

508 | Cuppa Joe | Historic Sites Foundation | The Development of the Community of Christ in the Netherlands up to 1948  
Project Zion Podcast

**Josh Mangelson** 00:17

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

**Karin Peter** 00:33

Welcome. This is "Cuppa Joe" where we explore Restoration history, and I'm your host, Karin Peter. Now here at "Cuppa Joe", we partner with the Historic Sites Foundation to interview the presenters from their lecture series, and right now, we're in the process of interviewing the lecturers from the Spring 2022 Lecture Series. So today, today's interview, we have an interesting connection with the start of the Latter-day Saints Church in the Netherlands, and we're going to hear about that from our guest who's going to share the development of the church in its first 25 years in the Netherlands, and how this has led to two, kind of, regional strongholds in the Netherlands. And our guest, who's going to guide us through this discussion of the church in the Netherlands, is Kees Olijnsma, and Kees is a convert to the Community of Christ. He was baptized when he was 17, and in his professional career, he was in marketing, sales, and business development, and was, let's see, in FrieslandCampina, is that how that's pronounced?

**Kees Olijnsma** 01:49

That's correct, yeah.

**Karin Peter** 01:50

Okay, okay, the world's largest dairy cooperative. And before his retirement in 2018, he visited over 50 countries, in all continents except Oceania. And in the Community of Christ, Kees serves in the office of high priest. He's been a pastor of the largest congregation in Europe, and he's been, and is a national leader and ministry coordinator. And I had the pleasure of meeting Kees several years ago when I got to visit Easter Camp in the Netherlands. And so, I'm just really thrilled to be here with him today. So welcome, Kees.

**Kees Olijnsma** 02:31

Thank you, Karin.

**Karin Peter** 02:34

So, Kees...

**Kees Olijnsma** 02:34

It's all, the pleasure is all mine.

**Karin Peter** 02:36

Well, thank you. When we began our conversation before we began to record, I mentioned to you that all of our *Project Zion Podcast* series have kind of a coffee theme to them. And you said that in Dutch,

there are lots of phrases that have to do with coffee drinking, which fits right in with our *Project Zion* theme. So even though I didn't ask you ahead of time, can you share one, one coffee term for us?

**Kees Olijnsma 03:04**

One of the most known and, which is a little bit hard to translate, but I will give it a try is that in Dutch you say, "niet zeuren voor koffie". That means that before coffee is being drunk, you should not, let's say, discuss any items which is early morning. First, you have the coffee and then you do the business, because you need to be clear in your mind and have the coffee first. So, a lot of Dutch people in their office, they start at seven or eight o'clock in the morning to drink coffee and basically they drink it all day until somebody-, some people even late in the evening, and they still can sleep. So that, that's quite an achievement.

**Karin Peter 03:49**

I think that's going to be one of my favorite coffee terms, "No business before coffee". Absolutely.

**Kees Olijnsma 03:56**

That's correct.

**Karin Peter 03:57**

Absolutely. That's, that's perfect for those of us who live out in the Seattle area in the United States, because that's our, that's our way of functioning as well. So, Kees, your contribution to the Historic Sites Foundation Spring Lecture Series is titled "The Development of the Community of Christ in the Netherlands up to 1948". So, this would be a really critical time in Europe when the church was developed in the Netherlands. And in your description, it says that, "The first desire to bring the Restoration to the Netherlands dates back to 1840." So, we're, we're going back to when the church was one Restoration movement before it divided with the schism.

**Kees Olijnsma 04:50**

That's correct.

**Karin Peter 04:50**

So, brief-, briefly, can you tell us a little bit about those original efforts to kind of plant the Restoration in the Netherlands at that time?

**Kees Olijnsma 04:58**

Yeah. It all started with a, what Olson Hyde's, at that point we'll call a kind of a vision. And he said that is that I have a vision, and the vision is that in Europe, there are big groups of Jewish people in, in London, in Amsterdam, in Jerusalem and in Constantinople, which nowadays we call Istanbul. And he said, those are the places we need to go, and along the way we will take all kind of other people, we will take them, Gentiles, we will take them along the route as well. So, his vision, which he shared in 1840, got kind of a blessing from the head office. And in 1841, he left for Europe in order to do what he wanted to do. In some countries he was successful. Like in Israel, there is still a, what I see is an Orson Hyde Garden in Jerusalem. In the Netherlands, he was not that successful. He was only there for a couple of months and the only thing he wrote during those times were kind of a tourist brochures. He

wrote how nice the town was, and how clean the streets, and how interesting the buildings, how many vessels in the harbor from all different nationalities. But he left without any convert in that same year, in 1841, in November, without no results at all. The only result, he spoke to a Rabbi in Amsterdam, who didn't speak English so it was a difficult conversation. But out of that, one tract was translated. So that was already then, the first draft was, was translated into Dutch. But that was all. That was all his, let's say, coming out of his vision to find, let's say, new members in Amsterdam. That was the first attempt.

