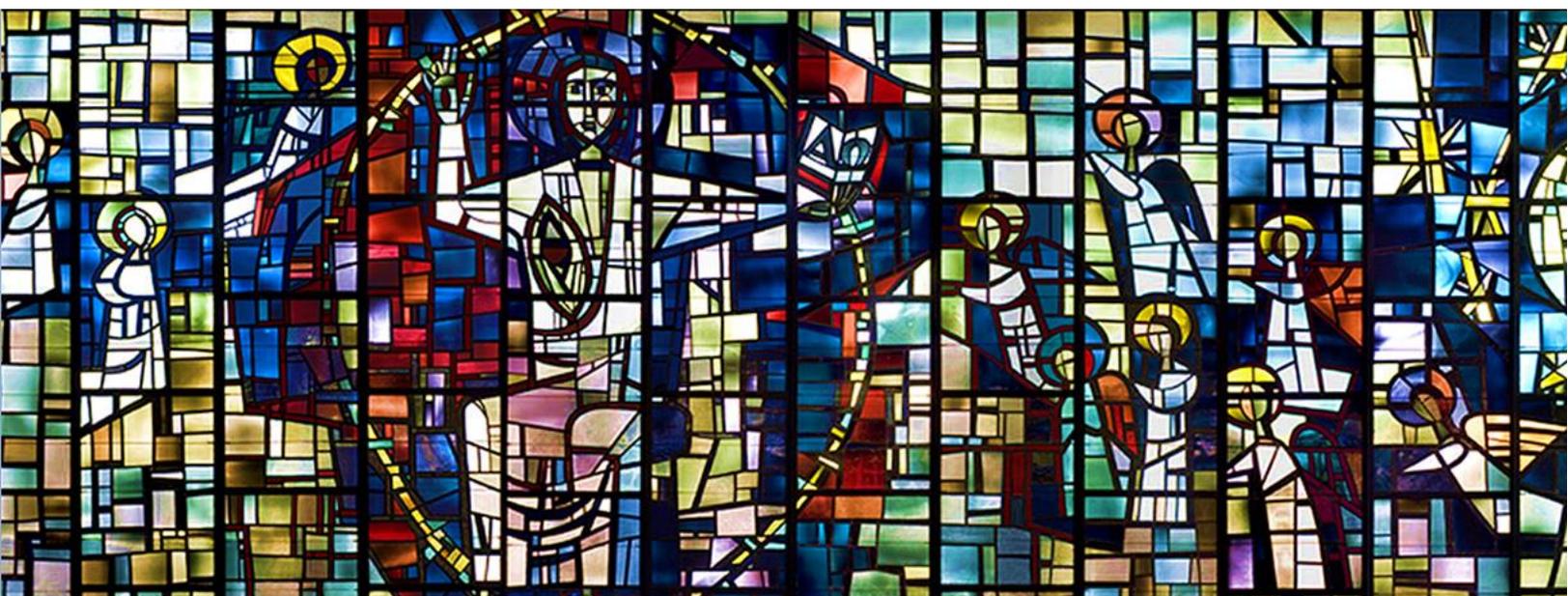


Promoting sustainability: Reimagining the societal role of our church

DISCUSSION PAPER OF CAPP CHAPTER THE NETHERLANDS

Submission for the 2019 CAPP International Conference, Vatican City, 6 - 8 June 2019



1 INTRODUCTION

The story of the Dutch Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice (CAPP) Chapter was initiated by Thijs Hendrix and Peter Kortjen in 2015 and expanded in recent years after having admitted its first new members as of 2016/2017. This CAPP Chapter is by all means young, possibly one of the youngest in our global network. Despite being in definitional stages, there is no lack of energy and initiatives in this local group in a country which – maybe surprisingly to some abroad– experiences growing interest in the vision of our Foundation.

