



Protestantse  
Kerk

The Protestant Church  
in the Netherlands

# 30 promising models for the missionary congregation

Geloof • Hoop • Liefde

Faith • Hope • Love

# Preface

This booklet describes thirty promising missionary models for the congregation. It is a condensed version of the file in which these thirty models are presented extensively, with tangible action-plans. The models originate from practise: they are missionary chances which were already put into practise in a religious congregation.

This booklet is meant to browse in. Not to do everything at the same time, but to make a choice from it.

How to choose?

- Reflect on the own congregation. Who are we? What is our strength? What are we happy with? That is what you can apply 'outwards'.
- Think about the environment. Where are we being-church? Which people live in our district, in our village? What are their questions and needs? How do they perceive the religious congregation?
- Think about what you can not and what you do not do. Not everything can and must be done. There are target-groups you can not reach, there are limitations and impossibilities.
- Think about other churches and organizations in your direct environment. What can be learned from them? Could you cooperate?

If you know who you are, what your environment looks like, what your limitations are and which possibilities for cooperation there are, you can browse more directed and make a choice. Often that will be a choice for a combination of models, cut to size for the own situation.

The brief models in this booklet all come with a question to get the reflection started. If you want more information and you really want to get going then there is the file of which your congregation has been presented with two copies. You can also go to [www.pkn.nl/missionair/MM30](http://www.pkn.nl/missionair/MM30) for information, literature and examples. We recommend to put together a missionary project-team in order to stimulate the process.

The congregation is missionary, it is her calling. A missionary congregation is a praying congregation: open to God's Spirit, letting yourself be surprised by what accrues to you. We wish you success and a lot of pleasure with that.

*Rev. Hans van Ark and Drs. Nynke Dijkstra-Algra, Missionary Team Protestant Church in the Netherlands*

# 1) The welcoming congregation

**In everything the congregation is aimed at the reception, accompaniment and care for possible guests.**

Do we make allowances for possible guests?

The best way to find out how you can be welcoming is becoming a guest sometime. Go and visit another congregation. How are you received? Are you being told your way about?

Guests do not come automatically. For many people the threshold of Sunday worship is too high. How are we, as congregation-members, invitingly present in our environment?

Hospitality seeks a balance between leaving space and giving someone a hearty welcome.

Guests get a wide berth. They may be who they are, ask their questions. Explore.

Do not befall them, (but) be available.

With whom do you have coffee after worship?

Many churches have a host or hostess at the entrance. Information-leaflets which are also obliging for newcomers are handed out.

In what way are our activities accessible to guests, not only on Sundays but also on week-days? How does a guest see us and what can we learn from that?

Easy accessible discussion-circles and a responsive sermon turn out to be important keys on the path to church and religion for many joiners of the congregation.

**Without hospitality there is no missionary congregation.**

Are you welcoming? Ask your newly joint members. How were they received? Was it easy to come into the circle? What could be improved?

## 2) The inspiring congregation

**The congregation is in discussion on and inspired by faith.**

If you yourself are unable to tell what your faith means to you, it is difficult to share it with others. The impassioned congregation has a 'drive', is touched and inspired, finds words for faith, without having an answer to everything.

Indeed in discussion on faith. That is not so easy. What you believe in is personal and vulnerable. Just try to find the words for it!

Personal conversations in a safe atmosphere can deepen your faith. In discussion-circles in private homes or bible-study-groups congregation-members meet and connections are made between faith and everyday life. "My faith got a new dimension through this circle", a participant said. "It became much more real to me".

Intensification can go through the mind, through the heart and through the hands. To many people a theological house of teaching is so challenging that their faith flourishes. For others this happens in a more practically directed course. In all cases the intensification leads to charisma.

**Since I learned to speak about my faith I am more spontaneous towards my colleague.**

What are the possibilities to have the faith-discussion in your congregation with each other and with possible outside guests?

### 3) The congregation at the source

**The congregation draws from the sources of the Scripture and experiences Christ as Source for all action.**

Jesus speaks of rivers of living water which will flow from the hearts of his followers (John 7). Christ is the Source who wants to turn your faith into a source. There can be times that you are dry. Then it is good to go searching, preferably together, and to 'resource'.

A way to do that systematically is through the book *Leven uit de Bron* (Living from the Source) by Marius Noorloos. In the book he describes three steps: action, reflection and communication. Through a tangible program the consistory is invited to take these steps.

