EXPLORING PIONEERING in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands
‘In a secular culture, the Church is challenged to a new open-mindedness and boldness when it comes to faith and speaking about God.’

Kerk 2025: Waar een Woord is, is een weg
ALL SORTS OF WAYS
Pioneering spots can start in all sorts of ways. They can start in a café discussing stories from the Bible; a clothes swap shop; a community; parents eating, singing and tinkering together; a monastery new style; a network of young people, everything is possible. Be creative! At the same time, all those pioneering spots have the same desire: to form a network or community where people can discover that God is love and wants to be near. Without wanting to press it on people, we would like them to discover the value of the Christian faith.

FROM PLAN TO ACTION
A pioneering spot need not cost a lot of money. A minister or ecclesiastical worker is also no prerequisite. The project need not be very large-scale either, because it usually concerns relatively small groups, somewhere between 15 and 75 people. Larger is possible of course. A pioneering spot often starts with one or two people who have a missional vision and want to convert this into action. How can they do so? See page 15 for three important aspects.

What is a pioneering spot?

In addition to the existing churches, there are chances to create other forms of Christian community and being a church. The Protestant Church in the Netherlands stimulates the creation of pioneering spots: new forms of being a church for people who do not go to church (anymore). It is vital that they are sensitive to their context, work from shared faith, and focus on creating a sustainable community.

What characterizes a pioneering spot?

• Innovative forms
• For fringe members and non-members
• Sensitive to their context
• Working from shared faith
• Sustainable creation of community

‘Because of its mission, the congregation is throughout its existence focused on testimony and service to those who do not know the Gospel or are alienated from it, so that they, too, will share in Salvation in Jesus Christ.’

Church Order of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, article X-1

Martiijn Vellekoop
Mission Team Leader
In practice: Het Badhuis

Since March 2013 Het Badhuis at Zwijndrecht has been reopened. After the local Council made financial cuts, the church wanted to step in and do something for residents in the neighborhood. The church cooperates with several organizations such as Stichting Welzijn Ouderen and the district platform. The pioneering spot is supported by the Oude Kerk, a orthodox congregation. The pioneering spot is supported by the IZB. Pioneer and chocolatier Peter Huijser (see photo) wants to create a ‘living room’ for the neighborhood in the Het Badhuis. So there are neighborhood meals, children’s clubs and computer courses. The building is also used for a shuffleboard competition and by the line-dance-association. Around these activities beautiful conversations and meetings arise. People share their lives with each other and care for each other. And people with an interest in the Christian faith can participate in meetings on Sunday morning.

‘Het Badhuis makes one know one another, old-fashioned familiarity in the neighborhood.’

visitor Het Badhuis

In practice: Kloosterwelle

‘Silence as respite in Kloosterwelle’, that is the mission of the pioneering team in Noordwelle, a village of three hundred inhabitants on Schouwen-Duiveland. ‘We are developing a contemporary and ecumenical monastic community, based on the age-old Christian monastic tradition. Various protestant congregations on the island support us in this. Kloosterwelle has become a place to practice a sustainable spirituality, which makes people resilient in a hectic society. Silence is very important to us. The visitors have different backgrounds. Some come from the village, others from the villages in the surrounding area. Kloosterwelle has a regional function and there are also many tourists. Kloosterwelle is also visited by people who may have been baptized but have not gone to church for decades. Now they feel part of this new style faith community.

‘This spot is like a massage for the soul.’

Lisette de Zeeuw

Every Wednesday there is a vesper with a meal. And regularly there are retreat days on which silence and reflection are central. These days are a combination of vespers, meals, meditative walks and group conversations. The rhythm of the day is determined by the rhythm of the tides. A visitor called Kloosterwelle a ‘weekly massage for your soul’.
Why should you start pioneering?

Less than fifty years ago, we ate little more than potatoes and vegetables. Now we eat wraps, nasi, sushi, noodles, quinoa and more. Our food has diversified with the general population. This diversification also goes for people’s world views. What we find important, beautiful and useful, varies enormously. A standard church service on Sunday morning does not reflect this diversity. By pioneering new forms of being church are found. New forms that enable people to discover more of the Christian faith in their own way.

When pioneering we do not ask people to adapt to our ecclesiastical customs, but we meet them in their context and adapt to them. Then, together, we discover what the Gospel mean in our lives. We hope and pray that in this way more people will discover the value of the Christian faith.

LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER

As existing churches we also want to learn from pioneering spots. How can pioneers reach people outside the church? How can a church be a small healthy community, both in terms of leadership and financially? In what new ways can we experience our faith? Because existing churches want to learn from pioneering spots, they need to be connected. Conversely, pioneers can also learn from existing churches, because after all, many problems were confronted before.

