



The Record

March 2025

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**The English Reformed Church
Begijnhof 48, 1012 WV Amsterdam**

www.erc.amsterdam

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**May the Lord guide our steps and strengthen our hearts,
and grant us refreshment of body and mind.**

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Letter from our Minister, Revd Marius Louw

Dear friends,

How do we make sense of our times? Where do we seek wisdom? And perhaps more importantly, how do we take our next steps as a church during these troubling times when truth seems elusive and bullying appears to be the new normal?

While observing a painting of a flute player at the Trappist Abbey of Genesee, the Dutch-born Catholic priest, professor, psychologist, and writer Henri Nouwen gained profound insights about spiritual discernment. Beneath the painting was a quote by David Thoreau:

“Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed, and in such desperate enterprises? If a person does not keep pace with their companions, perhaps it is because they hear a different drummer. Let them step to the music they hear, however measured or far away.”

For Nouwen, this painting and the quote sparked an understanding of spiritual discernment. He wrote that spiritual discernment involves “listening to God and paying attention to God’s active presence. When we are truly listening, we come to realize that God is speaking to us, pointing the way, and showing direction. We simply need to learn to keep our ears open. Discernment is a life of listening to a deeper sound and marching to a different beat—a life in which we are ‘all ears’.”



A Shepard Playing the Pipes - Johan Baeck

It is not new for the church to need to “discern the spirits”, as Paul described. Every era brings a time when right listening becomes the church’s essential task. This is especially true in a world where the noise of greedy politicians, warmongers, and self-assured quasi-prophets drowns out all wisdom.

In an appendix to Henri Nouwen’s book Discernment his former student Michael Christensen expands on Nouwen’s metaphor. The first lesson discernment teaches us is to “stop and listen to the beat.” It is easy to miss God’s rhythm amidst the surrounding noise.

Taking time to listen—and to listen with God’s ears—is perhaps an obvious yet often overlooked necessity. In a world full of quick reactions and instant opinions, this becomes particularly challenging. Here, the wisdom of Desmond Tutu is illuminating; he would often excuse himself from (important) meetings when the alarm in his pocket sounded, as he maintained a disciplined rhythm of prayer. Those moments were the most important in his day. If we do not hear the drumbeat, we risk losing our rhythm.

However, listening to God’s voice extends beyond our prayer times. It is also about “marching to the music you hear.” Nouwen points to Psalm 146 as an example. The Psalmist states, “I will praise” and “I will sing.” The source of this song, according to the Psalmist, is not “princes and mortals in whom there is no help.” Instead, it is “the God of Jacob, who made heaven and earth.” But what does it mean to march to the music of this Master Musician?

The Psalmist instructs us to sing along with the timeless song: “Justice for the oppressed; food for the hungry; prisoners set free; opening the eyes of the blind; lifting up those who are bowed down; and loving the righteous.” This is what it means to harmonize with the voice of the living God. Listening for God involves heeding the cries of the voiceless, the marginalized, and the despised. In more colourful terms, we can say that *vox victimarum*, *vox Dei*—“the voices of the victims are the voice of God.”

Like a metronome guiding our rhythm between two points, both the voice of God and the voice of the victim can serve as essential tools for navigating these challenging times in our world.

May we take the time to listen to both as we journey further into this year.

Revd Marius Louw



Consistory Report

Following a glorious Advent season that included Carols at Candlelight and our beautiful Christmas Eve service, the Consistory began the new year refreshed and with new energy. Our thanks again to Marius, Richard and our wonderful choir for creating such a special holiday for us all!

There were several outstanding items of business to be addressed:

All arrangements in relation to the moving of our new pastor to the Netherlands have been completed, a real learning experience for us; Elisabeth has been appointed as member of the Eco Congregation of the Church of Scotland; and the lights in the choir and the sound system have been upgraded.

On the 1st of February a meeting of the consistory was held at the manse to focus on the planning for 2025 and further.

Safeguarding

The Dutch Reformed Church (Protestantse Kerk Nederland, or "PKN") has recently amended its policy in relation to background checks for the people doing volunteer work in the church. In particular, volunteers will have to obtain and submit to the church a clean background check (i.e., a clean Verklaring Omtrent het Gedrag, or "VOG"). Consistory has decided to follow the PKN policy in this respect and will thus request that all volunteers (including Consistory members) supply a clean VOG certificate.

