

connect!  
program



**International Exchange Program  
July 05-19th 2016  
The Netherlands**

## Tue July 5, Judith

Arrived at 6:25am in Amsterdam. It was like a maze getting to Customs but it was like lightening when my passport was stamped. Collected my suitcase and met Mineke van Sloten. On my way to the Grail House I recognized the culture of cycling in the Netherlands. I travelled within the bus and train system, viewed the Dom and arrived at the quaint, simple, clean 200year old building called the Graalhuis.

... greeted by Carla who passed us on her bike on her way to the House, followed by Hilda and a youth called Mariem - a Muslim. Twelve hours later, the second participant arrived from South Africa in the person of Idah. Thirty minutes later we were sitting at the table (Carla, Elly who picked up Idah, Idah, and yours truly) when Christine from Australia, floated in fifteen minutes after.

... We dispersed after a lively conversation about Amsterdam and its surroundings, future plans for the program, religion in Amsterdam and nothing less than Grailville and its recent concerns, only to be aware that the day is not done for supper will be due at 7pm (1am NYC time).

Meeting the Grail in NYC has drawn many dangling threads in my life into a beautiful weave. Thank you Sharon and MaryKay for being the vital instruments in my relationship with the International Grail.

Do you know that KLM is known as the Royal Dutch Airline?

## Wed July 6, Judith

The day started with our daily 9:30 breakfast which consisted of coffee, tea and "me": bread, cheese, sausage, butter, jam, and peanut butter.

Carla called to order the session with the support of Ine and Mineke. The session proceeded as follows:

(i)Carla handed to each participant lovely bags which were not only aesthetically pleasing but functionally satisfying since they were full of goodies such as the schedule for the 14-day exchange program, notebooks, pens and "doppers". You should possess a "dopper". Ask Carla for one.

(2) Mineke reviewed the program using maps, schedules and handouts. In an attempt to get you enthused I will tell you that we learnt that we will be heading to Germany for three days and two nights, a museum, Brussels for two days and one night, church with catholic and ecumenical flavors and city walks.

(3) Ine provided a reading entitled "The Web of Life" which served as a basis for her motivational talk.

At 1pm we were delighted with a delicious meal prepared by Mariem who was in the best position to provide us with such tasteful and nutritious food. She was celebrating end of Ramadan, which signaled the end of a long fasting period.

Following this Hilde lead us in more than an hour of good liturgical dance. Putting us through at least six repertoires: Mother in Laws, ....

Our last activity for the morning was the Reading/Writing and Meditation session around 4:30pm led by Ine who stimulated the discussing through lead questions and artifacts such as cards, playful notebooks, colored pens and pencils. We ended this session with two more dance pieces and broke until supper.

Supper like every eating session was proceed by a pray in hymn form and again Evelien and Ank did the finest culinary piece of work which was manifested in our plates.

The day came to a close under liturgical songs such as - the antiphon of Be Not Afraid and Ubi Caritas which was sung in rounds. This session led by Carla came to a close around 9:15pm.

Thanks be to God.

### July 7, Idah

The group left for the station immediately after breakfast we all packed snacks for the journey we then walked to the train station boarded the train to Germany. At the station we were met by two Grail members, Christa Werner and Silvana Ferragutti.

They took us to a hotel near the station where we stayed for two days. We booked in and immediately left to go to a center where Silvana had a project which is for immigrants from different countries called Internationale Initiative Hochfeld.

At the center the people are taught to speak the German language and culture and history of the country. The center also has a group of women who are doing sewing and cooking lessons, kindergarten for children of the immigrants

We were introduced to beautiful women. Refreshments were served a combination of pies and vegetables and fruits. A tour around the area, containers in the park blue in color, these were used as boarding school for boys in the area.

We then went to catch a bus to another part of the town. There we were taken to visit three more projects and different churches and a Mosque.

One of the centers was used as a place for women who are victims of women trafficking working as prostitutes. The center is called SOLWODI meaning women in distress.

We were introduced to two women who worked there, one was the social worker.

We then went to the church St Peter where we were welcomed by Sister Martina who belongs to the community of Sacred Heart of Jesus. She showed us around and explained about the church.

It was sad to hear most churches in the area were no longer used for Sunday services, they are now used as centers for immigrants.

