

30 Opportunity-filled models for the missionary congregation

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Make your model 31

Colophon

Encs: dvd and missionary catalogue

Foreword

The file in front of you contains 30 missionary models: 30 opportunities to shape the missionary congregation. No detached ideas, no incidents, but different perspectives that can give the cong its own missionary 'colour'. It is of course also possible to go for a combination of models: one model does not mean the others have to be excluded.

The purpose of this file is to give you something to explore. The models were born in everyday practice and are attractive to be put into practice. Do not attempt them all, make a choice. This file will help you to do this.

Before you start reading about the models you will find three 'moments of reflection': 'Why missionary?', 'Prayer and receptiveness to the Spirit' and 'Relationships are the key'. All three of them have a discussion point, and for that reason they are eminently suitable to kick-start the reflection in your elders meeting or work group. That process comes before everything else.

After that you will find something to help you navigate the file. Four preliminary questions can help you make your choice. These questions can help you to achieve your own 'model 31', see the form at the back of the file.

The cong of Jesus Christ is a missionary one. It is not an island, not a closed circle. It is our mission to meet with those around us. Our identity may vary from one location to another, but the source lies in the Gospel.

The Revd. Peter Verhoef said in his first speech as synod chairman:

If I am allowed to emphasise one item of the agenda of the synod then this must be the missionary work of the church. You can write that down, this is what sets my heart on fire. Hendrik Kraemer, the great mission theologian said: The church does not do mission, the church is mission. This is still true today, or rather it is more true now than every before. Being part of the church means being generous and sharing what you have got.'

And Henk de Roest, Profession of Practical Theology at the Protestant Theological University writes in his book *And the wind gets stronger*¹:

When the question is asked how the Christian movement differs from other movements and how Christian faith communities differ from other religious communities or secular organisations and associations, then it is not a common need, not an ideal, principle or attitude. The Christian movement depends on the name of Jesus Christ and his proclamation of God's coming kingdom.'

On the basis of this inspiration we wish you joy and blessings as a missionary congregation.

The Revd. Hans van Ark
Dr. Nynke Dijkstra-Algra

This file was created with the help of the consultation group for missionary work. This consists of representatives of the IZB for mission in the Netherlands, Hearing the Good News², the Freethinking Association of Protestants³, the Confessional Association⁴, the Confessional Reformed Council⁵ and the Evangelical Working Group⁶. Missionary work is not bound by existing boundaries in the church. They all provided valuable suggestions and additions to the missionary models.

Professor Mechteld Jansen, Dr. Gert Noort, Professor Henk de Roest and Dr. Sake Stoppels also contributed to the contents of the file.

¹ *En de wind steekt op*

² Op Goed Gerucht

³ Vrijzinnige Vereniging van Protestanten

⁴ Confessionele Vereniging

⁵ Confessioneel Gereformeerd Beraad

⁶ Evangelisch Werkverband

Moments of reflection

Together these three 'moments of reflection' form the basis for each missionary activity. All three have a discussion point, and for that reason they are eminently suitable to kick-start the reflection in your elders meeting or work group.

1. Why missionary?
2. Prayer and receptiveness to the Spirit
3. Relationships are the key

1. Why missionary?

'Do we have to go out delivering brochures?'

'Is missionary not too pushy and pedantic?'

'Why should we bother? If people do not want to know, is that not their own choice?'

'We are so busy already, are we not doing it right perhaps?'

'The church is on the way out anyway, we should not try so hard to stem the tide.'

The pc attaches great importance to the missionary congregation. But what exactly does 'missionary' mean?

Missionary has to do with 'mission'. We have been sent. The church's existence is not an end in itself, but was sent into the world. It is not a closed circle but a community that is inviting. Outward looking, in witness and service, in word and deed.

The Gospel message is too precious to keep it to yourself; you want to share the goodness about Jesus Christ and the Kingdom with others. This is why we as older generation want to pass on our faith to our children and grandchildren, like the generation before us shared it with us.

At the same time we realise that this does not happen automatically. Many younger people leave the church and follow other routes, and this applies to the faith as well. There is powerlessness and pain. The churches are emptying. Are we not shouting too loudly?

An attitude

What is important here is not (additional) activities, but an attitude. A generous, guest-centred attitude. Would it be possible for others to be touched by the Gospel, again or for the first time. The missionary congregation knows about the source that is the Gospel, and it shows.

Missionary work is based on the presumption that telling people about the Gospel will achieve something. Mission can be regarded as *encouraging communication in which the Gospel has a chance to be heard and regarded as a new life orientation* (Professor Mechteld Jansen). That drive is important.

