True Story!

Stones That Tell a Story

Ten places in the Netherlands with a story

10 true stories

WIM KAMPHORST

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True Story! Stones That Tell a Story

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The stories in this book are based on Wim Kamphorst's books for adults. The sources are listed there with each chapter.

This book can be read and downloaded free of charge at whispermagazine.org.

For you

Do you know the best thing about the stories in this book? They all really happened.

Ten places in the Netherlands where something special happened. You can still go there. A spring, an attic, a house, a field. Every place has a story.

Some stories are exciting. Some are sad. And some are a little bit funny too. But they are all true.

After each story there is a short part called **True story?** There you read what we know for sure, and what we only know because someone told it themselves later. Because that matters too: being honest about what you know.

After that come a few questions to talk about together, a verse from the Bible and sometimes a tip for going to see the place yourself.

Enjoy reading!

For parents and teachers

The stories are written for children of about 8 to 12 years old. You can read them aloud to children from about age 6. Each story takes about eight to ten minutes.

The stories come from Wim Kamphorst's books for adults. All the sources are listed there. Nothing has been made up: no conversations, no thoughts, no details that are not in a source. Hard subjects like war, illness and death are told honestly, but without upsetting details. Feel free to read a story yourself first, so you know what is coming.

Bible verses are from the New King James Version.

Utrecht: the little church inside the wall of a fort

Look down

In the middle of Utrecht, a city in the center of the Netherlands, there is a square: the Domplein. On one side stands the Dom Tower. It is so tall that almost everyone looks up.

But look down for a moment. In the paving stones there is a long, rust-brown line of steel. That line shows where a wall used to stand. It was the wall of a Roman fort. A fort is a place with walls around it, where soldiers live.

A little further on you see other signs in the stones. They show where churches used to stand. One of those little churches was built by a monk from England, more than thirteen hundred years ago. His name was Willibrord.

How did a monk from England end up here, in an old fort by the river?

A boy in the monastery

Willibrord was born in 657 or 658, in the north of England. An old story of his life tells that his mother died when he was small. His father took him to a monastery when he was six or seven years old. A monastery is a house where monks live, pray and work together.

That was not strange in those days. Willibrord grew up among the monks. When he was about twenty, he promised to stay a monk himself.

After that he went to Ireland. There was a monastery there with an English leader. His name was Egbert. Willibrord stayed there for twelve years.

Twelve men in a boat

In Ireland the monks did something special. They chose to leave their own country. They left their families behind, to live for God in a foreign land. That reminds us of Abraham in the Bible. God told him to leave his country too.

Egbert himself wanted to go to the peoples across the sea. He was not able to. So he sent others.

In 690 twelve men got into a boat. Willibrord was one of them. They crossed the sea to the Low Countries. That is the area where the Netherlands and Belgium are now. They may have come ashore where Katwijk is today. But nobody knows for sure exactly where the boat landed on the beach.

In the north lived the Frisians. They believed in their own gods. Willibrord wanted to tell them about Jesus.

A powerful protector

First he traveled to Pepin. Pepin was the most powerful man among the Franks. They were a large people living south of the Frisians. Pepin had just fought against the king of the Frisians. That king was called Radbod. Pepin had won.

Pepin sent the monks to Friesland. He gave them his protection.

That was useful, but it was also difficult. Where Pepin was in charge, Willibrord could preach. Where Radbod came back, Willibrord had to run away. Because of that, many Frisians saw the new faith as the faith of the enemy.

A new name in Rome

In 695 Willibrord traveled to Rome. That is where the pope lived, the leader of the church. The pope made him archbishop of the Frisians. An archbishop is a very important leader in the church. He is above other bishops.

That was quite a big plan. There were hardly any Christians among the Frisians yet!

The pope also gave him a new name: Clement. But Willibrord almost never used that name.

When he came back, Pepin gave him a place of his own. It was the old Roman fort on the river Rhine. The Romans had been gone for a long time. There was already a small church in that fort, but it was broken down. Willibrord rebuilt it. He also built a new church. He called it the Church of the Savior. The Savior is Jesus.

Later the great Dom Church grew out of that rebuilt little church.

Old stories

There are old stories about what else Willibrord did. They were written down by a learned man, more than fifty years after Willibrord's death. He wrote them to honor Willibrord. We do not know if everything really happened that way.

According to an old story, Willibrord came to an island with a holy spring. You were only allowed to get water there if you were silent. Willibrord baptized people in that spring. King Radbod heard about it. One of Willibrord's companions was killed.

Another old story is about King Radbod himself. He was almost baptized, it says. He already had one foot in the baptism water. Then he asked where his ancestors were, who had never been baptized. The answer was: not in heaven. Then Radbod pulled his foot back. This story is probably a legend.

But it does show something. For a Frisian, choosing Jesus was very hard. It also meant choosing against your ancestors. What would you have done?

Losing everything, and starting again

In 714 Pepin died. Then King Radbod saw his chance. He took the land back. Churches were destroyed and priests were chased away. Willibrord had to leave Utrecht. Almost twenty-five years of work came to a stop.

He probably went to his monastery in Echternach. That is in the country now called Luxembourg.

But in 719 Radbod died. Willibrord went back to Utrecht. By then he was already about sixty. And he simply started again. He repaired churches and taught people about God.

He got help from another monk from England: Boniface. Boniface worked with him for three years.

In 739 Willibrord died in Echternach. He was 81 years old.

A rider with a little church

If you go to Utrecht now, you can still find a lot of Willibrord. Under the Domplein you can go down with a flashlight. There you see pieces of the old fort and of the old churches.

Walk a few minutes further and you see a big bronze statue. It is Willibrord on a horse. He is wearing a monk's robe. In his hand he holds a small church. Cyclists just ride around it.

And back on the Domplein that rust-brown line is still in the stones. That is where the wall of the fort stood. Inside that wall a monk from across the sea built his little church.

True story?

Yes. Several old sources tell that Willibrord came across the sea with eleven others in 690, became archbishop in Rome and built churches in the old fort in Utrecht. His childhood in the monastery and the stories about the island with the spring we only know from one life story, written to honor him. The story of Radbod with his foot in

the baptism water is a legend from much later. Nobody knows exactly where the boat landed in 690.

Talk about it

- Willibrord lost everything and started again at sixty. What do you do when something goes wrong?
- For the Frisians, choosing Jesus was hard, because it felt like choosing against their family. Can you understand that?

From the Bible

Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. (Genesis 12:1)

Go and see for yourself

The Domplein is in the middle of the old center of Utrecht, between the Dom Tower and the Dom Church. The steel line and the churches in the stones can always be seen. Under the square is DOMunder, where you walk past the old remains with a flashlight. The statue of Willibrord on his horse stands on the Janskerkhof, across from the Janskerk (Saint John's Church).

Dokkum: the chests full of books

A pump by a spring

In Dokkum, a small town in Friesland in the north of the Netherlands, there is an old-fashioned iron pump on the Bronlaan. It stands by a spring with brick edges. Behind the spring is a big brick chapel. It is shaped like a half circle and open in the middle. More than sixteen hundred people fit inside. Above your head there is only the sky.

Close to the spring a stone man stands on a pedestal. He is about two and a half meters tall, a little more than eight feet. He holds a book above his head.

