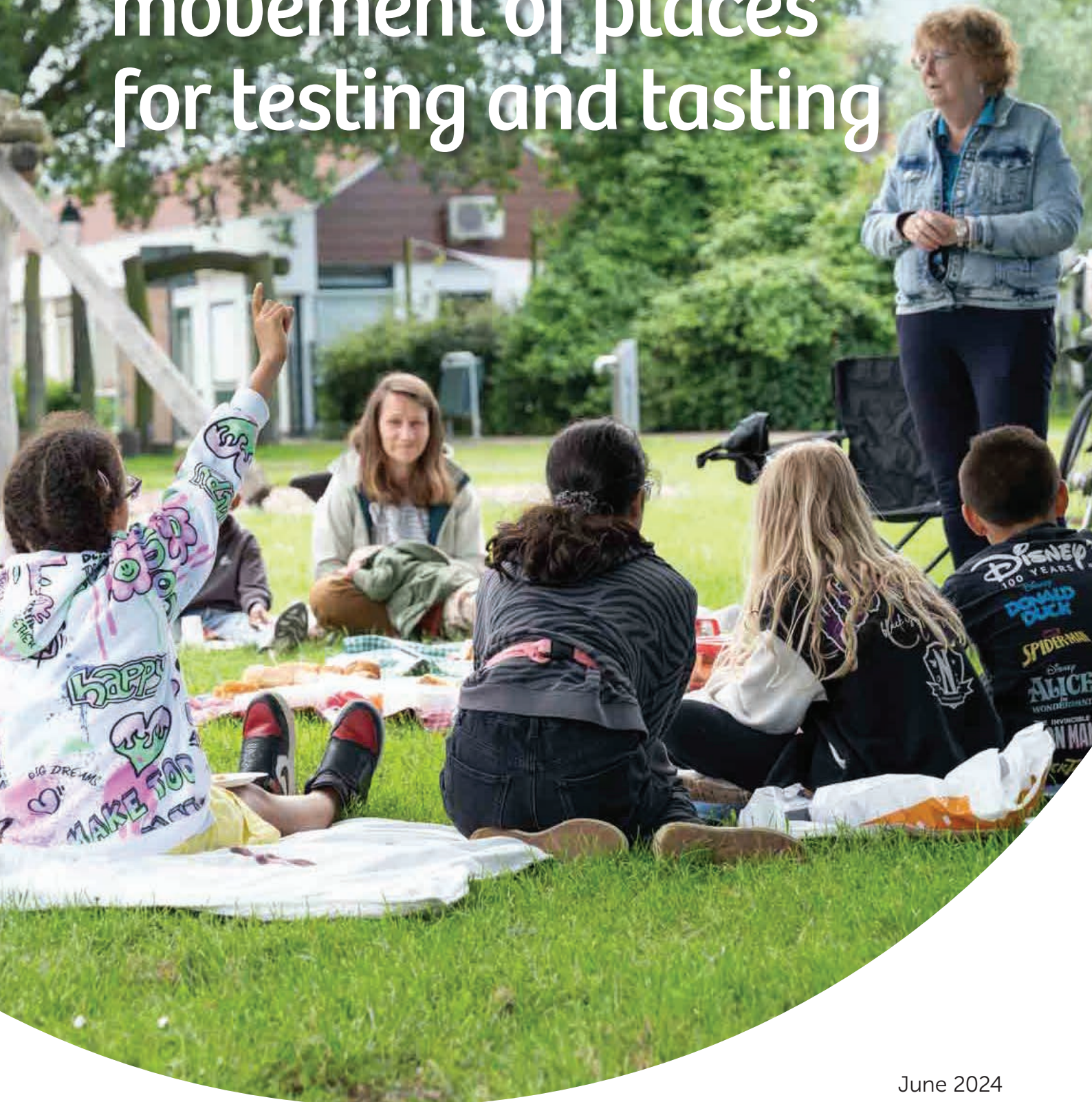




Protestantse
Kerk

Vindplaats van |
geloof, hoop en liefde |

Towards a pioneering movement of places for testing and tasting



June 2024

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Photo cover: The Messy Church of the pioneering place LichtDelen in The Hague-Loosduinen forms a bridge between the church and the neighborhood. (Photo by Niek Stam)

Introduction: An Inspiring Journey

As a pioneering movement within the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, we are pioneering and this is an inspiring process.¹ Every four years we report on the progress. A lot has happened since our last report in 2020. We have grown a little older and (hopefully) wiser. In this report, we look backward and forward.

We

- ... first give an account of the past years (I);
- ... tell about those who have joined us on the pioneering journey(II);
- ... present research on diversity in the pioneering fellowship (III);
- ... end with a preview of how we hope to continue the journey (IV).

Before we give our account of the past four years, we will start further back. Why did we embark on the journey? Why is there a pioneering movement? During a meeting of the General Synod of the Protestant Church in April 2019, the following answer was given in the memorandum *Mosaic of Forms of Being Church*:

Why are new forms of being church necessary? Already in the first vision document from 2005, the Protestant Church concluded that it is not possible to reach the breadth of our society with existing forms of being church. As our society becomes more diverse, a greater diversity of forms of being church is needed. This does not mean that traditional congregations have no value. On the contrary! For many people, these congregations provide valuable support in their lives and faith. But that's not the case for everyone. New forms of being church are needed, not to replace existing congregations but to complement them.

The space and support for new forms of being church can be traced back to a missionary desire: God himself embraces the whole world. The joy of the gospel needs to be shared. That is the mission of the church. According to our Church Order, this mission affects the entire existence of the church (Article X, paragraph 1).²

We recognise this missionary desire in the many pioneers. The movement is not motivated, as is sometimes suggested, by fighting the decline in the membership of the church, although some pioneers sincerely hope that more people will discover what they have discovered in the church. The pioneering teams have a missionary desire to make something of God's new world visible in all sorts of situations and for all sorts of people. They also manage to involve new people:

Research shows that there are many people involved who are not (or no longer) involved in existing congregations. For example, 56% of the visitors to messy churches are not involved in a traditional congregation and 38% are not religious. In pioneering places, about half of the people involved are not active in the church. Many new initiatives succeed in involving younger generations in activities. About a third of the pioneering grounds reach a multicultural audience.³

The pioneering movement is not going to "save" the church. That's not its aim. That said, it has always been hoped that the movement would, besides involving new groups of people, also would be a fresh source of inspiration and a 'test laboratory' for established churches. For instance

1. *In Hope of Blessing: Developments, Lessons Learned, and Challenges After Eight Years of Pioneering* (2016); *Pioneering Interim Status: Social Connectedness and Faith Development in Pioneering Grounds* (2020). Both can be found online at lerenpionieren.nl.

2. *Mosaic of Forms of Being Church: On Connection between Existing and New Forms of Being Church* (2019), p. 4-5 (available online).

3. *Mosaic of Forms of Being Church*, p. 5.

by promoting the theological rethinking of being church in today's society.⁴ That this is actually happening will become clear in our 'travel report'.

Although in this report we only portray the 'pioneering movement of places for testing and tasting', new ways are also sought in established congregations, starting from this missionary impulse. The vision paper of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands *Yours is the Future* (2020) puts it this way:

By means of new forms of being church, we seek contact with groups that have no connection with the church (anymore). Established congregations are also looking for new ways to remain present in the life of their surroundings. In doing so, they can count on the support of the national church. With all this innovation and diversification, the Protestant Church is increasingly developing into a mosaic of being church.⁵

It is our wish and prayer that the increasingly diverse pioneering movement will be a blessing to the whole church and the whole society, and that the mosaic of new and established forms of being church will reveal something of the multicoloured nature of God's new world.

On behalf of the National Pioneering Team: Peter den Hoedt, Symon Jagersma, Gert-Jan Roest and Erik Verwoerd

The mosaic is taking shape

It is clear: the Netherlands are a secular country. Old forms of being a church are only partially sufficient. That is why the Protestant Church has chosen to create space for a mosaic of church forms. As a missionary church, the Protestant Church is called to be where Christ is found. In the 'streets and alleys' (NIV, Luke 14,21) where there are people of all sorts. This requires a pioneering attitude and openness to various forms of being church. This update shows how this has developed within the Protestant Church in recent years. Or rather, it shows what God has done among us. And there's a lot to be thankful for! Pioneering has become a movement of very young christian communities, next to local congregations that have existed for centuries. . A movement of searching together where God calls us, searching for places where we can taste the goodness of God's kingdom. Very concretely in (now) traditional pioneering places, messy churches, places of presence, monastic places and communities for sharing faith based daily life.

We see that the different stones that constitute this mosaic no longer exist as particles of sand and no longer push each other away, but are starting to take shape and to complement and enrich each other. The mosaic church forms is taking shape.