These projects are funded by the parishioners and the church. Sometimes the German government also gives them money. Most of the money comes from the second hand shop that sister Martina operates. The clothes they sell comes from the parish community

The walls of center had graffiti on them: a beautiful message was painted; it was a church, Mosque, tower between the two buildings and men, women and children

We the gathered in the meeting room had tea.

We returned to the hotel to fetch suitcases those staying at the Grail center.

July 8, Liz

The feeling that comes to me today is that with tolerance and goodwill anything is possible. It was with such joy and comradery that our Grail members travelled to a Turkish neighborhood in Duisburg to visit a mosque. We were greeted by a Catholic brother named Martin who shared much of his involvement and history of the Mosque. The area had been a coal mining/steel producing town, in which he himself had worked for 10 years in the coal mine. His fellow workers were all Muslim Turks. He worked with them and broke bread with them in a plain wooden house where they cooked, slept and socialized. Five or six Turkish Muslims



bought the house (1985-89) and made it into their Mosque. The building is beautiful. There are numerous chandeliers with the 99 names of Allah engraved on them. The colors are bright and soft. Red signifying the color of the earth and blue the color of heaven. We stood in a circle holding hands and singing Alleluia, as others in the Mosque sat or kneeled praying. It was truly magical. There was a spirit in that room that emanated joy and tranquility. Brother Martin talked of respect without domination and for us to open our ears to the word of God. We need to cultivate the notion of accepting different religions. I was very moved by the experience. After that we walked through the neighborhood, as Brother Martin stopped to talk to theology students coming to visit the mosque and asked children coming home from school to show us their grades (since it was the last day of school). They seemed delighted to show us. We visited a nearby church named St. Peter, where a young man, who was also the

organist to this church and was preparing for his wedding the next day. He stopped what he was doing and played the organ for us. It was a magnificent organ and we were all thrilled. We hugged and said our goodbyes. Yet another magical and truly spiritual experience. From there we walked to a Protestant Church called Salvatore's Church, 700 years old, formally a Roman Catholic Church. We listened to a very interesting docent who shared many historical facts. In 1943 during the Second World War the windows of the church were destroyed. The baptismal area is 400 years old, the clock and tower are 250 years old. There are very old bibles, 120 years old. We were all in awe of so much antiquity and beauty. It is all so possible that we could practice our religions in harmony within blocks of each other. A mosque, a Catholic Church and a Protestant Church. I am convinced of that fact.

We later had a meal together at a restaurant in Duisburg. We ate, laughed and shared our feelings about our day. When we retired to our hotel rooms, we were exhausted, but happy to have spent time together exploring and enriching our hearts and minds.

A word about the graciousness of the German Grail. They welcomed us with open arms, warmth and enthusiasm. Gathering at the Grail House was very special. It was beautiful and felt like home. The food was delicious and the conversation inspiring. I am forever grateful for their hospitality. As Brother Martin would say, "We all need the Good Spirit of God."

## Saturday July 9, Fuva

Meeting at the Grail Center in Mülheim - evaluation of the program; where all participants raised positive aspects of the 3 days in German.

First Silvana, Christa and Gerda introduced the German Grail for us and the activities that they have; some connected with all activities of the initiatives that we visited and some that involve a conversation around a chosen theme when they invite friends to join.

A discussion relating to the continuation of the Grail in Germany was raised also, and everyone gave some possible solutions such as: invite more young people from Universities, High Schools and make the Grail House a space for readings, conversations among them with orientation.

The Group also raised questions related to how we all can communicate in order to give information of what is going on in our countries. And one of the ideas was to create an email network, where everyone could send something per month or per semester.

We had also there a delicious lunch together with Italian pasta, and for desert ice cream. And after that a goodbye to Gerda, who was not going with us to the station.

We went to the hotel to fetch the bags and after that straight to the station.

Moments to save - we felt a big challenge for the Grail internationally in terms of the guarantee of continuation in some countries with more elderly Grail members. But for a continuation process, we need to train and instruct other young women and involve them in the activities.

And that does not happen automatically, it needs many things such as a formation process and a research in terms where we can find people interested in joining the Grail, in order to achieve good results.

Travelling back with Christa to Utrecht was so special, so we could be with her for more days.