**Karin Peter** 07:04

So that was, so out of that whole experience, one tract, one pamphlet.

**Kees Olijnsma** 07:09

That's it. Yeah.

**Karin Peter** 07:10

Okay.

**Kees Olijnsma** 07:11

That was the total result of his...

**Karin Peter** 07:13

Oh dear. That must have been disappointing.

**Kees Olijnsma** 07:16

That was quite disappointing, yeah. The interesting thing is, and I will make a sidestep here, because as I said in my introduction, there is a connection with the LDS history, because in 1860-, 1861, a Dutch guy converted to the LDS church in, he was converted in Wales, then moved to Utah, and then was sent back to the Netherlands in order to bring the LDS, let's say, belief to the Netherlands. He was of Dutch origin. He was of Friesland origin. Friesland is one of the provinces in the north. You've been there, so you know, but many people don't. It's in the north. It's very close where I live, and it's very close where the larg-, and now the largest congregation of the so called a Community of Christ congregation is. It's only five miles apart, where the first LDS members were baptized, and where the largest congregation of the Community of Christ is based, which was, you can call this a coincidence, but it also has to do, that is one of the learnings that's further down the line, but we can come to that now, is that in bringing the faith, the beliefs to a certain country, it's very helpful to have native people, people who have the roots, the origin in the country they are sent to. They speak the language, they have stamina, they have courage, and they are very much aware of, let's say, the culture, the habits of the people. So they are, so to speak, one of them. So, it's very interesting that this gentleman, and that is also in my lecture. I will show you also the statue, there is a statue, big statue, based in that place. It's an interesting statue. And you see that he baptized his brother, his sister-in-law and his sister. I've done some research and from that whole family, none of them, let's say, stayed in the LDS church. So, they all wandered off, and he eventually moved back to the United States. But it's, it's a very interesting that so close to the place where the Community of Christ is based, also, the LDS church has had its first members and this, let's say, this ditch where it has happened, the ditch is still there. So, you can, you can still imagine how this has been happening over there.

**Karin Peter 10:17**

Yeah.

**Kees Olijnsma 10:18**

Very interesting.

**Karin Peter 10:20**

You could call it a coincidence, or you could call it the epicenter of Restoration beliefs there in Friesland. That would be fair.

**Kees Olijnsma 10:27**

Yeah, well, yeah, because on the other part, and, and that, that's a little bit of part of the Christianity in itself, Christianity was very late in this part of Holland. It stayed, what, what if you see Holland, you have the big rivers in the south, and then you have up north, which was all swampy area, it was flooded each autumn, each winter, because there were no dikes and dams yet. In my lecture, in my introduction, I will come to back a little bit about how, how Holland has been built. But Christianity was very late. The first missionaries from the, let's say, Roman Catholic Church were even killed over here. So, people had very strong nature belief. Everything was from nature, so Christianity was foreign. And now you see that two so new faith movements, like the LDS and like the Community, found some of the big bases in this part of the Netherlands, which was also interesting.

**Karin Peter 11:34**

Yes, because it doesn't sound like it would be the most fertile soil for a religious movement to be planted if, if there's this almost, not animosity, but resistance, maybe.

**Kees Olijnsma 11:51**

Yeah,

**Karin Peter 11:51**

Yeah.

**Kees Olijnsma 11:52**

Yeah.

**Karin Peter 11:52**

Absolutely.

**Kees Olijnsma 11:52**

It's a little bit hostile surrounding.

**Karin Peter 11:54**

Yes. Okay. I'll let you say it. I didn't want to say that. But okay. We'll...

**Kees Olijnsma 11:57**

Okay, let me say it then.

**Karin Peter 11:59**

Thank you. So that was 1861 when the LDS...