Ds. René de Reuver, secretary of the Protestant Church

I. An account of our journey

Since our last progress report in 2020, we have come a long way. In this first part, we report on this. First, we will give some figures of the pioneering movement. Next, we will tell you something about the choice of a new name: 'a pioneering movement of places for testing and tasting' as a result of the growing diversity in the movement that has led to a sharper vision and shared values. We report on the renewal of guidance and training, on the extra attention paid to the financial sustainability of places voor testing and tasting. We talk about the new impetus for research, describe the broader collaboration, and end with the influence of the pioneering movement on the broader church.

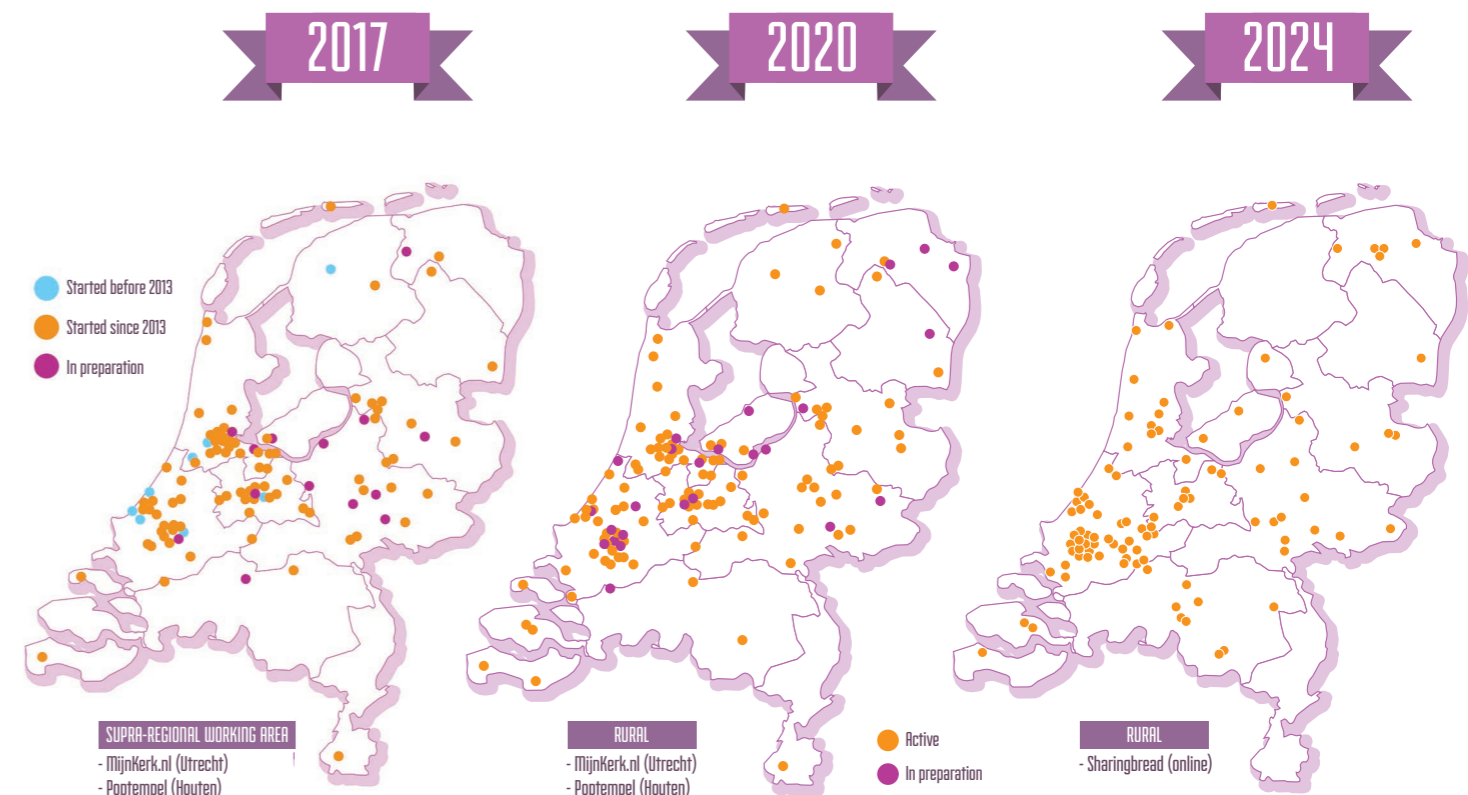
The pioneering movement in figures

Number of pioneering places

Up to and including 2017, 81 pioneering grounds (78 Protestant Church and 3 Christian Reformed Churches) have started, and there were 7 pioneering places from before 2013. In 2020, there were 134 pioneering places. At the beginning of 2024, the number of 180 was reached. In the past 4 years, the corona virus has had an inhibiting effect on starting pioneering places. Getting in touch with

new people, discussing things with the sending church, and with each other as a team, were difficult because of the social lock downs.

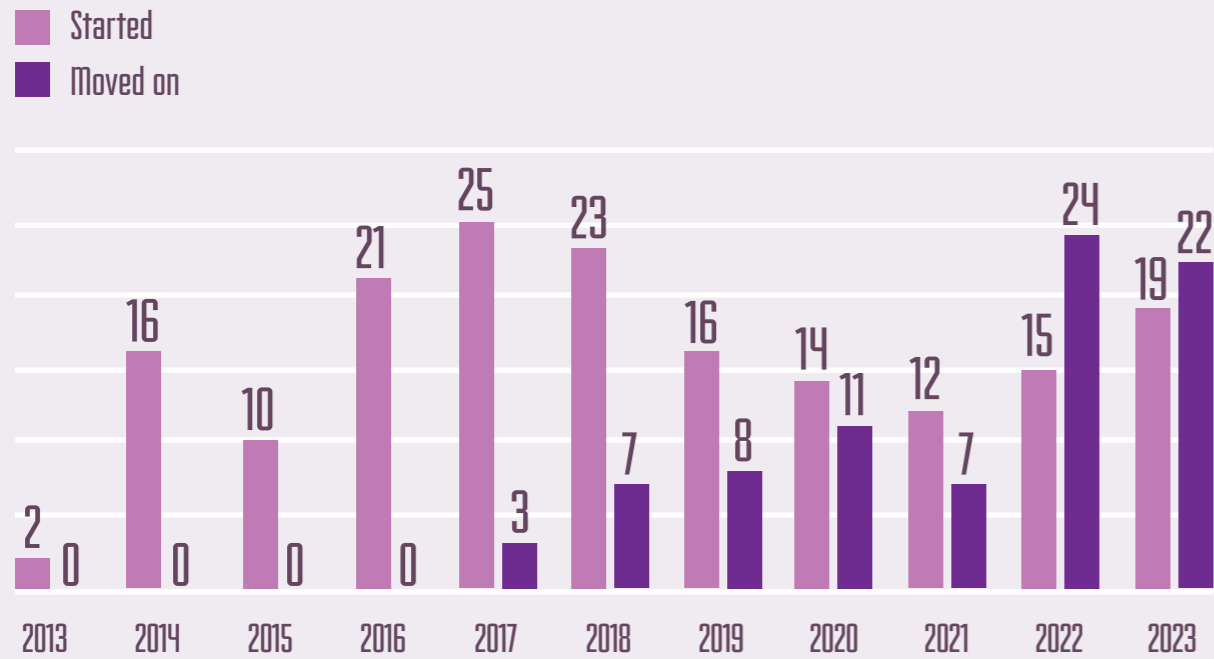
The maps show the locations of the pioneering places that were supported by us in 2017, 2020 and 2024. You can see that the pioneering grounds have become more spread out over the country over the years. We also see that more and more medium-sized towns and villages have started a pioneering place.



4. *With Heart and Soul: Policy Plan 2013-2016 for the Ministry Organisation of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands*, p. 20.

5. *Thine is the Future: Receptive and Watchful Life of Grace*, p. 49 (p. 18 in the online version).

PIONEERING PLACES



Moving on after six years of pioneering

As of January 1, 2024, the Protestant Church supported 99 pioneering places. The rest of the pioneering places that have started since 2008, have meanwhile moved on to another (independent) form of being church, or have stopped.

In recent years, the support of pioneering places has been for a maximum of 6 years. During this period, the teams and sending congregations were challenged to think about the direction in which they would like to develop for after the pioneering phase.

Most of the pioneering places that moved on (32) chose the form 'missionary activity'. This means that after the pioneering period they continue under the responsibility of the sending church, without their own legal entity and governing council. In this form, the pioneering place and the sending church remain closely connected to each other and continued support can be given in the form of prayer, volunteers, finances and buildings. There can also be lessons to be learned from the pioneering place. How the connection with the sending church in this form is shaped is determined locally.