Leaving Silvana who for the 3 days was enthusiastically taking us to special places, which we will never forget. She did a wonderful job.

## July 10, Luz

The day started at 10.30 AM with a breakfast prepared by Carla and Mariem.

We went out at 11.45 to catch the 12.30 English mass at Saint Augustine Church. The Gospel was about the Good Samaritan. What must we do in order to be saved? "Love our neighbor as we love ourselves". To be neighbor is to be more human, one who is more sensitive to the needs, to the joys and pains of others. It is in being a neighbor that our faith is shown. The parish leaders practice their being neighbor. They offered free coffee and tea after the mass.

Another church we went to was the church of Saint James.

We also visited the Dom church, dedicated to Saint Martin. The church with the tallest tower in Utrecht. The church has survived many disasters; the middle part was destroyed by the storm. According to the curator, the church was built for the bishop and not for the people.

There were also monks from rich families. The bishop was the head of the city and of the church. In 1580 the church was handed over to the Protestants.

At 3.30PM everybody went shopping. At 7PM dinner was served.

At 8.30 Carla invited us in her home, she has a beautiful garden. Home at 10.30PM.

### Mon July 11, Judith

At about 10am three cars left the Graalhuis full of occupants and travelled for about two hours to Tiltenberg. At the wheel of my car was Mineke. Our agenda outlined (i) Visit to the Tiltenberg and (ii) Guided tour of the Cruquius Water Management Museum

#### Visit to the Tiltenberg

At Tiltenberg we were greeted by our host who with eagerness launched us immediately into a guided tour. First, we walked through the halls of the building formerly owned by the Grail and is now the property of the archdiocese. Visible evidence of some changes were there. There were new physical structures and internally there were changes. In the Chapel the once existing stools were replaced by benches which were strategically placed around the altar in a symmetrical fashion (see photo below). After singing the Russian Alleluia we departed from the chapel to our next site.



We arrived at the Cemetery where we saw at least fifty tombstones of Grail sisters whose birth and death dates ranged from the early 19th to late 20th century. The cemetery was situated away from daily activity, well kept with a very visible grail(cup) embossed in the sand. Those grail members present who knew the history were able to

point out the graves of the original five grail members. Mineke van Sloten conducted an interactive exercise in which we read a piece written by Mia van der Kallen who was buried there and was one of the five students of Father Van Ginneken and the first members of the Women of Nazareth.

On our way back to the building, we passed the Bishop's house. As we arrive at the main building, we were just in time to participate in the regular 12:30pm mass which was conducted by two bishops and a priest.

## Guided tour of the Cruquius Water Management Museum

Moving away from Tiltenberg, we came closer to the Cruquius Museum. There, we viewed a 12- minute documentary on Water Management, following which our guide took us on a tour of the water management operations.

We heard all about dikes, dunes, sand, ice cap, windmills, salt, water rabbits, Delta Plan, pump stations, electricity, steam engines, coal, mud, locks, circular canals, polar stations, diesel and good soil.

How do all of these things which were necessary for the survival of the Netherlands, related to each other in the production of the world's greatest success in water management?

Simply put, the bad guys were: ice caps, salt and water rabbits. The ice cap caused the water levels to rise, while salt and water rats eroded and shortened the life of the dunes and dikes. The good guys were the pump stations, steam, electricity, steam engines, coal, mud, locks, circular canals, polder stations, diesel and good soil.

We see the interaction of these good guys outlined in the Delta Plan, which outlined the ways and means to drain the massive amounts of water, that oftentimes rise to very threatening levels into circular canals. From 1641 to 1912 and variety of energy and power producing mechanisms was used. For example, in the early years windmills, horses and coal. As technology and wisdom increased these "primitive" means of energy producers were replaced by much more efficient conduits likes electricity and diesel and even combinations of the energy producers to provide energy for the pumps. Dikes and dunes were built around the land and the draining was done in a collection of areas known as polders. To safe-guard against the flow of the water locks were designed and used in some strategic places.

Very positive things came out of this exercise without intentionality; such as from the mud came very fertile soil which allowed the farmers to produce in quantity and quality and at the end of it all the 4.6million dollars which was the cost of the entire water management exercise was earned back through the farming.