That man is Boniface. People have told stories about him and about this spring for a very long time. Some of them really happened. Others were added later. So what is true?

An Englishman with a new name

Boniface was born around 675 in England. At first his name was Winfried. He became a monk and a priest. A monk is someone who lives in a monastery to serve God.

In 716 he crossed the sea. He came to Utrecht, to another English monk: Willibrord. Willibrord had been telling the Frisians about Jesus for years. In those days the Frisians lived all along the coast. They believed in their own gods. They lived on terps. A terp is a hill of earth that people built themselves. That way they stayed dry when the sea came in.

Later Winfried was given the name Boniface. He worked mostly in Germany. He became an archbishop. That is a very important leader in the church. He also founded a big monastery in Fulda.

One more time to Friesland

In 754 Boniface went to Friesland one more time. By then he was about eighty years old. He still wanted to tell people about Jesus and baptize them.

A group of people traveled with him. There were priests and monks among them. We do not know exactly how many people there were.

Boniface set up camp by a stream called the Boorne. He had agreed on a day with some Frisians who had just been baptized. On that day they would come back. Then he wanted to lay his hands on them. That was how he blessed new Christians.

``Stop fighting"

It was June 5, 754, very early in the morning. The Frisians he was expecting did not come. Instead, a group of armed men came toward the camp.

We know what happened next from a book by a priest named Willibald. He wrote it down within about fifteen years. He was not there himself. He heard it from others.

Willibald wrote that Boniface's men grabbed their weapons. But Boniface came out of his tent and told them to stop fighting. You should overcome evil with good. He told the priests and monks not to be afraid. He used words of Jesus when he said it.

Then Boniface and his people were killed.

Imagine you were there. You have a sword in your hand, and your leader says: do not fight. What would you do?

No gold, only books

The attackers searched the camp. They found chests. They thought there was gold and silver inside! They took the chests with them. On the ships they also found wine, and they drank it all. After that they started arguing about the loot. They began fighting each other.

But when they opened the chests, there was no gold and no silver. There were only books inside. They threw the books away, into the fields and into the marsh. Willibald wrote that the books were found again later and taken to a monastery.

After his death Boniface was buried far away, in his own monastery in Fulda. He still lies there today.

According to an old story

And what about the spring? Willibald tells a story about it. He heard it from someone, who had heard it from someone else. So it is a thirdhand story.

According to that old story, a big mound was made at the place where Boniface died. A church was to be built on it. Years later one of the king's officials rode across it with his men. The horse of one of his servants sank into the soft ground. And when it came out, water started bubbling up. It was clear, fresh water.

Later the story was told differently. Then it was suddenly the horse of Boniface himself. Fresh water near the sea was very precious in Friesland. So it is not so strange that the story about the spring lived on.

The book above his head

And the book on the statue? That is an old story too. According to that story, Boniface held a book above his head to stop the sword. But Willibald writes nothing about that. This story only came much later. It is a legend.

There is something special, though. In Fulda there is a very old book with cuts in its edge. It looks as if someone hacked at it with a sword or an ax. Some people said: that is Boniface's book! But nobody knows that for sure. Many scholars do not believe it.

A spring that was found again

By the way, Willibald does not say that Boniface died in Dokkum. He only mentions the Boorne. Still, the people in Dokkum built a church for Boniface again and again. First of wood, then of stone. They always built on the same terp. Those remains still lie under the Markt, the market square.

For centuries people went on pilgrimage to Dokkum. A pilgrimage is a journey to a holy place to pray there. In 1853 an old spring was found again. People said: this is

the spring from the story. Nobody can prove whether that is right. In 1884 the pump was added. In 1934 the big chapel was built.

Now lots and lots of people come to the chapel every year. They walk through the park, past the pump and the spring. And there Boniface still stands, with his book above his head.

True story?

It is certain that Boniface and his people were killed in Friesland in June 754. What he said and the story of the chests with books we only know from Willibald, who was not there. The spring under the horse is an old miracle story from thirdhand. The book above his head is a later legend. Nobody knows for sure if he really died in Dokkum or if this is the same spring.

Talk about it

- Boniface told his people: do not fight back. Do you think that was brave, or not?
- The attackers looked for gold and found books. What is something that is worth more than gold to you?

From the Bible

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. (Matthew 10:28)

Go and see for yourself

The Bonifatiuskapel (Boniface Chapel) is on the Bronlaan in Dokkum, just outside the old town center. There you can see the spring with the pump, the open chapel, the park with the Stations of the Cross and the statue of Boniface with his book. In the town center the Martinuskerk (Saint Martin's Church) stands on the terp at the Markt. Museum Dokkum has an exhibition about the life of Boniface.

Deventer: the rich man who gave his house away

Two people without names

In Deventer, an old town in the east of the Netherlands, there is a square with a long name: the Lamme van Dieseplein. On that square stand two bronze statues. A man and a woman. The artist calls them brother and sister. They have no names. They are just busy with their work.

On the same square there is a museum: the Geert Groote Huis. A few streets away there used to be another house. That house is gone. But that is where it all began.

Because more than six hundred years ago a rich man gave that house away. His name was Geert Grote. Why did he do that?

A boy from the Brink

Geert was born in October 1340, in Deventer. His parents lived on the Brink, the big square in the middle of the town. His father sold cloth and was an important man. He was even the mayor.

When Geert was about ten, a terrible disease came: the plague. His father and his mother both died of it. An uncle took care of Geert. Geert got enough money from his parents to be able to study later on.

He was very clever. When he was about fifteen he went to Paris, to the most famous university of that time. He learned all sorts of things: law, medicine, and about God and the Bible. But he also read books about the stars and about magic.

An easy life

After that Geert got two nice jobs in the church. One in Aachen and one in Utrecht. He was paid a lot of money for them every year. He did not always have to do much for it.

He bought books, lots and lots of books. He had everything a clever boy from a rich family could wish for.

Until he got sick.

Books in the fire

Around 1372 Geert became very sick in Deventer. He asked for the last blessing. The church gives that to people who are dying.

According to an old story, the priest then said: first you must get rid of your books about magic. Geert had those books burned on the Brink, for everyone to see. After that he got better.

We do not know for sure if it really happened that way. This story comes from old stories of Geert's life, which his students wrote later. But it is certain that Geert changed in those years.

There is another old story. According to that story, an unknown man in Cologne said to him: "You must become a different person." Nobody knows that for sure either.

What we do know: Geert had a friend from his student days. That friend was called Hendrik and he was the leader of a monastery near Arnhem. In 1374 Hendrik came to visit Geert. After their talks, Geert knew what he wanted. He gave up his church jobs. And with them, all that money.

Have you ever had to let go of something you really liked?

A house for poor women

In September 1374 Geert had an important paper drawn up. It said that his parents' house was from now on for poor women. In the old language it said: "arme luden die er Gode dynen willen". That means: poor people who wanted to serve God there. He kept a few rooms for himself.

The women did not become nuns. They stayed ordinary women. They prayed together and took care of sick people. They earned their food by spinning and weaving. They shared everything they had. Later they called themselves the Sisters of the Common Life. Common meant: together, shared.

That was new. A woman could now serve God in an ordinary house, in the middle of the town.

Geert himself went to stay for a few years in the monastery of his friend Hendrik. There he read the Bible and prayed a lot. But he did not stay there. He went back to the towns.

