

## 16. The congregation with a heart for sport

*Church and sport get people moving*

**Church and sport, do they go together? Sport as missionary opportunity? Most certainly, because sports and games offer all sorts of possibilities for contacts and encounters. In the Netherlands sport is the number one leisure activity. The sporty congregation recognises this and uses it as a means to make contacts.**

The church can be present in places where there are many opportunities for recreation and sport. That can be achieved in a number of different ways, by taking part in local sports clubs but also by organising a sport week or sport activity.

What can the church do in cooperation with the sport club to make sure that there is a good atmosphere in the neighbourhood?

Many people will remember the Christian youth camps that meant so much in their lives. A sailing camp, a football camp or a horse riding camp. There are a number of Christian organisations that organise such camps. You as local congregation can of course organise something yourselves. Allow the children and teens invite their friends. Sometimes a congregation has sporty people among its members. How can they make use of their interest in the church and with the church as point of departure?

*In an old quarter of Rotterdam the children's club is not going very well, there are very few children. The leaders say to each other: Let's go out into the street to kick a ball around, then the children will come. With a ball under their arm they go to a little square and half an hour later they come back with ten very hot children, ready to have a drink of lemonade and a chat; in this way they make sure they have some contacts for the following week.*

### **A number of suggestions**

How are you present as church at sporting events?

- If a sports person delivers a wonderful achievement: send congratulations on behalf of the church.
- Organise a sport week or sport activity. Sometimes churches look down on sports. Paul wrote to Timothy: 'Physical exercise has some value'. But a healthy lifestyle is a matter of course for Christians, is it not?

- Many Dutch people ride bikes. How about organising a cycle trip after the Sunday service. Ask your congregation members to bring their children and neighbours along. Halfway through the trip have a coffee stop and then the minister could give a short sermon in the open air.
- Organise a cycle trip from one village to the next to look at a number of churches.
- Get the sports fanatics in your congregation together and tell them to make a plan. Begin with just one activity, don't be too ambitious to start with.
- Organise a sponsored walk for charity ('walk around the church').
- Many people regard riding their motorbike as a sport. Organise a trip starting at the church and ask the enthusiasts to organise it; then invite some motorbike riders who are not church members to join you on the tour. Don't forget to invite the press to get some nice pictures when you set off.
- A congregation could make the following offer (in a folder with a number of different activities which is to be distributed to all homes in the neighbourhood): a race for women runners on a Wednesday morning, with a crèche for the little ones.
- Organise a benefit match between the church council and young people.
- During lent each Sunday morning at 7.00 a long walk; during the walk a liturgical moment (hymn, text or poem) or a point for discussion. To finish with a healthy breakfast in the church hall. Invite enthusiastic walkers from your network who are not church members to join in.
- Organise a sports week in the summer, for the neighbourhood or the village. In the evening there would be an opportunity for meetings and discussion with follow-up activity in the neighbourhood. (See also [www.athletesinaction.nl](http://www.athletesinaction.nl).) In Enschede and Rotterdam there is a week like that every year, it is called 'Sonrise'. A cooperation project with a number of churches, including the protestant one.\*
- Invite a Christian top sports person: how do they regard top sport? Everybody is welcome of course. Then there is the film 'Chariots of fire' about an athlete who refused to run on Sundays during the Olympic games.
- A lecture about how Christians regard our body and fitness culture can also be interesting for outsiders.
- 'Panna cage' - playing football in a movable cage or within an enclosure: a good thing to do on start-up Sunday. Invite the children and teens who attend to come to a follow-up.

## **Possible approach for the church council**

- As church council make a list of the ‘sporting opportunities’ there are in your environment.
- If sport is important to your village or neighbourhood, if you see that sport offers good opportunities to make contact with people around you and together with others to be of importance to the neighbourhood, then carry out a targeted search for these opportunities. Which sports are people involved in? How can we become involved? What can we organise ourselves?
- Ask yourself the question: What do we have in house? Which congregation members might be interested in this and how can we involve them? Don’t forget the children and young people!
- Cooperate with other churches, in particular when a sports event is involved!

*\*Sonrise is a large sport and evangelisation project in which sports enthusiasts play sports with children and teens between the ages of 6 and 18. The project comprises an action week. Before this there is a training week for the sport lovers (15 and over). The Athletes in Action explain very clearly why they do it: “we love sport, we love Jesus and we love people.”*

*A number of different churches take part in this project. All these churches work together to bring the Gospel to the whole town or neighbourhood. Each church participating in the project works together with Athletes in Action in a particular neighbourhood or town, preferably in the neighbourhood or town where the church is situated and with a sport team that consists of about 10 young people, as many of whom as possible are recruited from the church concerned. After the action week there is a follow-up. The young people from the neighbourhood who have developed an interest and with whom good contacts have been made are invited to sport afternoons, a children’s club, a teen club or a Youth Alpha.*

*The organisation the churches want to support is Athletes in Action, a section of Agape.*