



**CLASSIS NORTH OF THE FREE REFORMED
CHURCHES OF SOUTH AFRICA**

Pretoria 24 Nov 2016

To: **Synod FRCSA 2017**

Re: **Lord's Supper at home**

Esteemed brothers.

Classis North decided at its meeting of 18 Nov 2016 to send attached Appendix to synod as an agenda point labelled:

“Administration of the Lord's Supper at the homes of those who cannot attend the church services anymore due to terminal illness”

With brotherly greetings.

T de Wit

Scribe

Appendix

Request for the Administration of the Lord's Supper at the homes of those who cannot attend the church services anymore due to terminal illness

1 Scriptural Considerations

- There are no Scriptural arguments clearly pleading against the administration of the Lord's Supper (LS) to this target group.
- There is also no Scriptural evidence clearly demanding the administration of the LS to those who cannot attend with valid reasons the congregational meetings.
- Celebrating the LS is always a communal happening. The LS is not possible without a community (1 Cor 10:17).
- The celebration of the LS should happen in the context of the preaching of the Gospel.
- The administration of the LS should happen under supervision of the office bearers. When the LS is administered at homes, it should therefore be done in the presence of an office bearer.
- The fact that it became technically possible to be connected live with the church service whilst elsewhere, is not sufficient argumentation as such for the celebration of the LS of the congregation at the same time at different localities.
- The outward signs of bread and wine are not a precondition to getting saved. The Holy Spirit also works in the believers who are not able to attend the sacrament. The LS should not be used as panacea.
- The preparation for the LS (self examination) is a vital part of celebrating the LS. It entails prayer and reflection. The self examination leads to comfort and strengthening of your faith. It is important that persons of the target group have to go through this process of preparation for the LS as well on an ongoing basis, just as is the case with the other believers who are able to attend the church services. Both the preparation for and the celebration of the LS are deepening and strengthening the faith of the believers. There can be a risk that with not able to attend the LS, the target group will start neglecting the self examination as well.
- Celebration of the LS at homes should not lead to the forming of factions in the congregation, celebrating the sacrament at different localities.
- Reading the liturgical form for the preparation of the LS, which gives a summary of the Scripural teaching on the LS, functions as a wake up call as well as a comfort for those who listen, whether present in the church service, or connected to the church service live with the help of technical aids.
- Is it Scriptural to administer the sacraments (baptism and LS) outside the official gathering (service) of the congregation? See in this regard Acts 8 and 1 Corinthians 11.

2 Practical Considerations

- Does the administration of the LS at homes, making use of the current internet technology, make of it a communal happening?
- It is possible to listen to the preaching of the Gospel live via internet. Can one therefore say that the administration of the LS at homes happens in the context of the preaching of the Gospel?
- Although partaking of the sacraments is not a precondition for salvation, when it is possible technically for the target group to partake, this is nevertheless the better option.
- When somebody desires to partake of the LS at home, the person should request this from the consistory. The consistory has to judge whether the specific person is not able to attend the LS in the church service. The consistory has also to judge on the merits of this request. It should not become an automatism. The consistory will decide whether the necessary technical aids are available for the person to be able to listen to the church service.
- If approved, the consistory will delegate an elder to be present at the home during the celebration of the LS. He and the person will partake in the church service by making use of the technical aids. The elder will share the bread and wine with the person at the same time it is happening in the church.
- The consistory will ensure that the number of homes where the LS is administered, remains limited, for example by bringing people in an old age home together in one room.
- The elder(s) involved have to report on the event to the consistory.

3 The topic in Pretoria-Maranata

The consistory of Pta-Mar received the request from members to decide in favour of administering the LS at the homes of those who are not able anymore to attend the church services, due to reasons like terminal illness and old age.

The consistory did an in depth study on this matter, from a Scriptural viewpoint, as well as with regard to the practicalities.

In the end the consistory concluded that there are no Scriptural arguments prohibiting it, although Scripture neither explicitly demands it.

As for the practical side, every church service of Pta-Mar can be listened to live on the internet, meaning at the same time.

In the end the consistory decided to vote on this matter, since the office bearers were not in agreement as for whether to implement this or not. During the vote the majority voted for not implementing it.

However this did not put the matter at rest. More letters were received from members, pleading for looking into the matter again.

The consistory then appointed a committee of three office bearers to come with a substantiated proposal how to deal with the matter in future.

The committee then proposed not to continue studying and discussing the matter in isolation, but to put it on the agenda of the synod (via the classis). This is a topic that is in the interest of all the churches in the federation, and a joint decision would therefore be the best way to go. This is also what happened in our sister churches.

The topic as dealt with in our Dutch sister churches

The Dutch Synod of 1933 (Middelburg) has expressed that there are no principle Scriptural objections against celebrating the LS at homes. Yet this synod saw too many practical obstacles to decide in favour of it.

The synod of 1996 (Berkel en Rodenrijs) expressed that the practical obstacles mentioned by the synod of Middelburg were no longer applicable, thanks to the technical aids that became available lately. However, this synod made the following preconditions for the celebration of the LS at homes:

- It should happen under the supervision of at least one office bearer (elder or deacon)
- It should happen as much as possible simultaneously with the church service
- The number of homes / addresses should remain limited.

This synod concluded that those (the target group) who cannot attend the church services, are part of the body of Christ, and when they express the desire to partake of the LS making use of technical aids, that this request should not be turned down without substantiated reasons.

The synod of Amersfoort (2005) furthermore expressed that although the synod of 1996 decided in favour of the celebration of the LS at homes, it should not become an automatism, and neither should this decision be abused. The local consistory retains the right to decide in favour or against it in each specific case.