``I hunt for books like a miser"

By the way, Geert never let go of books. Only the magic books were gone. He kept collecting books that brought him closer to God. In a letter he wrote about himself: "I hunt for books like a miser." A miser is someone who wants

to keep everything for himself. Geert did not want money anymore. But books, yes!

Geert also translated a prayer book from Latin into Dutch. That way ordinary people could pray in their own language. About a thousand old handwritten copies of it still exist.

The churches got too small

In 1379 Geert got permission from the bishop to preach. He was not a priest, but a deacon. A deacon is allowed to preach, but is not a priest.

Geert traveled to many towns: Amsterdam, Haarlem, Leiden, Delft, Gouda, Utrecht. He preached in Dutch, sometimes for as long as two hours. According to the museum, the churches got too small.

He called on people to change their lives. He also said that some priests and monks were living the wrong way. They did not like that! They complained to the bishop. In 1383 Geert was no longer allowed to preach.

What did he do? He obeyed. He asked the pope to lift the ban. But he did not preach in public anymore.

Brothers with a pen

Meanwhile something new started in Deventer. A friend of Geert's, Florens, lived in a house with a group of young

men. They copied books by hand. Because printing books was not possible yet. That is how they earned their living. They became the Brothers of the Common Life.

In 1384 the plague was back in Deventer. Geert went to visit a friend who was sick. He got sick himself too. On August 20, 1384 he died. He was only forty-three.

But what he started went on. Houses of brothers and sisters appeared everywhere. A famous book also came from their circle: The Imitation of Christ. People still read it today.

A square full of memories

If you go looking for Geert in Deventer now, you will not find a grave. You will not find his house anymore either. You will find words of his at the place where his house stood. And you will find a museum at the place of the brothers' first chapel.

And on the Lamme van Dieseplein the bronze brother and sister still stand. They have no names. They are just busy with their work.

True story?

Yes. Many sources tell that Geert Grote was rich, gave up his jobs, gave his house to poor women in 1374, preached

and died of the plague in 1384. The story of the magic books on the Brink and the man in Cologne comes from old life stories, and nobody knows if it really went that way. He wrote the sentence about the miser and books himself, in a letter.

Talk about it

- Geert gave away his house and his money. What would you find hardest to give away?
- Geert was not allowed to preach anymore, and he obeyed. Do you think that was wise, or should he have kept preaching?

From the Bible

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:21)

Go and see for yourself

Museum Geert Groote Huis is on the Lamme van Dieseplein in the center of Deventer. The statues of brother and sister stand on the square. Around the corner from the Broederenkerk, near the place where his house stood, there are words by Geert. You can also go and look at the

Brink, where according to the old story his books were burned.

Witmarsum: the priest who could not stay silent any longer

A stone among the trees

Just outside the village of Witmarsum, in Friesland in the north of the Netherlands, there is a small piece of land. Water runs all around it, like a moat. You get there over a little brick causeway and through an iron gate.

Among the trees stands a tall, gray stone pillar. There is a little fence around it. On the base of the pillar there are words.

It is a quiet place. Still, people come here from very far away. From Germany, Canada, America, Mexico and many more countries. Once two men from Canada and America

were standing here. They met a group from Germany. And they could understand each other just fine! They all spoke Plautdietsch, a language that many Mennonites still speak.

Why do all those people come to a stone in a Frisian meadow? That is because of a priest who had doubts.

A boy from the clay country

His name was Menno. He was probably born in 1496, right here in Witmarsum. His father was called Simon. That is why he was called Menno Simons: Menno, the son of Simon. It was a simple family.

Menno became a priest in the Catholic Church. In those days that was the only church in Friesland. In 1524 he started as an assistant priest in Pingjum. That is a village very close to Witmarsum.

Later Menno himself wrote something honest about that time. He was a priest, but he had hardly ever read the Bible!

Bread that stayed bread

Everything we know about what Menno thought, we know from him. He wrote it down much later.

The Catholic Church believes that during the Mass, the bread and wine really become the body and blood of Jesus.

As a priest, Menno stood at the altar. But he could not believe it anymore. At first he thought the devil was whispering this into his head.

Then he did something he had never done before. He picked up the New Testament and started to read.

A tailor in Leeuwarden

In 1531 Menno heard something he never forgot. In Leeuwarden, a tailor had been sentenced to death. What had that man done? He had let himself be baptized as an adult.

That was not allowed back then. Almost everyone was baptized as a baby. But some people said: baptism belongs to someone who chooses for himself to believe in Jesus. A baby cannot do that yet. Those people were called Anabaptists, which means people who baptize again.

Menno asked his pastor where the Bible talks about baptizing babies. The pastor admitted: nowhere. Still, Menno just stayed a priest.

Around 1531 or 1532 Menno became the pastor in Witmarsum, his own village. Later he wrote honestly why he did that: for the money and to be important. He preached, but without love, he wrote.

A terrible week

Not all Anabaptists were peaceful. Some thought they had to fight for God with weapons.

In the spring of 1535 a group of about three hundred Anabaptists went to a monastery very close to Witmarsum. It was called the Oldeklooster. They took over the monastery and shut themselves inside. A week later soldiers came. It became a bloody battle. Many of those people were killed, also after the battle.

Menno lived very close by. He had preached against the ideas of these people.

But now he wrote something remarkable. Their blood had "fallen so hot on my heart", he wrote. He could not find any rest. Because he knew what the Bible said. But he did not live by it. And they had even given their lives, for a cause he had preached against.

Menno prayed a lot. He asked God for forgiveness and for courage. That went on for about nine months. And all that time he was still a priest.

Have you ever known something, but not dared to say it? How did that feel?

January 1536

In January 1536 Menno made a big decision. He stopped being a priest. He let go of his good job, and his good name. He chose a poor and uncertain life.

Soon after, he let himself be baptized, as an adult. A while later a small group of people came to him. They asked if he would become their leader. After a lot of prayer he said yes.

So Menno became a shepherd for small groups of believers. He traveled from group to group. He taught people from the Bible and baptized adults who chose Jesus for themselves. And he taught: a Christian does not fight with the sword.

A price on his head

That was very dangerous. On December 7, 1542 the government in Friesland announced an order. Nobody was allowed to help Menno anymore. Nobody was allowed to give him food or a bed. And whoever captured him would get a hundred gold coins!

Menno had to flee. He married Geertruyd and they had children. Together they lived on the run. They moved from town to town, further and further away. Still, Menno kept preaching and writing.

In 1561 he died in Germany. He was buried in his own garden. Nobody knows anymore exactly where that grave is.

Back at the stone

As early as 1544 the Anabaptists were called Mennists, after Menno. Now in the Netherlands they are called doopsgezinden, and in the rest of the world Mennonites. They live all over the world today.

That is why those people come to Witmarsum. According to an old story, Menno's house once stood at that place with the water around it. He is said to have preached there in secret. Now the gray pillar stands there, among the trees. Not a statue of a hero on a pedestal. Just a quiet stone, at the place where a priest decided he could not stay silent any longer.

True story?

Yes. Many sources tell that Menno Simons was a priest in Pingjum and Witmarsum, left the church in January 1536, became a leader of the peaceful Anabaptists and had a price put on his head. About his doubts, his prayers and the blood on his heart we only know because he wrote it down himself. That his house stood at the place of the monument is an old story.

Talk about it

- Menno honestly wrote that at first he became a priest for the money. Why do you think he wrote that down?
- Menno believed Christians should not fight with weapons. What do you think about that?

From the Bible

For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 3:11)

Go and see for yourself

The Menno Simons Monument is at It Fliet 5, just outside Witmarsum. You walk over a little causeway to the gray pillar among the trees. In the village there is the Mennonite church and the Menno Simons Hûs, with an exhibition about his life. In Pingjum, where Menno started, there is the Victoriuskerk (Saint Victor's Church) and a small hidden Mennonite church.

Brielle: the barn that disappeared

A line in the grass

On the edge of Brielle, an old fortified town near the coast in the west of the Netherlands, there is a big brick church. Behind that church is a lawn. A covered walkway runs around the lawn. In the middle of the grass is a small stone building with eight sides and a dome. It is an outdoor altar.

Now look carefully at the grass. A line of stone runs through it. That line makes a rectangle.

That rectangle shows where a barn used to stand. Peat was kept in it. Peat is dried bog soil, which people used to burn in their stoves long ago. The barn belonged to a monastery.

In that barn, in the summer of 1572, nineteen men died. They are called the Martyrs of Gorcum. A martyr is someone who is killed because of what he believes. Who were those men? And who did this to them?

A restless country

In 1572 the Netherlands was a restless country. The king of Spain was in charge. He was Catholic. Many people had become Protestant. The king did not allow that.

So Protestants were persecuted. A special court condemned almost nine thousand people, for heresy or treason. Heresy means: believing something different from what the church teaches. About a thousand people were actually killed.

A revolt against the king began. The leader of the revolt was William of Orange. Some of the rebels sailed the seas. They called themselves the watergeuzen, the Sea Beggars.

On April 1, 1572 the Sea Beggars captured the town of Den Briel. That was what Brielle was called back then. It was the first town they won from the Spanish. The leader of the Beggars' fleet was called Lumey.

But now things turned the other way. The Beggars were Protestant. They turned against the Catholic priests and monasteries. The monastery just outside Den Briel was robbed and emptied. That is where the peat barn stood.

Captured in Gorinchem

At the end of June 1572 the Beggars also captured the town of Gorinchem. In those days that town was called Gorcum. All the Catholic priests, monks and friars were taken prisoner.

In Gorinchem there was a monastery of Franciscans. They are friars who live poor and travel around to preach. The leader of the monastery was Nicholas Pieck. He was born in Gorinchem.

The town's parish priest was captured too. His name was Leonard van Veghel. A year earlier he could have taken a job in Gouda. But he stayed in Gorinchem.

Pieck and Van Veghel became the leaders of the group of prisoners.

For almost two weeks the men were treated badly. They had to give up their faith. But they would not.

A boat to Den Briel

At the beginning of July the prisoners were taken to Den Briel by boat. There four more priests were added. That made twenty-three.

On July 7 they had to come before Lumey. He said: if you give up two things, you can go free. The first was about the bread and wine at Mass. Catholics believe that Jesus is

really present in them. The second was that the pope is the leader of the church.

For the prisoners, that was the heart of their faith. Four men gave in. Nineteen said no.

Imagine you were standing there. You can go home if you say two sentences. What would you do?

A letter from the prince

William of Orange did not want this. He had ordered the Beggars to leave priests, monks and nuns alone. A letter from him even came to Den Briel. It said that the clergy should be left alone.

According to an old Catholic story, Lumey only got a copy of that letter. That is said to have made him angry. We do not know for sure if that is true.

What is certain: the prince wanted to spare the men. But his admiral did something else.

The night of July 9

In the night of July 9 the nineteen men were taken to the empty monastery. There, in the peat barn, they were hanged.

Who were they? They were ordinary priests and brothers. Eleven of them were Franciscans, like Nicholas Pieck. The

oldest was a man from Denmark, born in 1482. So he was already very old. The youngest was a brother of about twenty-four.

Much later a woman told something special. Her name was Anna Centen. About four months after that night she came to live at the monastery. As a child she had played on a beam in the barn. She also said that many people came to that place to honor the martyrs.

And Lumey? William of Orange was not happy with him. Half a year later the prince took his job away from him.

A chapel, and now a church

How do we know all this? A nephew of Nicholas Pieck wrote a book about the martyrs. His name was Willem Hessels van Est. He looked up people who had been there and wrote down what they told him.

In 1867 the pope declared the nineteen men saints. That means they may be honored in the Catholic Church all over the world.

In that same year the church got the piece of land where the barn had stood. A wooden chapel was built. Later the small stone altar came at the place of the barn. And between 1929 and 1931 the big church was built.

In the church there is a large cross with nineteen flowers around it. They are passion flowers. That flower is named after the suffering of Jesus. Each flower stands for one of the men. And every year in July pilgrims come. Pilgrims are people who travel to a holy place to pray there.

On the lawn behind the church the barn has long since disappeared. The peat is gone. But the line of stone is still there. You can walk along it. You can even stand inside that line, where Anna Centen played as a child.

True story?

Yes. Many sources tell that in 1572 the Beggars killed nineteen priests and brothers from Gorinchem and the area around it in the peat barn near Den Briel, because they would not give up their faith. It is also certain that William of Orange wanted to spare them. Many details we only know from the book by Nicholas Pieck's nephew, and he wrote it to honor the martyrs. The story about the copy of the letter only comes from that Catholic tradition.

Talk about it

- In those days Protestants were killed by Catholics, and here Catholics were killed by Protestants. Why is it so terrible when people hurt each other because of their faith?

- The nineteen men could have gone free by saying a few words. What do you think of their choice?

From the Bible

Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Revelation 2:10)

Go and see for yourself

The shrine of the Martyrs of Gorcum is on De Rik, at the corner of the Kloosterweg, just outside the old fortified town of Brielle. Behind the church you see the small altar with the dome, and in the grass the stone line of the peat barn. The church is only open during the pilgrimage season, in the summer. In the town, the Historisch Museum Den Briel tells the story of the Sea Beggars of April 1, 1572.

Leiden: the minister who stayed behind

A gateway in an alley

In Leiden, an old university town in the west of the Netherlands, right behind the big Pieterskerk (Saint Peter's Church), there is a narrow alley. It is called the Kloksteeg. There you find a stone gateway with a door. If you push it open, you come into a quiet little courtyard with twelve low houses. It is called the Hof van Jean Pesijn.

On the wall of the gateway there is a sundial. That is a clock that works with the shadow of the sun. A year is written on it: 1683.

But this story starts earlier. Other little houses once stood at this spot. They were smaller and poorer, and you heard

English everywhere. A minister named John Robinson lived here.

On the quay

It is the summer of 1620. In Delfshaven, the harbor of Delft (now part of Rotterdam), a small ship lies ready. It is called the Speedwell. A group of English people goes on board. They are going very far away, to America.

Their friends from Leiden have come along to say goodbye. They hardly slept the night before. They talked about their faith.

Then it is time, and the minister, John Robinson, falls to his knees. Everyone kneels with him. He prays for the people who are leaving, with tears on his cheeks. That is how one of them wrote it down later. His name was William Bradford.

