

20. The congregation for tourists

Being visible and accessible to passers-by

Every town, every village has tourists. They stay in hotels, guest houses, holiday cottages and on campsites. Statistically 15 percent of the tourists are members of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. It is quite likely that they would like to visit you in your local congregation.

Can they find you?

What do that marina, that campsite, all those hotels and recreation parks mean to the local congregation? Do we wait and see if more churchgoers come in or do we take the initiative by looking for the tourists?

Very often the church services are publicised on notice boards or in the local supermarket. Sometimes even with the announcement that there will be a crèche. Are there also folders about the churches in the neighbourhood at the receptions of hotels, parks and campsites? In a folder you can provide more information than just the time of the church services (do not forget to give the address of the church building!). You can go further and opt to become active on the tourists' behalf. What can you mean to them? What might their needs be? Ask them. That is the quickest way to find out.

The local congregation organises a children's club during the summer holiday. The children are taken care of for a couple of hours and enjoy games and songs. They are invited to sing these songs during the Sunday service. In the meantime the parents have a couple of hours to themselves.

Young people in the church are involved in a children's camp that lasts a week. In this way the children of hardworking parents for whom the summer months are a particularly busy time are able to enjoy a fantastic week and the parents in the village can take it a bit easier.

Young people from the whole country are involved in organising a children's camp at the coast. They organise the open air church services on the Sunday morning. Quite an event! The local churches in the vicinity support them with resources and opportunities.

The church is present on the campsite, there is a 'listening ear' available (a pastor or congregation member who is good at establishing contacts).

The church is open, not just on Sundays but on weekdays too. There is a silence centre where people can catch their breath and relax. There are Taize celebrations. There is an exhibition and there are organ recitals. At the back of the church there are a few leaflets 'what else goes on in this church?'

The church is present at the annual fair, there is a world shop.

For all these activities hosts and hostesses are a must. They are present and offer invitations without strings attached and know how to respond to the different types of people who come along.

Many villages have an annual festive fair with at the end a 'service in a tent' for everybody. Are any tourists present invited as well?

In the Kampen region people involved in water sport are given a little news sheet called 'Land and Water'¹.

A number of suggestions

The Christian inspiration is characteristic for the tourist pastorate. In addition all activities are open to everyone, regardless of their philosophical orientation. These activities are geared to the wishes and needs of the tourists and can consist of:

- Low threshold celebrations and services
- Inspiring walks and excursions
- Opportunities for encounters and conversations
- Meditative meetings
- Exhibitions with inspiring, philosophical figurative art
- Forms of theatre
- Recreation (children's) activities
- Concerts
- Evenings with a theme, such as music (texts), poetry, socially relevant subjects, inspiration, spirituality
- Telling regional and other inspiring stories
- Lending a helping hand
- Tours round churches and monasteries
- Help and support
- Offering a quiet spot

Look at the IWR website (Inter-church Recreation Working Group²), where you can find ideas and support, see www.iwr.nl

The HGJB (Protestant Youth Organisation) organises 'dabar³ work' carried out by young people in camp sites in the Netherlands, see www.hgjb.nl and each year produces materials for holiday bible clubs.

¹ Wal en water

² Interkerkelijk Werkverband voor de Recreatie

³ dabar is a Hebrew word meaning 'statement'

Possible approach for the church council

- A church council have a think about the tourists in your neighbourhood. Important questions: what kind of people are they? What do we have to offer and how could this mean something to them? Whom could we involve in this (churches in the vicinity, other organisations)?
- Make a list of all the people who would be suitable to serve as host or hostess, people who are not shy in approaching other people and inviting them without being pushy. Children's workers, those who work with young people, people who are willing to 'carry' a celebration.
- What are the concrete opportunities that would suit your congregation? Make a concrete year plan. Do not try to do this all without any help, involve people who at the moment are perhaps not very involved yet.

'Hospitality does not mean that we want to change people, it means that we offer other people space where changes can take place.' (H Nouwen in *Open your Heart*¹).

¹ Open uw hart