In this paper we will first set the scene of the Netherlands, a country in which religion has long played an important and multi-faceted role (Section 2), and then discuss the activities and ambitions of the Dutch CAPP Chapter (Section 3). Based on *Laudato Sí* – which is the focal encyclical for the running CAPP year – we will then reflect on ourselves and the catholic church to share the state of mind with which we are furthering CAPP in the Netherlands (Section 4). We hope this gives the reader some idea about how the societal richness of our country could assist to further positive thinking, also far abroad and clearly supported by the Catholic Social Teaching (CST). After all, this is a story of revival rather than regression.



2 THE SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXT THE NETHERLANDS TODAY

The Netherlands is often stigmatised and listening to clichés that circulate about our country, one could get the impression that we are considered - by some – as almost a “rogue state”. This is partly understandable as the Netherlands has experimented with societal changes, surely with good intentions, but with mixed results. Arguably, flaring up controversy, rather than dampening it with our drug policy, the allowance of euthanasia, the allowance of prostitution, to name a few. In all this, it is fully imaginable that people looking from the outside into this country may have difficulties believing that Christian faith plays any part as a propulsive force of society. Indeed, we would venture to guess that most readers would see the Netherlands as a country in which Catholicism even stopped playing a major role since the Iconoclasm, and which at best is predominantly Protestant.

This view merits being corrected. The Netherlands has turned from a country in which a clear majority of the population proclaimed being of Protestant faith (59% Protestant versus 39% of Catholics in 1830), into a country in which in 2019 we find almost twice as many Catholics compared to protestants. This stunning reversal is a product of a relatively strong decrease in the Protestant faith, while Catholicism in

the Netherlands showed significantly more resilience (a 75% decrease in Protestantism versus a 38% decrease in Catholicism since 1830). Surprising isn't it?

EXHIBIT 1: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT BY TYPE OF FAITH IN THE NETHERLANDS

	Protestant	Catholic	Muslim	Other	None	Totals	Population	Catholic Population
1830	59	39	0	2	0	100	2,613,487	1,019,260
1930	46	37	0	2	15	100	7,935,565	2,936,159
1960	41	41	0	0.1	17.9	100	11,461,964	4,699,405
1980	30	38	0	5	27	100	14,091,000	5,354,580
1990	25	33	0	5	37	100	14,893,000	4,914,690
2000	21	32	0	8	39	100	15,864,000	5,076,480
2010	18	28	4	6	44	100	16,575,000	4,641,000
2017	15	24	5	6	50	100	17,000,000	4,080,000

Source: Wikipedia & CBS.

To be certain, this is not about *"Schadenfreude"*, as we would have preferred to witness the same robustness in our sister-religion and also note there are currently more positive developments in some communities too.

Taking a closer look at these numbers, another interesting statistic appears. The number of people of catholic faith in the Netherlands is more or less the same as it was in 1960, at around 4 to 5 million. Again, this is not a growth success story of course, but one cannot speak of an exodus either.

The question centers around the involvement of those practicing the catholic faith, and here the Netherlands probably does not deviate much from other Western-European countries. Take for example the percentage of Catholics that regularly attend church services (only 16% of Catholics) or those that go to confession (less than 12% of all Catholics).¹ Clearly, there are positive forces and there is resilience in the Catholic Faith. How can these positive forces be re-engaged?

Both from a quantitative as well as qualitative perspective, our impression is that the bottom of the trough has been reached, and, as Thijs Hendrix says, *"if we can manage a slight uptake, there are good chances the development will only further improve from there"*. Our belief is partly based on surveys that indicate that of the dominant portion of the Dutch population that says they are "not-religious", admits that they are open to faith and are supportive of the key messages of the Church. Pope Francis is even mentioned by our fellow country-men and -women as the person who is bringing the most important and inspiring message of all world leaders.