Communication is essential in this: the encounter with one and other and, Communication with a capital, the encounter with God. In church we are inclined to move over to action immediately and give too little or even no attention at all to communication and reflection.

Living from the Source helps consistories to continue this process carefully, during five evenings. This process results in tangible building stones for (missionary) policy. They can be an incentive to a process throughout the congregation. From the Source into a river which continues to flow outside of the congregation as well.

**What the heart is full with makes the mouth overflowing (What the heart thinks, the mouth speaks).**

Action, Reflection Communication (with God and with each other): what lacks in your congregation?

## 4) The congregation with attention to communication

**The congregation takes care of good communication, internally as well as externally.**

Without good communication and PR you can forget about being a missionary congregation. You maybe fully equipped, but how will people be able to join up when nobody hears of it?

Good communication can be practiced; among each other and in discussion with people outside of the church. Try to read 'from extern to intern': the website, the church magazine, the information booklet. Is all of the information in there? Address of the church, starting-times, but also a clear description of the congregation, of the activities and for whom they are intended.

Communication lives of repeating. People read little and do not always pick up everything the first time. Still the best communication is mouth to mouth. The congregation which is discussing and inviting. That is always more effective than a leaflet in the mailbox.

The language of the church: is it accessible to possible guests? What do we mean with big words like mercy, compassion and righteousness? Stories and examples are helpful. Conversations with interested people teach you to find words which explain.

Are there people to guard and stimulate communication and PR? Are there trained congregation members? Involve them. And ask young people to think along.

**It has to come from hear-say.**

How is the communication in your congregation? Which impressions to your guests have from you (through website, church magazine etceteras)? Are you paying attention to it?

## 5) The congregation from area-survey

### **The congregation is curious of her environment.**

What lives in the village, in the district, in the neighbourhood? This model therefore starts with an 'area-survey'.

That can be done very simply: make an inventory of what you already know of your environment and the people who live there. What characterizes them? Age? Interests? Needs? You could also go and ask. Start a discussion with family doctors, social workers, teachers, the police, and youth-workers. What have they noticed? Do they have ideas on what the church could contribute?

In Ermelo a district-congregation had a 'context-consultation'. All kinds of professional groups (as mentioned overhead) were invited. They were presented with the question: what do you notice of the church? It turned out to be an incentive for renewal.

Het Evangelisch Werkverband (The Evangelical Work Association) developed 'kerk in de buurt' (church in the neighbourhood), a series of evenings where congregation-members interview people in the neighbourhood. Not to 'bring' something, but to 'fetch'. May I hear your story?

In Apeldoorn Rev. Peter Hendriks developed 'Het geloof ligt op straat' (faith is in the street), a manner to come into contact with people in the district. What is on their mind? From where do they get support? Based on these conversations the follow-up was organized.

In all cases it is first about listening, subsequently offering.

### **Faith is in the street.**

How would you describe your environment?

## 6) The serving congregation

**The congregation is present with people in need.**

Jesus says: 'For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' (Matthew 25)

To be there for the fellow man, especially the one in a scrape. Being available for people in pain of life. The church is there where people are in need. We call it diaconal aid. It is not the duty of the deacons, but a task for the entire congregation.

It is not just about help, but also about righteousness: standing up for people. Exerting Influence on structures. Cooperating towards a more just society which no longer pollutes and spoils our creation.

Precisely our deeds of compassion and righteousness can bear testimony of our faith in a faithful, loving God. Not to preach, but because it is obvious to help. Words without deeds are empty.

**The church suits the action to the word.**

What needs are there in your environment? What do people suffer from? How can you be meaningful as a church?

## 7) The learning congregation

**The congregation herself learns and involves others in this.**

Many congregations have a supply of 'education and equipment'. Circles, courses, theme-evenings or a house of teaching. Could this supply also become missionary, accessible to guests?

Not all supply is suitable. Yet there are many topics for which there is broad interest. For example 'Life after death', 'Handling stress', 'Education: but how?' Keep your environment in mind here. What kind of people live in your district, in your village? What is on their minds?

Lectures on books or films which lead to discussion are also of interest for people outside of the church. Are you inviting broadly? Think for example of a leaflet, an article in a door-to-door magazine; of personal invitations.

'Easy accessible' is not the same as 'simple'. Sometimes people are interested in spicy stuff. As long as they get the freedom to form their own opinion and ask questions. People do not want to be 'preached on'.

