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The Record

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The English Reformed Church
Begijnhof 48, 1012 WV Amsterdam
www.erc.amsterdam

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Minister's Letter

Dear Friends,

I recently read a very thought-provoking book about the practice of lament. In lament we give voice to the pain and darkness that is all too prominent a part of life in the world, and it can include questioning God and anger at God. The Bible contains many examples of lament, not least in some of the psalms where the writers bear their souls and express their hurt and sometimes direct accusations at God. The thesis of the book I read is that church can fall prey to a kind of triumphalism - the tendency to avoid honest engagement with brokenness and suffering in the interest of emphasising victory. After all, the Church is in the business of 'the Gospel', and 'gospel' means 'good news', so why would we focus elsewhere?

Apart from neglecting an entire strand of Biblical literature, the problem is that this does not do justice to the realities of human experience. And it means that in some cases people who are doubting or stumbling through dark valleys may not feel that the church has much to offer. A church that is pre-occupied with victory can all too easily lack empathy.

The current season of Lent in which I am writing this letter could be termed a season of lament. It begins with Ash Wednesday, when we are reminded of our mortality: 'from dust you have come and to dust you will return...' And, of course, Lent climaxes with the events of Holy Week: the betrayal of Maundy Thursday, the injustice and terror of Good Friday, the ominous silence of Easter Saturday... these are moments when we come face to face with the reality of a broken world. And we must beware of rushing too quickly to Easter morning, as if it erases everything that has gone before. The risen Christ carries scars: there is no undoing what happened to him. God is able to bring something new to birth out of tragedy - but not if we try to deny it or play it down.

This time of pandemic which has now lasted a year has been a dark time in many ways. Some people have struggled, and we cannot and should not play down the losses that many have endured. For some, perhaps, God has not seemed very present, their faith has been stretched, and the church has had to do its best to sustain people while many of the usual means of support have been removed. Yet we do live in hope that the darkness does not have the last word. The light of Easter morning is coming. There will be life beyond Covid! To quote from Psalm 30, which combines both lament and celebration: 'weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning' (verse 5).

May God bless you with joy and hope this Easter,

All best wishes,

Lance

Consistory Report

Since the last issue of the Record was published, Consistory met in December 2020, February and March. On Saturday 6 February Consistory had their annual retreat which - because of the Covid-19 - was held via Zoom.

We pay tribute to all who make the services available via the web. We have people from the Netherlands and beyond following the services on Sunday mornings or later in the week. Although we missed our traditional Christmas services this year in a packed church, the Carols by Candlelight service with choir and musicians (and a tree!) under the direction of Richard was one to watch and enjoy multiple times.

We hope and pray that the situation changes for the better soon, so that we can resume our activities in church again, although we do not expect this to happen before Easter.

Membership issues

In December Consistory admitted Besong Etchu, Ivan and Naa Digber, Rebecca Roel, Robert van Dijk and Helena Mitchell into membership by resolution. They all followed the "Walk through the Bible" course.

Church Community

By sending out the Pastor's letter each week, organising gatherings via Zoom, keeping in contact via telephone and other ways we are trying to keep some sense of community going for as long as we lack the possibility of meeting in groups. In December we reached out to the congregation by sending out Christmas greetings accompanied with an angel, a co-production of some elders and members of the knitting group.

During Lent Pastor Lance will lead Bible study each week.

The Media team

With the focus of the Publicity Committee expanding to include live streaming, the decision was made to change the name to Media Team. Laura (convener), Thijs P, Pastor Lance, Ferry and Heleen welcomed Jessica Bell as a new member. The most important topic in the January meeting was the website. Jessica and Ferry have been putting a lot of work into building a new website (and salvaging content from the old). The issues the old website had regarding



stability and accessibility became so major that the new website needed to be launched in February which left the new content manager Jessica with little time to prepare. One of the advantages of the new website is that it will be easier to share the responsibility for keeping it up to date since the platform that has been chosen is more user friendly than the current one.

A new website also comes with a new domain which means that all the existing email addresses (ending with @ercadam.nl) needed to be rerouted and replaced with addresses within our new domain (@erc.amsterdam).

The ERC now has a platform in which we can work together digitally. At the beginning of the year G-suite was installed. Members of consistory, staff and volunteers who are responsible for certain areas can have a church email address (ending with @erc.amsterdam) and can share documents etc. in Google Drive.

