

# Church Closings in Denmark: The Copenhagen Overture

Churches in the Lutheran State Church are closing on a great scale for the first time in centuries.

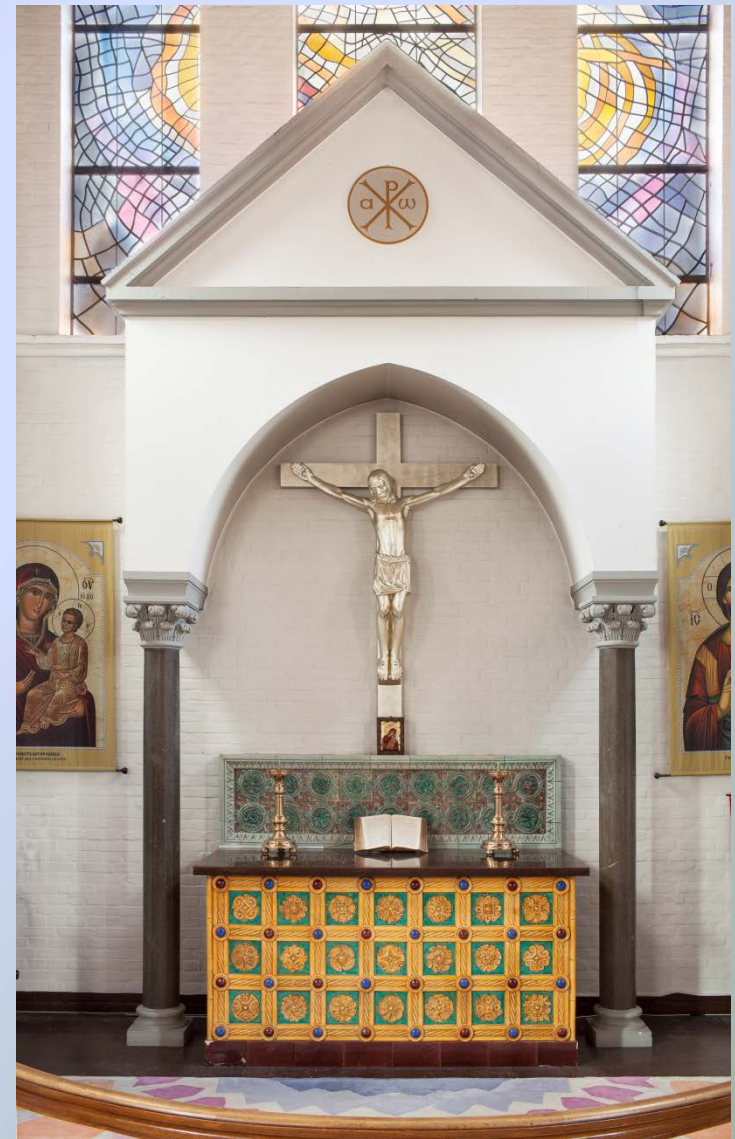
The first churches in Copenhagen have been deconsecrated, more to come.

200 churches in the countryside (app. 10 % of all churches) do not have congregations of a viable size, according to the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs.

**Lasse Jonas Bendtsen,  
Curator, the National Museum of Denmark**

# Copenhagen:

- Eight churches are closing 2013
- All of them were built in the 19th-20th Century
- Buildings will be sold off to other purposes
- Movable property mostly from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, very little of value
- However, church councils are confused about what to do with movable property:  
What/how/where/when to keep, sell or discard???