In eight places it was decided to become a 'missionary community'. This means that they fall under the general council of the local church and are accountable to it, regulated according to a local decision. There is no separate legal entity.

Four places chose to become 'missionary core congregations', which means that they have their own legal entity and become part of the local mosaic of church forms.

Seven pioneering places opted for a form of 'being church outside the Protestant Church'. This means that they have their own legal entity and council that is responsible for the congregation.

DIRECTION	NUMBER
Missionary activity	32
Missionary community	8
Missionary core congregation	4
Being church outside PKN	7
Otherwise	2
Stopped	29
Grand total	82

The category 'otherwise' includes the two pioneering places 'Poptempel' and 'MijnKerk.nl', which had a national (online) focus. This makes them difficult to connect to a specific local congregation.

Of the 82 pioneering places that have moved on, 29 have stopped⁶ altogether. That is more than a third of the total number of places that have continued. By way of comparison (for what it's worth), only half of the start-ups in the business sector make it past the first five years. It should be noted, however, that of the 53 places that continued after the pioneering phase, the majority remain permanently connected to the sending church.

Appointment and level of education

A survey was conducted to ask about the appointment and training of the pioneer. We first describe the extent to which there are paid workers working in the pioneering places and then the level of education of the pioneers.

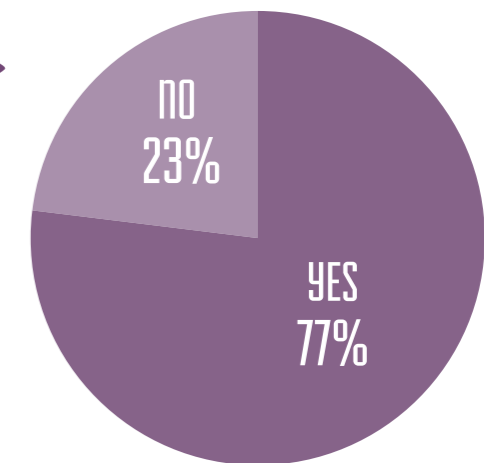
More than 75% of the pioneering places have a paid pioneer. There are 57 appointments, ranging from very limited to full-time:

3-9 hours	15 persons
10-18 hours	23 persons
19-24 hours	11 persons
25-32 hours	5 persons
32-40 hours	3 persons

It is striking that only 3 of the 57 people are appointed full-time (two for 36 hours, one for 40 hours). The largest group of pioneers has an appointment of two days or less (38 out of 57). Of them, seven are appointed for 4 hours and one for 3 hours.

6. Reasons for the cessation of pioneering places have been researched and described by Vellekoop, *Pioneering places that continue. What the church can learn from the sustainability of social startups*, Protestant Church 2017, p. 25-28.

Does the pioneering place have a paid leader?



Nearly 70% of the pioneers have a theological education; 42% with a master's degree and 28% with a bachelor's degree. Of this group, 9% work unpaid.

The remaining 30% have a wide range of education, from psychology and social work to HRM and Secondary Vocational Education (19%). Another part indicates nothing or 'no theology' or the like when asked about education level (12%).

Bottlenecks and challenges

In practice, we see that pioneers face many challenges. Small contracts, unfavorable employment conditions, and temporary appointments create uncertainty. Contracts often cannot be renewed after a certain period because the 'motherchurch' hesitates to offer a permanent contract. The challenges also involve arranging the necessary conditions to enable pioneering. For example, balancing the budget or creating support within the congregation. The pioneering team is often still in development, and practical support from the 'motherchurch' is limited. As a result, tasks that do not align well with the strengths of the leader or pioneer often fall on their shoulders. Additionally, pioneering places typically do not have permanent members, making it difficult to determine who they are for and who they are not. All of this significantly increases the risk of overburdening. Since pioneering requires a lot

and the necessary conditions are often lacking, opportunities for reflection and further training can easily fall by the wayside. All these points require policy-level attention from the national church, in collaboration with local congregations.

A pioneering movement of places for testing and tasting (new name)

In addition to the growth in the number of pioneering places, we have also seen a growing diversity of other types of initiatives in the last four years: messy churches, places of presence, monastic places and communities for sharing faith based daily life. These are wonderful initiatives in which people want to be creatively and serviceably present in society based on their faith. You can read more about this in Chapter II.

Because of this growing diversity, the definition of 'pioneering place' became too narrow. In the Protestant Church, the name 'pioneering place' has been used for initiatives that are connected to the national pioneering learning community and that want to grow into a new (independent) form of



▲ The language of music is universal. An intercultural encounter at the pioneering place Klimop in Winterswijk.

being church. But not all initiatives that start have the intention to grow into a new (independent) form of being church.

Because of this growing diversity, we have chosen a new name. We now use the name 'places for testing and tasting' to describe the entire range of initiatives: pioneering places and other types of initiatives. This is not only about a new name, but also about the support that comes with it. The support given to various colours was unevenly distributed. And that was not justified because the other initiatives are also pioneering.

This insight can be heard in the new name: 'pioneering movement of places for testing and tasting'. After all, the entire range of initiatives (places for testing and tasting) constitutes pioneering. At the same time, we continue to use the term 'pioneering place' for initiatives that want to grow into a new form of being church. This term is now so well established that it would cause great confusion if we were to define it differently.

The term 'movement' was also chosen deliberately. We want to stimulate a pioneering movement that also enables 'lighter initiatives'. Suppose, for example, that three colleagues at work want to embody some of God's love in that workplace, we want to encourage and support them, even if we know that they will never become an official pioneering place or another place for testing and tasting within the Protestant Church. We want to make our knowledge and insights available to them free of charge (online) because together we are 'children of one Father' (title of chapter 2 of the last vision paper of the Protestants Church in the Netherlands). A pioneering movement of places for testing and tasting can never be 'owned' by one denomination because it is a work of God's Spirit that stimulates people to make something visible of God's new world. We want to stimulate and nurture this broad movement.

A sharper vision and shared values

Increase in diversity of places for testing and tasting and the broadening of the movement have raised the question: how can we stimulate both unity and diversity? What holds this diverse movement together? How do you lead a movement?

You can't control a movement 'from above'. It is something that grows 'from the bottom up'. Too much control and hierarchy tend to extinguish

the Spirit. But freedom and autonomy are not the answer. It makes a movement break down into all kinds of pieces. A movement can only grow from the bottom up if there is a shared vision and shared values. We have therefore made the vision sharper and reflected on crucial values.

A sharper vision

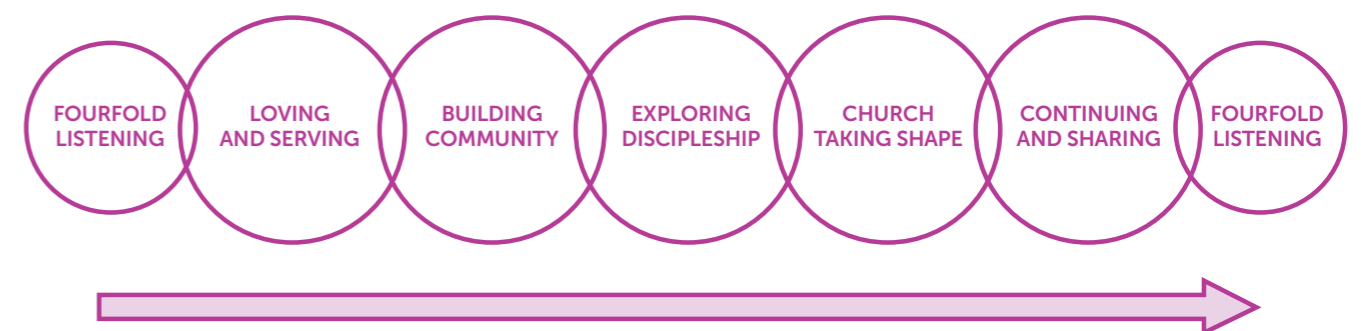
In the past, we defined a pioneering place as "a new form of church for people who don't go to church." That definition still has value, but due to the growing diversity, a new form of being church cannot be the focus. It must lie with God's mission (*missio Dei*), with God's new world (the kingdom of God) as its final destination, a world in which Jesus occupies a central place as the leader of this new world (Jesus is Lord).

All different types of places for testing and tasting each try to reflect something of God's new world in their own way. Therefore, we not only use the collective term 'a pioneering movement of places for testing and tasting' but add the subtitle 'a glimpse of God's new world'.

The term 'place for testing and tasting' has been used several times now. By this we mean all kinds of missionary initiatives that build a 'new, inclusive community'. Places where people from different backgrounds come together around something that binds them together. And where the initiators share something of their Christian inspiration in words and deeds.