Robinson himself does not go along. He stays in Leiden. Why? And how did all those English people end up in Leiden anyway? For that we have to go back in time.

Away from England

Around the year 1600 England had one church of the state. Anyone who did not want to belong to it could lose their job or end up in prison.

A group of people from the little village of Scrooby wanted their own congregation anyway. They thought the state church was too much like the old Catholic Church. They wanted to choose their own leaders. John Robinson was one of their ministers.

In 1607 they tried to flee to Holland, but they were betrayed. Robinson ended up in a cell. A year later it did work. At first they lived in Amsterdam, but things did not go well there.

In 1609 they asked the city government of Leiden if they could live there. There were about a hundred of them. The answer came on February 12, 1609 and it is still in the archives. The city would "geen eerlicke persoonen weygeren". That means: honest people are welcome.

A city full of refugees

That fit Leiden well. In 1574 the city had been surrounded by Spanish soldiers for a long time. After that, thousands of refugees came to live there. Many of them made woolen cloth. Leiden was a city full of weavers.

The English went to work too. They became weavers, printers or hatmakers, or they sold tobacco. Almost nobody got rich. Bradford later called Leiden a fair and beautiful city.

The group bought land close to the Pieterskerk. Small houses were built there for the poorer families. According to the sources there were twenty-one. The people of Leiden called it the English Gate. Robinson lived there too.

They had a difficult relationship with the Pieterskerk. According to a newspaper article, they did not like the organ or the bells. Still, they buried their dead in that church. They did not have a church of their own with a graveyard.

A minister back at school

In 1615 Robinson signed up at the university of Leiden. A university is a school for adults who want to keep learning. He got a few extras there, like a good amount of free beer and wine! But mostly he came for the classes.

He was not the only one who was learning. Samuel Fuller came to Leiden as a weaver. Eleven years later he left as a doctor.

Another man, William Brewster, started a printing shop in 1617. He printed books that were forbidden in England. That did not stay secret. The English ambassador stepped in. A man who had helped pay for it was put in prison. The printing shop was taken away.

Why they left

The group noticed: Leiden gave them a lot of freedom, but not unlimited freedom. There were more worries too. The work was hard and the people stayed poor, and the children had a hard time too.

Robinson was also worried about something else. The children were becoming more and more Dutch and less and less English. How would you feel if your own language slowly disappeared?

A new war with Spain was also coming. So they decided: part of the congregation will go ahead to America. The rest will follow later. Robinson would come later too.

That is how they came to the quay in Delfshaven in 1620. Bradford wrote that they knew they were pilgrims. A pilgrim is someone who is traveling to a holy place. They looked up to heaven, the country they longed for most. That is why we call them the Pilgrims today.

A leaking ship

The journey started badly. The Speedwell leaked so badly that it had to stay behind in England. In September 1620 the Mayflower left alone. There were 102 people on board. The trip across the ocean took 66 days.

More than half of the group stayed in Leiden. They waited for a sign to come. In the years after that, more ships sailed.

But Robinson never came. He stayed the minister of the people in Leiden. He wrote letters to America. In 1623 he heard that the people there had killed seven Native Americans. He wrote that he did not approve of it, even though he was on the other side of the ocean.

In 1625 John Robinson died in his small house in Leiden. He was buried in the Pieterskerk. In the same church lies a professor he strongly disagreed with. Now they lie under one roof.

The same place, now

Nothing is left of the twenty-one English houses. The courtyard with the sundial came later, in 1683. But it is the same place.

In the Pieterskerk there is a stone memorial plaque for Robinson from 1928. It was a gift from Americans who are descendants of the Pilgrims. In 1989 even the American president George Bush gave a speech there. And in the old sexton's house of the church there is now a small museum about the Pilgrims. Right across from the courtyard where Robinson lived.

If you stand in the little courtyard, the church with his grave is behind you. And above the gateway the shadow of the sundial slowly slides across the wall.

True story?

Yes. Many sources tell that the Pilgrims came to Leiden in 1609 and left in 1620, and that Robinson died in Leiden in 1625. The kneeling prayer on the quay and the words about pilgrims we only know from what William Bradford wrote down later. He was a friend of Robinson's. That they did not like the organ and the bells comes from one newspaper article.

Talk about it

- Robinson stayed in Leiden while his friends went to America. How would it feel to say goodbye like that?
- Leiden let refugees in if they were honest. How can you make someone who is new feel welcome?

From the Bible

These all died in faith, [...] and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. (Hebrews 11:13)

Go and see for yourself

The Pieterskerk is in the middle of Leiden, on the Pieterskerkhof. In the former baptism chapel there is a small exhibition about the Pilgrims, and the gravestone of John Robinson lies there. The Leiden American Pilgrim Museum is next to it, at Kloksteeg 16. Right across from the church is the Hof van Jean Pesijn, Kloksteeg 21. You may look in the courtyard, but be quiet, because people live there. In Rotterdam-Delfshaven stands the Oude of Pelgrimvaderskerk (the Old or Pilgrim Fathers Church), close to the quay where they left.

Amsterdam: a church above the living room

An ordinary house on the canal

In the old center of Amsterdam there is a narrow canal house. It has a pointed gable and a wooden shop front, just like many houses on the street. There is no tower on it. If you walk past, you see nothing special.

But if you go inside, you climb narrow stairs. You pass a room with a box bed in the wall. A box bed is a bed in a cupboard, with little doors in front. You pass a kitchen. And then the stairs keep going up.

All the way at the top, in the attic, there is suddenly a church. With pews, an organ and an altar with two little angels. There is room for about a hundred and fifty people.

How does a church end up in an attic? For that we go back to a morning in May, a very long time ago.

Out of the city in little boats

It is May 26, 1578, early in the morning. At the Amsterdam city hall, the Catholic mayors are removed from office. Together with a few priests and many monks, they are put into small boats. That is how they are sent sailing out of the city.

According to the stories, nobody was killed that day. But for the Catholics in the city, everything changed.

Their big church was dedicated to Saint Nicholas. He was the saint who was the protector of the city. That church now went to the Protestants. From then on it was called the Oude Kerk, the Old Church. In other churches the statues and altars were taken away.

In 1580 a ban came. Catholic church services were no longer allowed. You could still be Catholic in your heart. But you were not allowed to celebrate it together.

Forbidden, but still

What do you do when your church is taken away? The Catholics in Amsterdam simply kept meeting. In living rooms, in workshops and in warehouses.

The city government knew that very well. Often they let it happen, as long as you could not see it from the street. In the Netherlands we have a word for that: gedogen. Something is forbidden, but the government does nothing about it.

A church like that is often called a schuilkerk, a hidden church. Still, it was not really secret. Everyone in the neighborhood knew where the Catholics went on Sunday. The only rule was: you must not be able to see it from outside. So a tower was completely out of the question.

And there were a lot of them! In 1656 someone counted sixty-two houses where Catholics met regularly.

It was not completely safe. On a Catholic feast day in 1641 the schout raided two Masses. The schout was a sort of chief of police. There were more than five hundred people. The fines added up to 6,200 guilders. That was a huge amount of money.

A baker's boy gets rich

Now Jan Hartman comes into the story. He came from a small town in Germany. In Amsterdam he started out as a baker's journeyman, a young helper for a baker. He worked his way up and became a rich merchant.