The day of this very informative, intellectual stimulating and personally satisfying day came to an end with supper on the grounds of the Museum de Cruquius. The journey back to Utrecht began; arriving at Nienwegracht 51 safely with the blessings of God the Father.

## July 12-13, Priscilla, Brussels

Meet Didine, Karen, Patricia, Sister Andrea

Common goal of Grail women in Brussels:

- connections with others groups & NGO
- what can be done about
  - a. human trafficking
  - b. social injustices
  - c. racial discrimination

- d. prostitution
- e. illegal migrants
- f. asylum seekers

#### Goals

- a. legal assistance
- b. social support
- c. help migrant refugee
- d. to have a long term program
- e. help them find work

#### Links & connections

- a. sister Andrea of the Good Shepherd convent
- b. Payoke
- c. Sawa org. in Belgium
- d. Stephanie of CEJI / BELIEFORAMA giving seminars, training others to be trainers

- objectives  
be inspired to work to help these victims of hatred & social injustices & to obtain peace.



### July 13, Liz

Just yesterday I was walking the streets of Brussels and Antwerp, taking in all the sights and sounds of the city with my Grail members. We were met by at the train station in Brussels the day before by Didine, a member of the Brussels Grail who like the members of the German Grail reflect unbounding energy and enthusiasm.

Today (7/13/16) in Antwerp we visited a training program called Belieforama which provides an educational intervention and prevention of a growing social conflict. It is based on the premise that Europe's growing religious and philosophical diversity holds the potential for greater intercultural understanding but also greater conflict. It was created by a diverse partnership of organizations led by CEJI-A Jewish Contribution to an inclusive Europe. Our speaker was Stephanie, a lovely Jewish French woman who described the training program with wit and passion. It was interesting and thought provoking. Afterwards we had a delicious lunch at a Lebanese restaurant close by. It was so enjoyable to share our feelings about the presentation with our group and also continue to get to know the Brussels Grail members. From there we boarded a bus headed to another program called Payoke, a project that assists victims of human trafficking. We walked from the bus stop through the area where prostitutes are seeking clients. It looks like you are walking into a shopping mall, but instead of mannequins dressed in attractive clothing standing behind a large glass window, there was a woman (young or old) in each window dressed erotically to allure customers. It is suspected that some of these women are victims of human trafficking. They are often from countries like Bulgaria, Romania, the Philippines and China. It was devastating to witness these women selling themselves to men who were walking by leering at them hungrily. Two of our Grail members were in tears. It was heartbreaking. Around the corner was Payoke. Their Project Manager did a presentation for us. She spoke of the history of Payoke and their work against human trafficking, as well as their project of assisting women victims to return to their home country safely. She and her staff face many challenges in their efforts to help women who are so traumatized and fearful. Yet they are determined and steadfast in their efforts to make a difference. Again, the experience was inspirational and affected me deeply. We left with hugs and good-byes continuing our walk to the Cathedral and Grand Place, which were magnificent. Dinner was a few minutes further at the ancient cellar called Pelgrom. There was candlelight everywhere. Didine ordered our meal ahead of time. We still ended up taking a later train back to Utrecht, but that was fine, as it gave us more time to chat and thank Didine, Patricia, Karen and Christa (from the German Grail who joined us on this trip) for all their wonderful contributions toward making our experience so delightful and meaningful. We left to the train station from there, sadly having to say good-bye to our Grail members from Brussels and Christa from Germany.

I want to impress how blessed I feel to be part of this exchange program. Its mark on my life will be everlasting. It has been said that God is able to provide you with every abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.

### July 14, Mineke

This day we spent in the Grail house. Carla told about the Grail history and Mineke showed a power point to illustrate it with photos and supporting text.

The founder of the Grail was the son of a beer brewer. His father died when he was five years old, so he was raised by three women: his mother, his aunt and a sister. He was supposed to lead the brewery but instead he became a Jesuit monk and a professor of Dutch language and literature at the Nijmegen University. In 1921 he gathered five female students and named them the Women of Nazareth, to start a worldwide movement and bear witness of God's spirit

among people. They were Lay women who were allowed to work independently in the church, a revolutionary idea at that time.

