

## 24. The congregation with the church building as missionary point of departure

*Make use of the opportunities of the building*

**Everywhere in the Netherlands there are church buildings. Large monumental ones, small, chapel-like one, but also ‘multi-functional’ ones from the sixties. Sometimes the building is regarded as a burden: the maintenance costs lots of money and a monument has many limitations. What are the missionary opportunities of your church building?**

*We would like to strip out the old pews; they are uncomfortable and are really in the way. But if we do this we will not get anything more from the Historic Buildings Fund.*

Do not invest in buildings but in people! That is an option and it is in fact happening. Don't have your own building but have services in a school. Or in people's homes when the circle is small. But then there is an important question to be answered: What do we do with all the existing church buildings?

It is possible for the building to be a missionary opportunity. The building is recognisable. A fixed point in neighbourhood or town. It is there for all to see. Very often a monumental building is loved by everybody, not only by the members. ‘The church (read: the building) has to stay!’

### **A number of suggestions**

- Look at the positive points for a change: what are the opportunities the building offers and how can we make the best possible use of them? Are there people and organisations who would like to join in and who also see our building as an opportunity? You could for instance start a ‘friends’ club’. People who help with financing the maintenance and in exchange for their support you could invite them to a concert or other activities.

*Amerongen has an organisation called ‘the friends of St. Andrew’s Church’, a separate foundation that not only concentrates on the maintenance of the monumental building but also organises all kinds of concerts. In this way people ‘from outside’ are drawn in and they become actively involved in the building.*

*See [www.andrikerk.nl](http://www.andrikerk.nl).*

- It may help to invite others to have a look at your building, perhaps a financial advisor, or somebody who looks at it from the point of view of missionary or diaconate work; or better still somebody who combines both these qualities.

*Two young people combined forces and started an office that wants to help church congregations to use their building for the neighbourhood and the village. They look at the financial and missionary possibilities. See [www.transitieadvies.nl](http://www.transitieadvies.nl).*

- Very often church halls are hired by the week to all sorts of associations and organisations. There are courses, Weight Watchers are regular weekly tenants, an English course takes place in the church hall, sometimes during the daytime it is a laboratory for blood donations. In this way the church building becomes a neighbourhood centre full of action. And the congregation gets an income too. The caretaker can supplement his or her salary.
- Try to see it the other way around. Not just: who wants to use our church facilities is very welcome, but: whom would we like to invite to make use of our buildings? What fits in with us and with our identity? Not just: come along and hire a room or two, but: we would like to make use of this building together with you. Would you like to give a concert here or a theatrical production? Would you like to take part as a volunteer during a drop-in morning?
- Be hospitable to all those who hire the church, all those who go to courses, all those people who enter the building.

*Our church hall was a real mess. It looked more like a warehouse than a church hall. It looked shabby too. That was the first thing we tackled, with a number of volunteers. It took only two Saturdays. At least now we need not be ashamed to get people to come and have a look inside...*

*An enormous church in London has wonderful acoustics and is used by all sorts of musicians and film makers. The congregation itself is only small, just a handful of people left. Despite this the minister is very busy. People talk to her and these encounters lead to all sorts of discussions about life and faith. In the cellar some space has been made available as a drop-in for homeless people. Coffee is served and clothes are distributed. Every day a very varied public comes through the door, with the minister and a handful of 'driven' congregation members as hospitable 'hub'.*

*Place a rack in the entrance hall with folders with information about the congregation and also about faith subjects. 'What is Easter?' 'What does a minister do?' 'Who is Jesus?' 'What kind of book is the bible?' 'What is baptism?' etc. Compare the racks with patient information at the GP or the chemist.*

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

- As church council have a think about your building. How is it being used at the moment? What other possibilities are there? What would you like to do with the building, what fits in with your identity? Do you want to ask someone else to have a look at the building and give you advice? Not only congregation members that are knowledgeable about church buildings but also people and organisations from the neighbourhood who can identify opportunities.
- Make a plan. Are people available at particular times in the week? During the summer? Start in a small way, a drop-in hour, a coffee morning. And keep at it. People will have to find their way to the church building, see that it is open (how do you make that known on the outside?), be invited...
- What does the building look like? Is the exterior inviting? And the interior? Which steps could be taken to improve this? Ask people from outside to have a look and ask them what they think!
- Think about a possible follow-up: what if all those people that come in want more?

*Congregations can contact the following organisations for advice: SBKG, Stichting Behoud Kerkelijke Gebouwen (Foundation for the Preservation of Church Buildings), email: [sbkgu@planet.nl](mailto:sbkgu@planet.nl), telephone (0343) 56 16 52 OR (06) 53 and the KKG Kantoor Kerkelijke Goederen (Office for church properties), [www.kkgkka.nl](http://www.kkgkka.nl), telephone (033) 467 10 10.*