Mulanje Mission Hospital

A Mulanje Mission appeal was part of the Carols by Candlelight service since we could not organise a charity concert this year. A beautiful way of making Mulanje part of a service. The appeal raised € 6,000 for which we thank all who contributed. In the March meeting, Bram Sizoo, liaison between the ERC and the Mulanje Mission Hospital brought forward the MMH plan for upgrading the Children's Intensive Care. Bram will work with Giles and Ingrid to develop ideas for fundraising. Consistory agreed to the MMH plan.

Annual General Meeting to be held on May 16

In 2020 we were forced to cancel the AGM and make the annual report available to the congregation via other channels. The AGM will be held in 2021. As things stand currently, we are preparing for an interactive digital meeting. To allow a bit more time for preparation, we have decided to hold the meeting on Sunday May 16 (instead of in April). The report (and the audited accounts) will be available mid April.

International Presbytery meeting

The International Presbytery will meet online in March. Rev. Alistair Bennett from Bermuda will succeed Pastor Lance as moderator. Andreas Decker is the ERC's Presbytery elder.

The International Youth Presbytery will also take place in March, organised by Bochum, and open to all members of the congregation between 18 and 30 years old.

If you would like to participate in a Consistory meeting or bring forward a topic, please let me know. You can send an email to scriba@erc.amsterdam

Heleen Koning

Amsterdam City Rights: Recycle Appeal!

A couple of months ago Margaret Richards decided it was time to replace her lovely old red laptop and she bought herself a new one. She, like most of us uses a laptop to surf the internet, organize video calls with friends overseas and attend ERC online events.

Being very thoughtful about the wider world Margaret wanted to make sure that the old one was properly disposed of. I approached Annette Kouwenhoven who campaigns on behalf of undocumented refugees living in Amsterdam - did she know anyone who needed a laptop? Yes, she did came the immediate reply! Then, I started thinking about our two old iPhones that have been replaced with newer models. Could she find homes for the iPhones? Absolutely! These three items have all received very good homes (one of the guys had not had a phone for 5 months - can you imagine that?).

So, this appeal is to anyone who has electronic equipment lying about: would you like to give it a new home? We will make sure that all personal data is deleted and Annette will make sure that your recycled smartphone or laptop gets a new lease on life.

It is a win-win situation: Margaret is very pleased with her new laptop, she would not go back to the old one, even though it was a real red beauty.

Recycle your old smartphone or laptop. Contact me via email ingrid.sorensen@erc.amsterdam

Ingrid Sorensen



A happy owner , photographed by Annette Kouwenhoven

Finance Report

Income January-December 2020, Amounts in €

	<u>2020</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020 vs 2019</u>	<u>%</u>
Donations	105.759,43	84.255,49	21.503,94	26%
Collections	12.335,47	55.500,98	-43.165,51	-78%
Church hire	18.048,00	19.352,80	-1.304,80	-7%
Concerts	2.333,00	13.547,00	-11.214,00	-83%
Weddings	100,00	2.845,00	-2.745,00	-96%
Church shop	0,00	440,00	-440,00	-100%
Flowers	-16,00	85,00	-101,00	-119%
	138.559,90	176.026,27	-37.466,37	-21%

2020 has been a peculiar year. The world was shaken by Covid-19. The pandemic meant we had to endure strict measures which changed not only our way of worship but our way of living altogether. I believe some of us haven't been to the church since the first lockdown. Meanwhile, others had to be in church to ensure that the church was still open for us in our homes or wherever we were. We can also see the impact of the pandemic on our finances from the above statement.

Our finances were exceptional in 2020, showing a mixed picture on the whole. On the one hand our total income dropped by 21%, as you can see, and yet the year ended with a substantial surplus which could sustain our church financially for some years.

Donations increased by 26% compared to 2019 but that could not make up for the drops in collections 78%, concerts 83% and weddings 96% caused by the corona pandemic. As said earlier, the church doors were closed for normal church services and other public activities such as concerts and visits of tourists. However, thanks to extraordinary legacies we received, as I mentioned in my previous report, our Church's finances ended this year with a substantial surplus.