Shared values

We discovered the shared values for places for testing and tasting when we thought more deeply about the pioneering journey. This pioneering journey consists of several 'practices':



▲ This is the Dutch version of 'the fresh expressions journey'. In the Dutch version we have not only translated, but also contextualised some of the original terms.

Although not all places for testing and tasting use all practices (such as discovering the life of faith, giving shape to being church), all underlying values can be shared by the entire pioneering movement of places for testing and tasting.

As a movement, we find it valuable to:

- **To discover God's mission locally.** We therefore find it important to listen prayerfully and discern what God is doing in our environment, rather than just following our own ideas (*contextual*).
- **To participate in God's movement of love towards our surrounding.** We therefore find it important to follow Jesus in selflessly *loving and serving* people in our surrounding from a reciprocal relationship (*missional*).
- **Connecting diverse people and living environments.** We therefore believe it is important to *build communities* in which people with different beliefs, ethnicities and worldviews are interconnected and strengthen each other for the flourishing of society or other parts of creation (*communal*).
- **To go to Christ with others.** We therefore find it important to *discover the life of faith* for ourselves (living a Christ-connected life as a disciple of Jesus instead of being led by our unconverted ego), and to help others to discover and experience this way of Jesus (*formational*).
- **To have contextual expressions of the body of Christ.** We therefore think it is important that different forms of *being church* are designed (as part of a broader church mosaic) where people can praise God and reflect a glimpse of God's new world in their situation based on Christian spirituality, connected to the larger church (*ecclesial*).

- **To feed a larger movement.** That's why we think it's important that places for testing and tasting *continue and share*. Over time, places for testing and tasting can start new places or share their insights and thus support others (*movement mindset*).

The shared values approach helps us, for example, to start a discussion about how important it is to be part of a growing mosaic of church forms with places for testing and tasting that do not want to develop into a new (independent) form of being church. In this way, we seek to work in a more diverse movement from a sharpened vision and shared values.

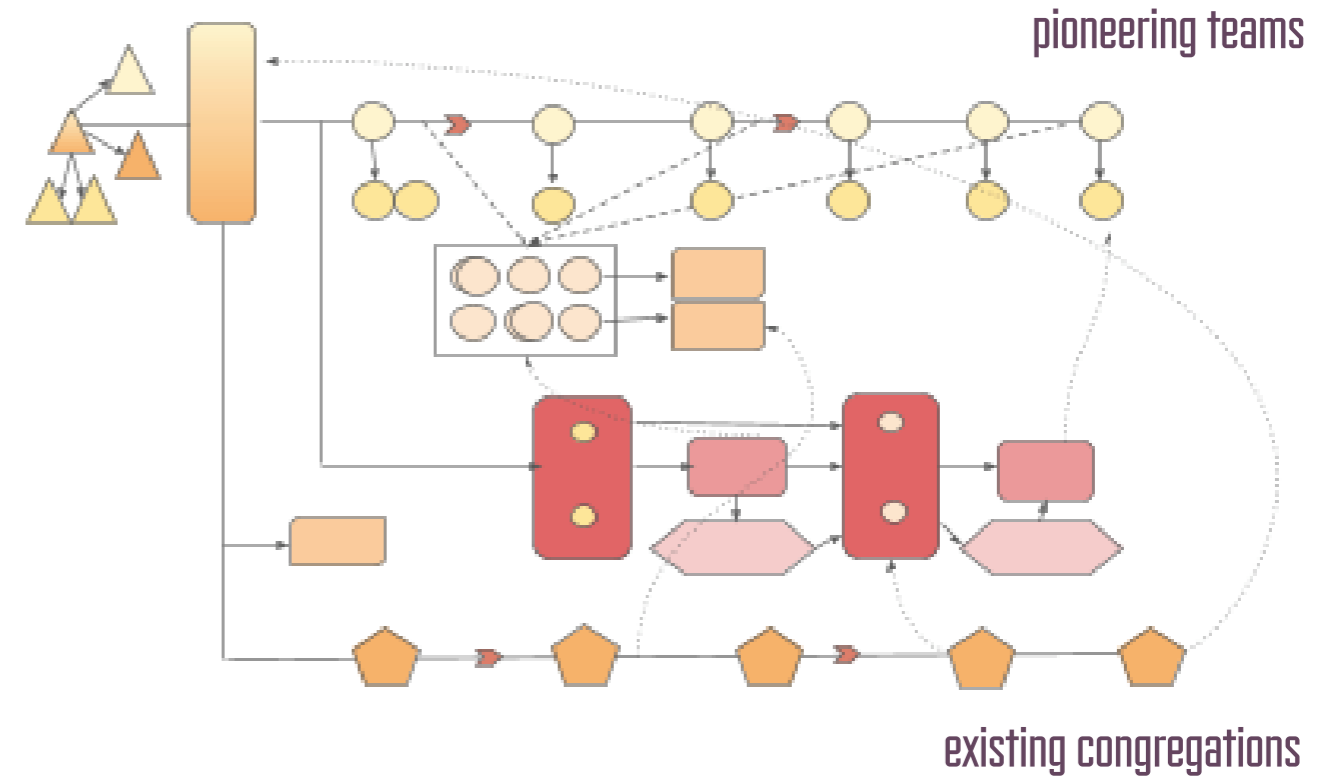
In the last four years, we have noticed in all kinds of discussions with pastors and church councils that the above-mentioned vision and values also evoke a lot of recognition among established congregations that are engaged in their missionary vocation. We notice this, for example, in the missionary training for pastors and church workers that is given in collaboration with the Protestant Theological University, called 'Outward oriented Church'. In this specialisation, insights from the pioneering movement are made fruitful for established congregations. The same is happening in the course 'Church with a mission', which is still in its testing phase. It is a course for church members and church councils that gives an orientation on how to participate in God's mission in this world as an established church.

Renewal of guidance and training

In the past four years, a lot of work has been done on the renewal of guidance and training. There were four reasons for this:

- The guidance and training was done by different people, but it turned out that it was not always well coordinated, and in some cases the content was diluted. In response to this, a learning framework was written in which the content of all themes (six themes from the pioneer trip plus six so-called 'travel support' themes) was presented in an integrated way. We have used this learning framework as a guideline for the substantive renewal of the guidance and training.
- The existing curriculum did not provide sufficient space for the diversity of the pioneering initiatives and appropriate support for the resulting support needs.
- The growth of the movement forced us to look again at how we could still provide maximum support with limited people and resources.
- We wanted to fuel a movement by making part of the training available online at no cost.

After the reason was clear, eight educational principles were formulated. These, together with the learning framework, became the basis of the renewed curriculum. The curriculum has components that focus primarily on leading teams of places for testing and tasting as well as parts that focus on existing congregations. At present, this curriculum is more



▲ Overview of the 'Church Outward' curriculum

Legenda

- ▲ Online content for individuals (articles, videos)
- Downloadable modules for teams
- ▭ Organized physical meeting for team from DO
- ⬠ Physical meeting organized locally
- ▭ Online meeting for individuals from team
- ⬠ Physical meeting for individual

appropriate for the pioneering teams than for existing congregations. A four tier cumulative curriculum has been developed for the leading teams of places for testing and tasting. Teams choose for themselves how intensively they want to use the curriculum and up to what level they want to participate.

We currently have two options for the established congregations. The course 'Church with a mission' gives an orientation on the theme of God's mission in this world and how you can move with it. After this orientation, a team can be formed to start a places for testing and tasting and take part in levels 2, 3 and 4. But even if they do not do this, the established congregations can use all the online modules. However, they will have to adapt the modules to their own context.

The solid lines in the schematic overview of the curriculum (Figure 3) indicate how people move through the curriculum. Both the leading teams of places for testing and tasting and the established congregations will start at the top left. The dotted lines indicate that other routes are also possible. In this way, the offer for established congregations and pioneers is linked to each other.

With this curriculum, much less individual guidance of teams is needed. Teams and established congregations can move through this curriculum at their own pace and with their own direction and thus gain access to the knowledge that is available about pioneering and about being a missionary church. Sometimes pioneering teams and established congregations run into questions that are not addressed in the curriculum. For instance questions that are so context-specific that they cannot be answered with a standardised curriculum, or new questions that the curriculum does not yet answer. Established congregations and leading teams of places for testing and tasting that are not part of a learning circle can contact the support centre in these situations. Teams that are part of a learning circle (level 4) can call on their mentor. This also gives room for individual guidance of teams per learning circle.

