



Lieve Van Driessen

[Evelyn]

We are already at the penultimate episode of our podcast. Today we speak with Lieve Van Driessen, pastor in the Sint-Jozef Tereken faith community in Sint-Niklaas.

Dear, thank you for being our guest in our podcast. We are going to talk about believing, as always, in all possible forms and how we can take it out of the taboo sphere, especially by talking to each other. We believe that you also have something meaningful to say about this, starting from your personal story.

So hence the first question. Would you like to introduce yourself? Who are you, where do you come from and what are you doing?

[Dear]

Thank you for the invitation. I hesitated for a moment, I think, to go into this, but we are here, so that is the most important thing.

My name is Lieve van Driessen. I am the youngest daughter and therefore the youngest sister of three more brothers and three sisters. I actually come from Philippine, just across the border in the Netherlands. But in the meantime I have been living here in Sint-Niklaas since 1997, because then I could start here at the parish as a pastoral worker, half-time and in the meantime full-time.

I am not married, but I do live with my partner Martine. I am now a grandmother of three grandchildren. Two sons and in the meantime that is already a nice event, of which I can be a part.

So in 1997 I ended up here in the parish, but I am actually a nurse by training, a pediatric nurse. I followed that training in Ghent. While I was working, I thought I wanted to do something more with believing. Then the training for pastoral workers, workers and deacons, as it was officially called, followed in the Diocese of Antwerp.

And by chance actually ended up in Sint-Niklaas. Then come and live here, to be able to work here. First part-time, because there was also a priest here, a priest. And when he went somewhere else, to De Pinte, Zevegem, so in Ghent, I was able to start full-time here. So in the meantime it's been a long time that we've been here.

And I am actually included in a warm community here, with many opportunities and possibilities. And that has given some room to work here. Yes.

[Evelyn]

Okay, nice. We will go into more detail about the faith community and what you do with it later. But perhaps first of all, that faith. Is that something you got from home?

[Dear]

Yes, we actually grew up on a farm. So my father was a farmer. He also had a few animals, but from farmer's trade, as they say.

Both my parents were very religious. And we actually got that from an early age. And apparently that has had an effect on me.

Not only with me, but also with the brothers and sisters, but with all of them. So yes, we did get that, but I do think in a way that we should be free to do so.

Or I myself have never really resisted it thoroughly. It was something that we did indeed get and that grew into it a bit, I think. I never really asked myself what it would be like if we now say that we are dropping out completely or that we are resisting or rebelling.

I think my parents would have had trouble with that, but on the other hand they could have dealt with it if it was our own way.

Fine.

[Evelyn]

The faith community here at Tereken is very active and is also something different from traditional parishes. Can you perhaps tell us a bit more about that, how you work and how you continue to appeal to believers?

[Dear]

The fact that I work here at the parish is already a bit exceptional. In that sense, it's a special statute as well.

It is not with the official permission of the diocese. I am also not paid by the diocese, like other volunteer ministers sometimes. That is already a bit exceptional and that was also due to the priest who was here at the time and then also the people with whom he worked, the volunteers, who supported it and dared to look to the future with a view.

So it was not with the full enthusiasm from the diocese to put it mildly. That question has been asked repeatedly, but from the diocese they mainly felt that it should be for a larger whole and not for one parish that someone is appointed in this way. So that's a non-profit organization that manages that and it's the people who make sure that I can be paid through sponsorship and on the spot. So that in itself is a bit strange, I think. But it does say something about the atmosphere, about the whole here of people who come here as volunteers or also here.

I think the way of celebrating is also different from other places, that we do not adhere so strictly to the entire rule or according to the course of a celebration, but that we do look for a language that we hope and think is understandable for people, so not so much the classical liturgy.

We sometimes dare to change the order of a celebration. We also don't always sing the songs from Zingt jubilate, but that we encounter here or there and that appeal to us. There is a moment for the children in the celebration itself that the parents also listen to.

