

# ■ Sacred Care

The societal role of vacant churches in the elderly housing crisis



## Research plan

Marc van Zantvliet (5485274)

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Authors: Marc van Zantvliet, (5485274)

Correspondence: Ivan Nevzgodin  
Technische Universiteit Delft

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## 2. Important terms

Before reading this research plan, it is important to know which key terms reoccur in this report and what is meant by them within this paper. In this way, an attempt is made to clarify the framework within which these concepts are determined.

Symbiosis<sup>1</sup>: The coexistence of two disparate organisms on or in each other for mutual benefit.

Independent elderly: In this study, we see the independent elderly as an individual who is able and willing to live most of their time individually, but with the ability to get “light care” when needed.

Light care<sup>2</sup>: By light care we mean:

- *Help with daily activities. For example, washing, dressing and cleaning.*
- *Participating in activities, or eating together in a restaurant near the complex.*
- *Living independently in a flat.*

1. Symbiose - 20 definities - Encyclo. (n.d.). Retrieved 20 September 2022, from <https://www.encyclo.nl/begrip/symbiose>

2. Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport. (2022, April 15). Verzorgingshuis. Ouderen | Regelhulp - Ministerie Van VWS. Retrieved 20 September 2022, from <https://www.regelhulp.nl/onderwerpen/ouderen/verzorgingshuis>

### 3. Ambition

I would like to design care homes for independent elderly people within a former church building. With the growing vacancy rate of churches, I think it would be possible to respond to the housing need present among the elderly. A church floor plan often consists of large spans with minimal obstruction. This provides the perfect opportunity for transformation, while these floor plans provide a lot of flexibility. In the Netherlands, a quarter of all religious buildings have already been transformed into a new function at this moment in time, which will only increase over the years<sup>3</sup>. In addition, I also think the social character of the church can contribute in facilitating care facilities, because the church already used to have a social role in society. Therefore, I would like to explore what we as architects can do with these buildings to provide the elderly with sufficient living space and take care of their mental well-being.

### 4. Context

During this study, the future contribution of vacant churches to develop more independent elderly housing will be investigated. To survey this, the Sint Dominicus in Utrecht is being examined for its potential for conversion to independent elderly housing. Here, the Sint Dominicus serves as a case study and will be used in a later process to outline a future scenario on possible uses needed to transform a place of worship into an independent care complex. To find out what an elderly person needs regarding facilities and help, information is mainly gathered through books and articles. Apart from that, people living in care homes and informal carers can be interviewed for extra information.

The aim is to respond to the growing demand for independent senior housing, trying to combine the phenomenon of vacancy and aging into an improvement in housing demand. The main emphasis here is on the independent living trajectory. Elderly people are living independently at home for longer and also want to continue living independently for as long as possible.

3. Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap. (2021b, January 20). *Eén op de vier kerkgebouwen heeft een nieuwe functie*. Nieuwsbericht | Rijksdienst Voor Het Cultureel Erfgoed. Retrieved 20 September 2022, from <https://www.cultureelerfgoed.nl/actueel/nieuws/2020/11/30/een-op-de-vier-kerkgebouwen-heeft-een-nieuwe-functie#:~:text=Net%20als%20in%20Nederland%20blijkt,in%20kerken%20te%20vinden%20is>.

This makes it one of the largest groups among the elderly who want to qualify for so-called “senior housing”<sup>4</sup>. By studying this group, I think I can tackle the largest amount of people who would like to qualify for senior housing. The outcome of this study can contribute to the growing housing problem of the elderly, as well as reduce the number of empty places of worship. In addition, the research also combines social disciplines (like healthcare and psychology) in combination with the field of architecture. An attempt is being made to combine the two phenomena of vacant churches and aging so that they are no longer seen as threats in the future. But more as a future vision of opportunities. In addition, it also contributes to the reuse and repurposing of materials and buildings, in which there is a lot of interest in 2022 about reducing the impact on the climate.