**Kees Olijnsma 12:04**

That's 1861. Now we move a little bit further in 1869. There is Elki Jasper and he was being sent as the first missionary to the Netherlands, and he had a very, the same short period as Orson Hyde. He was only there for a couple of months and then he left. He said, well, nobody wants to support me. I'm starving here because I don't have money, and I'm coming back. However, he makes a note in his reports that he made some converts in Zaandam, which is close to Amsterdam, Amsterdam and Rotterdam. So, there were some baptisms done, but they were never recorded.

**Karin Peter 12:43**

Oh, okay.

**Kees Olijnsma 12:47**

And then it was silent for almost, was silent for more than 50 years.

**Karin Peter 12:53**

So, this is what was interesting to me is that, in your lecture, you talk about how these original forays into planting the Restoration in the Netherlands led to the establishment of what became the Community of Christ. So, I'm assuming the RLDS tradition didn't happen till 1924?

**Kees Olijnsma 13:16**

That's correct.

**Karin Peter 13:17**

Okay.

**Kees Olijnsma 13:18**

It was, after 1869. Nothing happened for 50 years.

**Karin Peter 13:22**

So...

**Kees Olijnsma 13:22**

And then Freder-, Frederick M. Smith visited Europe in 1920.

**Karin Peter 13:27**

OK.

**Kees Olijnsma 13:27**

He had a long trip and he visited also the Netherlands. And there he found somebody who was a converted LDS member, which was John Graven. And he felt he was converted already to the RLDS, let me put it, because that historically, is easy to talk. And they came in in January 1921, and they baptized two of John Graven's sons. So those being recorded as the first baptisms in the Netherlands in 1921. But "first" basically is not accurate, because the first would already in 1869, but never record. So, we don't have names, and places, and people who did the baptism.

**Karin Peter 14:10**

Okay. So, 1921, people are baptized when F.M. Smith visited. The church then became officially established in '24. So, if you can kind of share a little bit about that story, and maybe where it came from there, and how you found this information. I mean, how did you find that there were people baptized in '61 that weren't recorded? So, let's talk about that and how hard this was to put together.

**Kees Olijnsma 14:40**

I must honestly say I had a lot of help from Joey Williams because a lot of this information is coming from his paper. He has made a paper when he has his MAR study in 2004. And there was already another study being done through the Community of Christ. Then it was in reading old name by another theology student in Holland. So, there were already two sources. Together with Joey, some interviews were made. And when the church or some of the congregations were having us for 40th or 50th anniversary, I also interviewed people from, let's say, the first period, from the first era. So, all these notes we found, and we put them, well, we tried to put them as much as possible together, because that was one of the things we were running into. In those days, you had also to do with people who were illiterate. So not a lot of people wrote down in a diary, or in a letter, or in a book, or in a notebook, what they had experienced, or putting dates or numbers to it. People were also simple people. So were, they were not skilled in writing, because they were handcrafts people. And as I am a convert in the Community of Christ, I have no relatives, earlier generations, I have no grandmothers or grandfathers who have done it, or who have been there for many years, who knew people or who describe certain developments. So yeah, that's the way we got all this information together.

**Karin Peter 16:34**

So, I don't, I don't know what the experience was like for you personally. I love doing that kind of research and, and discovering things about the church, especially where I live, because I have a, an affinity with that. So how was this for you? What was most important to you when you learned about the church in the Netherlands? What are some of the challenges, post 1924, that the church faced in the Netherlands. In 1924, I'm going to assume the Netherlands was still in recovery from what happened in Europe in the first World War, and yet, as we know, then comes a second world war. So, can we talk about the challenges the church faced growing in the Netherlands? What it was like? Who were, who were the people who first joined and made these large congregations?

**Kees Olijnsma 17:26**

Yeah, well, let me try to get that a little bit clear. One of the things which, which was very crucial, was that there were a lot of open-air services. So, people went to the park and had a service over there. And I think the Community of Christ at that point was different from other churches because there was