Those are things that make it a bit special. And I think that for many people it is important to come together in itself, to find each other in such a celebration, that it is perhaps sometimes even more important than the real celebration of the Eucharist itself. One does not separate from the other, but that it is a moment to find and meet each other.

[Evelyn]

So you also organize activities apart from the Sunday celebration?

[Dear]

We try to be a community that celebrates on the one hand, but also tries to spread the message further, also in the formal catechesis or towards children and families. But also... There is also a working group here for welfare links, so for people who are struggling financially, who assist people in this.

Also a working group that goes to the elderly, a working group that goes to people who are grieving or for people whose funeral was here in the church, to give some follow-up to that. So that care for people is actually part of it. Which actually forms a bit of the whole, I think, of believing together.

That one cannot exist without the other.

[Ben]

You actually just explained how the community works. That seems to me to be a very practical experience of faith as well. Finding each other, as you just said, how does that happen in practice? Or what effect does that have in practice?

[Dear]

Yes. The first thing that comes to mind is after the celebration itself, we always have a coffee corner. Some coffee is offered for the people who want, or soup, we call it a coffee corner. Which means that people can stand for a while after the celebration and meet each other or have a chat. I think that's important too. That there is also a framework, that it appeals to people to stay here for a while. Not everyone does that, they don't have to, but that the chance is there.

We had a meeting day last week, which is something else. We had about fifty people with us. We went on a short trip to the Roosenberg Abbey in Waasmunster, where we had a day where people talked to each other on the one hand, or went for a walk in nature, or were allowed to discover the Roosenberg a little closer, from the inside. Which also has a game element in it. That versatility actually gives people opportunities to be together in a different way.

Until last year, we always had a parish weekend. That was in Drongen. But we also tried to make it somewhat accessible to families. That is why it has been a meeting day this year.

What we also find important is that we party. For example, a thank you party for the volunteers. The impulse evening is a kind of New Year's reception. But also with a substantive sting. So that it is again the combination of the two. And so I think... The math festivities is actually something to get something financially, but at the same time it also gives employees who would otherwise not be immediately involved a chance to help out at that time. Because that is a little more non-committal. That has not too much to do with believing, but the fact that they want to do that, we involve them. And we always like that. And you always see other people, new people. It's not a mass, but still...

[Ben]

You are in the middle of an entire neighborhood here. Is there a certain interaction with other associations? Or typically with the people who are around here? What does the faith community mean in this, in this environment?

[Dear]

That's a difficult question, I think. We hope that we have that appearance here in the area. But that is of course a bit difficult to gauge sometimes. There are a number of associations, such as OKRA, or also for women, Femma, Ferm, which also meet here in the parish hall, Ons Huis. And with whom there is sometimes, depending on the people who are in it. Or sometimes also questions from... Would you like to come and do something from the parish?

I think so... Last year we set up a 'wonderful space' here, at the front of the church. So physically, it looked a bit like a stable. Literally and figuratively, that was the intention. And that has made people pause a bit. Literally. Like, what's that going to be here? What will that be here? We have also set up a number of activities around this. Perhaps the most striking thing was that we, together with the Berkenboomschool, Portus, had made sculptures. Students from the school made it as a nativity scene. A bit inspired by Picasso. So that was a bit challenging. That also caught the eye. And that has also made many people pause. We hope that in this way we just, maybe make people think. Or literally, but also figuratively, make you think about... What is that here?

[Ben]

I think the word challenging is a very nice word. But to what extent is that for example if you work with the other faith communities, parishes, here in Sint-Niklaas... You have a rather challenging way of working, so to speak. What is that relationship like and how are those reactions mutual?

[Dear]

It is also a bit of a suburb of Sint-Niklaas, so we are not in the center. And certainly throughout history it has always been more or less figurative in the suburbs.