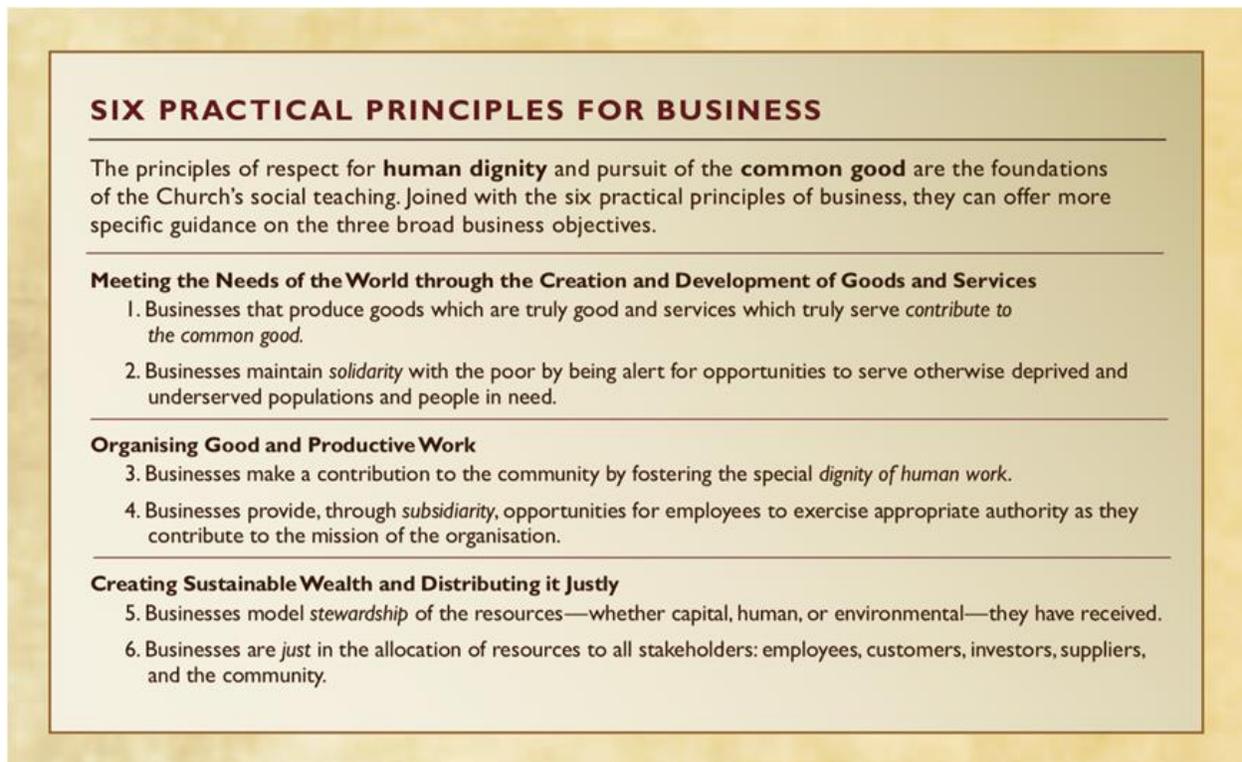
It seems to us that the number of – what may be called – searching or anonymous Christians in the Netherlands is large and growing. This may be a supporting factor in preserving and even building Christianity as a propulsive force for the good of humanity. Will we see a second renaissance after the important Catholic revival that happened here in the 18th century? The Dutch CAPP Chapter believes that this may well be the case if the message of the catholic church is brought in such a way that it fits

¹ Statistics Netherlands (CBS), 'Kerkbezoek daalt, vooral onder katholieken', 2 October 2014 (available at: <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2014/40/kerkbezoek-daalt-vooral-onder-katholieken>); Statistics Netherlands (CBS), 'Meer dan de helft Nederlanders niet religieus', 22 October 2018 (available at: <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2018/43/meer-dan-de-helft-nederlanders-niet-religieus>); Guillaume Cuchet, *Comment notre monde a cessé d'être chrétien*, Paris: Seuil, 2018.

our times and is less cautionary and uni-directional. As one of our mentors Mgr. van Luyn will say, this requires a dialogue in which our CAPP Chapter wants to play a role. The Church needs to regain functionality as the state has taken over schools, healthcare and social security. The feeling of community needs to be redefined. In short: what is necessary to make the Catholic Church attractive in the 21st century?