Learning together, also with people from outside or from the edge of the church. It will take you to other questions and possibly to new answers as well. In the early church Christians were baptized after a long period of learning.

**Other questions may bring new answers as well.**

What possibilities does your congregation have when it is about 'learning'?

## 8) The congregation with a faith-study

**The congregation chooses basic faith-study as starting point for the missionary work.**

A basic study Christian faith is an ideal manner to get informally acquainted with faith and church. Nothing is obligatory and all questions can be asked. Often such a course starts with a meal. People get acquainted and a relaxed safe atmosphere develops.

There are courses in all sorts and sizes. The Alpha-course is well-known. A little older is the 'orientation course on Christian faith'. 'On the way with Emmaus' is the beginning of a longer route of courses. '7+1, encounters with God' has, like the Alpha-course, a series of evenings with meals and a somewhat longer meeting of one day. Scopus is a series based on Bible stories, which appeals more to experience than to knowledge. For more information: [www.pkn.nl/missionair>geloofscursus](http://www.pkn.nl/missionair>geloofscursus).

If you choose a course, please look carefully what suits your congregation, what amount of manpower and investment the course needs, which level the course has and for which target group it is designed. See [www.izb.nl](http://www.izb.nl) for a simple choice-test.

Many people can be involved in organizing a course. Not only course-leaders are needed, but cooking teams, hosts and hostesses as well. Such a course can be supported throughout the congregation.

### **Not a private hobby, but everyone's business**

What does your congregation offer to people who want to know more about Christian faith?

## 9) The celebrating congregation for guests

### **The congregation emphasizes the hospitality on Sunday.**

For many congregation-members Sunday worship is the most important meeting of the week. A place of encounter, of worship, of hearing. Are guests welcome? Are we making allowances for them? Welcome every Sunday!

On feast days the churches are often full. And also at the crossroads of life (baptism, mourning, wedding) people, who usually are not there, come into church. Also keep special services in mind like youth-worships and church and school-worships. How do we deal with all those new people?

The church is open; everyone is welcome.

How do we make visitors to know their way around? Think of:

- Σ a Sunday-letter which also makes allowances for possible new-comers
- Σ a cordial welcome at the entrance (with identifiable hosts/hostesses)
- Σ showing people the way to child-care
- Σ a contact-address for people who want to know more or want to talk
- Σ coffee afterwards (with an open eye for new-comers).

It is not about incidental worships which 'are different from the ordinary', but about an attitude, an atmosphere which can be experienced every Sunday.

'Easy accessible' is not the same as 'simple'. However it does mean that there is no unnecessary obstruction. Ministers make allowances for possible new-comers in their language and explanation. Church-goers greet the people next to them. There is an inviting atmosphere.

**All our establishments are open each and every Sunday!**

Are the worships in your congregation suitable for guests you would want to bring along?

## 10) The celebrating congregation with mixed economy

**The congregation as an offer or worships for various target groups, especially new-comers.**

Many congregations choose for a vast variety in worship. Aside from the main-worship on Sunday morning there is a Taizé-worship in the afternoon; youth-worship, vesper, cantata-worship, praise-worship or a song-worship for elderly people. Theatre as well offers a lot of opportunities. Do not discharge the second worship, but do something with it, especially for possible new-comers.

With several worships on Sunday you reach a greater variety of target groups. Moreover it offers the possibility to experiment with forms and songs which are not suitable for the main-worship on Sunday-morning.

An 'agenda' for Sunday could look like this:

- 9.00 am: classical worship
- 10.30 am: worship for all generations with extra attention for children and young people
- 16.30 pm: youth-church
- 17.00 pm: vesper with classical hymns

There is no need for the minister to officiate in all of these worships.

This multi-track policy provides missionary opportunities. It is of importance that guests are well received, that congregation-members are attentive and have a chat. Are there possibilities for interested people who want more, a circle or a course? Think of good PR, in leaflets and door-to-door-magazines. And evaluate. Do we achieve what we want? Are there indeed new people coming?

Involve guests in the evaluation if necessary.

**With variety various groups are addressed.**

Which possibilities are there in your congregation to have various kinds of worships/celebrations next to each other?

# 11) The pastoral congregation

**The congregation does not only adapt pastoral care to the own members.**

'How are you?' In pastoral care we ask after each other. People visit each other. Pastoral care is the cement in the congregation. Without pastoral care no mutual involvement. Pastoral care can spread over the boundaries of the own congregation.