I think that has changed in the meantime. Now it is actually becoming more of a whole. But we used to be a bit on the sidelines as a parish faith community, in the sense of... 'They always do it their own way'. We had that image. I think that has changed a bit in the meantime, in the sense of... We do indeed have our own way, but more and more you hear that everyone is allowed to have their own individuality. And I am also in the parish team, so to think together with people from other faith communities about how to proceed. And that

shows us that it is important that there are characteristics and that people can also choose. You notice that more and more. They no longer go to this church specifically because they live here, but they live somewhere else and come here, for example, but that also applies to other faith communities. Some people will prefer the traditional. That is in a different church and here in a different way. And that is also important, I think, that it is possible.

But it is also important that this relationship is there, also with the others, to exchange, to go a bit in the same direction, but also with his individuality. That we are not separate from the others either. That is not our intention either.

[Evelyn]

Is it a conscious choice now or was it to do it a little differently? Was that a conscious choice to want to be contemporary, to remain relevant as a church in this world? Or has it rather grown that way?

[Dear]

Yes, I think the two go together. I think we're... I think it's fortunate that we used to have priests here who, let's say, think broadly. In my eyes, that's right. For some it is and for others it is not. But who also look to the future and try to see what is important to people and how we can address them.

And that is not only by priests. The priests have given the opportunity to employees and volunteers to further develop and work this out. And there were people who actually really stepped in for that and sometimes even gave the impetus to think broadly.

And that is why we still think it is important that a language is also understandable. That for us it does not always have to be the classical liturgy. Although that has its value in itself, of course. That we keep looking for words and gestures to bring that close to people. While I also feel that young people often believe that it is already far from them, believe and the church itself, as a building, they don't come in there that often anymore.

[Ben]

If you are talking about young people, the people who are coming now... Where can you catalogue them? Are they all the elderly, families, young people?

[Dear]

We have noticed, especially since corona, that this has had a major impact. I have to admit that we also have more older people than young people. We have a number of families, indeed also children who come, to whom we try to give an extra place.

But we also see that the audience is getting a bit older and that older people are falling away and it is difficult for many young people to join.

[Ben]

You say that you pay attention to the children. Can you perhaps explain that? I remember a very nice moment with the children. How important is that and how do you go about it?

[Dear]

Yes. We always provide a moment in the celebration itself for the children. Usually that is a bit lower school age. Toddlers sometimes too, up to twelve or thirteen years old. Then they often feel too big to be there. But the children are asked to go to the front. They then sit on the carpet in front of the altar. And then there are five volunteers who take turns providing a moment for the children, often in line with the gospel. But sometimes that gospel is so difficult that they look for another way or rather reach a different theme or at the first reading.

That can be a story, that can be a kind of game element, something that the children think about for a while or sometimes question-answer. And yes, the children who are used to that are very happy to come forward. They already know 'it's up to us'. You do notice that if they are not so used to coming here, it is sometimes hesitant, but yes... And that's about, if that works, five to ten minutes, that it gets its place.

[Evelyn]

Dear, you have a very living, lively faith community here. If you think about the future of the church, general or the Catholic church, do you have certain visions or dreams about it?

[Dear]

Yes, a dream for me is actually that we can let young families or young people feel what we are experiencing again. I think that's perhaps the most important thing. That the power of believing is great and strong and that it can help people on their way.

While I think that's difficult to pass on at the moment. You can radiate that, but how can you reach them? In addition, I think the question might also be a bit, what about women in church? What about... Married men, women, do they get a place? It would be nice if that was possible, I think, one day. But who knows, when will that be? And on the other hand, I think, I've been working for more than 25 years now. In itself, I have been given a place in it thanks to the people on site. For me, that's kind of the motivation that keeps me going. While I don't think it's unimportant, it had to be broader.

When people feel called, that's the most important thing that matters. Whether they are a man or woman, married or unmarried, with any partner. But I don't see that future evolving very quickly in that regard. And I hope that people will have the opportunity to mean something on the ground in that way, for others.

Apart from all the discussions about it, from all the questions that arise around it. Perhaps that question comes mainly from people who are a little further away from the church and do not always know what is actually happening. But when they see that people are busy, that's the most important thing for me.

[Evelyn]

That more is actually possible than it might seem at first sight. If there is the space for it.

