



International Convivium Groningen

The Ruimzicht Foundation¹ offers accommodation to Dutch as well as foreign students in the city of Groningen. A convivium (from the Latin, literally meaning 'sharing life together') is a student community. Characteristic for a convivium, is that its residents deliberately choose to live in a group and to weekly reserve time for moments of reflection, a good conversation or a sociable activity.

The Community

Ruimzicht Foundation has had years of experience in accommodating students. It manages eight of these communities in the university towns of Amsterdam, Groningen, Leiden and Utrecht, where a total of 92 students live together inspired by a Christian outlook on life. The convivium in Groningen is the 9th and 'youngest' convivium, developed in collaboration with the Protestant Theological University (PThU). New to this community is its international character: It will be the first convivium where Dutch as well as foreign students live together.

Characteristics of the current (Dutch) convivium is that its residents:

- consciously choose for living together in a community
- have a Christian background
- participate in the weekly home gathering
- commit themselves to a social church project
- (are allowed to) live in a convivium for three years
- study at a University or a University of Applied Sciences

An Enriching Experience

Living in a convivium is an enriching experience for almost all of its residents. One of the residents shares his experiences as follows:

"A convivium like Akapella (= a convivium in Utrecht) stands for living together, and that is exactly what it is. You really live together, like one big family. And of course there are irritations once in a while, but that's life. Living together with 16 totally different people and still managing to create a home, that is what makes living in a convivium so special. On Mondays we have our weekly evening together, we share dinner and organize some kind of special activity. Furthermore, there is always somebody at home, always somebody to talk to, to have a drink with or to prepare and share a meal with. This openness to each other, living and sharing, accepting each other just the way you are and creating a home together, makes living in a convivium so special"

Piter-Jan, 23 jaar



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE JOINING THE INTERNATIONAL CONVIVIUM

Structure of the International Convivium

The international convivium accommodates 15 residents: seven Dutch and eight foreign residents.

The composition of residents is mixed: male and female, and each resident has his or her own room. The foreign residents have been selected by the PThU, and have been invited to study in the Netherlands at the one-year Master's Degree Theology Program at the PThU. The Dutch residents are senior students or have just started their first job.

Global

The global character of the convivium is evident: a world of its own, with a colourful mixture of cultures. Each resident contributes his or her own tradition and habits, and you become acquainted with different views and (religious) insights that may be completely different from yours. You will definitely be surprised. Did you know that the Netherlands celebrates an 'Animal Day', and have you ever celebrated 'Sinterklaas'?

You will view your own society differently; things you have taken for granted will suddenly become less obvious.

If you have the ability to face the unknown with an open and inquisitive attitude, along with a healthy sense of humour, you will gain new insights, special experiences and friendships.

The communicative language is English.

Creating a Home Together

According to the concept of the international convivium, a part of the group of residents will change each year. At the beginning of the academic year, the foreign students will arrive, returning to their families and home country 12 months later. Saying goodbye is part of the deal. The Dutch residents reside at the convivium for a longer period; they usually stay on for three years, thus guaranteeing continuity in the convivium. This does not imply that the Dutch residents are (more) responsible for the success of living together. It is a shared responsibility, all residents playing their separate roles.

Together, you will create a home for each other.



Evening at Home

Sitting round the table together is fundamental for the convivium. Sharing a meal means more than eating the same food. Eating together offers an opportunity to get to know each other better: it is a chance to connect. If and when you eat together is decided by the group, but happens at least every Wednesday evening. This is the evening everybody stays at home and participates. Dinner ends with a simple liturgical moment, each time prepared by someone else.

This is followed by the home gathering, again, joined by everyone. The structure of this evening varies and depends on what you agree upon. One time it may have a reflective character, another time you may discuss a current topic. It can also turn out to be a cultural or sports event. Not to forget December 5th: Sinterklaas'!

Apart from this weekly evening at home, you will see and meet each other regularly but of course each person has his or her own (study) program, personal appointments and social contacts. You are free to do so, and will have enough time for your own activities.

Sunday Morning

Students often visit their families during the weekends. This is not possible for the foreign students; they will have to 'seek refuge' in the city of Groningen. What to do on a Sunday? Once a month, the residents of the convivium go to church together. One of the residents decides which church that will be. That person will take the others to a congregation where he or she feels at home, linked to a personal religious tradition. This may lead to elements of surprise: *'Is this how you live your faith?!'* The shared church service is meant to get to know and discover each other's background in a respectful way. It offers you the opportunity to look beyond your own borders.



Volunteer Work

In the other convivium communities residents commit themselves to a social, diaconal project. Due to practical reasons this is not required of the foreign students residing in the international convivium. However, voluntary work remains possible, for instance, when a church or society asks for help or assistance.



Organization

As in any regular household, practical matters need to be taken care of; this is no different in a convivium. This responsibility lies within the so-called 'triarchy', three members of the convivium who make sure that home life runs smoothly concerning organizational matters.

Three times a year the student council gets together, a council in which the international convivium is also represented.

The annual national convivium day is meant for all residents.

For the sake of continuity, participation in the triarchy and the student council is reserved for Dutch residents only.

A good tradition within Ruimzicht is to inaugurate new residents after a period of approximately three months. In a special ceremony you will become an official member of the convivium. This is an official event, but with a playful undertone.



Support

A (part-time) pastor is associated with the Ruimzicht Foundation. Her main task is to guide and support the 9 convivium communities and their residents. Among other things, she is responsible for the intake of new residents, and will be present at important events within the convivium. She can also be asked to assist in the preparation of the home gatherings. Furthermore, the convivium pastor is available when things aren't running quite smoothly and the convivium wishes to seek advice from a dedicated outsider.

For practical and financial matters the foreign students can appeal to the assistant international affairs officer at PThU. Pastoral care is provided by the student chaplain at PThU, the student chaplains of the Groningen Student Chaplaincy (GSP), one of the ministers of the involved church communities in Groningen or the minister/preacher of one's own congregation.

Who Is Eligible For The International Convivium:

A resident of the international convivium:

- is enthusiastic about the international convivium concept and endorses Ruimzicht's objectives
- deliberately chooses this kind of cohabitation
- will attend a 1-year Master of Theology program (for foreign residents) or is a senior student/working student/at the beginning of his career (for Dutch residents)
- will reserve time for the convivium
- is interested in others and is able to deal with diversity in faith, culture and inclination
- demonstrates a true interest in other cultures
- has an open, inquisitive nature
- is a trustworthy, self-reliant person and is able to put things into perspective
- speaks English