Congregation members have contacts in their own neighbourhood. They engage. Without 'agenda', but they bring their faith along. You are 'from the church' and people know this.

Pastoral care is directed to 'all people the Lord brings on our path' (Dienstboek = Service-book). This asks for an alert attitude, the capability to listen attentively.

Ministers, elders and pastoral workers get involved with relatives of deceased who never go to church. They get curious. All kinds of courses, circles and theme-evenings have 'pastoral' aspects. People tell their life story during the break or afterwards. Are you available?

It is no economizing-measure to stimulate not-participating church members to have them-selves written out. For years the payment to the national church has not been based on these numbers anymore. So don't do that! Exactly the people who are enlisted as members can be approached for a discussion.

## **Attentive listening.**

How do you engage yourself with people who come on your path?

## 12) The congregation with culture at heart

### **The congregation makes beauty visible and heard.**

Church and culture belong together. A lot of art and music can not be understood without knowledge of the Bible. Monumental church-buildings are suitable for concerts and exhibitions.

Art is often about the big questions of life around love, death and life.

This can be the starting point for encounter and discussion.

Regularly concerts are organized in a beautiful church-building.

On the pulpit a text from the Scripture is engraved. In a handy leaflet is explained what there is to be seen. Visitors walk about during the break, leaflet at hand. In the leaflet is a contact-address and information on Sunday-morning worship.

Do not only think of Bach for 'art'; there is also the culture of pop-music.

Art is not necessarily a product of established artists. In Lopik congregation-members exhibited their vacation-pictures around a previously established theme.

'Psalmen voor Nu' (Psalms for Today) is a project in which psalms are rewritten and set to music in a style which appeals to many young people. Also think of a movie, poetry-circles, a course on literature. Of course good PR is necessary.

**'If people are no longer surprised by beauty, they loose courage.'**

How is that in your congregation? What possibilities are there around art and culture?

## 13) The congregation as a monastery

**The congregation stands next to searchers and is with them on the way.**

People search for sense, for meaning. They suspect that there is 'something', but what?

Sometimes they have religious experiences. 'Coincidence' sometimes seems to be very 'coincidental'.

People ask and pray.

Religion seems to be 'in' again. Magazines like Hapinez have a lot of subscribers.

Many people are interested in all sorts of spirituality and sometimes they have special experiences in the form of dreams or a vision.

Are they right in the church with their questions, their experiences? Is there room for their stories? Is it safe enough? And does the church have something to offer from the private sources?

Ds. Jeroen Jeroense from Elst invented an 'umbrella' for all of these experiences: the monastery. In the monastery there are not only discussions and meetings. There is also silence. They have meals together. They make art and they work together. How is that in our congregation? Can we offer people more than just courses and discussions? In the 'monastery-model' there are faithful workers (the 'monks') and the incidental guests. They join in occasionally. For a meal, for a discussion or a moment of silence.

Many congregations have an annual monastery-weekend. Time for silence, encounter, walk and talk. Getting away from it all for a moment. Talking in freedom. Encounter.

Learning to trust and believe.

**There are many forms of spirituality.**

What possibilities are there in your congregation?

## 14) The congregation with a missionary minister

**The congregation is incited by a missionary-impassioned minister.**

The minister has a key role. He or she is the trailblazer, also when it is about the missionary congregation. The minister does not have to be a 'charismatic leader'. But what is indeed necessary?

- Promote the reflection on the missionary congregation.
- Pay attention to this in the sermon.
- Be available yourself, also for people who are not members of the congregation.
- Seek the discussion with people with other – or no - religion.
- Encourage those who are the trailblazers: members of the missionary project-team, people which are organizing an Alpha-course or a 7+1 course; young people which involve and invite their friends.
- Pay attention to the missionary work, also in the church-magazine and prayer.
- Get inspired for ideas through a conference, a visit with other congregations.
- It turns out that new-comers are mainly inspired by the sermon. If this is accessible and relevant it prompts curiosity for more.

Of course the minister is not the only one. The consistory leads the congregation. Congregation-members are active themselves. Yet they look up to you. You are minister, also in missionary perspective.

**Encouragement gives people wings.**

Is there room for missionary initiatives from your minister?

