he or she takes that path in his or her life.

"The Four Noble Truths", which are the basic framework of Buddhism were expanded by the Buddha during his forty-five years of teaching, to include numerous instructions on a wide variety of topics and questions of life. Within this wealth of teachings, the various Buddhist traditions each emphasize certain specific elements.

This diversity of teaching, practice and meditation corresponds to the diversity of people. Whatever Buddhist tradition you may follow, they all strive towards the same goals: the development of inner abilities, like love and compassion, the attainment of calmness and wisdom and ultimately the realisation of the Buddha-state as the full development of the potential inherent in every sentient being.

Buddhism in Austria

The roots of Buddhism in Austria date back to the turn of the last century, when Karl Eugen Neumann (1865–1918) founded the first Buddhist circle in Austria. From 1938 to 1945, all Buddhist activities in occupied Austria, then part of the Third Reich, were prohibited. The new start after the Second World War was initiated by small private groups, which then merged to form the Buddhist community in the mid-1950s. This development finally led to the recognition of Buddhism as an official religion by the Austrian federal government, with the name "Austrian Buddhist Union" (ÖBR) in 1983.

Institutions and structure of the Austrian Buddhist Union

The Austrian Buddhist Union brings together all residents and foreigners living in Austria who profess to this faith. Its bodies are: The Executive Committee, called the Presidium, the Sangharat, the Buddhist Community and the Arbitration Tribunal.

The presidium manages the interests of the ÖBR and also represents the Union externally. It consists of a president, two vice-presidents and the Secretary General, and also takes care of the administrative and financial tasks of the ÖBR. The Presidium reports to the Sangharat and is elected every five years by the members of the ÖBR.

The Sangharat is the largest decision-making body of the ÖBR. It represents all the religious orders, Dharma groups, institutions and foundations officially admitted as well as the Executive Committee and the voting representatives of the various Buddhist communities. The Sangharat meets at least four times a year. Its duties include accepting new religious orders and groups, appointing religious teachers, preparing their training program, dealing with constitutional matters, and approving the budget. The work of the Sangharat members is honorary. Like the members of the Executive Committee, they are obliged to lead a way of life that is in accordance with the goals of Buddhism.

The ÖBR provides information about the teachings of Buddhism, organises events and assists its members in religious matters; it also helps with the coordination and communications of the ÖBR's individual branches, which exist in all federal states to provide the best possible support for anyone interested in Buddhism as well as for existing Buddhist groups. The Austrian Buddhist Union unites 32 orders, Dharma groups and Buddhist institutes from all different forms of Buddhism.

Theravada Buddhism

- Buddhanuphap Temple
- Theravada Schule
- Sayagi U Ba Khin
- Wat Thaisamekkeewararam-Tirol

Mahayana Buddhism

- Bodhidharma Zendo
- Fo Guang Shan
- Kwan Um Zen Schule
- Neue Welt Institut
- Nipponzan Myohoji
- Österreich Soka Gakkai International
- Puregg Phönixwolke Sangha
- Senkozan Sanghe Nembutsu Do Dharma Gruppe
- Shaolin Kulturverein
- Yun Hwa Sangha
- Zen Zentrum Mishoan

Vajrayana Buddhism

- Drikung Kagyu Orden
- Garchen Chöding Zentrum
- Karma Kagyü Diamantweg
- Karma Kagyü Sangha
- Karma Samphel Ling
- Ligmincha Österreich
- Maitreya Institut Gutenstein
- Österreichische Dzogchen Gemeinschaft
- Palpung Yeshe Chökhör Ling Europe
- Panchen Losang Chogyen Gelug
- Rangjung Yeshe Gomde
- Shambhala Meditationszentrum
- She Drup Ling Graz
- Thekchen Dhongag Choeling

Cross-traditional practices

- Buddhistische Gemeinschaft Salzburg
- Buddhistisches Zentrum Scheibbs

Orders are defined as religious Buddhist communities, which adhere to an authentic tradition of teaching and practice, whereas Dharma groups are religious Buddhist communities formed in response to the specific culture of European people. Each order and group have to send a delegate to the Sangharat. These representatives account for the majority of this body. The orders, Dharma groups and institutions are spiritually autonomous, and oversee the religious life of their members in accordance with their own teaching views and traditions.

The “Mobile Hospice of the ÖBR” has been providing end-of-life care since 2006. Their support is available to all, regardless of religious orientation and origin, and is provided either at home or at permanent facilities. This association provides forms of care, offers respite for relatives to protect them from loss of resilience, and also provides bereavement support and counseling. The range of care services has now also been extended to include Buddhist medical support as part of the Engaged Buddhism concept. Specially trained members of the ÖBR also visit Austrian prisons. In recent years, the Mindful Economy network was set up, along with the Buddhist organisation Animal Compassion, whose main task is to promote the awareness of animals as our fellow sentient beings, by providing discussion events etc.

The positive developments achieved in education and Buddhist religious instruction are particularly noteworthy. In 2018, the Institute for Buddhist Religion was set up at the Kirchliche Pädagogische Hochschule Vienna/Krems, which coordinates the training and further education of Buddhist teachers in Austria.