Whether you want it or not, you are a witness. People around us see church buildings and meet people who believe. That makes an impression. Positive or negative. This means that you do not need to wonder whether or not you are a missionary congregation, you are already one. That can come as a relief. The question that still has to be answered is: but how?

The models in the file make it a bit more concrete. They are not new inventions, but describe what we have come across in everyday life. What is at the core is our own motivation, our hope and longing: to communicate in such a way that others will really be able to hear and understand the Gospel.

Discussion point

What is your longing and motivation with respect to being a missionary congregation? What do you want to pass on to the next generations, to people around you? Can you describe that in a few sentences?

Tip

The book *When a church starts again*¹, ‘Manual for missionary community formation’²,* much attention is given to the motives for planting congregations (and missionary work). Chapter 17 contains sufficient material for detailed discussion during an elders meeting or in a missionary working group.

¹ *Als een kerk opnieuw begint*

² handboek voor missionaire gemeenschapsvorming

* Authors: Gerrit Noort, Stefan Paas, Henk de Roest and Sake Stoppels, Boekencentrum 2008

2. Prayer and receptiveness to the Spirit

The life of the church is not possible without openness to the Spirit of God. In all communities where there is a blossoming of something new words such as inspiration, openness, amazement, and astonishment are used. Renewal is not the sum total of our activities. What we need is animation. Enthusiasm, literally 'being in God'. You cannot organise growth. It is a gift. What you can do is to look for vision, dream dreams and see visions. To have new longings and expectations, to find hope again. To pray together.

When we pray we realise that it does not depend purely on us. What is important is not our ideas or our wishes. The Spirit is greater than our ideas, gifts and limitations. *To him who by means of the power that is working in us is able to do so much more than we can ever ask for, or even think of (Ephesians 3:20)* Praying creates unity, we pray 'Our' Father. When we pray our ideas and those of others are brought before God. That puts things into perspective. Our agenda is open to surprises, to people, to inspirations from the Spirit of God.

The life of the church cannot do without this openness. This means that attention has to be paid to the process, to the spontaneity of the idea, for what occurs to you. Sometimes it means that you have to set out without knowing exactly where you will end up. To make adjustments as you go along. Sometimes doing nothing and waiting. 'Do not keep staring at what used to be, do not stand still in the past. See, I am going to start something new, can't you see¹?' This song by Huub Oosterhuis (231 from Liturgical hymns²) is a text from Isaiah 43. The text invites you to look at what God is doing. He has been at work in people's lives since time immemorial. That inspires longing and expectation.

Discussion point

Copy this paper and distribute it. Ask people to respond to this text. What do they remember? Compare your answers.

¹ Blijf niet staren op wat vroeger was, sta niet stil in het verleden. Zie, ik ga iets nieuws beginnen, het is al begonnen, merk je het niet?

² *Liturgische gezangen*

3. Relationships are the key

How do people get involved with the church, how are they touched by the Gospel, again or for the first time?

When you ask people who have joined the church what was key for them, the reply is always: relationships. However important attractive courses or lovely programmes are, they are not the deciding factor, nor are low-threshold celebrations, TV programmes, communication files or booklets. They all play a part in the relationships that have been made.

The heart of the missionary congregation beats in the networks of the congregations members themselves. In an inviting style the Gospel can be mentioned as a possible life orientation. Not in a forcible way, but hospitably and generously.

People can meet God again when people go to a language field where God is mentioned. Every Christian has neighbours and friends. These contacts are important. This is not to say that you have to play at being a missionary, but at a suitable moment you may be able to mention God. Or invite them to a church service. That is where people get together, that is where they can get a glimpse of another reality. That will have an effect, that is something I believe in.

Words written by Dr. Arjen Plaisier, general secretary of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, in *Trouw*¹ of 30 December 2008.

When stimulating a renewed meeting with God you need more than words. In relationships your whole person is involved. What is involved here is meetings in which people share their lives. At mealtimes, in the home, in real contact about everything that is important to you.

Paul and the Thessalonians knew this: *Because of our love for you we were ready to share with you not only the Good News from God but even our own lives. You were so dear to us!* (1 Thessalonians 2:8)

Personal meetings in which you expose your feelings. In which you have the courage to share what is important to you, your questions, joys and concerns.

This reciprocity can lead to meaningful discussions. In that setting your faith will come up.

Discussion point

Every Christian has neighbours and friends. These contacts are important. This is not to say that you have to play at being a missionary, but at a suitable moment you may be able to mention God.

How do you see that? Can you give examples?

¹ A Protestant daily in the Netherlands

Four preliminary questions

To make choosing easier

This file offers all sorts of ‘models’. They are not ‘ready to wear’; every model can and has to be adapted to suit your situation and possibilities. This file was made for you to browse through. It is easy to become overawed by the multiplicity.

