

# MERCIFUL JUSTICE



Retrospective  
and reflections  
on nearly 25 years of  
Gevangenezorg  
Nederland  
*(Prison Fellowship  
The Netherlands)*

Hans Barendrecht  
*and others*

God is the Almighty  
we may participate in His caring

*Laurens Barendrecht (1924 – 2008)*



Gevangenzorg Nederland  
PO Box 5042  
2701 GA Zoetermeer  
The Netherlands  
+31 (0)79-3310568  
info@gevangenzorg.nl  
www.gevangenzorg.nl

© 2020 Gevangenzorg Nederland, Zoetermeer

Cover photo: Anton Sinke  
Design: Anton Sinke, [www.antonsinke.nl](http://www.antonsinke.nl)

All rights reserved

# MERCIFUL JUSTICE

*Retrospective and reflections on nearly 25 years  
of Gevangenzorg Nederland  
(Prison Fellowship The Netherlands).*

Hans Barendrecht  
*and others*

Prison Fellowship The Netherlands  
Zoetermeer

# Table of Contents

Foreword for the English edition	<i>Ronald Nikkel</i>	6
Foreword	<i>Peter van der Sande</i>	8
A Personal Word		10
1 Justice: Judge or Serve		13
2 The First Few Years		23
3 Justice and Politics		35
4 The Projects		51
5 The Proof That Volunteers are Invaluable		69
6 Inside the Organisation		75
7 The Final Word		89
Care, Meaning, Restoration: Volunteer Impact in a Judicial Setting		
	<i>Peter Nelissen</i>	93
<b>Commentaries and Responses</b>		
An Introduction	<i>Joop de Goede</i>	98
A Fair Trial	<i>Johan Bac</i>	102
Life Sentence	<i>Willem Anker</i>	105
Between Church and Dungeon	<i>Peter Baaijens</i>	108
A New Year	<i>Peter van der Laan</i>	111
To Judge	<i>Bram van de Beek</i>	114
Taking Over	<i>Ine Voorham</i>	117
A Blinkered Perspective	<i>Henk Abbink</i>	120
Fuel	<i>Paul Baan</i>	123
Gert Jan	<i>Connie</i>	127
Calvinist	<i>John van Eck</i>	130
Giving Back	<i>Arie Bax</i>	133

Conscience	<i>Michiel van der Wolf</i>	136
Church Punishment	<i>Dan Van Ness</i>	139
Hands	<i>Willem den Hertog</i>	143
Content	<i>Arie van den Hurk</i>	147
Pardon	<i>Gert-Jan Segers</i>	150
Justice	<i>Wouter Boogaard</i>	153
Hot and Vengeful	<i>Kees van der Staaij</i>	157
Heartbeat	<i>Willem</i>	160
Solved	<i>Wies and Douwe van Urk</i>	164
Longing	<i>Andries Knevel</i>	168
Presence	<i>Alice Gaasbeek-Nentjes</i>	171
In the Bud	<i>Ilse van der Hoven</i>	174
Self-sufficient	<i>Marie-Anne de Groot</i>	177
Royal Honour	<i>Obe Veldman</i>	181
Facts and Figures		182

# Foreword for the English edition

*Gevangenenzorg Nederland* (Prison Fellowship The Netherlands – PFN) is a name that says it all, but it also raises a question. Why in the world should anyone care about prisoners – especially in a country like the Netherlands where prisoners are treated decently and humanely? Unlike in many parts of the world they are not in prison because they are victims of injustice or extreme poverty or lack of educational opportunity. Why should anyone care – aren't they just getting what they deserve!?



Some years ago, I met with Ministry of Justice officials responsible for justice and prison administration in Costa Rica. The stone archway above the main entrance to the Ministry was inscribed “Ministerio de Justicia y Gracia” – Ministry of Justice and Grace.

Could those words be true? I wondered, how could those two opposites exist in the same building? Which of the two is stronger – Justice or Grace?

The reality, the truth I have discovered in more than 40 years work among prisoners around the world is that justice cannot be done without grace, and grace apart from any sense of justice is meaningless. St. Thomas Aquinas observed that “justice without mercy is cruelty, and mercy without justice is the mother of dissolution.”

Any society that expects justice to be accomplished simply through the punishment of offenders will have to face the reality of re-offending. Imprisonment alone will not change the values, attitudes and behaviours of people for good. Eventually, after having served their time in prison, offenders return to the community either better or worse for the experience.

I have watched Prison Fellowship The Netherlands grow as an organization that recognizes the hearts and lives of those serving time in prison need to be touched by grace through human friendship, understanding, and care. They are fellow human beings with the same need for meaning and belonging and respect as any of us. When Hans Barendrecht, my esteemed colleague and friend left his career as a lawyer in the prestigious Court of Appeal to work in a small, struggling charity that cared

for prisoners, many people would have thought he was wasting his time and his life.

But Hans saw something others didn't see. He saw the possibility that people motivated by the love of God to show grace and mercy to prisoners could do more to change people for good than any court or prison in the land.

Hans dared to serve Jesus by spending his time with those doing time in prison. It has been time well spent. While he is quick to deflect credit for the success and impact of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands, I know that when he started, Hans worked very much alone and often unsupported. What Prison Fellowship The Netherlands is today is a tribute to God's faithfulness working through Hans' vision and courage multiplied in co-workers, volunteers, supporters, and partners across the country.

Back to the beginning ....

– men and women are serving time in prison are real people – created by God with dignity and worth. They are in prison because our justice system found it necessary to place them in confinement as punishment for their offences. However, apart from caring people who graciously befriend, encourage, counsel, and spend time with them justice would not fully be accomplished. While the justice systems of society necessarily exclude people for their offences, God's grace inevitably embraces every one of them, no matter what they have done – with the merciful possibility of redemption and restoration. As the late Abraham Kuyper (former Prime Minister of the Netherlands) stated, "there is not one square inch of all Creation over which the Lord does not say 'Mine.'"

Wherever Justice and Mercy meet – God is present, and this is the inspiring story of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands.

Ronald Nikkel, President Emeritus  
Prison Fellowship International

# FOREWORD

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this book reflecting the 25 years of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands. It is an impressive description of how a voluntary organization worked to attain its widely respected position within the world of the Dutch prison system. Based on my long-standing experience, both at home and abroad, I know how difficult it is to make people in our society aware of their responsibility in contributing to a safe society; a society we all like to live in.



The realisation is that prisoners are our fellow citizens and, even though they have committed crimes, they retain the right to live acceptably within society and their community after having served time in prison. It requires the help of many people to make this possible, and our help as a society is indispensable.

When I was appointed President of the ICPA (International Corrections and Prisons Association) in Singapore, I witnessed the beginning of a major initiative to involve society in the rehabilitation of former inmates. The project was called 'Unlocking the Second Prison'. When society avoids them, released inmates often find themselves in a different kind of prison - including all the adverse effects ensuing from imprisonment.

If we want to give inmates a second chance instead of a Second Prison, it is of paramount importance that society play an active role.

Twenty-five years ago, *PF The Netherlands* recognized that, as part of society, they could play an important part in this reintegration process. During the past years, I came to greatly appreciate and admire the professionalism of their volunteers in carrying out their activities. I believe that the foundation for their professionalism lies in the careful selection and recruitment process of those volunteers before being allowed to do their work; and this is by no means easy or straightforward. The recruitment method is very similar to the way new prison staff are selected, and this is a comforting thought.

Many years ago, I spoke with a highly educated former inmate, and asked him to advise me on a new detention programme that we (as the Justice Department) wanted to implement in our prison system. He was happy to respond, but warned me that inmates are greatly suspicious and mistrustful of anything offered to them by the Justice department.



His statement confirmed the essential need for people from society to make the connection between the Justice department and prison inmates; people who are capable of building bridges between them. In my opinion, this is something for which volunteers are particularly suitable. *PF The Netherlands*, in fact, is proof of this. Based on the results achieved and the drive and motivation of their professional volunteers, I can only wish that the Justice department would promote the deployment of volunteers from our society on a much larger scale. Perhaps we need to think about a model that is used by the Probation Service system in Japan, where civil servants working for the Justice department have a statutory obligation to collaborate with community volunteers in order to ensure that offenders are given better opportunities upon return to society.

Before we reach that stage, I most fervently hope that *PF The Netherlands* will continue in its unbridled commitment to inmates for many years to come, and to be an example for others to make the same effort.

I hope you will enjoy reading this book.

Peter van der Sande

*Since late 2011, Peter van der Sande has been the President of the International Corrections and Prisons Association. Before that, in 2000, he started working for the Ministry of Justice and Security as the Director of the Prison System and as the Executive Director of the Dutch Custodial Institutions Agency (DJI). From 2011 to 2017, we was also a Board Member of the European Prison Organisation (EUROPRIS). Since 2011, Peter is also a member of the Social Council of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands .*

## A personal word

Well, here it is. A publication that gives insight about how *PF The Netherlands* has developed over the years. It was mostly people from outside the prison system who encouraged me to do compile this book. And in this, I can see a parallel with our volunteers. As 'outsiders' they visit prisoners to encourage them to begin a new chapter in their life stories, writing on a clean slate, after serving time in prison. Some fine examples of this are on our website.

This book focuses on the development of the organisation which started below sea level, which meant that we had to swim or sink together.

It took me while to get used to writing in the first person, because I am very well aware of the fact that the development of *PF The Netherlands* is not only my personal feat. On the other hand, hiding behind the vessels like Saul while you have been labelled as the 'figurehead' of the organisation for 23 years, would also be wrong. I want to emphasise that this is my retrospect on everything that has been done and achieved. This is not a historic account of the organisation, and I certainly won't pretend to give a full account!

I hope that this account is informative and offers, in some way, a few guidelines to those who might be able to apply them in their own activities, in the same way that I have learned from people who wrote about their own profession and passion. This was an additional reason that motivated me to compile this book and to candidly pass on what transpired over the past years.

Every now and then, I introduce people verbally and I have managed fairly well to keep a record of the time and details of those conversations. At the same time, it was impossible to verify with each person whether or not the quotes I use are complete. This made me think of Jan Baan who once said to me: 'It's better to ask for forgiveness afterwards than for permission beforehand'. So that's why!

The Dutch title of this book derives from a line in the Bible (Genesis 3:9) speaking of the beginning of humanity. God came looking for Adam, the man who had been hiding in paradise. He had been hiding because he realised that he had done something fundamentally wrong by detaching himself from God. The title relates to our work among prisoners. They literally *find themselves* somewhere because of the wrong they committed. But another interesting question is where you and I find ourselves. Why and for what purpose do we do the things we do, especially in response to what is evil in this world?



*Hans Barendrecht, sit down and look back*

I would like to thank all my colleagues. They offered suggestions and encouraged me. Others simply did their jobs, just like all of our more than six hundred volunteers. I am immensely grateful to all of them. Because that is what it is all about, in the end, to take up our responsibility to help prisoners, those who are detained under a hospital order (TBS patients), and their families along during a difficult period in their lives.

I want to express my explicit thanks to Marja Baars and Lydia Weening. Between the initial idea and the realization of this book lies an ocean of (organisational) work. Volunteer Arina Otten lent me her other talent to meticulously check the book for spelling errors and other grammatical details. Thanks also to my former classmate Arjen van Trig, publisher at Kok Boekencentrum for his advice, which included asking Anton Sinke to coordinate the book design and styling. It all went very efficiently. Ton Konijn, thank you so much for spontaneously offering to meet the costs involved in publishing a book during one of our skeeler tours around the Groene Hart. Our friendship means so much to me.

My thanks to all the contributing writers! Your contributions enrich the book with insights and enliven it with your anecdotes. I was even given some unsolicited homework. Great! Most particularly I want to thank Wies and Douwe van Urk. You have a double-heavy family cross to bear, of victimisation and detention. Your willingness to cooperate and the way you did this – with such an open mind – makes me very grateful for your trust.

*'Ice King melts for criminals'*, was the headline in De Telegraaf newspaper for an interview with you, Willem (den Hertog). At some point, you simply went along just

to get them off your back. Our relationship also took some time to develop, and grew into a wonderful collaboration that turned into a friendship. You thought along and demonstrated your empathy, you introduced sponsors, and we made trips to prisons in Brazil, Nigeria, and Suriname. We talked, ate, laughed and prayed a lot, and even shed some tears. I learned so much from you, especially to persevere. 'Thank God in *everything!*' is your motto in life. My thanks are for life!

On page 18, I added a poem by Inge Lievaart. The poem is about *mutual* sharing, 'in the weakness of the other ... so... that there ... are only people' and no weaklings, no blacks and no whites; and I want to add: no prisoners or those who are detained under a hospital order, and no families of such people. Over the past years, thousands of them have given me their trust by sharing their lives with me. I am grateful for their invitation to sit *beside* them. It nurtured my desire to keep finding new ways of seeing them as *fellow human beings* and to have a meaningful influence in their lives. I also want to offer my thanks and appreciation to the victims of crime who participated in our SOS courses (Sycamore Tree Project). It requires a great deal of courage to enter a correctional institutions as a victim or as a bereaved person as the consequence of a fatal crime to share their story with people who committed crimes, people they don't know. For each one, please understand that your impact is huge!

The book begins with a quote from my father. I loved him tremendously and he was always interested in what I felt and did, as did my mother. 'Straighten up, Hans,' she would say when I tended to slouch my shoulders. Ultimately, I have taken the *straight* path and I continue feeling myself carried by parental love, excellent up-bringing, and pure lessons in life every single day.

Last but not least, nothing would have come of this book without the support of my wife Lea. The first few years were perhaps harder on her than they were on me. I was on the road and saw the opportunities for the future. She was the manager of 'the Barendrecht home and family' and saw the costs and gains of yesterday and tomorrow. Slowly but surely, the scales moved to green. I cannot thank you enough, Lea for your silent patience and rock-steady trust that this was the road we had to go and were given to travel *together*. When we started on this journey, our children Laura, Eline, Aron, and Levi were still young. Today, three of them have made a life for themselves and we are grandparents. How wonderful it is to be grateful to God, together, for what we received as a family as well as from society outside.

Finally, I would like to share that, over the years, I came to love the music of the nineteenth-century Austrian composer Anton Bruckner. Each and every one of his ten symphonies is a pearl that lifts up my thoughts, either into quietness or creative activities. Bruckner dedicated his ninth symphony to 'the Beloved God'. May this be the foundation for all who work within *PF The Netherlands*, in dedication to our good Lord.

Hans Barendrecht  
in the harvest month of August, 2018

## CHAPTER I.

# Justice: Judge or Serve

‘The Netherlands has the largest number of judges in the world.’ I looked around the hall and saw that I had chosen my opening statement well. Many a question mark appeared on the foreheads of the audience. But, beyond that, I also noticed some twinkling eyes and smiles. I had been invited to speak at a symposium in Shenzhen, in South China, a city at about a three hours’ drive from Hong Kong. It was 2005 and I was representing PF The Netherlands at the quadrennial meeting of Prison Fellowship International (Later on in this book, I will come back to our relationship with PFI)

PFI had nominated me as one of the speakers at a meeting hosted by Nanjing University for scientists and professionals from around the world concerning developments in rehabilitation-oriented efforts in correctional institutions. PFI, provided some necessary pieces of ‘sound advice’, which included being careful and frugal with the use of any biblical references. By nature, I am not a person who uses the Bible as a



*Presentation in Shenzhen (China)*

'lucky bag' for quotations. I believe it to be inappropriate and sometimes even cheap, for Holy pearls are not like sweets to be handed out indiscriminately. However, there can be exceptions every now then. When I come across believers who are strictly adhering to doctrine on Sundays while unmercifully neglecting what the Bible says during the rest of the week, it can be very appropriate to confront them with "holy pearls" of truth. It can bring matters to a head, but it can also just as easily lead into a wonderful and good discussion. And it will be a good discussion when entered into with an open mind and a desire to listen. The latter, listening, is especially rare. Our culture is focused on speaking first — we e-mail, twitter, text messages, send tweets, etc. It goes on and on, even in our bedrooms. Of course, this is not just a consequence of our culture. It is also part of our human nature. We think, feel and have opinions about all kinds of things, and we expect these to be heard and shared.

### **All the Dutch are Judges**

Let me return to my opening statement – “All the Dutch are judges.” Of course, this statement is not true, nevertheless, there is some truth in it. Crime attracts attention as do criminals. Even as I'm writing this, the Holleeder trial is still underway and sometime later the 20-year-old case of the murder of Nicky Verstappen also started. It was very exceptional for the full first and last names of the suspect to be mentioned on daily TV and media coverage of this story. In addition to these high profile stories the news also covers 'more minor' criminal offences like burglaries and vandalism. By the way, I believe the term 'minor' crimes to be a very ill-chosen term. My car was broken into a few times and even though there was not much damage, my frustration was all the greater. Rescheduling appointments, reporting the incident to the police, calling the insurance company, and finding out when the car repair company could fix the damage easily disrupted my entire day. And even if the criminals were to be caught red-handed, one would need to be careful not to lose control over oneself to avoid ending up court. I am by no means advocating for taking the law into our own hands. Leave this to the judges. We have a good justice system, but that doesn't mean it is perfect. Even so, it is more preferable to fall into the hands of a judge in the Netherlands than in places like Nigeria. In 2001, Willem den Hertog and I travelled to Nigeria where we visited several prisons together with Teunis Rijnveld, who works as an evangelist in Nigeria. He brought us to several prisons and when I close my eyes, the faces, stories (and the smells) still come to mind. People could be incarcerated for years without even knowing what they were accused of. That is wrong without any doubt, for as far as I am concerned, it doesn't matter what wrong a person committed, whether burglary or murder, justice requires sound legal procedures and their correct application.

### **The Law is Tough.**

I worked as a judicial secretary at the Court of Appeal in The Hague for some years.

As the name says, this court deals with cases under appeal. The suspects in these cases disagree with the ruling of the District Court and so they appeal the verdict. Sometimes, this can be to the suspect's advantage but at other times it is not. My responsibility was to prepare cases for the advocate-general who is, more or less, the prosecutor for the Court of Appeal. I had to look at two things: 1) Was everything done according to the rules? 2) Can the criminal charges be proven? For example, if the government failed to follow its own rules, this can have significant consequences. For example, when a case has been "lying on the shelf for too long" then this can result in a less severe punishment. In the worst case, the work of the Public Prosecution Department can be declared as inadmissible if it flouts its own rules to the disadvantage of suspects. In such a case, question two even becomes obsolete and the suspect is allowed to go free and return home. I fully understand that situations like this can cause confusion in society, especially when the public thinks that the suspect has been acquitted while 'everyone really knows that he did it'. *Lex dura*, the law is tough and sometimes, unmercifully tough. It brought Daniel in the lion's den. In the Netherlands, to this day we use the expression derived from that story; the edict of the Medes and Persians – "As it is written, it shall occur." As I've stated, our system is good but not perfect. It may sound like a cliché, but imperfection is a natural part of our humanity, and sometimes that can be hard to swallow.

## Merciful Justice

Another thing that can be difficult to explain is the motivation by which PF The Netherlands visits every inmate. We really don't concern ourselves with what crime someone committed. Maybe I need to formulate this more accurately, not that it is difficult to explain, but it is surely difficult to hear – at least in my experience. Unfortunately, this difficulty was not just the case outside the church, but also within. It affected me deeply for many years and it also irritated me, often quite unpleasantly. 'Mr Barendrecht, may I ask for your view on capital punishment?' and 'What do you think about the fact that my elderly mother has to share a room with three other women while criminals all get their own private cells?'. The next question was always posed as well: 'Don't you agree that punishments in the Netherlands are much too lenient?!'

I'd like to take the non-Christian reader along, into the quiet of the council chamber where the deliberations take place. You need to know that, for serious Calvinists, there is one thing at the core of everything, which is 'free mercy', the mercy that God bestows upon an individual for his sins. This mercy is free. That is why it is mercy. Man – *the sinner* – is incapable of acquiring or adding to that. This is something a person would never be able to do – stand before God free of sins – this freedom from guilt is what Jesus Christ realised for us. Through His life and crucifixion, He is the propitiation for our sins and for the sins of the world. You may believe it or not, and if you do believe it may be merciful. For the rather reformed-minded Christians,

## Merciful Justice

- We affirm the Nicene Creed which declares that God created humankind and the world and that Jesus Christ came into the world for human redemption and reconciliation forgiveness
- We do not judge; responsibility for prosecution and judgement in our society are in the hands of the judicial authorities; and we shall not be tempted to confuse the crime (which we recognize as wrongdoing) with the criminal;
- We practise our faith in keeping with the historic traditions of Christian belief and practice, that a person is not separated from their intrinsic human dignity by criminality regardless of its severity;
- We meet with prisoners and take an interest in their personal well-being;
- We will focus our efforts on helping prisoners and their families with a perspective on their present circumstance and the future; ideally, this will enable them to deal with the past in a positive and mature way;
- We see our work as merciful justice because we don't see the concept of (just) retribution only as a punishment but also as a healing and personal possibility across the full width of society and social life.

this matter is a critical issue in their lives. 'I know that this is true, but does it also apply to me?' To state this in church terms, it is about the appropriation of salvation which is a delicate issue and which I will not elaborate on. This is not why this book has been written, but bearing this knowledge in mind, I do hope that everyone who reads this will understand what motivates us.

So let us now get back into the court room. My issue was how fellow believers, in particular, would talk with such a lack of compassion about our fellow human beings who are in prison. Why do they see a need to unilaterally call for more severe punishments? At some unguarded moments, I also labelled inmates as a collective "butt of society" who represent everything that could be wrong in our country. But that is chitchat, personal emotion, and not a public opinion. And so that became my challenge: to provide input for a truly Christian opinion. I dare to say that, ultimately, this was achieved with the term *merciful justice* in which the cornerstone of the term is justice. All too frequently justice is explained with a unilateral focus on the past. This and that happened, and so we must respond in such and such manner. One often hears comments like 'this punishment is much too light', or 'he's only getting seven years in prison, but the victim is scarred for life'. However, in Christian theology, jus-



tice focuses not just the past but also on the future, a future defined by the element of mercy. This is what makes the Christian faith unique, while at the same time it can also appear as a 'stumbling-stone'. Apparently, not every Christian can draw the consequences from their own profession of faith, that every person is a sinner whose future is a result of the grace of God's mercy. Or to zoom in further: I have received mercy, but I cannot find it in me to extend the possibility of mercy to others.

## Calvin and human dignity

One of the books that helped me tremendously with the development of the term merciful justice, is the book '*God, mens en medemens*', (*God, man and fellow man*) written by dr. John van Eck and presents a view of humanity according to Calvinist theology. In 1982, when 'my number for military service came up', he was my army chaplain and following my military service, we remained in touch. John is a scholar but his view on the Christian faith is uncomplicated with both of his feet firmly on the ground. This made our discussions both fertile and inspiring. In the book, he quotes Calvin in regard to the consequence of 'living by faith' when it comes to accepting forgiveness and forgiving others. Every argument as to why we should not show forgiveness is unmasked. The decisive argument for Calvin is that all people are created in God's image. This needs to be emphasized because it means that life is all about human dignity, not just because we are people, but because God created us. For those Christians who think that the system has failed them or who have been hurt so badly that they cannot forgive, he asks whether they realise how much it cost Jesus Christ to forgive *them*. During lectures I have given over the years, I regularly used quotes from his book. After all, Calvin is a witness who is beyond all doubt.

*'He deserved something else from you – you would say. But what did the Lord deserve? (...) that we are not to reflect on the wickedness of men but to look to the image of God in them. An image that covers and obliterates their faults, which allures us by its beauty and dignity, to love and embrace them.'*

John Calvin

## Theological Test

Some years later, in the summer of 2013, I met with professor W.H. Velema for a cup of tea. He is a respected theologian and from early on, he lent his name as recommendation for the very first activities organised by PF The Netherlands. As I explained the term merciful justice to him and was curious to know his opinion. Although I

thought it was a valuable and easily communicated term, I had never actually tested it theologically. ‘Man, it is splendid’, he said delightedly. Then he inquired about the progress we were making and offered further encouragement. Near the end of our conversation on his sunny balcony in Apeldoorn, he spontaneously said ‘Let’s end with a prayer.’ These are the moments that stay with one for a long time. Simple, heart-felt, and encouraging. Such moments stimulate one to keep going.

During the preparations for this book, I also put the term before Professor Bram van de Beek, another erudite theologian. Though he is less widely accepted within our ‘community’ because of certain theological viewpoints, there is something that I and many others who read his books share in that he always stimulates us to think. One certainly doesn’t have to agree with someone like him wholeheartedly in order to appreciate him. In any case, he also thought the term merciful justice to be rather inspired. Even more so, as Van de Beek says, ‘justice cannot function without mercy.’

### Dealing with Criminality

Let me go back to our work. My colleagues (amongst whom I certainly count the volunteers as well!) and I deal with the horrible aspects of crime on a daily basis. It is something we never get used to because these crimes are too serious and sometimes even contemptible. Consequently, there is always the risk of placing perpetrators and

*If only one begins  
the confusion must be untangled  
the order of divide and rule  
in which the weak succumb*

*where only one begins  
to share and serve  
reciprocity can be found  
to share in the weakness of the other  
and to serve one another so  
that there are no more weak  
no more blacks and whites  
but only people*

*Inge Lievaart  
[Freely translated] from ‘Collected Poems’*

the victims, and others, on opposite ends of the spectrum. When that happens, people get caught in a frame of mind from which there is no easy way out. When I see a TV programme that requests the help of the public to solve crimes, I often wonder 'what line of work am I in?' I find it difficult to simply accept humane statements like 'everybody deserves a second chance' and 'he once was a victim himself', or any of the other similar reasons or excuses. That leaves me with a conundrum and the concept of merciful justice is helpful for it never negates the tough and distressing reality of the suffering of victims and the injustice they have to cope with. We are not to judge, that is up to the judges. With this in the back of our minds, we can do our work openly and joyfully: visiting inmates to see how we can help them change their lives. Or as Willem den Hertog used to say: 'The judge deals with the case, we are here for the soul'.

## Works of Mercy

In the Christian tradition, visiting prisoners is one of the works of mercy. The Protestants know of six works that come straight from Matthew 25. They are to feed the hungry; to give water to the thirsty; to shelter strangers; to clothe the naked; to visit the sick; and finally, to visit the imprisoned. The Roman Catholic church added a seventh work of mercy, which is to bury the dead.

Caring for prisoners is a work of mercy and it means that the other person is the focus. He or she is the person in need, finding themselves in circumstances that are not part of living a good human life. The 'Commissioner' for these works – if I may call him that – is Jesus Christ himself. And He places this work of mercy in the context of the last judgement. He who has not been merciful, will not receive mercy from Him. He who has been merciful, will be welcomed into eternal life. The merciful will be at His right hand and they are counted as righteous. Jesus literally says that these works of mercy are done to Him. 'I was imprisoned and you visited Me.' When we visit inmates, we basically see two dimensions. First of all, we see the person, who may be marked by criminality. By the way, it still affects me when a person's criminal career can be seen in their eyes and face, so to speak. I don't believe that there is a single person who dreams of a life of crime from the start. People can covet money which is the root of all evil and can certainly lead to criminal behaviour. But a career in crime as a vocation? No, I refuse to believe in that. I have spoken with too many inmates to do so. Crime does not bring happiness, perhaps some short-lived excitement, at most, but ultimately it brings a lot of pain and hardship, for the offender and most certainly for the victims. There are many different circumstances contributing to criminality. Sometimes, a person is brought up in an environment, and they don't know any better. On page 160, there is a summary of the poignant life story of Willem. The conversation I had with him left an indelible impression making me feel sad and powerless. There is so much evil in this world. As with so many others, it had nothing to do with a bad upbringing or 'the wrong crowd', but being in a situation

where the temptation got the best of him. This is something one often sees in drug-related crimes. Making money fast, to cover business losses and save the company, to get a better life in a bigger house, a new car, luxurious holidays, branded clothing for the children. You name it. These are not necessarily the wrong things to desire, but they can lead to the wrong means to acquire them. No matter the reason someone decides to commit a crime, a basic assumption is that it is a matter of personal responsibility. Personal history is no excuse for wrong behaviour. To abandon a sense of human responsibility, means that anything goes. When that happens, crime is the inevitable result and becomes 'bad luck', for the victims. Without personal responsibility there is no basis for punishment and confronting people with their behaviour. The end result is cover up and finding excuses reflected in statements like 'it's such a sad situation', and 'so sorry you had to deal with this', and 'are you okay?'

So, first of all, we see the inmate as a human being. A human being who did not take responsibility and, therefore, is at fault. But in the light of Matthew 25, we also see God behind that inmate. After all, Jesus identifies Himself with the person in need because that person was created in God's image. While we see every human being as being created by God this doesn't always make it easier. It gives us guidance, especially when we are shaken to the core by everything we see and hear. This can happen when the inmates themselves talk about what they did. And just to emphasise this - we don't actively ask about their history when they register with us. In addition, all of the things one reads in the newspapers or sees on television, also have an impact. We are not immune to evil and the suffering of the victims. On the contrary! I was moved by the column of my colleague Alice (a volunteer) who talks explicitly about victims and merciful justice. I thought it was beautiful. All the consequences and feelings involved with crime and victims definitely have an impact on us. We are not in some isolation cell where nothing and no one can touch us. No, we are firmly planted in the mud of misery and the suction power of evil. But we believe in restoration and rehabilitation, because God is the Merciful One!

## Identifying with Inmates

Another explicit source from the Bible is Hebrews 13:3. Here, Paul instructs believers "to remember those in prison, as if you were in prison together with them." So, this is about identifying with the imprisoned. It has been suggested that this text is only about those who are imprisoned because of the faith. While that may be the immediate thing he has in mind, it must be remembered that Paul also writes that we should do good to all people, and especially to those who share our faith. Even so, I think that the early Christians dealt with this pragmatically. They followed Paul's instructions by visiting prisoners to care for their needs by, for example, providing them with food and water. I once read a striking example in a beautiful book on the history of the Church, which was given to me by Lea Jupon my graduation in Leiden in 1993.

Emperor Licinius forbade Christians from showing kindness to prisoners by offering them food' and being merciful toward those who were wasting in prison. Licinius was the last pagan emperor before Constantine became emperor in 325 AD. He was particularly affronted by the conversion of prisoners to Christianity. He felt that only he as emperor should receive divine glorification, and so he forbade the care of prisoners. Fortunately, we live in different times, with better circumstances in prison and without the same degree of arbitrary demands. Nevertheless, it is helpful to understand the past in order to appreciate the freedom we have compared to those days. At the same time, it can help one be alert and sensitive to developments in today's culture in which excessive individualisation with all the corresponding entitlements and rights may result in diminishing respect for others and a weakening in social cohesion. Respect for authority is under pressure, and is attested to by prison wardens with many years of experience. In this respect, the situation and social climate inside correctional institutions are a magnified indication of the condition of general.



*Henk Willem van Dorp and Arie van den Hurk (r) – important support and advice for Prison Fellowship The Netherlands*

## CHAPTER 2.

# The First Few Years

Let me first clear up a possible misunderstanding: I am not the founding father of what is now PF The Netherlands. I started working for Prison Fellowship on 1 September 1995 and the organisation, however, had been established in 1993. The deed of incorporation shows the name Prison Fellowship Nederland. I first heard of the name when I saw the notification of its foundation in the *Reformatorsch Dagblad* (*Christian newspaper*). At that time, I was still employed by the Court of Appeal in The Hague where I was dealing with ‘severe cases’ every day. The files that landed on my desk generally contained some information about the defendant’s life, and to put it mildly, and often that information was not very positive. Broken homes, the wrong friends, unfinished education; in short, bad seed yields bad behaviour and grows from bad to worse. More and more, I came to the realization that criminal law alone will never be able to solve the problem of crime. Stone walls and iron bars only increase the probability of hardening a person instead of producing or stimulating change.

Apparently, I was the first legal expert to give Prison Fellowship Nederland a call, for I was quickly invited to come and explain the criminal justice system to a handful of volunteers who had already joined the organisation. After some time, I was asked to become a member of the Board which had a predominantly evangelical-charismatic profile. For the organization’s public profile and credibility with the Justice department – especially with the prison chaplaincy – it would be very conducive to have someone from the established churches on the Board’. And with my joining the Board that was now the case. I quickly noticed that the Board meetings did not go smoothly. There was a lot of tension between the Board and the way the organization conducted its activities and this made me uncomfortable. Soon thereafter, the Director, at the time, symbolically slammed the door by handing in his resignation.

### Calling?

Soon after his resignation, the Board asked it if I would be willing to manage the restructuring of the organisation. Before I write about that, and in light of my experiences over the past years, I would like to share a personal story. Over the years, I regularly met other people who, like me had questions about their calling. When I found the courage to share those questions during lectures, I explained that I also had not heard a voice from Heaven or received specific Bible texts, but that I had

come across a beautiful quotation that put everything in perspective. This struck a chord with many people who would come up to me after the lecture to speak with me further. Thus, it is that I make this small detour and, by the way, I am going to keep the quotation I mentioned for the end of this chapter.

## **Winding Roads to my Destination**

Roads that seem winding can ultimately lead onto a straight road. As a child, I wanted to become a lorry driver. I spent many hours spotting lorries on the A16 near my parents' home in Dordrecht. In 1982, a day after receiving my high school diploma, I entered the military service and within a month, I had my HGV driving licence. After my mandatory military service, I could stay in the army as a 'light lorry driver'. It was a bitter pill to swallow when they told me that I was assigned to the personnel transport department which meant that I had to wear a suit and chauffeur the General in a luxury limousine. Even so, it turned out to become a beautiful and fruitful period in my career. I was constantly on the road, a nice metaphor for our lives, and in that role, one thing was certain: I had to be 'standing ready' at any time, but never knew what time I would be finished, that always was a surprise. Meetings would drag on, receptions were much more sociable than expected, and schedules were never met during exercises at home and abroad. To make a long story short: I earned a diploma in 'having patience'. All of this happened before we had mobile phones, something the younger generation can hardly imagine. As my appointment with the Defence department was temporary – four years with a maximum extension to eight – they offered attractive study programmes. I decided to take full advantage of this because I wanted to become an officer, and although I earned my diploma, I didn't make it through the selection process. 'A lack of practical and technical insights', was the reason. It was time for me to use heavy artillery so in 1987 I enrolled at Leiden University to study Law. I was 24 years old and had just managed to obtain the so-called "colloquium doctum," a special and strict admission procedure for applicants who are not admissible to an academic course based on their prior education. From the very beginning, I knew that I wanted to specialise in criminal law. Don't ask me to explain why, it is just what my heart told me, and there is nothing criminal about that! The breeding ground for my interest may well lie in the sermons on guilt and reconciliation that I heard as a boy in the Singelchurch in Dordrecht. Walking to church on twice each Sunday, holding my father's hand was part of my life of which I have very fond and grateful memories. The walks were a feast of familiarity and security and I considered following my father's advice to become a notary of civil law. But when it became clear that the studies were not offered as an evening programme, I chose criminal law instead. Five and a half years later, I was attained the degree, Master of Laws. The big question, of course, is whether you have actually mastered the laws, as General Van Daal jokingly and poignantly said. He was a lawyer and in the military I chauffeured him around many times. He stimulated me and gave me all the time



and space I needed for my studies. He allowed me, for instance, to drive from The Hague to Delft during working hours so that I could follow lectures in Reformational Philosophy by Professor Egbert Schuurman. Reflecting on my life, I see people and moments that are links in my 'chain of life'.

### **'Yes', I'm Taking the Plunge**

Then, when I was asked to join the Board of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands, I had to overcome the serious consideration that they had no funds and were not able to offer a salary. When one has three young children and no bottomless piggy bank, the options are limited. The invitation came during the time that my contract with the Court of Appeal ended. Prior to that, I had served Her Majesty as a professional soldier for eight years. This meant that my years as a civil servant counted heavily and, based on that, I was eligible to receive a transitional benefit payment. It certainly wasn't much. Actually, it was not enough to provide for our family. Nevertheless, my wife Lea and I felt audacious enough to say 'yes', and so, on 1 September 1995, I signed a contract with Prison Fellowship The Netherlands for the unpaid position. I would receive a reimbursement for costs, but only if there were funds available. For my part, I also stipulated a deadline of 1 January 1997; if, by that time, the organisation had not been able to develop steady activities and funding, I would see it as a sign that this was not going to be my long-term career. The first year – converted from guilders which we still had at the time – the Fellowship received 8,000 euros. In a manner of speaking, this was just enough to pay for stamps and the phone bill. Financially, these were lean times, but spiritually extremely educational.

### **More Prisons but Closed Doors**

It is important to understand that, in those days, the prison system had virtually no policy governing volunteer work. Volunteers were hardly in the picture. One thing the system did need was a higher cell capacity and via the 'Cap '96' plan, additional prisons were built rapidly, including in my hometown Zoetermeer. This resulted in some response including from the Reformed Morgenstergemeente, which was my home church. Rev. J. Batelaan, a former prison pastor was invited to give a lecture. After meeting with him I asked him to become an adviser with Prison Fellowship The Netherlands and despite his advanced age, he gladly accepted. In a similar way, I continued talking with people who I thought: 'They can help us move on'. Among my 'victims' was Henk Willem van Dorp, one of our local entrepreneurs. I say this jokingly, because he was always be ready to listen and give advice whenever his schedule allowed. But I also had to be careful not to stalk people. I remember, for instance, that I quite literally bumped into Henk in the car park of a supermarket. He was just loading his groceries into his sleek BMW when I came racing by on my bike. There was no way of avoiding him and naturally, I grabbed the opportunity – with the at-

titude of a police officer catching a perpetrator red-handed – to ask him ‘for a small favour’. Afterwards I thought, ‘Solomon, you are right, there is a time and place for everything under heaven.’ There is a time to talk and a time just to wave and move on. By the way, I don’t think that anyone has held this incident against me and I’m grateful for Henk Willem’s advice and financial support for various projects.

## International Stepping Stone

In September 1995, I was full of confidence and had enthusiastically started with the job of breathing life into Prison Fellowship The Netherlands. It was my good fortune during this time that Ron Nikkel, CEO of Prison Fellowship International (PFI) invited me to the triennial PFI Convocation in Washington DC. PFI generously covered all the costs and the conference included participants from all parts of the world. Prior to the Convocation itself there was a training week for ‘young leaders’. My roommate, who was of the same age as I, was Pawel Wojtka, a prison chaplain from Poland. Some years later he became the head of chaplaincy in Poland. We talked about our work and faith until the early hours. For me, it was a first introduction to this unique PFI network and it made a huge impression on me. What struck me particularly was the happiness and simplicity of the participants from Africa and Latin America. Compared to our standards, they had limited means but their trust and faith seemed all the greater. In regard to Believe in Restoration – our motto in PF The Netherlands – one had to be blind not to recognise ex-inmates. The physical signs of a criminal past were often visible as silent witness, while at the same time, their faces radiated with gratitude and expectation. They happily and candidly witnessed to finding their way out of a life in crime ‘by God’s grace’. Some of them literally went from the dungeon to the church, like Avo Uprus from Estonia, a former prisoner who became the pastor of a Lutheran congregation in Tallinn, and even ended up as a Member of Parliament later on.

Not many people may know that PFI is the fruitful result of a crime. During the American Watergate Scandal of the early 1970s, Chuck Colson was the chief legal adviser of then President, Richard Nixon. Colson’s involvement in the scandal resulted in him being sentenced to prison after being found guilty on charges of obstructing justice. When he finished his time in prison he returned to public attention and championed the practical and mental needs of prisoners. This led to the foundation of the Prison Fellowship in America and, later, also PFI. Today, PFI has about 120 member organisations around the world with around 50,000 volunteers working actively in prisons. By the way, every member is a hundred percent independent when it comes to its policy, execution, and funding. PFI is a unique network of knowledge and experience, and of communal and mutual inspiration. All members constitute their activities on the Bible and subscribe to the Nicene creed. In organisational structure, background, and work method there is wide variety among the members. From that experience I developed wonderful contacts and friendships with colleagues from



*PFI conference in Canada: Heat and power failure; relaxed continuation on the corridor*

almost all Christian traditions including Roman Catholic, the Eastern Orthodox Church, to Lutheran and charismatic-evangelical congregations.

