

Five years Protestant Church in the Netherlands

On May 1st it has been five years that the Protestant Church in the Netherlands came into being. Three churches united into one church. Two traditions came together. This church-unification was a unique happening. In our country we are more used to conflicts and divisions than unifications. This unification was therefore a historic event. We sincerely rendered thanks to God for it. Many foreign partners we meet in ecumenical associations rejoiced with us. Although it continues to be painful that not everyone could join into the unification. After five years this pain is still felt in many places.

More important than looking back, is to turn to the future. Not to make all kind of predictions. We know that the future is in God's hand. Above all, the church is not our project. It is possible that we as a church are more and more marginalized – and we see it happening – but we should not begin lamentations over that. It should rather be an incentive to get clear what our core-business is: being church living from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Being church pursuing the course of the living Lord. Therefore a church – even in the margin - which is also open to all people God places on our path.

The Protestant Church is a church with rich traditions. Those traditions are not there to be followed meekly, but they are like sources that have to be made fluid and that can help to be a relevant church now, which really has something to offer to people of this time. Without the roots of the tradition a church starts to float. We live as well from what God gave our ancestors. That helps us to transfer that to our descendants.

The Protestant Church is a church with space for opinions and experience of different kind. Sometimes that varies from congregation to congregation, but also within one congregation this variety is regularly to be found. This is not because we are so generous or tolerant, but because the one church of Christ is such a large house. Sometimes we fundamentally disagree with one and other. Then we should not let go of each other. In the future as well it will be to enter into discussion with each other, in the light of God's Word, in order to come over and over again to the unity in faith, hope and love.

Finally: it is not about the future of the Protestant Church as such. That is a *shape* and a shape comes into being and passes. It is about the future of the Church, in the Netherlands as well. Therefore we seek for the encounter with other churches and Christians. We especially think of Christians from other cultures and countries which do not hide their being-Christian here. With them as well we want to be in the future church in the Netherlands.

April 23rd 2009, Dr. Arjan Plaisier, secretary of the general synod of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands