

Branch report Dutch L'Abri

We look back with gratitude at a special year in our history. Notwithstanding the Covid pandemic, 2021 was the year in which we expanded the team and celebrated our 50 year jubilee.

New workers

The most defining development for the Dutch branch over the last year has definitely been the expansion of our team for the first time in 18 years with the arrival of Arthur and Mika Metz in July 2021. For years we have been aware that the practical work load at our branch was not really sustainable for the number of staff we had. It is not a surprize therefore that this change has brought a very welcome sense of relief. We still find ourselves being surprized that it is *'not yet our turn to do the next meal'* and also the tempo at which new lectures need to be produced, has been mitigated. Arthur and Mika have settled in well, and are exploring various initiatives in terms of finding their niche and contribution in the work.

50 year Jubilee end of LEV and publications

The Jubilee celebration provided an opportunity to reconnect with so many people that have faithfully supported our work through the years. As we prepared for the event, collecting old photos and anecdotes, we were encouraged by a strong realization of God's incredible grace and faithfulness to our branch throughout its existence. One more wink in this regard was that the day we had planned our celebration, turned out to be the last day before a many month long winter lockdown in the Netherlands, which would have made the event impossible. It also afforded us the opportunity to acknowledge Wim and Greta's many years of very blessed ministry in the work of l'Abri – though they did not want too much focus of attention.

Publications

The jubilee provided a context for bringing to completion a few publishing projects we had wanted to do. We collected 100 of the most relevant articles form our news magazine LEV, which had existed for 25 years, and bundled these in a Jubilee edition. Riana also collected a selection of recipes from those 25 years of LEV issues and published a cookbook which was initially released as

an e-book but is now also in print. She is also working on an e-book edition of the International l'Abri Jubilee cookbook that was published a good number of years ago.

Covid creativity

The last two years have if anything, been an invitation to do some experimenting and tweaking with regards to our programmed activities. We had already reported last year on the shift away from LEV to more focus on a podcast of our lectures and a scaled down newsletter in which the digital materials are referenced and made accessible. A redo of our website is currently in the making and we have taken up having a more active social media presence to make our activities accessible. We have in the course of the year managed to do at least some residential work in every term albeit sometimes limited by the covid restrictions. We have changed the theme weekend format that we had used for many years and are now publishing only the Saturday morning lecture, but doing that every second week throughout the term. This was intended to spread our guests a bit more over the weekends because of the Covid risk, but has proven to work with our rhythms very favourably. It not only gives us the chance to mould the content of a weekend more to the people who are here (theme weekends were often experienced as overwhelming or a distraction for the long term guests), but also being responded to very well, by those who come. We now on average have more of a mix of people some who come for the whole weekend, and some that come just on Saturday often including lunch.

The lecture evenings and Movie discussions in Utrecht are once again part of the program and Arthur and Mika are experimenting with a midweek lunch discussion meal in the city.

Finances and maintenance

One of the great blessings of the last year has been a high degree of financial stability. Especially our local donors in the Netherlands have been very faithful in giving throughout the pandemic. This has made it possible for us to tackle a number of maintenance issues on our very long list of things that really need

doing. During the winter lockdown we started a renovation project of all the upstairs bedrooms in the main house, which we are now well on the way to completing. Replacing the carpeting and some wall panel work is still pending. We have also let an overhaul of the roofing on the flat roof part of the Utrecht house be done, and replaced some carpet in the stairwell.

Further, the panelling of the walls and ceiling of the stairwell of the main house, have been redone to increase fire safety and general aesthetic appeal. Also the kitchen in the main house has been redone. (we repurposed a kitchen that was being removed from a classic house, two properties over from the l'Abri site.)

There is still a lot of pressing maintenance though. We need to remove an asbestos bearing shed roof and the gutters and elaborate soffits on the main house need redoing. Also we would love to get double glassing in the main house, but that would involve redoing the window frames.

Closing remarks

Another year of change, globally fuelled by the effects of the pandemic and the event of war in Europe has provided ample fodder for lecture themes and new challenges. We have recently chosen to take in a Ukrainian family as the war and it's fallout has become existential for all of us in this part of the world.

I mention a few themes: There have been a variety of lectures about the new challenges for the church in a post-Covid era. Also a variety of lectures on the crisis of truth and various identity dynamics. Then the questions of what kind of shifts in thinking are taking place and what those mean for how people are living their lives: Meta modernism, a virtualization of the concept of home, and a change in relational context and dynamic fuelled by VR gaming platforms and the onset of the metaverse, to mention a few. There is plenty of work for us to do as we try to meet a new generation of l'Abri guests where they are with their hearts and minds.

On behalf of the Dutch team

Henk