These were two hugely inspiring weeks. It was amazing to hear so many stories from people from around the world who visited prisons all the time. While the input that I could offer was very limited, apart from the fact that, as a legal expert, I had just made the move to an organisation that was still barely more than ‘an idea’. Of course, I received loads of blessings and good wishes. In 2000 Chuck Colson, a lawyer himself, would say to me during a working visit to The Netherlands: ‘Hans, we took the best step because we are now lawyers for Christ’.

In the following years, my involvement with PFI increased with thanks largely to Ivan Sotirov, a former Bulgarian diplomat who became PFI’s Director in Europe. We clicked, and as he observed the developments within PF The Netherlands, he wanted to see the same things develop with other members. So, he ‘seized’ me with political politeness and asked me to visit fellow organisations from time to time. Later on, his initiative was adopted and formalised by PFI worldwide. In 2011, my European colleagues elected me as their chairman and I often joked that I ‘was the boss in Europe who had no power whatsoever’. This was how it was, and I was fine with it because, to quote

Herman Wijffels, I'm more interested in influence than in power. In all modesty, I cannot deny that people listened to me during PFI meetings. This was not entirely self-evident as the Dutch are known for their down-to-earth attitude. Whenever we were making introductions, I would tell people that I was living and working almost seven metres below sea level which means that we have to be very practical specially to ensure that the water is carried off properly. This introduction always worked well. And yes, 'the Dutch' are also known for their entrepreneurship. I would meet people from everywhere who would know 'that tiny country' and I always laughed when they said that they knew Holland, because 'it's a part of Amsterdam, isn't it?'



*Fltr Kees van der Linden, Hans Barendrecht, Ivan Sotirov. P.S. Notice the clock and read Wouter Boogaard's reaction on page 154*

After 2014, when PF The Netherlands hosted a European conference, the close cooperation between PFI and the national partners was more or less reduced to a minimal level. Because of decreasing funds PFI needed to restructure and the system of regional representation and convening of large regional and international meetings became a thing of the past.



*Avo Üprus (r), from criminal to pastor*

## Just Begin

And so, I returned home after that wonderful first congress in 1995 and landed again with both feet on the ground in the Netherlands. Everything seemed to be settled for inmates, we had no money to spend, and none of the prisons had opened its doors to us. I often call this period my 'hangover period'. After the international intoxication, I was thrown back into sober reality. At the same time, I thought: it may all make sense on paper, but when eight out of ten inmates who leave prison today end up back in prison after five years, something is wrong. Which would also be my conclusion if it had been 'only' five out of ten. To me it was clear that there was some sort of need and that it was very practical: visits to inmates and after-care which, for many different reasons including some confusion over roles, had not been done. Visiting inmates turned out to be a brilliant move. Slowly but surely, fuelled by hope, something began to grow and it did require a lot of difficult networking. Within the Church and the prison system, and everything in between, that is what I did to acquire the necessary contacts.

## First Fundraising Campaign

My first fundraising campaign was with Zoetermeer entrepreneurs who I knew to be active Christians or who were businesses like funeral organizations that conducted business activities related to the churches. The project was called, 'Gift and Fruit', inspired by Philippians 4:17. For me, it was not just about 'cold' hard cash (the

## First fundraising campaign Gift and Fruit

Request: help us building up our organisation by enabling us to address 2,200 churches for support

BUDGET		
addresses/labels	f	500.00
editing letter	f	200.00
paper	f	385.00
brochures	f	750.00
envelopes	f	390.00
Sub-total	f	2,225.00
VAT (17.5%)	f	389.38
Postage	f	1,748.00
Total	f	4,362.38

gift), but also about the ‘warm’ heart of charity (the fruit). I explained that the organisation was hoping to receive an amount of 4,300 guilders, which we needed in order to reach out to over 2,200 churches for support.

With contributions from the churches, we would then be able to help the prisoners. The gift proved to be limited although I cannot say it was due to any “cold hearts”. I had yet to learn that entrepreneurs are swamped with many similar requests and that caring for prisoners does not immediately warm their hearts and, last but not least, for the very simple reason that to be unknown is to be unloved.

## **Practising Patience**

I don’t know how, but for some reason I began thinking that instead of shooting blanks I needed to use live ammunition. A few months before this, I had invited Willem den Hertog to speak to the youth in our church. Willem had a measure of national renown because of the sale of his ice cream factory. He had produced the best ice cream, ‘made of full-fat milk and based on a simple recipe he happened to come across in a small Belgian restaurant’. He reached the point where he had had enough of the continuous cycle of investing, repayments, and reinvesting. He had a warm heart for ‘God and his fellow humans’ and so it was done: he sold his ice cream empire and the millions he earned from the sale were divided between his private life and his charity organisation, Foundation Rentmeester. Willem visited our church to speak to our youth group, about riches and entrepreneurship, and most of all about the pitfalls one encounters in the process and the danger of losing God in one’s life. During the break, I told Willem about our work and my ideas for getting it off the ground. I was delighted that he was more than politely interested because he had just had his first prison experience. A prison pastor in Rotterdam had invited him to explain to a group of white-collar criminals how to turn a nickel into a dime, in an honest way of course! Willem had to work hard to earn his wealth and if not for a stroke of good luck ‘as a young lad of sixteen, seventeen years old’, he would have ended up on the wrong side of the law himself. But thanks to the help of good people and God’s mercy, his life turned out well, with an ice-cold quality product as one of its rewards.

I thought that doing business with Willem would move forward quickly but my patience was sorely tested after all. His secretary, André Moolenaar, kept me at arm’s length just like a professional prison warden. When I called again in the autumn of 1995 to say that the PFI’s President Ron Nikkel would come for a visit, I thought that it would be a good excuse to arrange a meeting. Unfortunately, no such luck. He had no time, and so in mid-September, I tried again. ‘During this particular evening in Zoetermeer, Mr Den Hertog indicated that he was interested in my plans and that he certainly wanted to continue our conversations, and...’ ‘I’m sorry, Mr Barendrecht, but I have to disappoint you. Mr Den Hertog is recovering from an operation. Perhaps you can call again in January. But good luck with your work.’ Messages like this made

me feel like I was being put in an isolation cell, but fortunately I was not alone. My wife wasn't fazed by it at all and with three lively young children saw the sunny side in everything. And so I picked myself up and moved on. Soon enough, it was January 1996. On 8 January I was told that I would be welcome on 3 September. Another bitter pill to swallow. A year had passed and I had made no progress. On the evening of 29 August, Willem called me in person. 'I have some medical treatment planned on the 3 September, so let's meet on 17 September at my office in Dirksland.' Naturally, I expressed my understanding and sincere hopes that the treatment would provide the relief he needed. When the day finally came, I found myself in the stately offices of the 'king of ice creams' on a Tuesday morning. Following our meeting things began moving quickly and I could sense us moving forward. Willem was enthusiastic about my diaconal vision, which I had developed after completing an inventory of what the Dutch prisons offered. Compared to, prisons in Latin America and Africa, for example that really is a lot because there they generally have no prison chaplaincy or rehabilitation system, and only very limited help and support, in general. To put it simply, diaconate is the caring hands and feet of the Christian faith. The care is mainly of a practical nature. Willem, who was already visiting prisons regularly to conduct Bible studies, explained that he would probably not continue with his plans to establish a foundation for work integration of prisoners. Rather, he intended to discuss a collaboration with us with his Board. Later that year, Prison Fellowship The Netherlands received an encouraging gift of 5,000 guilders from the Foundation Rentmeester. The year of waiting was handsomely rewarded and there was more to come!

## A Second Entrepreneur

One of the good (business) colleagues of Willem was Aad de Boo. Willem advised me to let Aad know what I was doing and to ask him if he wanted to get involved. On 30 October 1996, I wrote Aad de Boo a two-page letter with two appendices. Just one week later I received his reply: 'I have a positive viewpoint on your request. What I would like to see are the following two things: 1) insight into your finances, and 2) your step-by-step plan for the future. If it looks good, I may want to invest 25,000 guilders in Prison Fellowship The Netherlands. What you actually need as well, are some additional people who are willing to offer a five-year guarantee. Let me call Willem den Hertog. I'll be in touch. 'Less than two months after my wonderful talk with Willem den Hertog, the conversation with Aad de Boo became the second heavenly encouragement. 'Hang in there, you will be provided for.' On 5 December, Aad de Boo came to my house in person. My office was a small room in the attic. We had put the children in one room because 'Daddy needed to work.'" When I close my eyes, I can still see it



*Aad de Boo*



*The room in the attic*

happening. Aad de Boo was a gentleman, a man of few words, to the point, and amiable. He had a sharp business mind yet with a warm, Christian heart. We discussed my plans for 1997 consisting of four core objectives. First of all, to create widespread public awareness; second, to recruit and train 140 new volunteers; third, to explain our purpose to churches and church organisations; and finally, to increase and expand the services and support we could be offering. To implement this plan, we had also submitted applications to Foundation Rotterdam and the Probation Service. Then came this exceptionally historic moment. Aad de Boo picked up my wood-coloured telephone and called Willem den Hertog. 'Willem, about Hans' plans that we talked about, you know, I want us all to go to Jan. I take it that you want to come along? Good! I'll let you know.' 'Hi Jan, this is Aad de Boo. How are you? Everything okay? Good! Listen, Jan, I'm sitting here with Hans Barendrecht who is working out wonderful plans to help inmates. Willem den Hertog and I believe that we should help him, but we need a third man. I assume that we are welcome to drop by? That's great, Jan! Yes, Willem, Hans and I will come to you in Hilversum, and we'll see each other on 24 December.'

Before that meeting took place, we received additional good news. Foundation Rotterdam granted us 15,000 Dutch guilders for 1997. In addition to this, the Fund introduced me to a new way of fundraising that I didn't know of: a matching gift challenge during the period from 1 November 1996 up to 30 April 1997 up to a maximum amount of 15,000 guilders on the amount already granted. In those days, these



were huge amounts, although I must in all honesty confess that the application had been for ten times that amount! Reflecting on all that happened, I can say that we were in dire straits and that our fundraising experience was still in its infancy.

## **Patience Rewarded**

Then came the meeting of Tuesday 24 December 1996. Willem den Hertog, Aad de Boo and I met up at the Barbizon hotel in Rotterdam. It was a very cold day. It had been freezing and there was a cloudless sky. The sun was shining brightly. And that is exactly how the day was going to end. A week before my deadline, I sat down with three successful businessmen who had known each other for years. For me, it was going to be all or nothing. Quitting or moving on, and it soon became clear to me that they were not going to leave the table before a decision had been made. That decision was certainly in my favour. They decided to back Prison Fellowship The Netherlands for a joint amount of 40,000 guilders. I was intensely grateful. My prayers had been heard and the strategy had panned out well. It was all a blessing from God. People, where are you? Well, you find yourself in a place where you may share in God's compassion, as my father used to say.

## **Confession and Basic Contemplation**

There were several people who were bold enough to admit that they thought my wife and I 'had made a crazy move'. At the same time, I was bold enough to put their minds at ease by offering a generous absolution for their small, sinful thoughts. Basically, they were absolutely right but, as I used to say, when you know how far you are able to go it's not that crazy at all. I had a deadline and I always kept my eyes on that deadline. "When things turn out as you had hope will, it brings forth gratitude and trust". My father once painted those words on a large piece of wood that he had put up on the wall of his potato shop in Sliedrecht. As a teenager, I spent many happy Saturdays there, helping him out. It took years before I learned to understand those words as a truth in life.

## **Step by Step**

Another lesson I learned during those first few years is this: "step by step, through focus and discipline." I applied this then and I am still learning this now as, by nature, I have an activist profile. My thoughts seldom stop. Thinking, contemplating, and reflecting are a continuous movement. Something that helped me was a TV interview with Henri Nouwen during which he mentioned that he would regularly go to the circus, especially to watch the trapeze acrobats. When they are not a hundred percent focused on their moves, it will go wrong, guaranteed. This gave me the focus and boldness not to accept repeated requests to join prestigious law firms. On one occasion, between other activities, I had helped out with preparing a case. It had been a

fun job and the legal profession appealed to me, but it didn't feel right. I listened to my heart that said: continue on this road and make sure that you never have to ask yourself the question: what if you had continued a while?

## Clear Calling

To conclude this chapter, I would like to fulfil my promise with the beautiful quote I mentioned earlier. During all the years that I have been busy, many people said that my work must surely be my calling. It always made me feel a bit embarrassed for I believed that a calling was something special, for special people. I had never heard a voice from heaven, although there had once been a text from the Bible that hit me like a rock and shattered all the doubts that I had about continuing. The text is quite short and not particularly spiritual. 'So Isaac settled in Gerar' (Genesis 26,6). There was a famine in the land and Isaac had thought of leaving. I saw a vacancy for a good job, and after this rock hit me, I threw away the advertisement. "Keep on," was the message. By the way – in 2017, during a campaigning day for Prison Fellowship by their youth organisation, a Reformed pastor told me that he had been invited to take up the pastorate of another congregation in 2013, and he found himself unable to make a decision. Then, on a Friday evening, he read an interview with me in the paper, and this was the line that prompted him to stay with his congregation. Apart from the amazing revenue of the campaigning youngsters – which was no less than 30,000 euros – this was 'meaningful,' a welcome contribution and a lesson in relaxed boldness.

Only seven years after I had pledged myself to this job, I found this quote that enabled me to feel free enough to confess that I was following a calling. On 26 March 2002, I was reading *Meditatief leven* [Meditative life] by Dr Van Brummelen. He writes the following: 'We often find our calling in the form of a profound desire for this or that. A persistent, holy stimulus that allows you to give yourself entirely to something or another. This desire motivates to the greatest effort. Whoever examines himself and accepts his inner calling by listening faithfully to the God in his life, receives a true freedom to work with joy and do the job designated to him.' His pastoral advice is to do your daily job 'in silent faithfulness and obedience' and to leave the outcome to 'our Maker' by prayer. This thin booklet is still worth millions to me.

## CHAPTER 3

# Justice and Politics

Six hundred and fifty metres separate the Dutch House of Representatives and the Ministry of Security and Justice in the centre of The Hague. One can walk between the two in seven minutes by a nice route via the Korte Poten and Plein. It is a sort of life-like game of Monopoly, which in reality is not so different. The prison system is scrutinised by the political parties and incidents such as escapes, are broadly discussed at the Binnenhof, providing newspapers and talk shows with great headlines. This is not surprising of course, as criminality on the one hand and public security are of interest to us all. In short, everyone strives for optimal well-being. Crime is not part of that for it is a disturbing factor.

### Entering a Prison

In the meantime, the prison system has become our work field. One cannot enter a jail if one is not welcome. It's very simple. You must really be welcome, you must have a reason for being there and you need to be trusted. As I discovered over the years, these things cannot be emphasised enough. People often tend to think that 'good intentions' are enough. 'I want to be there for the inmates, I want to visit them, they are lonely, and their mothers are so worried that they have asked us several times already, etc.' So, you understand, there are many good reasons to visit inmates. But to get in – contrary to the notion that 'many roads lead to Rome' – there is only one way in. I vividly remember one poignant occasion when two dedicated fellow Christians from a church in the Randstad area travelled south to visit their fallen fellow Christian in the prison of Maastricht. They were certainly not inexperienced when it came to visiting other types of institutions. Hospitals, for example, have visiting hours, yet simply wearing a black suit seems to be an easy way to "talk" your way in. Well, this proves to be different with a correctional institution. One may have a trustworthy face, but the doors to the 'heavy guys' just don't open automatically. A tough lesson. The correct route would have been an invitation from the inmate, preferably in collaboration with the prison pastor, because this always offers more opportunities for a confidential meeting at an appropriate time. Please take my free advice: call Prison Fellowship The Netherlands; we know the rules and the ways, and we gladly help you along.



*Joop de Goede, 1998, Director of the Arnhem Correctional Institution 'De Berg'*

## Lobby

I always spent a lot of time making contact with politicians and the Ministry of Justice, right from the start. Just to be sure: I use the term Ministry of Justice for the ministry itself and the prisons and the TBS clinics (clinics for those placed under hospital orders). For the sake of readability, I disregard the name changes of the Ministry of Security and Justice, and vice versa. 'What's in a name', I think, not to mention the ensuing costs. But whatever, it was quite exciting to enter a world that I had only read about in the papers. After my previous job with the Court of Appeal, the Ministry of Justice was not entirely new to me, but a criminal case on my desk and talking privately, face to face with an inmate in prison is an entirely different thing. As I mentioned before, the activities that volunteers did within the prison system basically had no status. That changed with the implementation of the so-called NJO accreditation (*Independent NGO's on Prison work*). Volunteer organisations like PFN could apply for accreditation that enabled them to visit inmates outside the regular visiting hours. Prison Fellowship The Netherlands was granted that accreditation. Before then, it was essential to have contacts who would arrange for the necessary introductions inside a prison. Despite the fact that I did not receive a salary, my function was that of Director, so I just took the plunge and introduced myself and our organisation to prison directors. Three of them who have supported us from the word go were Manon Wijbenga, Cees Boeij, and Joop de Goede.

Manon was the Director of the brand-new correctional institution in Zoetermeer. She liked what we were trying to set up. One of her main motivations was 'stimulating the good atmosphere inside a prison'. She even allowed us to use one of the private legal counsel rooms so she was far ahead of her time. I also met Cees Boeij, it would have been surprising had I missed him. Cees was a striking figure, both in the prison system and thanks to his persona. He was somewhat larger in size, with a ludic appearance, and loved a good cigar. He had an open mind to the outside world and we clicked instantly. He told me that in his view, it would not be easy for Prison Fellowship 'to get inside their prisons', due to our Christian identity. 'It's laying it on rather thick, Hans', said Cees. 'Personally, I don't mind, you know, but well.' Even so, he helped us in many ways and managed to include me in some interesting conferences. I'm still talking about the early years, by the way. I met Cees in early 1996. A year later, he agreed to act as a reference for us with the foundation Het R.C. Maagdenhuis. We had submitted an application for financial support and they had some additional questions.

## Good Joop

A second reference for that application was Joop de Goede who I see as being a gift from God. Joop was already a highly experienced leader and a very wise man who was open for new things. Joop knew who to contact, where to go, and he gave me a

lot of great advice. I travelled often to the old prison in Arnhem to meet with Joop. Eventually he moved on to Middelburg and then in 2003 he retired from the prison in Dordrecht. We were initially introduced to each other by Willem den Hertog while Joop was in the process of establishing a foundation, *Foundation Ontmoeting*, focussed on the reemployment of prisoners. Our role in that would be to utilize the efforts of volunteers to increase the possibilities for prisoners to retain employment. The foundation had located a nice reception and training centre in Epe, with a plan for us to develop a Penitentiary Programme together. At the time this did not prove to be feasible although eventually the foundation went on to develop a great programme on its own. Willem decided to incorporate his foundation with Prison Fellowship and we moved on with Joop.

### **‘The One-percent Budget’**

One of the initiatives that Joop worked hard on was the relationship with Rehabilitation services. They had a so-called ‘one-percent budget’ allocation for volunteer organisations that I had been unable to secure for Prison Fellowship The Netherlands. This avenue was impenetrable and Joop felt sorry for us. It frustrated him, and both he and his colleagues were bothered by the ‘formal attitude’ of the Board responsible for allocating the funds. On one occasion we even approached Den Bosch together to explain the activities of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands, but the organisation that was supposed to lead the movement towards change in human behaviour, itself had all the flexibility of an iron rod and showed itself repeatedly to be biased. However, Joop persevered. He contacted them again stating matter-of-factly, ‘I studied the file and I get the impression that Probation Service shows a real unwillingness to offer a grant to PF The Netherlands.’ ‘Well, that is putting it rather bluntly’, responded the person on the other side, ‘but it is nonetheless the case’. The main stumbling block was our identity which they labelled as the ‘evangelical factor’, based on information they had gleaned from the website of Prison Fellowship International. This organisation is rooted in America and can indeed convey the impression that evangelism is the main objective. The officials did not even accept the reference statements of Joop de Goede, their colleague who was a respected penitentiary professional. Joop was not of ‘our colour’ and was entirely impartial. What he saw was the significant need for good volunteer work in the prisons. Being a very down-to-earth person Joop observed that, ‘I’d rather see prisoners in church than in the pub, because when they get out, they have real choices to make. We are very good at coming up with answers to questions that are not relevant to the workplace. Former prisoners are not just victims of bad opportunities or other excuses, there is a lot of wonderful nonsense flying about, including more severe punishments. That’s all *bullshit* – and this is not a spelling mistake!’ Joop always chose the correct words – ‘as from the man in the street’, Joop would say.



*Correctional Institution Zoetermeer*

## **A Chance Grant**

Suddenly, we received our first grant from an unexpected source. By chance, – there is no such thing as chance for I can only see it in light of ‘the course of things. Persons, where are you? I believe in the hand of God even though the how, the why, and the what for questions often remain unanswered. That is fine. When it is something positive, it makes one grateful. When it is a setback, it makes one patient and dependent. It’s not just a lesson learned, but a matter of falling and picking yourself up again and working ‘by the sweat of your brow’. That is finding and knowing your place, as a person before God.

It was late 2002 and it was “The International Year of the Volunteer.” I happened to see a notification that the Ministry of Justice wanted to make a one-off grant to an organisation involved in good volunteer activities. The Ministry of Justice approached Joop as a reference and told me that this would be a good occasion for sharing his experiences with Prison Fellowship. He then went on to tell the Ministry of Justice that ‘he had positive experiences with us for many years and that we were not out to ‘convert people’. One of Joop’s keywords was ‘respect’ and he used that word saying, ‘they respect other convictions and beliefs. And when they are asked to testify as to why they do this work, then that is okay, of course for them to do so.’ A final issue that I should mention but about which I also want to be brief, is the ‘legacy’ that I inherited when I started with Prison Fellowship The Netherlands in 1995.

It haunted me for a long time and it popped up time and again like a jack-in-a-box. During 1993 and 1994, there had been an evangelistic approach with a focus on converting people. This was met with a strong resistance and consequently the question was raised with Joop de Goede. However soon after that conversation, the decision on our application was favourable. Although this was a one-off grant of specific value, the ensuing value of the recognition it gave us was invaluable. This felt so good! And yes, a history and reputation is something inmates know all about. The saying is surely true: trust is hard to gain but easy to lose. A few months later, Joop retired and I had gleaned a great deal of knowledge from Joop. For me, it was incredibly important to hear his views based on inside experience, that – and I quote Joop – ‘a liveable society must mainly be created by the people themselves.’ Joop believed that prisoners must be taken seriously. ‘They find themselves in an enforced situation and have few real choices that they can make, I cannot see any problem in receiving a little bit of kindness from a volunteer.’

At his retirement event, I wanted to show Joop my sincere gratitude for taking me on this journey of learning. I gave him a gift that I knew he would greatly appreciate: an icon that had been made by a Russian prisoner who gave it to me during a PFI trip to Russia in 1997. It had been given to me by a prisoner locked up in a dark cell with other prisoners at Butyrka prison in Moscow. It was the perfect gift for Joop.

### **Motto About Quality**

There is a quote from Joop that I have turned into a motto. ‘The annoying thing about De Goede (‘The Good’), is that it can always be done better.’ When he said this, he always smiled with a hint of self-mockery behind his curling moustache. My variation on this motto has become: ‘Quality organises its own opposition’. I still use it effectively, I believe.

*‘Every morning when I look in the mirror, I think:  
who am I that I’m allowed to shave this face.’*

*Joop de Goede*

### **Competency Profile as a Gift**

At Joop’s retirement party, Prison Fellowship The Netherlands was also presented with a wonderful gift. Joop introduced me to his colleague Ron Kloeken saying, ‘Let’s be honest, Ron, we definitely don’t know everything that goes on inside our institutions. We only ring the alarm bell when there is an incident.’ Ron, of course, had known this for a long time. He had been temporarily seconded to the headquarters of the earlier mentioned Dutch Custodial Institutions Agency (DJI), which is the agency operationally responsible within the prison system. At the time, he was managing the ‘competency management’ project and had some ‘space left’ to include



Prison Fellowship in developing a competency profile for judicial volunteer work. A competency profile describes the necessary knowledge and skills, and style of working. Ron told me that many directors and prison wardens were quite apprehensive about ‘all those volunteers hopping in and out of their prisons’ even though we had to comply with all kinds of requirements. Therefore, we had a common interest and within a month we received a visit from Willem van Essel who had been hired by the DJI to develop the profiles. I will explain more about that in Chapter 5.

## Cees Niessen

Slowly but surely, we were getting more and more involved within the field and our network was growing. But often when we had finally found our way inside a prison, a new ‘Pharaoh’ would take the throne, who had never heard of ‘Joseph’, and so the whole introduction process would start anew, and that took time, often a lot of time. Not all people are the same, and this is also the case with prison directors. It seems like it should be logical but it does require effort and good preparation. Right from the start, Joop de Goede – to mention him once again – instilled in me the importance of keeping track of everything I did. ‘It doesn’t what and how much you do, as long as you can demonstrate and explain it.’ I well remember meeting Cees Niessen who became the new Director in Zoetermeer in 2008. Cees was rather direct in his communications and, considering his hairstyle back then, if you were to meet him in one of the cell blocks, you would surely believe that he was one of the inmates. ‘I’m not a big fan of Christians who like to drop their message cheaply and quickly’, he said on 2 September during our first meeting. For a few seconds I thought: ‘Ouch, where is this heading?’ But soon enough we found common ground with each other in the area of ‘social responsibility’. ‘This refers to society and to the guys we have inside with us’, said Cees. He was brimming with ideas for improving the prison system and our conversation became increasingly animated. The pinnacle was my discovering that he knew Willem den Hertog from years back when he worked in a grocery store in Amsterdam. The way in which Willem used to advertise his ice cream was unforgettable. Needless to say, I offered to contact Willem to arrange a meeting. A year later, much the same thing happened with Henk Binnendijk. Cees wanted to talk to him ‘in the flesh’ which was a good thing for us as it allowed us to take a photo of Henk for a sponsorship campaign in the Evangelical Broadcasting magazine. It’s safe to say that Cees and I developed an open relationship over the years. It was never just about work but also about the deeper and more meaningful things in life. Cees has been one of the prison directors who always assured me: ‘Hans, the time will come that you will have the opportunity to build up De Compagnie (APAC – see p.64), I just know it.’ In the end, he was right.

With other prison directors and employees as well as with the DJI, I developed wonderful relationships and contacts. I cannot remember a single person bluntly showing me the door. Of course, some people have been more open to conversation



*Johan Groothedde (l) and Henk Binnendijk in jail for a sponsoring campaign*

than others, but that's only normal. With many, I felt they shared a certain drive and conviction as to how a good prison should function. That is no different today, even more so in view of the dynamics of the past years and the resulting pressure caused by prisons closing down. Every correctional institution wants to distinguish itself through excellent performance in some area. Sometimes, volunteer work absolutely fits that ambition.

### **Grant: Prison Fellowship The Netherlands**

Parallel to my 'search activities' to establish contact with people working directly with inmates, I also sought a way in to the DJI headquarters. As I mentioned earlier, the DJI is in charge of the overall prison system, making it one of the major stakeholders for Prison Fellowship The Netherlands. They can literally open and close doors for us. Every two years, we have to apply for NJO accreditation with the DJI and, fortunately DJI has also been responsible for granting subsidy funding since 2010. Their importance to us is clear and has only increased. Let me take this moment to explain a bit more about the grants. At some point, the Probation Service no longer distributed the annual budget for judicial volunteer work; the result of far-reaching cut-

backs in 2003 of no less than 25 percent. All in all, this amounted to budget cuts of thirty million from a total budget of 131 million. As far as I know, these cuts were never completely implemented. Nevertheless, it resulted in the Ministry of Justice assuming control over the budget for volunteer work, a change that ultimately turned out to be in our favour. It is not that the ministry contacted me spontaneously to find out if we were planning to submit an application. I really had to talk until I was blue in the face to get funding. For 2003 and 2004, we got zero subsidy and it wasn't until 2005 that we received our first grant of 16,000 euros. Their sense of humour was to call it a 'welcome grant'. Not officially, of course, but these were the words of the administrator who, with a certain degree of theatrics, gave me the good news. Our application had actually been for ten times that amount. The grant we received covered about three percent of our overall budget. I don't remember exactly what my reaction was, but probably something like 'Thank you so much for this wonderful welcome. At least, it shows that we are seen and trusted. At the same time, in light of the nature and scope of our activities for prisoners, TBS patients and their families, as well as the huge efforts we make every year to contribute to the objectives of the Ministry of Justice, paid by monies we receive from the public, I would have considered a slightly more substantial grant not disproportional. In any case, it gives us at least one item on the agenda for the coming year.' From 2007, the grants we received increased steadily. In 2008, it was nearly 100,000 euros and in 2011, it was raised to 200,000 euros. Slowly but surely, our income increased and the grant for 2018 stood at 775,000, of which 275,000 was from co-financing monies. This was also the result of a budget increase, even though it was the result of political policies, which never cease to amaze me. Over the years, I have not been able to see the Ministry of Justice making any effort to increase the budget. However, it may be worthwhile to describe how it was raised the first time. There is a story behind it which I, in short, have named the "smile of Providence".

### **Grant: for the Sector**

In 2008, at the invitation of the Foundation Oranje, Prison Fellowship along with nineteen other organisations launched the innovative Growth Programme. It was a new triennial programme through which the Foundation Oranje Fonds wanted to promote the development of promising initiatives in their growth and sustainability fund. Equity Funds are often more than willing to contribute to the many great projects they see develop and usually commit for a maximum period of three years, sometimes a bit longer, but they don't enter into structural partnerships. Even though this understandable because of the dependency it creates, the Funds also don't intent to take on this kind of informal ownership. It is difficult for such Funds to accept that the development and growth of good ideas often go up in smoke after a few years. Starting something is one thing, sustainability is a completely different story which, in my experience, is one of the hardest things to achieve. There are

plenty of ideas and enthusiasm in organizations like ours, but can we avoid the ‘project carousel’, as so often seen in the world of charities. Whether they are aware of it or not, people often think that the government should ensure the funding of volunteer organizations. In the many talks I had with the Ministry of Justice, I heard the same argument the other way around. Our contribution is a basic amount. You will have to knock on the doors of private funds, that is where the money is. Apart from the question of whether or not this is true, if there is one thing Equity Funds are allergic to it is becoming a source of funding for government. Charity organisations like Prison Fellowship are sandwiched between them. This is why I proposed that Ronald van der Giessen, the Director of the Foundation Oranje Fonds at the time, speak with the Ministry of Justice. He totally understood my point of view but also indicated that, for many reasons, doing so was not consistent with the policies of the Foundation Oranje Fonds. But, ‘if I’m asked to dance, I’ll gladly accept the invitation’. And so I picked up the glove of a new lobbying challenge.

It took me about eighteen months. On April 2011, we convened the first meeting between DJI (Frits Langeraar) and the Foundation Oranje Fonds (Bas Arends) at our office on the Ierlandlaan in Zoetermeer. Information was exchanged. The discussion the importance of volunteer work was short for everyone was agreed on that. This was also how I had become acquainted with Frits, a Christian to the core, who had been the Director of one of the prisons for a long time. We knew each other well. The conversation became a bit edgier when Bas wanted to know whether the Ministry of Justice would be willing to release some funds for ‘informal care’ as he always put it so nicely. It would be a powerful signal to Equity Funds for joining in. Bas knew very well that Frits could not answer that question with a simple ‘yes’, but the message was clear. After that, the lobbying process continued, both with DJI and the Foundation Oranje Fonds. In the end, the Foundation Oranje Fonds indicated that they were willing to reserve 500,000 euros for the services provided by Prison Fellowship The Netherlands, Exodus, Bonjo, and Humanitas. Within DJI, these organisations are called the 4VO, with VO being the acronym for volunteer organisations. One of the Foundation Oranje Fonds conditions was that the budget provided by the Ministry of Justice had to be increased by 500,000 euros. So, matching a euro for a euro. This certainly sounds better than an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth! On 8 November 2012, parliamentary leaders Kees van der Staaij (SGP) and Gert Jan Segers (CU) submitted a motion to increase the budget for volunteer organisations by 1,500,000 euros.

### **Grant: the Motion**

The motion was construed as follows; ‘Volunteer work is not free. It does require that volunteers are given proper facilitation, training and support. The intentions of the Cabinet anticipate growth in the current number of volunteers from 3,000 to 10,000 over four years, without increasing the available annual budget of 1.5 million euros.

A higher budget increases the opportunity for our society to become more actively involved in the situation of inmates and it can be targeted for use as an incentive in the acquisition of additional funds by the organisations. That is why this amendment intends to increase the current budget for volunteer work from 1.5 million euros to 3 million euros per year. For 2013, this can be backed by Article 34 relating to non-judicial mandatory expenses. The applicant wanted a structural increase of the budget to three million euros per year, which is about 0.1 percent of the overall budget of the DJI. The structural coverage of this increase for the coming budget years can be found in savings on expensive forms of detention.'

## **Grant: Inimitable Politics**

In the run-up to the vote on the motion, I was in contact with parliamentarians Ard van der Steur (VVD) and Ahmed Marcouch (PvdA). They both regarded the motion positively although they couldn't promise me that they would vote in favour. 'Where do you see this, these days, that when the government does something and society wants to double it?', was their response. My disappointment was made all the greater when Kees van der Staaij called me in late December to let me know that the motion hadn't passed, with the PvdA and the VVD both voting against the motion. The call came when I was on my way to the ice rink in the Hague for my weekly skating rounds with my good friend Ton Konijn. Moments like this are unforgettable, not that they are traumatic, but they are markers in an organisation's life. Never count your chickens before they hatch! You cannot spend money that you don't have! Early in January I contacted Ronald van der Giessen again. 'I think I should invite myself to a cup of tea with the state secretary', he said. Eventually this resulted in a letter, dated 21 May 2013, from the Foundation Oranje Fonds to the state secretary in which the Foundation Oranje Fonds stated that it was willing to reserve another 500,000 – for four years – for the 4VO, under the condition that one million euros of the volunteer budget of 1.6 million would be allocated to the 4VO.

## **DJI, Foundation Oranje Fonds, and the 4VO**

In September 2013, we held the first meeting between the DJI, the Foundation Oranje Fonds, and the 4VO. The DJI was not just represented by Frits Langeraar but also his boss, Jacco Groeneveld, one of the DJI regional directors. Jacco was also in charge of the volunteer work. As 4VO, we were very pleased with his presence since Jacco had been the former Director of the Probation department of the Salvation Army and had sincere affinity with our work. The meeting resulted in establishing a 4VO covenant on 4 March 2013. The covenant had been drafted in collaboration with the DJI and the Foundation Oranje Fonds. As an excited Bas Arends stated, 'This arrangement is unique in the volunteer work sector. You are the pioneers of what could be a future arrangement between government, Funds, and informal care.'

## Constructive Opposition

However, the most surprising event was still to come. The government coalition sought the support of a constructive opposition, which was ultimately formed by the parties D'66, CU, and the SGP in the well-known 'autumn agreement'. An unwritten understanding in the agreement implied that something can be asked in exchange. Kees van der Staij came to my office on 1 November to discuss that. Kees is a member of our 'Social Council', and we know when to find each other. Our discussion resulted in Kees submitting two motions for four million euros in total. The House of Representatives accepted those motions. One of them related to volunteer work and stated that the budget needed a structural increase of 1.5 million euros and introduced a new element that 750,000 euros had to be allocated to cofinancing. This was to be an incentive for the organisations' own acquisition of funds, to prevent them from becoming overly dependent on government grants.

## Grant: Political History

In 2011, Van der Staij had already confronted the Ministry of Justice with this element of financial sustainability and an active policy to stimulate the (around fifty) volunteer organisations to maintain a financially healthy budget. In early 2012, the government referred to this again by saying that they support 'the idea behind the motion by Van der Staij and would like to see that volunteer organisations aim their efforts for the acquisition of funding not solely on the government but also on other social sectors (...) as the grant opportunities from the government are limited. In certain sectors, the incentive that organisations are only eligible for government grants when they have generated a certain percentage of their own income is already in place. We will do our best to implement this incentive in the respective new grant schemes as well.' At the moment of writing this book, it was known that the application process for the 2019 grant would see a shadow process with a new scheme. It turned out to be a rather tough process involving the 4VO as well as other parties. In the meantime, Prison Fellowship was satisfied with progress in the grant relationship. Old prejudices are a thing of the past and we are appreciated for our efforts, professionalism, results, and innovative strength. By the way, with the CU now being part of the current government, the grant was increased by another one million euros. Is it a coincidence that this small political dossier receives the particular attention from the Christian parties and that they are to be thanked for a more than doubling of the budget? *People, where are you?*

## State Secretary Teeven

Last but not least, I would like to share an anecdote. During the 2014 New Year's reception of the DJI, Fred Teeven and I chanced to bump into each other – although the reader will know by now what I mean by chance. 'Fred, all the best wishes for the



*State secretary Teeven (l) congratulates Arie Bax (r) as the 500th volunteer of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands*

new year. And may I also thank you for the additional 1.5 million euros for the volunteer work we do in your prisons?' 'Sure, you may, but I rather wish that I didn't have to give this money', he answered frankly. 'But you know Van der Staaij. I don't have to explain it to you.' 'Perhaps you'd like to accept an invitation to visit one of our wonderful projects,' I said, the SOS Project, for example?' 'Absolutely, I will see the invitation coming. Until then, Hans.' After two cancellations, the third invitation was a charm when, later that year, Fred Teeven visited one of our SOS courses in the Rotterdam prison De Schie. He was noticeably positive about the project 'Even if this would create a slightly higher awareness in people so they will commit less serious crimes, the project can be called a success.' This certainly was a remarkably nuanced response from a politician who tended to display a rather black-and-white opinion on 'criminals'. His priority was the victims, something he also expressed in our newsletter of April 2011, right after having visited our office. This is why we can thank him for breaking a lance on victim awareness within the prison system. Frankly, I thought it was a sad day when he had to resign. Teeven was an approachable and straightforward person and you always knew what he stood for. Then, when I heard that he had become a bus driver, I felt a pang of jealousy. But who knows, my childhood dream may still come true someday as well...

## Rouvoet

I want to conclude this chapter with good thoughts about a politician who supported us from the word go. I'm talking about André Rouvoet. He had already provided his name for the Committee of Recommendation in 1996. Later on, we 'incarcerated' him on our Supervisory and Advisory Board. When he became the Vice Prime Minister in 2007, we proudly yet immediately released him from the Board. He was replaced by Kees van Staaij. André was a great ambassador of volunteer work in general and for Prison Fellowship The Netherlands in particular. Already in 2002, he had drawn attention to De Compagnie in the House of Representatives. It would take another thirteen years before this was launched, which was just as well. People, where are you? This is also something that I saw as a chance gift. It gave us time to develop ourselves as an organisation. But as a social entrepreneur, I always tend to think a few years ahead, which is good as it drives the ambition and focus.

## The Judicial Chaplaincy

Some people say that Christian work is to convert the 'heathen' and that it is a "hell of a job" to deal with Christians. I think that I have become an experienced expert, by now. The rise and positioning of societal initiatives with prison chaplaincy has been more complicated than with all the rest. I could be accused of an unbridled generalisation if I would label everything and everyone outside the prison chaplaincy as 'heathen'. As I mentioned before, since the late 1990s the Ministry of Justice allowed for more volunteer activities. PFN achieved the NJO status with facilities to visit prisoners independently outside visiting hours. That was new and, of course, set things in motion. During the two years after the launch, in which I was not involved, my predecessors sadly did not act as sensibly as they might have done. I don't mean this reproachingly, more as a matter of fact for their motives certainly were sincere. Their implementation, on the other hand, was not in line with our prison system. Especially after my first PFI conference in 1995, I could very much relate to the enthusiasm of my predecessors. Like them, I returned brimming with impressions and ideas about what colleagues did and experienced in other countries. But Nigeria doesn't have a prison chaplaincy like we know it in The Netherlands. And Chile has no rehabilitation system like we have. The same applied to other services and aspects such as medical, social, and personal care, which are organised in very different ways in countries like the Philippines and Columbia. Earlier on, I described choosing a practical, diaconal foundation for our work through visiting inmates in prisons and that the requests for this from prisons and inmates increased. The questions coming from the prison chaplaincy increased as well, but they were mainly critical. Pastors generally are good orators. The competency of some in 'listening', however, seemed to be less well-developed. It was a tough process.