### 5. Relevance

The Netherlands is increasingly aging. This is the result of the explosive growth in population during the Baby Boom period (figure 1). On 1 January 2020, the Netherlands had a percentage of 19.8% of the total population aged 65+. This is an increase of 7% compared to the 1990 figures. This increase is likely to continue until 2040, by which time the group of 20- to 65-year-olds will be almost as large as the over-65s<sup>5</sup>.

In Utrecht, 11 percent of the population is over the age of 65. This figure is lower than the national average as more young people live in the city looking for career opportunities<sup>6</sup>.

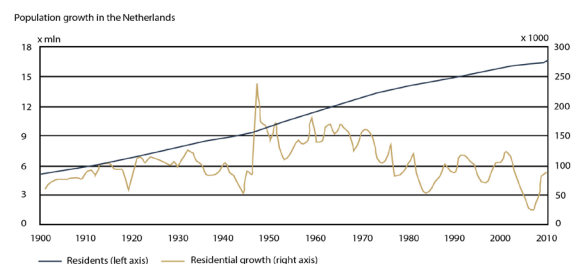


Figure 1: Population growth in the Netherlands (Source: CBS 2020)

4. Consultancy.nl. (2020, September 15). *Vraag naar ouderenwoningen neemt explosief toe*. Retrieved 20 September 2022, from <https://www.consultancy.nl/nieuws/30470/vraag-naar-ouderenwoningen-neemt-explosief-toe>

5,6. Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek. (2022, March 1). *Ouderen*. Centraal Bureau Voor De Statistiek. Retrieved 20 September 2022, from <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/visualisaties/dashboard-bevolking/leeftijd/ouderen#:~:text=Op%201%20januari%202020%20telt,van%20de%20inwoners%2065%20plus.&text=Er%20zijn%20%20618%20874,een%20838%20661%2080%20Dplussers>.

## 6. Research question

This has direct implications for the amount of elderly housing needed to accommodate these people. According to HEVO (a housing corporation), the number of elderly homes needed will double within 20 years<sup>7</sup>. The type of care desired in an elderly home varies greatly from person to person. This has to do with an individual preferences, but also the underlying problems for which care needs to be provided. Within this case study, the focus is mainly on elderly people who do need care but prefer to live independently. Research shows that 92% of elderly people can and want to live independently when they are 75. Often, the home is pre-arranged to provide care<sup>8</sup>.

At the same time, we see another trend in the Netherlands, namely the decline of churches. Today, 1 in 4 churches, mosques, or synagogues are no longer used as places of worship, more endowed with a new function<sup>9</sup>. About 40 percent of these are transformed into a cultural function such as a theatre, museum, or library. Shortly after that comes housing with a third of all transformations. Care also appears in this list with a paltry 4 percent. Despite the rising number of elderly people in the Netherlands, we still see that care is not yet very attractive as a function within a place of worship. Within this research, I want to find out what the reason is for the paltry interest in making care housing within a church, how we can encourage this better, and, through a case study, outline a future scenario on how to give these monuments a new life. Since the trend of an aging population and the emptying of churches is not predicted to diminish, it would be better to focus on a symbiosis between the two to reinforce each other. In addition, churches are also often centrally located, which could have a positive impact on avoiding feelings such as loneliness.

7. Consultancy.nl. (2020, September 15). *Vraag naar ouderenwoningen neemt explosief toe*. Retrieved 20 September 2022, from <https://www.consultancy.nl/nieuws/30470/vraag-naar-ouderenwoningen-neemt-explosief-toe>

8. Michael Stuart-Fox, Berry Blijie, Kenneth Gopal, Ruud Steijvers, & Sandra van Zoelen. (2021, January). *Monitor Ouderenhuisvesting 2020*. In *Rijksoverheid* (No. r2020-0085MS). ABF Research. Retrieved 20 September 2022, from <https://open.overheid.nl/repository/ronl-1ab15ce4-f214-447a-b3b4-a3840143662d/1/pdf/monitor-ouderenhuisvesting-2020.pdf>

9. Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap. (2021a, January 20). *Eén op de vier kerkgebouwen heeft een nieuwe functie*. Nieuwsbericht | Rijksdienst Voor Het Cultureel Erfgoed. Retrieved 20 September 2022, from <https://www.cultureelerfgoed.nl/actueel/nieuws/2020/11/30/een-op-de-vier-kerkgebouwen-heeft-een-nieuwe-functie#:~:text=Net%20als%20in%20Nederland%20blijkt,in%20kerken%20te%20vinden%20is>

### Main question:

How can the growing vacancy of religious buildings help create a housing provision for independent elderly people?

To answer this question, my research is divided into three parts. The first part is a general introduction to the phenomena that are happening to the churches and the growing amount of elderly in the Netherlands. In the centerpiece, the reason why not that many churches are repurposed is examined and explained. During this part, case studies will be explored to gain knowledge of the necessities needed to accommodate elderly people in a church. The conclusion looks at how architecture can respond to the life and mindspan of elderly people. Combining this with the other chapters, a toolbox is created that can be implied for the Sint Dominicus church to repurpose into a healthcare building.

### Sub questions:

#### Introduction:

##### Chapter 1

What is the reason that religious buildings get vacant?

##### Chapter 2

How is aging growing in the Netherlands?

#### Centerpiece:

##### Chapter 3

Why aren't very many churches being transformed into healthcare buildings?

##### Chapter 4

What kind of architectural elements does an independent elderly person needs to live in a home in which "light care"<sup>2</sup> can be provided?

##### Chapter 5

How have existing churches been transformed into care buildings?

##### Chapter 6

What can we learn from existing care buildings into re-designing churches?

#### Conclusion:

##### Chapter 7

How can architecture influence an individual's life and mindspan?

# 7. Methodology

During this investigation, several types of examinations are carried out

## Quantitative

The quantitative part of the research focuses more on the conversations I want to have at various care centers. With this, I try to create a better picture of the elderly target group I have chosen, with the associated social necessities these elderly people need. In addition, research will also be conducted into the interconnections of the various spaces located in a care home.

## Qualitative

With research on floor plans of restored monuments and newly built care homes, the aim is to understand the relation of various spaces in which elderly people can live within a care home. This will name and describe group sizes, flat dimensions, and functions.

The research is carried out through field research and desk research.

Using the results, a swot analysis can then be drawn up with an overall list of requirements needed to develop an elderly care home.

To gather information, the following will be used:  
Newspaper and journals: These explain relevant topics on aging and its impact on society, thus providing the reader with an idea of the social relevance of this topic.

**Interviews:** Through interviews with employees of care institutions, insight is shown into how an older person's day unfolds. This provides insight into the obstacles an elderly person experiences during their stay in a care institution. It also examines new and transformed care buildings by talking to various architects. The essence of this research is to use floor plans to investigate how various functions are connected in a care building.

**Archives:** Architectural drawings are collected in archives to get an idea of the links between the underlying spaces in the case studies. In addition, newspaper and magazine publications could also be found to help gather information.

**Case studies:** Case studies are used for subquestions five and six. These case studies are of transformed church buildings and existing care centers. Based on these floor plans, an attempt is made to retrace, for example, relationships in spatial planning.

