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The Record

December 2020

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The English Reformed Church
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www.ercadam.nl

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Minister's Letter

Dear Friends,

Christmas is coming, and as I write this letter we will soon be in the period that we call 'Advent', and plans are already being laid for carol services and other activities that celebrate this wonderful season. This year, of course, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, everything will be different as church services are being live-streamed without congregations, and many of the familiar Christmas routines will be disrupted. Who would ever have thought a year ago that things would be so different this year?

As I write, however, there is good news! Various vaccines are in preparation, initial trials look very promising and, all being well, there is light at the end of the tunnel and we can look forward next year to being able to celebrate Christmas in more 'normal' circumstances.

As we approach Christmas in these strange and troubled times, with our world facing many problems - and not just Covid-19 - I am struck by the difference between a *problem* and a *mystery*. A problem is something that, we hope, can be solved. So with all our astounding technological know-how we approach something like this pandemic as something that we will overcome with greater research, experimentation and hard work. And even the more enduring problems that afflict the human race - climate change, international tensions, poverty and inequality - are in principle problems that can be solved, and we hope that one day they will be. Mysteries, however, are different. Mysteries speak of things that are beyond human understanding and which we can never fathom and resolve. The proper response to problems is hard work, ingenuity, collaboration and resolve. The proper response to mystery, however, is wonder, awe, prayer and worship.

Christmas, of course, is mystery. These ancient passages of Holy Scripture that we read and ponder at this time of year point to extraordinary workings of God that are far beyond the workings of human, mortal minds. The Word becomes flesh. The eternal God becomes a human being. The Maker of heaven and earth is to be found in a tiny, vulnerable baby in a manger in an outhouse. Who can begin to grasp such mystery? Our only response is to worship with deep gratitude that ultimately the world with all its intractable problems is embraced by the love of a God like this!

I pray that despite the constraints and limitations of the pandemic you will greet the coming Christmas season with worship and with hope for the future.

All best wishes,

Lance

Consistory Report

In October and November Consistory continued the meetings via the Zoom platform.

Membership issues:

We received notice of the passing of *Mrs Vivienne van Kretschmar van Veen* on the 1st of October at the age of 90

Rev Iain Majcher, was ordained and inducted in Bothwell Parish Church (Scotland) on the 20th of October. He has asked for his lines to be transferred to Bothwell. Iain was elder in our church from October 2009 until September 2014, when he and his wife Celeste (former Youth worker in our church) moved to Edinburgh for Iain to start his studies.

Ms Pamela Robertson died on the 21st of October. A good number of members of the congregation were able to be present at the funeral, led by Pastor Lance

Church Community:

A live stream set up was put in place in September, when we resumed the live services. Jens Sorensen, Jessica Bell, Thijs Polstra, Olivia Decker and Sally Stone are working out the best way to record and stream, and uploading the service so that it can be accessed later. Due to the circumstances we had to go back to online services without a congregation. It was decided to continue with the livestream. The team is working on improvements on sounds and editing. Consistory thanked the group for all their dedicated work.



The status of the various study and social groups was discussed:

Coffee mornings: cancelled until further notice. They pose too high a risk in respect of the setting and the age group.

Bible study turns out to work well via Zoom; the attendance is quite high.

The 20s-30s Bible study group is also meeting in the Church Hall with small numbers of participants.

The *Book group* is still active.

The “*Further in Faith*” group is meeting in church.

Paster Lance will be organising a “*Walk through the Bible*” group; a number of people have shown interest in becoming a member of the congregation. This would preferably be held live, but will

probably be organised via Zoom.

International Presbytery Meeting:

Baafi and Andreas reported back from the International Presbytery meeting which was held online in October. You can find a more detailed report in this issue of the Record.

The October 2020 International Presbytery meeting was Baafi Owusu Sekyere's last meeting as presbytery elder for the ERC. Consistory expressed great appreciation for Baafi's years of dedicated work representing the ERC, but also for the role he played for the Presbytery as a whole (e.g. convener of the Mission Committee).

As was decided in the October 2020 Consistory meeting, Andreas Decker will succeed Baafi. He joined the October meeting as a guest.

General Assembly:

The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland took place in the first weekend of October, also online. Ingrid, who attended the Assembly drew our attention to one particular decision that would make it possible to call ministers from outside the Church of Scotland for a limited period, given the decline of ministers within the Church of Scotland.

Pastor Lance informed Consistory that the ERC was invited to send a commissioner to the General Assembly.

Mulanje Mission Hospital:

After taking over the liaison role between the ERC and Mulanje Mission hospital, Bram Sizoo had several talks with people who were or still are involved with the work for Mulanje Mission Hospital. One of the topics was a discussion with Pastor Lance, Giles and Ingrid regarding a fundraising event and ways to have a more reciprocal contact with the people at Mulanje Mission Hospital.

