

3 The congregation at the Source

What is important is the heart to heart meeting

A vital faith community keeps being driven by the Gospel. If you are no longer moved by the message of salvation, how will you be able to communicate it to those around you? Do you as church council have the courage to spend time and energy on this?

In his book *Life from the Source** Marius Noorloos presents a worked out method around deepening the faith and missionary congregation building. He describes the congregation as a community that is characterised by:

- Heart for the Lord
- Heart for each other as his disciples
- Heart for his work in the world.

In other words: what is important in the missionary congregation is to learn to find the Lord and to follow and to represent him.

The method to build up a missionary congregation via deepening the faith consists of three elements: Action, Reflection and Communication (ARC).

In the church we tend to quickly change gear to action and activities. We want to have a working plan and then we want to get going. If the activities receive too much emphasis you will get a 'business-like busyness' and there is a danger of the congregation becoming too business-like.

Reflection is essential. Reflection about vision and policy, a sensible approach, setting priorities and reflecting on where building up the congregation will lead. A one-sided emphasis on this may mean that we do a lot of thinking and talking, but that nothing gets off the ground. Nothing concrete happens. Everything becomes (too) theoretical.

Life from the Source starts with communication as the heart of the life and policy of the church. What is important here is the heart to heart meeting, whereby we practice listening to the words of the Gospel. As a result of these meetings our faith is deepened. Now we can be inspired to build a vital and attractive congregation.

A number of suggestions

* The Revd. Marius Noorloos, *Leven uit de Bron, via geloofsopbouw naar gemeenteopbouw (via building up the faith to building up the congregation)*, 5th edited and amended edition, publishers Kok, Kampen

- In the book by Noorloos church councils and policy groups are invited to connect the small c of the meeting of people with the big C of the meeting with God. Bible sections and questions are handed out to facilitate this meeting. What is important here is not discussion but the question ‘how is your life affected by this bible text; what strikes you?’ (See also the method used by Lectio Divina at www.pkn.n/missionair.) The conversation is vulnerable and it is important that the leaders make sure it does not turn into an argument. It is not important to be proved right, what needs to happen is that the various experiences are given due attention. In this way you will learn to understand each other better and blockades will be removed.
- The reflection will arise from this intensive communication. Who are we as a congregation? What do we contribute to our environment? What are the improvements that can be made? What are the ideas that live within the congregation?
- Finally, are there activities that can be used as building stones for building up faith and congregation? What are we going to do? Who is going to do it? How? When? And with which means?

In practice this means that the option is for the order CRA instead of ARC.

Noorloos offers a complete programme in his book, including a helping hand to the course leader and examples of concrete building stones. In practice it has been proved that following this programme as church council is a good start. To do so five evenings are needed that have to be reserved especially for this purpose.

Possible approach for the church council

- Concentrate on this method as church council; ask a number of people to have a look at it and to present it at the church council meeting. By way of introduction you could use *The ARC/CRA of working together to shape the heart of the church*¹ written by Noorloos. (see the website). Make a decision as to whether or not you want to start using this. Reserve a Saturday on which you can have a closer look at the contents, setup and intention. You could ask for help from a congregation advisor who knows *Life from the Source*. Alternatively, you could approach Noorloos himself. (You can find his programme on the website). On the basis of this meeting you can make a final decision whether the church council wants to pursue it or not.
- Set aside five evenings in the year in which you familiarise yourselves with the programme. Again, you can ask the congregation advisor to help you.
- Get going with the building stones via a plan of action.
- Invite members of the congregation to join in a similar process, maybe with church council members as monitors. You can also do this via house groups (this book has an appendix devoted to house groups).

¹ *Het ABC/CBA van samen werken aan het hart van de kerk*