## 15) The congregation for the village

**The congregation fixes on the village: 'from the village and for the village!'**

What if you are a small congregation in a village? You are happy even to persevere. The number of members is decreasing, there are few volunteers. Additionally: we are among ourselves.

This can provide familiarity, but also obstructions. You don't just talk about your faith.

What can you do? Jesus says: 'For where two or three come together in my name, I am there with them.' Matthew 18: 20. This provides hope.

A small congregation may feel discouraged, there may be conflicts and long lasting feuds. A feeling of meekness: it is the way it is and it can not be changed.

There can also be strength. Faith which deepens. People who are in discussion about what they see of God. Inspiration. Charisma.

The congregation can be meaningful for the village. Recognizably present. With compassion, prayer, a bunch of flowers. Also for the not-members. What are the needs in the village? Can we, as church, be meaningful in that? At the same time: come in, we have something to offer.

Spread the church magazine also door to door sometimes (Mind the content, add pictures.)

Look for cooperation with other villages in the neighbourhood.

**Being small is also an opportunity!**

What possibilities do you see for the congregation in the village?

## 16) The congregation with sports at heart

### **The congregation makes contact through sports.**

Sports are the leisure-time activity number 1 in the Netherlands. A good way to make contact. Precisely where there are a lot of possibilities for sport and recreation the church can be present and join up.

For example through congregation members which participate in local clubs.

A teenager invites his football trainer for worship. 'For years I have been with you on the football team, will you come and visit my church once?' It was the trainer's first time.

Or the religious congregation which organizes a sports-week or sports-activity: a sponsor-run, a benefit-match between consistory and local authorities.

Children and teenagers take part in sport-activities which are being organized by the church. 'Panna-football' in the square, playing soccer in the street. Children in the neighbourhood join up. Afterwards there is lemonade.

In Houten the protestant Sion-congregation offers run-mornings for women in the new housing estate. With guidance and babysitters.

Cycling-tours, walks: a fullness of possibilities the church could offer, also for not-members. The tour or walk could have the character of a pilgrimage.

In Rotterdam and Enschede the combined churches annually organize a sports- and game-week, supported by Athleticinaction, see [www.athlecticinaction.nl](http://www.athlecticinaction.nl). Of course there is a follow-up-offer.

### **Start moving; sport reconciles.**

Sports as missionary opportunity. How are you as a church present at sport-assemblies?

## 17) The congregation with children at heart

**The congregation has a heart for and prioritizes children.**

Children are not only the future of the church, they are mostly (part of) the church of today. They are baptized, there are prayers for a blessing on their life. They belong, in the circle. And then?

The upbringing is a responsibility of the parents. At the baptism they promise to lead their children in faith. The congregation has a task in this as well. The congregation supports the parents. Through a course in religious upbringing or a discussion-circle for young parents (not only for mothers!). In prayer.

And what else? Is the furnishing of the church-building suitable for children? Are materials available?

Above all: how is the atmosphere? Are children welcome, are they received with joy and kindness? Do you know their names?

In the new housing estates a lot of missionary work starts with a children's club. Through the children the parents meet with each other. Parents who notice that their children like it in church get curious again or for the first time.

What is happening there?

Try to cooperate with elementary schools. A church and school-worship are full of children and their parents which normally do not go to church. This is also the case with a vacation-bible-festival, a musical or children's holiday-camp.

**Go stand with the children.**

Is your congregation child-friendly? Which children do you know by name?

## 18) The congregation with youth at heart

**The congregation has a heart for and prioritizes young people.**

In the experience of young people the present situation in the churches is aimed at elderly people. Is it possible to do that differently, without falling short of for example the elderly people? It is not about all kind of other forms, other music or a popular style. It starts with relations. Who are the young people, what occupies them? How can you take them seriously, involve and apply them?

The models will follow.

It takes involved congregation-members, people with passion for youth which want to get to know their environment. Not people with answers to all questions. They should be people with something to say.

Often it is a long-term process. Could a circle of young people develop?

Young people who in their turn invite friends?

It starts with a choice: are you willing to put over the helm and really choose for the coming generation? This translates in policy, in finance and above all: in dedication for the youth.

'Vicar,' an elderly man said, 'I know where I have to go in my life. Go and pay attention to our young people'.

**Relations, relations and again ... enter into relations with them.**

Which teenagers do you know? Do you have a chat with them, are you interested?