On the one hand, we shared a cordial solidarity when it came to 'caring for the





*Thea Bogers (Director Prison Chaplaincy) and Hans Barendrecht*

person' as Jan Eerbeek – the head prison pastor at the time – used to say with much fervour. We had many intensive conversations, which later included the Board as well. In the end, it was Peter van der Sande, the DJI Director, who triggered the drafting of a document of collaboration that was signed by Peter, Thea Bogers, and myself on 16 December 2009. This document describes the mutual coordination of various activities. In this regard, I would like to share two anecdotes. When I came out of church on 13 September 2009, I had a voicemail message from Peter. That was a bit of a shock. He had received a call from Minister Hirsch Ballin about a meeting with Rein Willems at a CDA party meeting. Rein had been a top executive of Shell and was one of the advisers of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands. I had asked for his advice related to our position and relationship with the prison chaplaincy a couple of times. To him, it was crystal clear that Prison Fellowship deserved an independent position. This had nothing to do with a separation of Church and state, or with anything else for that matter. The differences in perspective between an enterprising organization and an established institution that wants to retain what it already has, would be a dynamic causing problems. I apologised and said that it had never been my intention to put pressure on anyone via political parties. Peter said he didn't feel uncomfortable about this at all and that he would speak with Thea. Three months later, we reached a collaboration covenant. About 3 years later, in 2012 – and that is my second anecdote – Thea Bogers and her managers visited our office for a meeting. On this occasion,

Kees van der Linden, Aad van der Maas, and myself made a presentation on the structure and delivery of our activities. Afterwards, while looking at her colleagues, she wondered out loud whether 'it would be possible that Prison Fellowship perhaps thought more deeply about their work than we normally do'. I considered her words to be a nice compliment for my colleagues and myself. The approach through sound consultation continued with the current leading pastor Jan Gerd Heetderks.

## CHAPTER 4

# The Programmes

At first, there was no programme at all, it was just a name – Prison Fellowship The Netherlands and a handful of volunteers who visited inmates. They could do this, thanks to personal contacts they had with prisons. I also visited one particular inmate myself, a sailor from the Philippines who had been incarcerated in Zoetermeer. He had been arrested for a drug-related crime and was a model prisoner. It didn't take long before he got cleaning duties, a coveted job because he was not stuck in a cell the whole day and could get to places in jail where inmates are usually not allowed. This means that he was trusted and earned some 'good' money, although 'good' is a relative term as the hourly wages of a prisoner who 'earns well' is not even one euro while the groceries are at least as expensive inside as 'outside' and they also need to rent their TV, coffee maker and fridge. So, prisoners are not watching TV all day at our expense. This is one of the big misconceptions among Dutch citizens.

Via my PFI network, I was regularly in touch with our colleagues in the Philippines by fax because they, in turn, were in contact with the inmate's family. The last thing I was able to do for him and his family was sending them the flight number and arrival time of his return to the Philippines. During that same period, our office was also contacted by a family that had four male family members imprisoned in Scotland. They asked if we could do something for them. Of course, we could because PFI also had an office in Scotland where they had several volunteers working. Surely, we could arrange for a place for them to stay when they went over to visit them, and so we did. We rented a minivan for two volunteers and four family members to travel to Her Majesty's prison in Shotts, Scotland, located between Glasgow and Edinburgh. We only made this one trip as it took a lot of effort to organise such a journey and we were barely able to cover the costs. We realized that our first priority should be with prisoners in the Netherlands.

### The Families of Inmates

One of our very first volunteers was Martine Fortuin. She has done so much for prisoners and their families, including giving talks and handing out information. She is a cheerful person with a deep faith. I have never seen her low in spirits, not even when the work did not go as planned or intended. She was always full of expectation. At one point, she said: 'Hans, shouldn't we organise something for the prisoners'

families? Their role is becoming bigger and there is basically nothing provided in that regard!'. The same thought had crossed my mind as well but I had been too busy to do anything about it., so this was the push I needed. Coincidentally, Martine was going to be visiting a woman whose husband I was visiting. Such meetings offer a much more complete picture of what people worry about and what they need. So, this how the 'Luchtplaats' [the 'Yard'] programme got started. The idea behind the Luchtplaats was that family members needed a place where they can share their stories. We offered them a place to do that and to get things off their chests. You can say that a prisoner's life is put on hold during confinement, but the lives of family members also get stuck. They, often the wife, are at home and they have many questions, along with feeling grief and shame, and facing reproach from neighbours, school, and church. Children suffer as well. They miss their father and are often stigmatized and bullied. Then, of course, household bills must be paid, but no wages coming in. This is how family care, as it is now called, was created. We hired an intern and the slogan on our stationary was adjusted to 'for prisoners and their families'. We also began promoting this actively via the prisoners themselves and the prison staff. This certainly proved to be effective as the number of requests for help increased.

## **TBS Care**

Later, the same thing happened in our concern for TBS patients (detainees under hospital order). When the judge deems a person to be unfit or not entirely responsible for their crime, they do not receive a (full) prison sentence but an enforced treatment order. Over time, as our organisation developed, we increasingly had to deal with prisoners who were transported to a TBS clinic after completing their prison sentence. They would ask us if the volunteer they had been in contact with could 'move with them'. Naturally, we wanted to comply with that for it is always good to know that a fellow human being who is in prison desires our presence. In 2008, this programme became the responsibility of Christiaan Verschoor. Two years before Christiaan had joined us as an intern and – at our request – one year later he graduated as a social worker in the area of volunteer care for TBS patients. He was now in a position to put his studies into practice via a programme plan called 'De Omgang' [The association']. Until his departure in early 2018 he was very much involved, and expertly so, in the development of our TBS care. We visit about a hundred TBS patients per year for which we have a group of specially trained volunteers. I hugely admire this group of colleagues as TBS progression is difficult. The average duration of a treatment spans eight to nine years. TBS patients never know exactly when they may be released because their case is subject to review by a judge every two years. This means that our visits are not focusing on the near term. It also happens that these patients usually lack the insight into why their behaviour and crime is wrong. You don't mistreat young children. Period. Fortunately, they are not all sex offenders, yet



*Beppie Geurtsen: Family care? The most wonderful programme of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands!*

it requires a lot of perseverance, patience and the ability to put things into perspective from our volunteer colleagues. Therefore, I take my hat off while making a deep bow to them. Something else that I appreciate deeply is that we managed to enter into solid agreements with three TBS clinics; the Balkbrug Clinic, the Van Mesdag Clinic in Groningen and, later on, the Oostvaarders Clinic in Almere. Recently, the Van der Hoeven Clinic in Utrecht has been added as well.

It is satisfying and gratifying that our volunteer work is seen as a strengthening component of the treatment plan. The similarity between prisons and the TBS clinics is that people are 'locked up' and have very limited freedom of movement. The main difference between prisons and TBS clinics is that we can visit an inmate in prison without the need for a prison employee as an intermediary. This does not apply to TBS patients where we can only visit them via a staff member of the clinic who is involved in the patient's treatment plan. This requires good coordination between the clinic and Prison Fellowship. We meet personally with all volunteers and invest in annual group get-togethers. In short, it is labour-intensive. In practice, this programme is the most difficult one to fund. During the start-up phase, it 'sold well', so to say. Equity Funds are often quite willing to look at new initiatives. Today, it is an ongoing programme that is mostly supported, thanks to donations from those who feel closely connected.

*What water means to fish  
and the air for the bird  
a condition for existence  
that even stronger  
is peace for mankind*

*What breath is to blood  
and blood to life:  
between to be and not to be, the difference  
is a love for being human  
It cannot live without*

*Inge Lievaart  
[Freely translated] from 'Collected Poems'*

## SOS

Another programme that was developed in this same period is the current SOS programme. Here, SOS is a Dutch acronym that stands for Speaking about Guilt, Victims, and Society. The focus is on offenders taking responsibility, not just for the past and future, but also for the present. What are they going to do now, with their time in prison? Will they just pass the time or are they going to deal with the past and work toward a new future?

We were able to begin work on this thanks to our PFI membership. It took a long time to prepare. When setting up the SOS programme (Sycamore Tree Project), the 'penny dropped' when I had a cup of tea with Lisa Rea at the 1999 PFI Convocation in Sofia, Bulgaria. In her general presentation, Lisa, who is now President of Restorative Justice International, talked about crime victims who participated in a course for prison inmates. Perhaps it was due to my background in criminal law, but I couldn't make head or tail of it. Why would you have victims participating in course for prisoners? These are two strictly separated worlds, right? That was one of the main aspects of our criminal law system! So why would victims want to join in? Prisoners and victims can certainly not be called natural allies when it comes to stopping crime. On the contrary! Perhaps I hadn't been working in the world of prisons for that long, but it was easy enough for me to formulate the possible responses by prison directors if I were to introduce the idea of an SOS pilot project. 'That's not our job. We are an institution for perpetrators. Not for victims. That will only create tension inside.' 'Peace and quiet within the prison', is more or less Article 1 of a prison director's ground rules, which is entirely understandable. Can you imagine, running a hotel solely inhabited

by guests who are not pleased with their state-enforced board and lodgings. Over the years, my admiration for people working in prisons has only grown, not in the least for the wardens and the ‘hospitality employees’ who are dealing with all of the pressures and impulses. Listening to their stories, it becomes clear that the respect they receive from the ‘guests’ has dwindled over the years. It takes more than thick skin and broad shoulders to do one’s job well and to stay motivated.

## **Practising in Lelystad**

The SOS programme first started as Proces Verbaal Lelystad [Police Report Lelystad]. The tenth anniversary of Prison Fellowship in 2003 was an opportunity to sit down with seventy stakeholders and discuss the options in the Netherlands for taking on a project like De Compagnie. I will write more about that later on. Peter van der Sande, the Prison System Director at the time, told me that he had enjoyed the discussion and that he believed that there was a certain degree of consensus for an experiment. ‘However’, he said, ‘the time is not right – yet – but I do see some other opportunities for you. You should talk with Ton Daans.’ And so, via Ton – who was always brimming with ideas and liked what we were doing – I was introduced to Jan Piek whose final job in his prison career was the implementation of a new Detention Centre in Lelystad (DCL). Within the walls of the complex, several pavilions were to be built to house 150 inmates per pavilion. These were prisoners with short sentences, often those who still had some time left in their sentence or those who were in prison for not paying their fines. The maximum stay was three to four weeks. This meant that the prison would see a fast turnover. One of Jan’s keywords was ‘touch’. ‘Now that they are here, inside, they also need to be touched by, as he said, norms and values. And that’s your department, isn’t it?’, he would say with a smile. Jan understood that I wouldn’t want our volunteers to act as a bunch of moralists so in the end, we agreed that we would introduce weekly SOS themes. At first, we also planned on teaching the prisoners computer skills but that never came to fruition as, to put it mildly, the PCs they were able to put at our disposal left much to be desired. DCL opened its doors in late 2005 and we implemented our activities quickly. The concept – with six prisoners per cell and a lot of electronics for arranging everything themselves right from the cell, including the visits – is still operational and we continue to go there for an SOS meeting on a weekly basis. Over the years, our volunteers have talked with thousands and thousands of prisoners at DCL. By the way, the concept for the Detention Centre Lelystad didn’t make it. The intention, at the time, had been to build seven pavilions.

## **SOS Youth**

In 2007, we introduced an SOS Course for adolescents in Teylingereind. This started out by word of mouth with our colleague Esther Klaassen playing a crucial role. We were able to do offer the course for several years and to great satisfaction. In 2010, the Verwey Joncker Institute submitted a very good report about its impact and

possibilities for the future. Unfortunately, this future never happened. The number of participants went down and the youth institutions also had to follow a course for rehabilitation-oriented work and wanted to do all of that independently. The fact that this trajectory includes some elements of SOS is something we just have to appreciate as a compliment. We even happened to see the wonderful impact of SOS right on our doorstep. One afternoon in 2016, a young courier delivered a package at our office. 'I know you', he said. 'I was at Teylingereind and your SOS course changed my views on things. I have now sorted out my life and I have a good job.' These are the kinds of wonderful encouragements that we need from time to time, so we know how and why we need to carry on. Our work consists mostly of sowing, and it's not often that we can see whether that grows into something beautiful.

## **SOS Adults**

In the meantime, in the spring of 2008 we started another SOS course in the prison at Zoetermeer. Cor Lewis, one of our first volunteers who was supervised by Esther Klaassen, fulfilled an important supporting role. When Fred Teeven was appointed state secretary in 2010, the prison system introduced the victim-oriented work programme. Empathy with victims is one of the elements of the SOS course. This created a favourable climate for a further rollout of the SOS course to reach more prisoners, while, slowly but surely, the number of prisons also increased. We needed to work with our feet on the brakes. Our first funding for the SOS course came from Equity Funds. DJI joined in later, but the cofinancing remained very limited. Furthermore, in the end it took a lot of patience and lobbying to acquire the means to the point that we were on the brink of quitting SOS altogether. Actually, it is more or less thanks to the admonition given by Nathalie Tonnon that we picked ourselves up to give it one more try in 2013. Nathalie was the Director of the prison in Krimpen aan den IJssel. She saw the impact of SOS with the inmates, even men who she thought that we would never get through to. 'Hans, I totally get what you're saying', she said after I had sent an urgent mail to several prisons. 'We are not allowed to spend money on it and you know my opinion about the fact that the DJI is not doing it either. But one thing is sure: it would be a shame if you were to cease the SOS programme!'

## **SOS and Victim Oriented Work**

After receiving that a message, we all sat down at the office and looked for one last resort. Our last resort was lobbying with Michel Groothuizen, the Director of the so-called Sanction and Prevention Directorate, the Ministry's policy board for, among other things, the prison system. Michel knew Prison Fellowship from a presentation on Probation Service in the Netherlands given for our Board of Directors and Supervisory and Advisory Board in 2008. One of the Board's topical questions was whether Prison Fellowship should become a rehabilitation institution. We, of course, stayed happily focused on our own trade. My SOS question to Michel, therefore, was to see





*PFN volunteers participating in SOS*

‘whether there were any opportunities for SOS to receive a contribution from the budget for victim-oriented work’. Michel didn’t answer with a yes or no, but he did ask Jan Bouman to conduct an overview of all the initiatives that had a focus on victim-oriented work. This gave us a bit of hope and it proved to not be in vain. In late 2014, we finally received a modest yet important contribution from the budget for victim-oriented work and that made our own fund acquisition efforts easier as well. Parallel to that, an international SOS project supported by the European Commission was implemented with seven PFI countries. The project was called Building Bridges 2014-2016. It’s objective was to create ‘dialogue between victims and offenders, aimed at restoration’. Prison Fellowship The Netherlands was appointed to manage the project. We soon realised that we had under-calculated the amount of time that we would need to spend on this project. A certain Equity Fund, knowing all the ins and outs of entrepreneurship, happened to hear about our plight and spontaneously offered us their help. Thanks to their crucial support, we were able to free up our colleague Joost de Jager to lead that project. It also allowed him to focus on the issue of what Prison Fellowship needed to do in order to become more current with digital technology developments in the prison system. Earlier on, during a meeting of prison directors. Hans Huizer, the former Director of Vught and national project manager of the project ‘Self-service for Sentenced Offenders’ had approached me about this issue

## Tailored SOS Programmes

We now have several variations of SOS. A full SOS course consists of eight meetings. Halfway through the course, a victim talks about how a crime has impacted his or her life. This generally makes a huge impression on the participating inmates, to the extent that they often reflect this in their 'deed of restoration' during the concluding session in which the victim is also present. At the request of several prisons and the DJI, we have made a condensed version of the course so it can be used with prisoners in a remand centre as well as with prisoners who have a short time remaining in their sentence. A remand centre, by the way, is for suspects who have not yet been sentenced by the court and those whose case is still under appeal. Upon sentencing they are usually transferred to a prison. The umbrella term for prisons and remand centres is Penitentiary Institution. As the name says, it is about penitence. For the sake of readability, I mostly use the word prison because everybody understands what that is. Along the same line, we also started to practise doing SOS one-on-one. We noticed that some prisoners find it difficult to, or don't dare to express themselves in a group. Slowly but surely, this one on one approach is also becoming a serious business. Last but not least, we provide some sort of aftercare: SOS follow-up, apart from the general aftercare that includes the availability of a visiting volunteer, employment mediation, and family care.

## SOS research

In 2016, a scientific report was published about the effects of SOS. The study also included 'Puinruimen' [Cleaning up the Rubbish], a restoration programme offered by the DJI. SOS got positive reviews, as did the results of the Puinruimen programme. The results and impact were quite similar for both. However, the study did not zoom in on the costs, the deployment of people from outside the system, or the options for follow-up in the form of visits and aftercare. The most important question I had for the Ministry of Justice was: "How are you going to translate this study?" There are three options: DJI will organise all courses entirely on their own. DJI procures all courses from Prison Fellowship, or a combination of both these options. During the time I was writing this book, the DJI communicated that it would like to see Prison Fellowship continue with SOS for the coming years. The available means will remain limited at the current level of 67,000 euros. But the fact is that there is much demand for SOS courses from the prisons and this demand increases every year. Another fact is that the funding is far from sufficient to cover the costs of the programme. Consequently, we need to begin calculating and lobbying again to determine where to look for funds, for example from the prisons and with Equity Funds.

## SOS Conclusion

Lastly, I would like to write two more things about SOS. Firstly, volunteers, again, play an extremely important role. We now have about eighty trained volunteers and some



*Esther Klaassen*

of them have also been trained as course leaders. This means that some courses are entirely run by volunteers. However, it is not possible to run the SOS programme without any paid employees. Before a course kicks off there is a lot of preparation work behind the scenes that must be done. Dates must be set, participants recruited, volunteers have to be rostered, etc. Upon conclusion of the course, we always evaluate everything with the prison. I also highly appreciate and value these colleagues. They give up their spare time for eight consecutive weeks. Some of them even take time off from work. Prisons are not (yet) flexible enough to offer the course during evenings or on weekends. Secondly, I absolutely want to mention that we have to thank our colleague Esther Klaassen for the fact that SOS has been put firmly on the map in the Netherlands. She began with a few SOS building blocks in 2005 and by investing a lot of effort and using her creativity to give content and substantiation to the programme. Esther left to join our PFI colleagues in Albania in 2017.

### **Employment Mediation: Its' History**

Strangely enough, this has become the most-requested programme of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands. But does it suit us? Work is hugely important in a person's life. Apart from an income it also provides meaning, whichever way you look at it. I'm thinking of the interesting book written by Gerard Dekker, *Van Roeping naar Baan* [From Calling to Job]. The title itself was a calling that brought me to Paul Baan, a former IT entrepreneur and founder of the Noaber Foundation, he invited me for a meeting on 17 October 2000,

he had read an interview with me in *De Gezinsgids* (*periodical*) that he said had inspired him. Under the working title 'Bakfiets' [Cargo bike], he had several IT ideas. With computers being everywhere and used for almost everything prisoners need to leave the 'bak' (a Dutch word for prison) with computer skills, otherwise they will just lag behind in the job market. I was pleasantly challenged to pull out all the stops and explain the perspectives on this within the Dutch penitentiary system. This kind of perspective makes a 'real' entrepreneur very unhappy. So much writing! Luckily, Lenard Prins was also present during that meeting. He was on our Board, had worked for Baan Company and more importantly, he knew the world of the police and justice institutions. Henk Kievit, Paul's adviser, also understood that 'we have to give Prison Fellowship some time'. Paul offered to organise an ECDL (European Computer Driving Licence) training for prisoners. The thing that made ECDL even more complicated was that the exam had to be done online. Prisoners on the internet?! At the time, this was out of the question and just proposing the idea would have been out of this world. Even so, I was given time to study the idea and I liked the challenge. At first, Zoetermeer didn't want to cooperate, they only had ifs and buts. Then I came into contact with Albert van der Plas, a fellow Christian who was the director of a juvenile unit of the prison in Scheveningen. He liked the idea but said that he was going to be transferred to Zoetermeer which was good news to me. He introduced me and my plans to Ad Kragten, the Location Director of Zoetermeer and I was pleased to hear that Ad favoured the plan as well and gave us the green light. By now another year had passed, but that's how the Ministry of Justice works. At the prison, Ron Wilbrink was appointed as our contact person and his contribution has been invaluable. Finally, in 2002 we could begin. Ron also came up with a suitable name for the project: the 'Aansluiting' [the Connection]. Every week, a lecturer from Driestar Christian University came in to teach the course based on the approach of 'training the trainer. At a certain point, the teachers of the Zoetermeer prison were capable of giving the ECDL training themselves. But what about the issue of doing the exam online? This ended up being solved in a very practical way: the teachers would simply sit with the students as they did the exam. Many inmates proudly left the prison having obtained their driving licence online. Paul did not just invest in the course, he also offered a very generous donation to PF The Netherlands which enabled us, to appoint a coordinator— Kees van der Linden – who began on 1 June 2002. Looking back on this, Paul's phone call made a huge difference in PF The Netherlands, for the first time, someone from within Prison Fellowship The Netherlands was given the opportunity to focus entirely on the development of volunteer work. Until this time, we had worked with one social worker who also acted as our telephone receptionist. Sometime thereafter we were also able to hire a secretary. But more about that later.

## **Employment Mediation: the Execution**

Two years after the computer programme started there was a wonderful follow-up. The Ministry of Justice launched the MI (Social Integration) project and therefore Zoe-

termeer prison was required to implement an MI department. Ad Kragten asked us if we would be able to help prisoners find jobs. Of course, the word ‘no’ is not in our vocabulary and since “one of the things we believe in is specialisation and ownership, we needed to find the right person *and* the funding for this.” Ad got the message. He stuck his neck out and arranged an ESF (European Social Fund) contract with us. The private component came from the Noaber Foundation. On 1 January 2005, Rinus de Boed started as ‘external trajectory supervisor’ with PF The Netherlands. He was the perfect fit for the job. Rinus talks with everyone, he takes on every challenge, and is no stranger to the employment mediation sector. The agreeable E-unit with just 24 cells became a real MI department for motivated prisoners. Rinus became part of the furniture, though at first, the prisoners were still somewhat mistrustful of him. Rob was the first prisoner Rinus helped to find a job. As Rob said, ‘At first I thought “who is this “bean picker” we see hanging around here all the time?”’ When the other ‘guys’ – as Rinus calls his clients – realised that he was not just a bag of empty words, things started to pick up. The prison staff also helped by creating a good atmosphere, and we organised activities like football games. I remember on one occasion that our ‘opponents’ casually remarked that their team represented a prison sentence of a hundred years. Everything went smoothly until the political powers in The Hague decided that the MI approach was to be cancelled. I saw first-hand the effects of rapid policy changes on prison staff. It requires a good amount of flexibility to keep motivated in an environment that is already challenging and unique. I sometimes think that we in PF have it easier because everyone who comes to us does so voluntarily and is therefore of good will – not that this makes our work easy-peasy.



*Rinus de Boed (l) and volunteer Adri (r) guided Gregorio from prison to job*

2007 was the final year of De Aansluiting with Zoetermeer, however, we were now on a roll and we could clearly see the possibility of helping the most difficult target group find work. According to a study conducted by Start Foundation, inmates score the lowest when it comes to 'profile acceptance'. Drug addicts score a little bit better. This means that inmates are the last in line when it comes to acceptance of their job applications.

### **Employment Mediation: Continued Thanks to Foundation Institute Gak**

In my search for funding, on 4 October 2007 I met with Geert Veentjer. He was an authority on social security and Director of Foundation Institute Gak. In 1999, the cabinet decided that the government would be responsible for the attribution and payment of benefits. That meant the end of the 'GAK' [Joint Administration Office]. This created some commotion but it also offered an opening for a new Equity Fund to be established for subsidising research and rehabilitation projects for benefit recipients. Veentjer found it odd that the Ministry of Justice ceased the funding. 'This can have an adverse effect on your application', he said, and he also had some doubts about the 'relevance aspect for the Netherlands' – one of their application criteria. A third issue that could make an application less likely to succeed was the question of whose interest would be served with this project – 'apart from the client's'. For example, 'why are municipalities not contributing?' Other criteria included the cost-quality ratio and a guarantee for sound execution. Also, organisation itself was not supposed to benefit from a grant via a separate company or otherwise. The application deadline was by 8 a.m. on 10 October, 'because the Board meets on 24 October'. On Thursday morning, 25 October, I received a phone call from Geert Veentjer. I remember it well as I was in the train at The Hague Central Station on my way to Schiphol for a business trip to Suriname for a prison visit with Willem den Hertog. 'Hans, this is Geert Veentjer, I can tell you that the Board approved your application yesterday. Congratulations and good luck!' I was over the moon and intensely grateful, my prayers had been heard and the work had been blessed. We could now continue following our passion and I wouldn't have to 'lay off Rinus', to put it bluntly. The Foundation Institute Gak supported us generously for two years.

### **Employment Mediation: Self-supporting?**

Our application also included a proviso that PwC would help us investigate the possibility of growing employment integration into a commercial market activity. The outcome of that showed that the municipalities could provide such opportunities. After all, they were responsible for the payment of benefits and would be to their advantage if former prisoners didn't have to hold out their hands. Armed with a portfolio of successful results (around fifteen former inmate placements with companies per year) and a great SROI report, we targeted the municipalities. An SROI report indicates the social return on investment and shows the ratio between costs and return. And another key

factor was that, Matthijs Blokhuis of the Noaber Foundation, who had drawn up the report, had clearly indicated that the municipalities profited most. To make a long story short: despite the great efforts by Gert Jan Castelijm and Rinus, this came to nothing even though we had budgeted that the project would be able to generate an annual return of 100,000 euros. After much convincing and talking, we managed to begin collaboration with two or three municipalities. Materially, this was not much. For many municipalities, the 'domain of prisoners' was very low on their priority list, the decision-making process was slow, and our influence was too limited. At first, we had some ideas about forming partnerships with secondment agencies, but the financial crisis thwarted that. We were, of course rather disappointed, but we couldn't reproach ourselves.

### **Employment Mediation: More Volunteers**

Lean and mean, we continued with a new idea, the 'Kruiwagen' [the wheel barrow], in 2013. Geert Veentjer tipped us off that the Dutch Refugee Council was working on something significant to get people into jobs via volunteers. We had some experience with that, but unfortunately also somewhat less successful. Apart from passion, which is benevolent, employment mediation requires professionalism. It's a trade-off. On an annual basis, we had a failure rate of around twenty percent, which meant that upon leaving prison some prisoners would not accept the jobs we had arranged for them choosing instead, to join 'an old friend'. Rinus de Boed has plenty of stories about that. This always resulted in a stiff 'hangover' for us, yet Rinus never failed to go on determinedly. 'You know it happens every year, you learn to accept it, but you never get used to it! It always comes down to money, they think that can make a lot of money really fast. It's sad when you see these guys slipping through your hands.' Eventually, the Kruiwagen project didn't bring us what we needed, and that had nothing to do with our volunteers. We just never managed to get it properly operational on an organisational basis, to provide it with sufficient scope for structural self-financing. All in all, it did contribute to employment integration receiving more attention in after-care training for our volunteers. Ultimately, De Compagnie was established which resulted in a process of consolidating employment mediation activities within De Compagnie.

### **De Compagnie**

The youngest programme of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands has the oldest roots. What I mean is, that after the first time I visited a prisoner, I asked myself what would give us the biggest possibility of contributing to changing a prisoner's life successfully. I was thinking, "suppose we could be working with these men every day and..." It was a mere glimmer on the horizon, without any contours. The contours only became visible in 2001 after Willem den Hertog and I visited our PFI colleagues in Brazil. My amazement began at the gate of the prison in Itaúna. It was manned not by a uniformed guard but by a prisoner who was serving the last phase of his sentence. He was the one to verify our identity by checking our passports. The prison in Itaúna was known as APAC (the

Portuguese acronym for ‘loving God, loving people’) and housed about one hundred prisoners. The complex was divided into a closed unit, a semi-open unit, and an open unit depending on the level of freedom each of the prisoners was given. What they all had in common was a constant reminder to take responsibility for their own behaviour. This is the common thread of the APAC approach, and it didn’t begin and end with cleaning their cells, it also came into play when there were disputes among individuals. These were discussed openly and handled by inmates who sat on the so-called ‘steering committee’. Whenever visitors, or anyone else, wanted to go from the semi-open unit to the closed unit, for example, they would be checked twice by a prisoner, once at the door of the closed unit and the other at the door of the semi-open unit. Another striking feature of APAC was the high level of involvement in the prison by the local community including the doctor and the dentist. Family members were allowed to stay for overnight visits in ‘family rooms’. They were treated with respect by the other prisoners and not pestered or stared at. Another important element was the emphasis on inner change, changing from within from the heart. Reading and studying the Bible with as a basis for the meaning of life was one of the corner stones. During a conference with many PFI colleagues from other Latin American countries, we heard and saw many stories of changed lives that made a huge impression. Inmates and judges embraced each other respectfully. Others explained that they had requested a transfer to APAC because they thought this prison was an easy place to escape from but, once on the inside, the communal spirit in Itaúna made them change their minds.

### **De Compagnie: Inspiration for the Netherlands**

I can safely say that this is where the penny dropped for me. Generally, we use the criminal law system to imprison people who don’t take responsibility for themselves, and then we hope that this is where they learn that their path was wrong and that they will come to their senses. This was what the system aimed for when in the Netherlands, when each prisoner was given his or her own cell. The domed prisons in Arnhem, Breda, and Haarlem epitomise this concept. The prison renovations were implemented, but the result in inmate behaviour did not measure up. People don’t change just because they find themselves behind bars. At best there is some adjustment in their behaviour only to avoid additional punishment. Nobody wants to spend their days in a bare cell without even a TV. A prison system is not intended to help someone take responsibility for themselves or even learn how to do so. The primary purpose is punishment, basically by taking away a person’s freedom. This is perhaps a bit simplistic, but I believe that is the essence of it.

### **De Compagnie: In the House of Representatives**

I was so enthusiastic about what I had seen in Itaúna, that I spoke about it with André Rouvoet, a Member of Parliament. This resulted in André using my information





*André Rouvoet (l) offers his input for De Compagnie, with Willem den Hertog and Hans Barendrecht*

during the budget discussion for the Ministry of Justice in the House of Representatives, on 6 November 2002. I like to quote the text, also because it contains facts, such as the need for cell capacity, that are slightly different today. “The current question is what we need to do with convicted felons. The cells are full and we cannot build more cells in time. Some people advocate for two or more inmates in one cell. In the worst-case scenario, we will also have to deal with the imprisonment of those who stay in the Netherlands illegally. And then the issue of cells really hits the fan. I would like to propose a different, perhaps unorthodox route to tackle the cell issue. After all, one of the main problems is a high level of repeat offences. In Brazil, for example, but also in several states in the US, the international organisation Prison Fellowship has proven that they can get better results at their own prisons. Why don’t we give the Dutch branch of this organisation, Prison Fellowship The Netherlands, the opportunity to set up a pilot project for something similar? Is the minister willing to find out more about this by having a conversation with this organisation? I will be happy to set this up because I certainly see possibilities.” A conversation did follow, on 13 February 2003, with a charming policy official and one of the directors of the Probation Service. I was joined by Wim Post of the Noaber Foundation. Our lunch afterwards felt more fruitful than our conversation. Nevertheless, we thought it would be a good idea to discuss this idea with a committee of wise men, something that took place several months later at De Vanenburg Castle in Putten. We were celebrating our tenth anniversary and Andries Knevel moderated a discussion during which experts like Anton van Kalmthout, Eduard Kimman, Willem Lageweg, Jeppe Balkema, Peter van der Sande, and Henk Willem van Dorp put a statement on the table as to whether De Compagnie would be suitable in the Netherlands. About seventy stakeholders who were also in the hall participated in that discussion as well. In the previous chapter about SOS, I indicated that the wind had already begun to blow from the right direction. Peter van der Sande, however, thought the ice was still

too thin for us to start. This meant a period of waiting, but De Compagnie would kick off sooner than the famous *Elfstedentocht* 200 km skating event.

## **De Compagnie: On the Agenda Again**

Ten years later, in 2013 we celebrated our twentieth anniversary. It was time for another party, which we did as a modest reception at our office. Representatives from a number of Funds and also some prison directors attended. Peter Hennephof, at the time the director of the prison system, came as well and gave a beautiful speech of appreciation.

At one point Willem den Hertog found his soapbox moment, he was like a king on his throne. Upon answering a question if he saw another challenge for Prison Fellowship in the next twenty years, he pleaded passionately for “De Compagnie to be put on the agenda once more.” Frankly, I was not surprised as Willem and I had been discussing it. This had been prompted by the fact that within a short span of time three different parties had unexpectedly asked me about our plans for De Compagnie. The first person was a staff member of an Equity Fund. During the few times that we had talked to each other over the years, I had apparently mentioned what I had seen in Brazil. For some reason, this had stuck in her mind. Even though I honestly had not been able to remember that I had ever told her about it, I was more than happy to believe that I did. She also used to refer to PF The Netherlands as the “conscience of our society.” I felt a bit awkward about that, because we just do what we have to do. Another Fund once called us “Brave, you do brave work.” Well, if others say that this is so, then it is probably what we do. “What about the organisation’s plans to set up its own prison? You did have plans in that direction, right?” Herman, my colleague, was present as well and we looked at each other - surprised! “Well, our goal is not necessarily for our own prison, but we always have ideas for helping inmates find jobs, of course, but then the Ministry of Justice needs to provide us with the scope and space to do that.” Not much later Cees Niessen, a prison director asked me about it as well. “You need to capitalise on that idea, Hans. I strongly believe in it. Really, the times are changing, and...” When Cees believes in something, he becomes a ‘preacher’ par excellence. Since I don’t believe in coincidences, I also don’t believe that every cloud will bring rain. So, I tested his statement with Peter van der Sande, who had joined our Social Council following his retirement. “I don’t think it’s a strange idea, Hans. We need the community. I would give it a try, if I were you.” So, we opened up the closet and took the old plans for De Compagnie from the backburner to see what possibilities there were both within and outside of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands.

## **De Compagnie: Exploration and Green Light From DJI!**

We soon found sufficient consensus within the organisation but the judicial institutions needed a bit more time. After our anniversary reception, I had a conversation

with Peter Hennephof and Jacco Groeneveld, his regional director. They both thought the idea worth exploring. At the same time, the prison climate was rather uncertain. Prisons were having to be closed down and the positions of many of the prison directors were changing. Normally, these are not favourable circumstances during which to come up with new ideas and plans. Eventually, D-day turned out to be my wife's birthday. On 29 May 2015, I was meeting with Ab Warffemius at the DJI head office. The reason for our meeting was a newspaper article in *Vrij Nederland* about the APAC programme in Brazil. The article came to me via Bert Koops, former chairman of the national Works Council of the prison system, and via the Christen Unie [political party]. "Old news" I thought, until it suddenly realized that I should talk about it with Ab. Did they know about this at the DJI? Are they doing something with it? Would it be a good idea to pick up the discussion where we had left off? The first question Ab asked me was: "Hans, what do you need? You know that I believe in it." My answer was. "Commitment - I cannot set up this plan without the backing of the prison system. I could write out an extensive plan, but it will just end up at the bottom of the pile. I'm not criticising, but you are busy as it is and I've been around long enough to know how things work." A week later we had a meeting with Angeline van Dijk, Ab's fellow director, and Liesbeth van Gent, the policy official. A humorous detail: After she had read an interview with me following my return from Brazil, Liesbeth had volunteered with us for a period of time. Not long afterwards, she began working with the Ministry of Justice. "Angeline is not convinced about De Compagnie," she whispered to me. "That only makes it a nicer challenge," I said in response. I have always had a relaxed attitude about De Compagnie. First of all, it's good to dream big because it keeps you on your toes with ambition, in a healthy way. Secondly, I believe more in relationships than in programmes. Every single day, volunteers around the country visit prisoners, TBS patients, and their families. I think that's so amazing! Various studies have shown the immense value of such relationships.

In any case, going to this meeting I felt relaxed and also motivated. As the conversation developed, I noticed that even Angeline became inspired by the philosophy of De Compagnie. From earlier talks with her, I knew that "employment" also resonated with her and De Compagnie focused on employment integration. We could begin inside immediately, at a separate unit where volunteers came in every day and where we could also invite entrepreneurs from outside to come in. During the week between these two meetings, I had "welcome note" from Peter Baaijens, the prison director in Krimpen aan den IJssel, in my pocket. Peter and I had known each other for years, from the time I started working with Prison Fellowship and when he was still the head of social-cultural work in the prison in Middelburg. "Okay", said Angeline, "I think we should give it a chance. So how are we going to organise this?" I explained my preference for a practical approach and said that Peter was interested. And so, it was done. A week later, I met with Peter who then wrote a letter to the DJI saying that he saw the opportunities as well. The idea now was to give the project substance along the way.



*Peter Baaijens (l) and Hans Barendrecht at De Compagnie*

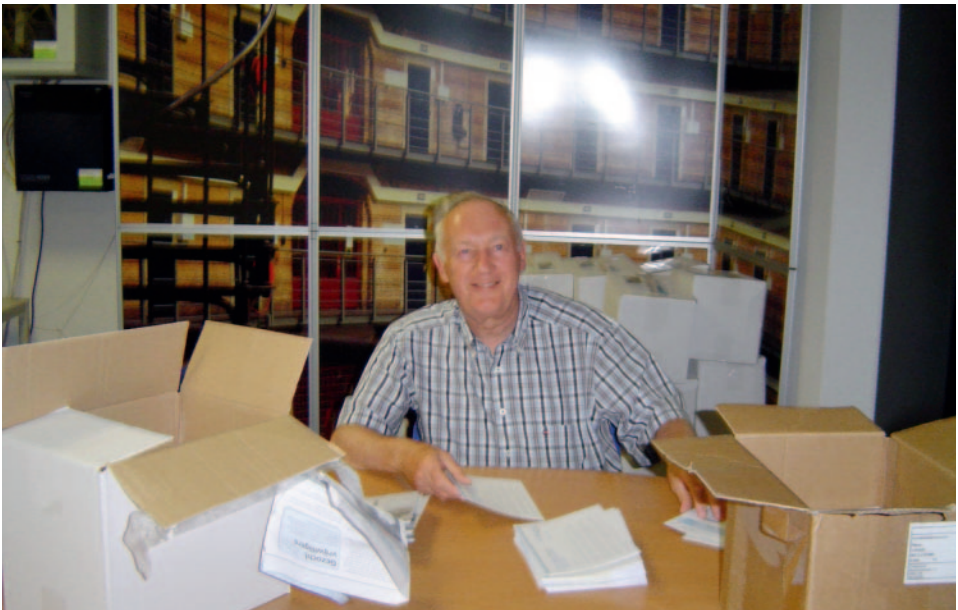
## **De Compagnie Kicks-off!**

And so, on 4 February 2016, De Compagnie kicked off with eight “companions.” Up to a point, De Compagnie represents the “intramural integration” of all our programmes including volunteer visits, SOS, employment mediation, after-care, and family care. The new element in this was the group-oriented approach. However, we didn’t have to do it all by ourselves. Supervised by Martin Budding, the experienced unit manager we had a group of keen prison employees involved with us, although this was not achieved without a struggle. Another new programme with volunteers who are even given a key, for crying out loud?! And prisoners getting such a huge amount of freedom? This is asking for trouble! Yet two years have passed, and the volunteers and entrepreneurs have become part of the family. We achieved some wonderful results and the concept is appreciated by the experts. The prisoners – who we call companions – are very enthusiastic as well. Giving responsibility to them – as in “it’s actually your programme and you can carry out your business plan for the future and we will help you with that – now appears to be working in the Netherlands as well. At the time of writing this book, the DJI assessed De Compagnie on the effects on the living environment, the work environment, and the integration. The results were not yet known when this book was published. The unit includes eighteen companions and more and more of them are actually managing to make a decent life for themselves.

