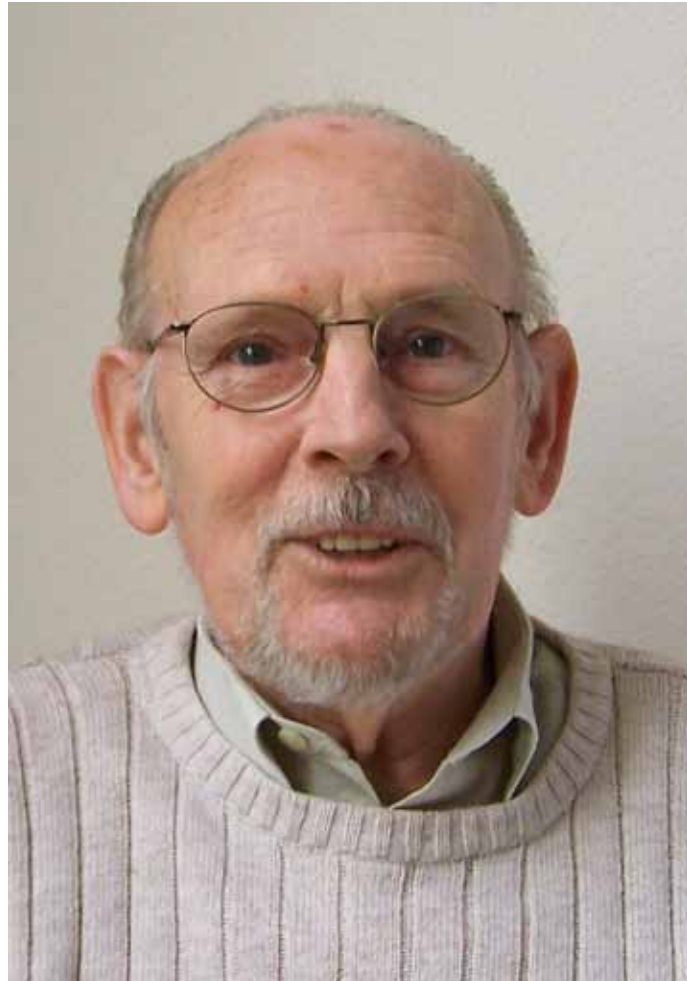


In Deo

Jos Lefeber

Joseph, Br. Gerwin

By Wim Swüste FIC



Jos was born on 26 November 1931 in Amsterdam. On 15 August 1952 he made his first Profession to the FIC. He died in Maastricht on 20 November 2021.

In the announcement of his death, there is a quote by the Prophet Isaiah:

"This is how precious you are in My eyes, how valuable.

The Eternal one loves you dearly."

All his life, Jos looked for an intensive connection to his Creator. He did that in his exemplary way of life, by being attentive to all he met, by seeking his Lord in silence, and through thorough self-reflection.

When in 2000 he came to live at De Beyart, I had a talk with him in his room on the fifth floor. He then said quite openly: "Last year I lost two people who were very dear to me. In my religious life I have had to relocate four times because my community was dissolved. And honestly I haven't yet found out how to serve people best. But I also realize, in spite of all, that God's goodness has never let me down."

A main theme in Jos' life is the realization that in the storm on the sea of life, his small boat is thrown around uncontrollably, and Jesus is resting in the stern. We just heard that parable in the lecture from the Gospel. And it is touching, but also a bit sad, that that is how Jos looked back on his rich and fruitful life.

In the Lefeber family, there were ten children. His father had a hairdressing shop in Amsterdam and he also sold tobacco. The family were devout Catholics and also close-knit and sociable. Jos also often played outside in the streets. "The neighbours called me 'street boy'", he told me.

For our congregation Jos was a precious person. He first worked as a teacher in Nijmegen, then went to the Institute for the Deaf in Sint Michielsgestel, where he was a pleasant fellow Brother and a good teacher.

In 1968, the Veghel community needed a new superior and he was asked for that. It made him the youngest superior of the time. The Council had much confidence in him. He was much appreciated there.

In the meantime, Jos did training courses with the Conference for Dutch Religious (KNR). In the Netherlands, those were troubled times in the Church, and the changes made themselves felt within the FIC congregation too. To help their fellow Brothers find their way around in the new ideas and philosophies going around, the then Chapter decided more inspiration and reflection were needed.