The questions below may help you make a choice from all possible options. The order is not important. We hope that these questions will create a buzz in the elders meeting and the congregation. Sometimes one questions will stand out, sometimes another one. The answers affect each other. Together they will indicate a direction that will help you whilst browsing. When you have formulated answers to these questions it will be easier to make a choice. ‘This is the model we want to choose, this is the best one for us!’ See also model 24 and 28 for more help in answering the questions.

1. What do we already do, where are our strong points?

You do not start from nothing. There are already all sorts of activities that are suitable for adherents and non-members. The question is: do they know about them? Is the PR adequate? How do we invite them? To be missionary is first and foremost an attitude. It does not mean starting all sorts of new activities, but to do the existing ones differently, to make them inviting, aimed at those around you. Make an inventory of the activities that are suitable for and aimed at guests. Are there several possibilities? Where are your strong points? And how can you make that missionary, or in other words use it for the benefit of your environment?

2. What does our environment look like?

What is a good idea in one congregation may not work at all in others. If you want to make young people your target group but live in a village full of elderly people, you have a problem. Have a good look at your neighbourhood, your district, your village or town. What is going on there? What sort of people live there? Start with a simple brainstorm. Get hold of a flipchart and ask: What are the characteristics of our environment.

You can also look at yourself through the eyes of others. **What is the impression we make on our environment?**

3. What is our blind spot?

What do you fail to do? That is a difficult question, because usually you do not see a blind spot. If somebody sits in the blind corner, you overlook them. It is true, however, that not everybody can do everything. There are people in the neighbourhood that you as church community cannot reach. There are activities that are not suitable, that you do not find easy. It is possible that you come to the conclusion that a lot of learning goes on in your congregation, a lot of education and equipping, but not much diaconal work. You can do something about that yourselves, but you can also ask the question:

4. What do others do?

Are you the only church community in your neighbourhood or village? Are you part of a larger congregation with a number of districts? What do these districts specialise in? Are there other churches nearby? What do they do? Peeking to see what the neighbours are up to can be instructive. Is there something you can learn from them? How can you strengthen each other? Are there possibilities to work together?

A fictitious example

Just imagine that a congregation gave the following answers to the questions:

1. What do we already do?

We are a village congregation. There is a faithful core of people who are very active. We also have members who are not so involved and who only come on a Sunday. We do no longer see many young families. Our monumental building has atmosphere, but if there are not many people you feel a bit lost. Our 'colour' is moderately orthodox. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say: pluriform. We have a number of different streams in our congregation. There is room for everyone. We try to have a presence in our environment, participate in the annual market with a stand. We also organise evenings and courses that are suitable for interested people outside the church. Our minister is the main mover in this respect. He enjoys literature and films and enables others to share this enjoyment. We have a very hospitable caretaker. She really radiates a welcome to people who come.

2. What does our environment look like?

Our environment is diverse. The village is no longer growing. It is not ageing any more either, in part because this is a commuter community. There is a lot of turnover, because people move elsewhere for their work. There are a relatively high number of people with higher education in our village. For the rest the surrounding area is agricultural, not far from the big city.

And what is the impression we make on our environment? Many people know the minister. Everybody knows the building; it is the church in the centre. At the annual market we chat to people. Many people know who the committed members of our church are.

3. What is our blind spot?

What do we fail to do? We do not have enough manpower to do what we would like to do. We are in particular short of elders and those willing and able to visit. That means that building relationships is problematic. We would like to have more contact with young families; in the past few years quite a few young families moved into our village. There is a small new estate where we have not yet many contacts. Another thing we find difficult is to introduce our faith into conversations. This is something that those who visit find very difficult. How do you do that? The visits are enjoyable, but we seldom have discussions about our faith.

4. What do others do?

Congregations in neighbouring villages have different priorities. They also have a different 'colour'. There is a small evangelical congregation that meets in the primary school; it is attended by many young people.

Question: which models might inspire this congregation?

This congregation might like to start browsing in model 2, 7, 8, 15, 19 and 24, about the inspirational congregation, the learning congregation, the congregation with a faith course, the congregation for the village, the congregation with an eye for target groups and the congregation with the church building as missionary point of departure. Which inspiration and examples can be found in these models? How can we apply them to our own situation?

TWO TIPS:

1. Make a clear choice for one missionary model as concentration point for the coming years.
2. In doing so, take the strength of the congregation as starting point and aim outwards, unless the context clearly requires the opposite.

The missionary project team, the missionary elder and the missionary budget

Every congregation has elders, deacons, letting officers and youth elders. Together they form the church council, all very logical. But who is responsible when we talk about the missionary core task? Who puts his hand up during the church council meeting when the secretary holds up a file or an invitation for missionary work? Who takes the initiative with this file with 30 missionary models? Who will monitor the progress?

