



The Record

December 2023

Vol. 2023/4



The English Reformed Church
Begijnhof 48, 1012 WV Amsterdam

www.erc.amsterdam

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**May the Lord guide our steps and strengthen our hearts,
and grant us refreshment of body and mind.**

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Letter from the Interim Moderator

An atheist friend tries to provoke me almost every year around Advent and Christmas, denouncing the Nativity story as an escapist fairy tale that - in his opinion - is a completely inappropriate answer to the horrors and suffering that we can see all around us. He does have a point: Gaza, Ukraine, famine, extreme climate events ... and our answer is angels, shepherds, and carolling Silent Night! Except. Except for the fact that the Nativity tells the amazing story of God choosing to get his hands (and, some would say, his nappies) dirty by coming too close for comfort to that very horror and suffering; by being born of a single parent in an occupied territory, homeless, a refugee. There is more to the Nativity than meets the eye, a message (and hope) of transformation for adverse times - and hence for our own times - beneath all the cuteness and the tinsel.

Or, to take another angle on the same point: Just over a month ago was the 375th anniversary of the signing of Peace Treaty of Westphalia on 24th October 1648 in the German towns of Münster and Osnabrück, not far from what is now my home town, Bochum. The treaty marked the end of the so-called Thirty Years War, a period of unspeakable brutality that had cost the lives of an estimated 5-8 million in an unholy power struggle waged throughout Europe between Roman Catholic and Protestant troops. It was certainly one of the bleaker periods in the history of Christianity and it saw hatred fêted rather than love being embodied. And yet it also produced one of Germany's most profound and prolific hymnwriters, Paul Gerhardt (1607-1676). His faith-filled poetry speaks intensely of trust in God (Gottvertrauen, NL: godsvertrouwen) as the source of Christian hope, even - and especially - in the most adverse of circumstances.

A (slightly) more modern liturgy - one that we love using in our congregation here in Bochum - articulates in plain but intense language that same core Christian faith in God and belief that, in Christ, God has and will always continue to overcome every form of evil. It is the *Commitment to Life*, attributed to the Welsh Independent minister and author Edmund Jones (1702-1793):

In the midst of hunger and war,
we celebrate the promise of plenty and peace.

In the midst of oppression and tyranny,
we celebrate the promise of service and freedom.

In the midst of doubt and despair,
we celebrate the promise of faith and hope.

In the midst of fear and betrayal,
we celebrate the promise of joy and loyalty.

In the midst of hatred and death,
we celebrate the promise of love and life.

In the midst of sin and decay,
we celebrate the promise of salvation and renewal.

In the midst of death on every side,
we celebrate the promise of the living Christ.

As believers in the power of God to create life - and even a whole universe - out of nothing (for the theology nerds: creatio ex nihilo), as believers that, if God so wills, even a Virgin shall conceive, as believers that God is foolish enough (see 1 Cor. 1:18) that he should choose us weak and imperfect humans to forward the work of his Kingdom ... let us make that Commitment our own. Let us *celebrate* so far as we are able those God-qualities of which the Commitment speaks, not just within the church, but in the everyday of our confused and challenging world.

Seasons Blessing!

Rev James (Jimmy) Brown



Consistory report

Locums

Rev. Alan Sorensen stayed with us until September 24th and was followed by Rev. George Whyte, who stayed with us until Remembrance Sunday (November 12th). The services in the following two Sundays were led by Rev. Irene Bom and by our interim moderator, Rev. Jimmy Brown. Our next locum, Rev. Lauran Bethell, is arriving at the beginning of December and will lead us in worship until mid-February. We are very grateful to our locums and Sunday preachers for sharing their faith with us and showing us how richly varied the approaches to ministry can be.

Ministry vacancy

The advertisement for a minister was posted at the beginning of August on various platforms including the ERC website, PKN website, social media channels of the World Communion of Reformed Churches and Life & Work (the Church of Scotland magazine). The call for applications closed on September 30th. The Nominating Committee worked through the applications received in the month of October and is now conducting the first round of interviews with a number of candidates.