a lot of singing. There was a lot of music. Music is also sound which people can hear from distances, which is intriguing to people. And especially in, if you look to Rotterdam congregation, there was Arie Pijl. He was the choir leader. He was already a choir leader before he came to the, to the church. And he was also the first man who made a small hymnal, a small booklet of 50 hymns, which he found important for people to sing. And it took almost 100 years before we had our own hymnal, which we just presented last month, because this is our own hymnal which has been published, and it's for sale in bookshops, etc. Although music was so important, we, as a church, always had our own internal kind of hymnals but we never went outside our borders, outside our community until recently. So, these, these open-air services, which was the success in Rotterdam, was also the success in the other stronghold. Rotterdam is a big city, which is in the West. In the North, there was the same story. We had Brother Veenstra, Fokke Veenstra. And he was, just as the LDS missionary, he was a native. So, he came from this area, the same area where I live. So, he was one of them. He was not a big singer, but his wife was a great singer. So, wherever she sang, there were 3 or 400 people present in order to hear how nice she could sing. So, people came for her singing and then Veenstra had a small service. He used simple words, because people were simple handcrafts people, people in shipyards, farmers, agriculture workers, that type, and trading people, there's a lot of trading people, but they were simple people. So, they should have a simple message. So, his message was very simple. He talked about injustice with other churches, because at that point, there was, there were very strict rules in several Dutch Reformed Churches. He talked about continuous revelation. But he was also always talking about invitation, coming to join. And those simple messages together with the singing, inspired people, and made people come in order to get baptized. So those are the, and that lead to two strongholds. So, we had a stronghold in a big city, like Rotterdam, and we had a stronghold on the countryside, because the place we talking about, the Zwaagwesteinde, which is a nowadays 5000 inhabitants, in those days, maybe only 2000. So now we have in the city and the countryside.

**Karin Peter 21:11**

So, you have, you've used the word that is music to a seventy's ears when you said that he focused on invitation with his message.

**Kees Olijnsma 21:22**

Yup.

**Karin Peter 21:23**

So, everybody out there, remember that, that when we share our story of faith and our choice to walk that faith in Community of Christ, that we also invite others to participate as well.

**Kees Olijnsma 21:38**

Yup.

**Karin Peter 21:38**

So. Absolutely.

**Kees Olijnsma 21:40**

Yup, our Mission Initiative, our Mission Initiatives start with that one, right?

**Karin Peter 21:45**

Invite People to Christ.

**Kees Olijnsma 21:45**

That's the first one to mention.

**Karin Peter 21:47**

Absolutely, absolutely. Careful Kees, you might have a change of priesthood focus there. You don't want to...

**Kees Olijnsma 21:55**

Oh yeah.

**Karin Peter 21:55**

You don't want to give us any ideas here in the seventy.

**Kees Olijnsma 21:58**

Yeah, yeah. Don't talk to Larry, please.

**Karin Peter 22:04**

So, as you, as you began to learn more about how it grew in the city, and also in the, in the country, I loved the fact that music was so central to that growth. And it seems such a travesty that even though it was essential to the growth that the church didn't have a hymnal in Dutch until now. And so...

**Kees Olijnsma 22:31**

Yeah, which, yeah, which is, which is very strange, which, which, which I came across when we discussed this in 2003, when the *Community of Christ Sings* was published. So, so I, as a national leader, I discussed it with Joey at that point, he being, let's say, the Mission Center President for Europe at that time. And we discussed it. But there were also other projects we had to do, many others that had also to do with, which is items, like I think about sexual behavior and all this type of issues. That was also the reason why Sandee Gamet came over to Europe, in order together with me, set up a kind of study, in order to teach leaders how to deal with those issues. So, the train the trainer, what was the assignment, her assignment, but it fell through because we couldn't find a university, except the one in Seattle, and we found it a little bit too far from the Netherlands to, to move over there to do this study. And then we decided to put this hymnal first. And of course, it was a nice coincidence that Sandee Gamet was a music teacher and she loved to do the project. So, we started this six years project with volunteers, and we finished it just last month, because yeah, we, of course, also this project was hit by the corona crisis. So, the last two years, we have monthly conversations, only on Zoom.

**Karin Peter 24:14**

Right?



**Kees Olijnsma 24:15**

Everything should go on Zoom. So that was, but that led to, let's say, I can, hopefully I can show you, because this is how it looks like.

**Karin Peter 24:26**

Think it's beautiful.

**Kees Olijnsma 24:29**

Yeah, and it's really a booklet. It's not for, it's for sale in bookshops. It's been bought by other choirs. So, our message, our mus-, our message, not our music, but our message is now as an invitation going to many other places, places we don't know where they end up, and we don't know what will be the end result of this. But I think choirs will find these new, these new songs, these new texts because there are many new text, appealing to people like, like acceptance, like how to deal with the environment, and how to do about peace and justice, etc. So those themes which are very actual at the moment, are very well captured in the songs we have in this, in this hymnal, which is all in Dutch.

**Karin Peter 25:26**

What a gift that is...

**Kees Olijnsma 25:29**

Yeah.

**Karin Peter 25:29**

...that will extend beyond the church. That's just marvelous.

