

Report about Church and Society of the Netherlands (Nelleke Wijngaards Serrarens)

The position and influence of the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands has really changed during the past decades. Until 1979 the percentage of the population, being catholic, was growing. Between 1979 and 1990 the amount stayed at the same level.

As is the general trend in Europe, because of secularization and individualization, the amount declined, especially since 2000. The last five years the effect of the child abuse has had a big effect too.

In the 70-ties : 40 % of the population was catholic.

In 2000 : 31,7 %

In 2014 : 23,3 % (3.943 million of a total population 16.8 million)

In 2015 there were 723 priests, 372 deacons and 525 pastoral workers (M/F) active in parishes and categorical pastorate (hospital, army etc.).The Dutch Catholic Church is the organization with the highest amount of active volunteers : more than 200.000!

In the dioceses the policy regarding the permanent diaconate varies. Some dioceses have mostly deacons with a secular job, other dioceses deacons-theologians with a full time job in the church. Halve of the dioceses have both forms. Most of the dioceses have a period of 4,5 years of deacon formation, including practical training in parishes and exposure experiences.

Because of the diminishing of the number of Roman Catholics and of church finances too, churches have to be closed, communities have to be united and find a new identity. That takes time, but can give new impulses too. Especially in diaconal groups the attitude to join with other communities is positive.

The influence of the Catholic Church has lessened, but still plays an important role in society, e.g. in the fostering of a open and positive reception of refugees and migrants.

The attention and care for marginalized people has always been huge in the Dutch Catholic Church. The diaconate too has made its own important contribution : many deacons are active in the parishes, in particular in Caritas organizations, care for the homeless and people with poor finances. They are not doing this work just by themselves, but are involving a lot of volunteers in their work. And so diaconal consciousness and involvement is flowering!

The eucumenical contacts (with the Protestant churches, Jewish and Muslim communities) and collaboration is growing .

There is a lot of interest in pilgrimages. Many people are interested in centers for spirituality, like the cloisters and abbeys. The influence of Pope Francis is huge in Dutch society. Not only Roman Catholics , but also Protestants and other groups are deeply impressed by the Pope. His open mindedness in church matters, interest in disadvantaged people and care for the planet are of great positive influence and can lead to a religious and diaconal revival!