

## Dutch L'Abri Branch Report – April 2019

We look back at the last year with thankful hearts, as the work has been blessed in more ways than one. The team has been stable once again, with no changes and we have been blessed with good helpers in all three terms. In March I turned 50 and as those things go, it was a moment for me to reflect on what a privilege it has been to function so long in such a well-oiled team. Having said that, we are now entering a phase in which we have started to talk about the transitions which will be taking place in the upcoming phase. As Beryl is approaching her retirement sometime next year and we are reflecting on how we use the house in Utrecht, there are a variety of options we are praying about together.

It has been a year with some marked contrasts, as the Summer and Fall terms were very busy with guest numbers exceeding that which we have seen in many years, while the Spring term has been a little too quiet for our liking though there have been occasional spikes in the number of guests. The theme weekends in Eck en Wiel on the other hand have been well attended throughout the year. The lecture and movie evenings in Utrecht have been a mixed bag.

### Themes and content

I will list some of the themes and lecture titles of our activities over the last year, as these are always published in Dutch and therefore not easy for the rest of you to follow.

In the summer of 2018 we did a series of 5 theme weekends all aimed at reflecting on what difference it makes if one believes:

- Community weekend
- Freedom and responsibility: dealing with the stresses of choosing (Robb did a lecture on *Millennial misery: the cost of being young these days*, Henk on *Choices and Commitment: the difficulty with pinning yourself down*)
- Honesty and reconciliation: how we deal with our families (Christa lectured on *Forgiveness and being set free*, Robb on *How to forgive your parents*, and Henk on *Generational conflict: one of the focal points of Christ's mission*)
- Creativity and Criticism: how we deal with art (Henk lectured on *Being creative vs. Consuming*, Robb on *Religious themes in secular art*, Marleen Hengelaar Rookmaker on *Love and hope in the old Jazz, Blues and Gospel songs that her dad loved*)
- Filmweekend: Is change possible (*Darkest hour*, *Ladybird*, *Three billboards outside*)

Fall 2018 theme weekends:

- Workweekend
- Getting to the bottom of your values (Robb on *Religion for Atheists*, Wim on *Picking the fruits without the roots*, Henk on *Valueless: what have we lost?*)
- The search for character (Henk on *Identity managing or being*, Robb *Naked and afraid: what we can learn from Millennials*, Wim *The apostle Paul and shaping character*)
- Finding your questions (Robb on *The art of asking yourself questions*, Wim *The hiddenness of God and the story of Esther*, Henk *Thinking about thinking: Questions as a key to unlock life*)
- Movie weekend with three episodes of the series *Black Mirror*

In Utrecht we did a series of 7 Tuesday evening lectures with some of the themes overlapping our theme weekends and a Movies series with 6 episode of Black Mirror – these were very well received.

#### Spring 2019 theme weekends:

- Long live our feelings (Beryl on *What is wellness*, Robb *The return of the heart: holism and fragmentation*, Henk on *Affective society*)
- Movie weekend on the economy going Titanic (Enron the smartest guys in the room, The Big Short, Margin Call)
- You are What You Love (Christa on *Music that moves me*, Robb *Liturgical audit: What do I really believe*, Wim *Your love is as the dew*)
- Work weekend

The Utrecht lecture series and movie evenings mirrored some of the lectures in the theme weekends and Robb did a three part series of Chef's table episodes.

#### **Projects**

In the fall of 2018 we installed some solar panels on the roof of The main house in Eck en Wiel, and will be doing the same at the Utrecht house. This has to do with the Dutch government's intent to start vastly increasing the taxes on gas in the coming year. After some storm damage last year we had some work done on the gutters, and a few windows with their frames renewed. Currently we are redoing one of the bathrooms in the main house

#### **Finances**

We have been blessed with steady finances over the last year with the income matching the expenses pretty well. Noteworthy is a number of specific gifts in kind, some of which I will mention here: A nice robust wood chipper to hook up to our tractor, a set of laptops and other computers, a projector, huge oak table, a lovely guitar for the guests to play on, duvet covers etc. This were all thoughtful gifts from people who are thinking along with the practical needs of our work. They have been a great encouragement.

#### **Conclusion**

For all of us it has been a year with plenty of activity, good involvement with our local churches, and lots of opportunities to speak outside the context of our own work, which is good for our visibility in the Netherlands and shows a general appreciation for the contribution l'Abri is making. Though some of us have had some health issues to deal with, on the whole it has been a good year for us all. The kids have been developing well with Babette having been blessed by a visit to Southborough and Ariëlle planning a visit to Korean l'Abri this summer. Ruben and Emilly Ludwick have been orienting themselves on what University they want to go to once school is done. Miriam, Gido and Mia are all doing fine at their respective schools, and being a pleasant presence on the property.