‘The open-minded and enthusiastic reaction of children to Bible stories is contagious for both parents and me. That’s why I started pioneering.’
Otto Grevink
Zin op school, Waalwijk

‘I started pioneering, because the good of God can be discovered everywhere and because nothing is more beautiful than going on a voyage of discovery together with others.’
Janneke Nijboer
Windkracht 3pt0, Noordwijk

‘I did not consciously start pioneering, I suddenly appeared to be doing it.’
Marjoleine Engelberts
De Fontein, Apeldoorn

‘I started pioneering because the Gospel is too good to allow it to evaporate in our society.’
Margrietha Reinders
Betondorp Bloei, Amsterdam
How a pioneering spot develops

How does a new form of being church arise with people who no longer go to church? This varies widely. First of all, it is important to connect with the people you have in mind. What motivates them? How could faith play a role in their lives? Do not assume too quickly that another (more modern) form of church services would attract people from outside the church. Although success is not guaranteed, research and practical experience points to certain things. To provide insight into the process of creating a pioneering spot, we use the ‘pioneering journey’. We introduce the pioneer journey here briefly. More information can be found at: www.lerenpionieren.nl

The pioneering journey starts with listening, fourfold listening: to the context, to God, to the pioneering team and to the sending church. You can, for example, listen to the context by conducting a survey, by researching statistics, or by reading the local newspapers. Talk to a doctor, a school director, a baker and a police officer, and you will gain a lot of insight into the situation. This listening phase yields insight into what people need, what their questions are and how they can be served.

We hope that a network of people will grow who meet regularly and share their lives. Where life is shared, discussion about spiritual questions may also arise. During the pioneering trip various processes overlap; taking a next step does not automatically mean stopping the previous step. We hope to end up with a new Christian community of people who weren’t church-goers before.

In practice: Geloven in Moerwijk

Betellies Westerbeek has been pioneering in the middle of the Moerwijk district in The Hague since 2014. ‘Dire poverty’, is how she characterises the district. And multicultural. Focal point of the pioneering spot is a house with a vegetable garden, where people from the neighborhood can go. There are all kinds of activities: working in the garden, neighborhood meals, sports, Bible study, walks. “Being present against all misery.” Is it a church? To Betellies it is clear: “The church is a place where people meet God. That happens here. Many people in Moerwijk come from other countries and are used to growing their own vegetables. In the crowded apartment buildings that is not possible. By having a vegetable garden as the heart of the pioneering spot people can grow vegetables themselves and meet others as a matter of course. This is how Geloven in Moerwijk connects to the context. Geloven in Moerwijk is supervised by the IZB.

‘Pioneering means starting with little. I get excited about it, and learn to be dependent on God. Ultimately, it is God who touches people.’

Betellies Westerbeek
Where do we find the pioneering spots?

Here you see a map of the Netherlands with an overview of all pioneering spots (January 2018). Each dot represents a pioneering spot. At the moment there are more than a hundred in total.

- Pioneering spots of the first generation; started before 2012
- Pioneering spots in progress; started after 2012
- Pioneering spots in preparation, letter of intent has been signed

More missional possibilities

Churches can be missional in many ways. It is a simplified view, but we notice that the following distinction can help you to focus on what you want. One way is not more important or better than the other. It is good to be aware of what you choose. Is your goal welcoming people into the existing congregation (‘welcoming’ and ‘making contact’) or do you hope to start a new community (‘sending’ or ‘pioneering’) with these people?

WELCOMING

When ‘welcoming’ you invite people to go to existing activities in your congregation. You lower the threshold, for example by a warm welcome at the door, by an understandable sermon or by extra tasty coffee. You can also think of outreach services for guests, young people or children. People who get to know the Christian faith in this way, can connect with existing activities to deepen their faith.

MAKING CONTACT

In ‘making contact’ you want to connect to people who did not come to the church before by a new, targeted activity. Think, for example, of an Alpha course, a collaboration with the food bank or a kids club during the holidays. If there are people who want to know more about the Christian faith, they can then join existing activities of the congregation.

SENDING

When ‘sending’, a congregation gives a group of people or a worker the opportunity to create a new faith community alongside the existing church. Not instead of the existing church, but as an addition to the regular church services. New people who become involved will then (usually) not be referred to the existing congregation. New activities will arise, activities that suit these people and their needs. They may culminate in meetings in a school building, a cafe or in someone’s home.

In some cases, the existing congregation has become so small that the whole congregation is relaunching as a pioneer spot. The existing is relinquished in favour of trying to connect with people who no longer visit a church.

