



Berdine van den Toren-Lekkerkerker

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Location: Netherlands



What I do: Living a life of mission, both locally in our community and globally as I support Christian leaders in Africa and Asia to resource others.

Dear friends,

Welcome to Het Pand!

In this letter, I would like to give you some experience of our Sunday lunch community and celebration.

All are welcome.

So, welcome, come in!

We start in the kitchen. It is noisy. In the centre there is a big table with bread, cheeses, snacks, cups of coffee. Someone is busy making a tuna salad. At the stove someone is cooking soup. We already noticed the nice smell before entering the kitchen.

Then Jan comes in and tells us it is time to pray. We all settle on chairs around the table, hear what we can expect today and discuss responsibilities. We take time to pray. During prayer, some teenagers come in, laughing. Some of them join in prayer.

In the main room the tables are arranged and a buffet table is prepared. Children are already running around and having fun. A bit after 12 noon, we all sit down and one of the children is asked to light the candle. "Why do we light the candle"? "Because Jesus is the Light and Jesus is here."

It is time to eat. After a short prayer, for which people are invited to join in, the children run to the table. There is enough food, so we just wait for our turn. This is also the time to chat, to share what preoccupies us, to have fun together and sometimes to cry together.

Celebration time

And then it is celebration time. This time I am in charge of leading it. The theme is: God's goal with creation. We are living in God's gift for us, a beautiful world. But also a world in pain and chaos. In Luke 14 Jesus tells us that God continues to realise his plan for this world. He compares it to a feast, where all are welcome, and especially the poor, the rejected, the outsiders, those who are not welcome in other places.



Het Pand community prepare food in the kitchen.

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**With Jesus
With each other
To the edges**



We read this story. We listen to the music of a Dutch artist who sings about eating and feasting together, but also about pain and destruction. This not Christian music, but his song reminds us that God's hand never lets go of creation, of us. Sometimes we too feel like the outsiders. We too carry pain. And we too are welcome. It gives us hope and encourages us to pray together, for each other and for this world.

During the community collection time, a young couple, regulars in our community, ask us for children's books. They have been asked to look after a young boy for two days a week, once they receive permission from social services who will check that their house is safe and that they are capable of caring for the boy. While they share this, their eyes are shining. They already care deeply for the boy.

At the end we all receive the blessing, God's blessing that is repeated each week: "Go with God. He

will be with you. He will care for you!"

The after-party

And then, children run around again. People enjoy a cup of coffee or tea. We chat, and some start to clean up.

While I am still standing and taking it all in "Andy" walks up to me. Seeing him, I realise I had made a mistake. He asked for prayer for a friend who is very sick, and I had forgotten to name this friend. But "Andy" is gracious: "Don't worry, I am sure that the message went upstairs anyway. I too have sent my energy up. So, it's fine."

Each time he joins us, "Andy" tells us that he is not a Christian. He receives and mediates energy. Yet, it is "Andy" who several times brings new people into our community. A bit later, I overhear another man say to "Andy": "I hope that one day you will meet the Person who gives this energy. I think it is Jesus."

During the celebration, I already noticed a young woman who was with us for the first time. She came with the young couple who asked for the children's books. I had seen tears running down her cheeks during the music. Now these three women ask me if she would be allowed to light a candle for the loss of her grandfather and her father. Of course she could! We found three candles. We gather around the Christ-candle, we pray, and the friend lights each of these candles, for her father, her grandfather, and also for the love they had shared with her.

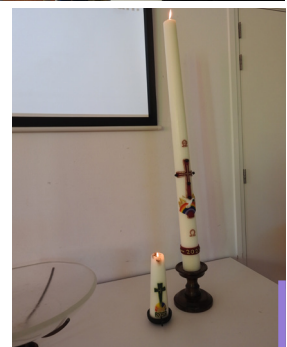
By the time I get to the kitchen to help with the washing up... I see that it is already nearly done. Some teenagers have been busy, and they are really proud of it. We all need to see it and compliment them for it. Of course, we are happy to oblige.

It is time to go home, filled with joy, because we have seen God at work.

I hope you enjoyed it too!

With love,

Berdine



Photos from top to bottom: All are welcome to our Sunday lunch community; The table of food is ready; After lunch, the celebration; The candle reminds us: "Jesus is the Light and Jesus is here".



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