The Austrian Buddhist Union is active internationally within the “European Buddhist Union” and as a member of the “World Fellowship of Buddhists”.

2.14 Jehovah's Witnesses in Austria

Jehovah's Witnesses in Austria are part of the international community of Jehovah's Witnesses, which now spans 240 different countries and territories. Worldwide in 2018, there were over 8.5 million active Jehovah's Witnesses, of which 21,563 are in Austria. Jehovah's Witnesses are Christians who strive to follow the guiding principles of the Bible in following Jesus Christ.

History

In the early 1870s, a group led by Charles Taze Russell (1852–1916) in Pennsylvania (USA) began a regular, systematic study of the Bible. This Bible study group explored various religious teachings, including the Coming of the “Kingdom of God”. Determined to pass on its knowledge to others, in 1879 the group began publishing “The Watchtower”, a magazine which today has a circulation of 93 million copies in 357 languages (as of Issue No. 1/2020), and is the most widely-distributed religious magazine in the world. Jehovah's Witnesses first became active in Austria in 1911 opening their office in Vienna in 1923. During the Nazi era, Jehovah's Witnesses were disenfranchised, persecuted and prohibited from worshipping, largely due to their refusal to give the Hitler salute or to participate in military activities. The mere fact of being a member of the international community of Jehovah's Witnesses resulted in potential reprisals—even for children and teenagers. During these difficult years, around 90 percent of Jehovah's Witnesses were incarcerated in prisons or concentration camps, where more than a quarter of them died. After 1945, Jehovah's Witnesses restarted their work, with renewed vigour. In 1998, they were given legal personality as a state-registered religious denominational community. Jehovah's Witnesses in Austria have been recognized as a religious society since May 7, 2009.

Teachings

God's name: In the past, Jehovah's Witnesses were known as “Bible students”. However, in 1931 they officially adopted the name “Jehovah's Witnesses”, a name that can be found in the Bible, at Isaiah 43,10, which reads: “You are



Kingdom Hall, Tyrol © Jehovah's Witnesses in Austria

my witnesses', declares Jehovah” (Bible quotations taken from the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures). “Jehovah” (or “Yahweh”) is God's proper name, and appears almost 7,000 times in the Hebrew Scriptures of the Bible.

God's Word: All of Jehovah's Witnesses' beliefs are based on the Bible, which for them is far more than a human cultural asset. Like the apostle Paul, Jehovah's Witnesses believe that “All Scripture is inspired of God and beneficial for teaching, for reproving, for setting things straight, for disciplining in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3,16).

God's Kingdom: Jesus taught his followers to say the “Lord's Prayer”, which says, among other things:

“Let your Kingdom come. Let your will take place, as in heaven, also on earth” (Matthew 6,10). Jehovah's Witnesses believe that this prayer will be fulfilled in the near future. The Bible describes God's Kingdom as a real government, which will rule from heaven with Christ as King. God will use this Kingdom to accomplish His will on earth. The work of the Kingdom's government will include restoring the earth to a paradise, where injustice, poverty, famine, crime, violence, war, pollution, and even disease and death, will cease to exist.

Public Ministry: Jehovah's Witnesses believe that each individual has the right to make their own choices about religious matters, and that this right should be respected. However, they also believe that in the Bible, God himself reveals how He wants to be worshipped. Therefore—following the Biblical model—they are active in missionary work, which they see as a commandment of love, to make Biblical truths accessible to as many people as possible. Preaching God's Word publicly, and from house to house, is an important part of their worship (Matthew 24,14; 28,19–20).

Relationship to the State: Jehovah's Witnesses have a positive attitude towards the State and society. They fully recognize the rule of law, and the principle of democracy. They see democratically elected state organs as being legitimised through authorities ordained by God (Romans 13,1–7). Accordingly, Jehovah's Witnesses are known as law-abiding citizens who take their civic duties seriously, cooperate readily with the authorities and state organs, and who contribute to promoting peace and tolerance in society through testimony and action.

Structure

According to the Bible, the governing body of Christians in the first-century was a body made up of Jesus' disciples closely united with one another by his teachings. They provided the congregation with Biblical directives as to religious matters, directives that helped to maintain doctrinal unity. They also provided the necessary spiritual assistance (Acts, Chapters 15 and 16).

In similar manner, the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses today gives guidance, encouragement, and advice, and issues directives, which are based on the Bible, in order to help Jehovah's Witnesses maintain doctrinal unity, and to provide the necessary spiritual assistance. The Governing Body that is leading the worldwide community of Jehovah's Witnesses is located in New York State and is currently made up of persons from various countries.

The supervisory organ of the Religious Association in Austria is the Branch Committee, which is composed of at least three elders. It operates and makes decisions according to the instructions of the Governing Body. The Branch Committee is responsible for the supervision of the Religious Association, its structural divisions and its agencies.

The legal representation of the Religious Association is incumbent on the Board of Directors, which is composed of at least three elders, appointed to their office by the Branch Committee. Every member of the Board of Directors each represents the Religious Association and is individually authorized to sign. The confirmation of the appointments to the Board of Directors can be viewed at www.jehovas-zeugen.at, under the heading "Recht" (Law).



Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses, St. Pölten: In this hall, with a seating capacity of approximately 1,200, Jehovah's Witnesses regularly hold public services in various languages. These services also include the religious holidays of the religious society. © Jehovah's Witnesses in Austria

The Religious Association includes the local congregations, currently counted at 299. Each congregation consists of around 50 to 120 Jehovah's Witnesses, and is directed and represented by a body of responsible elders or overseers (from the Greek: *presbýteroi* or *epískopoi*). They are supported by ministerial servants (from the Greek: *diákonoí*), who are given various organizational duties. The Religious Association appoints suitable members to these spiritual offices, which are intended to be permanent. All of these services are performed voluntarily, because of a religious awareness that these are sacred services for the honour and glorification of God.

Jehovah's Witnesses call their places of worship "Kingdom Halls". These are used not only for worship and teaching, but also as centres for spreading the "good news of the Kingdom" within the geographical region assigned to the respective congregation. Through this public preaching activity, all people regardless of their race, gender or background, are invited to learn more about the Bible and to find that a life lived according to biblical values is still relevant today, and leads to happiness.

2.15 The Alevi Society in Austria (ALEVI)

Since 2013, the Alevi Community in Austria (ALEVI) has been a state-recognised religious community in Austria for adherents living in the country.

Doctrine of faith

The term “Alevi” refers to the disciples of Ali (the son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet Muhammad) and those who consider Ali’s actions to be right. This was expressed by the Prophet Muhammad himself, as he had found the actions of Ali to be right.

After the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632, disputes over his rightful successor led to the division of Islam.

Alevis, alongside Sunnis and Shiites, form an independent religious community within Islam. They confess to God, the Prophet Muhammad and the Holy Ali. A characteristic of this doctrine is its specific understanding of the Koran and the special bond with the Prophet’s family (Ehl-i Beyt).

Alevis reject the Sharia (the legal code in Orthodox Islam) and the Sunna (forms and techniques of behaviour in Orthodox Islam). The worship of the twelve imams (the direct descendants of the Prophet) and the observance of their teaching are equally part of the foundations of this faith, as is the recognition of all human beings as God’s creations and bearers of divine light. This equality also encompasses gender equality.

Alevis pray in a *cem evi* or “house of gathering”. Communal prayer takes place during the *cem* (gathering). The service is led by a *pir* (guide or teacher), a spiritual leader who is a direct descendant of the Prophet. If the spiritual leadership is exercised with the necessary consent of the community, it is also respected by the members of the community. The rituals of the divine service are practiced with care and respect by the Alevi community.

Prayers offered during the *cem* are said in the respective mother tongue. During a *Cem* service, Alevi men and women pray alongside. Understanding and agreement in a *cem* service are of particular importance because,



An Alevi *cem* service. The ritual of awakening the holy light marks the beginning of every *cem* service. According to a surah from the Quran, the holy light is awakened in the name of God (Allah), his Prophet (Mohammed) and the Friend of God (Ali). The light is awakened in all the places where God is thought of and holy acts are carried out
© Alevi Faith Community in Austria (ALEVI)

according to the Alevi philosophy, communal prayer is not possible in the event of a dispute, and can only start after there has been reparation or reconciliation.

The *Semah* prayer ritual has a very high priority within the Alevi doctrine of faith. The *Semah* is accompanied by a *saz* (long-necked lute) and by mystical or religious songs sung by women and men.

The period of fasting is not the same as with Sunni or Shia Islam, instead it lasts for a period of twelve days (based on the twelve imams) during the month of Muharrem, the first month of the Islamic calendar.

After the 12-day fast, an *aşure* (dessert) is baked as a symbol of gratitude, and is distributed and enjoyed among friends, relatives and neighbours.

Alevism as we know it today was influenced by various Alevi mystics such as Sah Hatayi, Hacı Bektas Veli and Yunus Emre between the 13th and 16th centuries.

After the Sunni, the Alevis form the second largest Islamic religious community in Austria (around 80,000) and in Turkey (around 20 million). However, unlike in Austria, Alevi Islam and the Alevi houses of prayer (*cem evi*) are still not recognised in Turkey.

Humanism and universalism are strong features of the Alevi faith. The Alevis’ creed revolves around the concept of a human being having responsibility for the self. Their relationships with other people are important to them.

History and legal status

Islam is one of the largest religions in the world, and embraces different denominations. In addition to Sunniism (the Hanafi, Shafiite, Maliki and Hanbelite schools) and Shia Islam (Imamites, Ismailis and Zaidi), there is also Alevi Islam.

Alevi have been living in Austria for at least five decades, since the arrival of migrant workers from Turkey, but only since their efforts to gain recognition as a religious community in Austria.

On 23 March 2009, the Alevi in Austria achieved what was probably the final breakthrough to greater awareness, when the “Cultural Association of Alevi in Vienna” applied to the Office of Culture for recognition as an “Islamic Alevi Community in Austria”.

The application by the Association of Viennese Alevi was initially rejected. The Office of Culture recognised the Alevi as belonging to the “Islamic faith”, but the reason given for the rejection was that Islamic law did not provide for multiple religious communities. The Viennese Alevi successfully appealed the decision before the Austrian Constitutional Court (VfGH). “The Constitutional Court has ruled that the Federal Minister for Education, Art and Culture did not comply with the Constitution,” was the official statement by the Chief Justice. Nowhere in the relevant Austrian laws does it say that there is only one Islamic religious or denominational community. This view violates Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (the right to religious freedom).