You will find a similar overview on www.lerenpionieren.nl/maps. Here you can find additional information about the pioneering spots so that you can contact them or view the websites. When you are thinking of starting a pioneering spot, it can be very helpful to visit an existing pioneering spot.
In practice: De Schone Poort

A new neighborhood is growing in Almere: Almere Poort. No church is built, because planners do not expect that there will be enough Christians to fill it. When he retired, the reverend Pieter ter Veen and his wife Klazien came to live in Almere Poort. When they saw the situation they concluded: “Then it is up to us to be the church in the district.” They bought a mobile shop and converted it into a ‘mobile church’. Because they show themselves everywhere, they are now widely known. They are also present through various activities: a living nativity scene, a performance on horseback as St. Martin, the construction of a labyrinth for meditative walks, meetings in living rooms and at events in the district. From there, all kinds of contacts have grown with all kinds of people.

The pioneering team has grown slowly in recent years. And in the meantime they are looking for a ‘more permanent place’. They also regularly hold a church café, in a café nearby.

‘When you tell people about the friendship of God, then you are an evangelist. I cannot help it.’
Pieter ter Veen

The first steps

A pioneering spot starts with people in their own place and context who are motivated to share the Christian faith in word and deed with others. Their desire is the basis of pioneering. It can start at a church board meeting or with one enthusiast who starts a pioneering team.

Usually a pioneering spot starts with a few people with a dream. But what is the next step? Preparing for a pioneering spot three things are important:

• A vision
  In order to pioneer, it is important to have a shared vision, a vision the pioneering team and the congregation are enthusiastic about. The pioneering team takes the lead. In developing a vision the listening phase is of great importance. This will result in a pioneering plan.

• A team
  Nothing can be done without people willing to do it. It is therefore important to have a pioneering team of two to seven people who take the lead.

• Support
  Pioneering spots are always connected to one or more local congregations or a ‘Classis’ (Regional church board). Support for the project will need to grow if it is to prove effective. People need to be informed and their concerns must be taken seriously and they must be allowed time to get used to new ideas.

Experience shows that it helps to get the national church office involved in the preparations of a pioneering spot from an early date. For every pioneering spot in preparation there is a coach available.
Who is a good pioneer?

A pioneer leads the way and dares to try something new. That is not everyone’s cup of tea. Not everyone needs to be a pioneer. A pioneer does not necessarily have to be a minister or a theologian. And pioneers are not always paid: a growing group of people pioneers on a voluntary basis, in addition to a regular job.

Pioneers are generally people who think in opportunities and see possibilities. They have entrepreneurial qualities. In addition, they are good at listening, they are sensitive to their context. They are curious about what is going on and are interested in people. Faithful and with vision, the pioneers can sustain their efforts, even in the face of setbacks.

Paid pioneers are often recruited for pioneering spots. Sometimes this is necessary to give an extra boost to the work. We hope however, that when there are not enough financial resources, or when a pioneer leaves, the pioneering work continues. This makes it essential that a pioneer cooperates, transfers knowledge and can include others in the pioneering vision.

The role of the church council

A pioneering spot can only be started with the support and blessing of a Protestant congregation. It requires positive involvement. We hope that the church board will support the pioneering team. You can specifically think of:

• Stimulating contact
The existing church and the pioneering spot can learn from each other. That is why the existing church needs to remain connected. What’s happening there? What can we learn from this? Conversely, this also applies. The contact may be maintained by:
  • offering space in the church magazine
  • organizing a congregational meeting
  • Church board and pioneering team reporting and discussing progress

• Being responsible and giving space
The pioneering team works in solidarity with the local congregation. That also monitors progress. If something really does not go well at all, then it is the church board that acts first. Of course in consultation with the national church. That does not mean that the church council immediately intervenes in every failure. Pioneering is a process of trial and error. Only with room for maneuver and trust, innovation can evolve.

• Supporting and blessing the pioneering team
Pioneering is tiresome work and can be lonely at times. Personal support and informal contact from the church council is important. The pioneering team can also be blessed during a during a church service of the inherited church.

We hope the congregation keeps praying for the pioneers.
What started as a dream of a community to share God’s love with each other and others, became concrete when a building became available. The property is a former home for the disabled in the most densely populated district of the Netherlands, in Delft. Soon the dream grew bigger than just living together. The inhabitants of the community want to share their lives with people from the neighbourhood.

Every Friday now, a cozy coffee café is organized in the atmospheric ‘Hearth Room’. Here local residents can enjoy coffee and homemade pastries and they can meet people who live in the community. The garden is also available for the neighbourhood. People from the neighbourhood can rent a vegetable plot and there is a playground for the children. There is also a concert in the living room every month.