The transformed churches were determined based on residential function. Except for the Vredeskerk, all the churches were chosen based on the care function where the elderly can live independently. For the care buildings, the main criteria were that they should offer care to elderly people who want to live independently, with the possibility of light care being offered to whoever needs it. Based on this, the following case studies have been selected:

Transformed churches:

- *Bedaux de Brouwer - Vredeskerk Tilburg*
- *Bedaux de Brouwer - Haarendael Haaren*
- *Beleen CS - Bernadettekerk te Abdissenbosch*
- *Vincent Schreurs - Oosterkerk Aalten*

Healthcare centres:

- *Wartburg - Utrecht*
- *De Ingelanden - Utrecht*
- *Voorhoeve - Utrecht*
- *Bartholomeus Gasthuis - Utrecht*

Every project is analyzed based on the following points:

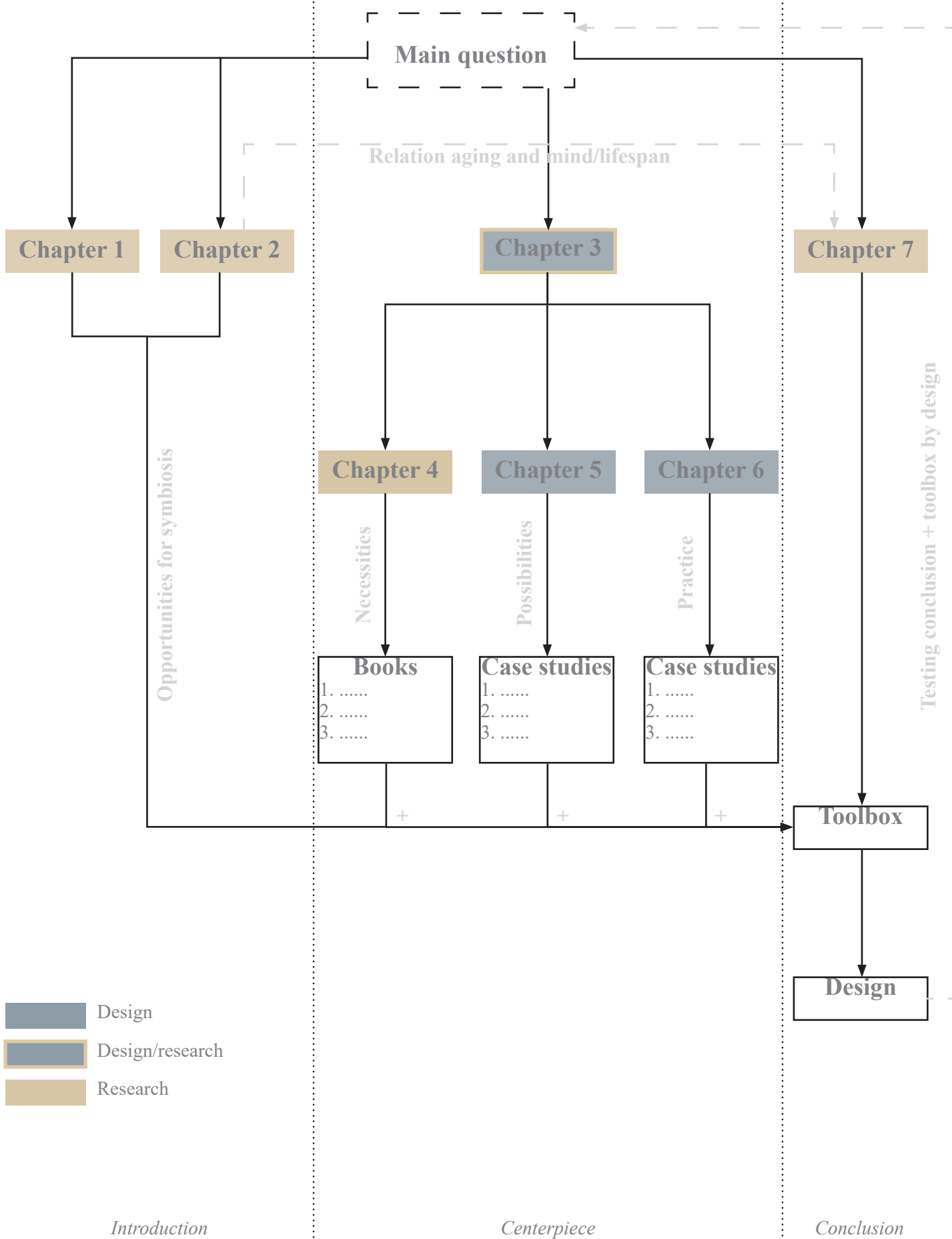
- General information
- Spatial planning
- Experience spatial planning
- Building-physical challenges (transformation projects)
- Architectural elements used to create mental well-being.
- The architectural concept of the building (lines of sight etc.)