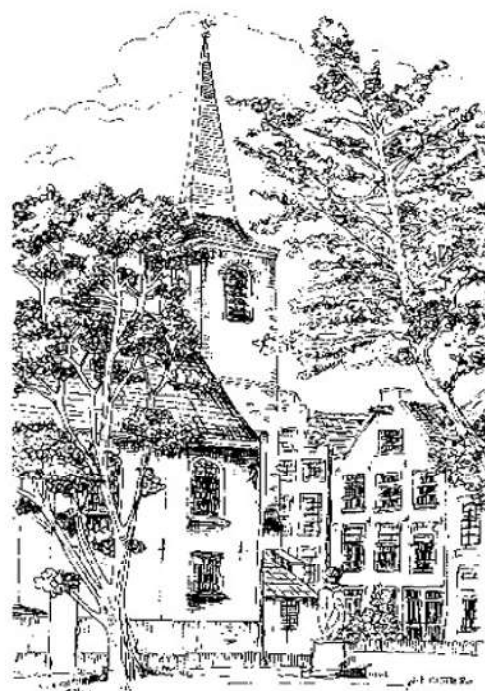
Youth Ministry

Announcements for volunteers to teach Sunday School (age range: 4-11) have been placed in liturgy sheets and weekly letters. A number of volunteers have come forward to help in a supporting capacity, but more volunteers are still needed to actually lead the Sunday School classes. Consistory will continue to approach people who might be able to take up a leading role. If anyone is interested in serving our youth, please contact John-Harmen Valk and/or Mattia Falcone.

Junior Church (age range: 12-16) is thriving - classes are being held regularly every other week and there is a strong core of youth who attends regularly.

ERC Website

The ERC website is managed by Laura Elliott and a team of volunteers. Aniek van Engelenburg stepped down from the team in September. Christina Potharst has come forward to help Laura with the website and a few others have showed interest too in joining the team.



Holiday Notes

Advent is here, and with it a full program of beautiful music in our church. The choir will sing on the first and third Sundays of Advent in the morning service, but that's not all! This year's Carols By Candlelight will be on Friday evening, Dec. 15th at 20:00. You won't want to miss this annual service of Nine Lessons and Carols, with lots of splendid music by the choir, the beautiful readings of the Christmas Story, and plenty of favorite carols for you to sing, too.

All of this is in our splendidly decorated church with Christmas tree and candlelight - and delicious coffee and Christmas cookies afterward! This is a perfect opportunity for you to invite your friends to join us in this pre-Christmas musical celebration.

But there's more on that weekend! After the Sunday morning service on the 17th, we all go out onto the Spui to regale the passers-by with Christmas carols. Then you can go get a warm drink and some lunch, but be sure to be back in the afternoon for our annual Joint Carol Service with the other three congregations around the Spui making up our H4H club - the Lutheran Church, the Krijtberg (RC) and the Singelkerk (Mennonite). That service will be in the Singelkerk at 16:00 on the 17th, with music from our choir and the other churches.

And then, of course, there is our lovely Christmas Eve service on the 24 th , with choir, lots of carol singing, and the grandest night of the Church year.

December is also the busiest time of year in our concert season. As many of you know, we have a full and varied program of performances in our church, presented by people outside the ERC who rent our beautiful facility to present marvelous concerts. Do check out the Concert page on the church website to find a complete listing.

Make a joyful noise!

Richard



Message from the Nominating Committee

Since its constitution on June 4th, the Nominating Committee has met ten times. It began by reflecting on the past, present and future of the congregation. It envisioned ideal traits of a future minister who might meet the congregation where it is and guide it going forward. It created and publicized a job advertisement, planned details of the interview process and formulated interview questions that might spur productive conversations with candidates.

Following the closing of the application period on Sept. 30th, the Nominating Committee has been busy reviewing the encouraging number of applications. It has now entered the interview stage. This is certainly an exciting time, but one that also requires wisdom in seeking to discern God's will for our congregation.

Please keep the Nominating Committee in your prayers. As you do so, perhaps you can give voice to the words from Ephesians with which the Nominating Committee has been closing its meetings:

Glory to God
whose power, working in us,
can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.
Glory to God
from generation to generation
in the Church, and in Christ Jesus
for ever and ever.
Amen.