Hartman was Catholic. In Amsterdam he was allowed to earn money and buy a house. But his church was not allowed to have a building on the street.

On May 10, 1661 he bought the house on the canal. Two small houses behind it, on an alley, came with it. He paid sixteen thousand guilders for it.

Then he had something special done. He had the attics of the three houses connected to each other. That made one big space at the top. Big enough for a church! In 1663 the church was first used.

People who went to church walked in through the alley and then up the stairs. Along the way a small holy water basin still hangs on the wall. Catholics dip their fingers in it when they go into a church.

Het Hart

The church got a name: Het Hart, which means The Heart, after Jan Hartman. It was dedicated to Saint Nicholas. Do you remember? That was the same saint as the big church the Catholics had lost in 1578.

The first priest was called Petrus Parmentier. He came from Ghent, in Belgium. There were also two women who helped: Maria van Eck and Margaretha van Loon. They were klopjes. That was the name for women who did not marry and gave their lives to the church. They did not live

in a convent. Klopjes did the housekeeping, sang in the choir and taught about the faith. About these two women we only know their names.

Jan Hartman only saw his church for a few years. In 1668 he was buried, in the Oude Kerk. So the man who built a new Saint Nicholas church lies in the old Saint Nicholas church. He did leave a lot of debts behind. His family had to sell the houses.

More than two hundred years in the attic

Still, the church in the attic stayed in use. In 1716 a big painting was hung above the altar. It shows Jesus being baptized in the river Jordan. In 1794 the church got the organ that is still there today.

Imagine climbing up to an attic every Sunday to go to church. How would you like that?

Only after 1795 were all faiths allowed to build a church openly. But it took a long time before it actually happened. In 1887 there was finally a big new church, close to the station. The people of Het Hart moved from the attic to a church on the street.

The old house was in danger of being torn down. But a Catholic society bought it. On April 28, 1888 it opened as a museum. The house is now called Ons' Lieve Heer op

Solder, which means Our Lord in the Attic. The attic church only got that name in the nineteenth century.

Still in the attic

The house is a museum now. But sometimes it is briefly a church again. Since 1951 a Mass has been held in the attic every month again.

If you go up there, look carefully at the two marbled columns next to the altar. In the left column a pulpit is hidden that you can fold out. When nobody was using it, it simply disappeared into the column.

And when you are back outside on the canal, look up one more time. You cannot see anything of a church at all.

True story?

Yes. Many sources tell that Jan Hartman bought the house in 1661, had the attics connected, and that there was a church here from 1663 to 1887. The museum of 1888 is certain too. The raid of 1641 and the list of sixty-two houses come from one study. We know the names of Maria van Eck and Margaretha van Loon from the museum. That nobody was killed in 1578 is only in one description.

Talk about it

- The Catholics were allowed to meet, as long as nobody could see it from the street. Do you think that was fair?
- What do you need to pray or sing to God together with others?

From the Bible

For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them. (Matthew 18:20)

Go and see for yourself

Museum Ons' Lieve Heer op Solder is at Oudezijds Voorburgwal 38-40 in Amsterdam, about a five-minute walk from Centraal Station. You go in through the new building next to the canal house. You see the box bed, the kitchens, the narrow stairs and at the top the attic church with the fold-out pulpit. There is also an audio tour for children. Nearby is the Oude Kerk, where Jan Hartman is buried.

Ulrum: one hundred thirty-seven names in an inn

A church on a hill

In the north of the province of Groningen lies the village of Ulrum. It is built on two wierden. A wierde is a hill that people long ago built their houses on. On one of those hills stands an old church with a thick tower. There is a wall around it, around the old churchyard.

Next to the church is a big white house with four chimneys. That is the parsonage, the minister's house. The street is called the H. de Cockstraat. That name was not chosen by accident.

Because in this quiet village something happened in 1834 that changed the churches in the whole of the Netherlands. It started with a church that was locked.

The door locked

It is Sunday, October 12, 1834. The church in Ulrum is full of people. There is a guest in the village: the Reverend Hendrik Scholte from Brabant, in the south.

But another minister has been appointed to preach. Scholte asks if he may do it. That other minister says no.

Then a woman calls out something through the church. Her name is Frouwe, and she is the wife of Ulrum's own minister. According to a historian she called out: "The time is here, it must happen here!"

After that the man in charge of the church building locks the church. So in the afternoon Scholte preaches outside, in the meadow by the parsonage. He stands on a farm wagon.

What was going on? For that we go back a few years.

A minister who started preaching differently

In 1829 a young minister came to live in the white parsonage. His name was Hendrik de Cock.

At first he preached more freely than many people in his village were used to. He talked mostly about living a good life and using your common sense. But there were people living in Ulrum who knew the old teaching of the church well. According to an old story, a farmer spoke to him

about it. He said something like: if I had to add even one sigh to my own salvation, I would be lost. He meant that only God can save.

De Cock started preaching differently. He went back to the old teaching of the church. The church filled up, also with people from other villages. Parents came to have their children baptized by him, because they did not trust their own minister. That was against the rules of the church. He also wrote a booklet against two other ministers.

Then the church leaders stepped in. In December 1833 De Cock was suspended. That means he was no longer allowed to preach in his own church.

Two sides

Why was there so much arguing? In those days almost everyone in the Netherlands belonged to the same big church, the Hervormde Kerk (the Dutch Reformed Church). People there had different ideas about what you should believe.

De Cock and his people thought the church had let go of the old teaching. That teaching had been written down in old booklets of the church, the confession. They wanted to go back to it.

The church leaders thought De Cock had to keep the rules. He had baptized children from other congregations and attacked his colleagues. So he had to stop.

In Ulrum itself, not everyone agreed with De Cock either. A farmer and writer from the village, Marten Douwes Teenstra, wrote fiercely against him. He also wrote against slavery.

So neighbors ended up on opposite sides. And they still ran into each other on the street every day.

A paper in the cooperage

At the beginning of October 1834 De Cock spoke with the church leaders in the city of Groningen one more time. They could not agree. A few days later his little daughter Jantje died. She was three years old. She was buried at the foot of the church wall, under the pulpit.

Then came that Sunday with the locked door.

The next day De Cock wrote a document. It was called the Acte van Afscheiding of Wederkeer, the Act of Secession or Return. Secession means: you leave something. Return means: you go back. That is how the writers saw it themselves. They thought they were going back to the church of the old days.

The document said that in their view the Hervormde Kerk was no longer the true church. That is why they were leaving it. But it also said: until the church returns. So the door was left open a crack.

On Tuesday, October 14 the paper lay ready in an inn. It was a cooperage, a workshop where barrels and casks were made. There 137 men and women signed their names on it.

What would you have done? You live in a village where everyone knows each other. Some of your neighbors sign, others do not.

Soldiers at the table

The next Sunday another minister came to preach. According to one story, seven veldwachters walked along with him. A veldwachter was a sort of village policeman. De Cock read the Act aloud from a pew in the church. There was shouting and name-calling.

After that the head of the province sent soldiers. On October 25, 1834 more than a hundred soldiers marched into Ulrum. They had to keep order. They mostly stayed with the families who had signed. Those families had to give the soldiers a bed and food. Whether they wanted to or not.