Total expenditure was 2% lower compared to last year and within budget except for the fact that we had to bear the cost of renting the church hall without restitution.

We received a total donation of € 44,718.00 in 2020 from the congregation and third party donors for the Mulanje Mission Hospital, including the Mulanje Covid-19 appeal. This amount has



been transferred to the hospital through the Wilde Ganzen project.

Finally, I would like to take the opportunity to thank everyone for their continued support to the church and the Mulanje Mission Hospital, especially in this extraordinary year when people were strained or stressed with the effects of Covid-19.

Donations can be made to:
English Reformed Church
ABN AMRO Bank. IBAN: NL44 ABNA 0547 6235 50

Charles Vanderpuye, Treasurer

From the music department

Dear ERC Family,

I'm afraid there is little to report at this time. While we were able to keep the choir going throughout the fall, the lockdown that was introduced in December along with advice from the PKN to discontinue all singing in church services, has left us unable to provide even a minimal amount of choral music, whether live or recorded. It is a great frustration to the choir members! We would all love to meet and sing together, but our church tries to follow the guidelines set out by the PKN so for the foreseeable future, the choir will remain on "holiday". With Easter only a month away, this is doubly frustrating! With any luck the choir will perhaps be able to start rehearsing again in April.

Until then, I hope you are enjoying the instrumental music which is still being provided for the live-streamed Sunday services, and singing along with yourselves on recordings of the hymns from services past. And for more music, do read elsewhere in this Record about plans for a coming series of short benefit concerts for Mulanje Mission Hospital which will be available on-line.

Keep singing in your hearts!

Richard Zook

International Youth Presbytery: a little sparkle of hope

The international youth presbytery meeting was held on Sunday March 7th. I attended on behalf of our church. Although this year's meeting was supposed to take place in Bochum, Germany, we instead met online via Zoom.

We had a good meeting with about 13 representatives from churches in Paris, Lisbon, Edinburgh, Jakarta, and Sri Lanka. Rev. Jimmy Brown from Bochum and Hannah Wolfenden, this year's international youth presbytery representative, organised the meeting. In order to get to know each other, we shared some of our favourite songs that remind us of home. We talked about



how we keep hope in times of Covid and when thinking about the future of our church. One of the participants shared that the Chinese word for hope is 'xiwang', which literally translates to 'look up': a good reminder that our hope is in knowing that God is with us and will see us through wherever life takes us; even a pandemic.

It was great to meet fellow young people and be connected in this way. We decided to continue the conversation and stay connected through a WhatsApp group. And we hope to meet each other again physically next year!"

Elisabeth IJmker

Celebrating Christmas in lockdown

We all had to find a way to celebrate last year's Christmas differently from previous years. For our family, this meant a cosy celebration with our three adult sons, who travelled from Amsterdam to Zutphen. Alas, no aunts, cousins or sisters could be included, following the National guidelines.

Attending church via the streamed service has become a

“normal” weekly event in our study. On Christmas Eve we attended the pre-recorded Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, and sang along where possible. The service took us to a beautifully decorated church, filled with music and light.

This celebration meant a lot to us and on behalf of our family, I want to express our gratitude to all who contributed to this and other Advent and Christmas services.

Richard, the choir, the musicians, readers, Pastor Lance, and all the people behind the scenes: decorating, filming, recording, editing and streaming the result...Thank you so much!!

A lot of time and effort was invested to give the church community this Christmas celebration. It made Christmas 2020 a memorable and special occasion.

Sascha Sizoo-Adema

Letter from Malawi

Dear friends at the ERC,

Greetings from all of us at Mulanje Mission Hospital. It's been a hectic few months here, with a serious second wave of Covid-19 infections sweeping through Mulanje and Malawi that kept us busy.

Like in the West, most patients who develop severe illness are those with pre-existing medical conditions. Translated to our setting, this meant that those living in cities and with formal jobs tended to be at a higher risk than rural villagers.

Of course, there are a lot of other patients with other diseases,



that deserve equal attention. For that reason, after a year with delays we're really happy that the renovation of the Childrens' Ward at the hospital has now started.

Every day, the banging of hammers and clattering of bricks and timber can be heard!