International Presbytery Meeting

The October 2025 meeting of the International Presbytery of the Church of Scotland may take place in Amsterdam, from the 9th until the 12th of October. The uncertainty is due to the fact that the meeting dates coincide with the celebrations of the city's 750th anniversary, which is driving up accommodation costs. It is expected that a decision about the meeting location will be made soon. If it is confirmed that Amsterdam will be the chosen location, the ERC will be expected to organise all the logistics (restaurant bookings, meeting venues, etc.) around the event. The consistory has formed a support team consisting of Andreas, Christina and Nick.

Mattia Falcone
Sies Plokker

Mulanje Mission Hospital Benefit Concert

Strijkkwartet Café des Chansons, featuring Charlotte Haesen

Friday March 21st | 20:00



Photo: Anahí Clemens

As is our tradition at the ERC, we arrange one benefit concert each year with all proceeds going to the Mulanje Mission Hospital in Malawi. In the previous issue of *The Record* we promised another Mulanje Concert in February 2025. Since then, calendars have been carefully aligned, re-aligned, and the three wise men consulted. All of this has led to a firm, albeit slightly later, date for your diaries: Friday March 21st at 20:00. The concert will be provided by Strijkkwartet Café des Chansons, featuring Charlotte Haesen.

Founded in Amsterdam in 2015, Strijkkwartet Café des Chansons explores the boundaries of French chanson in a unique guise. The ensemble pairs a professional classical string quartet, featuring violinists Giles Francis and Evelien Jaspers, violist Odile Torenbeek and cellist Sebastiaan van Halsema, with Charlotte Haesen, who trained as a jazz singer.

This marvellous ensemble also performed one of the pre-recorded concerts of the Summer Proms Series which we made during the Covid period in lieu of one live concert. So this is your chance to listen to them live! This concert will be a premiere of their new programme “La Blancher des Cygnes”, an intimate and moving selection of French chansons from such legends as Charles Aznavour and Jaques Brel, combined with their own compositions, all specifically arranged for the group. The central themes of love, resilience and self-discovery are explored throughout the evening with a repertoire which tells its own story. This is an

opportunity not to be missed! A chance to invite friends for a lovely concert and a visit to our church. Even better, a chance to make a difference by supporting the Mulanje Mission Hospital with the crucial and life-changing work they do.

Tickets for this concert are priced at 25 Euros. They can be purchased on the night at the door but why take the risk? They will be shortly available to buy in advance on the ERC website. All money will go directly to the hospital. Particular thanks to the artists of Café des Chansons for offering their professional services to this very special cause.



FOR A NEW YEAR

(dedicated to all Presidents and Monarchs)

Set these pictures beside each other: land desecrated, destroyed, desolated;
child in my street
leaping over the puddles, singing; Destruction and Hope.
I do not know what God is up to! But we chose our rulers
long ago we asked for, wanted, Kings, preferred the gold
to what we could not touch nor see, rather a sabre than a beating heart.
Tyrants and despots
govern our weeping lands.
In arrogance we grabbed,
believing we grasped power.

That child lives down my street
goes to a nearby school
I know his name: Emanuel
black-faced, tight curly hair,
he leaps along the wet street,
singing — child of immigrants
on his way home...

(Wendie Shaffer, January 2025)

Finance Report

January - December 2024, Amounts in €

Income	2024	2023	Change
Donations	86.532,85	80.008,22	6.524,63
Collections	30.961,46	29.525,77	1.435,69
Church hire	24.491,95	23.747,12	744,83
Church hall	21.586,48	23.910,39	-2.323,91
Concerts	12.742,10	8.045,53	4.696,57
Weddings	725,00	875,00	-150,00
Flowers	833,73	0,00	833,73
	177.873,57	166.112,03	11.761,54

I am glad to notice that our total income has consistently increased in the past 4 years which is great. The increase this year compared to 2023 is 11,762, that is 7% of 2023, thanks to all of your generous contributions. However, we ended the year with a little surplus of 2.240 despite an extra 12.000 contribution from the Stichting Friends of the English Church.

Our total expenses have also risen sharply (19%) compared to 2023. There are quite a few maintenance works which need to be done in the church. We have been able to carry out some this year and we have to continue in the coming years and of course, we now also have our minister. I would urge you to attend the Annual General Meeting in April for further details during the presentation of our annual consolidated accounts.

Finally, I would like to thank you for all of your support of the congregation, be it in your time, prayer or money.

