

## HISTORY

From its beginning, the American Protestant Church of The Hague has been an international, interdenominational church – home away from home – for many people.

Its forerunner by half a century was the English-language church services held for summer tourist in The Hague. This was organised by the Dutch Reformed Church at the suggestion of a Dutch school teacher named Jacob Smelik.

The Reformed Church in America became interested and in 1903 it offered to supply ministers and to be co-sponsor of the services, which were held in a building on the Prinsestraat in the centre of The Hague. This tradition continued until 1940, with the exception of the years of World War I, 1914-1918.

At the end of World War II in 1945, the Dutch Reformed Church set up a committee to reinstate summer English-language services. In doing so, it worked closely with Rev. A.C.J. van der Poel, Chief of Chaplains of the Royal Netherlands Air Force, who served as a liaison with the Consultative Committee of Air Force Chaplains from the ten NATO countries. The outcome was that English-speaking church services were held on the first Sunday of the month during the tourist season in the historic Grote Kerk in the centre of The Hague. The services were conducted by U.S. Army and Air Force Chaplains from nearby military bases.

In the mid-1950's, a dedicated group of American military and embassy personnel started a Sunday School and Youth Fellowship for junior and senior high school young people that met in the American School, and soon had an enrolment of 175 children.

As time went on, more American businessmen and military and Embassy personnel came into The Hague area and the desire to have year-round regular church services grew. The U.S. Air Force Chaplains were asked to contact the Dutch church for help in finding an alternative place to meet as the Grote Kerk had no heating in the wintertime. The answer to prayers came from the Board of Deaconesses who ran Bronovo Hospital at that time with their offer to use the hospital chapel for monthly services. From that time until the congregation moved into its own church home, the hospital's Head

Matron, Sister van Hardenbroek; her assistant, Sister Mooyart; Chaplain A.M. Nortier, the Chief of Staff; and all the nurses offered generous hospitality and did their utmost to meet the needs of their foreign guests, and came to hold a fond place in the hearts of the early church members.

By 1955, it was clear that the congregation of more than 100 worshippers was continuing to grow and that soon it could no longer fit into the hospital chapel. The monthly worship services were led by a young Air Force Chaplain, Richard B. Hayward, who was stationed at nearby Soesterberg Air Base. One day he was asked by some members of the congregation for help in starting a church with a pastor from the U.S.A. He agreed and wrote the National Council of Churches of Christ in New York City, which supervised 93 overseas churches, to advise what steps needed to be taken.

Just at that time, Rev. Gilbert Bremicker, a newly-retired Presbyterian pastor from Berwyn, Illinois, with 25 years of experience, wrote to the National Council of Churches stating that he and his wife, Emogene, wanted to help a church in Europe. Rev. Bremicker and the fledgling congregation met and as a result he was called to be the first pastor of the new church.

On September 16, 1956, Rev. Gilbert T. Bremicker was installed as the first permanent minister of the American Protestant Church at Bronovo Hospital Chapel, The Hague.

Under the guidance of the new pastor, activities increased and a constitution was drawn up, and as the congregation was outgrowing Bronovo Chapel, a search began for a church building of their own. Through a talk given by Mrs. Catherine Carp to the American Women's Club of The Hague it was learned that the Protestant Pavilion at the Brussels Exposition was for sale.

The inspiration for a Protestant Pavilion at the Brussels Expo came from Rev. Pieter Fagel, Pastor of the Netherlands Congregation in Brussels. He thought that since the Catholic Church was to have a big exhibition, the Protestant church (which was a small minority in Belgium) should have one as well.

The Pavilion, which cost almost one million Dutch guilders, was financed through the combined efforts of a committee in the U.S.A. and one in Europe. The churches in Germany, in particular, gave generously, as did visitors to the Pavilion.

Perhaps the most unusual help came from a strict Reformed Church in a small village on one of the Dutch Islands in Zeeland that had been damaged by a flood several years previously. The church was to receive an organ bought through flood relief funds, but instead of taking it at that time, the church loaned it to the Pavilion to be used during the six months the Expo was in operation.