(Ephesians 3:20-21)



The International Presbytery met in Rotterdam

The International Presbytery (IP) of the Church of Scotland with Churches - besides Amsterdam - in Bochum/Germany, Brussels, Budapest, Colombo/Sri Lanka, Geneva, Lausanne, Lisbon, Paris, Rome, Rotterdam, and Warwick/Bermuda met in Rotterdam from October 6th to 8th, 2023. Voting members at meetings of the IP are ministers and elders of the Churches belonging to the IP. At the meeting, among others, the Committees of the IP [such as Business, Vacancy Procedure, Education, Training & Safeguarding, Fabric (covering the properties of the Churches), Finance, Mission, and Mission Plan] report on their activities and “deliverances” (resolutions) are passed - impacting the Churches of the IP. One of the main topics at the meeting of the IP in Rotterdam was the implementation of IP Mission Plan - approved about 1 year ago by the Presbytery Mission Plan Implementation Group (PMPiG) - the governing body of the Church of Scotland. This approval allowed the ERC to start the process to call a new minister.

Andreas Decker



The Setting Apart of Sia van den Breemt, center



The Ordination of Cindy Campbell as OLM

News from Mulanje Mission Hospital

In their presentation to consistory on 12th October, Arie and Lysanne Glas gave an update on the hospital developments. The main news was on the positive developments regarding the new eye clinic and the training of its staff. It was also noted that in April 2024, the close ties between Mulanje Mission Hospital and the English Reformed Church will have existed for 25 years. This is worth a celebration, and any ideas concerning this joyful occasion are very welcome. We will keep you updated.

Bram Sizoo



Finance Report

January - September 2023, Amounts in €

<u>Income</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>Change</u>
Donations	50,307.42	57,729.08	-7,421.66
Collections	18,152.86	16,447.83	1,703.03
Church hire	18,535.10	14,554.60	3,980.50
Church hall	17,721.20	10,291.00	7,430.20
Concerts	4,448.53	5,038.80	-590.27
Weddings	0,00	800,00	-800,00
	109,165.11	104,861.31	4,303.80

Our total income has increased by just over € 4.303 compared to September last year. Unfortunately, we are still under budget by € 12.965. We still haven't fully recovered from the covid-downturn in our church attendance and our giving. Our total donations and collections till September this year is € 68.460 compared to the same period in 2017 was €94.046, in 2018 was € 88.101 and in 2019 was € 83.725, clearly showing a downward trend. However, we have a deficit of € 3.900 as at this third quarter.

As you know, the nominating committee is seriously busy with calling our new minister. So hopefully, we will have a minister next year. I have therefore budgeted for next year an extra € 30.000 for the salary of the minister. This means we could end up next year with a large deficit if our income stays at this level. I am yet confident that we as members of ERC will take responsibility in this matter.

We all proudly confirmed our membership this year. With our membership also comes responsibility to share and partake in the maintenance and the sustainability of our church. We are all responsible for keeping the Christian faith in our church by making sure we sustain and maintain it for ourselves and the future generation. I therefore hope each and every one of us will reflect on his or her contribution in money and in kind to the strengthening of our congregation and our ministry in Amsterdam. Soon, it will be Christmas. Prepare your present for the English Reformed Church.

As I mentioned in the last Record, spontaneous giving at the offering is great, yet I urge us all as members to consider a regular (weekly or monthly) giving for us to meet our costs and maintenance of our church. Do not forget, the tax office (Belastingdienst) will refund part of your contribution. I hope you would agree with me that donating to the bank account is the best approach to support and sustain the worship and work of our church in Amsterdam, considering the fact that the tax office shares our contribution with us.

Donations can be made to:

English Reformed Church

ABN AMRO Bank. IBAN: NL44 ABNA 0547 6235 50

Charles Vanderpuye, Treasurer

A Trip to Scotland

Although our next minister will not be a CoS minister that doesn't mean we have to lose touch. With this in mind I just thought I'd share a few memories from a holiday in Scotland/England in October. One Sunday I attended the CoS church in Berwick-upon-Tweed (St. Andrew's Wallace Gree & Lowick). Being up in the north it was a bit chilly outside but I received such a warm welcome to their Harvest Thanksgiving from the minister Adam Hood and from the whole congregation. The church had been beautifully decorated with posies of flowers in every pew, it was so pretty. Even better, the people were very friendly.