When turning to CST, we perceive a high degree of overlap between the driving values as summarised for example in the “Vocation of the Business Leader” by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace² (Exhibit 2) and the general sentiment and pioneering accomplishments seen in Dutch society.

EXHIBIT 2: VOCATION OF THE BUSINESS LEADER³



SIX PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES FOR BUSINESS

The principles of respect for **human dignity** and pursuit of the **common good** are the foundations of the Church's social teaching. Joined with the six practical principles of business, they can offer more specific guidance on the three broad business objectives.

Meeting the Needs of the World through the Creation and Development of Goods and Services

1. Businesses that produce goods which are truly good and services which truly serve *contribute to the common good*.
2. Businesses maintain *solidarity* with the poor by being alert for opportunities to serve otherwise deprived and underserved populations and people in need.

Organising Good and Productive Work

3. Businesses make a contribution to the community by fostering the special *dignity of human work*.
4. Businesses provide, through *subsidiarity*, opportunities for employees to exercise appropriate authority as they contribute to the mission of the organisation.

Creating Sustainable Wealth and Distributing it Justly

5. Businesses model *stewardship* of the resources—whether capital, human, or environmental—they have received.
6. Businesses are *just* in the allocation of resources to all stakeholders: employees, customers, investors, suppliers, and the community.

Some examples that resonate well with what we see in our country:

- Meeting the needs of the world: The Netherlands is one of the world's advocates to “follow the same standard of morality in all geographic locations”,⁴ where its companies operate or from where it imports. But also where the International Court of Justice found a home;
- Organising good and productive work: The Netherlands is a success story when it comes to inclusiveness and equality in the workplace (e.g. in 2016 it was the first country in the world

² Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, “Vocation of the Business Leader: A Reflection”, 2012, p. 17.

³ Idem, at 17.

⁴ Idem, at 27.

where on average female workers 25-35 years of age brought home a higher salary as compared to their male co-workers),⁵ and

- Creating sustainable wealth and distributing it justly: The Netherlands pioneered with providing social security in the 19th century, and today, it pioneers with adjusting these accomplishments to successfully avoid abuse, while preserving fairness.⁶

A cynic might say “well, but what would we then still need the message of the Church for?” Our response would be that if there is fertile ground for some significant ideas that are congruent with CST, there will sooner or later also be interest in an overarching set of ideas that interlock to provide a robust foundation for a better new world. Our faith provides this system in a unique fashion.

Therefore, so we believe, in the Netherlands CAPP – surrounded by Christians, both anonymous and outspoken – operates in an environment in which not only we shall find ready acceptance, but also one from which we can borrow ideas, that may already be useful elsewhere. The challenge in fact may not be so much in deploying CST as in convincing the searching or anonymous Christians to embrace the idea that the church is a forerunner and formidable unifying force in a quest that surpasses borders for justice and peace.

3 THE ACTIVITIES AND AMBITIONS OF CAPP NL IN THIS CONTEXT

The founding members of CAPP in the Netherlands Thijs Hendrix and Peter Korten had a personal history of contributing in the spirit of CST before establishing a wider group of members in our country starting in the Fall of 2016. This development was aided by the German CAPP Chapter which remains a sparring partner and supporter.

Today, CAPP in the Netherlands has 6 regular members and 5 aspiring members, with an interesting mix of clergy, academics, industrialists, investors, professionals - not to forget males and females - and an average age of 44. The centre of gravity of the team appears to be in the small city of Weert, which 3 of the regular members call home.

Our Dutch Chapter – in the true spirit of Dutch fluid organisations – meets regularly, often around religious events, recently for example at the occasion of the Holy Communion of one member’s daughters. Sometimes we meet spontaneously, like earlier last year when some of our members made available a Maria statue for a prayer room in the Dutch House of Parliament (Exhibit 3). Given the small size of our group, the emphasis in such meetings is mainly about getting to know each other better and developing common perspectives on CAPP’s objectives and discuss the question of how we can use the tools of CST to confront our world’s challenges? We believe that this process of jointly charting a path is

⁵ Statistics Netherlands (CBS), ‘Loonverschil tussen mannen en vrouwen iets kleiner’, 22 November 2018 (available at: <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2018/47/loonverschil-tussen-mannen-en-vrouwen-iets-kleiner>).