## 19) The congregation with an eye for target-groups

**The congregation is aware of the variety of target-groups and is involved in it.**

People are unique. Family Average does not exist. Each minister knows how hard it is to give a sermon for the 'total' of the congregation. And to know that most congregations mainly consist of white, elderly people.

Aside from 'children' and 'young people' you can focus on other target-groups. For example take the congregation which consists of people over 55. No young families in the district. There is not much point in thinking of child- and youth work. It might bring more to target people of your own age. For example there is a congregation which organizes a Friday-afternoon-welcome. People bring their friends and acquaintances. The congregation maybe aged, but is not shrinking. There is a growth of new elderly people.

Other possible target-groups are: higher educated, homeless people, singles, people who share a certain occupation, the age-group between 30 and 55 ... you name it.

A lot will depend on the environment: what does your village or town look like? Further ask yourself: what target-groups are there in your own congregation? How could these groups target themselves on their network?

**A prospering community attracts new target-groups.**

Which target-group do you belong to? Are there colleagues or friends you could invite for a discussion on faith and meaning of life?

## 20) The congregation for tourists

**The congregation has an offer for tourists and holiday-makers in the neighbourhood.**

The Netherlands has many tourist areas. In many places the churches are more filled in summer than in winter.

What can you as local congregation be to people on the camping, in the marina, on the vacation-homes-park? Often worships are announced on bill boards in the local supermarket or in the reception of the camping. Is that all?

Also keep in mind

- Have the church open for a moment during the week, for silence and reflection
- A child-club (so the parents have some time off); of course you invite the children and their parents for Sunday worship
- Camping-activities, organized by young people from all over the country, supported by the local congregations
- Concerts, of course with a leaflet for the visitors on the church-building and worships
- Possibilities for individual talks (the minister has consulting-hours)
- Guided tours in churches and monasteries.

The Interkerkelijk Werkverband voor de Recreatie (Inter-religious Work Association for Recreation) can give advise and support.

The HGJB organizes youth work on camping-sites in the Netherlands.

**Being visible and accessible for passers-by.**

How can you as a congregation-member be hospitable for holiday-makers together with others?

## 21) The congregation on the market

**The congregation is present when there is something up.**

What is going on in town, the district, the village? Is the church present there?

'Congregation on the market': the actual marketplace, think of a stand, but also of all kinds of other activities and festivities.

Join up

Σ With a stand on a fair

Σ With the course-offer of the civil community

Σ On 'Koniginndag' (Queensday), the 4th and 5th of May, Open Monuments-day, sporting events and openings

And make PR in the supermarket, the shopping centre, the canteen of the sporting club, the waiting-room of the family doctor.

The congregation on the market joins up with what is going on. There is no specific target-group. The church does not only say 'join us' but also steps outside.

Σ An inflatable bouncing cushion at the church during a village-festival with lemonade and tea in the church

Σ A living nativity scene at the shopping centre, with bits of paper for people to write their wishes on for the Christmas tree.

Σ A large celebration of the anniversary of the church, also for the neighbourhood and the village, with interesting programs

Make sure to have good leaflets, nice gadgets to hand out and a good decoration of the stand. What do you have to offer? And are you present in the door-to-door and regional papers?

**Outward church: show yourself.**

How does the church participate in your neighbourhood?

## 22) The congregation at the crossroads of life

**The congregation has an offer for people on the crossroads of their life, involved and caring.**

Birth, death, marriage, termination of employment, divorce, a disaster nearby. People experience radical events. They are touched by life. Suddenly there is great joy or profound mourning. The existence is vulnerable and fragile.

Especially then the church should be present. There are rituals, prayers and hymns. The church has comforting words and gestures.

People who have not been coming to church for years suddenly attend because of grandma's funeral.

People who never saw the inside of a church witness the baptism of their friend's baby.

The church is present when it matters. Not only for the own members. The church has an offer for on the way. Gestures of love, hope and faith. Sacraments, anointment of the sick, blessing, a listening ear, a prayer. But also: a discussion circle for partners in misfortune, a relation course or a theme-evening on mourning and parting.

There are booklets on baptism, on death, on marriage, which inform and introduce people in what the church has to offer. The combined churches of Woerden made an assistance titled 'If you have to say goodbye'; on what is to be done around a funeral and the possible role of the church in this.

**The church comes into the picture when it matters.**

Make an inventory of the crossroads and the possibilities your congregation offers there.