A Centre for Renewal and Reflection was set up, with Theo Mandos, Jos Lefeber, and René Bollen to run it. There were meetings, conferences, discussions, prayer gatherings. And very often

there were flipover sheets on the walls. "That's what they called me at the time, Bro. Flipover" said Jos some years later, meaning they'd put in a lot of work but it was not always well received among the fellow Brothers.

In 1980, religious were asked to go and give guidance to the inhabitants of the newly built town of Almere. A group of Sisters CB and Brothers FIC were willing, among them Kees Gordijn, Cor Creemers, Gerhard Dicks and Jos Lefeber. They worked with the parish priests, taught at the schools and were of service to newcomers.

From 1983 to 2006, Jos also served many orders and congregations in leading committees and working as a personal coach. He had taken the training required for that. We found a document among his papers listing all the congregations he'd worked for during that time. Sisters, Fathers, Brothers of 31 'brands' were listed there.

And yet, in an interview for our magazine he said to me: "You know, Wim, I honestly tried to discover what I did wrong to never reach my ideals. I tried and tried again to get used to new situations. Apparently I need a lot of time to get used to things. And looking back, there are many moments in my life where I put my all into a task or a project. Perhaps I expected too much, or I set my ideals too high. But it troubles me." I looked at him in surprise and he added: "I often see that when you are open to your fellow human beings, you can do many small miracles. No, I have not lost my faith in God. That is still growing, I hope and pray, every day."

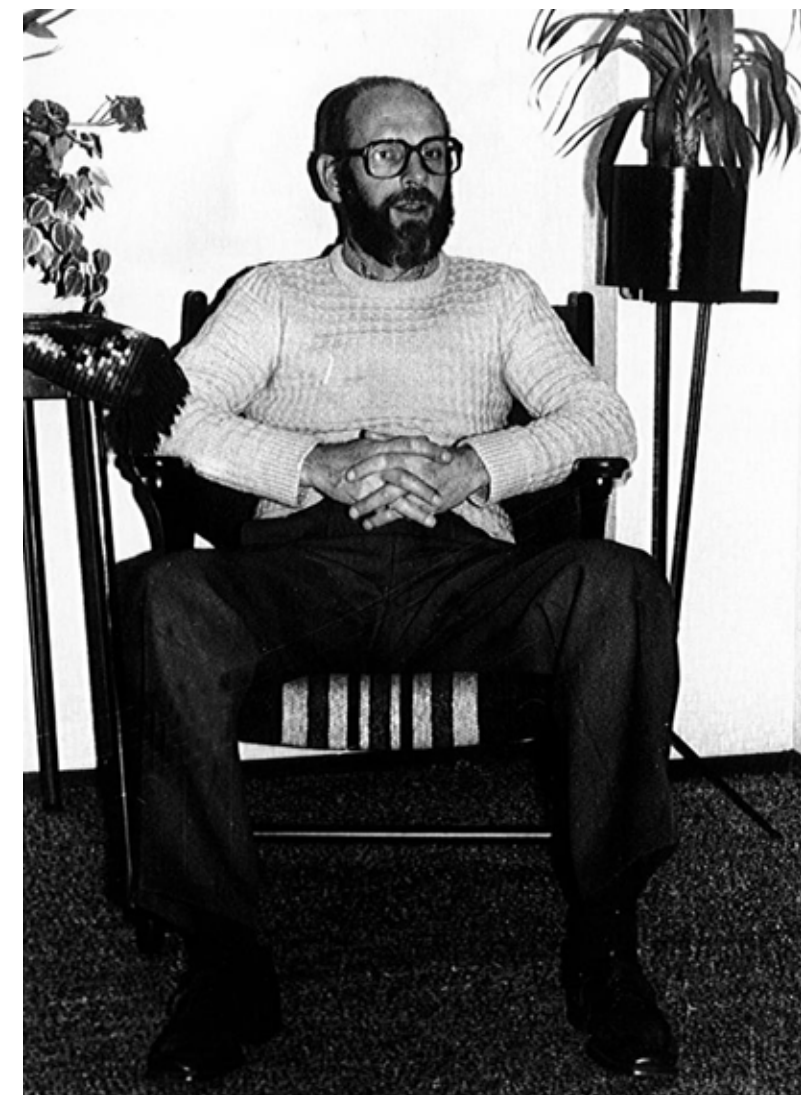
Jos spent a valuable life of almost 90 years among us. His relatives, who were very faithful, and his fellow Brothers, all feel and trust that this noble person, who sometimes felt so unsafe in his boat of life, has now entered into eternal happiness.