## CHAPTER 5

# Proof That Volunteers are Invaluable

Volunteers are staff members, qualified personnel. Their altruistic commitment is worth millions. I'm happy to call them 'my colleagues', something I learned from Matthieu Weggeman programme. It's not about whether they are paid for their work, but about whether they have the competency to do the job. For me, this is such a key insight. Volunteers are not "helpers" of the organisation but are colleagues who are deployed because they are motivated and have competency do something. We also don't want to use volunteers as just a means to an end. That is one of the government's temptations and when that happens volunteers are viewed as the extension of a government policy which is generally not described with any enthusiasm. No one is motivated to get out of their lazy chair in order to "decrease the rate of repeat offending" or "to improve the living environment prisoners." But people are motivated to help prisoners build up a new life. Volunteers are intrinsically motivated



*Office volunteer Kees Koevoet has been handling everything for years!*

to do something because they believe in it from their hearts. They are not miracle workers but they miraculously offer something inside the prisons that prison staff cannot provide. This is mainly due to their position - are they part of the system or are they from the outside? What this says is that volunteers are seen as different not necessarily as better. This is the reason I prefer to speak of the strengthening value that volunteer work offers rather than its complementary value. This may just seem like a different accent, but it does define our perspective.

Volunteer work is also called “informal care.” It’s not part of “the system” of care as it is more or less regulated and funded by the government. It is a private social initiative by and from the community. And utilizing those volunteers is also done on a voluntary basis. This is one of the most essential differences with the Probation. One of the questions we are often asked is: What is the difference between you and the Probation Service? First of all, Probation Service serve people by court order. If they don’t cooperate, there will be consequences. We have nothing to do with courts or judges. People are entirely free to use us, they can quit at any moment, without any consequences.

## **Volunteers and Their Stories**

I honestly do not know where to begin and where to end when it comes to stories from our volunteers. For many years, I wrote our newsletters. It was a feast of inspiration to hear (and see) what volunteers have meant to the persons requesting and receiving their help. I can fill books with their stories even though they are not all success stories. Volunteers certainly have to deal with disappointments as well. They encounter sadness, powerlessness, anger, loneliness, and good intentions that melt away instantly the moment that the prisoner is released. I could go on and on but naturally, they also experience so many wonderful moments and rightfully receive appreciation and gratitude from those served.

What strikes me time and again when I attend meetings with our volunteers, is that they really appreciate the guidance they get from our office. They are always able to come to us to share the good things as well as the bad. That is also why our standard work requirement includes reporting. This can be quite labour intensive but it safeguards the quality of our care and because the information in our systems is always up to date it also enables us to respond quickly if there are questions or calamities. To the outside world, this way of working offers trust, especially for the prisons. Furthermore, it gives us the opportunity to be a learning organisation, both through internal reflection and through scientific research.

## **Volunteer Work: What do we Research?**

Conducting research sounds simple, but it’s not. If there is one person who has kept me on my toes, it is Arie van den Hurk. He is the knowledge management adviser at



*‘One person  
is worth more  
than one euro’*

Henk Willem van Dorp

*National Volunteer Day*

DJI and a first-class questioner. There is always something to talk about with Arie. Always the next question. Over the years, we have spent many hours together talking and talking away. “Hans, you may want to know how your work affects recidivism, but do you actually know what the inmates think of what you do? Do you know what they get out of it? In other words, you think that you do something for them, while you don’t even know if that is true?!” And by the way”, Arie continued, “recidivism is such a complex phenomenon. Even the Ministry of Justice is unable to indicate a watertight relationship between policy and interventions on the one hand, and the impact of them on reducing recidivism.” Then Arie introduced a metaphor that, as a soup addict, hit me to the core and I could only agree with him: “Preventing recidivism is like a vegetable soup. It is made with stock, meat, leeks, vermicelli, and etcetera. The question is, which are the ingredients you supply? Then we have the next question - what is the quality of your ingredient? Because that also determines how the soup tastes. Equally important is the question of what others do and what the quality of their ingredients is, and...” By now I knew enough and I could only surrender to Arie’s sermon. I desperately wanted to show our financial supporters the proof and measurable results of our work. Herman, our organisation’s fundraiser, and I both felt this pressure from the Funds. By the way, Funds are dealing with the same problem. Eventually, we are all searching for a mathematical conclusion: one-euro worth of care produces a return of three euros and one eurocent. Beginning within the organisation asking the accountability question is good. Quite candidly, at the same time, we also need to consider our limitations. Thus, our initial research was carried out by Peter van der Laan, not into the effects but into the satisfaction provided by volunteers work.

## Volunteer Work Effectively Researched

The first research we carried out dates from 2012. It was conducted by Peter van Laan, professor in Rehabilitation at the VU University in Amsterdam. Volunteers and those requesting the help from PF The Netherlands were asked for their opinions about our work. Both groups were very satisfied - inmates, TBS patients, and their family members gave our volunteers a rating of 8.7 out of 10. Van der Laan concluded the following in his report titled *Tevreden en Gemotiveerd* [Satisfied and Motivated]: “A large degree of satisfaction suggests effectiveness. Help requesters indicate that they benefit from the visits, and the volunteers also experience their visits as meaningful for those requesting their help. The volunteers are of the opinion that most of the people asking for help are doing better as a result of their visits. This fact can be seen as an important step towards a successful resocialisation.” This study fulfilled a long-cherished dream of PF The Netherlands. Apart of having our own positive experiences and thoughts, it is good when others offer praise. If they do not, we would have some work to do. Therefore, I was very glad that two businessmen, Arie van der Berg and Henk van der Zwan saw the importance of this report and offered their generous support. We would not have been able to do all this without their support, which has been very important in other areas as well. Martine Cammeraat supervised this research more than adequately. The same applies to Prince Willem Alexander’s visit on 1 September 2009 which was not an

easy visit to organise. Royalty in prison, a helicopter landing onsite, these are not an everyday occurrence. I was very proud to act as the host that day as I welcomed the prince in the prison where we were guests as well. Later on, in this book, Obe Veldman, who was the Director in Veenhuizen prison where this took place, writes more about that visit.

After the first research study, two more followed. In 2015, the WODC study *Puur voor jou* [Scientific Research & Documentation Centre - Purely for you], commissioned by 4VO, was completed. It’s conclusion also described the significant value of the one-on-one visits by volunteers.

*“What our contact means? You know what it means, you are important to me. I look forward to your visits. I immediately call the office when you are not there.”*

(visited prisoner)

## The Presence Study

Lastly, I would like to mention the ‘Presence’ report (2016). This study went further than the satisfaction study by aiming at what the visits offer, what the volunteer does, and what that volunteer means for the inmate, the TBS patient, or the family.





*Group photo national volunteers day 2014*

The top-three answers to the question, “what does the visit offer you?” were:

1. I feel more trust and courage
2. I’m recognised for who I am
3. I know which road I want to follow in my life

The top-three answers to the question, “what does the volunteer offer? were:

1. Pays attention to my story
2. Stimulates me to persevere
3. Gives me advice and practical help

The volunteer is seen mostly as a confidant and adviser. I put these two terms in that order because trust is the foundation to give and receive advice. When that foundation is present, then we can work together and in hope to take the right exit at the roundabout of “in or out of prison.’

### **Volunteers, a Beam of Light from the Outside**

I conclude this chapter with the people I began it with: my volunteering colleagues. Their stories can fill volumes, but they are not in this book, although, Alice and Arie, as well as several others who requested our help respond in one of the commentaries. Should you want to know more, please visit our website and read our newsletters. Six times per year, our newsletters include stories from our volunteers about prisoners, TBS patients, and their families. One of those volunteer colleagues is Wim Visser. In response to a ‘thank you’ email sent to all our volunteers, Wim sent us a

very telling “thank you” email: “Thank you for your appreciation. I can truly say from my heart that the work we do for the prisoners enriches one’s life and that time and again it teaches me lessons in life. I currently visit two prisoners in Almere, one in the regular prison and the other in the TBS clinic. One of them is a practising Christian, the other a follower of the church of Satan. It gives me so much joy in life to be given the opportunity to visit them and to be a small beam of light for them. In return, let me thank you for appreciating the volunteer.”

Isn’t that wonderful! Such a reaction makes me stop in wonder. It is the fuel to carry on with difficult applications and the never-ending lobbying process. It’s all part of the job, but one can handle it when the result of what has been done can be seen: and that is the place of faith in the process of restoration in which volunteers are invaluable.



*Volunteers, a beam of light  
from the outside*

## CHAPTER 6

# Inside the Organisation

I would be remiss in only writing about what happens outside and not about how the organisation functions internally. Everything we did and still do outside, is based on a solid back-office. Sound organisation and the guidance of volunteer work is fundamental.

### First Office

When our first multiannual funding began coming in late 1996 we got our first proper office. My fond memories of this time also include Reverend George Hooijer who was the secretary of the foundation *Foundation Rotterdam*. The foundation managed the legacy of Rotterdam businessman, Bonda and the assets were to be used for Protestant Christian initiatives. Together with Aad de Boo, Reverend George Hooijer was the only financier who has been in my attic office and, thus, witnessed the fragile beginnings of our organisation. The Board of Foundation Rotterdam also had the courage to invest in our organisation when we had not actually achieved anything yet. Everyone can see the flag on the roof with the elegant letters saying “sponsored by,” but only the builders and those who have been down in the pit understand the foundations. Fortunately, we now have sponsors as well as builders but the beginning will always hold a special place in my memory. Our first office was on Fokkerstraat in Zoetermeer, just a stone’s throw from the prison. It couldn’t be better, or hotter due to poor insulation and being on the top floor ensured that the never-ending summer of that year left us huffing and puffing for months. And when the sun wasn’t shining, it could be freezing and dark because below us was Ali, a Turkish marble trader who regularly overused the electricity and we were inevitably the ones who suffered first.

In any case, we had a real office with four desks and an official location at which to receive guests. Many of them overcame their trepidation at having to walk up the wobbly spiral stairs, which is still the subject of jokes. We had several volunteers helping us by doing all kinds of jobs like doing shifts at reception and administrative work that included mailing out information packages.

### Our First Paid Employees

In the summer of 1999, we were able to employ Ilse Dekker, our first social worker, who remained with us until 1 June 2002. The day she left, Kees van der Linden was



*Ilse Dekker (r) thanks Frits Langeraar for his lecture on the volunteer day.*

hired. A year before that we had sufficient funds for a fully staffed secretarial office with Hester Roelofsen and Helen du Bois. Both Helen and Kees were with us to stay. They contributed significantly to the development of PF The Netherlands. They didn't come expecting any prerequisites such as a collective labour agreement (which we didn't have at that time), the quality of our office and workplaces, the kind of office equipment, and so forth. They were motivated to work hard, from the heart. To put it plainly, Helen "came out of nowhere." To use a prison term, she turned herself in, calling me in December 1997 – "I received an unsolicited newsletter from your organisation, I don't know why, but I run a small communication agency and perhaps I can do something for you. Perhaps we can meet." Helen was a busy lady because, apart from her own company and family, she was politically active in the municipal council for the CU/SGP alliance. We regularly ran into each other by plan or coincidence. The opening of a playground in my neighbourhood by one of the CU aldermen was one such coincidence. Naturally, Helen captured more of my attention than the alderman. In hindsight, that event was the final push to showcase her talents with Prison Fellowship and she soon felt right at home in her role. Helen was very decisive about who was allowed to come in and who not. Advertising salesmen were very quickly turned away, and when Kees and I were in a meeting she made sure that we wouldn't be disturbed. Helen's political knowledge and experience came in handy as well. She regularly offered excellent advice, whether I requested it or not. She also joined me from time to time when I made presentations in the prisons about employment integration and the role of politics. After all, it was good to show that PF The Netherlands was more than a one-person company and that we offered more than prisoner visitation. Due to health issues, Helen had to leave us in 2017 and she can now enjoy an absolutely well-deserved rest.

## **Kees and the Volunteers**

Kees is still with Prison Fellowship. Every volunteer – and we now have more than six hundred – knows him because there is no volunteer who hasn't been 'interrogated' by Kees. He has been the architect of our process of collaborating with volunteers. I could hardly believe my eyes at first, but Kees required everyone who wanted to join us as a volunteer come to his office for an interview. This applied to Els from Groningen and Klaas from Middelburg, everyone came! Just as important



*For several years, Kees van der Linden did the 'Race van Kees' cycling tour to raise money for Prison Fellowship The Netherlands.*

are the reports required after each prison visit. This was neither superfluous nor some kind of occupational therapy or make work requirement, but an essential part of our quality management and care for each other. After all, the volunteers are on their own when they visit the inmates and the possibilities of being manipulated are not unrealistic. Another vital part of this is that the volunteer becomes the “owner” of the problem. When consultation with the prison is required, it is best done from a centralised, coordinated role, and the most practical way to do this is with a fixed contact person within Prison Fellowship. Kees managed very quickly to sit down with the Ministry of Justice to develop a competency profile for our volunteer work. Willem van Essel did that very pleasantly and empathetically and I have already written about that in Chapter 3. Building on that, Robert Josten and Marleen Pol from the DJI supported us in developing our job classification system. It was encouraging to receive their knowledge and expertise within our organisation. “Your organisation is more built around people than functions” Robert used to say. “There is nothing wrong with that, but you do need to behave as you are.” Being motivated is one thing and that has to be the foundation or one shouldn’t even begin or else one will throw in the towel with the first setback – and there will certainly be setbacks! Apart from motivation specific skills are essential. The ability to listen and personal discipline are two. On one occasion I heard a volunteer say “You need to put on big ears.” This is so important. On the other hand, one needs to be able to play by the rules. Prison is the opposite of free society where we can do anything unless it is forbidden. In prison, everything is forbidden unless it is allowed. However, we did get a certain amount of leeway from the Ministry of Justice. For example, one of the things that was not permitted was evangelisation. As I explained before, our work has a diaconal accent and Kees screens out those volunteers who wear their heart on their sleeves too obviously. He will advise them to contact the prison chaplaincy or find some other volunteer work. We still benefit greatly from this competency-oriented work method. It is the foundation of our programmes and the support. Kees also wrote our first full-fledged training manual for volunteer work, and ever since then all of our volunteer receive solid training on life in prison, judicial processes, and our organizational rules. Our training includes role playing that naturally includes practising with “difficult clients.” By this means Kees built up a competent army of volunteer colleagues and laid the foundation of a work process that is highly appreciated and trusted inside the prisons. He developed the structure in such a way that his colleagues could develop it further and this ultimately resulted in our Restorative Care Method.

*About 25 percent of those who request information about volunteer work end up doing volunteer work. Self-evaluation ensures high-quality applications.*

Kees and Helen oversaw our growth from about 200 volunteers to around 650 by 2018. Our staff increased methodically from four paid employees to an office of

around thirty staff members (25 FTEs). Most of them are social work colleagues who deal directly with requests for help and support the volunteers.

## Supporters, Fund Raising, and Growth

From 2005 onwards we really began growing. This was predominantly the result of the opportunity we had to set up fund raising through Herman Kooij. Before then this had been my job. Herman decided that he would focus first on churches, private individuals, and companies. Gradually, he also began contacting Equity Funds, eventually targeting grants we could apply for. Our Fund Acquisition and Communication department now has four employees and our total revenues have increased from over 500,000 in 2005 to 2.7 million euros in 2017. About fifty percent of our funding comes from more than 15,000 private sponsors. Additionally, hundreds of churches take up collections for our work or organise campaigns via their youth groups. The launch of De Compagnie provided new impetus in identifying and recruiting entrepreneurs to our cause. Their support, as well as that of the many Equity Funds has been invaluable and we hope to retain their sponsorship so as to keep building the connection between society and prisoners and their families.

Therefore, I cannot wait to mention our highly appreciated PR volunteers. Dick and Marjolein Bikker were more or less the first. They were about to get married when Dick was imprisoned. Following his release, he and Marjolein organised countless presentations on behalf of Prison Fellowship. I also want to mention Bas Deelen, Ruud de Bruin, Kees Koevoet, Arend Witvliet, Klaas Honkoop, and others. Often in the



*Dick Bikker, PR volunteer with experience from the inside*

evening hours, they would drive around the country or book time off from work to promote Prison Fellowship at large and small fairs as well as at church events. It was wonderful to see that they considered it a sport to not just talk about our work, sometimes from their own experience, but also to secure new sponsors. That certainly requires boldness and it is wonderful that there are always people willing to take over and to make the effort in sharing the story of caring for those who are in prison. We have a keen team of PR volunteers who make about a hundred presentation per year.

Within PF The Netherlands we have begun calling our concern for a broad and stable flow of revenues “sustainable funding.” This is to prevent unilateral dependency on single sources and to ensure that we can continue doing things that the Ministry of Justice and Funds may not be interested in but which we don’t want to, or cannot give up. A good example of this is our care for TBS patients. In my view, doing one’s utmost to find private funding is the self-evident basis for any good cause with a focus on public interest - in and by and of society. Some people tell me that it is easy for me to say this because “you are a church-based organisation and church-going people give more easily and generously.” The first part is not true. The second, perhaps, is. “On the other hand,” I say, “your pond to fish in is many times bigger than ours” the Netherlands has become increasingly secular and there are plenty of so-called neutral organisations perfectly able to scrape together the funding they require. It is all about thinking carefully about who you are and what you want, and being able to communicate that clearly. Fund raising is hard work. There is no such a thing as a free ride and the money doesn’t just fall from the sky.

I already mentioned that we were able to employ Herman. This also didn’t just happen overnight; it was a process that took about a year and I see it as a kind of turning point. It started with a prison visit in 2004 for which I had invited Ronald van der Giessen. While in the prison we talked with Paul who, amongst others, was “my inmate.” He had been convicted for the manslaughter of his wife and I had visited him around a hundred times. It is a far-reaching crime that raises a lot of questions. Despite that, Ronald had a good feeling about what we were doing. “I hear good things about the quality of your work and I also think that you can get a lot more from your supporters than you are getting now. We will cover the costs for employing someone who will focus entirely on acquiring funds.” Another important result of our visit to the prison was a good conversation about identity. The Foundation Oranje Fonds, at the time, was not reputed for supporting organisations with an outspoken Christian identity. I decided to ask Ronald frankly: “Why are you interested in us and where does that stop?” He said he was interested because of our good reputation as well as our proven efforts to financially involve society with our work. In 2003, we received nearly 300,000 euros. About sixty percent came from supporters. “Our support stops when the Christian faith becomes a precondition for someone to receive help”, said Ronald. That had never been the case and, in my view, never will be. About ninety percent of the people who knock on our door for help have no interest in the Christian faith at



all. I also don't believe that they ask us for help just because we are Christians. They do so because of our good reputation and, not unimportantly, thanks to the word-to-mouth advertising among the prisoners themselves. This is quite crucial, as asking a volunteer to visit is not a very 'macho' thing to do in prison. Be assured, there are no secrets inside a prison. "It's like an old people's home, in here," Paul told me once. "When something happens on our ward, the whole prison knows about it within five minutes." It was good to have such an open conversation with Ronald.

It feels rather uncomfortable when fellow Christians so easily tend to complain about obstructions. I recognise feelings that arise in the superficial and stubborn prejudices some people have about Christians. In my case, I always felt that these conversations were leading up to the question about converting others. Sometimes this happened quickly but at other times it could take a while. Over time, I learned to strategically bring up the issue myself not just with funds but also with prison boards. I feel that it helps. It can make one feel vulnerable, but it is always good to know where everybody stands. People, where are you?

The process with Ronald also contributed to a progressive insight that Equity Funds are not just sources for funding but that they can also become collaborative partners with a lot of in-house knowledge. Over the years, we have made grateful use of this and have established wonderful collaborative relationships with many of them.

## Discovering Justice and Charity

Let me also share a surprising discovery I made in 2012 that made me very enthusiastic. This was the concept that the term *justice* builds a bridge between charity and philanthropy. Charity is the motivation for a person to be where help is needed, but does not consider the question of whether it helps. Your heart says that you need to be there, and that is why you are there. The person is intrinsically motivated. Presence in detention. Philanthropy is based on a much more programmatic approach. What is the problem, who is involved, who bears the responsibility, who benefits from it, etc? This means that it needs to be legitimised by policies and it must achieve a result. Private sponsors and churches are primarily motivated to give out of Christian charity. They give from the heart. Funds and the government give strategically. With entrepreneurs, it is a mix. Prison Fellowship basically functions as a broker to use funding according to the expectations of the donor. That is quite a big job and often creates a certain tension between presence and the desire for results. How to deal with that?

I found the answer through Rabbi Toledano when visiting the synagogue of the Portuguese Israelite Community in Amsterdam. In an article about the laws and different types of charity, he wrote that "one of the highest forms of charity is to donate money for the release of prisoners." This, of course, is not what Prison Fellowship does. His statement was related more to prisoners in a dictatorial regime. However, it piqued my interest because the article also referred to the eight levels of charity

described by Maimonides (1135-1204). The Hebrew word for justice in the Bible is *tsedeka*. Charity is part of that. I noticed it immediately when I entered the synagogue and saw the collection box in May 2012. *Tsedeka* it said. Toledano smiled. “Indeed, *tsedeka* is also the offering of a gift, and the best thing to achieve with that is making someone financially independent.” He used the well-known illustration of “giving someone a fish so they can eat for a day or giving him a fishing rod so he can learn how to fish himself.” He advised to focus working on the root of crime, because someone who repents becomes a different person. If you achieve that, you are not finding a job for John the Crook but the Peter the Recovered who is sincere, principled, trustworthy, and loyal; and so our motto “believe in restoration” along with our restoration puzzle including eight areas of life was born. After all, life is a puzzle and new pieces don’t fit just anywhere, and we can’t simply lay down a completely new puzzle. Still, we keep believing in restoration.

### **Maimonides’ eight levels of charity are:**

- 1 Reluctant donation
- 2 Giving less than required, but with grace
- 3 Giving what is required but only after the poor person has asked for it
- 4 Giving to the poor before they ask for it
- 5 The poor person knows the giver, but not the other way around
- 6 The giver knows who receives, but the poor person doesn’t know his benefactor
- 7 Giver and receiver don’t know each other, there is a mediator
- 8 Providing work or a loan for someone to become financially independent

You could say that the work done by Prison Fellowship falls into levels seven and eight in Maimonides’ schedule. Prison Fellowship is a mediator between the giver and the receiver and we hope that the prisoner leaves his criminal life behind by doing ‘honest work’. This will not help him just one time, but for the rest of his life. The lesson in this is that preventing (recidivism) is better than cure.

### **Every Gift Counts!**

Something else I want to mention is a small but certainly important comment. The motivation for offering the gift is always more important than its size. “Even if someone can only afford to give a tiny amount but gives from a good heart, that gift is just as commendable as a large donation,” the article said. Jesus put it even more poignantly when He saw a poor widow putting a small amount (two mites) into the collection box. She *offered* what she couldn’t do without and by doing so she had



*The 15,000th donor*

given more than anyone else. No matter what, every donation, big or small, needs to be treated respectfully, like a good steward.

### **Presence and Results: An Unequal Yoke?**

Earlier on, I mentioned that we experienced a second type of tension while thinking about our identity. The first was whether we needed to be able to measure results no matter what, or whether we would be satisfied only with the fact that we could visit inmates. The second tension concerned restoration. What actually constitutes restoration? And to what extent can that be achieved? Every day, we see situations in which restoration seems to be no longer possible. For example, long-term addictions come at a cost. Together with the person asking for help we also experience the pain as pieces of the puzzle cannot be mended. At the same time, self-reliance is not always the best thing that can happen to a person. For Christians this is and remains dependence on the acquittal of guilt through Jesus Christ. This is a restoration so sustainable that, even after our life on earth, it continues into eternal life. This is something we desire for every person but we cannot and don't want to force

or require that. As John van Eck says, “conversion is one of those things that happen, through the work of God’s Spirit.” It is a mystery we can, at most, pray for. For us prayer comes as automatically and essentially as breathing. We call it our Higher Appeal and is how we begin our days at the office, something like a morning call, so to speak. It is a short but very important moment. One of the colleagues says a prayer for what must be done or things happening that day, and we always include our volunteers and those requesting our help. Some people ask for that. We also pray for all the people and organisations we work with, as well as for the victims of crimes and for those who have the difficult job of working in the punitive area of justice. That must also be done properly. We call this time Higher Appeal because we realise that hard work and wonderful plans alone will not produce the blessing. Hence, we confess our dependency on God. Part of our prayers is also giving thanks for what we receive. When we receive donations, or hear about good conversations that have been had with prison staff, or when a prisoner has secured a job, or when a mother is grateful that one of our volunteers came by to deliver a gift for their daughter on behalf of the father in prison - then the Higher Appeal is the platform for offering our gratitude together. Once every two weeks, we allocate ten minutes for the “luchtplaats,” the yard. One of our colleagues takes the floor to share something from the field. This can be a beautiful or distressing report from a volunteer about his or her visit, but it can just as well be a story told by Rijno van Waarde describing how he is trying to win over entrepreneurs to be of value to prisoners.

The for our exploration of identity, work, and funding in 2012 was occasioned by an article written by Clara Miller, titled “Hidden in Plain Sight, the Capital Structure of a Non-profit Organization.” I discovered it because Jan Baan had given me the book ‘Good to Great’ by Jim Collins, a book about his study of the question about what makes some organisations perform excellently. Surprisingly enough, these were not the ‘big guys’. An sequel on “Good to Great” for the social or non-profit sector was published as well. The argument by Clara Miller more or less comes down to the fact that non-profit organisations cannot make a profit and, therefore, cannot have a policy to accumulate capital. If a foundation was to present a budget showing a financial surplus, it would raise questions. Nevertheless, financial leeway and flexibility is needed in order to perform well and sustainably. Her interest is the vital organisation, and it can only be vital when it knows who it is and what it wants. That is why we have thought about this internally in our office for a year and compiled our *Nota Vitalisering* [Vitalisation Note] which can be found on our website.

## **Growth in Employees**

Let me continue with the development of our organisation, because several years after we employed Herman as our “funding officer,” we experienced our second wave of development. This happened right after our participation in the three-year growth programme of the Foundation Oranje Fonds. Due to the fact that we were receiving



*Miranda Prins (r) and Helen Du Bois*

more requests for help and could therefore involve more volunteers, we also needed better coordination of our care plans and the recruitment and training of volunteers. At the same time, it was a crucial time to safeguard the proper organisation of our overall coordination. In mid-2008, we hired Joost de Jager as Project Manager for Care and Organisational Development. He had worked for KLM for many years and came to us at exactly the right moment. Prison Fellowship has benefited immensely from his knowledge and experience with processes. He developed a structure that our organisation still retains even though some elements have been adjusted over time. Ownership of the work “in the workplace” is still the foundation whenever possible. I also believe that the organisation can be grateful that, during the same period, we employed social workers who would stay with Prison Fellowship for a long time. I’m thinking of Beppie Geurtsen, Ilse van den Hoven, Prisca van der Roest, and Marilen Blijleven. Hanna Geuze, a social work intern ‘stuck around’ as our communications officer and has raised our communication to a higher level. After a period of working for a charity organisation in Africa she returned to Prison Fellowship in 2014 to set up De Compagnie. Of course, the overall growth also means more work “at the front door” which is why we were pleased when Jantine van der Tang took on that job in 2009. If you have been at the helm for some time, it’s also wonderful to see your colleagues develop. In 2004, when Miranda Prins was just eighteen years old, she joined us as a secretary. Now she is a mother of a beautiful family and one of the staff in our finance department.

Dick Alblas and Ruud Kuiper are two very special finance volunteers I certainly want to mention. They are both accountants and I came into contact with them by the end of 2003. We needed some maintenance work done on our financial administration and naturally, they saw that much more clearly than I did. From a heart-felt affinity for our work and to prepare PF The Netherlands for further growth they offered us their time and knowledge for free. Afterwards, Dick became our treasurer and sadly resigned from the audit committee of the Supervisory Board in 2014.

I wholeheartedly express my gratitude to them and all the other unnamed colleagues and the contributions they have made with passion and professionalism.

### **Executive Management, Supervision, and Advice**

This applies equally to the people in the background without whom a foundation cannot exist. I'm talking about executive management and boards. I will restrict myself to naming the chairmen. Marten Kleyn, a lawyer in The Hague, was our first chairman and Servaas Stoop, the mayor of the municipality of Korendijk is the current chairman of our Supervisory Board. Joop Spoor, Gerard van der Hoek, Henk Abbink and Jan van der Wal acted as chairmen in the intervening period. The Supervisory Board model was introduced in 2010. Before that we had a combined Supervisory and Advisory Board. According to Jan van der Wal chairman of the latter, its core task was to launch at least one good idea per year. Eventually, he launched the idea for



*Fltr: Henk Abbink, Jan van der Wal and Dick Alblas have done much for Prison Fellowship The Netherlands*

the Supervisory Board model. In fact, the Supervisory Board formalised the existing practice of policies and procedures: responsibility on executive level and supervision on board level. Jan has taught me much when it comes to all the management aspects and the preparations for and chairing of meetings.

### **Did You Know That...?**

The Prison Fellowship The Netherlands dossier contains some other interesting facts that I would like to share with you. For example, about its name and its initialism. The name Prison Fellowship The Netherlands (in Dutch - *Gevangenzorg Nederland*) has been firmly established by now, but its introduction did not go smoothly at all. The organisation was originally founded under the English name Prison Fellowship Nederland. I have always felt a deep connection with Prison Fellowship but first and foremost we are a Dutch organisation for prisoners in the Netherlands. We are also 100% independent, both operationally and financially. I needed all my powers of persuasion to have a Dutch name adopted. In the end, we began with a compromise. Underneath the name *Gevangenzorg Nederland*, it would say in bold letters “an activity of Prison Fellowship Nederland”. By the way, the name *Gevangenzorg* was not easily found and though it was a bit long there were no good alternatives. Names such as “Eye for Prisoners” or “Heart for Prisoners” didn’t make it. It was a matter of some years before the name *Gevangenzorg Nederland* was used independently. Every now and then over a cup of tea someone would suggest that we could perhaps find a better name. “Don’t ever do that! Listen to grandpa” Willem den Hertog would say. “If you have chosen name that has become a brand, don’t change it!” Moreover, there are some examples of organisations that have attempted to do just that, but they’ve rarely done that successfully. Our logo is still inspired by the logo of PFI which symbolises a Biblical quotation from Isaiah that “a bruised reed will not be broken.”

We also thought hard about an acronym. It contains the first letters of the two words and – and this is the fun fact – the last letter of the second word. This ‘d’ is also the ‘d’ of diaconate. Let me confess that I consider all the other variations that often pass by unsolicited, like GZN, GN, and GVN, as an offense. Pronouncing these acronyms makes the ‘G’ sound too hard. With GNd, it flows into the other letters and the ‘d’ is a nice topic for a conversation on the d of *diakonia*. *People, where are you?*

Now that I’m into details, I also don’t particularly like the word *detainees*. I much more prefer the words prisoners or inmates. Detainees sounds too abstract and is emotionless, sounding clinical and politically correct because “detention” means holding someone on behalf of another. That is of course what the prison does on behalf of society on the basis of rules that have been agreed on. But the prisoner is a fellow human being, of flesh and blood. He or she have lost their freedom and that cannot be the real purpose. It is for the condemnation of evil in our world. Why does this evil exist? How do we solve it? It’s all a bit ponderous perhaps, but I can’t make it any prettier. If we hide behind these questions, then life and work become just a

layer of varnish. The quiet and safe society we all desire has been cruelly disturbed and so we respond with interventions – investigating, judging, locking people up, resocialising to desired behaviour – and then we move on with our lives. In the meantime, within two years nearly thirty percent of the released prisoners find themselves behind bars again and forty-five percent commit another crime. This is something to stop and think about. It can make one despair. What is the use of what we are doing? And yet, we carry on because, as a beautiful teaching says: whoever saves one life, saves the entire world. People, where are you?

### **Boxes to Gain Insight**

Another interesting fact perhaps, is my search for insight. Not hampered by any formally learned entrepreneurial and organisational skills I simply began. Along the way and over time the cupboards began to overflow and before I knew it the desktop of my PC was filled with folders and documents, or as some would have it - one folder with containing literally all their documents. One can 'no longer see the outside world for the bars', to change a well-known expression, and there is no more light flooding in. One morning, I was reading Solomon. In Ecclesiastes 4:6 he wrote: "Better is a handful with quietness, than two handfuls with labour and the vexation of spirit." This old translation hit the nail on the head for me. "I need to create some order inside so that I can have one hand free for the outside" I thought. So, this is how the five Boxes came about. Five, because the hand has five fingers. Simple. They are still being used: Box 1 Personnel and Organisation; Box 2 Projects and Activities; Box 3 Finances and Funds; Box 4 Publicity and Information; Box 5 Development and Partners. I generally know very quickly where to find the documents that I have stored and also older ones, which was very convenient when writing this book. I had to click a lot of files from underneath the dust. A fun detail is that when we sit together with our management team on Mondays to look back and to look ahead, we call it the Box Meeting. This is how an organization creates its own lingo.



## CHAPTER 7

# The Final Word

In a court of law, the suspect always gets the final word. Not that I consider myself a suspect, but it may happen that people who read this book may suspect that I have forgotten them.

Delving through my history dossier I came across so many names and events that it was almost impossible to make a selection. I selected names and events as I went along without premeditation. The direction we chose for the book unfolded soon enough: giving insight into how Prison Fellowship developed and how I experienced it. I have not been able to mention all the people who have been important throughout the years. I'm thinking of Rev. Cornelis van den Berg, the small wanderer with a big heart for prisoners, and Albert Riezebos. Early on, Cornelis brought me into contact with Albert, an entrepreneur in Genemuiden. Albert's role in building up Prison Fellowship has been immense. I know that he's not expecting to be included in my credits list and he knows that my gratitude exceeds any words. "Greetings and blessings" is how he used to end his notes. I wish the same to you, Albert!

I also didn't mention the fact that soon after 1997, a situation arose in which we were unable to meet our financial obligations for three months. Luckily, I was the only paid employee at the time. Never again! was my wish and intention. Thankfully, this situation has not repeated itself.

I also haven't written about the hugely valuable conversation I had with Kaj Klom. If there is one person who taught me the importance of communication, it is Kaj – repeating the message in particular – as well as having a strategic mindset. As he used to say, "the solution always lies within yourself. And remember your *ability to compensate*. Doing your work with such conviction is wonderful but keep an eye on your own health and don't forget to skate regularly." This iconic man from Zoetermeer sadly passed away in 2016.

And then there are the beautiful quotes by Bram van de Beek, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Kaj Munk, and by C.S. Lewis that I would like to share because they helped me to carry on and keep my focus. This also applies to the Sunday church services for there is great power in regularity.

*Naturalist* the autobiography of Edward Wilson is another book I'd liked to have quoted from. Another time, perhaps. Also, from a forgotten book by Koos van Wieringh, *De ideale gevangenis* [The Ideal Prison]. I'm also not writing about the unfor-

gettable lectures at the VU University with Theo Schuyt about Philanthropy, or my thesis on the history of the PCRV, the Protestant Christian Probation Association. It includes valuable lessons for judicial volunteer work and Prison Fellowship The Netherlands. The convivial and valuable contacts I had with Mgr. Dr Everhard de Jong, auxiliary bishop of Roermond, are also not mentioned.

During my journey back in time, I rediscovered so many memories of my paid and unpaid colleagues. Prison Fellowship would never have been possible without their efforts and dedication, and it most certainly cannot continue without them in the future. From time to time what I saw, heard, and read of and about them lifted me up and carried me forward. Seemingly small gestures could have an enormous impact on me but writing everything down was an impossible task. Even so, all your first names, nearly 700 of you, are listed on the flyleaf! You are a wall of witnesses with a profound concern for the least appreciated in our society.

I also think more broadly about our stakeholders, without whom Prison Fellowship could never have developed into what we are now. First of all are the thousands of prisoners, TBS patients, and their families. Further are the hundreds of churches and entrepreneurs, dozens of Funds, and over 15,000 private sponsors. And last but not least, are the executives and employees of the prisons and TBS clinics as well as the civil servants in The Hague. Thank you for your trust, for knocking on our door for assistance, for opening your doors to offer your input and ideas so we could choose our course, and for supporting our work financially. The fact that so many churches and



*PFI, many cultures, one foundation*

Christians care about prisoners surely is a unequivocal sermon. These days, people listen with their eyes.

Every now and then, I have to deal with pressures for research and promotion. I would gladly welcome an intellectual challenge and deepened insight, but the weather prophets Andries Knevel and Obe Veldman have both predicted the same weather with other models: unstable, rainy, and temperatures that are too low. In short, keep focusing on your daily work (for the time being), then where you will in the future will be of much greater value. History has proven that I can listen as well. Thank you, Andries and Obe, for all our discussions and your advice.

I'm also thankful for PFI, for Ron Nikkel, Ivan Sotirov, and Dan Van Ness in particular. My meetings and discussions with you helped me in the process of building up Prison Fellowship. For me personally, your accepting me into "our international family" as you called it, has been an enriching experience. Thank you for believing in me. It allowed me to travel to nearly all continents, from Costa Rica to Beijing, and many places north and south of them. I encountered people I only knew from the media including as Aleksii II, the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church. My many conversations with Dan about Restorative Justice and its practical implementation

were enormously stimulating. Thanks to PFI, I also saw the big differences that exist within Europe. Within a two to three hours' flight from Schiphol Airport, one can see what a communist past can do to a country both inside and outside prison. In Iceland, because of its isolated position, I saw the other extreme. During the final period of the detention, prisoners can go to a so-called open prison, like we have in the Netherlands, but in Iceland they even have a beautiful golf course at their disposal. Frankly, and certainly with a view on Peter van der Laan's contribution in this book this is not an idea that Prison Fellowship will put forward. Going on a pilgrimage, such as Prison Fellowship offers in Poland might stand a better chance. There, prisoners act as buddies for wheelchair-bound people on a pilgrimage to a holy destination but then again, as Protestants, pilgrimages are not really our thing.



*An open prison in Iceland, complete with golf course.*

## People, Where Are You?

The title and structure of this book more or less forced me to lift the veil from my own life as well. What has working for the well-being of prisoners done for me personally? Where am I now? When I include my time with the Court of Appeal, I have been present in the garden of evil daily, for 25 years. I did what any gardener does; I sowed, weeded, hoed, looked around while leaning on my rake, enjoyed the blossoming flowers, and, fortunately, I was able to harvest the fruits. The basis for all this is being able to open the garden gate every single day, and to set out joyfully in the tradition I grew up in. And this is a Protestant tradition, of doing your work as a calling and enjoying the Sunday as a day of rest, contemplation and faith in a perfect future at God's moment. From the authority and control from above, and responsibility and respect to those next to and 'below' me; of sobriety and reflection on everything I do; and of loving God above all else and one's neighbour as oneself. In 'my' tradition, I am glad that we still read God's Law every Sunday morning. It informs us where we are; that man is inadequate in everything but the God provides His mercy for everything and more. Calvin convinces me to adopt an attitude that doesn't come to me naturally: to love despite everything else.

By walking in the worldwide prison yard of PFI, I have been in contact with nearly

all Christian traditions which has made me even more appreciative of my own tradition and has put it into a larger context. Summing up the differences would not be difficult but I don't want to trivialise or negate them. At the same time the mystery of God, creation, and mankind is altogether too big and wondrous. It humbles me and stimulates my curiosity, but does not make me a "dogooder." Because, as Bram van de Beek concisely stated "this world has already been judged, for that is why Jesus Christ came." He is the connection, the Medi-

ator, the Conciliator between God and man. We don't own Him, and He should not be taken for granted. You are fortunate when you are given the opportunity to share in His compassion. This was the wisdom given to me by my father, which I hope to make my own step by step. And I feel the vibes when I hear this same notion among fellow Christians around the world. People, where are you? I believe that this cause has become my life sentence. And I accept it gladly with gratitude.



## PETER NELISSEN

*Dr Peter Nelissen is a criminologist, independent researcher, and (international) adviser. His main research has always focused on the resocialisation of (ex-)prisoners. Apart from that, he has worked as an art teacher (also in prisons) and is a visual artist in his own right (modern painting).*



*At the request of Hans Barendrecht, Peter wrote this contribution. Hans is grateful for the wonderful and deep conversations he and Peter had about the causes of criminality and meaningful solutions over the past fifteen years. He especially appreciates Peter's constructive reflection on the identity of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands.*

# Care, Meaning, and Restoration as Result of Volunteer Work in a Judicial Setting: an analysis

In contemporary criminology and penology, we have adopted the desistance paradigm, implying the principle that interventions should focus mainly on stimulating and accelerating processes that stop criminality. Desistance is a natural (spontaneous) process that, sooner or later, develops in nearly all delinquents. When this occurs, the frequency of criminal behaviour goes down and their amenability for change increases. This process is also called 'desistance-from-crime'. According to the Good Lives Model (GLM), except on skills for avoiding criminal behaviour, interventions that encourage the cessation of criminal behaviour should focus mainly on a future life that, in the eyes of the individual, offers purpose, meaning, satisfaction, or fulfilment. Apart from this aspect of increasing their (future) well-being, this model puts the activation and use of strong character traits and the quality of the individual at its core.