⁶ See eg J. Berghman, A. Nagelkerke, K. Boos, R. Doeschot and G. Vonk, Honderd jaar sociale zekerheid in Nederland, Delft: Eburon Delft, 2003 (available at: <https://pure.uvt.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/496086/nagelkerkehonderd.pdf>). More current, see for instance the running debate on recalibration of the Dutch pension scheme: Letter of the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment on renewing the Dutch pension scheme, 1 September 2019 (available at: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2019/02/01/kamerbrief-vernieuwing-pensioenstelsel>).

very important at this early stage, because we could potentially address an awesomely broad set of themes in as many different ways.

We are by no means at the end, or even the beginning of the end of this definition process, but allow us to share where we in CAPP Netherlands currently stand:

- (1) If our mission is to instil principles of CST in everyday life – and notably the world of business – we believe we will fail if we will be perceived as missionaries of the catholic faith overall. We are not here to convert people but to open hearts and minds to the fact that CST can provide a very worthwhile and possibly unique perspective on the excesses and shortcomings of societies. If we manage to introduce CST in a dialogue,⁷ we may have opened the door a bit to greater explorations of the catholic faith. But that is not the primary goal.
- (2) The call from Professor Tarantola⁸ to each of us is to start doing the above at our individual level - not only by our words but also by our actions in our daily lives. CAPP strengthens us to do much more. But, in addition to the individual level, there is also a strong urge in our Chapter to find common projects to act jointly as a team.

EXHIBIT 3: PICTURE OF THE MARIA STATUE IN THE PRAYER ROOM OF THE DUTCH HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT



- (3) At the **individual level**, CAPP motivates us to be more outspoken about CST and to be more courageous in applying its principles. This is the case e.g. when investment decisions need to be made that don't sufficiently respect the human or the environmental factor. But, what we notice is that in a world where only what can be measured in monetary terms is accounted for, these initiatives, in turn, often come with a risk to us as private persons. What matters is how we behave and what choices we make once we hit that point. Do we retreat, do we circumnavigate or cruise forward undisturbed? Instilling CST in the business world is a skill that –

⁷ Compare eg Laudato Sí at 63 and 188.

⁸ A.M. Tarantola, Circular letter to CAPP, 8 March 2019.

as far as we know – is not taught at any Business School. This is why we came up with the idea to collect short stories/case studies of CAPP members who sought to instil a dosage of CST into business decisions and how they handled setbacks or unintended implications. This may not so much be about right or wrong, but more about introducing a CST perspective in such discussion. To give some examples:

- a. The owners of a biotech company decided to save a supplier from bankruptcy. However, that supplier later became a fierce competitor. Was it the right thing to do? Sure it was. But would it have been the right thing to do if it was known that the supplier would turn against them?
- b. The investor who did not believe that much in a company that was to be pulled out of insolvency, but who decided to give the company and its employees a chance because the investment sum was extremely low and there was no one left to step in. The company did not make it and afterwards the investor was heavily criticised for not having invested more. Was this the right decision? Should he do this again?
- c. The company in the machine building industry that developed a program to find and help employees with personal trouble. It handed out loans, organised medical support, and arranged for people to take months off, and so on. This program is rather unique and worked well. But, when a new owner came in, discussion emerged about its merits. How to convince him?

The Dutch CAPP Chapter could initiate and manage a process of collecting such case studies, but, we would not like to do this in isolation of other CAPP Chapters and certainly not without CAPP's Board looking over our shoulders.

