

## From Our Pastor January 19, 2019

Sabbath Greetings to Everyone!

Last year a report in NewsinEnglish.no proclaimed, "Norway is now the richest country in the world." The report went on, "A new method of calculating wealth has resulted in the World Bank ranking Norway as the richest country in the world. The World Bank based its ranking on wealth per capita and thus beat out Qatar, which earlier held the top spot."

The news from wealthy Norway this week is: Babies wanted: Nordic countries crying for kids. AFP reported, "Norway's Prime Minister Erna Solberg said in a speech, "Norway needs more children! I don't think I need to tell anyone how this is done," she said cheekily, but she was raising a real concern. Too few babies are being born in the Nordic region. The Nordic countries were long a bastion of strong fertility rates on an Old Continent that is rapidly getting older. But they are now experiencing a decline that threatens their cherished welfare model, which is funded by taxpayers." The truth is, the decline threatens all Western civilization.

Long known as the most generous welfare state in Europe and likely the world, the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration, or NAV, reports that one in five working age adults live on the dole. Every benefit possible from government is provided--health care, housing, food, day care, pensions, and the list goes on. To pay for all of this income taxes are about 70% of income, and overall tax burden is 45% of the GNP. This type of payout requires more workers than beneficiaries, and the trend for the future is not looking good.

Prime Minister Erna Solberg warned Norwegians in her New Year's speech this year, "There will be fewer young people to bear the increasingly heavy burden of the welfare state."

In Norway, Finland and Iceland, birth rates dropped to historic lows in 2017, with 1.49 to 1.71 children born per woman. Just a few years earlier, their birth rates hovered close to the 2.1 level required for their populations to remain stable. From Copenhagen to the North Cape, from Helsinki to Reykjavik, demographics across the Nordics reveal two things: there are fewer large families, and women are waiting longer before having their first child.

In order to encourage more babies, money is being offered. In Norway, one economist has suggested giving women 500,000 kroner (50,000 euros, \$58,550) in pension savings for each child born. The town of Miehhikkala, home to 2,000 people, is offering 10,000 euros for each baby born and raised in the municipality.

Since unemployment and low wages cannot be the cause, social "experts" tend to blame economics--such as high rent or living expenses for the demise of children.

However, could the real cause be something other than money? NewsinEnglish.no also reported, "Only 2 percent (of Norwegians) regularly attend services, putting Norway at the bottom of the church attendance rankings in Europe." That figure does not include Muslims who attend Mosque on Friday, it only reflects the incredible decline among the native population. Empty churches are common in all the Nordic countries.

Lack of church attendance is followed by lack of marriage numbers.

Safaritheglobe.com states, "Relationships and marriage in Norway are fairly relaxed compared to most countries in this world. Norway is a very liberal country that views relationships and marriage quite differently than they did a century ago. Today marriage is not viewed as a necessity and a couple living together or having children prior to marriage is not seen as a negative by society. Many young people want to establish themselves as individuals prior to marrying, which means dating is generally drawn out over time as individuals place education, careers, exploration, and owning a home as higher priorities than marriage." Living together and having children outside of marriage is very common and more babies are born to single than to married mothers.

One of the benefits of regular church attendance is less self-centeredness. People who believe in God and a higher purpose in life are not usually fixated on self. They tend to think bigger than that. Studies for years have shown that people who regularly attend church are more likely to marry, stay married, and have rewarding experiences with children and families.

The "fruit of the womb" is gradually disappearing in the Nordic nations. This is the opposite of what the Creator God wants. Historical records indicate that Sweden and Norway were settled by the tribe of Naphtali who were taken from Northern Israel during the Assyrian invasions of the 700s BC. (<http://www.britishIsrael.ca/Naphtali.htm>). As Israelites, they are still in a covenant relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Part of that covenant states, "He will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb ...." (Deuteronomy 7:13). But that blessing is based on obedience to God's laws, now mostly forgotten among the modern descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob.

When Jesus Christ returns to rule this earth, he will gather the descendants of Israel from all over the earth, teach them the truth, and lots of babies will be born! "I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob, I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together like sheep of the fold, ...(Micah 2:12)."

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