The stimulation of the process of ceasing criminal activities basically comes down to the empowerment of the individual, with the emphasis on positive experiences and the development of strength to make right choices in terms of personal growth and social rehabilitation.

Getting one's life back in order after a life spent in crime and multiple detentions is

not an easy feat. A criminal lifestyle is mostly fed by a negative mindset of demoralisation combined with a fatalistic attitude and the incapacity to cope adequately with stress, setbacks, and crises. Some people cope with such situations by choosing 'easy' criminal solutions. Typical for a life in crime, detentions, and a demoralising state of mind is the underlying presence of negative, existential attitudes of despair, confusion, isolation, helplessness, indifference, resentment (grudge), and the feeling that life is futile (existential vacuum and loss of meaning).

Detention can further increase this mindset of demoralisation. Loss of freedom is often experienced as a threatening situation in which the prisoner's essential being and personal core suffers most. It is a shocking experience that raises existential questions that can be experienced as a loss of meaning ('Who am I?' 'How can my life still be worthy?' 'Who will I be?' 'Is there still a future ahead for me?').

Successful self-restoration and ceasing criminal activities go hand in hand with overcoming this feeling of demoralisation and making a U-turn into the existential state of mind of re-moralisation whereby one develops the strength to do the right thing, even when everything seems to go wrong. Concretely, this is about dealing successfully with setbacks and stressful situations, to rise above them stronger than before. Remoralisation includes the development of resilience and an existential transformational process during which despair is replaced by hope, confusion by coherence, isolation by a sense of community (social inclusion), helplessness by the ability to act, indifference by involvement, resentment by gratitude, futility by experiencing that life has meaning. Finding a purpose and meaning in life refers to experiencing a deeper connection with oneself, with those around you, and with life itself.

As can be concluded from my own research and that of others, volunteer work in a judicial setting contributes to the process of ceasing criminal activities via remoralisation (hope, meaning, social inclusion, gratitude). The "active ingredients" of volunteer work with (ex-) prisoners or otherwise detained people includes a relational dimension (presence, the contact that people make, a listening ear, relational care) and a restoration-oriented dimension (practical help and support).

The contact people make with each other and the connection made with the life and situation of the prisoner or (former) otherwise legally involved party results in positive experiences for the (ex-)prisoner who will feel respected and appreciated as a human being. The quality of the bond of trust between the volunteer and the (ex-)prisoner, and especially the relational match between both, acts as a potential source of figurative benefits for the (ex-)prisoner. The (ex-)prisoner can draw strength, motivation, and hope from this bond to persevere and give meaning and purpose to life in his or her unique and positive manner.

Research has shown that the (ex-)prisoners' search for meaning in life is mostly initiated by the feeling that others have taken the trouble to be there for them.

A volunteer and (ex-)prisoner (or otherwise legally involved party) who begin a

conversation with each other exchange words or stories that have meaning. It must be stressed that both parties are involved in a world that has meaning and purpose as a whole. Meaning is the aspect that is particularly focused on. Speaking with someone means offering the other person the world through words. When the (ex-)prisoner and the volunteer talk with each other or, preferably, exchange their stories then they mutually and jointly give meaning and purpose to everything that surrounds them, and to the world they live in. As things and events are named during the conversations, the volunteer and (ex-)prisoner step back from them, creating a distance between themselves and what has happened. Speaking, the sense of being heard, and human interaction play an important role in the unfolding of a purpose and dealing with the loss of meaning. This is why (ex-)prisoners/involved parties describe the effects of having contact with volunteers in terms of 'getting things off your chest, having an outlet, learning from each other, getting to know oneself, showing who you are, and dealing with each other in openness and equality'.

There also appears to be a link between the dedication, help, support, and care offered by the volunteer and the prisoner's ability to better cope with a lost sense of connection by restoring the connection with oneself, with those who matter to them, with society, and with life in general.

The personal and societal rehabilitation of (ex-)prisoners/involved parties cannot be done without the active role and contribution of family, friends, acquaintances, and the community - apart from the help given by professionals, of course. Collectively, at a societal level, there must also be a willingness to give formerly convicted people, as fellow citizens, a second chance and to grant them a worthy place within society. Exclusion and the stigmatisation of (ex-)prisoners does not comport with the rule of law and a decent, civilised society. It even has a contrary effect, and actually incites a sense of rebellion and indifference with ex-prisoners, resulting in them going against society even more strongly and persisting in their criminal activities.

This is why the care that volunteers of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands have for the well-being of (ex-)prisoners is such a hugely important initiative. After 25 years, it offers a marvellous and powerful example of involved citizens who contribute actively to a merciful, inclusive, and safe society. Congratulations and keep up the good work!

TRANSPORT





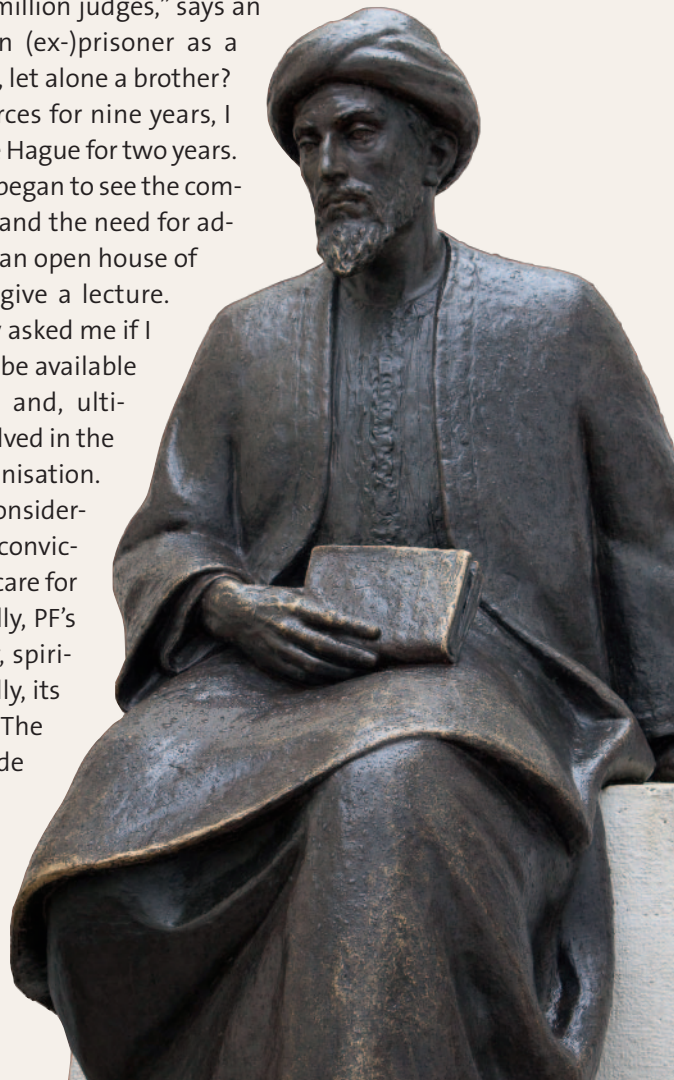
# Commentaries and Responses

*Commentary Autumn 1995*

## An Introduction

We are listening to Mr Hans Barendrecht, Director of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands since 1 June 1995. Hans is 32 years of age, married, and a father of three:

I have been fascinated by the phenomenon of punishment for a long time. People generally say that punishment is necessary. And yes, confronting undesirable behaviour requires a response. I'm glad that this is done in a disciplined manner by the government. Imagine if we would take the law into our own hands. The tiny island of Rottumeroog would soon be the most densely populated place in Western Europe. And I will leave other consequences to your imagination. A public yardstick for the trust people have in the rule of law is often the (severity) of the punishment, which is a sad thing. The Jewish philosopher Maimonides once stated: "If you judge someone, make him your brother." "Now that I'm free, I often feel that I'm being judged by fourteen million judges," says an (ex-)prisoner. Who would want an (ex-)prisoner as a neighbour, an employee, as a friend, let alone a brother? After having been in the armed forces for nine years, I worked at the Court of Appeal in The Hague for two years. Particularly during this last period, I began to see the complexity of the problem of prisoners and the need for adequate help. On 1 October 1994, at an open house of Prison Fellowship, I was asked to give a lecture. After that, it all went very fast. They asked me if I wanted to train volunteers, would I be available to serve as their Board secretary and, ultimately, whether I wanted to be involved in the building up the PF operational organisation. When making my decision, three considerations played a role. First of all, the conviction that Christians are be called to care for the well-being of prisoners. Secondly, PF's broad scope of concern – mentally, spiritually, socially, and legally. And finally, its work method based on volunteers. The involvement of people from outside



*Statue of Maimonides in Córdoba*

the prison system is invaluable. Not just for the (ex-)prisoners but also for their families. I hope that many of you with full conviction will join the ranks of thousands of enthusiastic volunteers of PF worldwide. In turn, I am convinced that it will enrich your personal life as well.



## RESPONSE FROM JOOP DE GOEDE

*Joop de Goede was the first prison director who dared to give Prison Fellowship an opportunity. Joop started as a management intern in the prison system in 1972. After a two-year course, he was appointed as the Deputy Director in the prison in Breda. In April that year, he was transferred to the juvenile remand centre in Haarlem. In 1980, he was appointed as Director of this institution. After that, he worked at the correctional unit within the penitentiary complex in Scheveningen which was the most severe Prison in the Netherlands at the time; Jail De Berg in Arnhem; and the penitentiary institutions in Middelburg and Dordrecht, where he was the Managing Director. He retired from that position in 2004.*

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRISON FELLOWSHIP THE NETHERLANDS

*It all started at the former correctional unit De Kantelberg in Scheveningen, part of the Scheveningen penitentiary complex. Reverend Jan Eerbeek, who was held in great esteem by the personnel as well as by the inmates, introduced Willem den Hertog. He was a jovial and eloquent entrepreneur who, under the reverend's wings, wanted to contribute to a possible resocialisation process for prisoners. It primarily involved those who were incarcerated at the B-unit, also commonly known as the Bunker. During that time the correctional institution, and certainly the B-unit housed problematic prisoners and those being held for political reasons were held. It was the most severe institution in the Netherlands.*

*In the conversation groups, which I was not involved in Willem shared the highlights of his life, but he also shared the low points and how his Christian faith provided the inspiration and strength to cope with and overcome his problems. The conversation groups were a success, which means that a relatively large number of prisoners attended the talks and were inspired by the approach and content. Over time, these group conversations were followed up with individual meetings. Given the nature and background of the prisoners involved I had not*

*expected this kind of outcome or success.*

*Additionally, the reverend and Willem implemented a “centre for contemplation” as a dedicated space suitable for the nature and content of the conversation groups.*

*After a major reorganisation in 1993, I began my work at De Berg prison in Arnhem, better known as the ‘Koepel’ [Dome] prison. Soon thereafter, I rekindled my contact with Willem again who at some point, introduced me to Hans Barendrecht. Our intention was also to conduct these activities in Arnhem in a similar way as they had been set up in Scheveningen, with adjustments if necessary. Hans told me that he was in contact with Prison Fellowship The Netherlands (PFN) and that he would like to know to what extent PFN’s ideology might be of added value to the Dutch penitentiary institutions. Considering the typical American strategy and approach, which I believed differed significantly from the European approach, I was initially rather apprehensive. On the other hand, my experience with Willem den Hertog gave me some confidence that we could continue our talks.*

*During the regular meetings that followed, it became clear that Hans and his people could play a meaningful role within the institution. I don’t remember exactly when, but at some point, we were no longer talking about PFN but about Gevangenzorg Nederland (GNd), which sounded much better to me.*

*I was drawn by the broad approach of GNd. Especially their use of volunteers was a very valuable formula, both during and after the detention period. Yet it could also be its Achilles heel. How, given the mission of the organisation could they possibly keep all the volunteers, each with their own motivations for doing the work, ‘on the straight and narrow’? Voluntary doesn’t mean non-committal!*

*As with all new initiatives, some people were sceptical and others opposed. During our conversations, I repeatedly emphasised that any hint of ‘converting people’ had to be avoided at all costs. Participating in conversation groups and/or programmes should be on voluntary basis and must be accessible to every interested prisoner, regardless of their origin and/or background. Hans wholeheartedly agreed to these requirements.*

*It is remarkable to see that prisoners are surprised or astounded by the fact that this work is done by volunteers who are committed to care for their well-being on their own time and without being paid to do so. Naturally, they are also curious to know more about the volunteers’ motivation and reasons for doing this. In the case of GNd, it is clear that they do this from a Christian faith which, in my view, is perfectly in line with our Judeo-Christian culture. Nevertheless, there will always be those who frown upon this. So be it. Over the years that I have known GNd, I can only say their approach has been nothing less than professional and, as far as I know, there have been no, or hardly any words of complaint.*

*For the critics who express their opinions condescendingly in words like 'it's carrying coal to Newcastle', I have a good story from a foreign colleague at a symposium:*

*'There once was an older fisherman sitting on a bench on the beach of tropical island. It was low tide and the sea was receding. Along the water line, more and more starfish stayed behind lying in the bright and hot sun. Suddenly, a little boy ran onto the beach and frantically began throwing the starfish back into the sea.*

*After a while he grew tired and sat down next to a fisherman to catch his breath. The fisherman was amused and asked him why he bothered throwing the starfish back into the sea as it would be impossible to save the hundreds of starfish anyway. The little boy thought about this question for a moment and then answered: "Sure, I may not be able to save them all, but what if you were that particular starfish that I did save?" The old man realised that he had no answer to that.'*



## A Fair Trial

Whether in a criminal case or an application for a building permit one desires to have a fair ruling. No tinkering at the edges. Justice is justice. I don't need to tell you that practice shows otherwise and is sometimes caused by unfortunate procedural irregularities.

While I'm writing this, my thoughts go to Jan, Leo, Ronny, and Henkie; four Dutchmen who have been imprisoned in Scotland for two years. Late August, I had the opportunity to visit them in the high-security prison where they are incarcerated. The charge against them is importing hashish. They seem deflated like a punctured tire. Their 'case' lacks any cohesion and seems unfair. They were arrested in international waters and there is no evidence that they had even a single ounce of hashish on board. Expert witnesses reportedly prove their innocence. However, the jury thinks differently. Jan and Leo were each sentenced to fourteen years and Ronny and Henkie, each to ten years in prison. Experts recently discovered that an important tape recording used as evidence had been tampered with. A crucial part is cut out. One can understand the level of stress they (and their families) have now that they are waiting to appeal their case. Will they finally get a fair trial?

A major event like appeal requires moral support. I shared John 8:1-11 with them. The upholders of the law and order are dealing with a case: adultery. Caught in the act, they say. The case 'stinks' and Jesus can 'smell' it. They are not just trying to catch Him out but they have dismissed the male who was complicit. Adultery, caught in the act! Surely the man had be present as well? Jesus' response is masterful, and just. He did not come to judge but offer justice according to the law of Moses. To save people who find themselves on the brink of death and to reconcile them with God. That is what it is all about.

Prison Fellowship The Netherlands has not been called to judge. Rather, we are here to help, to be present for the other person, on behalf of Jesus who knows about need, misery, and detachment. This creates an enormous pressure in our diaconal work among prisoners and their families. As Aart Peters (diaconal consultant in Gelderland) says, "Diaconate means rolling up your sleeves with folded hands." This means work-



Rembrandt: *The woman taken in adultery*

ing and praying for the well-being of those in need both during their detention and certainly afterwards as well. Only then will a process be fair and concluded, for even when judgement is not justly given everything will be made well – when the released ex-prisoner no longer wanders around like a bird who has fallen out of a nest but is allowed to take his place before God and with mankind because Jesus, the Other has taken his place. This is the care offered by Prison Fellowship the Netherlands and by many among you, I hope.

## RESPONSE FROM JOHAN BAC



*Johan Bac worked with the Public Prosecution Department where he held several positions, the last one being that of Chief Public Prosecutor. After that, he worked for the Ministry of Justice & Security for several years, including as the Director Criminal Law Chain. In 2017 he took the initiative to contact Hans Barendrecht, who was pleasantly surprised to learn that Johan had known Prison Fellowship for some time as a private sponsor. For Hans, several surprising streams flowed into one another. Since 1 June 2018, Johan is the Managing Director of the Dutch Probation Service.*

## FAIR PROCESS, FAIR WORK

*Hans, you are right: the most important thing is a fair trial for all parties. And we both know that it is better to be imprisoned in the Netherlands than in some far-away country.*

*People may complain about Dutch rule of law, and sometimes they may be right. However, in the Netherlands, you will have an excellent chance of getting a fair trial. Our country is one of the world's highest ranking countries in this respect. Last year, we in fifth position out of 113 countries and even first in some respects. When you find yourself in prison, you are still entitled to many things such as getting counsel from a lawyer, the services of an interpreter; your case is assessed by a judge, witnesses and experts can be called in, etc. This is how it should be under the rule of law: a fair trial basic requirement, not a luxury.*

*The likelihood of being the of a criminal act is also low in the Netherlands. Crimes reported to the police have been decreasing for years and public surveys on the question of whether people have become victims of a criminal act confirm this downward trend. Although this is good news, we need to stay alert, even one victim is one too many. At the same time new forms of criminality like cybercrime are appearing and must not be overlooked.*



*Where to go after imprisonment?*

*For many years as a public prosecutor and since I recently joined the Probation Service, I have put my heart and soul into guaranteeing justice for society in criminal cases, for victims, and suspects alike. When a case was concluded my job was usually done, but for the convicted criminal it just begins. When the sentence has been pronounced and the prison door closes behind a convicted offender, there is no time for complaining and hanging about. Offenders need to get to work and during this period, it helps if they allow themselves to be helped in order to gain insight into how criminal actions affect victims and, when possible, attempt to repair the damage caused, deal with their addiction, and settle their debts. We all know, both inside and outside prison, that this is not easily done and that many fall back into old habits. This is why loved ones, family and friends, are important, but also the employees of the PI (Penal Institution), of the Probation Service, and the volunteers such as those from Prison Fellowship The Netherlands. These people are there to listen, to help, to guide and advise, even when things go wrong after a prisoner's release. A fair trial also requires that offenders look fairly at themselves and their environment. That they work on everything in fairness. This is what the volunteers from Prison Fellowship The Netherlands and the professionals in the criminal law chain share: a fair trial, fair treatment, a listening ear, and a helping hand to prevent further criminal victimization.*

*Hans, it is with great pleasure that I congratulate you and the employees and volunteers of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands on your 25th anniversary. Thank you for your enormous and dedicated efforts, I wish you all the best and wisdom for the continuation of your beautiful, crucial work.*

Photo Johan Bac: Jeroen Bouman



## Life Sentence

For the coming period, the campaign theme of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands is “Life Sentence.” Since life sentences are hardly ever given in the Netherlands it means that every prisoner will be released at some point and will need to find his or her place in society again. Nearly eighty percent of ex-prisoners become repeat offenders. “Once a thief, always a thief!?” If this is true, does it mean that we need life sentences?

Strangely enough, such a sentence seldom provokes liberating, comforting, and healing thoughts. For example, about the atonement of Jesus Christ is once and for all; for the entire duration of one’s existence. The power of the Gospel is effective for a lifetime, regardless of the times and circumstances we find ourselves in.

In 1532, Calvin stated in his commentary on Seneca that we “must not focus on the evil in mankind but on God’s image in mankind. An image that covers and obliterates their faults and allures us by its beauty and dignity, to love and embrace them.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who sadly died far too young, writes in his wonderful book *The Cost of Discipleship* that the only task a Christian person has is “to pray and offer righteousness.”

This is something I would like to see in our churches - that they would regularly pray for prisoners and the prison chaplaincy, and also that Christians would stand up for prisoners. It could be done in a practical way, without making too much fuss, but with sincerity, with dedication, and knowledge. Seeking out a prisoner and sitting next to him, I believe would be a blessing, to both sides, since it is after all, a service to and from Jesus Christ. Because that is what the diaconate is all about, “rolling up your sleeves with folded hands.”

Help Prison Fellowship break through the life sentence. Your support is vital. Remember the prisoners in your prayers. Register as a volunteer or support our work with your gift. Thank you.



## REACTION FROM WILLEM ANKER



*Willem Anker LLM has worked as a criminal lawyer in Leeuwarden since 1981. Before that, he worked for the Ministry of Justice for four years, at the TBR (now called TBS) and Rehabilitation department. His areas of specialty are lifelong sentences and TBS. In addition to his legal practice, he is a guest lecturer at nearly all the Dutch universities, he delivers courses for other lawyers and gives two to three lectures per week concerning his profession. In 2016, he began giving theatre lectures throughout the country. Together with his twin brother Hans Anker LLM, he manages the nationwide known law firm Anker & Anker Lawyers based in Leeuwarden.*

## A LIFELONG SENTENCE

*I had been working as a criminal lawyer for just three years when Ton P., a prisoner with life sentence, contacted our firm. He had just been convicted by the Court in Groningen and had filed an appeal on his case.*

*From that moment, our firm started collecting everything we could about life-long sentences, both in the Netherlands and surrounding countries. We discovered that very little was known about this type of sentence and that even the Ministry of Justice was unable to provide us with any relevant information. There weren't even records on the number of prisoners with a life sentence in the Netherlands, where they had been placed, and for which crimes life sentences had been given. This was when we named them the "forgotten group."*

*Ultimately, the Court of Appeal in Leeuwarden sentenced Ton P. to eighteen years in prison and TBS for murder.*

*We are not against the ultimate sanction, but we do fight the way it is applied in the Netherlands because life sentence here means that the prisoner will literally spend the rest of his or her life in prison. There is no end in sight, no hope, and we believe that this is inhumane as it is a postponed death sentence. In our opinion, the guiding principle should be that every prisoner deserves a second chance. In 1986, the infamous serial killer Hans van Z. was the last prisoner to be pardoned in the Netherlands. Since then only a terminally ill prisoner who was serving a life sentence was pardoned in 2009, but the pardon was basically for show. Pardons are granted by the minister or state secretary and are therefore politically sensitive correctional decisions that can have electoral implications. On paper, the Dutch legal system offers the opportunity to apply for a pardon but practice shows that they are never granted.*

*Just like Prison Fellowship The Netherlands, we see the individual first and then*

*the facts. For us, a person is never Bert H., but Bert Hendriks, a person of flesh and blood, with his own character traits and personality. Prison Fellowship The Netherlands has been helping prisoners for 25 years now. A joyful thought. In March 2017, former state secretary Dijkhoff introduced a new regulation about life sentences. During the first 25 years of the sentence, the prisoner has no possibility of release whatsoever. They stay where they are and there is no form of furlough of any kind. After 25 years a newly appointed advisory committee will provide advice regarding clemency. In the end, the minister will decide on a clemency procedure. Considering the above, this doesn't bode well.*

*We think that the solution is quite simple: the minister must be excluded from the process and the case put into the hands of the judge. The assessment and the final decision should lie in the hands of independent judges in the Netherlands. We would opt for the Court of Appeal in Arnhem, in particular the Penitentiary Chamber, which consists of three justices and two behavioural experts. This Chamber has been judging TBS extension appeal cases for many years and is highly experienced in assessing the risk of recidivism. It should be relatively easy to change the law on how life sentences are handled yet the political powers are not ready to do so!*

*Every year, my brother and I visit several former clients who have been irrevocably sentenced to very long prison sentences.*

*When several of the prisoners with life sentences were in the PI at Scheveningen during the 1990s, I once made a rookie's mistake: I visited three of them on one day and it was hugely depressing and exhausting because there is nothing, I could do for them legally. There is no future, every day is the same as the day before and the next day.*

*My (con)frère and I are very pleased with the 25 years of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands. Thankfully, they know where "People are."*

# Between Church and Dungeon



*Visiting the prisoners, one of the seven works of mercy.*

*Painting by the Master of Alkmaar.  
Rijksmuseum Amsterdam*

– during which the Nicene creed was formulated – encouraged the visiting of prisoners. Bishop Ambrose of Milan also stood up for prisoners. In our day we have the well-organised prison chaplaincy and there are church services in prisons every week, but this is not enough. What prisoners need is overall care. Chaplaincy and diaconate are needed, not just during the detention period but also afterwards, because sooner or later, eight out of ten released prisoners will become repeat of-

The Dutch translation of this seems to be a nice pun. *Tussen kerk en kerker*. But this is only at a first glance. Church and dungeon have more in common than, for example, hotel and cell.

Did you know that the term Penitentiary Institution (PI), the official name for remand centres and prisons goes back to the Quakers? In the nineteenth century, they introduced significant prison reforms. One of those reforms was the use of solitary imprisonment in order to stimulate the criminal to penitence and transformation. Hence the term Penitentiary Institution.

Repentance (from sin) and transformation (conversion from a life of sin) are also at the core of weekly church services. In contrast to this is the profession that God is good and merciful. This profession is made tangible in the world. It is not trapped in the church particularly when it is expressed by those who are serious about their calling to demonstrate God's mercy by being merciful to those in need.

This is how the church has treated prisoners for centuries. Those who believe in mercy and those who don't. The First Council of Nicea (325), for example

fenders. One of the main reasons for this is a lack of after-care.

This is why our volunteers sit down with the prisoners and their families in order to help them build up a new life. This month, letters were sent to churches and congregations in which we pleaded for their support, and this is why we also ask you to support the work of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands. Between church and dungeon.

## RESPONSE FROM PETER BAAIJENS



*Peter Baaijens is the Director of the Penitentiary Institution in Krimpen aan den IJssel. Peter was a warden in the Amsterdam Bijlmer prison. After having worked in the prisons in Scheveningen and Breda, Peter, who had been born and raised in the province of Zeeland, accepted a position in Torentijd, the Middelburg prison in 1984. Prior to becoming its Director, he had been the head of sociocultural activities. Hans Barendrecht and Peter Baaijens have known each other for many years and also find one another in the Christian faith.*

## THE CHURCH IN THE DUNGEON

*I have worked behind prison walls for nearly forty years, and have seen many people come and go. What is my opinion of the system where all these people spend their time in prison and of the efforts we make to release them responsibly?*

*Apart from being a civil servant, I'm also an individual with his own opinions and views about what a sentence or punishment should mean. For me, seeing the individual through Christian belief lies at the heart of it.*

*After all, one of the core principles of Christianity is the idea that the entire human race is guilty before God. A difficult concept for people outside the church, but certainly an undeniable fact within the church community for those who believe. From this perspective it is not difficult to offer support to prisoners. As Christians we know that we can stand side by side with anyone because we begin at the same starting point.*

*Forgiveness lies at the heart of Christianity, but that is certainly not a simple matter of "water under the bridge, let's forgive and forget." Similar to the Dutch criminal law system – which is largely based on the ten commandments from the Bible – there must be penance. The debt must be paid, no matter what. This payment of debt is done through our institutions by taking away a person's freedom.*

*That is why it is good to offer church services in prison. The term church is broad as there is accommodation for different religions and ideologies. The ability to fall*

*back on one's faith and/or conviction and to find support and guidance in doing so is **the** foundation for restoration and becoming a worthy individual in our society. That is why, from the Christian perspective it is good that Christians who are free reach out to those who have still to repent of their guilt.*

*The fact that the debt is paid for us as Christians, and that we are redeemed, doesn't mean that we are above those who have not yet paid their debt. Christians are fully aware of that.*

*This is the foundation of the work that Prison Fellowship The Netherlands has been doing in our penitentiary institutions for many years. The fact that the presence of the Church within the institution is a constitutional right is wonderful but, in my opinion, it should not be the only means of help offered by free citizens to their imprisoned fellow human beings.*

*I have known Prison Fellowship for many years now and I greatly appreciate their efforts and commitment to our prisoners. The many Prison Fellowship volunteers who come from different churches and communities are the embodiment of what I believe is meant by "looking after your neighbour."*

*As it is our task to return prisoners to society successfully, we have been working for many years to bring society inside so that this return can take place as gradually and naturally as possible. The good collaboration with Prison Fellowship fits right into that goal. When society, in the person of the volunteer, demonstrates involvement by selflessly investing time to visit and support their imprisoned fellow human beings, then this is a return into society in its purest form. You will be hard pressed to find more involved and warmer support! Our prisoners certainly realise and appreciate this.*

*The Church is the people not the institution. Fellow humans who want to stand side by side the prisoner, not by being patronising or telling the other person how they ought to live their lives, but through a sincere and supportive commitment with empathy for the other person's situation.*

*Church in the dungeon: "The free Christian who reaches out to imprisoned fellow human beings."*

## A New Year

It seems years ago but really not so long ago that we faced the big question: are we millennium-proof? Won't all of our computers crash after midnight on New Year's Eve when the year turns 2000? The uncertainty was soon replaced by relief as nothing major happened and life went on. Now it is a history lesson. Soon after that 9/11, whether we wanted it or not, became our big concern. Again, uncertain times. Not knowing what one's life is going to be like is an extremely uncomfortable feeling. It can be paralysing and can make it impossible to take any initiative.

I can taste this inside the prisons. People who are still in remand talk a lot about their case that still has to be tried in Court on such and such a date. It's what they live for. After the hearing they wait to learn their sentence for another two weeks. And then there is the following two-week period in which to file an appeal. Do I want to appeal or not? What are the risks? A higher sentence?

Can I face many more months of uncertainty? - because that is how much time it takes, on average, before an appeal case is processed, and so that is why some people simply opt for clarity. You know what to expect and the countdown can begin. The virus of uncertainty retreats. Even so, by the time the end of the sentence is in sight, uncertainty strikes back with full force. Where can I go when I leave the prison gate? Where can I find a place to live? Where will I find a suitable pathway for rehabilitation and support now that I know that I will not be able to support myself? Who can I turn to when I'm out of my depth?

I would like to write something 'new', but it is the same old song over and over again. Most ex-prisoners by far, don't succeed. Nearly eighty percent of them return to a life of crime, not because it is their ambition to do so, but because they lack sufficient support and see no other way. And this is why I am pleased and grateful when we can be a guide as fellow human beings created in the same image. When we are allowed to help someone on well-trodden paths, like André there is hope for his future, his social environment, and for society as well. André sheds his old life, full of "crazy things" as he puts it and begins a new life of initiative, responsibility, and meaning. Fortunately, there are many André's who would like to break with their old lives to just lead a normal life. But they need you. And so, I wholeheartedly hope that in the New Year, many of you will want to become involved and remain in the work we are doing. May we draw new inspiration from the familiar and trusted Word of God to serve our imprisoned neighbours and their families. May God bless you and all those who want to leave their "criminal way of life" in the new year.

## REACTION PETER VAN DER LAAN



*Dr Peter van der Laan is a professor on Probation at the Free University in Amsterdam and is a senior researcher with the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement (NSCR). He is currently researching the outcome (effects) of criminal law interventions such as detention and rehabilitation activities. He is a member of several national and international advisory committees, including the Council for the Administration of Criminal Justice and Protection of Juveniles (RSJ). He is also a member of the Social Council of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands.*

### GET INTO ACTION!

*In his column 'Old and New' published in 2001, Hans Barendrecht writes the following as a response to the 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers: 'Again, uncertain times. Not knowing what your life is going to be like is an extremely uncomfortable feeling. It can be paralysing. It makes it impossible to take any initiative.'*

*He sees the same uncertainty in prisons. During the legal proceedings leading up to the sentencing: what sentence will I get, do I want to appeal or not? Then the same thing happens when the detention period draws to an end: what can I expect when I'm outside again, will I have a roof over my head, a job, or even a family?*

*I completely understand that such mental and physical uncertainties can be paralysing. However, it is not just uncertainty which is inherent to detention. Prisoners easily find themselves trapped in a mental lethargy (the constant urge to sleep) and inertia (slowness). Apart from that, they don't get enough exercise; there is good reason why we call detention "sitting in jail" Inmates spend most of their time in prison sitting or lying down on their beds. As Jesse Meijers writes in his thesis, published early 2018<sup>1</sup>: prison is a 'distressed' environment. It has an adverse effect on the functioning of the brain, self-regulation, etc. and this contributes to (more) recidivism which is not good, of course, and it works against the effectiveness of detention.*

*Hans Barendrecht already stated: eighty percent of the prisoners' relapse and resort to criminal behaviour again. And even though this percentage does not say everything, and it seems that the percentage has shown a downward trend over the past few years, recidivism following detention is still a great cause for concern. It means a prison sentence is not very effective and that we can and must do something about it.*

<sup>1</sup> J. Meijers (2018), *Do not restrain the prisoner's brain. Executive functions, self-regulation and the impoverished prison environment*. Thesis Vrije Universiteit.



*First of all, by assessing whether alternative, non-incarceration sanctions can be applied more often. The scope to do so is more than sufficient. In 2016, over 33,000 people were released from prison. Of this group, three quarters had been in prison for less than three months, around fifty-five percent even less than one month, and thirty percent less than two weeks. Was detention necessary in all those cases? And what can be achieved with such a short incarceration? Not much, I think. So, let us start by giving community service sentences and more suspended sentences with meaningful conditions!*

*Imprisonment can be reserved for the more severe cases. At the same time, the execution of sentences must be reviewed. Prisons must be 'enhanced' for inmates to become active, both mentally or spiritually and physically.*

*The Spiritual Counselling Service keeps those prisoners who desire that, spiritually active. The same applies for what the volunteers of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands and other volunteers contribute. After all, contemplating the purpose and meaning is a form of spiritual activity. The effects may be difficult to measure, but we all agree that it does something. So, this must certainly be continued.*

*Increasing physical exercise is a different story. It's not enough to do some sports once a week or to pump iron in the gym. Spending time in the yard also has too little effect. At the same time, increased daily exercise fights off lethargy. Perhaps Prison Fellowship The Netherlands can think about how to encourage that. As a fervent ice skater, Hans Barendrecht would be the right person to come up with some ideas.*



*Gym in a juvenile institution © DJJ*

## Judging

Most inmates in a remand centre or prison believe that they have been wrongfully imprisoned. If they could take the law into their own hands, there would be many acquittals, which is understandable. I've never come across a competition offering an opportunity to win a fully catered stay in a prison! Perhaps this alone proves that prison is, after all, not a hotel - Let alone one that is star rated. Their clients are also not typically not stars. They have done something "stupid" and were caught.

No, we can safely state that prisoners are not the brightest and best of people. they are not rising stars. With this in consideration I feel a bit downhearted about the future. The government needs to cut costs and views prisoners mainly as an expense. About seventy-five percent of them have sentences of less than six months, and it seems impossible to effect behaviour change within just a few months. So, their motto is: "No investment." This means that prisoners are written off and yet that will be another expense. Then when it comes to after-care for prisoners, there is the political tug-of-war between the Ministry of Justice & Security and the Ministry of Health, Welfare & Sport. When will they realise, that whatever happens we cannot abandon prisoners after they have served their time in prison!

Furthermore, in the daily judgement of "this" country's sixteen million judges, this also comes as no surprise. The emphasis is on the word 'this' because we judge from a comfortable distance, harshly demanding – "Lock them up and throw the key away, and stop whining." Church father Augustine wrote to the judge after his friend had been murdered: "Do not punish him out of revenge but as a compassionate father." Within the boundaries of the law, of course.

In the meantime, our volunteers sit beside the prisoners and this can sometimes make for an awkward situation. "What actually happened? Guilty or innocent?" Personally, I recognise the dilemma for Jesus says: '...I did not come to judge the world...' (John 12: 47). On the other hand, later in John's gospel the Christian community is given responsibility to convict the world of 'sin, righteousness, and judgement' (John 16:8). In his wonderful book *Ontmaskering* [To unmask], Dr Van de Beek says that the word *convict* actually means *to check in on*. What does this mean for Prison Fellowship The Netherlands? My opinion is that when a person has served their time in prison, he or she should be given the opportunity to participate normally in society, and that society itself must play an active role in this. There is an obligation to make the effort. If society fails to do so, then we will not meet the requirements when it comes to 'righteousness'. I will leave the domain about punishment aside. We will to the responsibility given by Jesus to visit the prisoners (Matthew 25:42). We are not here to judge. The Early Church was also very active in visiting those in prison.

We offer simple and basic care like giving them a “cup of cold water.” We come and sit down with prisoners and through words and deeds help them along the “Highway to Zion.” For us this is more than just social work based on humanity. We see the Holy Spirit as an Advocate who leads the way through the swamp of knots and worries and this puts our work and service into the right perspective. Deep down, we feel that visiting prisoners is not our work but God’s assignment to us. When we do this, we can expect God’s blessing on the prisoners, their families, and ourselves. This pronouncement is not written in the stars, but is written in the Bible.

## REACTION BRAM VAN DE BEEK



*Bram van de Beek (1946) was a pastor in several communities for eleven years. In 1981, he became a professor with the Reformed Church at Leiden University, and from 2000 until his retirement in 2010 he lectured as a professor in Theology at the VU University in Amsterdam. He is still connected to the University of Stellenbosch (South Africa) as an endowed professor. His book ‘Ontmaskering’ [To unmask] had an enormous impact on Hans Barendrecht, who was inspired by the explanation of John 16:10 regarding the task in connection with righteousness. Among other things it compelled him to formulate the term “merciful justice.”*

## CONVICTED

*‘Now they’ve put me in here, between these criminals.’ A teacher has been imprisoned and he talks to his best friend. He had been too intimate towards his students. He doesn’t understand. A popular teacher, and now he finds himself in prison.*

*The next day, his friend visited him again. “It is what I told you yesterday, but I’ve now discovered that I’m one of those criminals.” His perspective had changed. What had seemed like casual behaviour at one time has now become a crime. The person who seemed to be a sociable man, is now seen as someone who abused young girls.*

*How do we see ourselves? And how do we see convicted criminals? These two things are closely connected, when people are convicted the public will know what they did. But what if people were to know about the wheeling and dealing of others who are not convicted? Their lives seem normal, unruffled, functional, and so forth. But what if you look at things from a different perspective? Suppose the container of your life is opened and scrutinised? You may not have transgressed any laws for which you could be tried, and yet... perhaps you have not always been*

*that straight? When it comes to sexuality? Or finances? - just to name the two biggest areas of evil. If we were to begin looking at ourselves or others with suspicion, the prisons could soon be overflowing. In any case: how do we treat and relate to one another? If everything is brought out into the open, especially things we once said about others, I fear that our society would explode.*

*The key element here is “out into the open.” I think that when we think about convicted criminals this is also one of the problems. We can punish people but the severity of the sentence doesn’t actually mean much. There is not much difference between three or five years in prison. The difference lies in having been imprisoned. The difference lies in being convicted. The difference lies in people knowing that you are “no good.” You have a social stigma which is why criminals don’t benefit from more severe punishment which barely even helps to prevent crime. The real question is whether someone is socially accepted – and then, in which social context? When civil society rejects people, they essentially have no other option than to find a home somewhere else and this becomes ground for recidivism.*

*Does the Church not have a principally different approach? No, I don’t mean a cheap grace seeing the good in everything. I don’t mean that the Church should accept convicted people just as they are. It is the opposite, the Church does not accept them, for they are evil. They are so evil that God cannot accept them. He discards their old life and He gives them a new life in Jesus Christ. This is where the key to healing lies: take prisoners seriously, especially as convicted fellow humans. Only a new existence in Christ will offer them a future within a new community. This is where they will meet others who were fortunate that their wrong deeds were not exposed, but who realise that this could very well have happened to them. What if people would know everything about each other, which relationships would endure that? Old people are crucified and new people rise again, in a new life. One person can make a difference – to open another person’s eyes, especially those who are blind to their own behaviour. What we do need, is that one person. The volunteers working for Prison Fellowship The Netherlands can be a means of liberating prisoners, not from their rightful punishment, but from their lost lives. They show that convicted fellow human beings matter, not because their deeds don’t deserve punishment, but because they want a new existence for them. When that happens, it will become a lot easier to convince prisoners of the need to start a new life, to be good citizens.*

Commentary May 2005

## Taking Over

Some time ago, a volunteer showed me an article from *Waarheidsvriend*, the weekly publication of the Reformed Alliance in the Dutch Reformed Church. The article had been taken from *Vol-Zin*, a magazine on religion and society. In the article, author Vonne van der Meer writes about an insight she had about receiving redemption for our sins because Jesus Christ has taken over those sins from us. 'The term "taking over" is something I have thought long and hard about, for many years', says the writer. She discovered that taking over the (financial) debt of someone else in order to settle an injustice "doesn't just restore my position towards the victim, but also my position towards the offender. I was no longer infuriated with the offender because I had been able to help to restore the situation. By doing that, a balance and honour had been restored."