Twelve of them came to the parsonage. Twelve soldiers at the table! De Cock's books and papers were taken away. Only after about half a year did the soldiers leave again.

The congregation now met wherever it could. In barns, on a farm or outside in the field. But that was against the law too. There was an old law: you could not meet with more than twenty people without permission. The minister would then get a fine, and often the owner of the barn too.

De Cock even got three months in prison. His wife and children had to leave the parsonage.

What happened next

The same thing happened in many other villages in the Netherlands. Within five years there were more than a hundred and fifty seceded congregations. Only after 1840 did they get permission from the king. In 1848 there was freedom of religion for everyone.

Some people left for America. Scholte did too, the minister of the farm wagon. With almost eight hundred people he founded a town in America in 1847. It is called Pella. On the seal of that town it says: in God is our hope and our refuge.

The church is still there

The inn where 137 people signed was torn down long ago. But the old church on the hill is still there. In that church the history of 1834 is now told. In the very church the seceders left back then.

In 1834 Ulrum had one church. Now there are more. And sometimes the whole village acts out the year 1834, with old carriages and plays in the street. Then soldiers walk through the village again. But this time they are just neighbors in uniform.

If you walk across the churchyard, look at the church wall. There, under the pulpit, a three-year-old girl was buried in 1834. The inn is gone. The church wall is still standing.

True story?

Yes. Many sources tell that the church was locked, that Scholte preached on a farm wagon, that people signed in the inn and that soldiers came. Exactly how many people signed is not certain: one source says 137, another 144. The story about the farmer and the village policemen comes from one source or from what people told each other later. That Jantje was buried under the pulpit we know from one study. Whether the Hervormde Kerk was

really no longer the true church at that time is something Christians think differently about.

Talk about it

- Neighbors ended up on opposite sides, but they saw each other every day. How do you get along with someone you disagree with?
- The people of Ulrum signed, even though it cost them a lot. Why do you think they did that?

From the Bible

God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. (Psalm 46:1)

Go and see for yourself

The old Hervormde church is at H. de Cockstraat 5 in Ulrum, on the hill with the wall around the churchyard. Inside you can see the pulpit from 1745 and an organ from 1806. Check the website of the Stichting Oude Groninger Kerken (the Foundation for Old Groningen Churches) to see when you can go inside. Next to the church is the white parsonage, where De Cock lived. Stichting Ulrum 1834 has a walking route through the village past places from that time.

Edith Stein: a tile in Echt

Two names and a time

In Echt, a small town in Limburg in the south of the Netherlands, there is a street called the Peijerstraat. On the front of number 16 there is a tile. If you are in a hurry, you walk right past it.

There are two names on the tile: Rosa and Edith Stein. There is also a date on it, and even a time. August 2, 1942, 17:00. Five o'clock in the afternoon.

What happened then? A little further on, on the Bovenste Straat, there is a plain brick convent. That is where the two sisters lived. On that Sunday in August the German police stood at the door. They had come to take Edith and Rosa away.

Who were those two women? And why did they have to go? For that we go back in time.

A clever girl from Breslau

Edith Stein was born on October 12, 1891, in the German city of Breslau. She was the youngest of eleven children. Her parents were Jewish. Her father died before she was two years old.

Edith went to study at the university and became a philosopher. A philosopher thinks about big questions. For example, she wrote about the question: how do you understand what another person feels?

As a teenager Edith had let go of her parents' faith. At that time she did not believe in God at all anymore. But later she read the life story of Teresa of Avila. She was a Spanish nun from a very long time ago. On New Year's Day 1922 Edith was baptized. She became Catholic.

Into the convent

In 1933 the Nazis came to power in Germany. They made rules against Jewish people. Edith was no longer allowed to teach, because she had Jewish parents.

That same year she entered a convent in Cologne. It was a convent of Carmelite nuns. They are sisters who live behind the walls of their convent and pray a lot. Edith got a new name: Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross.

In 1938 it became even more dangerous for Jewish people in Germany. So her order decided to bring her to a safer place. On New Year's Eve 1938 she arrived in Echt.

That convent in Echt had once been started by refugees too. In 1875 twenty sisters from Cologne had come to Echt. At that time convents were being closed in Germany. Now another sister from Cologne joined them.

Rosa comes too

Edith had an older sister, Rosa. Rosa had also become Catholic and wanted to be with Edith. First she traveled to Belgium, to a woman who said she would help her. But that woman was a swindler. Rosa lost almost everything she had. She arrived in Echt with almost nothing.

Rosa did not become a nun. She lived at the convent and did the things that had to be done outside the walls.

Edith kept writing in Echt. She worked on a book about John of the Cross, a Spanish poet. It was given the title The Science of the Cross.

The Netherlands occupied too

In May 1940 the German army invaded the Netherlands. Now the cruel rules against Jewish people came here too.

To the Germans it did not matter whether someone was baptized. Anyone with Jewish parents was Jewish to them.

People looked for a way out. A convent in Switzerland would gladly take Edith. The sisters there all voted yes. But Edith did not get a visa. A visa is a paper that lets you enter another country. Without that paper she could not leave.

In July 1942 the Germans began taking Jewish people away from the Netherlands by train.

A letter in church

The big churches in the Netherlands were deeply shocked by this. Together they sent a telegram to the German who ruled the Netherlands. A telegram is a short message that is sent very quickly. They wrote that they were against it.

Then the Germans made an offer. Jews who had been baptized before 1941 would not be taken away. But then the churches had to stop standing up for all the other Jews.

The churches wanted to read the telegram aloud in church on Sunday. The Germans forbade that. The biggest Protestant church decided not to read it. The Catholic bishops did read it. On Sunday, July 26, 1942 their letter was read aloud in all Catholic churches. So in Echt too.

It was a hard choice, for everyone. What would you have done if you were in their shoes?

Sunday, August 2

A week later the Germans struck back. On Sunday, August 2, Catholics with Jewish parents were arrested all over the Netherlands. A German leader said out loud that it was a punishment for the bishops' letter.

In Echt the police came to the convent on the Bovenste Straat. Edith and Rosa had to go with them. At five o'clock in the afternoon they were taken away, at the place where the tile is now. Later a sister told what Edith said to her frightened sister then: "Come, we are going for our people." We do not know for sure if she really said it that way.

The sisters were first taken to Camp Amersfoort. Then to Camp Westerbork, in Drenthe. On August 7 they went by train to Auschwitz. That was a huge camp, far away in the east. There the Nazis murdered very many Jewish people.

Edith and Rosa were murdered there too. According to the official papers, that was on August 9, 1942. Edith was fifty years old.

The tile and the convent

After the war Edith Stein was not forgotten. In 1998 the pope declared her a saint. With that the Catholic Church says that she is an example for believers.

Not everyone was happy about that. Edith was murdered because she was Jewish. So some Jewish people found it hard that the church called her a Christian saint. The Dutch bishops asked for respect for the Jews who stayed faithful to the faith of their parents. They called Edith a daughter of Israel.

The convent on the Bovenste Straat is still there. It is still a convent. Next to the entrance there is a memorial stone for Edith.

And on the Peijerstraat that tile is still on the wall. Two names. A date. Five o'clock in the afternoon.

True story?