A new bishop asked them to start youth groups for girls instead of a University in Indonesia and they gave in to that request. That was the beginning of the Grail movement. The movement became very big, growing to 10,000 members. Huge religious games were performed with colored costumes in Amsterdam, Ireland, Berlin. World War II put an end to that. The movement was forbidden and the members had to go into hiding. After the war there was a new interest in the needs of developing countries. A school was started to prepare professional women (nurses, teachers, midwives) for work in tropical areas: Ubbergen. Before the war the movement had already spread to Germany, Australia, and the USA. Gradually more countries joined. In the beginning there was a single president (mother Margriet van Gilse, Rachel Donders, Magdalene Oberhofer,) later followed by an elected International Presidential Team of three women.

The Grail story is one of continuous adjustment to the requirements of the, with creativity and modern means, flexible and with an open heart for the needs of the women in different societies.

In the afternoon we listened to the stories of two of the group members: Idah and Fuva skillfully interviewed by Ine. This method, called kitchen table conversation, is used in the Dutch grail to allow the elderly members to share their Grail experience with all others. The generous amount of time for the speaker and the non-intervening listeners makes it an impressive experience for everyone and the stories we heard this afternoon brought tears to some of our eyes: tears of sadness as well as gratefulness and recognition.

#### July 15, Sádía - Visit to The Hague

Today we visited The Hague, which is an important city because of the houses of Parliament, the work palace of the King and the Peace Place with its international courts. We were received by Mienieke Hage. With Mienieke and Yne we went to the Humanity House where we saw photos and videos related to the war refugees.

We saw another church that has been Catholic and is Protestant now. There were the symbols of the evangelists St. Matthew: Angel, St. Mark: Lion, St. Luke: ox and St. John: eagle.

Then followed the Peace Palace. After there had been many wars in Europe 26 countries joined to achieve peace. The palace was built in 1913, after the second session (the first was in 1900). The irony is that in 1914 the greatest war of all times began. All countries of the world can bring their conflicts to this palace. It has two sections (Permanent Court of Arbitration, and International Court of Justice) and has a huge library.

And finally, we visited the Panorama Mesdag. It is a painting. It was made in 1880 by 5 people in only four months. It is an illusionist painting suggesting that you are standing on a dune looking at the beach below. Seems real. The Panorama Mesdag is a 46-foot-high illusion with a circumference of 395 feet. It was painted by Hendrik Willem Mesdag, his wife and a few friends. It is one of the world's finest, and largest, surviving panoramas.

After the panorama we went to see the real place that was painted, so could verify that some buildings were still there, but the rest is totally different now.

Remarkable Moments: being in the Peace Palace, a historical and global place with all those records of war and the power that the house has mediating in world conflicts was very inspiring as if we had a light to continue with our challenges.

The panorama is an authentic art work; the most impressive was the way the beach, the place that served the panoramic view, after about 103 years since the painting.

In Mienieke's company, the places we visited were close to each other. Her enthusiasm was contagious.

### July 16, Christine

Saturday was a day we all looked forward to as we were to meet many more members of the Dutch Grail. We all shared a delicious lunch together and then played, in pairs, many 'getting to know you' activities where we discussed such questions as 'the meaning of our names; our biggest talents (this one was quite amusing at times); how and when we got to know the Grail, as well as the biggest challenges faced by the Grail in our own home-countries.' This activity gave rise to lots of cross discussion and certainly helped us all to get to know one another better and added to our understanding of how the Grail operates in countries other than our own. As well as this, friendships began to form and many of us will value the opportunity to both keep in contact with the Dutch Grail and the possibility of meeting again some time in the future.

In the afternoon we had a song-teaching session which was quite fun as the songs came from a range of different languages and cultures. There were talks given by individuals in between each song session and, later on, a small market where we were able to buy artefacts from some of the cultures represented.

### July 17, Judith - Amsterdam Dominicus Church and surroundings

9.45 AM at train station Amsterdam Dominicus church

We arrived at Amsterdam and were greeted by Chris who was our hostess in one of the greatest cities of the world - Amsterdam

Our walk to the church of Dominicus was not void of the "ohes" and the "ahes" since obviously the view was breathtaking. Once at the church we secured seats, visited the WC and walked back into the midst of a mini rehearsal of the songs/hymns that were to be sung during the service.