As an important first step on the path towards recognition as an independent religious community, the Alevi in Austria celebrated their approval as a registered religious denomination on 16 December 2010. With the decision of the Federal Ministry for Education, Art and Culture of 16 December, the Alevi in Austria have been officially allowed (retrospectively, since 13 December 2010) to designate themselves as the “Islamic Alevi Community in Austria” (ALEVI). After their successful recognition as an Islamic Alevi Confessional Community, the Alevi also pursued their goal of gaining recognition as a religious society. To obtain this, they needed proof of membership of at least two per thousand of the



Alevi prayer house (Cem House) in Vienna, Schererstr. 4, 1210 Vienna: Sah Hatayi Cemevi, named after the Alevi mystic Sah Hatayi, whose praises of the 12 imams and cem rituals are still used by Alevi today. © Alevi Community in Austria (ALEVI)

Austrian population (approximately 17,000 people). In December 2012, the Alevi reached the required number of declarations of faith.

In April 2013, the authorities reviewed the declarations of faith, and announced that all the conditions and requirements had been met in full. Any objections had to be presented by 8 May 2013. On 22 May 2013, it was announced that the legal part of the recognition process had been successfully completed, and that the Alevi faith in Austria now enjoyed the status of a recognised religious society.

By officially recognising the Alevi, Austria has established itself as a global pioneer, and could also serve as a model for other countries that also have a significant Alevi population. On 27 October 2015, the general assembly of the Alevi decided to change its name to the “Alevi Faith Community in Austria (ALEVI)”, and this was approved on 5 November 2015.

Regardless of membership, the number of Alevi in Austria has been estimated at 70,000–80,000.

Organisation of ALEVI

ALEVI has a federal executive board, a central religious council and regional parishes, each of which is responsible for one or more federal states. Within ALEVI, different religious currents (including the Kizilbas, Bektasi, Mevlevi and Arab Alevis) are represented within the religious communities. The chairman of the Central Faith Council automatically becomes the president of the ALEVI faith community. The head office of the religious community has its seat in Vienna.

Community goals

- The main task of the ALEVI is to preserve Alevism (in other words the Alevi faith, teaching and culture) and to provide care and education for its members, in accordance with the Alevi doctrine of faith.
 - ALEVI is active in the construction of houses of prayer, cultural centres and educational and social institutions. To this end, the community arranges a number of diverse educational and benefit events.
 - ALEVI strives to educate Alevi youth in the spirit of Alevism, according to democratic, secular, social and modern values, while respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms. Any kind of discrimination, particularly racism, xenophobia, fanaticism and fundamentalism, contradict the Alevi doctrine.
 - ALEVI has set up committees and bodies for scientific research into the historical development of Alevism. In this context it also organises conventions, symposiums, seminars, panel discussions, courses and press conferences, and is active in publishing and building libraries.
 - To the extent permitted by law, ALEVI offers support and care according to the principles of Alevism in Austrian institutions (armed forces, hospitals and prisons).
 - ALEVI also gives religious instruction in Austrian schools, to the extent permitted by law.
- ALEVI calls on its members to live together peacefully with people of different religious beliefs or from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.
 - ALEVI promotes the integration of Alevis into Austrian society, while preserving Alevism.
 - ALEVI respects democracy, the rule of law and the Austrian constitution, and operates within the framework of the laws in force in Austria. ALEVI also attributes high priority to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).
 - ALEVI promotes charitable activities, and is involved, among other things, in the provision of care for the elderly, children and young people, those in need and disadvantaged groups such as the homeless, migrants and asylum seekers.
 - ALEVI supports the campaign for the legal recognition of Alevism in Turkey and in other countries, by advocating for secure legal status.

2.16 Free Churches in Austria

“Free Churches in Austria” incorporates all the congregations in the Federation of Baptist Congregations in Austria, the Federation of Evangelical Congregations in Austria, the Elaia Christian Congregations, the Free Christian Congregation—Pentecostal Congregation and the Mennonite Free Church Austria. The association has been a legally recognised church since August 2013.

Be there for Austria

“Free Churches in Austria” encompasses a total of 200 free-church congregations, across all the federal states. Together with other Christians, the Free Church association aims to take responsibility for society, and bring their values to it. Their top priority is to convey the Christian faith in a timely and understandable way, and to show that it can change the way people live and coexist, for the better.

Structure

The point of contact for the public, the State and for other churches is the Council of “Free Churches in Austria”, which is composed of leading exponents from the five free churches mentioned above. All fundamental decisions are made within the forum of the “Free Churches in Austria”. This is the general assembly of all the federal administrations, which in turn are responsible for the delegate assemblies of their federation. This means that decisions are always shared and made by the grassroots of the organisation.

A common foundation of faith

“Free Churches in Austria” and its members profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour of the world. The movement sees itself as being connected to worldwide Christianity through the Apostles’ Creed. The Bible, also known as the Holy Scripture, is the basis of the movement’s beliefs, thoughts and actions. The common concern is to pass on the gospel through words and deeds, and to show people the way towards a new, meaningful life.