Other competent business:

Consistory approved a proposed remit for a financial committee (in the process of being formed). Elements of the remit are fundraising, general oversight, proposals for the management of the bequests, financial aspects of our relationship with Mulanje Mission Hospital. The committee would ideally consist of seven members. Charles suggested beside the treasurer, also the minister, the treasurer of the Friends and four other members of the congregation. Charles started preparations for the committee.

The next meeting of Consistory will take place on 7 December, via Zoom. If you would like to participate, please let me know via scriba@ercadam.nl

Heleen Koning

Advent

Advent, the four week period leading up to Christmas - like the period of Lent - is one that is marked by some Christians by taking on some sort of spiritual activity or discipline in order to help them prepare for Christmas.

Just a suggestion... since lockdown a small group have been meeting together for evening worship, 'Compline', on Thursday and Sunday evenings on Zoom.



Compline is a short, reflective service that last about 15 minutes, offering an opportunity to wind down at the end of the day and to pray for the church, the world and one another.

Care to join us during Advent?

Lance

De Kloof

De Kloof is Amsterdam's oldest shelter for the homeless. It is located in the basement of one of the canal houses on the Kloveniersburgwal, right in the center of the city.

In the Kloof homeless people can shower, change their clothes, drink coffee and have something to eat. It is also a place to relax, take part in activities and get help from, for example, a social worker.

For many years volunteers have been going along to the Kloof on the second Monday of the month to prepare and serve a meal for the visitors. It's always an enjoyable and rewarding activity, but since the start of the pandemic we have been unable to attend because of number restrictions.

We have however continued to support them by making a monthly financial contribution and this, along with donations from other supporters, has enabled them to buy a lovely, much needed new cooker.

We hope it won't be too long before we can go along and try it out in person!



Sally

Finance Report

Income January - September 2020, Amounts in €

	<u>2020</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020 vs 2019</u>
Donations	60,879.35	44,581.62	16,297.73
Collections	12,033.61	39,143.57	-27,109.96
Church hire	13,009.80	14,514.60	-1,504.80
Concerts	1,358.00	9,058.00	-7,700.00
Weddings	0.00	2,295.00	-2,295.00
Church shop	0.00	370.00	-370.00
Flowers	0.00	146.73	-146.73
	87,280.76	110,109.52	-22,828.76

It is rather unfortunate taking over as treasurer during a pandemic. However, I consider myself lucky to observe the enormous tasks and effort that our minister Lance and his team, Richard, Sally, Jens and all others, put in to make sure we have our Sunday services and most of our activities through recorded online services, live streaming services and other online activities. I applaud the success achieved so far and I will urge the congregation to join me in thanking all who make this possible by continuing to contribute by donating to the finances of our church.

Total income continues to fall (21%) compared to the same period last year. This is due to the fact that very little to nothing is coming in from Collections, Concerts and Weddings because of the restrictions of the corona measures.

Our expenses have also fallen by 11% compared to the same period last year but in line with the budget. Nevertheless, we have a total shortfall of about € 50,000 in our normal operation. This, considering the fact that most of our costs are fixed whilst most of our income is variable, means a downward trend of our income should require the attention of the congregation. Fortunately, we are very blessed in these difficult times with substantial legacies received from Cor Stijger and Ms. Knowles which have reversed this shortfall to a considerable surplus.

Donations can be made to:

English Reformed Church

ABN AMRO Bank. IBAN: NL44 ABNA 0547 6235 50

Charles Vanderpuye, Treasurer

Notes from the Music Department

With great enthusiasm the choir started rehearsing again in September, with LIVE services beginning again on the second Sunday of that month. Yes, numbers during the services were very limited, but we were hopeful that things would continue to improve and open up. We all now know that our optimism was soon thwarted by reality. Although services continued to be streamed live rather than pre-recorded, the doors had to be closed to members of the congregation after just a few weeks, with only participants gathering to create the services which, we hope, you have been enjoying from home.

Meanwhile, the choir has been hard at work preparing Christmas music. As mentioned in the last *Record*, this year's service of Lessons and Carols will be a pre-recorded service, thus enabling the entire choir to participate, something which has been impossible so far this season. But this also opens up extra chances to make use of added instruments and certain arrangements that would normally not be part of the carols service. There is always a silver lining to be found! Also, after consultation with Lance, we have decided to use this year's carol service as the Christmas Eve service, making that an extra-special and festive occasion. Do watch the church website to see at what time this service will be made available. As always, there will be plenty of opportunity for you to join in singing your favorite carols, but this year around your own table or in front of your own hearth.