### Why this quote?

Every time I speak with volunteers and prisoners and hear about what happens between them, I feel an intense joy. A passive and negative line has been broken. Believe me, for most prisoners, 'being criminal' is more of a stigma than a career choice. Of course, wrong is wrong and it will continue to go wrong when society, like the best horseman just stands by passively and does nothing. The fact that criminals must cease their criminal activities is entirely justified. It is what we think as well yet in the meantime, nothing will change when nobody steps up to "take over" something from their fellow human being.

I vividly remember the desperation of a man whose daughter was in prison. One evening, during one of our sessions with other people in similar situations, he said: "I once got reproached for wanting to go away for a week. My wife and I desperately needed a break. Someone asked me 'Would you leave your daughter alone on her own?' I said: 'Would you want to take over from me, just this once?' He didn't respond to that."

The dictionary gives various meanings for "take over" - to take control of something; to follow up on something; to accept something. It will soon be Pentecost. Jesus prom-

ises His Spirit to do justice now that He is departing to be with His Father in heaven. We are called to follow Him. To make His calling our own. "I found myself in prison..."

Taking over is mostly about doing something. Vonne van der Meer didn't get any further by just thinking about it. But after she had acted on it and realised that guilt really is something that someone needs to take over, and she ran straight to the church. This is a fruitful movement - from the world to the Church, and vice versa.

*'Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them'.*

Jesus in John 13:17.

Let us take over this piece of good advice to care for prisoners and their families, and to pray and work to ensure that what was damaged will be restored, also for the victims.

## RESPONSE FROM INE VOORHAM



*Lieutenant-Colonel Dr Ine Voorham was the Director at the Salvation Army for Welfare and Healthcare. In 2006, she obtained a doctorate based on the thesis 'Er buiten staan' [Standing on the outside], about social exclusion. Ine Voorham is also a member of the Social Council of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands.*

## THIS WILL NOT HAPPEN TO ME

*It is not difficult to make a list of things one doesn't want other people do to you. I assume that injustice and feeling ignored will rank highly with many of us. Such a list will be made from our own frame of mind and living environment, of course, and will be influenced by the issues we are dealing with at that moment. Things that we are convinced will never happen to us are not likely to make the list.*

*My long-standing experience as the Director of the Welfare and Healthcare Foundation of the Salvation Army has taught me that life can sometimes bring a sudden and unexpected problem to your door. Saying things like "that will never happen to me" is no guarantee that disaster will not strike. Homelessness, becoming poor, ending up in prison, can happen to anyone. For those affected (and for their families), disaster strikes when someone ends up in prison and their freedom is taken away, regardless of whether it is their fault or a tragic twist of fate. I am fortunate to have seen many unexpected blessings as well. People who, with*

*judgement, have an eye and attention for those who are in need.*

*Writing this contribution for this anniversary book comes with the assignment: provide a response to the commentary from 2005 titled, "Taking over." The story about a financial debt being taken over by a blameless, compassionate person with a big heart immediately reminds me of the act of redeeming as described in Ruth 4 which ensures that there is still room to live by walking in another person's shoes. At the time of Ruth, the "redeemer" took off his sandals and gave it to the other person. That settled the case and the threat of losing space to live had been averted.*

*Over the past 25 years, the volunteers of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands have shown that a small gesture can have a huge impact by being a listening ear for the man or woman in detention, faithfully honouring agreements and appointments, visiting the other again and again, even when the contact is not yet going smoothly. It seems so simple, but it requires loyalty and a sincere love and respect for the other person. It is an attitude of life, based on the love given by God, who loves all people: those who are free as well as those who are not. God holds a special place for those who are not free. He was willing to sacrifice what He held most dear, His Son Jesus, in order to set free those who are not free. Living in and from that sense of freedom, we are challenged to stand in the other person's shoes. To see the other by having an eye and attention for people in need.*

*I congratulate Prison Fellowship The Netherlands on its 25th anniversary and wish all who are involved many blessed years in which employees and volunteers all want to be there for their imprisoned fellow human beings.*



*A PFN volunteer visiting a prisoner in a NGO visitors*

## Blinders

Have you ever thought that judges are not part of society? That they rule from an ivory tower? You may have thought so because judges are generally not the people we meet on a daily basis. We see and hear about them through the media when the judge has pronounced the sentence in a particular case. The judge speaks, but it is not really his own voice that we hear, a voice which we don't hear that often. Apparently, this is inherent to certain jobs. The person carries out what the law asks them to do. Their own opinions and feelings don't particularly matter. This is also why we should not expect to see much emotion and excitement from judges and public prosecutors.

Time does not stand still, not even in the courts of law. "We are not wearing blinders" says Mr Verheij LL.M. in the *Algemeen Dagblad* (newspaper) of 22 January 2006. Verheij, the Vice-President of the Court of Appeal in The Hague, is also the chairman of the national assembly of the criminal-law chairpersons. The reporter remarked that some parliamentarians are of the opinion that judges in the Netherlands are still too soft on crime. "Members of Parliament should stop giving such over-simplified criticism," says Verheij. Very often they don't have access to all the facts (for example, regarding the acquittal of Samir A.). "Let the House of Representatives first make sure that the punishments that we inflict, are actually carried out. Again, we may be facing a significant shortage of cell capacity." Good, tell them how it is, is what you think.

In an article in the *Reformatorsch Dagblad* (Reformed newspaper) of 27 December, Mr H. Brouwer LL.M., Chairman of the Prosecutors-General, also vented his concern about the negative image of his organisation. He believes it to be unjust that the Public Prosecution Department is increasingly seen as an organisation making one mistake after another. According to Brouwer this is not supported by facts and which is why he wants to use the media more often in order to explain certain issues. He expects that this will sometimes make them fall flat on their face. Blinders, face, it is obvious that the Dutch justice system is working on its image, not an easy thing to do. A well-known Dutch saying translates as "cutting off your nose to spite your face." One had better have a nose for justice. The justice system does not judge without good reason, thankfully it investigates and searches for facts and solutions. The commotion over the robbery of a 49-year-old woman from Spijkenisse and the hanging of her dog proved to be unfounded. However, if you think that this will settle things and you can just move on as normal you must be wearing blinders. After all, the woman who presented herself as the victim is now the offender. Giving a false declaration can result in a maximum sentence of one year in prison or a fine of 4,500



euros. Should it come to a fine I think that Member of Parliament Geert Wilders should pay, as he was the one who instantly put a price of 10,000 on the heads of the culprits. Just a matter of keeping the blinders on.

Back to the image of the Ministry of Justice. In my opinion, they should talk more often. Explanations and clarifications would be perfect! But not with raised voices or with modern mediagenic make-up. It should be all about finding the truth in order to do justice to the violation of the past, with an eye on the future for victims and for perpetrators. This requires patience and wisdom as well as an empathetic and involved society that understands mercy and compassion. The Divine charge against the sin of humankind was answered by Divine justice that cut right across the punishment. This is how “mercy boasts against judgement,” or as poignantly stated in later translations: “mercy triumphs over judgement” (James 2:13). Whoever can see this has taken off their blinders.



## RESPONSE FROM HENK ABBINK

*Henk Abbink was the senior councillor with the Court of Appeal Arnhem-Leeuwarden and former Chairman of the Board of the Prison Fellowship The Netherlands.*

## BLINDERS AND MEDIAGENIC MAKE-UP

*‘Speaking in loud voices and modern, mediagenic make-up are not befitting the justice system’, says Hans Barendrecht.*

*Our country has three state powers: the legislative power, the executive power, and the judicial power. All three are equally important and must keep each other in balance. Two of them regularly announce their messages in the manner we just mentioned. Every single evening, in the talk shows on TV, we see parliamentarians and, sometimes members of the government, loudly expressing their points of view. You never see judges. This is probably because well-founded points of view and their subsequent explanations are not desirable. The ‘spécialités de la maison’ of such programmes are soundbites and one-liners.*

*Topics regularly featured in talk shows are ongoing criminal cases. When that happens, the guest is often a criminal lawyer who also enjoys his moment of fame and publicity. Similar as in court, the lawyer will not comment on the question of guilt (did the suspect commit the crime he or she is accused of?); instead they reflect on countless unimportant issues such as a press conference during which the*

*Public Prosecution Department unfairly expressed its opinion about a key question, or the shameful conduct of the police.*

*In the courtroom, the only question that really matters is whether the suspect accused of a crime has actually committed that crime and, if so, what sentence must be given.*

*During the investigation into these questions it is not such a crazy notion for the judge to put on blinders. A harnessed horse can become frightened when he sees too much of what is coming close behind him. A broad visual field would only distract the animal from its task. In short, blinders ensure the safety of the horse, the driver, and other traffic. In a similar way, blinders can help the judge in court keep his eye on the most important questions in a criminal case and avoid being distracted by all kinds of accompanying drum beating. This is how blinders contribute to a sound justice system by safeguarding a judge from being impacted by the wrong elements.*

*Every year, Statistics Netherlands (CBS) conducts a survey into the confidence of the Dutch population in the different institutions and persons. The 2017 report was recently published and as for many years now, the report indicates that public confidence in our judges is substantial. In 2017, 73 percent of the population trusted the judges. To make a comparison, only 41 percent have confidence in the House of Representatives.*

*Without making any far-reaching conclusions, the Dutch population deems it unnecessary for judges to appear in talk shows in the manner of institutionalised raised voices and mediagenic make-up, with or without the figurative blinders,*

*When a judge has pronounced the sentence, the talk show caravan moves on. Then Prison Fellowship The Netherlands comes on the scene and its volunteers offer a whole different kind of attention to the now convicted person who had been the subject of talk shows. The organisation only cares about him and possibly his family thereby providing an important contribution to the resocialisation of the prisoner and to society.*

## Fuel

Did you know that the wrong type of fuel is filled 68 times a day in the Netherlands? People fill up with gas while they actually need diesel. I read that this amounts to one million litres per year. It happened to me, some years ago when I attended a court case in Den Bosch in the morning. That afternoon, I had planned on going ice skating with a friend. We know place where the water freezes quickly, and with no more than fifty centimetres of depth underneath the ice not much can go wrong – that is, except when you need to fill up with gas while you’re already mentally on the ice. At first, I thought that my car had difficulty accelerating. Could it be the stiff wind from the north? But then it began spluttering quite seriously, and the smoke coming from the exhaust looked rather ominous. Just outside Culemborg, my car packed it in. One glance at the gas receipt confirmed my suspicion, the gas tank had been filled with the wrong fuel. At such a moment it’s good to have a friend. We had arranged to carpool from Utrecht, but now we were pooling from Culemborg after he had towed me to the nearest car dealer where the engine had to be cleaned.

It’s not something that is easily forgotten and there is no one else to blame but myself.

The risk of recidivism for an ex-prisoner is a lot bigger than mine, I have learned my lesson. For many prisoners this appears not to be the case, otherwise not nearly eighty percent of all released prisoners would become repeat offenders. Could it be related to them using the wrong type of fuel? Or does society run on fuel that they cannot burn (yet)? Let me explain. The police investigate, the public prosecutor lays charges, and the judge determines – “with this behaviour, Mr Criminal, we believe it to be prudent for you not to participate in society for a while.” So, then Mr Criminal is temporarily parked in one of the highly secured “parking garages” that our country has. If he has to stay there longer than four months he can register for an extended maintenance contract. This means some major tinkering on the engine is required, so to speak. When Mr Criminal gets parked for less than four months he is only entitled to a kind of MOT (Ministry of Transport) test. Social services will only check that his identity papers are in order, whether he has housing after his detention, if there will be income, and what extent of additional care is needed. A judgement on his ability to drive is not given. That is the role of society and in the most ideal case, via a ‘warm handover’ to the municipality. This is the new policy of the Minister of Justice and Security, based on insights mainly from England and Canada. The prisoner’s personal responsibility lies at the core of this. I think it’s an excellent starting point. It shows that the individual is being taken seriously. After all, the reason why Mr Crimi-

nal ended up in prison is that he had not accepted responsibility. The question remains whether the engine of integration will run smoothly on the fuel of this system. I fear it will not. "It is not good that the man should be alone" states Genesis 2:18. A society that thinks the justice system has to solve the problem will never become safe. There are many prejudices to overcome even among Christians. A life of forgiveness and mercy for the sake of Jesus means laying down our "judge's robe." I know of no better source of fuel for filling up than the Creator of heaven and earth. To believe in receiving justice is also to share and offer justice. To put it frankly, this is a clean type of fuel. Wonderful, without ulterior motives, liberating, and above all, free!

## RESPONSE FROM PAUL BAAN



*Paul Baan and his wife are the founders of the Noaber Foundation. This Foundation has fuelled Prison Fellowship The Netherlands several times and in different ways and always from the conviction that neighbourliness should benefit everyone and, in this regard, that social entrepreneurship offers good options.*

## ESSAY

*Urban myths can be highly entertaining. Take the example of the Dutch school exam, which happened many years ago. High school students were given the assignment to write an essay. The exam committee offered a list of titles from which the students could pick one. One of the titles was: "What is courage?" One student somewhere, took the exam paper that the school provided and wrote down the centre of the page, in neat and clear handwriting:*

*This is courage*

*Nothing more. The 'essay' was handed in and the exam candidate was given a solid passing grade.*

*I was reminded of this anecdote when I considered Hans' request to respond to the commentary titled "Fuel". After all, - what can I add to the meaning of his commentary? He is perfectly right! When you fill up with the wrong fuel you come to stop and it is all by your own doing. A good friend will be able to help. That is neighbourliness with a bonus! The recidivism percentage that he mentioned? The figure is probably correct. I rely on that. Other wonderful elements are the idea of*

a “warm transfer” and the prisoner’s personal responsibility. Then there is also the part of the police who investigate, the public prosecutor who charges, and the judge who determines... Hans would know, after all, he studied Law!

But when I read this again, I halted. ‘The judge determines’? I went to the website of the Dutch Justice System to look for the words that I (also) remembered: ‘decision, judgement, sentence, and binding’. Surely that is more than ‘determining’?

That’s my plan out of the window, I thought. Because after having read the column once, and thinking of the student and the essay, I had planned to show ‘courage’ with regard to Hans’ request and respond with just a very short statement. Why elaborate if a short answer suffices! Anyhow, I was glad that I read the final paragraph again. It made me bold enough to try it anyway, and I knew what my ‘essay’ would say.

I would ask you to read ‘Fuel’ once more, and to follow and understand the thought that is expressed here. And then please forget what I have written above and think only of that which comes before the ‘clean fuel’ Hans writes about, which is:

## Sola Gratia

P.S. One of the Dutch words for courage is ‘lef’, which derives from Yiddish. This word, in turn, comes from ‘lev’, which is the Hebrew word for ‘heart’. I am so glad that I used the urban myth in my reaction. Because I could just have left it with that. If you understand what I mean?

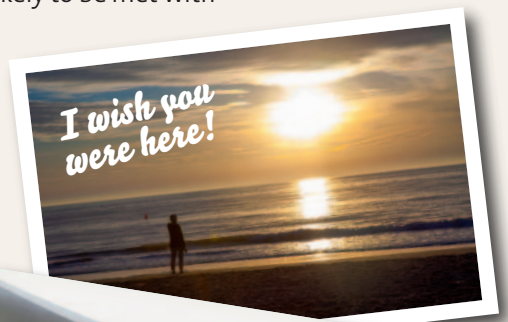


## Gert Jan

Do you know someone in your social environment who has spent time in prison? Or who is in prison now? Perhaps someone you used to know like an old school friend, a former colleague, or someone down the street? I would not be surprised if you know someone who has 'a history'. When I talk about our work there is often someone who wants to get something off his or her chest'. The greater the distance from the individual, the easier it is to share in a group. When the relationship is close most people prefer to talk about it only in private. No one else needs to know - 'It's funny, actually, that I'm telling it to you now and in this way. My brother once spent some time in prison. It is okay now, but still.'

Detention is far-reaching. Reckless behaviour that ends with a broken leg is sure to be met with flowers and 'get well soon' cards. Wrong behaviour (or the suspicion), with prison as the final station result, is less likely to be met with good deeds. Sending flowers is useless anyway for they won't be delivered. Prisons are closed environments and a cell are definitively boring. Don't misunderstand, cards are welcome and they are greatly appreciated. Lining the walls with cards makes the cell a little less depressing - a nice photograph, heartfelt best wishes, or an inspiring poem. Prisoners are human beings, just like you and me. Being alone is not a healthy situation.

I can hear you thinking, what is this column leading up to? Who is Gert Jan? In fact, I only have one goal in mind - involvement with prisoners and their families. That is what we stand for, that is what we aim for. We believe in recovery and restoration, even for the prisoner who has been imprisoned for the seventh time. Our motivation is not simply to see the results but because we believe that God Himself encourages us to visit the prisoners. The fact that we do see results (thankfully!) motivates us to not give up. We are not assembling Ikea wardrobes. We cut and paste ourselves together with compassion and patience knowing that we all depend on the one same mercy. The poet Geert Boogaard describes it beautifully in his poem titled 'Gert Jan and I':



*He spent half  
his life in prison.*

*Gert Jan, my childhood  
friend from the school yard.*

*In our town,  
He counted for nothing:  
Recidivist, who, time and again,  
nicked or sold stolen goods.*

*I visited him  
and we hit it off.*

*Two friends, living  
off one kind of mercy.*

## RESPONSE FROM CONNIE

*In May 2015, Connie's partner was arrested in England for drug smuggling. He was sentenced and spent eighteen months in an English cell and, after that nearly eighteen additional months in a Dutch prison. He recently came home with an electronic tag. At the time of the arrest, two of Connie's children were still living at home, a son aged 17 and a daughter aged 18. She contacted Prison Fellowship for help and she continues to be very pleased with the support she gets from volunteer Ria.*

## 'FINALLY, SOMEONE UNDERSTOOD'

*'I feel most sorry for my children. My partner is not their biological father. We had just managed to regain a sense of confidence, that our family would be fine, and then this happened. On 11 May, I underwent bariatric surgery and on 18 May I heard that my partner had been arrested in England. How was I going to handle that? I don't speak or understand English. So, then I had to contact the embassy. They didn't help, so I was completely on my own. I really resented that because I had no idea what to do. "You have only yourself to blame" said the woman at the embassy. That night, I told the children. They were shocked and scared about what was going to happen. I told my neighbours that we had split up because I didn't want my children to be bullied because of this. They don't deserve that. Soon my*





Volunteer Ria

*family also gave us no support. I noticed that once you've told your story you have to shut about it. I feel very lonely. Of course, we need to have prisons but there is such a lack of understanding. These are the hardest things, and you have to deal with them on your own. As a matter of fact, we are punished in some way as well. And that's horrible.*

*When you are desperate, you start searching online. I think that is where I found the phone number of Prison Fellowship, or via the embassy, I cannot remember. When I called, I talked to Ilse and then just sat down and cried. "Finally, someone understood." There was someone who didn't judge me and who wanted to listen. She said: "If there's anything, just call." That is wonderful because you enter a world you know nothing about.*

*She arranged for volunteer Ria to visit me. Initially, I thought: "How is she going to help?" But Ria is an amazing woman, she has this special vibe. We laugh a lot, but it's also fine when I'm angry about something. She pulls me back and offers advice: try to see it this way. She brings me a present on my birthday, and for the children as well. And she's doing it all for me!*

*My partner returned home recently, and we are trying to pick up our lives again. That's easier said than done. When he left, I weighed 162 kilos and spent a lot of time on my sofa. I couldn't do anything. Now I weigh is just over 70 kilos and I can do everything. I've become very independent, and thanks to the help I get I've also become more self-confident. We are a proper family again, but a very damaged one. One of the upsides is that the relationship with my two youngest children is much stronger now. I'm very glad about that.*

*I like it that Ria is still visiting even now that my partner has come home. We always have a great time and she still offers support. It feels like a wonderful friendship.'*

## Calvinist



Have you already tasted Calvin 09? It is Swiss chocolate by Maison Poyet. At the request of the Swiss Protestant Church, Maison Poyet created a special chocolate to celebrate the five hundredth anniversary of John Calvin, the lawyer and theologian. This is not a just a chocolate with some logo on it. Poyet, who actually didn't know about Calvin, seriously studied his work and life and expressed that in the brown treat. 'The first layer consists of a "reformed" praline mix, explains Poyet. "I added caramelised hazelnuts with salt from the Swiss Alps. This gives the pralines a real kick. The second layer is made with the best Grand Cru chocolate from Bolivia.

This symbolises Calvin's theology about the glory and perfection that is God. Because Calvin could be a difficult person while being sensitive at the same time, the caramel is made of Swiss cream, making the chocolate milder. And the taste is pure heaven" says Poyet. It embodies the love for one's neighbour. The final touch is the addition of wormwood. Because Calvin had the ability to plant, sow, and let things grow, the chocolatier explains.

How is all this related to prisoners, you might ask. Not very, I admit, but Calvin is 'hot' this year. Apart from culinary delights and drinks under the 'Calvin' label, there are several weeks of symposiums, debate nights, and exhibitions on Calvin's life. If only he knew!

I am a born and bred Calvinist. If we are to believe the Dutch Catholic priest Antoine Bodar, Calvinists are boring and humourless. Good joke. American expert Maarten van Rossem is of the opinion that the Calvinist attitude to life is that of a killjoy. Now I must say that his comments on the world we live in also don't particularly excite me. At any rate, I mention these two opinions because they are widely assumed by many people in the Netherlands. Is it true? You tell me. Some time ago a Hungarian pastor who had been living in the Netherlands since the 1950s told me that "every Dutch person is a Calvinist at heart." "Because they are idealists, but not fantasists," he said. "They like systems and common decency. That is why entrepreneurs are willing to give ex-prisoners a chance by giving

However, Calvinists also have another side to them - helping people even when they have not taken the responsibility for their own actions. I quote Calvin: "God di-

rects us to do good to all, without exception, although many of them are not worthy of this should they be assessed by their own merits.” This is not exclusively Calvinistic, by the way. In his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI states more or less the same thing. Give evidence of mercy, for Christ’s sake.

## RESPONSE FROM JOHN VAN ECK



*John van Eck was an army chaplain from 1981 to 2008. In the early 1980s. Hans Barendrecht met him when he started his military service at the Elias Beekman barracks in Ede. They stayed in touch ever since and followed each other’s careers. In 1992, John van Eck’s book was published, titled ‘God, mens en medemens, Humanitas in de theologie van Calvijn’ (God, man and fellow man: Humanity according to the Theology of Calvin). Hans studied this book intensively and amongst other things used it to come up with a definition the term “merciful justice” for his work with Prison Fellowship The Netherlands.*

## A MATTER OF EMPATHY

*Antoine Bodar will always think that Calvinists are bit boring. So be it, but reading Calvin is seldom boring. Regardless of the topic on which we need his council, he goes straight to the point, and so poignantly that one often forgets that he put his thoughts to paper nearly five centuries ago.*

*‘What would he say about prisoners’, I wondered - about the Gospel: ‘Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering’ (Hebrews 13:3) for example. Calvin does not say much about this, but he hits the nail on the head when he says: “Nothing fulfils us with a greater feeling of pity than when we put ourselves entirely in the shoes of the person who is struck by hardship and suffering.” This is how we need to care about prisoners, “as if we were in their shoes.”*

*Something like this makes one stop and think and one often has to read Calvin’s words attentively, twice before one understands them; but then you truly get something. The two sentences Calvin provides here are a complete recruitment course.*

*In talk shows, for example, when people are talking about prisoners, it often seems as if they deserve no mercy or compassion. They should have abided by the law. Then there is the suffering they caused to other people. Yes, victims deserve our compassion. Unscrupulous deeds deserve our outrage. These are all valid, yet when we look beyond all this, we are not finished. There is still the prisoner. They*



*The young Hans Barendrecht, visiting a prisoner in Arnhem Prison*

*are also individuals with a personality, with a past that shaped them and sometimes misshaped them, with a wife or husband and children they would want to care for but no longer can. Even though they have food and shelter they miss the freedom that is part of human life. In our faith, we know – and that is most important of all – that the prisoner is a fellow human, wanted and created by God, just like us. This alone is reason enough to concern ourselves with prisoners. We draw the prisoner closer by thinking about these things. They are no longer a far-away concept, outside our own world, safely locked up behind prison walls, but in our thoughts we let them (the ‘person’, as Calvin says) into our lives and we begin to feel empathy.*

*We can also do this thinking exercise the other way around and pretend as if we were in their shoes, says Calvin. These shoes are the cell. How would I feel being in there, in a small space, which I can only leave during certain fixed hours per day? How would I feel if I was full of regrets, and worried about the people who depend on me and for whom I can now do nothing? How would I feel if I had done something that can never be put right or undone?*

*These are the thinking exercises that Calvin gives us: putting the other person in our place and ourselves in the other person’s place. Isn’t this exactly what Jesus did for each of us? So, this is how Calvin gives a complete course in empathy in just two sentences. Surely, there is no better way to prepare for visiting prisoners.*

# Restoration

'You have restored Queen's Day back to us and to the country.'

This is how Queen Beatrix summarised the process of restoration in one sentence. The Netherlands was relieved. Crime does not have the final say. What was broken in Apeldoorn a year ago, was restored in the rain of Wemeldinge and in the sunshine of Middelburg. We can be grateful for that.

Of course, there is much more to say about this. But you understand that I want to make the link to our work, because the words from our Queen touched me. 'That's it', I instantly thought. Restoration! Society punishes. The right to freedom is taken away. On the day of release, the debt has been paid. Society has the responsibility to restore the right of freedom and no longer look back. What's in the past, is in the past. Everything and everyone work together and looks ahead to the future.

Meanwhile, in practice it is different. When the box beside your name is ticked to indicate a criminal history, everything becomes more difficult. There are loads of other applicants for the job and your neighbours would like you to move further away. Please understand, I am not going to plead naive goodwill. Love must come from both sides. Apart from that hard reality proves that often the behaviour of ex-prisoners does not demonstrate a willingness to take responsibility. The recidivism rate of around seventy percent is not just caused by an unfriendly society. During our work among prisoners, we aim to emphasise the personal responsibility of the individuals. They have done something wrong, unlawful, and they will have to face that fact. When they accept that, their realisation must be turned into actions. The great about our work with volunteers is that we can talk to prisoners about this without any constraint. This is done individually during visits, but also with several prisoners at the same time during our SOS Courses. Volunteers play an important role in this as well and only recently, the Verwey Jonker Institute published a study with a positive outcome.

Restoration. That is precisely what God does in Jesus Christ. Forgiving criminal



acts. Acquittal instead of conviction. God gives justice. Something I never get tired of thinking about. The foundation for this lies outside us, and that is why visiting prisoners is not a question about what we feel but about our focuses on faith in what God does. He teaches us to visit the prisoners. May this be blessed by Him when we serve prisoners in gratitude and they are restored by Him.

## RESPONSE FROM ARIE BAX



*Arie Bax (controller with the Ministry of Defence) was the 500th volunteer and joined Prison Fellowship The Netherlands in 2010. Since then he has visited prisoners in Krimpen aan den IJssel, Dordrecht, Scheveningen, Nieuwegein, and Zoetermeer. Apart from that, he was involved with De Compagnie in Krimpen aan den IJssel from the very beginning. He believes it is a privilege to interact with people who, for whatever reason, find it difficult to function in a complex society.*

## RECEIVING AND PASSING ON

*What does restoration actually mean? According to the dictionary, one of the meanings is giving something back to the owner. So, this is you have no right to do for yourself. I have already received so many things in my life. Was I entitled to all those things? I'm thinking of an invaluable upbringing, parental love and wonderful in-laws, a wife and (grand)children, housing, health, and employment. I'm also thinking about the religious education and still receiving God's word. In 1 Corinthians 4:7, we read: "For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift? Having no entitlement to anything and still receiving so much. First of all, that requires gratitude to the Giver of all this. And let us not forget our neighbour as well. This can be specifically expressed through the love we give our parents and (grand)children.*

*But we should not restrict ourselves to our inner circle. Within this framework, we can also include the 'neighbours' we don't know. Perhaps, this is not so much a case of restoration but of passing on. Passing on what we ourselves receive in abundance. Passing on love, a heartfelt interest, and a cup of water to our neighbour in need, perhaps to a neighbour who hasn't received that much. Perhaps even to a neighbour whose many years in prison are entirely justified. He is still our neighbour! Again, 1 Corinthians 4: "For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? So, we are not above our neighbour, but standing next to him.*

*Out of this conviction I was given the opportunity to do volunteer work in prisons for several years, which would be impossible without the expert and generous support from Prison Fellowship The Netherlands employees. Prison Fellowship has been able to do this work for our neighbours for 25 years. It is an anniversary that deserves a moment of contemplation and a time for reflection. If there is something we would love to know, it is whether our work has paid off. We don't know, and we should put this question to rest. In Ecclesiastes 11, we read: "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shall find it after many days." Frankly, it is an impossible assignment. Can we apply the same on the work done by Prison Fellowship? Should we really occupy ourselves with the oftentimes incorrigible criminals? I read the answer to this question in a book of sermons about the prodigal son. "People let us never write off a fellow human being. We can be so condescending about a sinner or someone who turns away from his upbringing and the service of God. But know that, deep down, we are all the same and it is the Lord who holds us fast. That doesn't mean that I condone the sin. No, but there is no one who has sunk into the mire of sin so deeply, who cannot be reached by God's loving arms in the searching works of Christ."*

*My sincere congratulations to all who are involved.*



## Conscience

Do they still have a conscience? One sometimes wonders when reading the newspapers. An elderly lady being cowardly robbed; a merchant shot dead in front of his children; a girl kidnapped and abused on her way home. You are aware of incidents like this. Crime is horrendous. One never gets used to it, and it has a huge impact on people and on society. Victims in particular, often suffer the consequences for years or, even worse, may never fully recover. Do they even have a conscience? - or has it been seared as with a hot iron, as Paul describes in his letter to Timothy. Such a heart is so hard that it cannot feel anything any longer.

This came to mind when I was sitting down with Sem. A boy who was barely seventeen years old, deeply impacted by his first time in prison. I explained our SOS Course to him, (SOS stands for Speaking about Guilt; in six sessions, young adults learn to take responsibility for their own behaviour) and asked him what had changed in him.

A question such as this often receives an answer that is as beautiful as it is vague. "How are you?" "I'm okay, man!" Sem's answer also as vague as that. "You know, I now do things better than I did before." "Okay" I responded, "so, can you give an example?"

"I'm more honest now. In the old days, if they asked me whether I did something or other, and even if I hadn't done it, I would I say, 'yeah, sure, I did that'. Now I can hear my conscience and so I'll give an honest answer. The other

day, a guy asked me if I had done the dishes. So now I'm not just making up an answer, and that feels much better." You can imagine how this was music to my ears. It's hard not to like a kid like that. A fresh face, a generous smile, a person who should be able to flourish. What if he had a few good friends, a stable family, and love as well as a firm hand to correct him. He would develop a purpose in life, a goal, the ambition to learn a trade. You know what I mean. While listening to someone, my mind doesn't stop.

These kinds of testimonials are encouraging. Our work has meaning and fortunately, it is not just ploughing on hard shameless rocks, it is sowing with hope. It is believing in restoration. It is serving with patience and determination. This requires a good sense of right and wrong before God and with others.



*Kitchen at prison wing De Compagnie*



## RESPONSE FROM MICHIEL VAN DER WOLF

*Michiel van der Wolf is a legal expert and psychologist. He is an associate professor in Criminal Law and Forensic Psychiatry at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam as well as a lecturer at the University of Groningen. He also serves as a substitute judge in the District Court of Amsterdam. He began his career as an intern-psychologist in the former TBS clinic De Singel (in Bijlmer Prison, Amsterdam). In 2012, he obtained his doctorate at Rotterdam based on his thesis titled: TBS – veroordeeld tot vooroordeel [TBS – sentenced to prejudice] concerning the historical background of current bottlenecks in the TBS system.*



### SUPER-EGO

*Why does someone commit a crime? “No conscience,” people say or “Deficient conscience formation”, psychologists may say (as one among other deficiencies) noted in reports on criminals placed under hospital order. But how does one come by a deficient conscience and is improvement even possible? When I began my psychology internship in a TBS clinic 15 years ago, I asked the practitioner in charge whether they had some sort of theoretical framework for their work. Most of them were not exponents of theories. One practitioner said: “Piaget!”*

*According to Piaget, the Swiss psychologist whose theory of cognitive development was later complemented by Kohlberg, moral development is linked to personal mental development. Up to the age of seven, a person’s morality is determined by egocentrism: initially based on fear of punishment (phase one) and later based on aiming for advantage (phase two). Up to the age of fourteen, personal morality is first determined by external factors such as the opinions of the social environment (phase three) and then by rules (phase four). At around age fourteen, internalised ethical principles begin to play a role: first based on a sense of community, democracy and utilitarianism (phase five), and then based on personal perceptions and opinions regarding prevailing universal principles (phase six). Kohlberg states that most adults don’t develop beyond phase four. The TBS clinic practitioner was of the opinion that combined with the influence of the wrong crowd, the moral development of most TBS patients had not grown beyond phase two or three. The practitioner I spoke with was at least very respected by the patients, I believe that this was also because he consistently addressed them respectfully. You shall reap what you sow.*

*In this way, he may have been the figurative father figure as per Freud’s psychoanalytical theory which was the first in psychology that seriously addressed the element of the conscience. The child develops a conscience in resolving its Oedipal*

conflict in which, through identification with the father, its norms and value system are internalised. The external control of parents becomes replaced by internal control. The name Freud gave to a person's conscience was *superego* (Über-ich). The difference between Freud and Piaget was whether a person was identified as being *superego* or having a *superego*. According to Freud, God is a projection of the *superego*, an additional father figure who may not exist literally, but who plays a vital role in the development of conscience. When violating Divine laws, Christians recognise similar feelings of guilt that children feel towards their parents and hopefully which TBS patients increasingly feel towards their practitioner.

The example that Hans Barendrecht gave in his commentary "Conscience" is similar to the two sons in the parable (Matthew 21: 28-31). "There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. Which of the two did what his father wanted?"

By the way, this is very similar to the dilemmas that Piaget offered to his young test subjects to determine their level of conscience development. It is a telling example. A person who has a conscience, can still make mistakes but they can also repent and change their behaviour. That is why Hans was pleased by the boy's honesty, even though the change in behaviour has yet to follow: he still hasn't done the dishes. TBS treatment is aimed at behavioural change: no more serious crimes. The psychological theories I mentioned offer hope that this will be improved through conscience development. Despite the fact that it remains exceptionally difficult to move an adult on to a next phase when we consider Piaget; and Freud's concept of the fatherly transfer of norms and values has been scientifically discredited.

Nowadays, a deficient conscience is often explained by neurobiological factors: a small amygdala. Research shows that psychopaths suffer from a small amygdala, although they don't actually 'suffer'. No empathy, no fear, not sensitive to punishment or reward. A deformity in a person's brain sounds pretty hopeless. In the old days the prevailing idea was that psychopaths would only become more dangerous even when treated. Nowadays, we see a growing albeit tentative belief that treatment can work (for example, with schematic therapy) and also that the brain can be bypassed or changed through treatment. Daniel Reisel in a hopeful Ted Talk, contends that restorative justice interventions are more effective – and that thinking about the experience of victims and possibly even meeting the victim – can bring about positive changes. This is why the restorative efforts by Prison Fellowship The Netherlands can really contribute to behavioural change, even with apparently degenerate and hopeless cases. Through close collaboration we are also trying to make this work of redemption available to the TBS target audience. We can only hope and pray.

Commentary October 2011

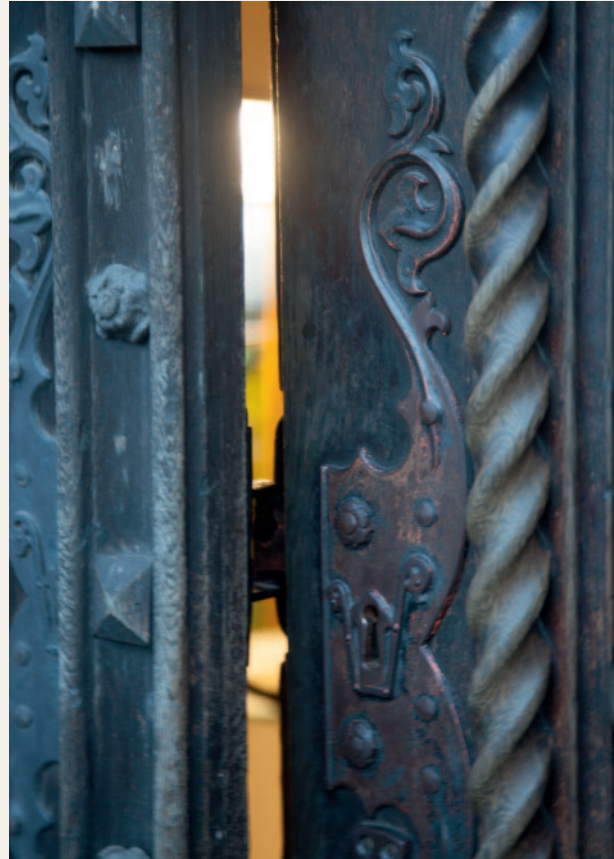
# Church Punishment

Did you read the article? In the United States, offenders can choose: a year in prison or a year in church. The idea is going viral. Bay Minette, where the idea was born, doesn't even have 10,000 residents, but it is global news. What is this all about? The police force and churches want to give offenders the opportunity to really come to terms with their past. They are all convicted for minor offences, so not for assault or violence. They are offered a choice: spending time in prison or singing in church. Whatever they choose, they are doing time.

So, what to make of that? "I'd rather see them going to a church than to a bar," a prison director told me some years ago. He was the opposite of being a regular churchgoer himself, but he had seen too many people checking into his 'hotel' again. Naturally, I couldn't agree more. In a bar, you drink your life away; in church, you can find your life. This is where you look up instead of down into a glass.

Even so, should the Church agree to participate in the implementation of punishment? Many churches in Bay Minette think that they should. The police force is pleased. A church programme of one year will be more effective than a short spell in prison and I'm more than happy to believe this (although it will be much more difficult to prove scientifically). I also think that the Church is the best place to work on one's life in a meaningful way. And a life of crime is a serious question when it comes to meaning in life. It is what I learned from Solomon, who says to "guard your heart, because everything you do flows from it." (Proverbs 4:23). The Ministry of Justice is also accepting this more and more, through the programmes that are offered to prisoners.

But to replace the rehabilitation officers who check and report, with a



*The church door is open...*

clergyman might be taking it a step too far. The clergyman should not be shackled to the Ministry of Justice or anyone else, only to the justice of Christ - for where God and man come together is what he explains and shares with the community, The community is not a government instrument or a civil society “yard” in which moral development takes place. The community is the Body of Christ, and this is exactly what it must remain.

At the same time, I hope that many offenders find their way to the Church – also through the work of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands – both inside and outside the prison as the church, the heart of God’s Spirit, is the true workplace of actual resocialisation.