1. ORIENTATION	2. ONLINE MODULES	3. NETWORK DAYS	4. LEARNING CIRCLE
The teams orient themselves from the church to the outside world by reading information about it or through another type of orientation. After this stage, they are well placed to decide whether pioneering (or some other form of church outreach) is right for them.	The teams start with their initiative. From the start-up phase, they can use online modules as a team, developed for the 12 core themes. Each module consists of basic and in-depth programmes.	Teams that find it important to meet other teams and get direct feedback from 'teachers' go to the networking day twice a year. The network days focus on two core themes from the learning framework.	Some of the teams find it important to have more intensive contact with other teams and to be guided. Within a learning circle, 5 teams meet under the guidance of a mentor. With the help of intervision, they get to work on their own learning questions.

▲ Levels in the curriculum for teams of testing grounds

Extra attention to financial sustainability

Since the Protestant Church started the pioneering program, the pioneering places have received financial support in the form of a 6-year subsidy. By providing grants and guidance to pioneering places, 200 pioneering places have started since 2008. The provision of the subsidies often made it easier to get started.

However, these subsidies have not always led to financially sustainable pioneering places. Why not? On the one hand, it turned out that it was often only at the end of the subsidy period that people really started thinking about financial sustainability. On the other hand, the pioneering team and/or the local congregation concerned did not always have sufficient expertise in the field of financial sustainability and entrepreneurship. Some pioneering places have continued in a slimmed-down form after the subsidy period. Others have stopped. Of course, the 6 years of pioneering are valuable in themselves, but it is a shame if the pioneering places stop or have to slim down because of not paying attention to financial sustainability in time. That's why we've made three changes.

- We encourage new pioneering places to think about financial sustainability from the very beginning. We support them in their (starting) guidance and pay attention to it during the networking days. The theme of 'financial sustainability' within the curriculum for testing teams has also been radically renewed.
- We have started a *community of practice*. In concrete terms, this means that we bring together 3 pioneering teams and 5 financial experts in three sessions to learn how a pioneering place can be helped further. Over time, we will use the insights from this *community of practice* in the further development of our curriculum and offer for teams in the field of financial sustainability.

- We have tightened up the eligibility criteria. When granting subsidies, we look closely at how they will contribute to making the pioneering ground more sustainable. The financial position of local congregations is also examined. If sufficient resources are available there, no national subsidy will be provided. Grants will also be given to places for testing and tasting that pioneer with groups with which there is still limited experience, or in an area where little is available. Think, for example, of pioneering with young generations, with migrants, or in regions where the Protestant Church has a limited presence.

New impetus for research

Research has always been an important component of the pioneering movement. This has also been the case for the past four years. In 2021, Sake Stoppels conducted research into the missionary mindset of pioneers within the Protestant Church.⁷ The research paints a picture of their theological position (e.g. their understanding of gospel and salvation), their sources of inspiration and the experience of the (missionary) impulses they receive from the support of the organization of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. Marinka Verburg-Janssen completed a dissertation on faith communities in the pioneering movement in 2024.⁸ In 2024, Sake Stoppels wrote an extensive overview article on the pioneering movement in the Netherlands⁹ and Hans Euser researched intercultural pioneering places.¹⁰

We want to strengthen the role of research in the coming years. We regularly receive students who want to do research on an aspect of the movement for their bachelor's, master's or PhD. At the same time, we notice that systematic and practical research into the functioning of the central themes in our movement is not getting off the ground sufficiently. We started with an initial inventory of themes that we believe will be important for the

7. Available through researchgate.net/profile/Sake-Stoppels. See also the parallel study among 40 pastors: 'The missionary mindset of pastors within the Protestant Church' (2021).
8. Marinka Verburg-Janssen, *Around the Space of the Beginning: An Ethnographic Study of the Formation of New Faith Communities with former church members and non church members within the Pioneering Movement of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands*. Utrecht: Eburon, 2024.
9. Sake Stoppels, 'Pioneering in the Netherlands: Developments, experiences and challenges.' See researchgate.net/profile/Sake-Stoppels.
10. See chapter III on 'Intercultural diversity in the fellowship of travelers.'



▲ Every Wednesday, there is a kids' club at the pioneering place Het Badhuis in Zwijndrecht, where children from the neighborhood are offered a safe and welcoming space.

pioneering movement of places for testing and tasting in the long term. This will lead to the creation of a research agenda that we will then share with educational institutes for a greater win-win situation

Broader collaboration

Our society is sometimes referred to as a network society and we see that the influence of institutions is diminishing (de-institutionalisation). At the same time, cross-border traffic between churches and organisations is increasing. We also notice in the pioneering movement of places for testing and tasting that the connections with other churches and organisations are only growing.

The pioneering movement is composed of several members. At the moment, these are formally: IZB (Internal Missionary Society), ICP (Intercultural Church Plants), Evangelie & Moslims (Gospel and Muslims), Op Goed Gerucht (movement of liberal churches), Protestants Church of Amsterdam, Protestants Church of The Hague, Maatschappij van Welstand (Society of Welfare for funding), Stichting Geloofsintegrering (Faith Integration Foundation) and Youth for Christ.

In the last four years, we have started to work more closely with the Christian Reformed Churches (CGK) and the Salvation Army. These denominations and organisations supervise their own pioneering teams, but do make use of

the network days, think along with the national team and in the development of learning methods and materials. Locally, many more denominations are cooperated with in the form of interdenominational pioneering places. About 20% of the pioneering places are interdenominational. In addition, there are contacts with various parties, including Heart-Edge Netherlands, City Movements Netherlands, Business as Mission, IFES and R3NEW.

There is also increasing contact with foreign churches and partners. Just as we have been in contact with and received inspiration from Fresh Expressions in England, foreign churches have contacted us because they are inspired by the pioneering movement of testing grounds and they want to learn from us: Germany, Czech Republic, Wales, Denmark, Switzerland, Austria and Hungary.

Influence of the pioneering movement on the existing church

In the introduction it was mentioned that there has always been hope that the pioneering movement would be a fresh source of inspiration and a sort of 'laboratory' for established church congregations, by giving an impulse to the theological rethinking of being church in today's society. During the early years of the pioneering movement, it was not yet clear whether this hope was well-founded. The

movement was still in its infancy. In the meantime, this child has become an adolescent and less dependent. It has grown and has developed its own identity. We think that the movement is growing into maturity and has therefore become an increasingly serious discussion partner in the church mosaic. Looking back, we also see the influence of the pioneering movement on the established church.

- In the spring of 2019, the General Synod approved the memorandum *Mosaic of Church Forms: On Connection between Established and New Forms of Being Church*.¹¹ In it, pioneering places were creatively characterised as a 'caravan' (flexible and small) that has been given a place next to the 'tiny house' (flexible and safe) and the 'house' (sturdy and safe). This showed that the pioneering movement had not only provided inspiration to local churches, but had also stimulated a shifting self-understanding of the church.
- It has also stimulated intense reflection on the ministry and training of pastors and church workers. The pioneer movement has raised the question whether only ordained ministers can lead pioneering places that have become independent or whether other forms of training for the pioneering pastor are also possible. It is not a simple question and it is a question that has been occupying the Protestant Church in the Netherlands intensively since 2019. The demand is given extra strength because of the general shortage of pastors and because even small established congregations are not always able or willing to appoint an academically trained pastor. In this way, we see that a church that makes room for pioneering is renewed both practically and substantively.
- The pioneering movement was also the impetus behind the vision of the church as a mosaic. A variety of church forms is needed. We see cross-pollination between established and new forms of being church on a regional level. In the smaller towns and villages, pioneering places function as an additional faith community side by side with and sometimes cooperating with the (surrounding) village churches. For example, the monastic community of Nijkleaster in Friesland offers an additional form of being a church for the Northern Netherlands. In many places in the Netherlands you see several forms of being

church developing side by side, as the mosaic of church places intends. Locally, too, we see mutual learning, mutual cooperation and joint reflection on the question of why we are church.

- **Learning together.** Within the pioneering movement of places of testing and tasting, learning happens collectively. For example, when it comes to shaping church life in a networked society. Established churches are also exploring renewal around this and other themes. The lessons learned from the pioneering movement can be very helpful in this regard. The key lessons have now been incorporated into online learning modules with dozens of lesson programs around twelve core themes. These learning modules are primarily aimed at supporting places of testing and tasting, but with a few adjustments, this material is also suitable for task groups and church councils of established congregations.
- **Culture.** The culture within the pioneering movement is innovative in areas such as language use, flexibility, and encouraging an adaptive and innovative mindset. Pioneers carry this culture with them wherever they go. Both nationally and locally, this contributes to the cultural shift needed for the whole of church life in a new era.
- **Ecumenical cooperation,** interculturality, and shared mission. Ecumenism and interchurch cooperation are thriving in the context of places of testing and tasting. The same applies to themes such as interculturality, diversity, and creativity. Within the pioneering movement, it is also possible to shape a shared mission across the full breadth of the church. Each in their own way, but still together. The knowledge and experiences from practice and our collaborators are always incorporated into the further development of the movement.
- **Influence on churches in Europe.** The pioneering movement in the Netherlands is being closely watched with great interest from abroad. Just as the Dutch movement received much support and inspiration from the English Fresh Expressions movement in its early years, more and more countries are now turning to the Netherlands. The Protestant Church now advises various church associations in Europe on church renewal. Groups of pastors and pioneers are also coming to the Netherlands on inspiration trips to visit places of testing and tasting.

