

Dutch L'Abri Annual Report 2015

We are especially grateful for an encouraging year on many fronts!

Terms:

5 January - 6 April (break 22-27 February)

11 May - 18 July

24 August - 4 December (break 18-23 October)

Theme weekends (Eck en Wiel):

9-11 January: Why I am not an agnostic

6-8 February: In search of meaning - the art of holding on

27 February - 1 March: Work weekend

13-15 March: Film weekend: It is what it is

3-5 April: Connection: a lost art?

15-17 May: Art in the church?

29-31 May: A rich reality: letting nature reach its potential

12-14 June: Open for others: living together as a family

26-28 June: Filmweekend: Is there more?

10-12 July: Truth as disclosure

4-6 September: Rootedness and the gift of singleness

2-4 October: Film weekend: Alienation and Rootedness

16-18 October: Work weekend

30 October - 1 November: Jewish roots: rootedness brings nourishment

20-22 November: From revival to depth: rootedness bears fruit

Lectures (Utrecht):

13 January: The Art of Letting Go Revisited

27 January: Doubt can be liberating

10 February: Beyond apathy: how postmodern are we?

3 March: Utopia or prophecy: high expectations

17 March: Doubt can be hindering

31 March: Easter in classical music

8 September: From revival to depth

22 September: Wesley Hill's Spiritual Friendship

6 October: Caught and longing to be free

27 October: The Jewish roots of Christianity

10 November: 7 Conversations in Sue Johnson's Hold me Tight

24 November: Jewish symbolism in a Christian package

Guests:

At this time last year we were wondering whether the low numbers of long-term guests was becoming enough of a trend to be worrying. There were some moments when we only had our helper in the house! But as the year progressed we saw our prayers answered as more began to come again. People coming for the whole term remains rare. But a higher number of people signing in for a few weeks made the house begin to feel regularly full again. That trend has continued through 2016 so far. Theme weekends continue to be well-attended. They remain intense and our long-term guests don't always like it, but we are convinced it is a good form for our branch. Groups continue to apply to come quite often. We want to be open to them but have learned by experience that we need to be clear that they are coming to participate in l'Abri and not simply using our house to cater their own retreat. The streaming lecture network has been a great blessing. Folkert's work on it, as well as the newly standardized lecture collection helps feel up to date and able to offer our guests good resources. Though the Friday night film discussions in Utrecht remains really popular, with new people each time, the lecture evenings in the city seem to have hit a kind of plateau. There are in our opinion too many 'regulars' and not enough feeling of outreach. We are working on some new ideas again for Utrecht through a renewed and lively contact with leadership figures in Christian student organizations and a local young church initiative. We haven't seen a lot of university students in recent years, so we are excited to see what might come from this.

In general we don't see a big change in the type of guests or questions being asked. But in a recent national survey (done by the Catholic Broadcast company every 10 years since 1966), it was revealed that Christendom in Holland become for the first time a distinct minority – even called “an exotic world” for the average citizen. Interest in “alternative spirituality”, which grew sharply in the last survey, has apparently stagnated. But in the past ten years the numbers of atheists and agnostics have nearly doubled. One of the primary reasons mentioned is a lack of awareness that Christian faith has any real relevance for the current needs and crises of society, and the paucity of Christians actively disproving that. We have taken this theme on for our summer program with specific examples and arguments – and calls for those who believe to get busy!

Property and Finances:

In Eck en Wiel we are thankful for how well our heating improvements have worked out. Though the winters have not been especially cold, the savings have been significant and we are proud to have more environmentally-friendly systems in our homes. It has been hard work and a real adjustment, but we are getting into the rhythm of cutting, splitting and drying wood to keep our stoves running well. We are thankful for the trees that the first generation of workers planted here 40 years ago, to make this possible! We are also thankful for good friends whose expertise was needed in installing these systems well – our faithful Leon will be back soon to replace the old boilers in Kortenhoeve. The house in Utrecht is at the moment also getting some long overdue maintenance on the windows and frames. Though it is a bit costly, we are thankful that it is not a repair that comes often and that there were some timely gifts to help cover it.

Our base of regular givers, including churches, and a few last-will gifts have kept our finances fairly steady. The savings in energy and our willingness to tackle some maintenance projects ourselves have balanced out many of the costs of the properties. Thanks to some good research by Henk and the fact that one of our Utrecht renters works with a green energy company, we learned it is a good moment to renegotiate our energy contracts – and are now happy to be supplied by cleaner and more cost-efficient energy for the coming three years. While we have not had any salary cuts in 2015, the line of income and expense always remains fragile. We remain very aware of our dependence on God's provision each term.

Robb Ludwick
April 2016