**Kees Olijnsma 25:32**

Yeah, yeah.

**Karin Peter 25:32**

That's marvelous. I'm so excited to hear about that. Kees, when you, when you began this research, I'm assuming that where you started with your understanding of the development of the church in the Netherlands is different from where you ended up. So, what did you learn along the way that you, that you think, either was new to you, or gave you new insight?

**Kees Olijnsma 26:08**

That, there's always the inter-, I've been to the World Conference several times, and before it starts, there's always the flag ceremony. So, it starts with which country was first, which was the United States, I think Canada was second and, and then suddenly, the Netherlands is number five in row, which I found intriguing, because I knew the church started only in 1924 and I could not imagine that we, in 1924, we were only 5<sup>th</sup> in line, which was, which was an intriguing question, because when, when starting about history, you go back to your own congregation. That's where you start. You know where it is. But that congregation was from 1937. And I knew Rotterdam was first so you go back to 18 to 1924. But we are 5<sup>th</sup> in the row in the flag ceremony. That comes off 1841. So, what has happened

between 1841 and 1924? Which is a quite an intriguing question. What has happened? So, then the research started in order to see we are filling the gaps.

**Karin Peter 27:16**

Yeah.

**Kees Olijnsma 27:16**

When there was not so much to fill, because there was 1841, 3, 3, 4 months - Orson Hyde, 1869, four months - Elki Jasper, and that's it. And then we have to wait until the President himself comes along...

**Karin Peter 27:31**

Yeah.

**Kees Olijnsma 27:32**

...in 1920 in order to really start.

**Karin Peter 27:36**

He put those early missionaries to shame, didn't he. Because...

**Kees Olijnsma 27:39**

Yes, he did. Okay guys, I will do it myself.

**Karin Peter 27:43**

Exactly. So, after, after finishing your lecture and doing all the research and, and your experience in putting the hymnal together, and the other things that have been going on in the church in the Netherlands, what do you think is the most important, what are the most important aspects about the church in the Netherlands that people should know? Just, as people listen to *Project Zion*, or learn more about the church globally, what is important that we need to know about the church in the Netherlands?

**Kees Olijnsma 28:17**

I think one other thing is not particularl to the Netherlands, but one other thing I learned is that if you're going on mission, and we've seen it in many occasions, we go into mission, and we send people to a certain country, and then after a couple of years disappointed, they come back and say it doesn't, it didn't work. I couldn't get it done. What we see in the LDS church in the Netherlands and also here with let's say the RLDS at that time, is that if you use natives, indigenous people, who knew, who speak the language, who have the level of understanding what is, let's say the habits in a certain country, what is the culture, what is the wording I should use in order to touch people's heart, not to speak their language but to touch people's heart? What should I, I think that's a big learning in order to, to get established or to get accepted, and later on, get established. I think that's, that's a learning I got out of all these papers, and that's something, also professionally I've seen that many times, because we are a big company, we have appearance in various places, and, of course, we used also expats. Big companies use expats. That's, that's what they do. But if you really go to the heart of your consumer, if it is business or it is church, if you want to go to the heart, you should have local people in order to get

things done. And I think that, that's a big learning for me. Another big learning for me was that music can be a great means in order to touch people. I think we all know everybody listening to this podcast will know that music can really touch your heart...

**Karin Peter 30:23**

Absolutely.

**Kees Olijnsma 30:23**

...either in the wording, or in a melody, or in the combination of the two, or in the occasion where it is. But music, it com-, it binds people, it puts people together. Because one of the guys who was in our presentation with the hymnal, he said, "Music is the only way and only moment everybody is on the same note." And that's true because....

**Karin Peter 30:53**

That's a beautiful sentiment.

**Kees Olijnsma 30:53**

Because at that point we all read the same... sorry?

**Karin Peter 30:56**

I was writing it down, because it's such a beautiful sentiment. That's a, that's a beautiful statement. Yeah.

**Kees Olijnsma 31:00**

Yeah.

**Kees Olijnsma 31:02**

Yeah. And that's, that's very clear is, so then you, you feel, you feel as a group. One of the eyewitnesses of those open-air meetings said that also. She said, "We felt as a group, and we felt that everybody was part of that group. Nobody felt excluded from the group. It was all inclusive. Everybody accepted each other." And I think that that's great for music. So that, that is my second learning. That yeah, let's say and if you under-, yeah, the church in the Netherlands, yeah, I think we always have been a kind of a liberal church in forefront of movements, is it in peace and justice, or is it in LGBTQ issues or many other issues. The Netherlands people are, in that sense, liberal. They look for freedom for people, they look for acceptance for people. So that's, I think, another learning.

