

## 26. The congregation at a pioneer's location

*Prepare well and start something new*

**There is building work going on, houses are rising up like mushrooms. One street after another, the building does not stop. A whole neighbourhood full of newly built houses, a whole town.**

**In a large district of the town there is still a protestant church, but it is greying quickly. There is not much leadership. Closure of the church threatens on the horizon.**

**What are the opportunities for the church in both these situations?**

In the past few years much attention has been paid to the possibility of being pioneers: founding or 'planting' new churches. Just make a (fresh) start, however you do it. Being and remaining present in the new neighbourhood, in the town, in the village. Even if there are only very few people and even if there are not many possibilities. There are opportunities; there is vision and longing, there are people eager to get to work - pioneers who have an eye for what is possible and who do not look at what is not (no longer) there.

Planting a church, making a fresh start somewhere. These are not unpremeditated initiatives that are set up without much forethought. A protestant pioneer location can be started only in cooperation with the existing church council. Otherwise it is not possible. The synod has made it possible for new communities to be founded, the church order offers possibilities for this. There is a two track policy: the existing churches are invited and stimulated to be present in town and village as a missionary congregation. In addition new communities and congregations are possible. Perhaps a new neighbourhood congregation, perhaps a meeting place that slowly grows into an independent protestant congregation. The existing congregation can give its missionary calling content by founding a pioneer location. Volunteers are made available to work at this project. There are different ways in which it can be started.

### **Two important suggestions**

- A new congregation that meets on a Sunday right from the start. People who are made available by congregation(s) in the vicinity to help them get started. The people in the neighbourhood or the village themselves will be the ones who carry it. Very often there is a paid worker who is paid from funds who is assisted by people from the church council and workers from the national office of the services organisation of the Protestant Church and/or the IZB<sup>1</sup>.
- A 'place of presence' in the neighbourhood. In a new neighbourhood children's work often offers a good starting point. There is a room, there is a worker (see the previous suggestion), there are meetings during the week: drop-in mornings, children's clubs, a faith course, themed evenings.... On this basis it will in the end

---

<sup>1</sup> Inwendige ZendingsBond or: Internal Mission Association

be possible for a community to grow which will become a congregation. Here too funds and monitoring are very important.

In both instances discussions with the local church councils are important. Get going together and keep working together. Have the courage to ask each other questions and to learn from each other.

### **Church, but different**

In addition to 'church planting' we also speak of 'emerging churches'; a church that springs from the soil like a plant, independently from a church organisation. Very often it starts with people in a living room, it is informal, low threshold, not with the intention to start a 'church' as we know churches. It is experimental, searching, making use of new forms and opportunities. Sometimes a thing like this grows into a new community, something like a 'church', but different. Because these 'emerging' groups would like to have much freedom they are not looking to become part of a church denomination. But the contribution of ideas and empathising are always appreciated.

On the other hand such initiatives can also be seen as threatening and competitive. Is it perhaps possible to support each other and complement each other, in other words to build each other up? We do not all have to do the same thing or be identical to each other.

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

- If you as church council want to think about 'church planting' or new initiatives in your environment, then you must discuss the vision it is based on. Why such an initiative? Do some research into the neighbourhood, into the people who live there. Contacts with existing initiatives are very important. What are the experiences that have been made? How do we translate that into our situation?
- Think before you jump. That may cost some time. Do you have the necessary support in the congregation?
- Do some research into the environment, into the new neighbourhood, the village where the church has closed down. What sort of people live there, which questions are there and what are the needs? You will be able to get help with this kind of research. What do you want: celebrations right from the start or just activities during the week? Do you have the courage to make available people from your own congregation to help with this?
- Are there financial resources for a worker? Is it possible to tap into funds? It is possible to get help from the services organisation of the Protestant Church and/or the IZB.

Every year two new pioneer congregations are started from the services organisation. For a period of three years a minister and a networker/fund raiser are paid from national funds. Active, positive involvement from the surrounding congregations and the district council is a precondition.

## **BOEI 90**

A good example of a protestant pioneer location is BOEI 90 in the neighbourhood Wateringse Veld in The Hague. The worker there is Arjen ten Brinke. He is supported by the two protestant church councils of Wateringen and assisted by the IZB and the missionary team of the services organisation of the Protestant Church.

*BOEI 90 is a very ordinary house in a very ordinary street in Wateringse Veld. It is a house where everybody is welcome! From this house we want to make a positive contribution to the neighbourhood by realising the phrase 'looking out for each other'. The atmosphere in BOEI 90 is experienced as 'warm'. People look out for each other and have empathy for each other. It is a place to meet others, to have a chat and to exchange experiences. From BOEI 90 we offer activities that revolve around 'meeting'. Many people are looking for more, are they looking for God perhaps? But who is God and who is Jesus and what does it mean to believe?*

*What BOEI 90 wants is to be a safe place for the inhabitants of Wateringse Veld where children, young people and adults can feel at home.*

*([www.BOWI90.nl](http://www.BOWI90.nl))*