

Dutch L'Abri Branch Report – April 2020

We have a lot to be thankful for this year. In general we've had a steady flow of guests each term in Eck en Wiel, with a handful of long-termers and several who come and go for shorter stays. It is always encouraging to see how vital the community experience is for what we do. A growing number of Dutch locals come regularly for a week or even weekly moments. Theme weekends have also averaged high numbers and remain an intense part of our schedule.

In Utrecht we have had as usual varied attendance for lectures and films, but with several new faces. It remains on average an older crowd. We continue to think about how we could mean more to the student age group. All they seem to have time for is a form of an annual retreat. Somewhat disappointing was an experiment with film nights in Amsterdam, together with another group. There could still be possibilities there, but the setting and the publicity were more limited than we realized.

As we all get older we are thankful for the rhythm of work we have found with each other. Our team flow will, however, be interrupted for the first time in years when Beryl retires at the end of the summer. Beryl will be moving to nearby Veenendaal where she has built a good network of friends and church involvement. We will be celebrating her years of service with us in a summer reception. It is hard to imagine the work here without her – and we are thankful for her offer to continue to help us with financial administration after she moves. We are planning to have Arthur and Mika Metz from the South Brazil group join our team in the fall for two years as workers. They feel called to l'Abri work and we are excited to welcome them as help to our branch for this time, also as a period of training for whatever channels may open in the future.

Themes

The last 3 terms we have clustered our lectures and weekends around one general theme. Summer 2019 we looked at the biblical basis for addressing human needs, built around the 5 'basic needs' of Maslow: food, connection, self-confidence, safety and self-development. We had a guest speaker each weekend, including the Reichows from Greatham. We also had a busy lecture night in Utrecht with Frank Stootman about faith and science. There was high interest in having Frank repeat it as a theme weekend this summer, but with the virus crisis it was not possible.

Fall 2019 we addressed the character of God through three questions relevant to society at the moment: Is God a populist? Is God an activist? (with Jim Ingram speaking on the biblical foundation for humanitarian work) And Is God a determinist? We repeated the lectures for the Utrecht program. For the films we did a series on the lives of artists, later repeated for the Amsterdam experiment.

Spring 2020 the theme was the biblical foundation for hope in 3 problematic areas we regularly address with people: Hope for troubled relationships (film weekend on marriage), Hope for troubled society, Hope for troubled minds. We again repeated the lectures in Utrecht. For the film series we had 6 films on troubled marriages – one of the most heavily visited series in years.

Projects

Our solar panels continue to provide substantial benefits in Eck en Wiel, and we now also have installed a set in Utrecht. Although a plan for a work crew in January fell through, we went ahead with a much needed renovation of walls and ceiling in upstairs Kortenhoeve. Two very large trees fell

recently in a storm, and after weeks of sawing and chopping we have the largest wood supply we have had in years. As shelter-in-place advice have hit Holland we are again very aware of and incredibly thankful for the blessings of property that we have.

Finances

Again it was an encouraging year. Regular donors, gifts of labor and materials, two significant inheritance gifts and two very large anonymous gifts at the end of the year have all ensured that our financial picture is stable. We saw these provisions as an affirmation of our hope to take on Arthur and Mika, and we now also realize we were given a buffer for the unexpected closings in 2020.

Prayer

We are sad not to see you all this year at the meetings. It reminds us how special and important the “fellowship of our Fellowship” is. We will be praying with and for you all on Thursday. Please pray with us that the various transitions in our branch will be smooth, that the necessary paperwork for Arthur and Mika will be quickly processed, and that we will have wisdom in how to spend our time and resources in the coming weeks of uncertainty.