**Books:** For the research part, mainly books are used as first-hand literature. They are used for this research to gain insight into the life and mindspan of the elderly. Besides, this literature is also used to learn how architecture can influence the well-being of the elderly. The books are mentioned in the bibliography.

Question	Goal	How
<i>Introduction:</i>		
<b>Chapter 1</b> What is the reason that religious buildings get vacant?	The aim of this chapter is to give an introduction to the reason why religious buildings get vacant. This in combination with the second question contributes to the general introduction of the topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview with Anja van Leusden (church manager)</li> <li>• News articles</li> <li>• Statistics from CBS</li> </ul>
<b>Chapter 2</b> How is aging growing in the Netherlands?	In the second part of the general introduction, the aim goes to the growing aging in the Netherlands. In combination with the first question, it contributes to the general introduction of the topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• News articles</li> <li>• Statistics from CBS</li> <li>• Books (see the ones mentioned)</li> </ul>
<i>Centerpiece:</i>		
<b>Chapter 3</b> Why aren't very many churches being transformed into healthcare buildings?	To gain insight and information about the reason why the transformation from a church to a healthcare building isn't this popular.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case studies (see the ones mentioned)</li> <li>• Articles</li> <li>• Interviews with architects</li> </ul>
<b>Chapter 4</b> What kind of architectural elements does an independent elderly person need to live in a home in which 'light care' <sup>2</sup> can be provided?	In this chapter, the architectural qualities of a space and the needs of independent elderly people are addressed to gain insight information about how to design a facility that contributes to the desires of this target group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews with independent elderly people</li> <li>• Books (see the ones mentioned)</li> <li>• Case studies to analyze how they structure floorplans that houses the target group.</li> </ul>
<b>Chapter 5</b> How have existing churches been transformed into care buildings?	To gain an image of the possibilities that are already used in the transformation from church to health care building, but also to reflect if this way of transforming the church is an ideal way to redesign a church into a health care.	Through existing case studies, information is gathered about the possibilities that occur when a church is transformed into a healthcare building. At the same time a reflective approach is used to see if the transformation is working properly and or if some changes need to be made.
<b>Chapter 6</b> What can we learn from existing care buildings into redesigning churches?	Through the analyzation of existing healthcare buildings, I want to gain knowledge about the way the routing and organization of a care building are structured.	This information is also analyzed in coherence with existing healthcare buildings, which some of them will be visited. To redesign a church, you first need to understand the basics to apply them to your case study.
<i>Conclusion:</i>		
<b>Chapter 7</b> How can architecture influence an individual's life and mindspan?	Through these books, design strategies are collected that can be used in the redesign of St Dominic's Church. Besides, insight is given into what life span and mindspan are, but also how architecture can influence this.	The answer to this sub-question is reasoned through literature research in the books mentioned above.



# 8. Research scheme



## 9. Sources and data collection

- Archives: Drawings of existing churches and care buildings for analysis
- Architects: Defining the criteria that you need in order to design a care building
- Healthcare staff: Getting inside in the daily procedures that they need to do
- Elderly: What are the activities that an elderly person does on a day-to-day basis
- Books: Books are used to gather case studies, for example “Kerkgebouwen”. Also used to gain knowledge about the aging process which influences the way people live.
- CBS: This is the national database in the Netherlands to gain inside into demography
- Cultureelerfgoed: Here you can find documents about revitalizing churches
- Bouwbesluit: Here information about building regulation can be found.

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