There will, of course, be special Advent/Christmas music in all the Sunday services as well. And then comes January. Who knows what the situation will be then? I expect we'll be doing live-stream services for the foreseeable future, but at some point we will undoubtedly be opening the doors to the congregation, first in limited numbers, but gradually, we hope, moving back to a full church. Someday.

The Choir of the English Reformed Church wishes you a very Happy Holiday Season!





MMH and the English Reformed Church

Thorsten and Astrid have been very active in maintaining the ties with Mulanje Mission Hospital for many years, and their dedicated work will not be forgotten. This makes the challenge even bigger taking over the liaison task from them, as consistory asked me to do in September. It helps that Sascha and I spent four years at Mulanje Mission Hospital from 1999 to 2003, and witnessed the start of the warm relationship between the hospital and the English Reformed Church. Twenty years later the hospital can still rely on the loyal support provided by the congregation and many friends around the world.

To highlight some of the recent projects that you made possible, think of work that has just started on the renovation of the Children's Ward and walkways. This is very important for protecting vulnerable children against infections, especially in the rainy season. The ERC also took part in a special grant around COVID-19 for a project aimed at home gardening training. The target was to train 720 households in 36 villages on improved home garden technologies. This is on track: 240 households have already been trained in 12 villages.

Next year the hospital will be upgrading the Intensive Care Unit for children. With between 2,500 and 3,000 deliveries per year, it is essential that the hospital is well-equipped to save the lives of vulnerable young children. For the older children, the intensive care unit will be important in the treatment of conditions such as severe malaria, respiratory infections, trauma, and other life-threatening conditions.

Therefore, this month the focus of our fundraising initiatives will be on

the project 'Improving Intensive Care for Children at Mulanje Mission Hospital'. Should you want to learn more about what wonderful work is being done in Mulanje, please visit the hospital's website www.mmh.mw

Bram Sizoo

Would you like to support the 2020 project **Improving Intensive Care for Children?**

Below are the ERC bank details, kindly mark your payment "MMH 2020".

English Reformed Church

NL44 ABNA 0547623550

BIC/SWIFT Code ABNANL2A

ANBI status: RSIN 813612809



In October and November, flame trees decorate the Mission entrance with their wonderful orange flowers.

Advent & Christmas services



Sunday December 20th, 10:30:
Nativity Service including children and families*

Thursday December 24th, 19:30:
Carols by Candlelight with the choir of the ERC*

Friday December 25th, 10:30:
Christmas Day Service**

*pre-recorded services, available on the church website at those times.

** live stream from the church.



Christian Education

Various Christian Education programmes continue despite pandemic restrictions. Zoom Bible Studies continue to attract a good crowd, including some from beyond the Netherlands. Our series on the Parables has been much helped by a book called 'Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes' by Kenneth Bailey, who lived for many years in the Middle East. He helps to set the parables in their cultural context, often giving fascinating insights.

The 20s-30s have not been able to meet due to restrictions, but the Book Group is hoping to meet again soon to continue discussion of the writings of Wendell Berry, who brings a powerful perspective to bear on our current world.

Our Further in The Faith group continues studies in the Book of Exodus and another Walk Through The Bible Course will soon be starting on Zoom.

Lance

In memoriam

Mrs Vivienne van Kretschmar van Veen

(1 October 2020)

Ms Pamela Robertson

(21 October 2020)



Virtual Presbytery Meeting October 2020

New situations demand new and innovative ways of doing things. In this strange Covid 19 period when it's inadvisable for groups to physically get together, more especially when that also involves travelling, the second of this year's Presbytery meetings, which was supposed to take place in Budapest, Hungary from the 9th till 11th of October was done remotely via the Zoom cyber application.

The decisions taken at the meeting are summarised in "Consolidated Deliverances" :

Business Committee

- noted the Induction of the Revd Betsi Thane to St Andrew's, Malta (pictured)
- approved the sale of the Manse in Gibraltar
- agreed the appointment of the Revd Alistair Bennett of Bermuda as Moderator for 2021-22.



Vacancy Procedure Committee

noted the Call to Rotterdam of the Revd Graham Austin

Education & Training Committee

- congratulated Scott MacSween, David Lloyd, Cindy Campbell and Marlon Gilbert-Roberts on being accepted into the process of discernment for ministry and thanked their Ministers for agreeing to be their Mentors and Gillean MacLean and Laurence Twaddle for agreeing to serve as their Presbytery Assessors.
- encouraged all Presbyters, especially Ministers, to make congregations aware of the paths to ministry that are available to those seeking to serve, namely: Deacon, Reader, Ordained Local Minister and Full-time Minister of Word and Sacrament. Also, to publicise the Discernment Webinars organised by the Faith Nurture Forum (taking place monthly from September 2020 to March 2021)
- commended to the prayers of Presbytery those who are reflecting on, or have started, on the path to ministry
- requested that congregations ensure that Safeguarding is discussed in Kirk Sessions and that Elders and congregations are aware of the Church of Scotland's Safeguarding Policy.