In some congregations they (still) function: the 'open door teams' or evangelisation committees. Sometimes they flourish; sometimes they are more dead than alive. A missionary congregation needs to form its own missionary project team. This team must also be linked directly to the church council. That means that the president of the team is a member of the church council. In the same way as the youth elder you can opt for an 'elder with a special task', in this case the missionary work. This can also be done within the so-called 'working group model' that many congregations work with. 'But we have already a shortage of volunteers. How will we ever be able to find the manpower for this new team?'

Not more but different

When your congregation decides to become more missionary, what you need is not more money or more volunteers. What is needed is not more, but a difference: a different way to deploy the manpower that is already available, a different way to use the finances that are already on the budget. This 'thinking differently' starts with the discussion within the church council whether you really want to turn into a missionary congregation. Such a basic decision also means that there must be willingness within the church council to make manpower and means available and that will mean that there are other things that will have to be left out or done less intensively. In other words: choices will have to be made.

Exactly this same process has unfolded itself within the national church. Economies had to be made because of failing member numbers and dwindling financial resources. Then a principled decision was taken to economise even more than was necessary at that moment. The extra means that became available in this way were then used to start up the missionary work. This process was given a code name: '(G)rowing with the oars you have got.' Thanks to this policy the new missionary team was set up and as one of the results you can now make use of the file in front of you.

We use the word 'principled' on purpose, because such a decision is fundamental: to make new choices also means breaking down old things to create space for the new ones. At the same time it is important to opt for a brief and clear decision taking procedure within the church council to ensure that the new discussion about a new missionary approach does not get stuck in endless talk about priorities.

Important

* Make sure that your missionary project team does not become an island. Also take care that it does not become a collection of people making excuses in the trend of 'they do the work on our behalf' and then we can get on with other things again. The church council provides leadership, the cc is responsible for the policy, including that in terms of missionary work. The team reflects, comes up with ideas, delegates and (in part) executes.

* These days people are no longer prepared to bind themselves structurally to things, but they are willing to contribute to projects. It is said that people no longer go for the generality, but for what is special. To recruit volunteers it is important to invite them on the basis of a project. We ask you to volunteer for this one new project in our church. The missionary projects as it takes shape in the whole country is in the first instance a four year project.

Possible approach

Step 1

Who are the members of the church council who can be made available to provide leadership in this process?

Step 2

Which members of the congregation are willing to become part of this project team*?
And is any one among them willing to become a member of the church council?

* If you get going with (the appointment of) such a team, you will be able to make use of a handbook: 'Kerk naar buiten' (The Church outside), Nynke Dijkstra-Algra. Publishers Boekencentrum.

Step 3

If there is a current evangelism committee, consult with them carefully. Which members will be able or willing to become a member of the new team? Will the existing committee be able to take on all of this task? That will often mean that the committee must be willing to follow new roads. Very often these committees have been in existence for years. The members are very faithful in carrying out all sorts of activities. The distribution of magazines, organising welcome services... all very good work. The question is if this is the most fruitful working method. Is there (in addition) any room for something new? Is it possible to start thinking about new models as the ones that are presented in the file? Are newcomers allowed to present their ideas?

Step 4

In the church council take the fundamental decision to make funds for the missionary work available in the next budget.

Step 5

The missionary project team comes with a plan to be discussed in the church council.

Step 6

Carry out a small missionary activity whilst this process gets underway. Getting active and not just talking will engender enthusiasm.

TIP

Each year one-off stimulation subsidies are available nationally for promising missionary initiatives up to a maximum of € 2500 per local initiative. Visit the website www.pkn.nl/missionair for conditions to be considered for this one-off stimulation subsidy. Criteria are among other things that the initiative must contribute to the missionary élan of the church, that the local church itself also provides funds and that the possible results of the project are also relevant nationally for other local initiatives and made available to them.

Finally: we would like to receive the postal and email addresses of the members of your missionary core team. In this way we will be able to keep you informed of the developments. You will then receive our six-monthly newsletter. You will also receive invitations to meetings and conferences.

Did you know...

* that every year there are several missionary collections on the national collection timetable with the advice to the local congregation to incorporate these collections in their own local collection timetable? **The local congregation is allowed to keep half the proceeds of two collections. This means that the proceeds of these collections are shared between the local and the national church. This gives you as local congregation room for manoeuvre with regard to your own missionary activities.**

* that it is possible to become a donor of the new missionary work of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands? See www.pkn.nl/missionair.

* that each year a number of people decide to donate (a part of) their estate specifically to the missionary work of the church in the Netherlands? In doing so they allow their legacy to help the progress of the work of the church in the Netherlands.