## 23) The congregation with sensible love

**The congregation reflects on the questions of faith and life and has an offer.**

We worship God with all our heart, all our soul and all our mind. Faith is more than emotion and experience. It is possible to think reasonably and sensibly about it.

Could you target this especially as a church? For example if you are a congregation in an environment which loves to reflect and debate, like in a town where many students live.

In Athens Paul entered into discussion with the philosophers of his days (Acts 17). He connected with their thinking and at the same time he was very clear on his message.

How do we enter into discussion? Think of

Σ Lectures, with a debate afterwards

Σ Intensification in special teaching-worships

Σ Courses

Σ Houses of teaching

Faith is not a 'leap into the dark'. It is not 'either you believe it or not'; it is possible to discuss it. There are arguments. Of course good PR is essential. Also involve people from outside of the church. Which questions do they have? What can they contribute?

Encourage congregation-members to invite their friends and acquaintances. 'I think this is something for you.'

The location is also important: a lecture could be held in a more 'neutral' location.

**Faith is not just a leap into the dark.**

Is there need for reflection in your congregation? How is that for the environment?

## 24) The congregation with the church building as missionary starting point

### **The congregation uses the building for the neighbourhood.**

Everywhere in the Netherlands are church-buildings. Great monumental ones, small chapel-like or multi-functional buildings from the sixties. Maintenance is expensive, a lot of church-buildings have to be closed down. 'We should not invest in buildings, but in people!' That is certainly true, but could the church-building also have a part in this? Try to look at your own church-building with new eyes, as a stable point in the district, in the village, seen by everyone. What are the possibilities?

Many church-buildings are hired out to all kind of associations and organizations throughout the week. The building is a house of welcome to the neighbourhood. Can you handle this in a missionary manner? Not just invite everybody in, but think about the missionary possibilities. Invite people to make use of the building. Not (just) for rent, but also: we would like to make use of this building together with you.

A monumental church in London is used by many musicians. The congregation itself is only small, but very active! In the basement is a homeless-shelter. The minister walks about in a recognizable manner, she wears her collar and is talking to everyone. An active centre with involved congregation-members as the centre-point.

### **The church-building itself offers missionary opportunities.**

Is your church-building in missionary use?

## 25) The congregation in a multi-cultural context

**The congregation makes contact with the multi-cultural environment and is present there.**

In the Netherlands we live in the middle of many cultures. Aside from Christians there are followers of other religions. Entire neighbourhoods change character. And the church? Does she participate?

It begins with encounter. A combined meal, a cup of coffee. People get to know each other. They greet each other. They discover how they can cooperate.

Sometimes an inter-religious dialogue begins. On similarities and differences regarding content.

Church and mosque could work together in the district. To take away suspicion, to build on society.

And could the church be open for people from other cultures? Is there an inductance loop with translation? The congregation could change colour and get to look more and more like the collection of from all nations, races and cultures. A big change, but not an impossible one – that has been proven in practice.

For example in the Scots International Church in Rotterdam, part of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands.

There is a network where you can get guidance and advice:  
[www.icpnetwork.nl](http://www.icpnetwork.nl).

**Who eats together learns to live together.**

What can you do in the encounter with people from other cultures?

## 26) The congregation with a pioneers-place

### **The congregation supports a pioneers-place.**

A new beginning, in a new housing estate, a town-district, a place where there is space for new initiatives. That is pioneering. The synod provides room for it: pioneer-places, set up by the Protestant Church. Just beginning (again), in whatever way. Being and staying present in the new district, in the town, in the village.

What is needed? Thorough investigation. In what environment are you starting, what kind of people live there or will be going to live there? For this research you can turn to a college or university which have the people and the means available. Also see the model of the investigating congregation (number 5).

How to start? There are several possibilities and two basic structures:

- a. to start immediately with worship on Sunday, a new community/congregation
- b. to start with networking, with activities in and for the district. That is often work with children. A new community/congregation can grow from that.

Also necessary is a supporting consistory. With a vision. A consistory that does not see a pioneer-place as a threat, but as an opportunity. And people of course, volunteers.

A pioneer who takes the lead.

Funding is available from the department Missionary Work and Church-development of the Protestant Church. Advice and guidance are possible from the Church Ministries and IZB.

Experimenting, searching new forms, new possibilities, where searchers and sceptics can join up.