Finance Committee

noted that the number of congregations requesting Salvesen grants this year had dropped. Approved the Salvesen grant applications submitted for the year 2021. Financial concerns of congregations such as Rome, Costa del Sol/Fuengirola and Gibraltar were noted.

Fabric Committee

noted the challenges with completing the Manse purchase in Malta

Mission Committee

- recognising the challenges to fundraising brought on by the Coronavirus Pandemic, designated the Rabagirana Ministries in Rwanda as the Presbytery Mission project for a second year, 2021
- noted with deep concern the hostilities and violence directed at the Tent of Nations, (an organic farm, located in the hills southwest of Bethlehem. A centre where people from many countries come together to learn, share, and build bridges of understanding and hope) encouraged to consider donating to the Tent of Nations
- commended to our attention the challenges faced by Afro-Brazilian women in higher education in Faculdade Unida de Vitoria, Brazil and encouraged to consider giving to the scholarship fund set up for these women.

The 2021 Presbytery Meetings are planned as follows,
12-14 March in Bochum, Germany and 8-10 October in Brussels, Belgium

Baafi



Monday KnitIn

Our weekly KnitIn meetings moved from Zoom as soon as we were allowed back in the church. It was good to return to its calming and peaceful atmosphere and to spend a couple of hours together drinking tea, chatting and catching up on news (and getting some knitting done).

Our levels of angel production have been nothing like they were this time last year; the pandemic and absence of the many far-flung knitters who helped us so much in 2019 have reduced our angel numbers. But we enjoy getting together and always welcome newcomers (dogs and humans) to join us.

Sally

Church life during lockdown

20s&30s group: contact Elizabeth Ijmker, updates on Facebook. The group has arranged a short evening act of worship (known as Compline) on Thursday and Sunday evenings at 21:00 via Zoom.

Bible Study: Wednesday 19:30. Weekly via Zoom. Contact Lance Stone.

Coffee Morning: suspended

Women's Fellowship: suspended.

KnitIn: Monday 14:00-16:00 in church. Contact Gillian Walker.

Men's group: upcoming activities postponed

Psalm reciting: Tuesday 08:45. Weekly via Zoom.

Cooking at the Kloof: volunteer work suspended, financial support continues. Contact Sally Stone.

Please note that **Carol singing** on the Spui, and the **yarnbomb** with knitted angels have been cancelled.



Baptisms

Alexander David Jean
son of Nataliya and Michel
and brother of Richard
baptised on 27 September 2020

Farrell Kamdem Fomeche Fossoh
son of Besong and Fritz
baptised on 25 October 2020

The end of an era....

When you think of the ERC website, you think of Jens.

Jens Anders Wejsmark Sorensen has been the dedicated webmaster of our church's website for several years. In our latest annual report, he wrote "*the ERC website plays an essential part in our communication with the congregation, and even more so with visiting Christians from all around the world. To*

emphasize this, 85% of the traffic is new visitors, and three out of four gain access from a foreign IP address (mostly from the USA and the UK). Since the AGM in 2019, we've had 19,400 unique visits to the website - an increase of 1,700 from the year before. There were about 63,000 unique page views, and apart from the opening page, worship, upcoming concerts and the calendar gained most views".

Since having to resort to online services, the importance of the website has only increased. It was Jens' idea to link the website to a weekly digital newsletter, which is sent to around 250 subscribers every Friday.



Jens, photographed by Ingrid Sorensen

Jens also contributed towards the content of the website, especially with his wonderful pictures and slide shows. And a lot of work 'behind the scenes' like managing the church's email addresses etc. At the end of 2019, Jens announced that it was time to take a step back and to get new people to take care of the website, especially since it needed an overhaul.

But then the consequences of Covid-19 forced the ERC to get ready for a new digital challenge, and Jens stepped in, along with others, to facilitate pre-recorded and later live stream services on the website.

With Jessica, Roman, Hanna, Ferry and other people already very much involved in ERC's media, Jens decided this would be the right time to follow up on his decision from last year.

Jens, on behalf of the website visitors, the congregation and consistory, a big thank you for all the skills, time and energy that you have given for our congregation.

Heleen

Deadline next Record: 20 February 2021. Send your contributions to the editor, Sascha.adema@hetnet.nl. Thank you!



Above a colouring page for grown ups, and one for all ages on the following pages. Download from coloringhome.com/coloring-page/86564

Send a photo of your finished coloring page to the editor!





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English Reformed
Church Amsterdam

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