[Dear]

If there is room for it, yes. That is important of course. That it is possible.

[Ben]

As with any guest, we also ask... Let me hear some of that music where you say... That touches me. That does something specific. Even if it's the same a hundred times, but it still does something to me. So just say, what's for you... When you say, "I want to listen to music right now," what's the first thing that comes to mind?

[Dear]

At first I go quite a bit to classical music. Baroque music especially, modern classical music is less to my liking.

But I am thinking mainly of Bach and Monteverdi. Bach, depending a bit on the time period, but the Christmas Oratorio, its great works, cantatas, the Matthew Passion. It all appeals to me. I like to listen to that. Yes, why? I don't know. It always does something to me, right.

For example, the Matthew Passion. I like to listen to it too, that it is performed live. It's something I already know quite well by now. As a child... I think I also got that from home. Our mother still likes to go to the Matthew Passion every year. And indeed we already know it a bit. It used to be a long time, those repetitions. And now I can easily listen to it for three hours, to the live performances too. Monteverdi is also one of those composers that I also like to hear.

But I actually also like to listen to songs like Stef Bos or more modern singers of our time. But I do think that I usually like it to have something of a message in it.

If I may give an example for funerals. Here in the church there is also more and more demand to put on CDs. It's not always my genre, but I always try to look at what those people sing. And if you look at those lyrics, there is often much more in them than you would think at first glance or that it seems. Then people think that modern music doesn't belong. For me, it often does. And if I try to interpret that a bit, I think that helps people a bit to link that music to the event itself, at that moment. And then that's not Stef Bos, then that's My Way (Frank Sinatra). Sometimes other classics, literally. But yes... So actually I'm quite diverse, I think.

Preferably perhaps classical music.

[Evelyn]

Music with depth.

[Dear]

But it can also be light-hearted sometimes. I mean, if I do something at home, there is also something else on it.

[Ben]

In addition to the music, there is a book that makes you say... Yes, that's where I get my inspiration from. Or that touched me. Nine chances out of ten, that's more than one book. I wouldn't know what to choose either. But it's up to you to... Take out a piece of your bookcase.

[Dear]

What I like to get out of my bookcase is *The Little Prince*. I might just list them. There are others, but if I have to choose something, it is Toon Hermans, because of his simple language. But also, for example, a book by Marc Desmet with the title *The Gospel according to me*. Also books by Huub Oosterhuis, who already has a lot of them.

And I also take from Charlie Mackesy, for example, *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse*. That is a book with drawings, but also with very simple, short sentences that do inspire, I think. I have also used it in a celebration, to put in a mass magazine just to give some thoughts.

Maybe then return to the one I mentioned. Huub Oosterhuis. This is a biography. It has made me think that that will not have been an easy person to deal with, I think, on the one hand. But it is very inspiring, I think, of texts, of language too, to today, which the gospel, the Bible has actually translated as well, in many songs as well.

He was taken off the list in the Netherlands at the time. He is somewhat blacklisted for the liturgy, which I don't think is a fair choice. Perhaps not always so easy for people today, but poetic too, but I think he still knows how to get that message out very strongly and brings out a strong force in it. Occasionally you can also hear it if there is a recording of something. And then the way he talks or delivers his message, I think... Yes. I find that inspiring.

The Gospel, according to me, is a book by Marc Desmet. Marc Desmet is a Jesuit who is also a doctor, has been a palliative doctor, but in the meantime is head of the Jesuits and therefore no longer exercises his doctor's function, vocation, at that time. But he has also translated a number of Gospel texts or brought them to daily life. And for example, also for working out a homily, I like to look in it to see of... What does that Bible text tell him, but actually also, what does it say for us humans today. That sometimes also helps to translate difficult texts, which are also there in the Bible – if they are not all like that – to us a bit.

Of course, Toon Hermans is also a genius of that, I think. We often know him from the comedians, but he has actually also given a lot of prayers, texts, reflections. It is a thin, simple prayer book, but I also notice that it appeals to many people, because his language is also simple, I think.