II. New Fellow Travellers

In the previous chapter it was mentioned that the pioneering movement is broadening into a pioneering movement of places for testing and tasting. In this chapter, our new fellow travellers present themselves: messy churches, places of presence, monastic places and communities for sharing faith based daily life. They identify challenges for their situation and pass on interesting advice. In the previous chapter it was also mentioned that the missionary and pioneering work of established congregations is not portrayed here. As a pioneering movement of places for testing and tasting, we have less insight into this. But this does mean that the work of God in our church is even more colourful than we can see here. At the intersection of church and village, for example, there are many great initiatives going on.

Messy churches: discovering, celebrating and eating together

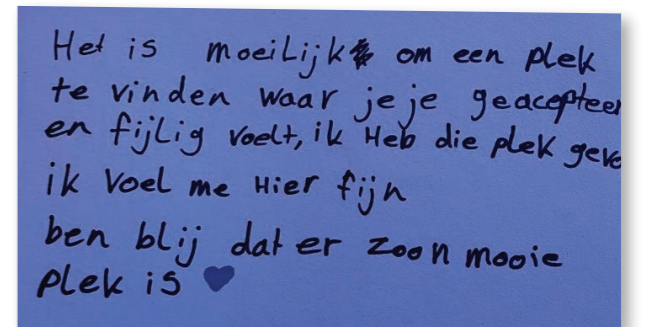
Messy Church is a form of being a church in which young and old encounter Bible stories in a creative way, by doing activities together through which they discover the Bible stories step by step. A messy church has the characteristics of a church service because of the celebration with prayer, songs and a blessing, and is missionary because of the DNA of hospitality, discovery and eating together. It appeals to people with little or no familiarity with church, as well as to church-involved families who would like to have a shared experience on Sundays in their busy lives. A messy church is usually embedded in an existing congregational structure. This can be in a local church but also in a pioneering place as part of an ecumenical cooperation. In practice, therefore, a messy church almost always functions in connection with other places of being church.

Power of this form

This missionary way of being church with all ages gives new impetus to the church. Both religious and non-believing (grand)parents feel at ease during these celebrations because of the atmosphere and the set-up of discovering together. Through messy church, people start to feel more connected to the church.

Challenges

How do you reach the intended people, how do you keep teenagers engaged, and how do you find volunteers? But also: how do you involve the church congregation, and how do you ensure that messy church is not a fun event but really a form of being church? How do you guarantee that this way of being church continues as part of the church congregation in the event of changes in the



▲ Every week, visitors at the pioneering place Klimop in Winterswijk close the week with a moment of silence. Reactions, questions and feelings are expressed through the Thought Book.

core team? These are questions that many messy churches are trying to find their way into.

Advice to the Church

The church tends to think in terms of age groups; Children and young people in particular often have their own service and are, as it were, separate from the rest of the congregation. Involve as a messy church as many ages as possible, for example by focusing on interest or hobby. Who likes painting, Lego, or working in the vegetable garden? Make sure that children, young people and adults feel welcome and are allowed to help organise. And show some of it to the rest of the congregation. Hang the painting or Lego artwork somewhere, and hand out the home-grown vegetables.

Number of places

Number of officially registered messy churches (February 2024): 272
First messy church: December 2014 in Barneveld

Want to know more?

protestantsekerk.nl/kliederkerk
kliederkerk@protestantsekerk.nl

11. protestantsekerk.nl/download7065/Voorproefje%20rapport%20'Moza%C3%AFek%20van%20kerkplekken'.pdf. Chapter 6 on the ministry was not approved.

Meaning at School in Waalwijk: working on relationships

'Meaning at School' is a pioneering place at a Protestant Christian primary school in Waalwijk where the Bible stories are still told but where 80 to 90% of the children have no religion at home. One of the activities in the quest to search with the children and their (grand)parents how the Christian faith can be relevant in answering their life questions, is 'messy class'. As a local pastor, pioneer Otto Grevink got contacts at the school and started to establish relationships there: with the students, with their parents and with the teachers. "It starts with establishing and working on relationships, and then activities and forms naturally emerge from that." This pioneering place was born out of that, with activities in the classrooms, with families, with the parents separately, at Easter and Christmas. It happens at school, but theologically what happens at this school is church, Grevink believes. It is very fluid and porous, and intertwined with the entire community that the school embodies. For a place like this, it is necessary to think fluidly about community; Involvement and relationships are already splendid in themselves.
zinopschool.nl



Photo: Marianne Roosdorp

Places of presence: 'being with' instead of 'doing something for'

A diaconal place of presence is a faith community that focuses on the outside world, in particular on the vulnerable people in their environment. It's about being side by side with these people. This can be done, for example, by drinking coffee together at the weekly morning meeting in the neighbourhood and sharing each other's joys and sorrows. It is not really a new or an extra task for the faith community, it is looking for a place where people already come together and being present there, starting from 'how can I be with' instead of from 'how can I do something for'.

The power of this form

The strength lies in the simplicity of the form. A cup of coffee and an open attitude is enough. It is based on reciprocity and equality, and the entire faith community participates; It is not just a matter of a diaconal worker or pastor. By being diaconally involved in the neighbourhood, something changes in the lives of the people who are in trouble, but something also changes in the lives of the faith community.

Churches that form a diaconal place of presence appear to be of real support to people who are in need. They alleviate poverty, get people out of their isolation, help people who have a residence permit to turn a house into a home, teach people the Dutch language, ensure that someone can tell their story, and more.

The churches themselves are also changing, for example from a congregation with mostly elderly people to a multicultural congregation of all

Focus Deventer: not what you are but who you are

Focus arose from the needs of people who suddenly found themselves out of work. The meeting place was set up by the Protestant Congregation of Deventer in the Meester Geertshuis, the ecumenical diaconal center in the city. Focus wants to offer inspiration, self-insight and perspective to people who are facing life questions. It wants to be a place of inspiration and inner spirit for them, says project leader Annemiek van Reenen. "People who suddenly lose their work go through a grieving process. Focus give you the opportunity to reflect on yourself. It's not about what you are, it's about who you are." Nowadays it is much more widely accessible, people can have a need for depth for all kinds of reasons. "It's a fairly fixed group that comes, but self-insight is good for everyone," says Van Reenen. "What makes you view things the way you do? It's a learning process, a development, being able to handle it again. We discuss a theme or walk meditatively, but we also do fun things, such as photographing in the city, enjoying the beauty."

The diaconate of the Protestant Congregation of Deventer is involved. meestergeertshuis.nl/krachtvoer



ages. And it gets them moving; Church members experience what they are church for and are committed to being diaconally present in their neighborhood.

Challenges

- Patience. Diaconal presence is first about relationship, only after that - and not always - about helping.
- Serving one's neighbour and honouring God is all connected. At the same time, it is an art to keep a connection between what happens in the diaconate and the church service. Someone involved in both can play an important role in this. Sometimes this is the pastor or church worker, sometimes a deacon or volunteer.

Advice to the Church

- Reflect on why you exist as a church. Diaconate plays an important role in the vocation of the church and is not an extra for it.
- Look at what you have already been given by God, in people who belong to the church and people around it, in a building, in relationships. See how that can play a role in diaconal presence.

Number of places

10 official places of presence (as of 2019)

Want to know more?

protestantsekerk.nl, search by place of presence

Monastic places and communities for sharing faith based daily life

About 10 to 15% of the pioneering places are labeled 'monastic'. In a survey in 2019, 40% of these initiatives indicated that they had many monastic characteristics. Almost half of these places thought they had some of these characteristics, more than 10% said they did not consider themselves monastic. It turns out that the term 'monasticism' is mainly associated with the offering of activities related to the monastic tradition, such as the Liturgy of the Hours, silence, meditation and lectio divina. Sustainable community building is not an objective for many monastic initiatives, which are not pioneering places. One initiative where this did happen is

Nijkleaster in Jorwerd, one of the first pioneering places which has since grown into a community and retreat center. This also applies to De Pelgrim in Zoetermeer, which has become a missionary core congregation.