(4) At the **group level** we have been engaging in some specific ideas, they often tend to boil down to a belief that CST needs to be taught more intensively and proactively:

- a. New style catholic boarding school: In the Netherlands, catholic boarding schools have entirely disappeared. Parents who wish to send their children to such an institution have to opt for solutions abroad, as one of our members experienced. We believe that while such boarding schools in their traditional format may have lost their appeal, the basic interest of parents bringing their children to a values-based institution where pupils enforce each other positively is still there. The Dutch CAPP Chapter has entertained the idea to establish a new style catholic (boarding) school in a secular setting, with secular teachers who are open to the Word of God and trained on CST. This idea originated while we were speaking with Father Peeters during a visit to the Koningshoeve monastery near Tilburg. Needless to say, this idea will require a high level of commitment and financial support, but so far that has not deterred us.
- b. Guest lectures of CST at schools: Tying back to the idea of the book with live examples of the application of CST in the business world, we have also spoken about preparing guest lectures at universities in the Netherlands and neighbouring countries. In these lectures we would introduce the basic principles of CST (using “The Vocation of the

Business Leader”) and bring this to life with selected case studies. This project has a lower entry hurdle than the previous one.

- (5) While the above points help address the first two of three CAPP objectives (namely (i) promoting informed knowledge of CST business and professional leaders and (ii) promoting initiatives aimed at expanding the church’s role in all sectors of contemporary society), we have in all honesty not focused much yet on the third objective, namely (iii) promoting fund raising initiatives to support the mission of the Holy See (By-Laws, Art. 3). This de-prioritisation, however, appears natural to us as we first have to earn our right to fundraising through a clear common message and value adding activities.

We believe these five points spell out our program for the coming 1-2 years. In doing so, we are inspired by Pope Francis, in particular with the following words from the encyclical *Laudato Sí*: “*Love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care, is also civic and political, and it makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world. Love for society and commitment to the common good are outstanding expressions of a charity which affects not only relationships between individuals but also ‘macro-relationships, social, economic and political ones’.* That is why the Church set before the world the ideal of a ‘civilization of love’. Social love is the key to authentic development: ‘In order to make society more human, more worthy of the human person, love in social life – political, economic and cultural – must be given renewed value, becoming the constant and highest norm for all activity’.”⁹

4 REFLECTIONS ON SUSTAINABILITY

To be certain, injecting a dosage of CST into all sectors of society, and most notably the world of business is not an end in itself. The end-goal is to leverage our age-old wisdoms of living in harmony to do justice to the work of God. Allow us to end this paper with some of our thoughts about this topic. This may help to calibrate our thoughts with others and hence engage our environment with a more mature message that is agreeable to CAPP elsewhere.

In the first sentence of *Laudato Sí* the Pope recalls us to be witness of the beauty of all that was created by our Lord, by reciting two lines from this old but beautiful canticle:¹⁰

¹Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,

Yours are the *praises, the glory, and the honor, and all blessing,*

²To You alone, Most High, do they belong,

and no human is worthy to mention Your name.

³Praised be You, my *Lord*, with all *Your creatures,*

especially Sir Brother Sun,

Who is the day and through whom You give us light.

⁴And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;

and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.

⁹ *Laudato Sí*, at 231.

¹⁰ *Laudato Sí*, at 1.

The canticle reminds us, also in subsequent sentences, of the adoration and respect for all of God’s creation. Which is something we, as Christians especially, should have special care for. This special care is realised in particular in the aim of sustainability. It is many times a term that is applied in the area of our earth and the natural creation, although, it should not be limited to this (see also Exhibit 4).

EXHIBIT 4: MIRRORING THE UN TAXONOMY OF SUSTAINABILITY WITH THAT OF CAPP



In our justified proclamation for all people of good will, to take up this duty of care taking of our “common home”,¹¹ in a sustainable way, we should not forget in applying it to ourselves. As protagonists of creation, we should treat God’s creation in a sustainable way. Here we do not stand alone. As Pope Benedict XVI wrote in the encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*: “As society becomes ever more globalized, it makes us neighbours but does not make us brothers.”¹² However, common efforts for our common home may help us bring more brotherhood.

