International Exchange program in the Netherlands, July 2016
A group picture together with two Brussels group members. Patricia took this the picture. Standing from left to right:

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This letter is intended to be a two-way communication channel for Grail members to fill up the gaps between Crossroads with short news items and an events calendar. You are encouraged to send in
- short impressions of international and national meetings and activities (maximum 10-15 lines)
- job advertisements, vacancies at your Grail center
- changes of address
- international events for the calendar

This letter is sent from iltsecr@thegrail.org to one contact person of every Grail country, who will make sure all members in their country get a chance to read it.
New Earth Network Coordinator

Sarah Mabanja from Kenya has been named the new coordinator of the Grail Global Network on concerns of the Earth. Anyone interested in being part of the communication and exchange within this Network (water, energy, sustainability, climate change, biodiversity, etc) should contact Sarah directly at this email address: mabanja83@yahoo.com. Grail members as well friends are eligible to participate in the Network.

UN Sustainable Development Goals – August 2016
The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the month of August for Grail members to consider are these:

Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities, and Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation
What is the Grail in your country doing to further these goals?

Experiences at International Exchange program in Europe

In January of 2014, the four of us -- Carla van Thiel, Ine van Emmerik, Chris de Leeuw and myself -- had participated in an international exchange program to Uganda. That was a most heart-warming and eye-opening trip because we saw the country with Grail eyes and minds. We heard the personal stories of those who live and work there as well as of the other participants. We decided we wanted to pass this experience on to others. This resulted in a program based in the Netherlands for eight Grail women from a variety of Grail countries.

Since the Netherlands is a country with mainly elderly Grail members with limited energy for Grail projects, little space for sleeping and no staff for cooking, we had to improvise in many ways. The enthusiastic participation of the German Grail and the young Brussels Grail group helped us to start making a program; and our dear friends offered guest rooms, helped with cooking, shopping, guiding city tours and picking people up from the airport.

We had a hard time waiting for the visas, and one applicant from Tanzania was refused but five others (two from Mozambique, one from South Africa, and two from the Philippines) were successful. The two from the USA and one from Australia did not need visas.

What a happy day it was when everyone finally arrived with an incredible amount of enthusiasm, warmth and energy! We started the first day with reflection about what each of us brings to this program, with sacred dance, a lot of eye contact and many smiles.

During the program, the group visited one Roman Catholic church in Utrecht with a Eucharistic service in English; and a service with interreligious mantra singing in the beautiful ecumenical Dominicus church in Amsterdam. The 16th century Reformation had a strong influence in the northern part of the country: we visited several churches that were built by Catholics but later became Protestant.

More interreligious experiences happened in Germany, where the Initiative Hochfeld, started by the Grail as a support for Italian immigrants in the 1970s, now mainly sees Rumanian and Bulgarian immigrants and Romas who may be Muslims. Also in Germany, we were introduced to a beautiful mosque by a Catholic brother who spoke Turkish fluently and encouraged us to sing the Grail song.
‘Alleluia’ in the middle of the huge space while several elderly Muslim men were praying near the entrance.

In Germany and in Brussels, human trafficking is an issue for the Grail to be involved in. We heard moving stories of women who chose to help other women getting out of forced prostitution. We also walked through a red-light district where we could see women selling their bodies. In Belgium, trafficked women who choose to set themselves free get help to find a job or an education -- whether they are willing to testify in court or not. The organization Payoke in Antwerp helps women to go back to their own country (some because they had left their children behind or just because they get homesick) and looks for safe places where they can stay and get their life back on the rails.

There were some days of seeing more of the Netherlands: city tours in Utrecht, Den Haag and Amsterdam; and the water management museum Cruquius which demonstrated the history of the well-known windmills and polders through the advanced techniques of today – all to keep Dutch feet dry. About half the country is still below sea level.

Finally we saw the graves of the five Women of Nazareth who were the pioneers of the later Grail movement, as well as the place where women were trained to become members, ‘The Tiltenberg,’ now in the possession of the Diocese of Haarlem. We had a Saturday of celebration with Dutch Grail members and friends with foreign songs, speed dating, a market and a celebration. The last day was reserved for reflection, evaluation and dancing to remember how we had started.

I think I was not the only one feeling exhausted by this intensive program but at the same time very energized and rejuvenated by the sharing and the many hugs.

**Mineke van Sloten, the Netherlands**

**Visit to The Hague**

With Carla van Thiel and Mineke van Sloten, we left Utrecht for The Hague, seat of the Dutch Parliament.

When we arrived at The Hague, we met our hostess Mieneke Hage who guided us to the Humanity House Museum. There we met Yna, a wonderful lady who had been the conduit for our invitation. At the museum, we were oriented by a staff member on what we could expect, shared a drink, collected literature and proceeded to peruse the exhibitions.

The exhibitions were about persons who sought asylum in the Netherlands. Many stories came from people of the Ukraine and its surroundings. They had suffered loss of relatives, property and even limbs, as a result of bombings. Both men and women told their stories.

After the visit to the museum ended, we began a tour of The Hague itself. We moved on to view the Parliament which was made up of a number of buildings. We viewed them from the outside: buildings of various architectural designs, using unbelievable shapes and patterns. Here we also
participated in a traditional Dutch pastime: eating raw herring.

Our hostess, Yna, was eager to show us her church which, like many churches in the Netherlands, was a Catholic Church turned Protestant.

By bus we found our way to the Peace Palace, another remarkable piece of history. The *Palais de la Paix* houses the International Court of Justice, the Permanent Court of Arbitration, The Hague Academy of International Law, and the Peace Palace Library. At the entrance to the Peace Palace is an eternal flame with the names of the countries represented at the first peace conference there. Included in the list of countries were the United States of America and Trinidad and Tobago among perhaps 75 other countries.

There is a peace tree with leaves of paper hanging on branches where visitors were allowed to leave their impressions or message in words. I left my message.

Leaving all the chiming bells behind us, we went to the *Panorama Mesdag*. The panorama itself is a huge cylinder: 14 meters high, it is a three-dimensional picture of The Hague, containing many scenes of the city and its surroundings.

The *Panorama Mesdag* was painted in 1881 by Hendrik Mesdag who worked with five artist-painters around the clock for four months to produce it. However, the museum that housed the panorama was not profitable and was closed. Mesdag himself then bought the museum for just over the amount he had been paid to paint the panorama, and dropped the price of admission to the museum from 95c to 35c. The *Panorama Mesdag* is still open today.

Thank you, Mieneke Hage. You gave us very memorable experiences. You even got us an impromptu guide at the *Panorama Mesdag*. Bless you all.

*Judith DeFour-Howard, USA*

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**Calendar**

**2016**
- September 18 – 20, European meeting on the concern of migrants in Mülheim, Germany
- October 8 – 16, Formators training at Golegă Grail Centre, Portugal
- November 5 - 15, ILT meeting in Portugal

**2017**
- January 14 – 29, Formation on social change methodologies in Belo Horizonte, Brazil
- February 17 - 26, Formator training program in San Pedro Sula, Honduras
- March 13 – 24, CSW61 in New York, USA
- **July 13 - 25, IGA in Fatima, Portugal**