## RESPONSE FROM DAN VAN NESS

*Restorative justice has been Dan W. Van Ness’ major professional interest throughout his career. He has explored and promoted restorative justice as a public policy advocate, a program designer, a writer and a teacher. For twenty years he was Executive Director of the Centre for Justice & Reconciliation at Prison Fellowship International (PFI). He led a coalition of NGOs in preparing an initial draft of the UN Declaration of Basic Principles on the Use of Restorative Justice Programmes in Criminal Matters and in campaigning for its eventual endorsement by the Economic and Social Council in 2002.*



*He led the design team that developed The Sycamore Tree Project®, an in-prison restorative justice program used in 35 countries. Since his retirement from PFI in June 2017 he has served part-time as its Special Advisor on Restorative Justice.*

## CHURCH AS PUNISHMENT

*Prisons as places of punishment are a relatively recent development in the history of criminal justice. The prison era arguably started in 1790 in the US city of Philadelphia. Its jail was converted from a place of detention prior to trial into a place of punishment where it was hoped that guilty defendants would find rehabilitation. They were isolated in single-bed cells, given a Bible to read and visited regularly by the prison director and a pastor. It was thought that, removed from the criminogenic influences of their communities and immersed in the wholesome and anti-septic environment of the jail, they would repent of their evil ways. To underscore this hope, the facility was called a penitentiary: a place of penitence.*

*This new approach was largely unsuccessful, as were the replacement philosophies and programs that followed. So, it is not surprising that 200 years later, the*

citizens of Bay Minette were willing to try something different with nonviolent offenders. Unfortunately, their proposed solution of sentencing offenders to attend church had several problems. One was that it was unconstitutional under the First and Fifth Amendments to the US Constitution. Another was that a dose of church each week is unlikely to produce magical results in the lives of people who are there only because they are forced to be. Had they tried their experiment, Bay Minette would likely have been just as disappointed as were the citizens of Philadelphia in the 1790s.

We cannot forcibly change someone's character. Taking off a prison uniform and putting on street clothes does not transform a person. We simply have the same person in a new wardrobe. Character change requires sustained effort on the part of the individual who wants to change. Transformational dynamics leading to character change include:

- Instruction, which connects us to the transforming power of truth,
- Committed people who allow us to experience the transforming power of relationships,
- An awakening of the inner person which helps us find spiritual transformation, and
- Life experiences through which we learn to live out our transformed character

A local church could offer a community in which to find all four dynamics of transformation – instructional, relational, spiritual and experiential. For this reason, Prison Fellowship works with and through churches in carrying out its ministry to prisoners, ex-prisoners, victims and their families. With proper training and perseverance, churches can provide what the criminal justice system cannot: a transforming community whose members – including people with criminal records – become more Christ-like in character.

The most remarkable demonstration of this in the past 25 years took place in a Canadian Mennonite congregation which created what are now called Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) to help a serious child sexual offender return from prison after completing his maximum prison sentence. Trained lay volunteers maintained daily contact with the offender and were given support by professionals with expertise in managing the risks posed by sexual offenders. A few months later, an Anglican church in Canada formed a CoSA for a second high-risk sexual offender just being released. Neither offender repeated his offenses, and CoSAs expanded across Canada and the US and now are used around the world.<sup>2</sup>

A church should be a transforming community for ex-offenders, but sometimes it refuses to be. Because of fear or indifference, some close their doors to members of this population who want to become mature followers of Christ. But others are welcoming.

---

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, R.J., McWhinnie, A.J. and Wilson, C (2008); *Circles of Support and Accountability: An international partnership in reducing sexual offender recidivism*. Prison Service Journal 138 (178), 26-36.



*Dan Van Ness, visiting The Netherlands. He is at one of the SOS Courses in PI Lelystad*

*That is, for me, the real story of Bay Minette: 56 of this small city's churches had agreed to participate in the sentencing experiment. They were willing to offer themselves as transforming communities to ex-offenders.*

*The story of Prison Fellowship Netherlands is that for 25 years it has built transforming communities around the country by recruiting and organizing church member volunteers into skilled and seasoned agents of transformation within prisons and in communities into which prisoners are released. It has been my pleasure to work with Hans Barendrecht and his team on many occasions as they demonstrated the beneficial impact of programs based on restorative justice theory and the Good Lives Model. Well done.*

*And now, here's to another 25 years of transformation.*

# Hands

Early this year, I was suddenly captivated by Christ's hands. It happened in the wooden cathedral in Paramaribo which has a woodcarving on the wall depicting 'the judgement of Christ'. It caught my eye and it made a huge impression on me. Christ's hands are bound behind his back. Over the years, I have seen so many prisoners bound in this way - in front of the courthouse, in the transport van, on the news, in the papers, and of course, in prison. But now I saw Jesus. Bound. "And yet, he is free" I thought immediately. How curious. I studied the carving a bit more. Christ is not wearing shoes. The prosecutor, the judge and the guard wear shoes. The latter also wear a helmet. Christ has only a crown made of thorns, but His clothing is completely white! Similarities and differences in one work of art. A telling sermon. He knows what it is like to be imprisoned. That others decide what you can and cannot do. That you are at the mercy of others. That your fate is in someone else's hands. At the same time, He is the only one who is truly free and if I may say so, that is the difference between Christ and the criminal. He is just and innocent in his undisturbed relationship with God.

I went to Suriname with Willem den Hertog. It was a very special trip. In every prison we visited we would meet with inmates who studied the Bible together every day and praised God with their songs. When I close my eyes, I can still hear them sing in the 'Nieuwe Haven' police cells. I asked the taxi driver to stop there so I could give them some soap and shampoo that I hadn't used in the hotel. Unbelievable! Imprisoned and still free! That is what the bound hands of Christ can achieve!

Thanks to Willem den Hertog's foundation, Rentmeester, Malvin was appointed as its director. He spent ten years in prison. After five years, he turned to God. While in prison, amongst other things he got his high school diploma. He was released five years ago and the thing he wants most is to go back to prison. The love of Christ urges him! I am thankful to be his distant mentor. But it is Christ's hands that bind us.

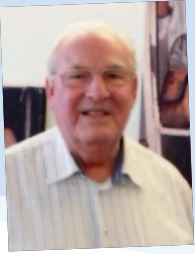
Only recently, in the newspaper I read that we need another 'Great Story'. A study conducted by professor Gabriël van den Brink concludes that the higher power has



not disappeared, it has only changed. Vital values such as a joy in life and health are most important to atheists, but they are the least likely to offer themselves as volunteers who are people who know a personal God. They know whose hands are carrying them, now and in the afterlife. This makes them not just grateful but benevolent and also active, even when it comes to visiting prisoners. Because '...you have visited Me'.

## RESPONSE FROM WILLEM DEN HERTOOG

*Willem den Hertog was born in Hazerswoude in 1945. His mother died when he was still young and so he had to fend for himself in life. He sees it as God's Providence that there were people willing to offer him shelter and care. His lifelong ambition and joy was being a market vendor. He sold butter, cheese, and eggs and, later on, operated a delicatessen as well. After many years, his name became synonym for the most well-known brand of ice cream in the Netherlands. He sold Hertog IJs in 1991 as the pressure from banks to invest and pay off loans diminished the joy he felt about his company. Part of the proceeds of selling the company was put into the Rentmeester Foundation which, for many years, he has used to support good causes in evangelisation and Christian charity both at home and abroad. He has a unique heart for prisoners and has given Bible studies in prisons for many years. He also initiated prison chaplaincy for people held in remand in police stations. Since meeting in 1995, Willem den Hertog and Hans Barendrecht have become close friends.*



## YOUR HANDS, MY HANDS, AND HIS HANDS

*I first met Hans when he was considering the idea of establishing Prison Fellowship The Netherlands. The concept greatly appealed to me. As a legal expert, he did not choose a brilliant career but to serve God and our fellow men. Shortly before, I had visited the Noordersingel PI in Rotterdam at the request of a prison pastor who invited me to advise white-collar criminals how to turn a nickel into a dime in an honest way. Hans and I made several trips to visit prisons abroad. We went to Nigeria and Brazil, and we've been to Suriname seven times to visit the prisons and police cell blocks.*

*My work is to open the Bible wherever I visit and bear witness to the healing and blessing of Jesus hands. Hans came along to share his knowledge and experience in the area of restoration and resocialisation, which was very much appreciated by prison management boards. During our visits, Hans would always enter a church to pray or look for an organ to play on. He had a 'heart-warming' experi-*





*Willem den Hertog poses in a cell in Suriname*

*ence in the Roman Catholic cathedral in Paramaribo. It has a beautiful woodcarving of Jesus with his hands bound behind his back. In my contribution, I would like to meditate on that, together with you. Our hands are free. When do these hands offer comfort, healing, a blessing? Or are they just busy building our own 'house' we live?*

*When Jesus speaks about the heart, our inner person, we all know that we are not in the best condition when God calls us in paradise by asking: People, where are you?*

*Jesus let His hands be bound, he voluntarily sacrificed Himself, out of love for you and me! When your and my hands do something good, it is by His mercy. Following Jesus is always paying attention and in difficult as well as humbling situations asking ourselves: 'What would Jesus do?'*

*I thought of this question on one occasion when I was at the detainee care department of the Doelwater police station in Rotterdam. At the first cell, the detainee care giver said: "Willem, I wouldn't open this door if I were you, she was picked from the street last night and is too dirty to touch, she is a homeless person." The question just popped up: What would Jesus do? "Just open the door anyway," I said. The detained woman was sleeping underneath a blanket, the cell stank, and I carefully woke her up. She sat up and asked: "Who are you and why are you here?" I said: "I'm a volunteer and want to ask you if you will have a cup of tea with me, and whether you need any spiritual assistance." "Are you a pastor?" "No, let me introduce myself," then I took her hand and said: "My name is Willem, I'm not a pas-*

tor, but I like to talk about the Bible and Jesus.” She sat up and we had a wonderful conversation; she had tears running down her face. These are the people for whom Jesus came to earth, to offer them a helping Hand! His hands touched lepers and embraced the children. His hand heals the paralytic and made him jump with joy. Jesus reached out his Hand to Peter who shouted “I’m drowning.” His last deed during life on earth was saving a murderer. They were to be crucified together. He called to Jesus for mercy and the mercy was granted! Every morning, I read St. Francis’ prayer. A life with Jesus makes one truly free, it calms and gives peace, and it encourages you to serve others with your hands! Prison Fellowship The Netherlands, it is my fervent wish that in the coming years, you will work under blessed hands, that prisoners are helped on their way to Christian freedom. God bless the management, the employees, and all the volunteers involved with this wonderful foundation!

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me bring love.  
Where there is offense, let me bring forgiveness.  
Where there is discord, let me bring union.  
Where there is error, let me bring truth.  
Where there is doubt, let me bring faith.  
Where there is despair, let me bring hope.  
Where there is darkness, let me bring your light.  
Where there is sadness, let me bring joy.

O Master, let me not seek as much  
to be consoled as to console,  
to be understood as to understand,  
to be loved as to love,  
for it is in giving that one receives,  
it is in self-forgetting that one finds,  
it is in pardoning that one is pardoned,  
it is in dying that one is raised to eternal life.

Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226)

# Content

The Free University (FU) has recently conducted a study with our prisoners, TBS patients and their families, our so-called help requesters. We wanted to know if our work has any meaning. Not that we doubt that. We frequently receive grateful letters but, in that regard, think more of the number of lepers that were cured. Only one of ten makes the effort to thank Jesus for his restoration. The others can't be bothered and continue living in their own reality. That is the way people are. However, to continue with the topic of the study of the FU: the study showed that our help requesters are more than content. They gave us a score of 8.7. Our volunteers who were also considered in the study scored us 8.2.

Now, the temptation could arise to lean back satisfied. But don't worry, we will not do that. Of course, we share our joy about this with a proper sense of gratitude. But most of all we carry on in consideration of the interesting findings. One of them for example is that twenty percent of volunteers indicate that the visits are an emotional burden. This doesn't immediately make me think of things like sleepless nights, but suggests that there are volunteers who, in one way or another, are not fully able to distance themselves from help requesters and their problems. Make no mistake. Volunteers get to hear a lot from people behind bars. Prisoners often have their own tragic stories that, more often than not, originate in childhood. On the other hand, there are prisoners who minimise their crimes and consider themselves to be the primary victim. Volunteers aren't miracle workers who have a magical recipe that immediately works for everyone. Restoration is a process. You would like to see some quick progress, but what if it takes longer? I now think of Henk. He has been visiting Fred for over ten years. When he comes home after his monthly visit, they pray for Fred at the dinner table. This way Henk keeps his eye fixed on the Heavens. He is then able to work towards the restoration of Fred, in faithful independence with his hands and his heart. What comprises Henk's contribution is not what matters the most. Not everything is measurable. However, to be content with God's Providence is the path towards peace.



## RESPONSE FROM ARIE VAN DEN HURK



*Arie van den Hurk has been working as advisor for knowledge management for the Dutch Custodial Institutions Agency (DJI) since 2011. His most important task is to utilise (scientific) knowledge regarding custody for the purpose of policies and practice. He was originally trained as a cultural psychologist. Before joining the DJI, he worked for the university in Nijmegen and in probational care for addicts. According to Hans Barendrecht, Arie van den Hurk is one who is always asking questions and who really appreciates the work Prison Fellowship does. This has resulted in a relationship that is nourishing and stimulating.*

### MORE THAN CONTENT

*Many thanks for the invitation to contribute to this anniversary book. An excellent opportunity for me to communicate in written form how much I appreciate what the employees and volunteers of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands stand for and the work they do.*

*I was asked to respond to the commentary titled “Content”. In this piece, a lot of the elements that – in my opinion – contribute to the uniqueness of Gevangenzorg Nederland are highlighted. I would like to note some of these and elaborate on them.*

*First of all, I would like to note that Prison Fellowship The Netherlands is strongly driven by its values. There is ambition, there are goals such as restoration and reintegration, but the main impetus is a strong humanitarian drive. This is best summarised in “being there for someone else.” In my opinion, this attitude is of invaluable importance. Why? Because first and foremost volunteers interact with prisoners as fellow human beings in a non-manipulative manner. Establishing contact is a goal and not a means. The purpose is to really get to know the other person: who are you? This is greatly appreciated by prisoners. It is the manner in which someone is treated that arguably results in more sustainable behavioural change than many other efforts that are directly focused on this. As is often the case: the detour proves to be shorter!*

*The commentary contains a second element that is also typical of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands and that is to aim for knowledge, preferably scientific knowledge, about the value of volunteering. Because of this need for knowledge I met Hans Barendrecht a long time ago, when I was working for the Dutch Custodial Institutions Agency (DJI) as an advisor for scientific research. There was an immediate spark between us and we have kept in touch over time to talk with and*



*De Compagnie, PFN project wing at Krimpen aan den IJssel prison*

*inspire each other. Questions such as, “what does it mean when clients are satisfied with us? how can we start a process of restoration? how valuable is our work? and is it also measurable?” were often discussed. Over the years, many scientific insights have been gained about these topics and fortunately, Hans and I are not yet finished discussing and studying them.*

*One last positive element that I would like to point out is that Prison Fellowship The Netherlands keeps reinventing itself. Contentment is dangerously close to complacency, so it is important that we keep that at bay. The most recent project of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands, called De Compagnie in Penitentiary Institution Krimpen aan den IJssel, illustrates how inventive, ambitious, and innovative Prison Fellowship The Netherlands is, even after all these years. Ahead of the scientific evaluation I would like to conclude that this is a very valuable project for the further development of the Dutch prison system in terms of developing a stimulating daytime programme for prisoners for bringing about behavioural changes. I would be very surprised however, if research does not demonstrate this very soon.*

*To conclude I wish to express my hope that Prison Fellowship The Netherlands will continue to be as dedicated, innovative and curious in its work as it has been for the benefit of a group of people who often come last regarding receiving attention and compassion from others.*

# Pardon

The Netherlands has a king! Did you know that he is 'into' prisoners? On the first of September 2009 I welcomed His Royal Highness King (then still Prince) Willem-Alexander to the prison of Veenhuizen. He wanted to be personally informed about our volunteer work and spoke among others, with a prisoner and the volunteer who visits him. The royal visit was connected to the fact that he, together with Queen Máxima, is patron of the Foundation Oranje Fonds. Prison Fellowship The Netherlands was part of the growing programme (Groeiprogramma) that the Foundation Oranje Fonds organised.

This was and will of course, always be a memorable occasion. When it was announced that we would have a king on the 30<sup>th</sup> of April, I thought for a moment - will there be a pardon? But soon after, the website of the Dutch Royal House announced that this would not be the case. However, Queen Wilhelmina and Juliana had done so in the past and Juliana had last granted a pardon to several prisoners in 1953, in response to the North Sea flood. All around us, a pardon – or grace – has not fallen out of favour. Around Christmas time, many prisoners in Germany are granted a commutation of their sentences. Until the 90s of the last century, a pardon was sometimes granted to a few prisoners in Belgium. In Morocco, a few prisoners are granted a pardon on the birthday of the king. In 2007, King Mohammed pardoned almost 9,000 prisoners and granted 24,000 prisoners a commutation to celebrate the birth of his second child. Oh, well!

In the Netherlands, prisoners just' stay locked up. And our volunteers just' keep on visiting. But is this just something that happens? In conversations with people from Equity Funds for example, I am sometimes told: "The work you do is so brave, understand that!" or "You are the conscience of our society." I must confess that this is not the way I look at our work and neither do our volunteers. During the last couple of weeks, I have attended some local meetings of volunteers and listened quietly to what they had to say. To summarise it all in one word: compassion! But also, determination, to keep going, even when there is no change noticeable at all. Perhaps one can call this "brave" after all, and perhaps we can consider all their visits to be "walking lectures," calling upon the conscience of others who tend to avoid them.

For us, it is more important to be able to continue our work. This is not a given, and it is not easy. "Determination has been my heart in hardship," is what Wilhelmus, our national anthem, states in the 13<sup>th</sup> verse. Determination, that is what is most important! It is wonderful to hear and see that the source of determination springs from the grace of our King Jesus. Our faith in Him leads to the gift of forgiveness for

sins and care for others in our community, especially in our prisons and TBS clinics, for grace knows no boundaries.

## RESPONSE FROM GERT-JAN SEGERS



*Gert-Jan Segers has been a member of the Dutch Parliament for the ChristenUnie since 2012 and group chairman since 2015. Until the beginning of 2013, he was director of the Mr G. Groen van Prinsterer Foundation, the scientific institute of the ChristenUnie. He has been to Egypt as a missionary and has published a couple of novels. His party is part of the third government led by Rutte. However, Segers did not take up office as a minister but continued as group chairman instead. Gert-Jan has a keen interest in restorative justice initiatives.*

## A SECOND CHANCE

*In Les Misérables, the famous novel by Victor Hugo, Jean Valjean is finally released after nineteen years of imprisonment in a prison camp. Theft and the resulting long prison sentence have placed him outside society and the community. When he had served his time, he regained his freedom and went back into society, but that did not mean that as a free man he was immediately accepted back into the community. He wandered around on an empty stomach until, late at night, he knocked on the door of bishop Myriel and his housekeeper. Valjean was welcomed inside, was offered food and went to sleep in a clean bed.*

*However, “once a thief, always a thief” and in the middle of the night Valjean crept towards the cupboard with valuable goods. As he was busy stuffing the silverware into his bag the bishop, who was woken up by the noise, made his way towards him through the hallway. When he looked around the corner, Valjean attacked him and ran away with the loot. The next morning a crying housekeeper looked through the boxes where the silverware used to be. Bishop Myriel tried to cheer her up: “Less silverware to polish.”*

*A moment later, there was a knock on the door and there was Jean Valjean again, now in the accompaniment of some policemen. The police officer placed the bag with stolen silverware in front of the bishop and asked him with a smile: “This man claims that he was gifted these things by you, is that true?” Bishop Myriel touched his face (it was still hurting) and answered: “That is true, but he forgot to take the silver candleholders that I had given him as well.” After the astonished housekeeper returned with the silver candleholders, the bishop put*



*Jean Valjean (Hugh Jackman) with the candleholders in the film Les Misérables (2012)*

*them in the bag, stuffing it even more. The policemen and Valjean were as astonished as the housekeeper, but the policemen had no other choice than to remove the handcuffs and release Valjean.*

*“Why are you doing this?” Valjean stammered, when he and the bishop were alone.*

*“With this silverware, I deliver you from hate and fear,” the bishop answered, “and I buy your soul to give it back to God. You will never be the same again. You are a new person.”*

*Prison Fellowship does not have any silver or gold. However, whatever the employees and volunteers do have, they give away. Their time, attention, commitment, their hope in God. By giving a second chance and showing the meaning of grace, they do not wait for the prisoner to become a repeat offender. They try to get ahead of the blows the repeat offender inflicts on the bishop and replicate the grace of the bishop with handshakes and personal meetings. The essence therefore remains the same. Whoever has been given grace themselves, knows that he has not been deserving of it either, and is therefore able to spread and share it more easily.*

*Thanks to Hans Barendrecht, thanks to all employees, all volunteers for spreading and sharing what we have been given for free. And thanks to all men and women who were willing to accept grace.*



How do you deal with someone who has done something “stupid”? Our gut knows the answer: “punishment, serves him right!” Well and good considering the position, but there is enough reason to seriously question whether this is just an opinion or if in fact, it is a just one. For instance, consider people who go on a skiing holiday and believe themselves to be as good skiers as a cyclist. They fall flat on their faces have to be flown back in an air ambulance and end up lying on a couch from which they can comfortably admire all their “get well soon!” wishes and “how terrible that this happened to you” cards. If they are lucky, there will even be flowers sent by their church community for them to appreciate. “So happy that it didn’t end worse, we will pray for you, warmly from the women’s group.” Supported by such a vast amount of compassion, they get to recover comfortably. Good thing too that the insurance covered everything.

Our ‘clients’ also took risks. They were overconfident and thought they would not get caught. But when burgling the house, they were caught red-handed. “A good thing that is,” we then say to each other when reading about it in the newspaper. “Happy that he is locked away for a good amount of time. That serves him right!” Right?! No extra work for the postman and florist either! This symbolizes the general feeling among society, straight from our gut.

But Mr Opstelten, minister of Justice scratches himself behind the ears and thinks: “Wait a minute there buddy, if you go to a hotel you must pay for it, right? And now you visit my ‘hotel’ without me even inviting you in, and I have to pay all costs, accommodation AND full board. Do you know what that amounts to a day? Two hundred euro! And did you know that I have to make budget cuts? We all have to tighten our belts a little! It seems only right to me that you contribute as well. I was thinking of about sixteen euro a day. If you have to do a lot of time, it will be free after the first two years. Seems to be a pretty nice way to save some 65 million for the Treasury, eh?”

Well, what to think about all this? I doubt that any insurance company will be offering a suitable product for possible jail costs, unless they think they will be making as much money from it as the minister. But in July of this year, the Council of State announced: “We do not think this is a very good idea. Almost 75 percent of prisoners are already dealing with debt and over 30 per cent are on benefits. When the amount of debt increases, so does the likelihood of committing new crimes. Also, we must not forget this would increase the social issues these families are already facing.” But the minister has disregarded this advice and proceeded anyway.

It is almost Christmas. A time to remember the most unimaginable thing to ever happen in history. God became visible in Man, Jesus Christ. He paid our debt of sin and guilt. If one is arrested by this amazing grace, then one should be inspired to show compassion by caring for someone who has fallen flat on his face, but has had even worse luck, and has to pay for it in prison – and rightly so. Let us not speak of paying but instead speak of loaning. Our volunteers give the prisoner the loan of listening and encouragement. Let us hope and pray that investing in “merciful justice” yields an interest rate of inward renewal, to the glory of God.

## RESPONSE FROM WOUTER BOOGAARD



*Wouter Boogaard is director Audit & Concern control / Finances & Operation at the Dutch Custodial Institutions Agency (DJI). Hans has invited him to react to one of his columns since Wouter Boogaard is responsible for the finances of the DJI. They respect each other as fellow human and as experts in their field. This has resulted in a constructive and pleasant relationship.*

## NO FOOT MAY SLIDE

*The Dutch Custodial Institutions Agency (DJI) contributes something special to society in the imprisonment of detainees. Imprisonment is necessary to do right by the victims and society at large, and it also offers the opportunity to help someone get their life back on track and prevent recidivism, outside the enforced framework of the Justice department. We are continuously working on the effective enforcement of prison sentences that do justice to punishment and contribute to a safer society as well. We do not have to do this alone but work together with our network partners, some of which are volunteer organisations.*

*In your column, Hans, you address the costs of detention. These are costs we have to make to keep the prison environment safe for employees and detainees, and includes the building, the guards, and the support and guidance to assure a successful re-entry into society. Some programmes take a long time, but most are usually shorter, since most detainees only have to serve a short amount of time. On a yearly basis, over 30,000 detainees are re-entered into society. Whether it has been a short or a long sentence, there is always an intensive guidance programme. If we can help to stop recidivism, we are achieving our goal, especially since recidivism comes with high societal costs. Preventing recidivism also prevents suffering and nuisance as well as a lot of expenditure.*

*I have already briefly mentioned our network partners. Prison Fellowship The Netherlands is one of them. Your volunteers play an important role when it comes to (former) detainees. The presence of volunteers contributes to a dignified life for detainees. I often hear from detainees that it does make a difference whether they are talking to a volunteer or to a paid employee from the DJI. It is clear that a volunteer has a different role and therefore he/she is trusted more easily. A volunteer shows up for altruistic reasons not for selfish ones, and this has a certain effect on detainees. The work is even more valuable when it also contributes to preventing recidivism.*

*To me, it is a wonderful thing that people want to do something for our detainees on a voluntary and impartial, basis, because they would like to give without expecting something back in return. This is not always a given. You do these things as acts of charity and passion. Wonderful! Prison Fellowship The Netherlands operates out of its Christian identity. This identity differs from the DJI which aims to be as neutral as possible. We each have our own position. We appreciate your organisation and give you the space you need. You have now been doing your work for 25 years. That is deserving of our congratulations and we would like to wish you – and our detainees – many good years of “gevangelisatiezorg” (care to prisoners) to come.*

*Hans, in your office you keep a long-case Westminster clock. Did you know*



*that the Westminster Chimes are accompanied by a poem of four lines? At the first quarter the first verse of the melody is played, and at every following quarter another verse is added, until the full melody is played on the hour, every hour. But you have turned off the melody on your clock: your colleagues from Prison Fellowship The Netherlands found it to be a bit of a nuisance... Do you know the lines of the Westminster melody?*

*O Lord our God  
Be Thou our Guide  
That by Thy help  
No foot may slide*

*I am intrigued by that last line, "No foot may slide." It is of course a good thing if we keep our feet from sliding, but when considering (former) detainees we can interpret this as meaning to keep them on the right path. That is the goal our employees are working towards, and so do the volunteers of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands! If fewer feet slide it means fewer cases of recidivism as well. This way we can protect society against future injustice and harm and give perpetrators the opportunity to henceforth contribute towards society in a positive manner. That is the goal we all strive towards.*

*Hans, why don't you turn the melody back on, will you?*

## Hot and Vengeful

Do you also experience an unpleasant feeling when reading these two words? They evoke tension. A tension that can get out of control. I came across these two words – hot and vengeful – when reading Deuteronomy 19 and they connected to what was keeping Prison Fellowship quite busy at the time. As an exception, I will try to be a little less abstract than I usually am. I think there is every reason to do so.

The Bible first speaks of a hot heart. The family ('blood avenger') of someone who is killed is angry and calls for revenge. "A life for a life." Yet imagine the death was the result of an accident. The axe head slipped from the handle. The emotional response is the heart becoming hot and probably 'overheated'. There is however no need for revenge and as a preventive solution, the accidental slayer can flee to a city of refuge. There, the perpetrator will find peace and protection.

A few verses further (from Deuteronomy 19:6) there is reference to a 'false witness', a malicious one. "I accuse you, because...." When the judge studies the accusation, it turns out to be incorrect. This false witness should then receive the punishment he desired for the man he falsely accused. "An eye for an eye."

The Dutch city of Leiden has been in the news a lot because of the fact that someone is living there who until recently lived somewhere else: in prison. Only few people stay in prison for life. This man did not. The judge had sentenced him and he had served his time. When you have served your time, you would suppose it is done and are then allowed to move on. But not in this case, and certainly not when it became known that Leiden was to be the city of refuge for this man to flee to. More than one mayor did not feel up to the task of hospitality, but Mr Lenferink did. My compliments! My compliment as well to the city council of Leiden and to secretary of state Mr Teeven for the political support he provided afterwards. I think this is extraordinarily courageous, especially during the time of an election! This man surely should be able to live somewhere in the Netherlands, should he not? Justice has run its course, has it not? The evil he had bestowed upon society had been compensated. However, at the same time I realize that this does not mean that the wounds that were inflicted have healed. This sums up the terrible dilemma we encounter in our work. We are well aware of the sorts of crimes 'our clients' have committed and how wrong those were. We do not make any excuses for them. We also do not make excuses for those (albeit only a few) who wish ill upon him, an ill they would never wish upon their own family. Those few have hot hearts, they are vengeful. That sentiment is wrong and ruthless.

The churches have also been in the news. They were there for him, but had been

silent for so for many years. He has been visited by a volunteer from Prison Fellowship more than a hundred times, and we are still in touch: if there is a relationship of trust we continue even after detention. The volunteer is also a witness, but one of the merciful justice that we come to know and receive Jesus Christ, our ultimate “City of Refuge.” I am grateful that our volunteers are such witnesses, with hearts that have a pleasant temperature and testimonies that are full of mercy.

## RESPONSE FROM KEES VAN DER STAAIJ



*Kees van der Staaij has been a member of Parliament for the SGP since 1988 and group chairman since 2010. Apart from that he is also a member of the Social Council of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands. The commentary that Hans asked Kees to respond to, is more or less about the eleventh commandment. Van der Staaij has written about this in his book *Goede gesprekken* (Good conversations). During a fishing trip that they went on together, Kees advised Hans to write down his experiences and thoughts on paper, stating that these would be worth reading.*

## LOVE AND JUSTICE

*I recently attended an evening discussion on the topic of being a Christian in the workplace. A Christian entrepreneur who was partner in an international secular service company was asked to give his opinion on this matter. The example he gave was unexpected. At an office party, one of the employees had enjoyed a few drinks too many and was verbally harassing a female colleague. A very unpleasant incident. Shortly after, the employee burst into tears, apologised profusely and pledged that this would never ever happen again. The company proceeded to investigate the incident. All sorts of commissions considered the matter – this is after all the era of #metoo. What if the reputation of the company was damaged...? What to do next? During a meeting of the board there was an awkward silence, upon which the Christian entrepreneur spoke up and said: “Considering all the procedures and endless discussions, this man has been punished enough. I would like to say: one who confesses and renounces their sins, finds mercy...” This was well received by the board and thus it happened.*

*In our time, lawlessness and mercilessness are sometimes very close to each other. At first, almost everything seems to be allowed but then, suddenly things begin turning around, and there is no longer any room for mercy, only strict legal-*

*ism. If we follow the paths God shows us through his Word, there is room both for justice as well as mercy.*

*This mature way of thinking is something I recognize in the columns of Hans Barendrecht. An eye for mercy, offering someone a second chance. Not looking down on what went wrong but keeping a distance from the resentful and heated mindset of “the stricter, the better!”. Yet at the same time we must not, out of convenience, consider the perpetrator to be the victim without holding him accountable. We must also consider those who were victimized and who suffered because of the wrongdoing. Justice must run its course.*

*Reformer John Calvin articulated this quite well. “When imposing punishment, it is important to keep the right balance between a weak sort of indulgence or irresponsible kindness on the one hand, and excessive strictness that hurts more than it heals on the other.” Beautifully said.*

*This Biblical balance is extremely valuable, for justice is being done in response to the irresponsibility of the injustice, but the attitude towards the perpetrator remains one of love. It is about justice as well as about love. A detainee is also a valuable human being, created in the image and likeness of God. Do not forget that our hearts are also susceptible to evil.*

*Does this mean that the course we should follow will always be clear? That is an over-simplification. There will always be dilemmas. Should a life sentence always be considered as unmerciful? What is a suitable punishment in cases of gruesome murders or horrendous sex crimes?*

*We must remain focussed when discussing these topics and allow room for various perspectives. The perspective of the perpetrator, but also the perspectives of the victims and society at large.*

*I would hereby like to take the opportunity to congratulate Prison Fellowship The Netherlands on their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and wish them God’s blessing for the future.*

# Heartbeat

Dear fathers, are you aware of the heart rate of your son? If the pulse is slow, your son is prone to criminal behaviour. However, this predisposition will only emerge if he witnesses you being violent. This is one of the research findings on violent behavioural patterns over five generations. Steve van de Weijer initiated his study by looking at 198 boys who were confined to a disciplinary school between 1914 and 1918. He looked at the convictions of their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Apparently, a biological factor such as one's heart rate can be a factor, because a lower heart rate makes one less fearful and thus desiring more excitement. His PhD research, conducted at the Vrije Universiteit, also showed that sex offences (violent crimes as well) are concentrated within families and are passed on to members of the family. The researchers expected that there would be fewer role models available to youth as a result of the group breakdown and increased social mobility. It turned out that this is not the case. Raising a child continues to be a huge responsibility. Apparently, the crimes of fathers are being evidenced, even up to three or four generations as stated in Exodus 20.

Speaking of youth, a month after the release of this study, The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) published a study “Geloven binnen en buiten verband” (Faith Inside and Outside the Church Community). The study confirmed – unfortunately – what we already knew. Church communities are becoming smaller and only ten percent of the Dutch population consider themselves to be members of a church. In 1980 it was still fifty per cent. However, according to professor Joep de Hart, the church is also becoming a more ‘pleasant’ place, since younger members of the church turn out to be more orthodox than older members in regard to confession of church doctrines such as the authority of the Bible, life after death, heaven and hell and the devil. This trend towards ‘re-traditionalizing’ can be seen throughout protestant and catholic churches. This is partly a result of the fact that the only members left are those who were serious about it in the first place. However, it could also be the result of a need for moral clarity. As society provides less and less clarity, young people are once again looking to churches for guidance. This is encouraging news, especially after a massive decrease in the percentage of young people who are church members.

It is not easy to see the connection between these two studies. However, I would still like to try. As we all know, it is better to have an example to live by than just being told what to do. Apparently, there is a need for role models. This is also what I recognised in the story of Willem and Hugo. Willem prefers not to speak about his child-



hood because the memories are painful. However, Willem does want to talk about Hugo, the volunteer who gives him hope that leads Willem to take action for himself. It can be tempting sometimes to go back to his old criminal ways, Willem says, but the support of people such as Hugo act as a “rod of discipline” - to remember the words of Salomon. Volunteer support is an incentive towards good behaviour and happiness. I can think of worse!

I am grateful for the commitment and engagement of so many volunteers and contributors. For me, the most important reason for this is the fact that for them the heartbeat of life is the love and mercy of God as shown in Jesus Christ. Surely our hearts beat for our fellow humans too, even for those behind bars!

## RESPONSE FROM WILLEM

*Willem was imprisoned in 2013 and started receiving visits from a Prison Fellowship volunteer beginning in May of that same year. He was released in February 2014 and lost touch with Prison Fellowship. In 2015, he was arrested again, and for the second time he made a request for someone to talk to. From that September to April 2016 the volunteer and Willem were in touch on a regular basis, but this contact was disrupted by a transfer. In September of 2016, Willem made another request to Prison Fellowship. He has been visited by one of our volunteers ever since.*

## LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON – BUT NOT ANYMORE!

*It wasn't until recently that I saw my father cry for the first time. This happened when we hugged each other goodbye in jail. He got a sentence of fifteen years, I got eight and TBS. We were in the same prison. You know I have a little boy, Dillan. He is only seven now. Dillan means the world to me. That is why I have asked for a transfer to another jail. That makes it easier for him to visit. I'm going to break this chain of crime, I know I will. My father has been locked up many times. I have been too. I'm only 26 years old now. I first went to "juvie" when I was 11. You know what they say, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. You follow the lead even when that lead shows criminal behaviour. I very well remember coming home crying from school when I was about six. "Why those tears?" my father asked. "What are you crying about? Don't come back home until you have beaten him up!" I picked up a piece of wood and smashed the guy. I remember feeling good about it, thinking I now had become someone. And my father was proud of me.*

*From then onwards, things got worse. Next time I picked up a piece of iron instead of wood. I became addicted to violence. I went looking for it, I needed it. It*

*may sound crazy, but it made me feel happy. Otherwise I was without emotions. "Defending our name." That was the only thing that mattered to my father back then. He said to me, laughing: "When I'm dead, there must be someone to defend our name." Well, I was busy trying. I'm now in jail for my first homicide and I have done time for violent crimes before. I have done a robbery. I'm not proud of it. I just got out after a sentence of eighteen months and had only been out for five weeks when I committed the homicide. My father was there too. When my son visits, he asks me: "Daddy, have you killed someone?" I answer him: "No boy, don't worry. I will tell you everything later, when I'm released from the clinic." He is far too young now to know what happened. I feel like I'm abandoning him. That is a horrible feeling. You know, I deserve this punishment. But it starts again every day at a quarter to five. The door of the cell closes for the day and I start to think and worry. And I'm not the only one who does that, you know. But in jail you learn how to stay tough.*

*According to the reports drawn up by the justice department, I'm impulsive, severely traumatised and hang out with people who aren't good for me. However, I do not believe that I was born a criminal. Everyone is born with a clean slate. But if you don't receive love, are abused, have to watch your mother getting hit, and your father encourages you to beat up other people, well, things go downhill from there. For years I have been without emotions. Crimes, victims, punishment, I didn't care about any of it. But in 2015 I asked Prison Fellowship if Edwin could start visiting me again. At some point I realized that I just can't do it alone. I have difficulties dealing with authority. Edwin is from the outside and he had visited me before. You know, I have a real connection with that guy. I trust him and can talk to him about anything.*

*I'm doing this for my son. I don't want him to be a criminal. My father has never told me he loved me. That is something I never had, unfortunately. I always tell Dillan: 'Daddy loves you!' I got a diploma here, and in September I will get my hairdressing diploma. I want to show him: never give up! Don't let your head hang down. I dream of being happy. When my son and I say goodbye in jail, I can see he is trying to delay it, because he wants to spend more time with me; man, that makes me happy. He shows me love, love my father should have shown me.*



*What key give entrance  
into the heart?*

## Solved

We like to see crimes being solved. However, upsetting it may be, we need clarity and closure. Who did it? And why? Often those questions are immediately followed by another, could this have been prevented? What if we had done this or that... would he or she still be alive? While writing this I think of a woman, mid-forties, whose life, according to the obituary, was taken as a result of violence, her brother, in his late thirties, is the alleged offender. He is also suspected of killing Els Borst last year. The offender is suffering from delusions and an overpowering fear of an Islamic terrorist attack. In 2012, he was sentenced to three years imprisonment for illegal possession of weapons and to receive treatment for his delusions. However, he never received treatment.

In the meantime, a commission has been established to resolve the questions: how could this have happened? How is it possible that someone who is dangerous, is able to walk free? It cannot be a case of cell availability. A lot of cells sit empty. But even if we get to the bottom of this, can we ever really say this case has been resolved?

I think about the parents of both the victim and the offender. Are there any words to resolve their situation? “No creature is hidden from His sight” states the obituary, referring to Hebrews 4: 13. Nothing is resolved, but it has been addressed. By God. In the middle of such enormous grief and unbelievable sadness, this is proof of silent belief in restoration, someday.

As you may know, “believe in restoration” (geloof in herstel) is the motto of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands. The words are printed beneath our logo, a reed that is bent. Not only the lives of the victims and bereaved have been destroyed, but the lives of the offenders as well. I am proud, but most of all grateful, for my volunteer colleagues who made almost 800 restoration visits in 2014 to 100 TBS patients.

I do not dare to think that this resolves “the problem.” The question of course is, what exactly is the problem. “Recidivism,” the Justice department is quick to say. Fewer relapses into old behaviour prevent further victimization. Prison Fellowship likes to approach societal safety from a positive point of view: it is about personal restoration. By this, we do not only mean that someone who is released from prison should have a roof over his head and be able to sustain himself through honest work. More importantly, we would like to see that a person takes responsibility for what has happened and for what needs to happen. It is the most beautiful thing when we see that someone’s heart has changed from the inside out. “From the heart flow the springs of life,” wise Salomon teaches (Proverbs 4:23). Crime is first and foremost an issue of the heart. That is where choices are made.