Shake Youth Camp © Freie Christengemeinde

“Free” in so many ways

“Free Churches in Austria” see themselves as being connected to one another: through the individual’s unrestricted, personal decision to follow Christ, through the independence and vitality of individual church congregations with no supreme hierarchy, and through their commitment to freedom of religion and conscience. This is a commitment that presupposes the separation of Church from State. At the same time, it means that both sides can work together in partnership for the good of people and society as a whole, particularly in the areas of social care, education and development aid. These distinguishing characteristics of “Free Churches in Austria” have contributed significantly to the emergence of the term “Free Church” in Austrian religious history.



Vision Day of the LIFE Church Austria © "Freikirchen in Austria"

"Free Churches in Austria" is distinguished by:

- *Connection*
The religious services and diversity of offer bring us closer to the loving nature of God. Hearing about others' experience of their relationship with God can be inspiring.
- *Faith that inspires*
"Free Churches in Austria" think of the Bible as a book that captivates the reader, and through which God speaks to people. It gives the believer a completely new image of the Creator.
- *Love that transforms*
Free Church services give practical tips on how to experience and pass on God's love during your lifetime.
- *Building the church together*
Each community funds its own services and social care provision, through voluntary contributions. The communities live according to the model built by their members.
- *Belief in action*
With a large number of volunteers, the Free Churches make a valuable contribution to people in Austria and around the world.

- *Yes to life*
The gospel is a JOYFUL message. "Free Churches in Austria" express their faith in a life-affirming way: through contemporary music, song lyrics, sermons and shared activities.
- *Christ himself*
The direct, exclusive path to the Creator through Jesus Christ can be experienced at the Free Churches, which bring God closer in the truest sense of the word.

Growth

With more than half a billion adherents, Free Churches are a recognised and growing part of the Christian landscape around the world. But the history of "Free Churches in Austria" is still young. The first Baptist church in Austria was founded in Vienna in 1869, and was followed in the 1920s by the first Pentecostal church, also in Vienna. This late development is quite surprising, as the free churches worldwide date back to the Anabaptists of the Reformation, and this population group was particularly large in Austria at that time.

The Anabaptist ("re-baptizers") movement started in Zurich in 1525, and soon also began to flourish in Austria, where its followers were either martyred or driven out of the country. If Anabaptism can be considered the origin of the modern free church movement, then Austria has a longer history in this respect than most other countries in the world. Free churches are not an "import from North America", as many people in this country might think. The Mennonites emerged directly from the Anabaptists; the first Baptist congregation was founded in Amsterdam in 1609.

Positive cooperation between many free churches is a worldwide phenomenon. Until now, nowhere else in the world have free churches with such a breadth of theology, traditions and expressions come together, all under one roof. From this point of view, "Free Churches in Austria" is unique in the world. They see their diversity as mutually enriching.

The Federation of Baptist Congregations in Austria

The Baptists emerged from the “left wing of the Reformation”, Anabaptism. From the beginning, the Baptists stood for freedom of belief, religion and conscience and their advocates included Thomas Helwys, who wrote the oldest English-language declaration of human rights in 1612 and which formed the basis of the constitution of the second Baptist colony on Rhode Island. The Englishman William Carey, who lived in the 18th century, is considered to be the father of modern missions beyond colonialism and conversion by the sword. He was both a missionary and a human rights activist. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Billy Graham followed in this tradition. Today, the Baptists are among the world’s largest Protestant church movements, with around 120 million adherents.



Gospel concert © Federation of Baptist Congregations in Austria

The first meeting in Vienna took place in 1845, when police disruption and forced Catholic baptisms were part of everyday life. In 1869, the transfer from one church or religious society to another was regulated by law in Austria. 1869 was also the year in which the first Viennese Baptist congregation was formed. The Austrian Federation of Baptist Congregations came into being in the 1950s. Pastor Arnold Köster, who spoke out against the regime throughout the Nazi period, and whose congregation helped many persecuted Jews, showed how closely preaching and social welfare tie together in mission work.

The Federation of Evangelical Congregations in Austria

After the Second World War, international mission societies began to found free-church congregations in Austria. Numerous stand-alone communities emerged. In 1992, 17 of them came together to form the “Federation of Evangelical Congregations in Austria”. The federation’s founding aim was to further expand the previous collaboration. This primarily involved establishing new communities, reinforcing its work with young people, and improving the unsatisfactory legal situation. In 1998, the Federation of Evangelical Congregations was registered as a “Religious Confessional Community”. Numbers have risen steadily since the Federation was founded, with an increase in the percentage of foreign-language communities. By 2013 the Federation already counted 45 member communities.

The Free Church is committed to a conservative theology, and has a flexible form and structure. The federation considers the independence of the local communities to be particularly important. Nevertheless, a common identity, mutual support and mutual consideration are important values. Its guiding principle is:

“Because God has given us rich gifts, we want to unite as Austrian communities, to bring people from our country and the world towards Jesus Christ.”