The power of this form

In response to the hectic pace of daily life, the 24-hour economy and the constant stimuli of social media, there is an increasing longing in our society for slowing down and stillness, for contemplation and care for the soul. Ecclesiastical life, in which the emphasis is often on organisation and activity, cannot escape this either. Monastic initiatives respond to this, with a range of activities that meet this desire.

Challenges

Making initiatives 'more sustainable' requires entrepreneurship, collaboration with partners and community building. Monastic pioneering places often do not have an explicit missionary focus (outward-looking) nor do they often have a focus on sustainable community building, rather on hospitality for all kinds of people who can come and go.

Advice to the Church

Be careful, don't give the label 'monastic' to random initiatives. The term is too easily used for all kinds of activities and initiatives. In addition, it is questionable whether 'monastic' initiatives fit within the (former) frameworks of pioneering places. Give more attention to Christian communities and their growth and development in the context of the mosaic of church forms, in collaboration with the Association of Religious Communities in the Netherlands and New Sion.

Number of places

The number of monastic places is difficult to estimate, as there are different definitions for monasticism. Within the pioneering places, there are a few dozen initiatives. In addition, it is estimated that dozens of initiatives have emerged that have not been pioneering places.

Want to know more?

verenigingreligieuzeleefgemeenschappen.nl
protestantsekerk.nl > seek for 'verkenning monastiek pionieren (2015), download

We wonder as we wander in Slangenburg: catch your breath and move on

Looking for silence, contemplation, depth and connection with yourself and the (An)other? The pioneering ground 'We wonder as we wander in Slangenburg' meets this need. This pioneering ground makes use of the Slangenburg church on the edge of the forest near Doetinchem, a unique place that invites contemplation. And that is what the pioneering team, which consists of five enthusiastic people, aims to do with the place. "We welcome people who are on their way in life, who are looking for something but sometimes don't know what," says Janny Jansons of the pioneering team. "We give them something from the Bible, something that is valuable, in the hope that they will look for God. We're not out to keep people. If that does happen, that's great. For example, there is a small group that comes weekly for the walk."

It is a place to recover your breath and then move on with your life, just like a monastery. Activities include an inspiration afternoon around the labyrinth, a half-day meditative painting, a meditative meeting with the Bible or a day of silence. And there is always walking, in nature and regularly to the nearby abbey, rain or shine.

spoorzoekenslangenburg.nl



III. Intercultural diversity in the fellowship of travelers

Research into the strength and vulnerability of intercultural pioneering places connected with the Protestant Church in the Netherlands

Because our society is becoming more diverse, a greater diversity of church forms is needed, as the synod of the Protestant Church in The Netherlands said in 2005.¹² The growing diversity in the Netherlands has several facets that require attention, but that certainly applies to cultural diversity. Will churches and pioneering grounds be able to respond positively to this? What does cultural diversity look like within the pioneering movement? What contributes to intercultural community building and what do places need to increase and strengthen their cultural diversity?

Hans Euser researched the intercultural diversity in the fellowship of travelers in the pioneering movement. Below is a summary of his research, the results of which were presented in the report *Cross-border Pioneering*.¹³

Summary Pioneering

Intercultural pioneering places

With the dozens of church places that have been created in recent years, new groups are being reached. The impact study from 2020 shows that almost 60% of those involved had not previously joined a church. In this follow-up study, we specifically zoomed in on the pioneering places where a relatively large group of people with a migration background is involved, the so-called intercultural pioneering places. It seems that the cultural diversity in the pioneering places is increasing. The Protestant Church wants to know whether this is indeed the case and what factors promote or hinder that development, what challenges these pioneers face, and how these places can best be supported. The report *Cross-border pioneering in the Netherlands* provides insight into the development of the pioneering movement

over the past ten years (2013-2023), and takes a closer look at the challenges pioneers face in the multicultural society in which they operate.

Connecting to the context

The introductory chapter describes why this research is relevant and what questions it seeks to answer. Pioneering places want to connect with their context. Dutch society is becoming more and more culturally diverse. This raises the question of the extent to which the pioneers succeed in connecting with this changing environment. All the more so because the Protestant Church, according to its policy plan, seeks to connect with migrant Christians.

To this end, research has been conducted into the role that pioneering places play in this. This research has focused on the characteristic strength and vulnerability of intercultural pioneering places. It has mapped out what the cultural diversity within the pioneering movement looks like now. And it has examined which factors promote intercultural community building and which challenges intercultural pioneering places face.

Research method

The next chapter deals with the method of research. Quantitative and qualitative research was used. The 183 pioneering places that were once started were first investigated on the basis of data from the database of the Protestant Church. Subsequently, the 106 places that are still supported as pioneering places were contacted with a short survey. 70% responded. The data was collected, analyzed and presented.

Six intercultural pioneering places were then selected for a visit and two interviews, one with the (Dutch) pioneer and one with a member of the pioneering team who has a different cultural background from the pioneer. This resulted in twelve interviews with people from seven different

cultural backgrounds. The interviews were transcribed, analysed and processed anonymously in the report.

Cultural diversity

The report then gives an overview of the cultural diversity within the pioneering movement. Of the 183 initiatives started, 52 pioneering places have moved on to other forms of being church. In addition, 25 pioneering grounds have stopped. The 106 pioneering grounds supported by the Protestant Church at the end of 2023 collectively reach an estimated 14,500 people (regular and irregular visitors). It is striking that about 60% of the 74 pioneering places that were surveyed indicate that there is a certain degree of cultural diversity present in the pioneering place. This is not surprising, since 75% of pioneering grounds function in a multicultural context. However, the pioneering teams are generally monocultural; Only 30% say they have an intercultural team.

Promoting factors

The next chapter provides insight into the factors that promote cross-cultural pioneering. The surveys show that a multicultural environment is a prerequisite, and a special focus on other cultures and intercultural leadership teams greatly help in building culturally diverse pioneering places.

The in-depth interviews show that intercultural pioneers are driven by different motives. They often have a personal biography that prepares them for intercultural coexistence, because they were born or lived abroad. Usually there is also a theological motivation: the one God loves all people, therefore all people who love God should be one. Almost all of them have a missionary drive to make disciples from all nations. It is striking that some explicitly mention that the desire for justice drives them; Racism and discrimination are more likely to come to light in an intercultural context and



▲ Every week, the pioneering place Klimop in Winterswijk cooks a vegetarian meal for those in need in the neighborhood, using fresh vegetables from its own organic vegetable garden.

12. See quotation from *Mosaic Church Forms* in the introduction to this brochure.

13. His entire research is available at protestantsekerk.nl/pionieren.

living together can be practiced. Sometimes pragmatic motives play a role, such as the importance of learning the language and good integration. For only a few diaconate is a driving force.

Join a diverse target group

An intercultural approach is very beneficial. It creates relationships with people from other cultures, that not always happens naturally. Many lessons are learned, for example about cultural differences, creating more mutual understanding. And the life of faith is enriched when other perspectives from the world's churches are shared.

When it comes to *best practices*, intercultural pioneering places build inclusive communities where values such as curiosity, adaptability, trust and good communication are indispensable. They are committed to intercultural leadership that sets a good example of intercultural coexistence, holds on to the importance of diversity in a visionary way, and builds bridges in teams and the community in a connecting way. And finally, they look for accessible activities that match a diverse target group in terms of form and content.

Different challenges

The report then elaborates on the challenges faced by the pioneers in intercultural pioneering places. The surveys showed that being intercultural is seen as important and as something to pay attention to in training. The learning questions mentioned are often about understanding the different cultures, making contact and building intercultural communities.

During the interviews, seven challenges were identified that most pioneers struggle with. There is the personal challenge of fear and uncertainty, shame and impatience. And there is a relational challenge with believers from different cultures who sometimes come into conflict with each other. Furthermore, there are cultural, theological, administrative, financial and spiritual challenges that are more complex, because of the greater diversity of opinions than in homogeneous groups.

Conclusions and recommendations

In the final chapter, the report answers the research question in the form of a number of conclusions. Pioneering grounds show that being an intercultural church is possible and attractive, but also extremely vulnerable, complex and complicated. In the end, it can only be done with

the help of God who makes unity in diversity possible, and so it becomes "worthwhile."

Finally, recommendations are made to the (intercultural) pioneering places, to the National Pioneering Team and to the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. The latter is advised, among other things, to look for forms of rapprochement with Christians and churches with a migration background. This can be done by expanding the local mosaic of church forms and by connecting with existing non-cultural networks of churches.

The report concludes with a number of appendices, including those containing research data on the FTE related size of the paid appointments and the level of education of pioneers.