If you have the opportunity, pop in. The countryside and scenery is spectacular, the folk lovely. After leaving Berwick, I went to stay with friends in Edinburgh and met up with our old friends, Margaret and Russell Barr. They have me a quick guided tour of Edinburgh before the light started to fade and we headed for a bottle of Prosecco. But not before posing in front of the CoS HQ.

Gillian Walker



Dates for Your Agenda

15 December: Carols by Candlelight Service

17 December: Carolling on the Spui (after the service)

17 December: Joint Carol service at the Singelkerk (16:00 uur)

20 December: Bible Study

24 December: Fourth Sunday in Advent Morning service 10:30 hrs

24 December: Christmas Eve (with carolling from 22:00hrs)

25 December: Christmas Day service (10:30 hrs)

2 January: Coffee Morning

22 January: Women's Fellowship



Food Run

The Food Run, which is in its 9th year, needs a few volunteers. If you own a car and can spare an hour on one Sunday a month right after church to drive the food from pick-up point to the charity, Jeanette Noelhuis (<http://www.noelhuis.nl>), or if you can spare 2 hours on a Thursday morning once a month, you will encounter lots of smiling faces.

Please contact Joe Alibasah, joehennes@yahoo.com



Study, Services, Fellowship

Coffee Mornings

The coffee mornings take place on the first Tuesday of each month, a wonderful opportunity for fellowship with members of our congregation who carry the history of our church. Please join if you are interested, you are most welcome to come. You can contact Sies Plokker or Joke de Bruin for more information. The next coffee mornings will be held on the following Tuesdays:

December 5

January 2

February 6

Bible Study

Bible Study meets on the first and third Wednesday of the month at 19.30 hrs at 9, Jan Willem Brouwersstraat, 1071LH. All welcome. You can also join via livestream. Details are publicised in the weekly newsletter.

Taizé Service

Third Thursday of the month is our joint Taizé service with the Roman Catholic Begijnhof Chapel, a wonderful opportunity to share in ecumenical worship with our near neighbours and to welcome visitors. If you haven't given this a try, come along. Services start at 19:30 hrs.

Coffee after the service

Meet your fellow members of the congregation over a cup of coffee after the service each week. And if you enjoy these gatherings, please consider volunteering once in a while or regularly. We always need help in this vital ministry.

Women's 'Fellowship

For those who have not yet been able to attend, we start out by having dinner together followed by a time of fellowship.. If you would like to join us but are not on the invitation list, please contact Peggy Krol and you will be added to the list. All ladies are most welcome.

De Kloof

Giles is always looking for people to help out on the second Saturday of the month. A group of four will prepare a meal for visitors to the homeless shelter De Kloof. A great outreach. among evangelicals who runs into trouble for questioning the existence of hell. Should provoke some interesting discussion!

20-30's Group

Enjoy fellowship with young people in our church. The group meets regularly for study, lunch (every first Sunday of the month) and social events. Please contact Elisabeth (Elisabeth.ijmker@erc.amsterdam) if you are interested.

A Big Thank you to our Locum Ministers



*Rev Dr George Whyte
locum minister
October/November 2023*



*Rev Dr Luran Bethel
locum minister
December 2023- Mid February 2024*



*Rev Alan Sorensen
locum minister
Mid February - March 2024*

And to the ministers who took single services



*Rev Irene Bom
OLM (Rotterdam)*



*Rev Jimmy Brown
Interim Moderator*

Membership notices

In Memoriam

Cynthia de Jong, age 90
October 16, 2023

Admitted to Membership

Roman Aleksandrovich (Alex) Lalaian



The March 2024 edition of The Record will be put together by Margaret Davis.

Please send your contribution before March 5 to: margaret.davis@erc.amsterdam

*Wishing you all
a very blessed Christmas
and
a happy, peaceful and healthy
New Year!*



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**English Reformed
Church Amsterdam**

A congregation of the Church of Scotland and
the Protestant Church of The Netherlands (PKN)