A life of which we can say, honestly, "And God saw it was good. Very good."

The world has lost a valuable man.

attentive to all he met

Jos in 1982, the Almere days



Uncle Jos

Anja Lefeber

namens alle neven en nichten

Dear uncle Jos,

I only really got to know you some six years ago when I was starting to take care of aunt Eveline. Every time I phoned you, you had an answer for me, and it was very clear that you had understood what I was asking and why. You'd always give me an answer that helped me. And we continued in that vein over the years, when we started to worry about uncle Wim. And you always listened carefully and gave me good advice.

In recent years we kept in contact, and it was always good to be here with you at De Beyart. The last time I came with Paul and Roos, and of course you had coffee and cakes ready. You showed us around the entire building, where the kitchen gardens used to be, the cellars, the laundry kitchen, the cloister corridors and all the pictures and paintings. The recreation room of your community, your own room, the garden and the pond where you liked to sit. Such a familiar spot.

I don't know much about the time before 2015, but Peter and José told me a lot. We know how you came to Maastricht just after the war, about 14 years old, you could get a lift in a truck and the driver dropped you off in the centre of Maastricht but you had no idea of where to go. There you were with your suitcase. Fortunately a lady with a pram came and she put the suitcase on the pram and brought you to De Beyart.

In 1952, you made your profession as Bro. Gerwin. You contributed a lot to so many orders and congregations I couldn't possibly name them all. In the sixties you taught at the School for the Deaf, and helped to restructure the process by stimulating children to use their voice, and create a bond. They ended up with a mixed system of teaching methods, both in sound and in sign language.

After that you were the superior for a community in Veghel and then you went to Almere. That was when you met Nelly, and for a number of years you had a close friendship, until she died in 2006. Nelly often came with you to visit the family and for celebrations, also when we had a big party at De Schark. In 1995 you joined a community in Nijmegen, a small alternative group. Your best quality was your intense commitment to others, in many ways, through pastoral work.

After the community in Nijmegen was dissolved, you returned to De Beyart. Uncle Ben was here too at the time and at first you were afraid you wouldn't feel at home but after a while you said it was all okay. I think your fellow Brothers must have been glad of you, you knew everyone and you always spoke kindly to others. You also did practical things, such as shopping for people who couldn't go out themselves anymore. And you always listened to people, and supported them all the way, even when they were dying.

In 2017 the new Bernardus community was formed and it was a great group, even though unfortunately it grows smaller and smaller.

You were a real people person, as Bart can testify after he interviewed you for four hours on religion. He could ask and discuss anything with you, doubts, forms of belief and life philosophy. All those discussions are still there on tape, they are lovely to listen to.

You knew how to touch people's hearts, how to encourage them. You were someone for the fine nuances, and we'll really miss you. All those years when you'd come to Amsterdam for visits to your brothers and sisters, and to the December family reunions. You'd make a song for every celebration, and we'd sing along even if the melody was strange.

Lately, your health was slowly deteriorating, and that was difficult for you. The fear of how 'it' would be occupied your mind. Your heart attack last year, after which you said you'd fought the living. And the idea your eyes were closed already, even though you were still there.

You did look forward to your 90th birthday, and hoped you'd be there for it. But in the past few weeks, after you'd been tested positive, you turned

sad. I tried to find words to cheer you up, but I don't know if I succeeded to any extent. You'd have done better yourself in my place.

I don't know what your final days were like, you didn't want me to call every day, but I hope it was peaceful. I hope you are okay now that you don't need to fear anymore, now you are together again with all those dear to you, fellow Brothers, your brothers and sisters, all those who went before you.

Dear uncle Jos, rest in peace, and thank you for everything.



Jos singing together with his brother Wim at a family celebration





Jos as a young Brother



*Jos in the
nineteen sixties*



Jos in 1965 with his pupils at the School for the Deaf in St-Michielsgestel

Nijmegen, 1991. Regular prayer service in the community. Henk de Wilde, Willem Sondejker, Jan Garnier, Amedé van Raak, Ton Kropman en Jos Lefeber



Maastricht, 2021. Recreation in the days of Covid-19. Jos Lefeber, Gerard Hermans, Ton Kropman, Joop van Eijk, Paul Marx, Johan Muijtjens