Charles Vanderpuye, Treasurer

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

Study, Services, Fellowship

Coffee Mornings

We are happy to continue our monthly meetings with coffee, cakes, drinks, etc. This is a wonderful opportunity for fellowship with members of our congregation who carry the history of our church. We usually meet in church on the first Tuesday of the month from half past 10. As always, everyone is welcome!



If you would like to attend or would like to have more information, please contact Sies Plokker or Joke de Bruin. The dates of the next meetings are: March 4, April 1 and May 6.

Bible Study

Bible Study meets on the first and third Wednesday of the month at 19:30 at the Manse, 9 Jan Willem Brouwersstraat, 1071 LH. All are welcome. You can also join via Zoom. Details are publicised in the weekly newsletter.

Taizé Service

Our joint Taizé service with the Roman Catholic Begijnhof Chapel is held on the third Thursday of the month. This is a wonderful opportunity to share in ecumenical worship with our closest neighbours and to welcome visitors. If you haven't given this a try, do come along. Services start at 19:30.

Coffee after the service

Meet your fellow members of the congregation over a cup of coffee after the service each week. And if you enjoy these gatherings, please consider volunteering once in a while or regularly. We always need help in this vital ministry.

Women's Fellowship

For those who have not yet been able to attend, we start by having a potluck dinner together followed by a time of fellowship. If you would like to join us but are not on the invitation list, please contact Peggy Krol and you will be added to the list. All women of all ages are most welcome.

De Kloof

Giles is always looking for people to help out on the second Saturday of the month. A group of four prepare a meal for visitors to the homeless shelter, De Kloof.

20-30's Group

Enjoy fellowship with young people in our church. The group meets regularly for study, lunch (every first Sunday of the month) and social events. Please contact Elisabeth (elisabeth.ijmker@erc.amsterdam) if you are interested.

Make a joyful noise!

For those of you who remember ten years ago, you may recall that the choir used to sing just once a month. Well, those days are long gone! You will have noticed that the choir now sings every two-to-three weeks, something almost unheard of in most Dutch churches. And what a joy it is - for the choir and, hopefully, for all of you!

We will be singing twice in February and twice in March, which then leads us to the busy Easter season. You may be just getting over the recent holiday season, but the music department has for weeks been hard at work on Holy Week and Easter! This year will once again find us celebrating the entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. With our new minister Marius and the now-growing children's participation in the services, we hope to make this the festive occasion it deserves to be. Bring your palms!

Holy Week continues with our evening services on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. For the latter, the choir will be singing some of its most intense and moving music of the year. This service, relating the dramatic story in the Garden of Gethsemane and culminating on the cross, will be preceded by a half-hour of meditative organ music in the darkened church.

And then the atmosphere changes completely for the triumph of Easter morning. The choir will be accompanied by an instrumental ensemble (of course with trumpets!) for the most splendid and festive music of the year. And you, of course, will once again be joining in Handel's Hallelujah! I can promise you there's no other church in the country where you get to do that!



You won't want to miss it - so come in good voice!

As always, the church continues to be a much-loved venue for a wide variety of concerts. Do check the concert page on the church website for the schedule. And the next benefit concert for the Mulanje Mission Hospital is rapidly approaching. You will find more information on that elsewhere in this Record.

“Come into his presence with singing.”

Richard

Membership notices

Baptised on 16 February 2025

The children of Akwasi Addai Prempeh and Beatrice Pabi Prempeh
Emmanuel Kwabena Kumah Prempeh
Esther Akuaa Yeboah Prempeh
Enoch Kwas Poku Prempeh
Eleazer Kwabena Ankomah Prempeh
Elizabeth Abenaa Aku Prempeh

Ordained on 24 January 2025

Former member and elder of our church

Dr. Thorsten König

was ordained in Kilmacolm Parish Church and
appointed as Assistant Minister in charge of the congregation
(<https://kilmacolmparishchurch.co.uk/>)

Services in the Holy Week

Services and events during this most important of weeks are as follows

Sunday April 13 | 10:30

Palm Sunday

Thursday April 13 | 20:00

Maundy Thursday - Holy Communion service.

Friday April 18 | 20:00

(with devotional music from 7.30 pm):

Good Friday service.

Sunday April 20 | 10.30

Easter service with Holy Communion.

Members of Consistory

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Nick Anderton 0251 679962

Andreas Decker 06 83172702

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English Reformed
Church Amsterdam

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

Please send your contribution for the May 2025 issue before April 20 to:
record@erc.amsterdam