The hospital is grateful

for the fantastic result of the Concert held online in December. The proceeds coupled with the doubling by Wilde Ganzen meant that we can now renovate the general Childrens' Ward and build a much bigger and better equipped treatment room. This will enable nurses and clinicians working on a sick child to access life-



-saving equipment and work from all sides in a professional resuscitation area. We are also using this opportunity to renew ceilings, paint and re-design some areas to improve the prevention of infections.

With the upcoming series of online concerts, we hope to raise enough funds to complete this work by renovating the Intensive Care area. Solar electricity, better separation of patients with infections and new vital medical equipment will mean more children get a better chance when they're ill.

We hope to finish the first phase of renovations in April. Once that is done, we hope to continue not long after that with the second phase so that by the end of 2021 the project will be completed.

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused a reduction in hospital attendance, including antenatal care. This sad reality stems from widespread fears in the community that hospitals are a source of Covid-19. Please pray that we'll succeed in restoring trust through our community work and radio programmes.

We also ask your prayers for the government of Malawi, steering the country through a difficult economic and social climate.

We are very grateful for the continued ERC contribution of € 1,000 per month, especially during this time when drugs and supplies are very expensive; this helps us to continue to provide medical care.

Thanks once again and we hope you enjoy the pictures!

Arie Glas, medical director MMH

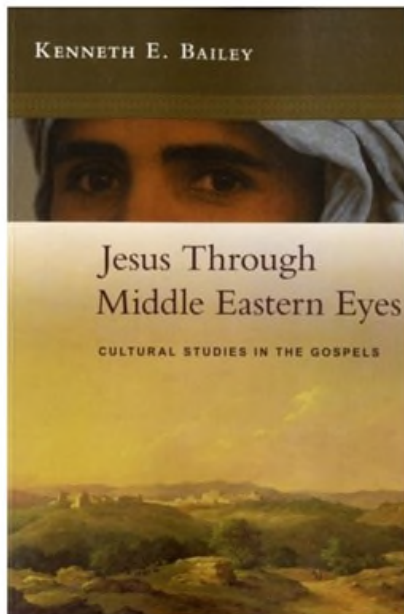
Midweek Fellowship

I think most attenders of the **Bible Study** have now grown used to the peculiarities of Zoom and are fairly comfortable with it. During Lent we have been meeting every Wednesday, looking at the Gospel passage for the following Sunday. A good crowd includes participants from Germany, London and Edinburgh.

Sadly, **Taizé services** are still not possible, and the same applies to the **Women's and Men's Fellowships**. We look forward to their re-commencement.

Christian Education

Various Christian Education programmes continue despite pandemic restrictions and the Zoom Bible Studies continue to attract a good crowd.



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 and 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

Pastor Lance's Weekly letter

Each week a letter from Pastor Lance is sent by the elders to their "pastoral group". We are dependent on the information given by you all. If you have a recent change of address or email address, please make sure you inform your elder or send a message to scriba@erc.amsterdam

If you do not receive these letters and you wish to be on the list, please contact an elder or send a message to the scriba.



*From the Dutch
Kijkbijbel by
Kees de Kort*

Holy Week and Easter Services (online)

