



Dick van der Geest 1941 - 2024

Dick grew up as the seventh child of a butcher's family of nine. In our memory, we often quarreled with him as a child. This quarrelsome nature never left him completely. The six sons went to a school in The Hague run by the Brothers of Maastricht. Two of the sons, Ted and Dick, decided to become brother teachers. Dick attended secondary school and a teacher training college. After joining the brothers, he became a primary school teacher ("the best time of my life"), then taught at a teacher training college and finally became a school counselor in The Hague.

In 1989, he took unpaid leave to provide school counseling in Ghana. There were enough people in the Netherlands who could do that work, he thought. When he arrived in Ghana, he discovered that the most basic conditions for education, such as a school building, school benches and teaching materials, were often lacking. This is how his idea of building schools was born. He was also assigned financial tasks. He had a talent for it. However, in that position he got into conflicts over incorrect accounts. The conflicts escalated and led to painful lawsuits, after which the brother congregation expelled him as a member. Nevertheless, Dick decided to stay in Ghana and to focus on building schools, which he financed with his own fat Dutch pension. His strict and skillful management enabled him to build ten schools in close cooperation with a local contractor. A German philanthropist donated money for five more schools. Dick's 'new life' and good relationship with Ghanaian friends and workers became a 'missionary passion' and personal enrichment for him. In spite of his expulsion from the brother congregation, he remained for everyone 'Brother Dick'.

However, the years had their effect on him. Riding his motor bike became risky. He came on holiday for a few months this year and planned to return to Ghana for one more time to complete his project. Things turned out differently; he was diagnosed with incurable tumors on his brain. He died two months later in The Irishof, a palliative unit in Zoetermeer. We are left with a jumble of memories. Dick was a talented, stubborn, and driven brother. We are grateful that he managed to mean so very much to so many people after his tumultuous beginning.