We raise this with regard to three dimensions of our current state of mind, which from our Dutch vantage point seem important in credibly proclaiming a message of sustainability to the world around us:

- First, in the global movement to adjust our position in promoting a more sustainable world, we feel that the local churches that are supposed to be closest to the people, are far behind in spreading and living that message. Very little – if any – time in the sermons within our churches is dedicated to concrete mundane sustainability issues. And also, our time after Mass could be used to spread messages of environmental and social justice? Or, could we use the positive energy after Mass to rally groups to go out and do something good in our communities? And furthermore, empower churches to more actively employ alternative energy sources and/or better isolate windows and walls? Having visited some churches in North America, we see evidence that this increases the attractiveness of the church.
- Second, the revelations of last summer showed the issue of structural and world-wide practices infringing on many of our principles of CST. We feel that the dynamic here is the inverse, as it

¹¹ Laudato Sí, at eg 1, 13, 17 et seq, and 164.

¹² Caritas in veritate, at. 19.

seems to be the central level that is lagging behind what the church-goers expect. The church is required to more actively and substantively respond to this crisis, which deprived so many people of their human dignity. Our impression is that we can't seem to muster the courage to disappoint more change averse sections of the Church's upper echelons. In this context it seems clear that amendments must be considered to secure a more sustainable church.

- Third, how do we, in particular in the Netherlands, provide for sustainable presence of the church? The decreasing number of practicing Catholics has resulted in a diminishing cash flow, resulting in a structural closing down of churches. The church is withdrawing from many areas of society, and now also losing physical appearance. Whereas these buildings have been carriers of faith and community for many generations, and beacons of stability and comfort in the core of villages and cities, this is now hidden behind closed doors.¹³ They are the common place to share and dialogue on matters of CST. How can a catholic church be sustainable, when it seems to withdraw its presence among the flog of Christ? Surely, addressing the first two dimensions will help immensely. However, more is needed, and sooner.

EXHIBIT 5: FATIMA CHURCH IN WEERT



Our national coordinator Thijs Hendrix has shown us one phenomenally courageous path by acquiring (and becoming steward) two former mid-20th century churches in the city of Weert (Exhibits 5 and 6) to restore them to their old glory. Not to turn them into hotels, book-shops or

¹³ Sible de Blauw, 'Kees Fens-Lezing. De versteende droom: Over de noodzaak van het kerkgebouw', Amsterdam: Athenaeum-Polak & Van Genneep, 2016, p. 1-32.

apartments, but to destine them to serve the community with social, educational and cultural activities, inspired by CST and the Advent message of former Bishop of the Diocese Roermond, Monseigneur Frans Wiertz.¹⁴ A child wrote around Christmas in the visitor book (during a children's ice-skating event in the former church): "Thank you God that you allow me and my friends to ice-skate in your house".

EXHIBIT 6: FRANCISCUS HUIS IN WEERT



5 CONCLUSION

With CAPPs support, we are eager to continue our five point agenda for the local Dutch CAPP Chapter. CAPPs work and meetings have been inspiring, and we aim to further our chapter's activities in this spirit. Furthermore, there is an appeal to the leadership of our church on the three points of sustainability, as most of the changes require also their support. We wish to engage, with them, CAPP, members from our fellow CAPP chapters and all people of good will on all these matters in a spirit of dialogue,¹⁵ in order to contribute to the objectives of CAPP.

¹⁴ Advent message of Mgr Wiertz, December 2013: "De getuigenis van Paus Franciscus geeft ons een krachtige impuls tot kerkvernieuwing. 'Nu is het de tijd van genade', een genadekans voor de Kerk nú. Als Kerk Teken zijn van Gods mensenliefde hier op aarde, dat is toch de taak die de Heer ons heeft opgedragen.

De viering van de geboorte van Jezus, onze Heer en Verlosser, moge ons daartoe inspiratie en kracht geven. Op voorspraak van Onze Lieve Vrouw, Onbevleekt Ontvangen, de Sterre der Zee, bid ik dat in ons bisdom vele Paus Franciscusgroepen mogen ontstaan."

¹⁵ M. Buber, *Ich und Du*, Stuttgart: Reclam, 2008.