And then I also had *The Little Prince*, by Antoine Saint-Exupéry. Yes. I like the image he uses of just a simple person who then comes into contact with people here... *The Little Prince* actually comes from another planet, so he gets to know some people or animals. I actually think the approach is very clever, to bring that to us in this way. It's about love, about friendship, how do you treat each other. Yes, how do you see it when someone... You then have a small star, his star is then in the sky. Also that connection he has with where he comes from and the flower he wants to take care of... If you haven't read it yet, I don't know if it exists, but would say, do it anyway.

[Evelyn]

Mandatory reading for every person, something like that.

[Ben]

Also a bit of gospel in a story form.

[Dear]

Yes. In a completely different way, but yes, I think.

[Ben]

Is there a certain thing, because you just said, of very concise, beautiful statements, is there something certain that you say is very nice to read aloud?

[Dear]

Then I have to look for it again, but I may include the Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse. I'll just mention one of them. *"There's nothing like kindness," the horse said. 'Quietly transcends all that.'* If we can get started with that, then the world would look a bit different, I think. Another is also, for example... *"What's the bravest thing you've ever said?" the boy asked. "Help," the horse replied.*

[Evelyn]

That's nice, isn't it?

[Dear]

Asking for help is not always that easy, I think.

'The person you find most difficult to forgive is often yourself.'

[Ben]

That's a truth if...

[Dear]

Yes, it's actually... There are a lot of them in it, aren't there?

[Dear]

'Imagine what we would be like if we were less afraid.'

[Ben]

So the book will be full of very beautiful things.

[Dear]

To get goosebumps when you read through it. And also to be quiet for a while.

[Ben]

I go back to music for a moment.

[Ben]

You have added a number of music choices to that. And at the same time, if I have understood correctly, there is also a Taizé evening three times a year, also here in the faith community. Where did the idea to do that come from? And also how does that appeal?

[Dear]

There used to be Taizé celebrations in our parish, and I'm talking about the big parish, but on the side of Pastor Van Ars, the other side of the city, there were always Taizé

celebrations, in a cozy little church. But in the meantime that had come to a standstill and a number of young people who were inspired, some perhaps a little possessed, from Taizé have turned up. And they were like, we actually want to organize that again, set it up.

For those who don't know Taizé, Taizé is a place in France where a group of ecumenical brothers come together and where especially many young people from all over the world come to pray together. But especially singing together is also very powerful. Usually this is built up in a week where they also meet, exchange, and then especially the highlight of those celebrations in the weekend.

So we try to find a bit of that atmosphere here in the Taizé celebrations. So especially with singing, music, and the occasional moment of silence and here and there a short text. But that's about it.

The peculiarity of that music or those songs is that they are usually simple, polyphonic, but because of the fact that they are repeated so often, you can sing along quite quickly. It is now about the third year or the fourth year that this has started again. So the people who used to organize it come here again.

The turnout could be more, I admit that, but I also think that the atmosphere is good. In the sense of, it's a different setting, it's also differently lit, more atmospheric. It's also with live music, a few musicians playing. And I also like the peace and the atmosphere that is there. I also went to Taizé once, not a whole week, but a weekend. And yes, I find that kind of celebration striking and responsive. On the one hand soothing, but also satisfying, warm to the heart. Yes.

[Ben]

You just said Taizé, is an ecumenical community. How important do you think ecumenism and interreligious dialogue are?

[Dear]

In that sense, I think it's very important that I think for myself of... As Catholics, we are certainly not all in charge. Happy. I mean, I wouldn't like it any more than for it... I will put it another way, there are actually many believers, many types of faiths that are as good as the Catholic one. Sometimes it is according to what you grew up in and that we have been given that. In that sense, it is also important to exchange ideas about it, to exchange ideas, and to actually feel that it is essentially about the same thing.

To... For me it is that one god, but the experience or the way we deal with it is sometimes different. But one is not better than the other. It's just that sometimes it's a pity that faith is abused, or used to want to do or propagate things, while that's not the intention for me.