**Karin Peter 32:18**

I know when I visited, Kees, those, that tone of acceptance and kind of being on the cutting edge of what it meant to be progressive and open and, and mindful of these bigger matters that face us as humans, was something that was really apparent to me when I visited the church in the Netherlands, that people were interested in these bigger issues and how as a church we address them, we come together, we focus on them. So...*[inaudible]*

**Kees Olijnsma 32:53**

Yeah, sometimes we are a little bit over that edge, and we try to, let's say, as a small country of only 70 million people, we try to steer the whole world more or less. And so, sometimes we should be a little bit more modest and say, oh, hang on, hang on, we're just small. Don't shout that, that hard. We're only small. But still, yeah, that's a little bitty attitude we have.

**Karin Peter 33:18**

I like it. I like, I like that. And I like stopping for coffee every morning. So, yes, those are good things about the Netherlands.

**Kees Olijnsma 33:27**

Yeah.

**Karin Peter 33:28**

So as people listen to your lecture, they're going to be learning a little bit more about the church in the Netherlands. How can this experience of learning more, more in depth understanding of the church in the Netherlands, help our corporate discipleship in Community of Christ, help us as a body of faithful followers?

**Kees Olijnsma 33:55**

I think it will, it will at least show that each country has its own history, its own story. What you see in the Netherlands, for instance, it started in Rotterdam. Why did it start in Rotterdam? Because it's a big harbor, and everybody in those days came by steamboat, not by airplane. So, all the steamboats came to Rotterdam. So, the first stop in the Netherlands was a big harbor, which was Rotterdam. So, it started from there. It was easy because you didn't travel all the way up to Friesland which is 250 kilometers down, down. You don't go there because you don't know where to go. You don't know anybody. So, it started where it's, let's say from logistical point of view, it was most easy to start. It didn't start in Amsterdam, which was said in Orson Hyde's talk, he talked about Amsterdam, but he started in Rotterdam, because that was his first point of entrance.

**Karin Peter 35:08**

So that Dutch pragmatism is showing, as you talk about that, Kees.

**Kees Olijnsma 35:15**

Yeah.

**Karin Peter 35:15**

There's a, there's a phrase that used to be on greeting cards, and it said, "Bloom where you are planted." And that's kind of what this is. It's where you find yourself, that's where you begin.

**Kees Olijnsma 35:27**

Yeah.

**Karin Peter 35:28**

Yeah, absolutely. So, in the United States, it was by train, so you...

**Kees Olijnsma 35:32**

Yeah.

**Karin Peter 35:33**

...find all the plantings along the railroad lines in the US.

**Kees Olijnsma 35:37**

Yep.

**Karin Peter 35:38**

So, as you studied this, what do you think was most impactful or most important in your own faith journey, when you looked at the history of the church in the Netherlands? You joined at age 17, so, your, your life experience has been pretty extensive since you were a young person when you joined, but how did this impact you and your discipleship?

**Kees Olijnsma 36:04**

Yeah, well, I came to the church in the early '70s, and that was when we had in Europe, what nowadays what we tend to call the International Youth Camps, which was new. It was started in the early '70s, and I met some of my school friends who were with the Community of Christ. I met them, and more or less, they invited me to go as well. And that was the occasion when we went to Dunfield House in England. I was from a poor family, so we didn't have money to go on holidays, so I talked to my parents, because I thought, for me, it was a unique opportunity to go on holiday in a safe surrounding abroad, which was completely new to me. If I didn't go to church, fine, then at least I had a nice holiday out of it. That was the basic idea. So, my parents, members of the Dutch Reformed Church, they helped me and said, well, we'll see if we can find, I think it was, 300 guilders. So, it was around 120 euros, which is around \$150, more or less, which was quite an amount in the early '70s. But we found 'em. So, I got inspired there, and a year later I was baptized, because I found there something new. It touches my heart, and those times were of, of a unique structure. And if you look down the lines of, let's say, the, the European and the British Isles leaderships over the last, let's say 40-50 years, most of them, I think 80%, maybe even more, originate from those youth camps. And then you talk, also guys like Andrew Bolton, Mike Botts [*spelling?*], well, a huge amount of others were all there as youngsters, and stayed. I think even, even guys, he just passed away, Greg Savage, was there, just as an example. Many were there. And there I've, I started my journey, and which eventually led to all kinds of leadership roles, etc. But there, it all started and I think that was very important, and it still is important to find a, as youth, a kind of a sound base where you can say, here's my, my faith based. Here is my foundation, my own foundation, my own experience, and from here on I move on.