The Elaia Christian Churches

In 2006, five independent free church congregations joined together to form the Elaia Christian Churches. Other congregations subsequently joined. The Greek word “elaia” means “olive tree”, and was used in the Bible by the apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans for the people of Israel. The Elaia Christian Churches’ message is that all non-Jewish believers have Jewish roots because, according to the Bible, they are placed in this olive tree. The Free Church wants its followers to nurture a new love for the Jewish people, and for them still to be regarded as God’s chosen people. Another goal is to establish contacts with (“messianic”) Jews who believe in Christ. Without them, the worldwide church of Christ would not be complete.

Austrian Fellowship of Pentecostal Churches

In the early 20th century, believers in the United States experienced God's Holy Spirit through prayer in a way that is comparable to the Pentecost feast in the Acts of the Apostles. This resulted in the emergence of Pentecostal churches across the globe.

At the beginning of the 1920s, Swedish missionaries founded Free Christian Congregations in Vienna. With the help of Swiss preachers, a Pentecostal church soon emerged in the Salzkammergut region. From 1936 to 1938, due to the political situation, religious societies that were not recognised by the State were banned from holding public services and meetings; foreign missionaries were forced to leave the country. But by gathering in private houses, committed Christians were able to maintain their religious life during this time.



Baptist Congregation, Mollardgasse, Vienna
© Baptist Congregation Mollardgasse

In 1946, a group of Austrian pastors founded the Federation of "Free Christian Congregations in Austria". In the 1950s, the high proportion of refugees and the wave of emigration led to a sharp decline in the number of members, although it subsequently grew steadily thanks to the local population. Around the turn of the millennium, some formerly independent groups of free church congregations joined the Federation, which today calls itself the Free Christian Congregation—Pentecostal Congregation in Austria.

The Mennonite Free Church Austria

The Mennonites can be traced back to the time of the Reformation and the Anabaptists, and are named after the Dutch-Frisian theologian and contemporary of Luther, Menno Simons (1496–1561). Simons served the peaceful Baptists of northern Germany and Holland, and was an elder of the congregation in Groningen.

After parts of Poland came under Habsburg rule in 1772, Joseph II invited the Mennonites to settle in Galicia. The reason for this was their peacefulness, their agricultural expertise and their industriousness, for which they were granted special tolerance and settlement patents. To show obedience to Jesus Christ and act in accordance with the Holy Scriptures, the refusal of military service is just as important to the Mennonites as the oath. Remarkably, the authorities took this peculiarity into account: Mennonites were exempted from military service, and the State also recognised the simple handshake instead of the oath. Finally, in 1908 the Christian-Mennonite community in Kiernica-Lemberg (known today as Lviv, Ukraine) even obtained the recognition of their bylaws, by the Culture Office of Vienna.

After the Second World War, North American and German missionaries performed charitable work at refugee camps in Austria. As a result, Mennonite communities emerged in Linz in Upper Austria, Salzburg and Styria. In the 1950s, with the help of Mennonites from Switzerland and the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), a community was founded in Vienna.

3 Addresses of the legally-recognised churches and religious communities

The Catholic Church

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Chairman of the Conference of Austrian Bishops

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E-mail: sekretariat@bischofskonferenz.at

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Wollzeile 2, 1010 Wien

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Protestant Church of the Helvetic Confession in Austria

State Superintendent Mag. Ralf STOFFERS

Dorotheergasse 16, 1010 Wien

Tel.: +43 1 513 65 64

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www.reformiertekirche.at

Greek Orthodox Church in Austria

His Eminence Metropolitan Archbishop

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Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Austria

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E-mail: kirche@metropolisvonaustria.at

www.metropolisvonaustria.at

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Church of Our Mother of Mercy

Fünfhausgasse 27–29, 1150 Vienna

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E-mail: a.nikolaw@hotmail.com

Serbian Orthodox Parish of St. Sava

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www.crkva.at

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E-mail: pr.dura@rumkirche.at

www.rumkirche.at/j/de

Russian Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas

Bischof Alexij (Zanochin)
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Bulgarian Orthodox Parish of St. Ivan Rilski

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Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Austria

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www.ikg-wien.at

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Freikirchen in Österreich

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www.freikirchen.at

4 State-Registered Religious Denominational Communities

Followers of a church or religious society that has not yet been legally recognised can unite to form a “State-Registered Religious Denominational Community”. This type of denomination has legal personality, but unlike a legally-recognised church or religious society, it is not a public-law corporation. Having the status of a State-Registered Religious Denominational Community can be seen as a preliminary stage to official recognition as a church or religious society, and it also enables smaller bodies to appear as a recognised religious affiliation.

The status of a State-Registered Religious Denominational Community can be obtained upon application, if certain requirements are met. Details of these can be found in the relevant Austrian federal law. One of the requirements is the presentation of the religious community’s bylaws, and the provision of proof that the community includes at least 300 people who are resident in Austria.