Yes. It is certain that Edith and Rosa Stein were arrested in Echt on August 2, 1942 and murdered in Auschwitz. The bishops' letter is also in many sources. The words "Come, we are going for our people" come from one sister, and she did not always tell it the same way later. One researcher has doubts about the exact date of her death. Nobody can

say whether Edith and Rosa would have been saved without the letter.

Talk about it

- The bishops spoke out, even though that could be dangerous. When is it right to say something out loud?
- Edith and Rosa have not been forgotten. Why is it important to keep remembering people from the war?

From the Bible

For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.
(Romans 11:29)

Go and see for yourself

The Carmelite convent is at Bovenste Straat 48 in Echt. Next to the entrance is the memorial stone for Edith Stein. It is a convent, not a museum, but according to the Stichting Dr. Edith Stein Echt (the Dr. Edith Stein Foundation) the chapel is open every day. On the square in front of the Sint-Landricuskerk (Saint Landricus Church) there is a monument to her. The tile hangs on the house at Peijerstraat 16. By the town hall stands the war memorial

with the names of Edith and Rosa. The foundation has a walking route past five places.

Biddinghuizen: a city of tents in the polder

Roller coasters and a big field

In the middle of the polder of Flevoland lies the village of Biddinghuizen. A polder is land that was once under water and was pumped dry. On the Spijkweg you can see the roller coasters of the Walibi Holland theme park from far away. The land around it is completely flat.

Next to the theme park is a huge grass field. It is about eighty hectares, around two hundred acres. More than a hundred soccer fields would fit on it. In the summer the pop festival Lowlands is held there.

But at Pentecost something completely different stands there. Then a city of tents appears. Tens of thousands of people camp there for a long weekend. They come to sing,

to listen and to pray. This is the Pinksterconferentie (Pentecost Conference) of Opwekking.

In May 2026 it was already the fifty-sixth time. The organization talks about some sixty thousand visitors a year. It once started with about five hundred people. How can that be?

Pentecost

First something about Pentecost. In the Bible, in the book of Acts, it tells what happened then. The first followers of Jesus were together. Then the Holy Spirit came upon them.

There are churches that give extra attention to that. They are Pentecostal churches. They expect God to work just the same way today. For example by making people well.

In the Netherlands the first Pentecostal church began in 1907, in Amsterdam. For a long time it stayed a small group. In 1920 there were about 270 of them in the whole country. Most Dutch people had never heard of them.

A young preacher

In 1958 an American preacher came to the Netherlands. His name was T.L. Osborn. After that many more people joined the Pentecostal churches.

There was also a young Dutchman who began to preach. His name was Ben Hoekendijk. He was born in Baarn in 1938. According to the story of his life, he held his first tent campaign of his own in Utrecht in 1959. A tent campaign is a series of meetings in a big tent, where people are told about Jesus.

That same year he married Wiesje Hijink. Remember her name, because she will come back later.

In 1960 Ben started a magazine. He called it Opwekking. An opwekking is a revival: a time when many people come to faith. Around the magazine a work grew with tent campaigns and meetings for young people. Ben did it together with Wiesje, his sister Else and her husband Peter Vlug.

Five hundred campers

In 1971 about five hundred people came together on the Pentecost weekend. They slept in tents, with their children along. Back then it was called the Nationale Gezins-Camp meeting, the National Family Camp Meeting. That is a gathering of a few days, where you camp and sing and listen together.

Where was that exactly? We do not know for sure. One source says De Harskamp, the other says Bennekom. The stories also differ about who exactly started it. The NOS,

the Dutch public news broadcaster, later called it “a camping trip of a small group of Christians”.

So it was not a big plan. Just families with tents, a sermon and songs.

A hill near Vierhouten

From 1973 the camp was held at the campground De Paasheuvel, near Vierhouten. That is also on the Veluwe, an area of woods and heath in the middle of the country. It stayed there up to and including 1995.

It got busier and busier. According to Opwekking itself, fifteen thousand people were already coming in 1983. Later there were around thirty thousand. Someone who went there twice wrote much later what he still remembered. That was mostly the crowds, the cold, the rain and the mud!

The campground got too small. A bigger place was needed.

A field for scouts

Meanwhile something was happening in the polder. In 1971 a park about farms and animals had opened there: De Flevohof. Lots of schools went there on school trips. In 1993 the park went bankrupt. A year later it became a theme park with roller coasters.

Next to the park a big field was set up for scouts. In 1994 and 1995 there were two big scout camps there, with scouts from all over the world. After that there was a site where tens of thousands of people could camp.

Just what Opwekking was looking for! In 1996 the Pentecost Conference moved to Biddinghuizen. Since then the tents have stood in the polder.

Sixty songs in a thin booklet

Do you remember Wiesje Hoekendijk? She led the singing. In the old songbooks of the Pentecostal churches there were few songs in which you sing to God Himself. She thought that was a shame. So she brought in new songs.

In 1978 the first booklet came out: the Opwekkingsliederen, the Opwekking songs. It had sixty songs in it. Every year new ones were added. Now there are more than nine hundred! The new songs are sung for the first time at the conference every year. After that they are heard in churches all over the country.

One number is missing. In 2007 number 666 was skipped. In the Bible book of Revelation that number is the number of the beast.

Do you ever sing an Opwekking song? At first they were only sung in Pentecostal churches. Now they are sung in many other churches too.

Not everyone was happy with them right away. Some people thought the songs were too simple. Or they missed songs about sadness. People even talked about it in church meetings. That is how important these songs had become.

Mud or heat

What is a weekend there like? A journalist walked around there in 2018. He saw a campground with simple toilets and long lines. Depending on the weather it is muddy or very hot. There is a Big Tent for the large meetings. There is a program for children, for teens and for young people. There is also a tent for people with an intellectual disability.

A volunteer told the NOS in 2022: "Alcohol and drugs are strictly forbidden here." No alcohol is sold. On Sunday morning the visitors celebrate the Lord's Supper, with bread and grape juice. Together they remember the death of Jesus.

In 2023 they collected money for mission work on the Monday. More than a million euros came in. That was a record.

Ben Hoekendijk died in 2020, eighty-one years old. But the camp goes on.

The same grass

After Pentecost the tents go away again. Two months later Lowlands is held on the same grass, with very different music.

Do you drive along the Spijkweg on an ordinary day? Then you only see the roller coasters and the flat land. You see nothing here of the five hundred campers of 1971. But their songs are now heard in churches all over the country.

And every year at Pentecost the tent pegs go back into the ground.

True story?

Yes. Many sources tell that Opwekking started with about five hundred people, was later held near Vierhouten and moved to Biddinghuizen in 1996. The first songbook of 1978 is also certain. The sources do not agree about where the very first camp was and who started it. All the visitor numbers and the money from the offering come from the organization itself.

Talk about it

- It started with a small group of people in tents. Do you know something that started small and became very big?

- Which song do you like singing to God best, and why?

From the Bible

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. (Acts 2:1)

Go and see for yourself

The event grounds are next to Walibi Holland, at Spijkweg 30 in Biddinghuizen, in Flevoland. If you want to see the city of tents yourself, you have to be there on the Pentecost weekend. Check the website of the Pinksterconferentie of Stichting Opwekking for dates and the program. You can also follow many meetings online. The beginning of the story is on the Veluwe, near Vierhouten, at the campground De Paasheuvel.