



# The History of women's ordination in Germany

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## Introduction

Germany: not one Protestant Church in Germany but many independent regional churches, at the moment 20 different Lutheran, united or reformed churches.

The EKD, the Evangelical Church in Germany: umbrella organization with very limited possibilities of making decisions for all the protestant churches in Germany.

Germany: not only one decision of a synod for the ordination of women but many different ones.

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## 1. The first women who studied theology

**End of the 19<sup>th</sup> century:** Women in Germany were allowed to pass the “Abitur”

**1900:** The country of Baden in Southern Germany was the first to allow women to fully matriculate as students.

**1907:** Carola Barth in Jena was the first woman with a theological Licenciat.

**1916:** Elsbeth Overbeck was the first woman in Germany who did a church exam.

**1919:** The Weimar Constitution allowed the entry of women and men to all professions, i.e. women could pass the exams at all theological faculties.

## 2. First Rules for employing women theologians in the church

### **Before 1933:**

11 regional churches had first legal decisions about the employment of women theologians. Women theologians were blessed, not ordained, for working with women, girls and children.

Women were not allowed to do parish services or funerals, baptisms and weddings. They were not allowed to marry – like the first women employed as state officials, for example teachers in higher education. They got the title “Vikarin”, not pastor.

**Time of the Second World War:** Many women took the place of the pastors who had to go to the army.

## 3. The long way towards women's ordination

**1950s:** Some women became ordained and could work as pastors in regional churches in the German Democratic Republic.

**1974:** Women theologians in East Germany were allowed to get married.

**1982:** The pastors' services law in the Federation of the Protestant Churches in the German Democratic Republic declared women and men pastors as fully equal.

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## 3. The long way towards women's ordination

**1958:** The first three regional churches adopted laws for a restricted equality of women and men as pastors.

**1959:** Elisabeth Haseloff in Lübeck was the first woman to be ordained as fulltime pastor who did not only work for women's work, but also in a parish.

**1991:** The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Schaumburg-Lippe was the last church of the EKD who decided to ordain women.

## 4. The first women in leading positions in the protestant churches in Germany

**Mid-1960s:** First women were called as church officials (“Oberkirchenkirchenrat”).

**Since the 1980s:** More and more women were elected as rural deans, superintendents or regional bishops.

**1992:** Maria Jepsen was elected as first female Lutheran Bishop worldwide by the Synod of the Northelbian Church for the district of Hamburg.

**2009:** Dr Margot Käßmann, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hanover, became chairperson of the EKD council, the highest position of a theologian in Germany.

5. Everything fine?