In Austria there are currently ten such communities (listed in chronological order according to when they acquired legal personality):

Baha’i—Religious Community in Austria

Maroltnergasse 2, 1140 Wien

Tel.: +43 1 479 11 53

Fax: +43 1 479 11 53-19

E-mail: ngr@at.bahai.org

Web: www.bahai.at

Acquired legal personality on 11 July 1998;

Decision of 20 July 1998, GZ 7836/18-9c/98

The Christian Community—Movement for Religious Renewal in Austria

Mariahilfer Strasse 49, 1060 Wien

Tel.: +43 1 587 12 87

E-mail: info@christengemeinschaft.at

www.christengemeinschaft.at

Acquired legal personality on 11 July 1998;

Decision of 20 July 1998, GZ 7836/18-9c/98

Seventh-Day Adventist Church

Prager Strasse 287, 1210 Wien

Tel.: +43 1 319 93 01

Fax: +43 1 319 93 01-199

E-mail: office@adventisten.at

www.adventisten.at

Acquired legal personality on 11 July 1998;

Decision of 20 July 1998, GZ 7836/18-9c/98

United Pentecostal Church of Austria (VPKÖ)

Simmeringer Hauptstrasse 2/2, 1110 Wien

Tel.: +43 1 796 25 97

www.vpkoe.at

United Pentecostal Church of Austria (VPKÖ)

Acquired legal personality on 11 July 1998; Decision of

17 April 2018, BKA-KA12.056/0005-Kultusamt/2017

Hindu Religious Community in Austria

Lammgasse 1, 1080 Wien

Tel.: +43 1 944 03 14

Tel.: +43 699 171 135 47

E-mail: office.hroe@gmail.com

www.hroe.at

Acquired legal personality on 10 December 1998;

Decision of 15 April 1999, GZ BMUKA-13.486/2-9c/99

Pentecostal Church of God in Austria

Maculangasse 9, 1220 Wien

Tel.: +43 1 333 77 29

E-mail: office@gemeindegottes.at

www.gemeindegottes.at

Acquired legal personality on 13 October 2001; Decision of

21 December 2001, GZ BMBWK-T12.056/0004-KA/c/2001

Islamic-Shiite Religious Community in Austria

Pezlgasse 58, 1170 Wien

Tel.: +43 699 111 979 350

E-mail: office@schia.at

www.schia.at

Acquired legal personality on 1 March 2013; Decision of

28 February 2013, GZ BMUKK-12.056/0005-KA/2012

Old Alevi Community in Austria

Märzstrasse 11, 1150 Wien

Tel.: +43 660 811 36 22

E-mail: info@alt-aleviten.at

www.alt-aleviten.at

Acquired legal personality on 23 March 2013; Decision

of 23 February 2013, GZ BMUKK-12.056/0006-KA/2012

Unification Church in Austria

Seidengasse 28/4, 1070 Wien

Tel.: +43 664 523 87 94

E-mail: office@vereinigungskirche.at

www.vereinigungskirche.at

Acquired legal personality on 15 June 2015; Decision of

9 June 2015, BKA-KA12.052/0001-Kultusamt/2014

Austrian Sikh Faith Community

Arndstraße 51, 1120 Wien

Tel.: +43 676 521 7307

E-mail: office@sikh.at

www.sikh.at

Acquired legal personality on 23 December 2020;

Decision of 17 December 2020, GZ 2020-0.734.953

Free-Alevites in Austria (FAGÖ)

Simmeringer Hauptstraße 181, 1110 Wien

Tel.: +43 660 2421982

E-mail: info@frei-aleviten.com

www.frei-aleviten.com

Acquired legal personality on 15 April 2022;

Decision of 14 March 2022, GZ 2021-0.338.029

Assyrian Church of the East in Austria (Assyrian Church of the East)

Winckelmannstraße 34, 1150 Wien

Tel.: +43 699 819 240 85

E-mail: maraugin@at.acote.church

acote.church/vienna-austria

Acquired legal personality on 21 November 2024;

Decision of 7 October 2024, GZ 2024-0.478.095

5 Statistics

Membership of the legally-recognised churches and religious societies in Austria

Religious society	Number of members*
Catholic Church (Roman Catholic, including churches united with Rome)	4.557.471
Protestant Church of the Augsburg and Helvetic Confessions	248.113
Orthodox Church	approx. 436.700
The Jewish Religious Community	approx. 8,000
Islam: IGGÖ, ALEVI, all branches and communities (all Muslims)	approx. 745.600
Armenian Apostolic Church	approx. 7,000
Syrian Orthodox Church	approx. 5,000
Coptic Orthodox Church	approx. 10,000
Old Catholic Church	approx. 9,500
Methodist Church	approx. 1,400
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints	approx. 4,700
New Apostolic Church	approx. 5,000
Austrian Buddhist Union	approx. 4,500
Jehovah's Witnesses in Austria	22.000
Free Churches	approx. 18.000
Share of population claiming affiliation to a religious community	77,6%**

Total population 2021 by religion (absolute in thousands, in percent, confidence intervals)**

Religion	people by religion			Percentage of people by religion of the total population		
	in 1000	lower limit of the 95%-confidence-interval	upper limit of the 95%-confidence-interval	in percent	lower limit of the 95%-confidence-interval	upper limit of the 95%-confidence-interval
Buddhism	26,2	17,7	34,9	0,3	0,2	0,4
Christianity	6.004,8	5.901,5	6.072,9	68,2	67,0	69,0
Hinduism	10,0	3,5	16,2	0,1	0,0	0,2
Islam	731,3	684,5	771,9	8,3	7,8	8,8
Israelite	5,3	1,8	8,8	0,1	0,0	0,1
Other religion, denomination or religious community	56,2	35,1	77,9	0,6	0,4	0,9
Not affiliated with any religion, denomination or religious community	1.972,8	1.914,7	2.042,8	22,4	21,7	23,2

* The figures are based on the exact published membership figures for the Catholic and Protestant churches (as of 2025) as well as on the survey by Statistics Austria during 2021/22 (<https://www.statistik.at/en/statistics/population-and-society/population/further-population-statistics/religious-denomination>) and current self-reported information.

