



In support of Dutch prisoners abroad

Since 1984, we have been providing spiritual care to Dutch prisoners abroad and their families. We are supported in this work by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Security and Justice, churches, private individuals and social funds.

In the Christian tradition, visiting prisoners is one of the seven Works of Mercy. The name Epafras comes from the Bible – Epaphras was a friend of the Apostle Paul, who visited him in prison.

Most of our approximately ninety Dutch spiritual caregivers live and work in the countries where these prisoners are being detained. Only a few people visit them from the Netherlands.

Although most of our volunteers have a Christian background (Roman Catholic or Protestant), Epafras is open to people from diverse religious backgrounds. We provide the necessary training to our visitors.

- Being able to practise one's own religion is part of good detainee care. The Dutch government considers our work part of the consular support offered to Dutch citizens in foreign prisons. Therefore, it also financially supports this work. We report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the well-being and living conditions of the inmates. We of course first consult with the prisoners themselves regarding what will be reported. We respect the obligations concerning confidentiality and professional secrecy.

In fact, some Dutch prisoners are not known to their embassies, but still request contact with an Epafras visitor. This is also one of the options.

We are happy with the diverse types of prison chaplaincy in prisons around the world. Many Dutch prisoners are able to participate in church services or prayer meetings, and greatly appreciate the pastoral guidance they are offered. Whenever possible, we like making contact with local pastoral caregivers.

Most of the inmates consider a conversation or prayer in their own language, as well as the familiarity of Dutch culture, an important addition to the care that is already being provided.

We offer

- ▶ Visits with a listening ear. Instead of judging, we reflect.
- ▶ Attention to a person's life story, offense and individual responsibility.
- ▶ Support in processing loss and trauma.
- ▶ Attention to relationships with parents, loved ones and children, sometimes including mediation.
- ▶ Attention to sources of comfort and change: faith, hope and love.
- ▶ The opportunity for a moment of meditation, prayer, confession... or a ritual.
- ▶ We send Dutch Bibles, Korans, prayer beads, books, etc. upon request.
- ▶ Practical help: medication, clothing or initial living expenses after release.
- ▶ The opportunity to correspond with a spiritual caregiver or another volunteer in the Netherlands.
- ▶ Support upon return to the Netherlands.
- ▶ Four times per year, in cooperation with the Rehabilitation service and two law firms, we send a magazine called *Comeback* to all Dutch prisoners abroad. The articles cover topics such as faith, prison conditions and legal matters. There are also sections on leisure and current events from the Netherlands. Another section called "Letters to the Editor" is quite popular as well.

From our small office in Leiden, we coordinate and facilitate this work and provide training and peer coaching for our spiritual caregivers.

It is a point of contact for prisoners and their families but also for embassies and consulates.

epafras /

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