But more and more you also hear, I think, that there are experiences from another faith, for example in the Catholic faith, around meditation and the way of praying, that that can inspire to enrich each other in that way. So in that sense, I think that is very important. And also that we get rid of it, insofar as that has not yet happened, from the fact that that one faith, the one holy Catholic Church, can no longer be the message as being of 'we are it'.

[Ben]

I come to the proposition that we put to everyone. Years ago I read a book by Greta Vosper. That's a Canadian pastor. At one point she proclaimed to her community 'I am actually atheist'. Part of the story is also in a book she wrote. The title of this is *With or without God. It is more important how you live than what you believe in*, but then believing is dogmatically. If you were to see the title of the book, what would your reaction be?

[Dear]

It is indeed about how we experience it, how we propagate it, how we live, above all. I'm not that dogma-like, but some things might help by knowing or believing in a number of things.

But I think that believing, for me personally, it does help to be able to live by... for me then the example of Jesus, after that love of God, which I think is there for every human being, I hope, I believe. So it is always a bit of a search. At one moment that will be stronger than the other, that trust, that faith that is there. So in that sense I really understand it. But I say it, it also helps me to live from there.

I'm not saying that people that's, let's say, atheists or don't believe, or whatever they call it, that they... Because that is also often a question, do you have to be religious to be a good person? Certainly not. But it may help or give strength or stimulate.

[Evelyn]

But not from a particular religion, but from what it does to you.

[Dear]

Yes, but if you can experience that from a certain religion, that's certainly nice too, I think. It does give inspiration, I think. And also makes it think every now and then.

I sometimes hear someone say, 'if you don't come to the celebration on Sunday in church, where do you get your inspiration in the end?' Some people may do it at home, but I find it harder for myself to do it alone than when you feel that there are still people who believe in it. And in that sense, I think religion does have an influence.

[Ben]

The connection.

[Dear]

Yes, it is. And also the exchange sometimes of images of God, of how do you experience it and so on.

[Ben]

Lately it has been said that believing is something you have to do privately. That should not be done in public and certainly not in public life. You've heard that statement too. What is your reaction to that?

[Dear]

I think it's hard for a lot of people to just believe. If you do that in the private sphere... I am not allowed to speak it for everyone, but I notice it for myself. If you have to do it alone, it's much more difficult for me. It is precisely the exchange, the talking about it, the feeling that

others are also going a bit the same way. Even if that may differ a bit, or that experience may also be something else. But I think we need each other to believe and that we can also call on each other to do that together and that it doesn't have to be in the private sphere. Even though everyone may experience it in a different way.

But for me, a crucifix can hang in the town hall, but someone with a headscarf can also sit behind the counter of that same town hall. I mean... That's just to give an example. Those are outward signs. That doesn't always say everything about how you experience it, but with everything in the private sphere, I don't think we're going to get there.

I think that religions have a lot to say in society and that it should be given its power. And if that can be done in respect of what everyone thinks and feels, I think that's the most important thing.

[Evelyn]

I think that is very much in line with how we think about it. It's also a bit of the approach of what we want to try to do with this podcast.

[Evelyn]

Thank you for sharing your story with us and the story of the faith community here. Is there anything else... A few final things you'd like to share with the listeners?

[Dear]

I would say: believing is a nice adventure. It is not a certainty, it is something that goes up and down, which is also allowed, with doubts and uncertainties. And I would just say, try it, taste it. If you haven't tasted it yet, go and discover it, to those who want or can listen to it.

[Evelyn]

Fantastic. Thank you.

[Dear]

Thank you so much.

[Evelyn]

We are going to wrap up with this. This was also our penultimate episode, our last interview with a guest. Next time we will do a short reflection.

Or maybe not so short, so we'll see how that goes. But then we will talk to each other, so Ben and I, about everything we have heard from the previous conversations.

We are very curious what you thought of it, so be sure to let us know via our social media or via our e-mail address or via the website.