**Karin Peter 38:55**

That's very helpful, Kees. A lot of our listeners are learning about Community of Christ by listening to *Project Zion Podcasts*. And one of the questions we receive, often receive is, how does Community of Christ shape the discipleship of children and youth. And our response is usually, well, mainly through

our camping program, our youth camping program, and you are a wonderful example of that, of your experience of the camping program, turning into a life of faithful leadership and ministry. So, for our listeners, there are other episodes about the camping program, but Kees gives us a good example of what it looks like from the inside.

**Kees Olijnsma 39:43**

I think, I think there's a nice historical study in, in the effects of those International Youth Camps and how it has shaped the European church.

**Karin Peter 39:53**

So, is that your next Historic Sites lecture, Kees? Will that be next year?

**Kees Olijnsma 39:57**

Well, I don't know. I don't know because I, next to this one, I already have another invitation because, as you mentioned, the church in Netherlands started in 1924, so it's only two years away that the church in the Netherlands is existing 100 year. So, people already spoke to me and said, are you gonna write a book about 100 years history? So, there is already a kind of a challenge because my lecture has also been captured in a booklet. So, there's even a book for my lecture.

**Karin Peter 40:34**

Oh, marvelous. Who are the individuals on the front?

**Kees Olijnsma 40:39**

That is, I hope we can see it on the camera, but this is Pijl, who was the music leader in Rotterdam, and this is Veenstra, who was the missionary...

**Karin Peter 40:51**

Right.

**Kees Olijnsma 40:51**

...in the north?

**Karin Peter 40:52**

Right. And he's the one who, with, his wife was the one who sang?

**Kees Olijnsma 40:59**

His wife, sorry?

**Karin Peter 41:02**

Was his wife the woman who sang, that people came and listened to the singing?

**Kees Olijnsma 41:07**

Yeah.

**Karin Peter** 41:07

Okay.

**Kees Olijnsma** 41:08

Yeah, that was his wife.

**Karin Peter** 41:09

Excellent.

**Kees Olijnsma** 41:09

Exactly. So, so I comp-, I compiled all my text and I added all kinds of pictures to it, because some pictures were lost because, at one time, Joey Williams, his laptop was stolen, so all the illustrations were on his laptop, and it was all gone. So, I had some help with people, members in Rotterdam, and we went through all the archives in Rotterdam in order to find all kind of old pictures in order to illustrate my lecture more.

**Karin Peter** 41:40

So, for folks who are going to watch this on the archives at [historicsites.org](https://historicsites.org), [historicsitesfoundation.org](https://historicsitesfoundation.org), you'll, they'll be able to see all those slides of the photos as you give your lecture. So.

**Kees Olijnsma** 41:53

Yeah, and I've sent already two copies of the booklet to Barbara.

**Karin Peter** 41:57

Oh, to the Historic Team. Good.

**Kees Olijnsma** 42:00

Yes.

**Karin Peter** 42:00

Good.

**Kees Olijnsma** 42:01

It should be somewhere already in her office. So.

**Karin Peter** 42:05

Perfect. So, I find it interesting, Kees, that your first international travel was going to youth camp and your life took you to 50 countries after that. So.

**Kees Olijnsma** 42:17

Yeah.

**Karin Peter** 42:17

Yes.

**Kees Olijnsma 42:18**

Yeah, some, some of them were holidays, but some of them were connected to my profession, and I must honestly say, I've ended that. I was one of the first employees of my company, company to go beyond the Iron, what was then called the Iron Curtain. So, I've, I've seen, I've seen those countries as they were in the communist time.

**Karin Peter 42:43**

Right.

**Kees Olijnsma 42:44**

So, I went to countries like Hungaria and Romania, which was not that bad, but I also went to Macedonia, to Albania, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and all these kinds of nice places. And I've seen it, as in the old times...

**Karin Peter 43:00**

Yeah.

**Kees Olijnsma 43:00**

...as how people lived, how limited the liv-, their living was, how hard existence basically was. And yeah, those are stories who have also shaped my life. I have seen that, let's say the market in Uzbekistan, which is a 24 hours market, nowadays everything in the western world is 24 hours, but they already had it then. But those people were more happy than we are because they have no problems with mortgage, or with rent, or with stocks, or with pension, or with you name it, because they don't have those problems. The only problem they have is, do I have a place to sleep tonight? And, do I have food tomorrow? Yes? Then I'm happy because my family is here as well, so I'm happy.