We know now that humans are not easily changed. The average duration of TBS treatment is almost ten years. In the future, this is to be reduced to eight. Recent studies have shown that almost 23 per cent of those released come into contact with the judicial system again. Disheartening? Not at all! According to the church calendar, we are living in a time of suffering. The “payment for our sins” that Jesus Christ has endured in our place has not directly led to “peace on earth.” Many reject the peace offers and try to carry on as they did before. A solution has not been found. Yet those who have been arrested by the Divine solution, hand out joy and make peace. Do they resolve anything? Yes, since they are present in their brokenness. This makes them witnesses to a simple “belief in restoration,” which knows where to find the final resolution. Someday there will be a day of final reckoning with the worlds power of sin and crime. Everything will be resolved then.

## RESPONSE FROM WIES AND DOUWE

*Wies and Douwe van Urk are father and mother to their imprisoned son Bart as well as their dearly beloved eldest daughter Loïs, his deceased victim. Bart is mentally ill and has not only been convicted for the homicide of his sister, but also for killing former minister Mrs Borst. Hans Barendrecht is truly grateful that they were prepared to respond openly to his column. It shows what their lives have been like since the trial. Their son Bart receives regular visits from a Prison Fellowship volunteer.*

## TRIPLE GRIEF

*We have been affected by a triple grief. Our dear daughter Loïs was killed by our only son Bart. This has changed our family in so many ways. We would like to deny it, but it truly has. Fortunately, we still visit each other. We visit our children and they visit us. We love our children and grandchildren with all our heart. Their remarks can sometimes cause mixed feelings, smiles and tears welling up in our hearts at the same time. “Mommy, policemen visited the school today. They came to tell us about their work and they also brought some straps.” Those straps were handcuffs. Well, handcuffs are for thieves and criminals. And that is what our son is considered to be. We fully understand that. Bart has also killed Mrs Borst. It’s terrible for us that he did this as well. The way in which we came in contact with the bereaved family was very special for us. Amidst their own grief, they were sympathetic. That was healing.*

*Bart has now been locked up for 42 months and will be for some time to come. He got eight years and TBS, where he will be treated for his serious illness. We*

hope and pray that he will heal and recover. That we will someday have our old cheerful and active Bart back. We are a family of sailors. He was our best navigator. Slowly, he lost control over his life. Lois sometimes warned us about it. "Dad, mom, Bart is not doing well." It is almost unbearable for us that of all people she, who took Bart into her own house, was killed by him. That happened three and a half years ago. She was eight days away from turning 44. One of the hardest things for us was identifying her. The wounds that we saw inflicted on our Lois were heart-wrenching. Horrible. Such fear our child must have felt! She resisted greatly. She must have called for help. The last words she cried out were: "O Lord, Lord, help me." But there was no human to help her. Cleaning out her house was very difficult too.

The children have been a great help from the beginning. It has also been very difficult for them. They are still processing it. We have four sweet girls. They all deal with it in their own way. That makes sense. They each have their own personality and had their own connection to Lois. It is saddening for us to see how they think of Bart. We would so much like for them to not forget him. If you can't wish him a happy birthday, at least send him a card. Everybody is thinking about Lois. They do think of Bart too, but differently. Our eldest daughter is changing her opinion. She will send him a card, but she wouldn't be able to shake his hand. That hand has blood on it. Our youngest daughter is still fighting with the Dutch Public Prosecutor, Parliament and mental health care authorities (GGZ) for a law to make it possible to place someone who poses a threat to himself or someone else, in custody. Since Lois there have been seventeen similar cases with a fatal outcome. We do not blame our children. They too are intensely sad that they have lost their cheerful and happy sister.

Lois' birthday is twice as painful. We still go out for dinner and pancakes. The whole family. That is a wonderful thing. Lois used to do the same. We once sent an invitation to all children and grandchildren. On the front a photo of Lois, on the inside a photo of her eating pancakes on her 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. When one of the grandchildren, three years old at the time, received the invitation, she said: "You see, auntie Lois can still send us invites." For us parents they remain our children. Our daughters as well as Bart. Of course we do not make any excuses for Bart. Sometimes it is very difficult for us to visit him. We think that Bart is realizing more and more what horrible crimes he has committed. He is still not well mentally, but we can hear him looking and praying for forgiveness. That gives us hope. "Bart, son," I say to him, "where do we go after all this? At the end of our life, we all must appear before God. The question that needs answering then is if your sins have been washed by the blood of Jesus Christ." That is what my heart, the heart of a mother, tells me and I hope we will get to what Ecclesiastes 3: 14 states: 'I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any

*thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before Him.”*

*I can understand my wife. But as a father I recently said, to Bart: “You have taken away my daughter from me!” That might be harsh, but it was straight from my heart. If he doesn’t get better, Bart is a danger to himself and others. He is still my son, in spite of the way in which he took Lois from us and the grief that remains with us. The Lord has given us the strength to carry on. We found a lot of comfort when Lois’ coffin hadn’t been buried yet, and we heard a verse from Job in our church during the sermon, Job 16: 20: “My eye pours out tears to God.” We hang onto this and pray that along with our children, grandchildren and Bart, we may see and feel in grace that we don’t only miss Lois but look to God (Hebrews 4: 13 and 16).*

## Longing

Suddenly it's time. Do you know that feeling? It has been simmering for months, perhaps even years, slowly cooking until it's ready. However, before the time came, the cold wind of daily worries blew out the little flame. Now suddenly it is ignited again, because someone asked you subtly about something you once said casually. I now have visited De Compagnie a couple of times. I never know up front how long I will stay. I don't want to get in the way of our (volunteering) colleague, and I don't want to impose on the "companion" as we call our prisoners there. Of course, I make sure to arrive around dinner time, since they sure know how to cook food and it doesn't take much convincing for me to stay for a bite. "Well, people," one of the companions will say, "can I have a moment of silence for those who wish to pray... Enjoy your meal!" There we are, prisoners and people from the outside, voluntarily sharing a meal together. Sure, prisoners aren't in prison voluntarily, but they actively chose to become a companion. That is what makes this dinner so special. People from the outside who donate their time to share a meal with prisoners and to become part of life in jail.

The programme has now been running for a couple of weeks and already some positive developments are visible, giving hope for the future. Slowly but steadily, a peaceful atmosphere of trust and responsibility is being built. Companions share things from their past that are often very painful and have been part of the reason for the mistakes they made. Some of them have been in prison for many years, double digits. However, what they and we have in common is a longing for restoration. Restoration of family bonds is one of the most important things especially if there are children involved. They want to set an example and to just be there for them. We participate in that longing and give them the practical tools they need. The first tool is our presence in detention. We are there, we are available. We are not a judge trying to convict them, nor a public prosecutor trying to accuse them, nor a lawyer trying to get them out, rather a fellow human with an open heart and a true longing that the other person is going to be well.

The other night around ten o'clock I was driving home from De Compagnie. The weight of wonder about what I had witnessed that evening, the trust that was given and received, exceeded my weariness after a long day. In one of his proverbs, Solomon writes that "a desire fulfilled, is a tree of life" (Proverbs 13: 12). I will not go into the matter here whether this life is to be understood as natural, spiritual or eternal life, or whether there is a connection to the tree of life from the first and last books of the Bible. I would like to stay with this chapter for a while. In the next proverb (verse 19), Salomon writes that "a desire fulfilled is sweet to the soul, but to turn away from



evil is an abomination to fools.” Quite a statement, but true, nonetheless and in regard to De Compagnie: longingly working on restoration and detaching oneself from crime. In the project plan for De Compagnie, there is an elaborate description of restoration regarding all areas of life: one’s outlook on life, reconciliation with victims, housing. The thing that has to be the main goal is that the companion, after serving his sentence, should be able to be part of society and do “honest work.” The idea of settling down remains a concept for basic happiness. And our deepest longing? That our work may rest on the Cornerstone, a healing blessing for many.

## RESPONSE FROM ANDRIES KNEVEL



*Andries Knevel is a theologian, author, television and radio presenter and former program director of the EO (Dutch Evangelical Broadcasting). He has been involved with Prison Fellowship for a long time. In 1996 he was asked to become a member of the advisory board, and despite being asked for many such boards, he agreed.*

*Hans is grateful to Andries for his good advice. Andries was moderator when Prison Fellowship celebrated its 10th birthday and first discussed De Compagnie.*

## DON'T STOP DREAMING

*Follow your dreams, but don't forget to make a budget too. This is a piece of advice that I have received many times and have also given to others. The best results in society, the economy, and perhaps even the Kingdom of God have been achieved by people who had a dream - literally and symbolically. A dream is connected to ideals, passion and longing. A dream is focused on the wellbeing of others. A dream wants to get something up and running, so that others can flourish. However, dreaming also has the connotation of becoming a reality in the long-term. A dream is not turned into reality overnight. Of course, you can dream of becoming one of the big five in the tech industry, but I wouldn't call this sort of aspiration a dream. Dreaming to me has to do with altruism and keeps a safe distance from (a healthy dose of) egoism.*

*Years ago, I heard something about this dream: a department of our own inside a jail; with our own rules, values, culture and atmosphere. I was surprised. Was something like that even possible? Yes, perhaps in South America where the prison system has a different structure but here, in the Netherlands, with all its rules and regulations? The main characteristic of a dream is that it doesn't immediately become true the next day. I am sure Hans Barendrecht and Prison Fellowship The Netherlands have discovered this to be true by now.*

*I have been involved with the work of Prison Fellowship since 1996, albeit from*



*Living room at De Compagnie, PFN's project wing at Krimpen aan den IJssel prison*

*the side lines. Sometimes there wouldn't be any mention of the dream for a while, and then suddenly it sparked again. I think it is such a great accomplishment that this dream – De Compagnie – eventually came true, despite (or perhaps I should write, thanks to) the fact that it took many years. To make dreams come true, you need time, the wisdom of others, disappointment, adversity, change of plans and all those other factors that together ensure that the dream is viable and will eventually become a reality.*

*Every dream has a goal. A United States without racism, to name one of the more famous dreams. The dream of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands was (and is) about restoration. I once had the pleasure of being moderator at a symposium to celebrate the tenth anniversary of Prison Fellowship – that was in 2003 – and what I remember most from that, was the great longing the participants and the audience felt to contribute something, however small, to the restoration of the men (and some women) whose life had somehow gone awry.*

*Yes, sure, in many cases it was their own fault. Yet it also really wasn't. So much depends on where they were born and if their behaviour during childhood and adolescence was lovingly corrected. A longing for restoration. For people in detention; a detention they deserve but is not their final destination. Rather, it is the beginning of a new life phase.*

*These words are idealising, to be sure. However, this atmosphere and culture, this mission, this dream I had already noticed in Hans Barendrecht and the men and women of Prison Fellowship many years ago; inspired by the love of God and the life of Jesus. How else could one explain why so many dedicated volunteers are a part of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands ?*

*So, what do we do? Well, we keep on dreaming and before you know it, another dream will have come true.*

Besides “belief in restoration” and “merciful justice” Prison Fellowship has a third and concise summary of the work we do: “presence in detention.” Marcel and Antoinette (from a story in our newsletter) can explain exactly what this entails. They both reached out to Prison Fellowship. First Marcel. He actually is in detention. Antoinette, his wife, is locked inside her house, as a consequence of her husband’s crimes. You can decide which is more difficult. Volunteer Wyneke shows quintessential Dutch modesty as she attempts to downplay her role as just listening. I would like to take a peek behind the curtains with you, to explain how our third motto came into being and what we do with it.

Around 2010 we were growing a lot. More and more prisoners reached out to us, a growing number of people signed up as volunteers and, fortunately, more donors including renowned Equity Funds trusted us financially. There was a lot going on which quickly resulted in the question: does this really help? And if so, how do we keep it up in the future? You should know that seventy percent of our funds come from society. I’d like to remind us that this is not our money but is given to us by others in trust. We feel that we have to prove and earn that trust every year. That is part of good stewardship. And of course, our prisoners, TBS patients, and their families receive what we wish for them - restoration. We really believe that. However, we do not see all our wishes come true. Last time I wrote to you that of every hundred prisoners who are released today, fifty of them will be locked up again within two years. Not very encouraging. But not a reason to give up!

This work of mercy is not about a single action that immediately solves the problem, it is about presence! Jesus teaches us to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to welcome strangers into our home and to give clothing to the naked. Presence in detention was already shown in Matthew 25.

You have probably guessed what the next question is: those visits, what do they result in? In a lot. Foundation Presence Approach is concluding a study of the people who request our help. I would like to share with you the top 3 responses; thanks to Prison Fellowship 1) I have more faith and courage, 2) I receive recognition for who I am and 3) I know what path I want to choose for my life. Is this not a great encouragement for you, as supporter, and of course for our 600 volunteers?! We really do get through to the hearts of prisoners in detention. I am still in awe of the way God cares for His creatures. It is not our deeds or crimes that truly matter but His image and likeness in us.

I would like to take it one step further. Recently I heard a surprising new interpre-

tation of the parable of the merchant who gives up everything, so he is able to buy a very valuable pearl. I had long thought that we should give up everything to get our hands on that one necessary thing. I am sure I am not the only one who thought that. However, it is the other way around! Jesus is the merchant and He gave up everything to “buy” you and me (and our freedom). Not only us, but also people such as prisoners. When perceived in this way, the work done in prison becomes extremely valuable: a prison full of pearls, with an official report issued by court to check into the market of healing and restoration. Let us keep believing this!

## RESPONSE FROM ALICE GAASBEEK-NENTJES



*Alice Gaasbeek-Nentjes has been a volunteer at Prison Fellowship The Netherlands for over 10 years. Alice is one of more than 600 volunteer workers who form the heart of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands. In her daily life, she keeps herself busy with books and children. She works as a remedial teacher and care coordinator at a primary school in Soest. She also coordinates a large Christian bookshop in Soest. Alice is married to Jacco and together they have three children.*

## WALKING TOGETHER

*Being present, being there. Having someone who listens to you and frees up some time for you if you are in trouble is a wonderful thing. We have all experienced this and when this happens, we are so grateful for that person.*

*Presence, this is very important in our work at Prison Fellowship The Netherlands. How special it is when there is someone who wants to help you, even when you have made a mess of your life, and even when you have scarred your victims for life.*

*Merciful justice - the motto of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands. This motto rings so true for me. The motivation to be present for prisoners and TBS patients.*

*Justice is done by the justice department. I myself, as a volunteer, have a role to play in regard to mercy. Perhaps some prisoners will see something of Jesus' mercy shine through me.*

*For years I have been “walking” with two TBS patients. I visit them and their world every three weeks. They have now been released and I call them on a regular basis. Loyalty and trust are so important in these cases; being there for the other person. Listening to their stories, their pain, but also thinking along with them about their future.*



*One to one visits, a privilege for prisoner and volunteer*

*As a volunteer I often encounter the brokenness of their world. The pain we as people inflict on each other. By being present we are sometimes able to lift a piece of that pain from the perpetrator. It is such a relief for them to tell their story to someone who is not a counsellor or paid professional. Someone who doesn't judge what they tell them. However, it is still important for volunteers to be mindful that there is a victim as well.*

*During a train trip I took it happened that a man was harassing a group of girls. The whole carriage became silent and at first nobody had the nerve to speak up about it. After a while another passenger stood up and got really upset about what the man was saying. That event has made me think again. During my visits I usually get to know the story of the perpetrator and tend to 'side' with him. Sometimes I might even forget about the consequences of his or her crimes.*

*Not everyone in my environment is fully understanding of the fact that I visit TBS patients. "Just leave them there, such people deserve to get locked away forever. Look at what they've done. I really don't get why you are spending time with them." It hurts me to hear this. Sometimes I begin to wonder - am I not becoming too lenient? Is my view becoming somewhat distorted? How would I react and feel if my daughter were the victim? These are important things to think about.*

*But still... merciful justice, that is my drive for doing this work.*

## In the Bud

She looked at me, her face a question mark and at the same, time a look of recognition. I was seated on the organ bench and was playing the last piece for the church service. I looked behind me to see if everyone had departed, and then I saw her, smiling. She was the last one to leave the church and the question mark deserved an answer. A good moment to lift my feet and fingers from the king of all instruments and get up to meet this friendly lady. “You are from Prison Fellowship, aren’t you?” she asked. “I know it... well, the work you do is wonderful... beautiful! I donate money and always read the newsletter, I recognized you from the picture.” Her great-grandchild had just been baptised, which is why she was visiting our church. “Well, thank you very much,” I replied, “that is wonderful to hear and...” - but before I could finish my sentence, the lady continued speaking. “Well, you should hear this from someone now and then. You are also a human person after all and you really need it.” This, of course made me smile, but doesn’t make it less true! It doesn’t always come naturally and easily. Such a spontaneous meeting of just two minutes conveys a blessing that lasts the whole week.

I thought about it when reading the main article for this newsletter. The great-grandmother was present in the church to witness the blessings that both she and God desire for her great-grandson. That little boy is still so fragile, still in his bud. He doesn’t know the difference between left and right, between good and evil. How will this be when he grows up, when he is five years old, or fifteen, and begins to realize that not everyone always wants the best for you? I don’t want to be dramatic about this, but at the same time I cannot ignore it. Our world is full of filth and evil. The work that I do with my colleagues including more than six hundred volunteers is beautiful indeed. However, when we really let it sink in and think about the suffering, it is also a raw feeling. To see children yearning for safety and security. Or to speak with adults – at one time also still in their bud, but now broken too soon by the vile lusts of family members who they thought they could trust. Or to meet prisoners who are fully aware that their crimes have more consequences than just for them doing jail time. Yes, I also think of prisoners who we visit because they have hurt children themselves. This is intensely saddening. But we aim to be there for everyone who asks, no matter what they have done. “Your work is beautiful.” Yes, it is, especially when you get to hear and see that seemingly small things such as a visit or a gift are received as healing balm.

It was with warm feelings that I read the story about what volunteer colleague Harma does. Not only what she does, but also what she thinks (“think about your

responsibility!)” and feels. It is now spring and nature reveals her potent buds. Insects and birds can’t get enough of these delicious little meals, but the buds protect themselves. The buds of alder trees for instance, have a sticky exterior which a Great Tit (bird - Parus Major) avoids being trapped by, so it looks for food elsewhere. I wholeheartedly hope that our work can be a protective layer for the buds of youth and the buds of restoration with the “big guys” we visit; so that evil will be averted and overcome by the good. We are committed to this goal, through our actions and – just like Harma – by our prayers, in our “High Appeal.”

## RESPONSE FROM ILSE VAN DEN HOVEN



*Ilse van den Hoven (married to Kees and mother of Samuël) has been working as social worker in programs for prisoner care, family care and the children’s gifts program with Prison Fellowship The Netherlands for nine years. After the birth of her son she became a full-time mother. She is still active as volunteer, working for Prison Fellowship’s chat program.*

## A UNIQUE TREE

*Still a little bud, it is her ninth birthday today. Her father is in prison and has been for a couple of years now. On a beautiful day, a volunteer comes to bring her a birthday present from her father. Of even greater importance is the letter that accompanies it! The gift is left on the table untouched. First, she runs off to her bedroom with the letter. It is much more important to her! She reads it there, alone with her father. The gift was of, course opened soon after.*

*Volunteers of Prison Fellowship have already contributed to many smiling kids by bringing them a present from their imprisoned parent. This attention to children is extremely important. For these young buds it is of immense value to know that their father or mother in prison hasn’t forgotten their birthday. For the imprisoned parent, this is a small gesture towards their child. Perhaps a small consolation for their absence, but consolation nonetheless.*

*The tree of Prison Fellowship has been growing a lot over the past couple of years. This tree wouldn’t have to be here if we had not eaten the fruit of that other tree, six thousand years ago. So, am I happy that Prison Fellowship is celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary? Am I happy that some people have been asking us for help for more than eight years? I wish something different for them, but I think it is a wonderful thing that in this broken world, this tree has grown strong roots.*



*One should not forget the small 'prisoners' at home!*

*Especially because this tree sometimes gets to connect its branches as a link between family and prisoner. Between children and their imprisoned parents. And sometimes this leads to little flowers opening up. Some buds are old already but have never before flowered. Yet they open up when talking to a volunteer. Why, how? Because the volunteer shows them sincere personal attention. It helps that the volunteer is not seated on a separate branch, but is sitting next to the prisoner who asks for help, at the same level and sharing their roots. That is true connection!*

*No two trees are alike. This tree is also unique in its kind: it has sprouted branches for prisoners as well as branches for families. The family branch is so valuable since many trees don't allow the family to be part of it at all. But there is room for them here. And since the tree knows what it is doing, the family is able to breathe gain. Take good care of this branch!*

*Each tree has its own needs for nourishment and water. My wish is that Prison Fellowship will continue getting its nourishment from the One Spring, the Word of God; and that its roots may deepen in this spring and grow and flourish and be a blessing for everyone who asks for help!*



# Self-reliance

Everyone is supposed to fend for themselves. You are probably familiar with these words. Stop complaining, keep going, pull your own weight. This is what we should all do, right? What type of person do you expect to see in prison? Weirdos? Saints? It's all up to you! But what if you find yourself in trouble? Nick, the young companion mentioned in our newsletter, is someone who did get into trouble. He has served half a year with us, at De Compagnie, our APAC inspired wing at Krimpen prison. I appreciate going to see the companions. Nick has surprised me in every way. His attitude and appearance weren't exactly what I would consider inviting. He didn't seem to be interested in small talk. He had committed quite a serious crime. "What goes around comes around," people would probably say, but boy was I wrong about him!

He worked really hard, studied and obtained several certificates. What especially struck me was the story he told during a presentation for visitors to De Compagnie. He had wanted to become the best welder there was, and he would be happiest if he was able to go to the zoo with his wife and child. You should know that he is not married and does not have any children. But he does have a dream! He wants to say goodbye to his old life. "You know that arrest has saved me. I would have kept going otherwise, I would have made new victims." He was proud to show me his SOS-piece. It was very symbolic. Together with his volunteer Jos he had been thinking about the consequences of his actions. This had led him to draw a traffic light with a red light: stop doing crime. With his sense of humour, he had also added a Top 600... in the left upper corner, stating "... volunteers" one-line further down. (The core list of repeat offenders is called "Top 600," and Prison Fellowship has about 600 volunteers).

There is something else I would like to share with you. Nick is not used to people really wanting to do something just for him. Many had talked to him, but no one went the extra mile. This went back all the way to his childhood, he told me. The atmosphere in De Compagnie creates an opportunity for people who really want to improve their lives, to say goodbye to their criminal past. We are now slowly starting to see the results of this new experiment. The programme is gaining momentum within the justice department world and we receive a lot of visitors who want to take a look. The companions are dealing well with this. They are excellent ambassadors and developing in their role as hosts.

I am quietly able to enjoy the connections that are made between companions and volunteers, that is where beautiful things are happening. The prisoner begins believing in the possibility of a different, better future. Two is better than one. You can get yourself in trouble. If no one helps you, you will stay stuck in the meaning-

lessness of crime and before you know it, your life has been turned upside down.

The Dutch government has a policy mantra about self-reliance. The (former) detainee, without work or income, is primarily responsible for finding (paid) work or daily activities during or after his detention according to the prison system. I agree wholeheartedly, but one can't do it on one's own. "Two are better than one,

because they have a good return for their labour: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up" says Solomon (Ecclesiastes 4: 9, 10) Self-reliance? Yes, of course, but with the help of a committed volunteer, an entrepreneur who wishes you well, a colleague who can mediate, an open prison ward etc. No human should have to go through life alone. What a blessing it is to be able to help!

## RESPONSE FROM MARIE-ANNE DE GROOT



*Marie-Anne de Groot has been director of a prison since 2005 and has experience with different types of regimes, from open wards to prisons with maximum security. Marie-Anne has been branch director of the prison in Veenhuizen since 2016. According to Hans, Marie-Anne is a director who is always striving to do better, without taking it too far.*

## FENDING FOR YOURSELF

*Everybody must fend for themselves. I'm sure you know this saying. We all need to do this, right? For most people, these words ring true. In our everyday lives we are not always aware of the fact that we must do this every day, over and over again. Certain groups within our society are more vulnerable than others. Sometimes they have just not had the opportunities that are a given for most of us.*

*In his column Self-reliance, Hans Barendrecht discusses the case of Nick. He was lucky to make a mistake and get caught – a paradox!*

*Nick then started to think: is this what I really want? The moment that he made that decision, was the moment his life began to change. If you accept responsibility for the (re)organisation of your own life and if you decide to pull your own weight, there are people and institutions and possibilities to help you.*

*Prison Fellowship The Netherlands is a partner that I, as branch director of a penitentiary institution, am very proud of. Think for example of the pilot that is now running in the prison in Krimpen aan den IJssel. Thanks to the dedication of the volunteers, progress is now being made with detainees towards their goal of getting them a (paid) job. This is a giant step in the direction of fending for them-*

*selves. Go try and find six hundred volunteers who can and want to work on the socialization of detainees.*

*Within the prison system, self-reliance is an important topic. Together with taking responsibility, this can be the key to start thinking about one's crimes and whether this is the life one desires for oneself. The role of the volunteer within these walls is becoming more important: talking to a volunteer is vastly different from talking to an employee of the prison. Many volunteers can help with finding a job and employer that contribute to the final societal outcome: a full life with a diploma, a job and a family, stability that is a goal in itself.*

*Nick's case isn't the only one. Detainees who make this choice, are increasingly able to study and gain certificates to prepare themselves for becoming full members of society. From the start I have followed De Compagnie in Krimpen aan den IJssel with great interest. I have visited De Compagnie and have seen for myself the influence that things like colour can have in the living environment.*

*On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April, a ward for fathers in the prison in Esserheem (part of prison Veenhuizen) was opened by Sander Dekker, our minister of legal protection. Partly inspired by the wonderful example of De Compagnie, different colours were used within the scope of the family programme and especially in the ward for fathers.*

*The commitment of volunteers within the walls of a prison is very important, as shown by the unique concept of De Compagnie. We expect that the ward for fathers and the accompanying programs will motivate fathers to take control of their lives and futures just as Nick has done. People are capable of so much more than they think.*

*With Nick, volunteer Jos played a valuable role in the decision-making process. Jos offered him a mirror and stimulated him to do things differently and to do better.*

*Volunteers are of great importance. There are many volunteers who want to help establish the necessary contacts within the walls of prison, making a wonderful and grateful contribution, together with the prison, each from their own intrinsic values. Every success matters!*



*Hans and Kees with the Royal couple  
Photo © Foundation Oranje Fonds*

## OBE VELDMAN

*Obe Veldman is currently branch director of Lelystad prison and acting branch director of Leeuwarden prison. Beginning on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October, he will be branch director of Zaanstad prison. His first introduction to Prison Fellowship The Netherlands and to Hans Barendrecht was in 2009. Obe then worked as branch director of Veenhuizen prison. King Willem-Alexander (at the time still a prince) visited Veenhuizen prison to emphasize that the Foundation Oranje Fonds greatly cares about the work of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands. After this first meeting between Obe, Hans and Prison Fellowship – in such a special setting – a beautiful relationship has developed.*



## A Royal Visit

Whenever someone from our Royal Family visits a penitentiary institution, this leads to extra security regulations. Therefore, I still have a clear recollection of the visit of prince Willem-Alexander. Especially the helicopter making a test landing in the inner courtyard caused a great deal of commotion, as I am sure you understand. The visit went well. The prince came to visit, together with the Oranje Fonds, to take a closer look at the work of Prison Fellowship The Netherlands and showed great interest in our work. I especially appreciated that he engaged in a conversation with a volunteer of Prison Fellowship and also a detainee. Their conversation took place in a private room, as is usually the case. A photo of the prince and all persons involved was taken to remember this day; I still have this photo. It was during this visit in 2009 that I was first introduced to Prison Fellowship The Netherlands and to Hans Barendrecht in particular. There was an immediate connection between us. As it turned out, we had the same hobby: fishing. But that wasn't the only thing that created a bond between us. Hans and I are driven by the same norms and values and share the same views regarding humankind.

Human beings matter, every one of them. To me, this is the most important thing in life. Everyone can contribute and make a difference. It doesn't matter how small. You never know how great the effect may be. This is true for everyone: the people close to you, your colleagues, fellow citizens and imprisoned citizens as well. Even though imprisoned, detainees are still fellow human beings. I'm not always able to help detainees directly, as our employees are



*prince Willem-Alexander (m) in Veenhuizen prison with PFN (volunteers) and prison directors. Photo © Foundation Oranje Fonds*

trusted with their care. However, by telling my employees that they can really make a difference for each other and for the detainees, I can begin a process. Prison Fellowship The Netherlands consist of a group of people who also listen to their heart. In the world of prisons, this approach is sometimes seen as soft, and Prison Fellowship The Netherlands (PFN) actually adds this softness to our organisation. This is necessary, as the soft approach often leads to more results than the tough approach. The volunteers of PFN are available to all detainees, regardless of who they may be, and they do not only care for the detainee. They are there for the people related to the detainee too, since they must also deal with the consequences of detention. Within the range of assistance that PFN offers, this adds extra value, since the prison itself is not fully capable of this. GNd helps us to bring “the outside to the inside.”

I consider my leadership to be part of a greater whole. I want people to feel that they contribute to something bigger, to the organisation, to society. That they are a part of it and that this is really true of everyone. The employee when working, the detainee while serving his sentence, and the volunteer when visiting. Someone who is appreciated and experiences trust, can develop himself further. This makes it possible – quite literally – to temporarily remove the wall. This does not only help the person, but the organisation as a whole as well. It also has a broader effect on others. PFN operates based on Christian belief. The values and norms that I try to represent are quite similar. You can make a difference too, through unity and connection, by letting things flow naturally and working based on nature and your own heart. When that happens, you are choosing the royal road.

# Facts and Figures

Year	Number of Prisoners (30/9)
1995	10.330
2005	17.600
2015	9.145

## Prison Fellowship The Netherlands (2017)

Total number of clients	2.772
Clients in aftercare	821
Total visits to clients	5.010
Number of prisoners visited	446
Number of visits to mentally ill prisoners	800 (112 persons)
Families visited	700 (368 with a present for children)
Prisoners in SOS project (STP)	985
Prisoners in Labor integration	34
Number of volunteers	625
Number of private donors	15.192
Staff	33 (26FTE)

## Donations (in €)

Private donations	595.000	(26%)
Churches	256.000	(11%)
Businesses	132.000	(6%)
Foundations	583.000	(26%)
Government grants	685.000	(30%)
Other	21.000	(1%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>2.270.000</b>	

## Did you know that

- The ratio male to female prisoners is about 93% to 7%
- In 2016 and 2017 there were no escapes from prison (2015:2 and 2014:1)
- There were 11 suicides in prisons in 2017
- The Netherlands has almost the lowest detention rate per 100.000 inhabitants in Europe: Iceland 38, The Netherlands 50, Germany 78, Belgium 91, Spain 126, Portugal 128, UK 140, Russia 408 (US 693)
- The crime clearance rate is about 20% (number of crimes: almost 1.000.000)
- For additional information about Prison Fellowship The Netherlands and our programs and results, please visit [www.gevangenzorg.nl](http://www.gevangenzorg.nl)

General information on the Dutch prison system can be found on the following website:  
<https://www.dji.nl/english/index.aspx>

Information on prison systems around the world can be found on the following website:  
<https://www.prisonstudies.org/>

Information on Prison Fellowship International can be found on the following website:  
<https://pfi.org/>

Klaas-Henk, Kirsti, Johan, Alexandra, Marijke, Simone, Ad, Hendrie, Rob, Herbert, Janny, Ed, Linda, Mirjam, Roel, Menno, Jelte, Joke, Philip, Marja, Hans, Piet, Shirley, Eugenie, Willem, Mark, Ria, Gerie, Jan, Reina, Ramona, Linda, Ramon, Fred, Cathy, Markus, Piet, Anneke, Paula, Corrie, Andrea, Peter, Linda, Jan, Digna, Benaja, Bert, Gerrit, Kees, Johan, Ko, Jannie, Elisabeth, Petra, Ed, Peter, Didie, Hetty, Karline, Wim, Arie, Hannah, Niek, Gerrold, Mario, Caroline, Jilles, Bert, Wouter, Ineke, Hugo, Siem, Stefan, Job, Maarten, Joanne, Gijs, Euft, Helmer, Cor, Aad, Marieke, Jenneke, Ria, Rieke, Ludo, Duifke, Marijke, Joop, Adri, Bruin, Albert, Daniëlle, Thea, Laurens, Martine, Annelies, Christelle, Joost, Marianne, Lydia, John, Ineke, Saskia, Ditta, Piet, Arend, Corine, Wim, Corine, Cees, Nico, Simon, Willem, Jan, Idelette, Jan, Wim, Jan, Rien, Martijn, Mien, Joost, Gerard, Martin. Harmen, Lydia, Bart, Ria, Jantine, Chris, Joke, Marja, Ida, Ria, Hans, Leonie, Arie, Paul, Bas, Dirk, Siem, Karlijn, Leonie, Albert, Douwe, Ruben, Johan, Ria, Rien, Annet, Arina, Rob, Wim, Alike, Anneke, Louram, Anja, Wim, Jos, Kees, Arjan, Johan, Ineke, Ilse, Wil, Arie, Petronell, Johan, Meinke, Benjamin, Koos, Bas, Adrie, Kees, Nelleke, Faas, Ton, Tim, Corinne, Arjan, Bert, Henk, John, Ko, Wout, Harry, Annelies, Kadèr, Sarien, Harmen, Anna, Kees, Marianne, Sueli, Henny, Karin, Martine, Saskia, Loek, Maarten, Eliza, Kees, Gerard, Benno, Wendelmoet, Wilfred, Anneke, Leens, Miranda, Klaas, André, Mariska, Biju, Henk, Heleen, Judith, Truida, Willem, Maaïke, Jacqueline, Tineke, Harold, Paulien, Rufus, Laurens, Jan, Renze, Josca, Martine, Tienco, Cor, Hans, Ronald, Kees, Nicoline, Govert, Jos, Kees, Paulien, Gerdien, Marian, Maatje Arie, Hanna, Hanneke, Liesbeth, Herman, Jannie, Tiny, Kees, Nicolette, Joke, Hans, Ben, Rita, Coby, Thys, Gerben, Alice, Joanne, Bernhard, Gert, Petra, Judith, Ad, Roel, Hanneke, Corrie, Anja, Roeland, Gerrit, Riet, Henk, Bert, Rina, Bart, Bert, Bram, David, Rien, Cora, Meine, Peter, Rinie, Sophia, Kees, Henk, Gerriët, Marjon, Binne, Dirk, Frank, Gijs, Maarten, Ria, Marlies, Gert, Ide, Gert, Robert, Jan, Elise, Dorathè, Arend, Chiel, René, Pieter, Marjolein, Mieke, Annemarie, Boudewijn, Annemieke, Arjan, Tjaco, Arjo, Morea, Bert, Roelien, Piet, Erik-Jan, Harry, Gerrit, Robert, Gideon, Kees, Rianda, Harmen, Miep, Jos, Lindy, Bert, Annet, Charles, Stef, Gerco, Mari, Alexander, Jan, Willie, Ben, Imke, Suzanne, Menno, Jeleijn, Leen, Ali, Leonard, Wim, Marinka, Heleen, Simone, Huib, Francion, Richard, Peter, Marianne Ineke, Rinus, Sary, Diny, Roel, Jan, Theun, Jannie, Hans, Paul, Cor,, Roger, Herman, Gera, Ineke, Leo, Kees, Agnes, Jaco, Jelle, Arjan, Cecilia, Carla, Hans, Kees, André, Paulien, Dielidon, Glody, Christa, Harm, Marjolein, Yolanda, Wim, Jenny, Jan, Marco, Suzanne, René, Jaap, Rob, Mariean, Hilda, Adriaan, Harry, Geert, Corry, Jelle, Willeke, Karel, Jan, Johan, Klaas, Inge, Riëtje, Ben, Piet, Tonny, Aleida, Gerard, Hannie, Antje, Gijsbert, Ian, Rignald, Peter, Ger, Gijs, Theodoor, Riet, Anton, Gert, Adrie, Jan, Coosje, Ed, Henk, Els, Marjan, Henk, Klaas, Carla, Jan, André, Gerrita, Marjolein, Mieke, Stefanie, Dick, Manuela, Marjanne, Rianne, Jan, Herman, Eveline, Cor, Brenda, Atie, Harma, Chris, Thamara, Gerald, Leon, Anneke, Rianne, Harry, Henk-Jan, Frank, Hans, Mirjam, Ilse, Hester, Helen, Kees, Marlies, Miranda, Annemieke, Heidi, Franciska, Rinus, Herman, Esther, Petra, Hanna, Christiaan, Brenda, Lea, Joost, Ilse, Jantine, Prisca, Martine, Beppie, Annemieke, Gert-Jan, Aad, Marilen, Lia, Johan, Jan, Jeroen, Iepy, Jan-Willem, Ria, Arie, Jan, Henk, Jan, Martin, Jan, Jacob, Eline, Klaas, Jouk, Saskia, Jannet, Dirk, Wim Lucio, Bert, Gerrit, Chris, Herman, Willy, Geert, Huigert, Jan, Alie, Arie, Ben, Erik, Willemina, Eultien, Ronald, Linda, Adrie, Lindy, Judith, Hugo, Harmen, Martine, Thea, Herma, Eline, Angela, Erik, Kees, Rijno, Kees, Erik, Karline, Gerie-Anne, Jan-Willem, Joost Henriëtje, Maaïke, Gerdine, Eric, Emke, Sharon, Geri-Anne, Marja, Marjon, Pia, Chantal, Alrik, Andries, Gert-Jan, Harry, Ine, Jan, Jan, Kees, Marleen, Peter, Rein, Servaas, Peter, Siemon, Willem, Johan, Rutger, Wim, Jan, Jan, Jonny, Steven, Jan, Geke, Gerben, Hester, Henk, Oetje, Jorijn, Erik, Jan, Edwin, Helga, Dries, Dick, Marian, Harry, Henny, Cobi, Izak, Dik, Koos, Johan, Freddy, Bram, Stefan, Gert-Jan, Hans, Gerrie, Jan, Margreet, Alie, Jaap, Riek, Jouke, Wim, Jan, Wiebe Ype, Johan, Annita, Klaas, Betty Sietske, Jacqueline, Gerke Jilt, Jent, Marieke, Hessel, Geertje, Henk, Annet, Bernhard, Dick, Thelma, Albert, Renny, Klaas, Ineke, Riëtje, Wout, Henk, Douwe, Janneke, Hans, Henk, Ank, Peter, IJsbrand, Haije, Jan, Koos, Sjoerd, Germa, Suzan, Ria, Onufry, Tineke, Jannie, Herbert, Joop, Hillie, Wim, Hans, Teije, Huib, Wietze, Ludie, Having, Johan, Jan, Piet, Bert, Frits, Herman, Henk, Mirjam, Huib.



*Anniversary books depicting how things were, may appear to have a boring element – eliciting only a quick look and then put aside.*

*This book is different. It presents the history of PFN through the eyes of Hans Barendrecht and brilliantly includes thoughtful responses by experts and highly dedicated people in response to Hans' insightful commentaries on critical issues related to imprisonment and people.*

*This book is a surprising, inspiring, challenging and thoughtful reflection on the theme: merciful justice.*

*And yes, this book also includes and pays tribute to the highly motivated volunteers, without whom Prison Fellowship The Netherlands would not exist.*

Andries Knevel

*“Merciful Justice” opens a window on the development of Gevangenenzorg Nederland (Prison Fellowship The Netherlands). What makes this book special is Hans Barendrecht, the author who was at the helm of this NGO more or less from the beginning. This book is an eyewitness report.*

In 25 years PFN has developed from an idea in an attic room into a highly respected volunteer organisation. It has worked tirelessly to put the Biblical calling of caring for prisoners into practice. The multiplied effort of a countrywide network of volunteers who invest so much of their time in visiting prisoners, mentally ill prisoners and their families, give the mission of PFN a very special character. Slowly but surely PFN has achieved a respected position in the prisons.

In the tension between the hand of punishment and hand of caring PFN developed a deep understanding of merciful justice and made ‘belief in restoration’ its motto.

This book – which includes 25 responses by experts to commentaries written by Hans – asks readers to reflect on imprisonment and on our attitudes to our fellow human beings.

**Gevangenenzorg  
Nederland**

*geloof in herstel*



[www.gevangenenzorg.nl](http://www.gevangenenzorg.nl)