

Covid-19 became real for us when our eldest brother, Father Johannes, died due to this virus on March 31st. It was at the beginning of the infections in our country, and especially in our region, that has been worst hit. Our infirmarian, lovingly cared for Br. Johannes but became infected himself. It was and still is a painful fact for the community that they could not say properly farewell to our brother and that his funeral had to take place in an extremely austere manner. After the funeral the virus remained in the community for weeks. Some brothers felt ill but were tested negative and three other brothers were tested positive and got sick. Because of this we were forced to take ever stricter measures. On the advice of the doctors, we didn't sing the Divine Office for a month and we didn't even receive Holy Communion for some weeks. Luckily we always came together to pray and we tried to make regular life as normal as possible. Since the end of July all the brothers are cured.

In the community dialogues we had about the influence of Covid-19 it appeared that we felt privileged during the lockdown with so much space in and around our house. The brothers have also been grateful that we have always been able to celebrate the Divine Office while many people were not allowed to go to church. The whole crisis has made us more aware of our vocation as a praying community. At the beginning of the crisis, at the request of our bishop, we opened the church in the afternoon for prayer (Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament) and the possibility to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation. After Easter, when we ourselves had so many sick, we stopped for health security reasons. At the entrance to our chapel we placed the medieval statue of the Mother of Sorrows, which enjoyed special veneration in the abbey of Mariawald. Every day a candle burns there to remind us of our task to pray for the world.

Our guesthouse was already closed mid-March as well as the public liturgical celebrations. Recently we are open again on Sundays for 100 people who have to register via the website. This is going well and the longing of the faithful for participation is great. There is no singing in that celebration, according to the rules of the Dutch Bishops' Conference. The Guesthouse and the weekday celebrations are still not open for the public. We are very cautious at the moment.

Our brewery has been hit hard, but now it's running again. The restaurant and monastic shop have been closed for a long time but are now open again with restrictions. The Webshop of the monastery gave us some income during the lockdown. The cheese factory continued but the brothers made twice a week cheese for the local food bank. Also our bakery has baked bread for the most poor families in the city during the months of March-May. It was a concrete way of solidarity. Some religious communities in our city have been very hard hit and we have assisted them as much as possible by means of prayer, telephone and other attentions. We ourselves are grateful, also to our daughter houses, for their prayer and moral support in sometimes difficult days.

The impact of the virus on our community is big. There is still fear and insecurity among many brothers. Community dialogues help us to name all our different reactions to this crisis. Now there is a certain Covid-19 fatigue and a longing for rest and relaxation. Soon we will organize a week of recreation for the whole community with more attention for rest and relaxation in and around the house.