

## 14. The congregation with a missionary minister

*What do you mean, missionary? We don't have time for that...*

**The role of the minister is a big one, in particular if he is in a missionary congregation. Places where there is renewal, where new members are joining, where a missionary movement has started often have a minister who is a pioneer. His or her role is important but not self-evident. What can he or she do, even if there is not a lot of spare time?**

For many ministers, and most certainly those in a plural setting it is difficult to take the initiative in being a missionary congregation. There are members who object to missionary work. There are others who run ahead of the troops and are seen as naggers. There are also members who for a variety of reasons have a fear of everything that is missionary. The minister holds these groups together; he suspects that if he were to make a choice it could lead to problems.

Some ministers have a missionary background, they may have worked in the missionary field. They may at some time have been active in Youth for Christ and have never left that behind. They have a 'missionary drive' and enjoy conversations with people outside the church.

Other ministers have found themselves in a situation where they have no option but to concentrate mainly on the internal problems of the congregation. There is already so much going on: merger problems, buildings that have to be got rid of, a greying congregation gets greyer, closure is threatening... Ministers are eaten alive by meetings. That demands all their energy. What do you mean, missionary? No time, no opportunities either. Ministers are busy, often very busy. Then suddenly there is this appeal from the synod and the services organisation to start being missionary. That can lead to all sorts of reactions. Resistance to changes, tiredness and discouragement.

*We have tried it for years, but nothing ever came of it.*

*So what have I done wrong up to now?*

*I just don't see it, this missionary appeal. The churches are getting emptier all the time, which is a development that cannot be stopped. It is possible that new forms will develop in a number of places, but making the church missionary, forget it.*

*I shall just hang on in this small, greying congregation. It is quite something that the congregation itself is also hanging on. That is all that can be expected.*

Maybe there is a degree of discouragement or pain because of one's children who no longer want to have anything to do with the church or the Christian faith. But the role of the minister is of vital importance, including in a missionary congregation. He or she does not have to do everything on his or her own, of course, but without the support from the minister and the church council it remains the hobby of a few individuals, often those at the periphery. What are the steps you as minister can take, even if you do not have a lot of spare time?

### **A number of suggestions**

- It appears that the sermon is very important to many newcomers. Many guests do not understand much of the service, but if the sermon is accessible in everyday language and with good examples, then that accounts for much. See in this respect also [www.izb.nl/areopagus](http://www.izb.nl/areopagus) and [www.passievoorpreken.nl](http://www.passievoorpreken.nl).
- Support and attention for missionary groups in the congregation can mean a lot. Are the missionary activities that are carried out remembered in prayers during the service? Ask people involved in these activities how things are going and can I do anything to help?
- If it looks as if nothing is possible, are there colleagues or others with whom you can share your experiences and pain? When and where are prayers said for you as minister?
- Have the courage to be a leader. Not everyone is a charismatic leader, but you can take steps and take a lead. Show others what can be done, without this being forced.
- Is the communication in the church newsletter accessible? Here too you can play an important role as minister.
- Which contacts do you have with people outside the church? Do you allow yourself to be strengthened by conversations with adherents and non-members? Are you at home in their world?
- Have you had a look at others who are involved in missionary activities? Congregations in your vicinity? The Council of Churches published a brochure about missionary presence with descriptions of 'places where hope can be found'<sup>1</sup>. Which are the ones in your neighbourhood?

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

If your congregation wants to become a missionary congregation then what is needed is thorough reflection and a change in your way of thinking. The church council feels that and you know it. But how? Many ministers struggle with that question. If you want to take a step forward the training course for ministers called 'The wind in your sails. New opportunities for being a missionary church'<sup>2</sup> from the PThU is a good opportunity.

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<sup>1</sup> Vindplaatsen van hoop

<sup>2</sup> De wind in de zeilen. Nieuwe kansen voor missionair kerkzijn.

*After an introduction day in September we will go to London for an exposure to get some inspiration from examples of missionary church renewal and church planting in a different but not too alien context. After the trip to London we will probably have a think about the experiences gained with a view to modifying them for a Dutch context. We do that in four meetings of two days in our own Dutch situation of town congregation or village congregation, of a congregation in a new estate or in a traditional geographical district. In the framework of the learning route there will be a second exposure within the Netherlands.*

At the end of the course you will have reaped the following benefits:

- Knowledge of recent developments in the missionary work and of their missiological interpretation, both in a foreign as in a Dutch context.
- Insight into new opportunities in your own working situation for new missionary work and the skill to lead it in accordance with a policy
- broadening of your skill to connect acquired theory with practice.
- The course is taught by Henk de Roest (professor of practical theology at the PthU), Gert Noort, missiologist and professor at the HK), Bert de Leede (head of the PthU seminary) and guest teachers.

*There is something that has been bothering me recently. It is this question: how is it possible that in the past seven weeks in Vathorst I have had more missionary contacts than the past seven years in my previous church in Harderwijk? Here all I have to do is knock on a door and it is opened wide. If it is so easy, why did I never do it in Harderwijk? It just never occurred to me. In Harderwijk I was so busy with all the standard minister things that there was no space left to get outside the church circuit and to make contact with people and organisations.'*

*(Ron van der Spoel, minister in the new estate of Vathorst of Amersfoort, in the protestant Christian newspaper Trouw)*