The community consists of both singles and young families. There are private rooms and communal spaces. Every resident is asked to spend at least one part of a day per week serving the neighborhood and one part of a day for the community. How this time is spent varies per person and depends on his or her talents. This spot is supported by Intercultural Churchplants (ICP).

In practice: Taste

The church is on the move

This development does not stand on its own. Society is also changing considerably. Old institutions no longer meet requirements and new ones have not yet found a sustainable form. We also see this development in the church. Old and proven forms of being church no longer meet requirements in all situations. Many crumble, while new, less formal and more fluid pioneering forms tentatively arise.

The Rev. Dr. O. Noordmans already pointed out roughly a century ago that the Spirit creates forms of ‘being church’ that suit their period in time. The church, born from the feast of the Spirit, is a dynamic institution. The church is dynamic because the Holy Spirit involves her in God’s mission and focuses her on people today.
For starting teams we offer the following support:

- **Starting coach**: A starting coach supports teams preparing for pioneering. He/she helps to form a vision, a team and to create support in the congregation.

- **Listening day**: This day in Soesterberg focuses on listening to God, the team, the context and the church. You will also meet other teams here.

- **Articles and pioneering films**: On the website there are all sorts of tips and in-depth articles that can assist in making your own plans. There are also several stories from real-life situations. Discussions about such films may help your team or church.

Starting pioneering teams can get the following support:

- **Pioneertraining**: A pioneering team can participate in the pioneer training sessions twice per year. Each team partakes in at least one pioneertraining every year.

- **Finances**: read more on the next page.

- **Pioneering counselor**: If a pioneering spot has started the pioneering counselor takes over from the starting coach. He/she is the first point of contact for both the church board and the pioneering team.

Within the learning community for pioneers you can both acquire knowledge and experience and share your own. After all, we are learning together.

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Financial support

There are pioneering spots that do not need financial support, for example because they are run by volunteers and because the activities take place in living rooms. Then there are no (high) costs. However, if financial support is needed, it is available. The local church is also asked for a financial contribution. This is important because financial support also is an important sign of involvement and support.

The financing of a pioneering spot needs to be made to measure. Discuss this therefore with your Starting Coach. Here a rough guide of the maximum financial support available. The higher the external funding is, the more difficult it will be to make the pioneering spot financially sustainable.

**GRANT**

From the national church a maximum grant of € 8,000 per year is available. The Maatschappij van Welstand can give a grant of € 4,000. The condition attached to both grants is that a minimum of € 6,000 is contributed locally. When the local contribution is smaller, the grants are correspondingly lower. Of course, a larger local contribution is always allowed.

**EVALUATE AFTER THREE YEARS**

After three years each pioneering spot is evaluated with reference to its sustainability. If the prospect is favourable, three more years of coaching and financial support are available. The financial support in that period is gradually reduced. After six years national financial support ends. But local (church) financial support may go on for some time.

**SUSTAINABILITY**

The development of a pioneering spot to maturity often takes about five to ten years. It is therefore important to arrange the financing from the beginning in such a way that it is also sustainable in the long term. This will involve limiting spending and stimulating a personal contribution by the people from the pioneering spot. This will make the pioneering spot future-proof.

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The national team

In the national team, all kinds of organisations work together to support pioneering teams via training, guidance and finances.

Do you want to explore or pioneer in your context and congregation? Please contact Erik Verwoerd. You can contact him via e.verwoerd@protestantsekerk.nl or +31 (0)6-12558013.

RESEARCH ‘OP HOOP VAN ZEGEN’
At the end of 2016, a survey was conducted among the pioneering spots that started between 2008 and 2016. In this study you will find lessons learned and challenges for the future. This study and the in-depth articles can be found on www.lerenpioneren.nl/ophoopvanzegen.

NATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS
IZB, association for mission in the Netherlands
EW, Evangelical Work Association
PKA, Protestant Church of Amsterdam
OOG, Op Goed Gerucht
DHIB, The Hague in Motion for Jesus Christ
ICP, Intercultural Church Plants
PGG, Protestant Congregation of the Hague
PThU, Protestant Theological University
CHE, Christelijke Hogeschool Ede
MvW, De Maatschappij van Welstand

Back row: Henk Boerman (IZB), Maarten Atsma, Ronald van der Molen (EW), Erik Verwoerd, Peter den Hoedt.
Middle row: Bas van der Graaf (PKA), Ronnie Zuidam, Peter Bakker (DHIB), Anneke van der Velde.
Front row: Hans Euser (ICP), Christiaan Ceval, Martijn Vellekoop, Berthe van Soest (OOG).
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