Reflection on the importance of this research for the whole Church

The study of the intercultural approach is important not only for the pioneering movement but for the church as a whole. In the vision paper of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands *'Yours is the future'* it is said that we want to meet migrant Christians as equals, that we want to serve and enrich each other and that we want to look for concrete and spiritual unity in Christ, in all diversity (p. 33). Research makes it clear that being an intercultural church is possible and attractive, but that it also brings with it considerable challenges. *"The fact that this is not an easy task makes the vocation all the greater. It takes a lot of grace to make progress here"* (p. 33). Not every local church will be in an environment where being an intercultural church is the most obvious option, but even then we cannot close our ears to the calling that lies in this area. Leaders in the church (pastors, elders, deacons, church workers, classis ministers, etc.) are challenged by this research to develop an intercultural awareness. Sometimes we don't see clearly how much many different cultures are present in our village or city. The local congregation is also challenged by this research to develop intercultural sensitivity. In this way, as a whole church, we have an opportunity to grow spiritually into a church where intercultural diversity does not separate us from each other, but where the love of God and each other makes us one. In a polarised world, this can be a great sign and foretaste of God's new world.

IV. Continuing the Journey ...

In the national pioneering team, we not only look backward, but also forward. We want to continue our journey and try to discern which path is the most suitable. Below we give our thoughts on the continuation of this journey. In this way, we outline directions that can be translated into policy.

We give our thoughts in a creative way. We imagine to be looking back in eight years and to be reporting on the journey. We hope to read the following in the account of our journey:

Focused on God's new world with Jesus as Lord

Despite the fact that so much has changed in the world and in our churches in the last eight years, we can say with gratitude that as a movement we have remained focused on God's new world and on Jesus as Lord. This focus on God's future, which breaks through into the present, was already the supporting theology in the vision paper of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands *Yours is the future* (2020). At the time, it was already the guiding vision in the movement of testing places. The fact that we have been able to maintain this vision and focus for the past eight years is a gift of God's grace. As people and as a movement, we have no control over this. God has given us the grace to prayerfully focus on what His Spirit is doing in our midst and to work with heart, soul, mind and all our strength.

We see that many places for testing and tasting have grown in spreading light and hope in their villages and neighbourhoods. They have a positive impact on their environment. Together with other neighbouring churches, they are recognised by the government and municipal agencies. They want to work with the churches on social issues because they recognise that something positive and healing emanates from these communities.

Looking back, we see that there was an enormous pressure to interpret 'God's new world' one-sidedly, as if places for testing and tasting were only about their social contribution. Fortunately, there has been an ever-increasing boldness to be a truly Christian movement, focused on Jesus Christ as Lord. Not ashamed of its own identity and therefore very open and inclusive towards others. Not locked up in ecclesiastical boxes, but learning from the worldwide church and talking to a range

of different groups about seeking peace and justice in society.

Looking back, we don't know exactly how this focus on God's new world has grown in our movement. We have certainly focused on it in our fellowship and training, but it feels as though we've been moved forward more than moving forward ourselves, moved forward by the Spirit of Jesus Himself. This has been an inspiring experience.

A varied, bottom-up learning movement

Eight years ago, in our report *A movement of places for testing and tasting* (2024), we already talked about the fact that a movement must grow from the bottom up and at the same time needs guidance based on vision and values. We are pleased that letting go of control and steering from vision and values has made room for a grassroots movement over the past eight years.

We have seen it clearly in relation to so-called 'blank spots', places where the church no longer had a presence. A breakthrough came when different classes and regions started to take more responsibility and started talking together about the opportunities and needs in 'their' part of the country. They began to pray together and dream how they could reflect something of God's new world despite declining membership and church closures. They stimulated congregations and Christians to develop new initiatives based on vision and values and came up with a wise plan to invest part of the money remaining when churches were closed in new initiatives. New initiatives have also emerged in regions where the church was less represented. The number of intercultural places for testing and tasting has increased considerably. For every 10,000 migrants, there is now a place of

being church, and the 'older' intercultural places for testing and tasting have grown into stable faith communities for the second and third generation. We have also seen a steady growth in the number of communities of all shapes and sizes over the last eight years.

We also look back with joy on the increase in diversity in lighter, temporary and 'low-budget' initiatives. We are surprised how many young people found the online training courses helpful. Despite the fact that they were not part of a team and despite the fact that they had limited time, they still wanted to make a positive difference in small groups (sometimes of only two or three

people) at work, at their sports club or in a community center. The young people who lead these initiatives in most cases have no or only limited theological training, but are deeply moved by the vision and values of the movement.

At the same time, much has been invested in the recruitment of theologically trained workers in the church. We are pleased to announce that, in collaboration with universities of applied sciences, general universities and partners, there is now a training course for pioneers in experimental grounds with a focus on theology, missiology, practical experience, spiritual formation and specific contexts and target groups (including

intercultural groups). The insights gained from the movement of places for testing and tasting over the past 24 years have been incorporated into this. It is also significant that the route through the training is partly determined by the gifts of the student (pastor/teacher; gifts for enterprise; prophetic gifts.....). As a result of this accredited training, the working conditions for the pioneers of places for testing and tasting have improved considerably.

The dream that the movement of places for testing and tasting would be a breeding ground for building blocks for theologising in a postmodern society was already alive eight years ago. The impetus for research that was realised at that time has indeed contributed to sharper empirical observation and theological-missiological reflection on practice. We now also see more clearly where Dutch society requires a different approach from 'Fresh Expressions of the Church' in England. We also learned a lot about the balance between concept development around successful initiatives (similar to a concept such as messy church, which was already widely used eight years ago) and contextualisation. Frequently the application of a concept was endangered by insufficiently taking the context into account. But we have also seen that the value of new concepts can extend beyond the specific context in which they were developed.

An interactive and rewarding mosaic of places of being church

The 2020 vision paper of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands asserted that new forms of being church were not only developed in new situations, established congregations were also looking for new ways to relate to their context. Through renewal and diversification, the church was beginning to develop into a church mosaic (p. 49). But in 2024 the movement of places for testing and tasting tended to be separate from established congregations. The colours in the mosaic were beautifully juxtaposed, but mutual solidarity and mutual learning were often still limited.

Now, eight years later, this has changed substantially. The process has not been easy. The many crises in church, society and the world

have unified us. Somehow, the Spirit of God has led our fixation away from the success of our own church or place for testing and tasting to a shared focus on the hope that God's new world brings. As a result, we have started to think more in a complementary way rather than in a competitive way, and greater solidarity between all kinds of pieces of the mosaic has evolved. We have become a more interactive and rewarding mosaic.

The course 'Church with a mission' and the specialisation 'Church in the world' for pastors and church workers have contributed to the fact that the theology of God's mission (*missio Dei*) has taken deep root in the church. Because established congregations and places for testing and tasting live and work from the same theological presuppositions, it has become easier to learn collectively from the various practices. This theological vision has also given direction in a liberating way to the search for a 'lighter church'. We have been pleased to see how older and aging congregations offered support to new places for testing and tasting and how people from the places for testing and tasting grounds lovingly cared for the elderly. This mutual love even had a financial component.

The regional superintendents have played an important role in the interactive mosaic. Despite the fact that they had a lot to deal with because of decline in membership of the church, they continued to wisely stimulate mutual learning between established congregations and places for testing and tasting. They were convinced that the values of the pioneering journey are important for all churches and Christians.

Because of how the church has developed over the past eight years, Christians in the Netherlands have grown in their ability to listen deeply (value 1), in their willingness to serve and love (value 2), in bringing reconciliation and peace to a polarised world (value 3), in inspiring people to discover the way of Jesus (value 4), in shaping the church together with others in such a way that there is no unnecessary clash with the context they are church in (value 5), and in their willingness to pass on what they have learnt and at the same time learn from others (value 6). A church mosaic that is nourished by these values and the vision of God's new world is a blessing for our country.



▲ During the summer holidays, those staying at home can enjoy a fun gourmet meal at the pioneering place Het Badhuis in Zwijndrecht.

Acknowledgements

We thank the partners of the National Pioneering Team for their leadership in the movement. Working together with many organisations and denominations has proved to be of great added value in the further development of the pioneering movement. We also thank the leaders of the movement of messy churches, places of presence and monastic places and communities for sharing faith based daily life for their vision, wisdom and willingness to move forward with us as fellow travelers. We would also like to thank the leadership in the support organisation of the Protestants Church for the space we are given to shape the movement.

We are also happy with the inspiration and support from Fresh Expressions of Church (England) and our partners in Europe who have stimulated us through their enthusiasm, curiosity and questions.

We also thank the Synod which initiated and enduringly enabled our work with their faith and vision.

Follow up

If you have become enthusiastic about the movement of testing grounds and want to explore whether you could possibly get started with this yourself, check out [lerenpionieren.nl](https://www.lerenpionieren.nl). Here you can also find the online materials and dates for various meetings. If you have any further questions, please send an email to pionieren@protestantsekerk.nl.



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