### **Accurate preparation and beginning something new.**

Who dares?

## 27) The crimp without cramp-congregation

**The congregation is going to close down and does that with confidence in the remaining possibilities.**

And if it is not possible anymore? The congregation is getting smaller, greyer, lacking work force. There is a part-time minister, but for how long? The possibilities for something new are limited or the courage is lacking.

What can be done? Closing down a church is a painful mourning-process. People remember how it used to be. They are attached to the building. There is powerlessness. Guilt. 'What did we do wrong?' It can be good to ask those who left the church for their reasons to leave, what is on their mind now and what you as a church could be to them.

Such processes need guidance from 'outside'. How do you say farewell? Where can the remaining congregation members go to? How are they guided? Is there a possibility of a small home-circle? Crimp without cramp, with care and love.

A home-congregation is also an opportunity: being put back to the most basic form of being-church: singing, praying, scripture reading together; supporting each other, eating together. There are congregations which are making a second beginning by pioneering. It asks for vision and people who are willing to support this.

Do we have the faith for it? Small groups enlarge the chances of a second beginning.

Meekness does not have to be the last word.

**In the folds of crimp are hidden chances.**

Just closing or second beginning as well?

## 28) The congregation at the table

**The congregation uses the meal as possibility for contact and encounter.**

The meal is a wonderful opportunity for hospitality, encounter and discussion in a relaxed atmosphere.

Preceding the Alpha-course and the course '7+1', encounters with God' there always is a meal. Without it there is no 'real' course. This way the people get to know each other in a natural way.

Many congregations have groups which eat together: singles, elderly people. Families. And what to think of a meal preceding the Christmas-night-worship? An Easter-breakfast or Easter-brunch? Of course there are broad invitations. Everyone is welcome. During the meal something is read or told about Christmas or Easter.

If children come along: remember to bring a colouring picture and organize a playing area.

Do not underestimate the amount of work this will bring. A lot of people love to cook, but do not overburden them. Sometimes hiring catering is a good solution.

Rev. Han Wilmink is not only a minister, but a cook as well. See: [www.bijbels-culinair.nl](http://www.bijbels-culinair.nl). For inspiration.

**Conversations just change into faith-discussions.**

Are there combined meals in your congregation? Are guests welcome?

## 29) The reflecting congregation

**The congregation starts with a look in the mirror: who are we, and how can we be missionary?**

Who are you? If a congregation looks at herself in the mirror something starts to move. She suddenly notices that her hair is not good or that she could better put on another coat.

Reflection on the private identity and on all activities can lead to cutting back, to new initiatives and to growth.

'Who are we, what do we think of importance? How do we realize that?' There are all kind of books and aids which can be of assistance in this reflection-process.

An example. Robert Warren mentions in his 'Healthy Churches' Handbook seven characteristics of a healthy and flourishing congregation:

1. inspired by faith
2. an outward aimed vision
3. looking for what God wants
4. willing to face the cost of change and growth
5. living as a real community
6. creating space for everyone
7. limiting yourself to a number of tasks and perform those well.

Through a 'scan' you can scrutinize your own congregation. The congregation-advisor has experience with these processes and will be glad to be of service. A missionary management-course can also lead through reflection to new initiatives.

**Reflection which leads to change. Also in missionary perspective.**

Have a look in the missionary mirror!

## 30) The peeping-at-the-neighbours-congregation

**The congregation lets herself be inspired by examples from elsewhere.**

What do others do? What do they accomplish what we do not? How is that possible? Can we learn something?

No easy questions. The 'others', especially when they are nearby, can be a threat. Soon you think: 'not like that!' This may prevent you from learning something.

Congregation-members which travel far are sometimes touched and inspired by churches elsewhere in the world. 'There they welcome you so cordially', 'There they have good children-work, unbelievable!' 'What an inspiration!' Ministers which visit conferences are fascinated and get new inspiration. Peeping with the neighbours can be beneficial.

You do not need to copy everything just like that. You are looking in someone else's mirror. To learn or to discover. What you do not want, but also what you would want and what you could. It is always necessary to translate it into the private situation.

Fortunately in many places there is already consultation between ministers and officials. They work together, learn together and they pray together.

What could you learn from? Nearby or far away? Also keep the migrant-churches in the neighbourhood in mind. Partner-congregations abroad. Congresses and courses.

**Getting acquainted to others is refreshing.**

Where can you take a peep?

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