The service was lively with songs, readings, sharing of the bread and wine, collection. The structure of the service had missing elements of a general Holy Mass, but also had elements of a general Holy Mass. Do you think that they had "prayer of the faithful"? Do you think they sang the "Gloria"?

Our group was recognized publicly by the "female pastor" and a bit of English was spoken. Beautiful and far from boring, the services ended and then coffee sharing began.

Leaving the church we trekked to the house of Lot, a friend of Chris, who allowed us to tour her 16th (???) century house. After spending at least an hour there, Bernadette invited us to visit an area in Amsterdam where only ladies live.

## Amsterdam guided tour, Begijnhof

We visited the Begijnhof Kapel which was described as the hidden church, called “the Old Church”. This church was moved first to the house of a rich man who had allowed the Catholics to set up a church in his house and then the St. Nicholas Basilica was built. We were able to see these sites as we moved along.



We entered the Amsterdam Museum where we saw life sized figures of David and Goliath.

Along the way, we viewed the activities and buildings of the heart of Amsterdam which was the place where the city of Amsterdam was built. Around that area was the city hall which was taken over by Napoleon. The other sites were the Madame Tussaud Museum which is said to be the first wax museum outside of the United Kingdom (1971). We then made our way through the Red Light District and stood in front of the Salvation Army Building which was originally built to house the homeless and to feed the hungry.

We closed the tour by bidding the tour guide farewell and then our gracious hostess Chris was sent off with hearty good byes and appreciation.

Arriving at the Amsterdam Centraal we boarded the train back to Utrecht Centraal. Had a hearty supper prepared by Evlien and Ank, closed with an understanding of what tomorrow will bring from Carla. We ended the day with love and thanksgiving to our almighty Father.

### July 17<sup>th</sup>, Christine

On Sunday we headed, by train to Amsterdam where the day began with an Ecumenical service at the very beautiful Dominicus Kerk which had, centuries ago, been Catholic (like many post-reformation churches in the Netherlands). As it had outstanding artwork, look at it on [www.dominicusamsterdam.nl](http://www.dominicusamsterdam.nl) As Chris de Leeuw was one of the parishioners she was able to tell us much of the church's history and ensured we had the best seats at the front. The church was packed and the choir who stood down in the main body of the church, had a particularly energising and talented conductor so, when choir plus congregation all sang together, it nearly 'raised the roof.' the hymns sung at that beautiful church were in various languages, which all emphasised that church's ethos of inclusiveness. As Chris was one of the helpers distributing bread and wine at Communion time this gave us an extra sense

of belonging. It was quite moving, actually, to be part of a church service which was available for and welcomed everybody.

After the service we went for a long walk along some of Amsterdam's most scenic canals, admiring homes and buildings on the way. The treat ended with afternoon tea at the historic and very beautiful home of Lot and Ko. This home, beside a canal and which we entered at below street level, had several floors, each artistically decorated and with a lovely view out the window, front and back.

Before catching the train back home we were taken on a tour by a professional young guide who had an impressive knowledge of local history. At the Begijnhof, where several Grail members have lived, we were allowed to visit Sister Bernadette's house.

### July 18, Christine

Our final morning began with an evaluation session run, very ably, by Ine (van Emmerik). It was very helpful to be able to pool our memories of the program and to be given time to dwell on, and to discuss together, each event. Doing so made us realize what an enormous amount of content had been covered in a bare two weeks.

Ine began the session by quoting from Pope Francis's meeting with young people in the Philippines. To summarise:

'We have plenty of information but don't know what to do with it all. We don't need people who are store-houses; we need people who are wise. We need love. Love leaves you open to surprises.'

At the end of this valuable session we had to write answers to 'What inspired me most? What shocked/hurt me most? What shall I share with those at home?' All of this was a most useful evaluation of what had taken place and a reminder of what was most important for us to now act upon, and to share with those at home. Thank you, Ine!

A highlight, before packing began, was another beautiful session of sacred dance led by Hilde (Debacker). This was a new experience for me (although I had experienced something similar once when part of a Waldorf school). The sense of connectedness, of peace and of a mental state reminiscent of meditation made the experience a fitting tribute to all that was aspired to during our two weeks together. The music was calming and uplifting and, in itself, a form of prayer. Thank you so much Hilde, for adding this new dimension to our lives. I wish more people had access to this beautiful art form.