**Karin Peter 43:55**

Very simple existence.

**Kees Olijnsma 43:57**

Very simple existence, but more happy. And if you go to, if you go to countries like Ghana, people have the same, but the big difference is, in Ghana, everybody is singing all the time.

**Karin Peter 44:10**

You have some great stories, Kees. Next time at World Conference when we visit, you may have to share some things with us.

**Karin Peter 44:18**

Oh, yay. Well, I...

**Kees Olijnsma 43:18**

This is marvelous. So, I'm looking forward to future *Project Zion Podcasts*, whether it's on your book that you're going to produce, or whether it's on the camping program, whatever it might be. I'm looking



forward to hearing more from you about the church, not just in the leather, Netherlands, but also how it influenced the church in other parts of Europe. So, are, do you have any closing thoughts or pieces that you meant to share during our conversation that we didn't get to that you'd like to share before we close?

**Kees Olijnsma 44:52**

I think I want to share a little bit about, let's say, the courage and the determination of the first members who got baptized. I think those people and, in Friesland it were even two women, one of them was seven months pregnant, and they went into this small river in order to get baptized. And in those days, there are horrible stories that peoples throw rocks at them. People were disturbing, people were shouting, were cursing. People were seeing them as a kind of a sect. And still, and we talk about here the '30s, where things were very bad economically, etc., but still they persisted. Still, they went on, and their belief and their trust in that everything would come to a good end, they just moved on. And I think it's very courageous what these people have done, because if I think, if I could do it myself, I'm not sure if I could do it that way. I think it's very courageous for so such simple people, because they could have get fired, or they could have get ignored, or they could have get kicked out of the community, everything could happen in those days. And still, they did it.

**Karin Peter 46:16**

So, Kees, some of our listeners who have left their faith community in which they've grown up, many of them grew up LDS and are exploring Community of Christ, are, might feel, have some feelings of solidarity with those early members, because they are experiencing similar issues, and...

**Kees Olijnsma 46:38**

Yeah.

**Karin Peter 46:38**

have had to be also...

**Karin Peter 46:40**

Yeah.

**Karin Peter 46:40**

...persistent, and trusting and courageous. So.

**Kees Olijnsma 46:44**

Yeah.

**Karin Peter 46:44**

Thank you for sharing that. That is a, that is part of the history of being a person who seeks a spiritual home in a way that maybe other people either don't appreciate or don't understand. So, thank you for that.

**Kees Olijnsma** 47:01

You're welcome.

**Karin Peter** 47:01

And thank you, thank you for being with us today...

**Kees Olijnsma** 47:04

Ok. No problem..

**Karin Peter** 47:05

...and sharing with us. And for our listeners, we do encourage you to view Kees's lecture and that will be housed in the archives on the Historic Sites Foundation website at [historicsitesfoundation.org](https://historicsitesfoundation.org). And if you have additional questions or ideas for Kees, he's retired now, and he has all the time in the world, right? But he said to just...

**Kees Olijnsma** 47:35

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Well...

**Karin Peter** 47:36

Right. Lot's of...

**Kees Olijnsma** 47:37

...that's, that's probably the biggest misunderstanding of when we retire. I've...

**Karin Peter** 47:43

But we do...

**Kees Olijnsma** 47:43

I've never been so busy. I cannot imagine how I did it because I had a full-time job, and I still don't know where all the time went, because if you're retired, people know how to, who and know how to find you, even children and grandchildren, especially grandchildren. So...

**Karin Peter** 48:03

Indeed, indeed.

**Kees Olijnsma** 48:03

...they eat your time.

**Karin Peter** 48:05

I won't tease you about that anymore because I am aware that that happens when one...

**Kees Olijnsma** 48:10

Yeah.

**Karin Peter 48:10**

...retires and we appreciate...

**Kees Olijnsma 48:11**

But we, but we see it as a great blessing, so don't worry.

**Karin Peter 48:16**

And we appreciate your continued leadership and, and ministry in the life of the church in Europe as well. So, for "Cuppa Joe", part of the *Project Zion Podcast*, I'm Karin Peter. We've been with Kees Olijnsma talking about the church in the Netherlands. Thank you so much for being with us.

**Josh Mangelson 48:47**

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