

21. The congregation in the market

Taking part in what happens in the neighbourhood

What are the activities taking place in the neighbourhood, the town, the village? The church congregation can play a part. The congregation ‘in the market’. Sometimes this literally means the market, with market stalls, but it can also be seen figuratively as the ‘market of opportunities’. The church in the market does not say ‘come and join us’, but steps outside and joins in with what goes on in the neighbourhood.

Just before Easter our congregation distributes invitations to come to the church services. We do that at the local supermarket where we have a spot with lambs and chicks. The children love to come and have a look and the parents are invited to a special celebration with the children.

Around Christmas and Easter there is always a group from different churches that form a choir and sing Christmas carols in the shopping centre. Shoppers can join in and sing (and some of them do just that). They can take the song sheets home with them. On the back there is a list of church services in our town.

Around Christmas we organise a live Christmas stable in the shopping centre. There is also a large Christmas tree where people can hang their wishes...

As churches together we promoted the Marriage Course. We had a stand in the market organised by the municipal authorities. We had made a large heart where people could have themselves photographed as couples. Of course they were also given a brochure about the course to take home. The photo could be found on our joint ‘Marriage Course’ website.

Around 4 and 5 May¹ we always make sure that we participate as local Council of Churches. If one of these days falls on a Sunday we organise a joint service in the celebration tent.

The IZB² has a ‘market stall package’ with the title ‘taste the life’³. A box of materials that is suitable for a market stall. It is intended to show people in a creative way how God wants to be involved in our lives. Information: www.izb.nl.

¹ Remembrance and Liberation Days respectively in the Netherlands

² Inwendige ZendingsBond or: Internal Mission Association

³ Proef het leven

A number of suggestions

- Be there on the annual fair with a stall: make it attractive and inviting, not pressing.
- Be there on introduction evening organised by many municipal authorities.
- Take part in courses offered by the municipal authorities.
- Be there at moments such as the Queen's birthday, remembrance occasions such as 4 and 5 May, the Open Monument day, sports competitions.
- Be there on the national citizenship day, when in every Dutch municipality new Dutchmen and women receive their nationality. Many of them have a Christian identity.
- Be present in locations such as the market, the supermarket, the shopping centre, the sports club canteen.
- Create your own celebration. How about the anniversary of your church: a monumental church that has been in the village for centuries or a relatively new church community that celebrates its 25th anniversary? How do you celebrate that? With a celebration for members only, with much nostalgia and looking back to the past, just for insiders? Or do you involve the village, the neighbourhood?

The Janskerk in Mijdrecht celebrated its 150th anniversary. There were activities throughout the year. The minister wrote a well-produced booklet about John the Baptist. There was a symposium to which all churches in Mijdrecht contributed. A musical about John the Baptist was performed in Mijdrecht.

These are characteristics for the 'church in the market':

- participation in existing opportunities and festivities;
- no specific target group: everybody can take note of the activities or take part in them;
- it is not 'come to us', but going out and taking part in what goes on in the neighbourhood.

Possible approach for the church council

- As church council draw up a list of what the opportunities are in your vicinity (market, annual fair, celebrations, places).
- Where can you present yourself? How? Ask people outside the church to contribute ideas. What do they find attractive? What is suitable?
- Involve members of the congregation who have enough courage to stand 'in the market'. Others could be active in creating conditions: developing brochure material, creating little 'gadgets' to distribute, dress a stall etc.
- How can you involve young people and children?
- Can you work together with other churches in the neighbourhood?
- If you organise something yourself, how do you involve the other people in the village or the neighbourhood?
- Make a year plan and make sure that there is good communication and PR.