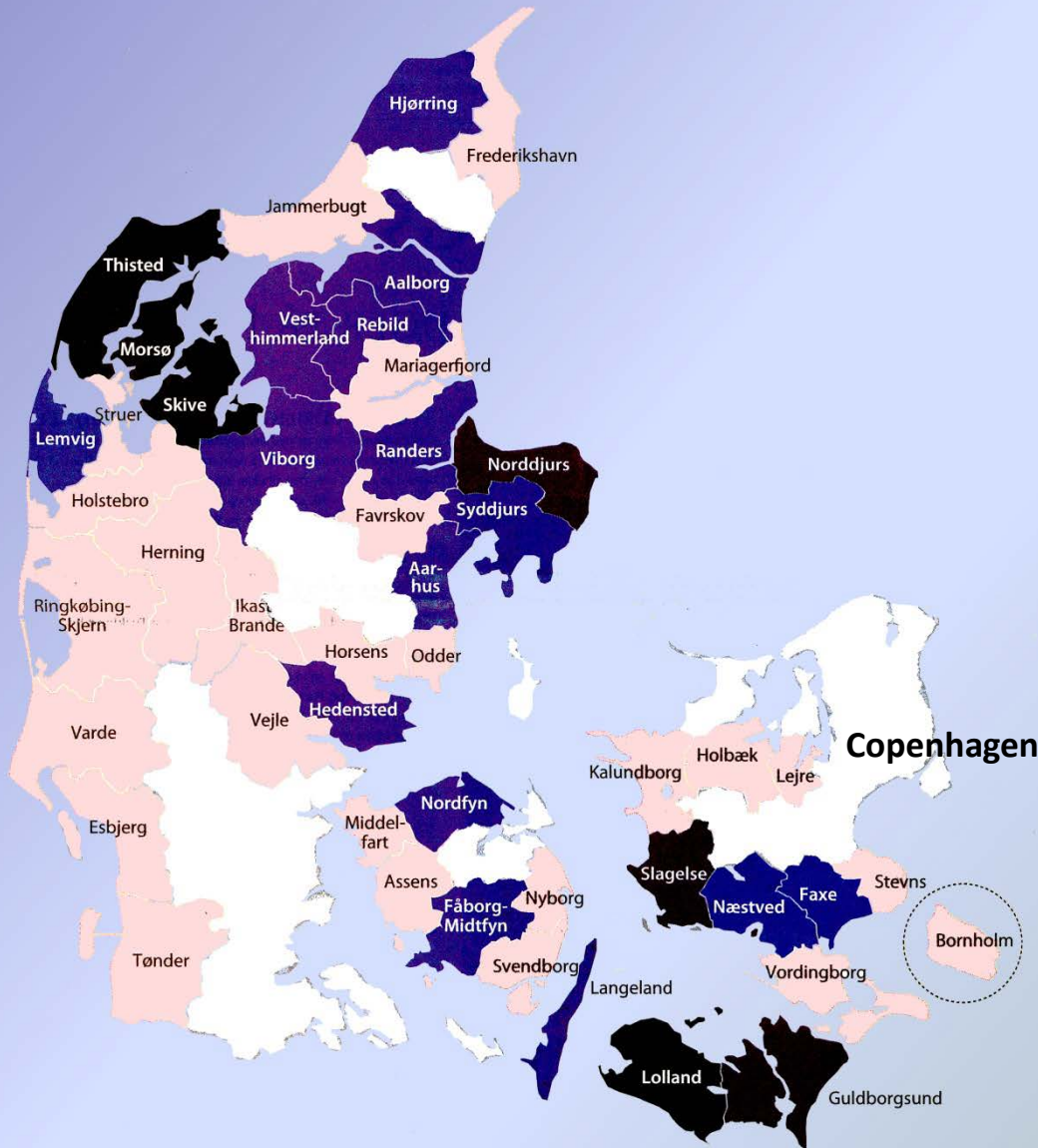


Blågård Church (1926)

# 200 churches without viable congregations

## Characteristics:

- Located in depopulated parts of the countryside
- Romanesque buildings
- Valuable movable property from the middle ages and onwards



darker colours = greater number of redundant churches (less than 200 parishioners)

# The existing legal framework

**When in use** by the Lutheran State Church, a church and its **movable property** is subject to the law governing the Lutheran State Church:

## *Responsibility*

- The local church councils bear the responsibility for protecting objects from theft and destruction.

## *Decision making*

- No repair, alteration or deaccession of objects more than 100 years old may be made without the consent of the diocese, with the National Museum acting as consultant.

**When deconsecrated**, the church buildings are subject to the regulations of the Danish Cultural Agency, which oversees cultural heritage protection, while the status of **movable property** is uncertain:

Buildings older than 1536 automatically gain status as protected buildings, while younger buildings will be assessed for their protection eligibility.

There are presently no guidelines for handling movable property from deconsecrated churches.

## Recommendations for future church closings made by a special committee:

- that the National Museum should always be involved, assessing movable objects
- that an exchange for religious objects should be established, distributing objects within the church
- that objects for which there is neither demand nor space in museums should be destroyed



Altarpiece (1648), Jannerup Church



Chalice (c. 1350), Vindeby Church.  
Purchased 1687 from the nearby  
Utterslev Church.



Crucifix (c. 1250), Ejerslev Church