The Pavilion was designed by a Swiss architect living in Brussels, Mr. Calame-Rosset. It had two levels, the upper level being devoted to an exhibition designed by Rev. Robert Kurtz of Zurich, Switzerland. It illustrated God's gifts and promises to man and the pioneering work of the church, such as German Kirchentag, industrial missions, and lay organisations. It also told about the World Council of Churches, displayed a Christian world map, gave information about Protestantism in Belgium, and described the work of the United Bible Societies.

One of its striking features was the mirror in the centre of the exhibition, which was asked where the onlooker was in relation to what was happening in the church activities around him/her.

There was a literature section, with various brochures and religious magazines, a visitor's book in which comments could be written and a beautiful leather-bound witness roll sent from the churches of America.

During the week there were two short services daily, alternately in four languages, for which booklets were available. Pastors represented a host of nationalities and denominations. It was a truly ecumenical gathering with all praying and singing together in their own language. There were organ recitals and prayer services in one or more languages.

Rev. Fagel had wanted to use the Pavilion as an ecumenical centre and a new home for his congregation in Brussels. However, following the Expo there were still debts to be paid off, so the building had to be sold.

At the closing of the Expo, the Pavilion was dismantled, crated and stored, waiting for a buyer. This came in the persons of the American Protestant Church congregation who had been searching for a site. The City of The Hague proposed a property in the dunes not far from Scheveningen. The land and building were purchased and Dutch architect M.M. Immerzeel was asked to draw up a plan which include the chapel, a two-story recreational, cultural and social center to be connected with the church building by a gallery, an auditorium, a kitchen and banquet facilities, a library, a motion picture projection room, a snack bar, and various meeting rooms which would be available for the whole community. Thought was also given to a manse, separate from the church that could accommodate a family of five. In the end, the cost of such an extensive plan proved to be prohibitive, and only the church was erected.



Acting on faith, the congregation went ahead, bought the land and had the crated pavilion shipped by barge to The Hague. On May 14, 1961, the groundbreaking ceremony took place and building could begin. Pastor Bremicker, U.S. Ambassador John Rice and Mrs. Rice were the first to put shovels to the ground.

Construction work was carried out under the supervision of the original architect and his Dutch colleague. Soon it appeared that the steel work had not been properly marked in Brussels and the building superintendent in charge of this work did not know how to proceed. When the person who had supervised this work in Brussels was approached to help, he accepted with alacrity, and within three days of coming to The Hague he had solved the problem. Moreover, he stayed with the project until it was completed.



The sanctuary with a seating capacity of 350, was basically left unchanged. However, the open passageway that had allowed visitors at the Brussels Expo to view the chapel's interior was converted into a glassed-in reception center, with the second story harmoniously combined with an adjoining two-story church school wing.

Central heating and a pipe organ were added in the new design.

Finding sufficient funds to pay the workers to complete the building became a problem. It was suggested that a 125 guilder a plate dinner be held and that former U.S. Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, who was defending a client before the International Court, be asked to be the speaker.

An Episcopalian minister's son, Mr. Acheson said he understood their situation, and would gladly accept their invitation if the dinner could be held before he left in ten day's time. Arrangements were made, one hundred and twenty-five men attended the dinner and the payroll was ensured.

The Dedication Service of APCH took place on Palm Sunday, April 8, 1962, with the participation of so many who helped make the dream of an American church a reality.



In November 1985, the Fellowship Hall was renovated through a gift of the family of American Ambassador Philip Young (1957-1961) and is dedicated in loving memory of his wife, Faith Adams Young.

At the end of December 1963, after seven years of fruitful and faithful service, Rev. Dr. Bremicker and his wife Emogene left The Hague. Before their return to the U.S.A. a special dedication service was held around the church tower, so beloved by the pastor, and it was given his name in honour of untiring service.

In January 1964, his successor David P. Thompson arrived with his wife and three children to take over, and so began a succession of devoted pastors to minister to “the American church in the Dutch meadow.”