** © Statistik Austria (2021): 6.9 million people in Austria – that is 77.6% of the population – claim affiliation to a religious community (<https://www.statistik.at/fileadmin/announcement/2022/05/20220525Religionszugehoerigkeit2021.pdf>). Due to the regular changes in population and membership figures, data are subject to corresponding adjustments (total population 2021: 8.932.664; 2025: 9.197.213).

6 Laws on religion

1) Constitutional provisions

Art. 14 of the Basic Law on the General Rights of Citizens, Imperial Law Gazette No. 142/1867 (StGG):

“Article 14. Everyone is guaranteed complete freedom of conscience and creed.

The enjoyment of civil and political rights is independent of religious confession; but civic duties shall not be compromised by religious confession.

Nobody may be compelled to perform an ecclesiastical act or to participate in an ecclesiastical ceremony, provided that he is not subject to the power of another who is justified by the law.”

Art. 15 of the Basic Law:

“Article 15. Every legally-recognised church and religious society has the right to joint public religious practice, shall organise and manage its internal affairs independently, shall remain in the possession and enjoyment of its institutions, foundations and funds intended for religious, educational and charitable purposes, but is, like any society, subject to the general laws of the State.”

Art. 63 of the State Treaty of St. Germain, State Law Gazette No. 303/1920:

“Article 63. Austria shall grant all residents of Austria full and complete protection of life and freedom, regardless of their birth, nationality, language, race or religion.

All residents of Austria have the right to freely practice any kind of belief, religion or creed, publicly or privately, provided that their practice is not incompatible with public order or good morals.”

Art. 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights, Federal Law Gazette No. 210/1958:

“Article 9—Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes the freedom of the individual to change religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or in private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.
2. Freedom to manifest one’s religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law those provided for by law, and are necessary in a democratic society are necessary measures in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.”

2) Provisions of laws on cultural and religious affairs

Imperial Law Gazette No. 49/1868:

Act of 25 May 1868 governing the interdenominational relationships between citizens in the relationships specified therein

Imperial Law Gazette No. 13/1869:

Ordinance of the Ministers of Culture and of the Interior of 18 January 1869 regarding the implementation of the provisions of the Act of 25 May 1868, Imperial Law Gazette No. 49

Imperial Law Gazette No. 68/1874:

Act of 20 May 1874 on the legal recognition of religious societies

Imperial Law Gazette No. 99/1877

Ordinance of the Minister for Culture and Education of 18 October 1877 officially recognising the Old Catholic religion

Federal Law Gazette No. 74/1951

Ordinance of the Federal Ministry of Education of 24 February 1951, on the recognition of the followers of Methodism as a religious society

Federal Law Gazette No. 229/1955

Ordinance of the Federal Ministry of Education of 27 September 1955 on the recognition of the followers of the “Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints” (Mormons) as a religious society

Federal Law Gazette No. 524/1975

Ordinance of the Federal Minister for Education and the Arts of 25 September 1975 on the recognition of adherents of the “New Apostolic Church in Austria” as a religious society

Federal Law Gazette No. 72/1983

Ordinance of the Federal Minister for Education and the Arts of 13 December 1982 on the recognition of the followers of Buddhism as a religious society

Federal Law Gazette II No. 139/2009

Ordinance of the Federal Minister for Education, Art and Culture regarding the recognition of Jehovah’s Witnesses as a religious society

Federal Law Gazette II No. 250/2013

Ordinance of the Federal Minister for Education, Art and Culture regarding the recognition of adherents of the Federation of Baptist Congregations, the Federation of Evangelical Congregations, the ELAIA Christian Congregations, the Free Christian Congregation—Pentecostal Congregation and the Mennonite Free Church in Austria as a church (religious society)

Imperial Law Gazette No. 57/1890

Act of 21 March 1890 governing the external legal relationships of the Jewish Religious Community

Austrian Law Gazette No. 543/1939

Act on the collection of church contributions in Austria

Federal Law Gazette No. 182/1961

Federal Act of 6 July 1961 on the external legal relations of the Protestant Church

Federal Law Gazette No. 229/1967

Federal Act of 23 June 1967 on the external legal relations of the Greek Orthodox Church in Austria

Republication: Federal Law Gazette No. 155/1985

Federal Act on the Religious Raising of Children, 1985

Federal Law Gazette I No. 19/1998

Federal Act on the legal personality of religious denominational communities

Federal Law Gazette I No. 20/2003

Federal Act on the external legal relations of the Eastern Orthodox Churches in Austria

Federal Law Gazette I No. 39/2015

Federal Act on the External Legal Relations of Islamic Religious Societies—Islam Law 2015

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