Sunday 28th March, 10.30 hrs: Palm Sunday service

**Thursday 1st April, 19.30 hrs: Maundy Thursday
Communion service**

Friday 2nd April, 19.30 hrs: Good Friday choral service

**Saturday 3rd April, 21.00 hrs: Easter Paschal service
with renewal of baptismal vows (on Zoom)**

**Sunday 4th April, 10.30 hrs: Easter morning choral
Communion service**

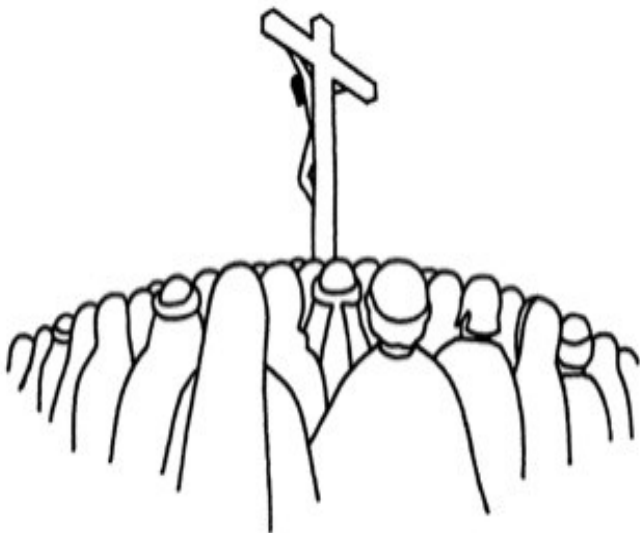
Letter from Glasgow

Dear Friends,

In the last weeks, I have been wondering whether the movie “Groundhog Day”, rather than being a comedy, is a visionary documentary of what we are experiencing. In the movie, the television weatherman Phil Connors experiences the same day over and over again, trapped in a time-loop. And here I am again: I am sitting in my home office, it is 8:00am and I have time until 9:00am for my first lecture of the day to start via zoom streamed onto my monitor, almost like every day. And again, each week seems to be similar, essays lined up to be written, again from the - well, I must admit - cosiness of my home office. It could be so easy to surrender to this routine and become passive and complacent.

And then I remember Lotti. Lotti was an elderly lady in the congregation in Amsterdam. She was singing in the choir, and when

her voice faded away, she still came to every rehearsal, preparing the tea and the biscuits for everyone and making the rehearsal break something special. In the last two years of her life, she could hardly walk anymore and she had to be picked up from her apartment in a wheelchair to attend worship. But Lotti was smiling, she could not stop smiling. When I asked her what made her smile, she said, that she had not enough time to be sad, that she decided once during the war that it is “much more fun” to focus on the things in life that make her smile rather than what would make her sad! And that God has given her so many things she can enjoy, she just needs to look for them, and be thankful. Wow, I thought this is what I want to learn and practise too! Knowing Lotti’s life, for sure that was not easy for her, but somehow, she kept smiling and made the people around her smile too.



And while I write this, my thoughts start to drift. Easter is approaching and I wonder how the disciples must have felt when Jesus was arrested, prosecuted, sentenced, and crucified. All gone, nothing to smile about, just darkness. And then, the morning of the resurrection, when the two Mary’s went to Jesus’ tomb, found it empty and the angel was telling them that Jesus is risen from the dead. They were “afraid yet filled with joy and ran to tell

his disciples” (Matthew 28:8).

That is what God has promised. There will be Easter each year, over and over again. God’s living love will prevail over darkness and even death. There will be light. Even better, there IS light, we just need be brave and practice to see it!

So today, even if it is raining cats and dogs, I remember the two days of sun we had, and the walks I took with my wife during these two days. I remember the delicious cake my mother-in-law made; I realise that it is not dark anymore at 8:00am but that the days are becoming longer. And I really enjoyed writing this, sharing with you Lotti’s story - it made me smile and I hope it made you smile, too!

Thorsten Koning

Church life during lockdown

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

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

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

The ERC Summer Proms

As you can read on page 10, the management team of Mulanje Mission Hospital is grateful for the support of the refurbishment of the Paediatric Intensive Care Unit.

The online service of the traditional 'Carols by Candlelight' raised an impressive € 6,155.82, thanks to the hard work of the choir, and especially Richard Zook. Sales of the lovely book Lance wrote (and his children illustrated) raised another € 217.82, making a total of € 6,373.64!

In the meantime, renovation of the Children's Ward and walkways is progressing well. This is the first phase of the project. The funds you helped raise over Christmas are earmarked for the second phase. Arie Glas explains in his letter what this phase entails. For more information visit the hospital's website: www.mmh.mw.

We are already half-way there, but another € 6,000 will have to be raised, in the hope that Wilde Ganzen will also contribute to this project. What plans do we have?

The ERC has a rich music tradition of performances in the church by talented musicians. The past year has made live concerts impossible due to the Covid-19 restrictions. Therefore, we are preparing a musical surprise for you, and your relatives, friends, or colleagues. We will mysteriously call this '**the ERC Summer Proms**'. As of the end of April you will be able to see and listen to a series of monthly pre-recorded musical performances from wherever you are, and whenever it suits you. The audience will be asked to consider supporting the important work in Mulanje in return. More details will follow soon.



ever you are, and whenever it suits you. The audience will be asked to consider supporting the important work in Mulanje in return. More details will follow soon.

Bram Sizoo

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English Reformed
Church Amsterdam

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